

Ban on Chinese film-makers 'so passe'

By CHRISTINA NG

CHINESE director Lou Ye knew that the lead actor, Jia Hongsheng, in his 2000 film Suzhou River was depressed.

But little did he know the depression was so bad that it would drive Jia to suicide.

Jia, 43, leapt to his death from an apartment building in Beijing in July.

In a phone interview with *my paper* from Beijing, Lou said that he was inconsolable when news about Jia's death hit him – even though he had not contacted him for a long time after their collaboration.

The Shanghai-born film-maker reminisced fondly: "I've plenty of memories of him being unreasonable and very nasty when he was in one of his angry moods – so much like a kid. Yet, he could also be very gentle."

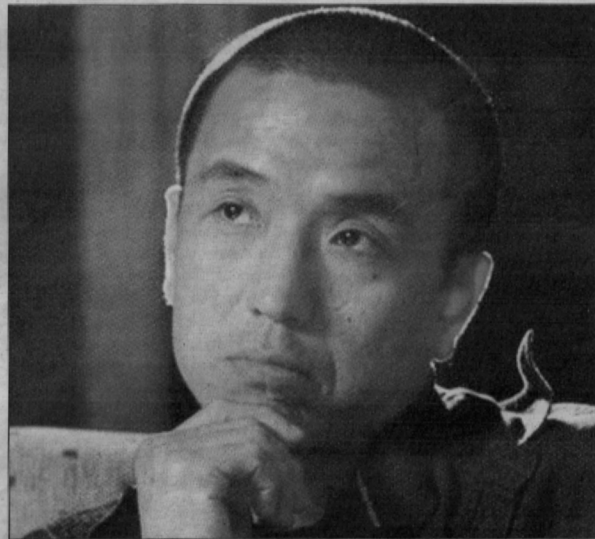
The 45-year-old cast Jia, who had a long struggle with drug and alcohol addiction, in *Suzhou River*, which also starred Chinese actress Zhou Xun.

The film about obsessive passion was banned, after it was shown at the Rotterdam International Film Festival without official endorsement from the Chinese government. And it was not the only film that got Lou in trouble with the country's authorities.

In fact, the film-maker, who is married, spent the most part of his directing career working round the constraints of China's censorship.

Weekend Lover (1993), his first film, was banned in China for two years. *Summer Palace* (2006) contained overt references to the Tiananmen massacre and was shown at the Cannes Film Festival, again without receiving the official go-ahead.

Subsequently, Lou was banned from making films for



CONTROVERSIAL: Director Lou Ye (top) went against China's ban by filming *Spring Fever*, a movie about homosexuality that has many sex scenes (above). (PHOTOS: INTERNET, FESTIVE FILMS)

five years. His films also cannot be screened in China until the end of next year.

Undeterred, he depended on overseas support and financing for his latest film, *Spring Fever* – a Hong Kong-French co-production.

He said: "Banning film-makers from making films is so passe – it's what (other) countries did 10 years ago."

Lou – who is known for his works that touch on sexuality, gender and obsession – shot the sexy *Spring Fever* surreptitiously on digital video in natural light in Nanjing, China, over the span of 2½ months.

The film, peppered with raw and explicit sex scenes, explores the taboo subject of homosexuality. It details the messy formation of two intersecting polysexual triangles involving

five people: a married couple, the husband's secret gay lover, an investigator hired by the wife and the investigator's girlfriend.

He said: "It's sad that I can't show the film in China. I'm sure many people think that the ban is stupid."

It is precisely this sort of attitude that marks the film-maker of the Sixth Generation, which refers to Chinese film-makers who shoot in an underground, edgy style, and who have found ways to subvert China's censorship policies.

Other Sixth Generation film-makers, who began their ascent in the mid-1990s and early 2000s, include Zhang Yuan and Jia Zhangke.

Lou said of such film-makers: "We are very independent, we do not stick to what the authorities say."

He is determined to carry on with his work, ban or no ban. He is already making another film, due to be released in the first half of next year.

The film, tentatively named *Love And Bruises*, is his first French film, about a Chinese teacher in Paris.

When his ban to make films is lifted, he will return to China to continue making films.

He said: "I want as many people as there are in the world to be able to watch my films."

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◆ *Spring Fever (R21)* is being screened at GV Plaza and VivoCity.

HELPDESK 我的字典

Reminisced: 缅怀 miǎn huái

Banned: 被禁止 bèi jìn zhǐ

Undeterred: 未受阻吓的 wèi shòu zǔ hè de

Polysexual: 多性恋 duō xìng liàn

SIXTH GEN-ERS



WANG XIAOSHUAI, 44
Born in: Shanghai
Known for: *Beijing Bicycle* (2001). The film about a youth's

search for his stolen bicycle propelled Wang to international fame.

Upcoming film: *11 Flowers*



JIA ZHANGKE, 40
Born in: Fenyang
Known for: *Xiao Wu* (1997), his first feature film about a pickpocket in Fenyang. The

film catapulted him to international success.

Upcoming film: *I Wish I Knew*



ZHANG YUAN, 47
Born in: Nanjing
Known for: *East Palace, West Palace* (1996), China's first homosexual-themed

movie. It is Zhang's most controversial film to date.



LI YANG, 51
Born in: Xi'an
Known for: *Blind Shaft* (2003), for which he won a Silver Bear for Outstanding Artistic Achievement

at the 2003 Berlin International Film Festival.

Upcoming film: *Blind River*



WANG QUAN'AN, 45
Born in: Yan'an, Shaanxi
Known for: *Tuya's Marriage* (2006), winner of the

Silver Bear at the 2007 Berlin International Film Festival

Upcoming film: *White Deer Plain*