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Angels Wear White
嘉年华 *Jiāniánhuá* (Carnival)

Vivian Qu 文晏（*Wén Yàn*) (女), 2017. 107 min.

Grand Jury Award (Beijing College Student FF; Tromso IFF).
Best Film (Huading Awards; Antalya Golden Orange FF; Asian Film Critics; Faro Island FF; International FF & Awards Macao; Nantes Three Continents FF; Pingyao IFF; RiverRun IFF). **Outstanding Film** (Chinese Film (Ningbo Cixi) FF).
Top Ten Films (Shanghai Film Critics; Top Ten Chinese FF); **Honorable Mention** (Pingyao IFF);
Best Director (China Film Director's Guild; Golden Horse; Asian Film Critics; Faro Island FF; IFF of India; Malaysia Golden Global Awards; Nantes Three Continents FF; RiverRun IFF).
Best Screenplay (Asian Film Critics; International Women FF of Sale Morocco; Malaysia Golden Global Awards; Nashville FF). **Best Actress** (Antalya Golden Orange FF; FEST IFF; RiverRun IFF; To Ten Chinese FF).
Favorite Actress (Guangzhou Student FF); **Best Supporting Actress** (Malaysia Golden Global Awards; Top Ten Chinese FF);
Best New Performer (Asian Film Critics; Chinese Film Ningbo Cixi FF; Chinese Film Media; Nashville FF).

Said to be the first mainstream Chinese film to address the problem of the sexual abuse of underage girls, *Angels Wear White* takes the form of a mystery drama of two preadolescent school girls abused by a high ranking commissioner. Nothing explicit or sensational is depicted in the movie, instead, the film probes the effects of the social conditions and motivations of those involved: an undocumented migrant worker, an acrimonious divorced couple, a frustrated lawyer seeking truth and justice, corrupt officials "trading favors," a reluctant witness, and the girls themselves.

The movie comes on the heels of a flurry of high profile cases in 2013 of school children sexually abused by men of power in several provinces, which inspired public protests on-line and in the streets. Although the movie narrative is fictional, it draws on elements in the highly-publicized Hainan 海南 Province case where six 11- and 12-year old girls were taken to hotel rooms by a school principal and a local official.

Beyond the storyline, though, *Angels* is a film about women: how society defines them and the choices it allows them, the variable and contradictory images of womanhood faced by every young girl, and the price of resistance. As the director said of the movie's female characters, "inside each one of them is a woman defined by society, and a woman who tries to break free."[1]

Main Characters

Mia 小米 (*Xiao Mi*; lit. small grain of rice), a young, hard-working, low-level employee at a seaside motel adjoining an amusement park. A migrant worker without an official ID, Mia's job status is tenuous, and she is tempted to take risks to secure it. One night she agrees to substitute for the receptionist who has a date with her boyfriend.

Lili 莉莉, the desk receptionist who is Mia's immediate supervisor. She is self-absorbed, particularly with her appearance, pleased with her present station in life, and concerned to please her boyfriend. Lili often acts like a big sister to Mia, and even protects her by claiming to an official inspector that Mia is in fact her little sister.

Jian 小建 (*Xiao Jian*)**,** Lili's boyfriend, a low-life with lots of drinking buddies and petty criminal connections.

Boss, the motel manager. The operation of his motel business depends on maintaining a squeaky-clean reputation and the concomitant approval of the official inspectors.

Meng Xiaowen (**Wen**), 孟小文 a 12-year-old schoolgirl who along with a classmate may have been sexually assaulted by a middle-aged Commissioner who is her godfather. Wen lives unhappily with her high-strung and critical mother.

Meng Tao 孟涛 / **Ba** 爸, Wen's father, who is divorced from her mother. He is the person who honored his boss, the Commissioner, by asking him to be his daughter's godfather.

Wen's mother 小文妈, a bitter and unhappy woman trying to balance her parental responsibilities with her own needs to find a little joy in life, and consequently is viewed by the school officials as a negligent mother.

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[1] "Angels Wear White", Director's Statement, SOAS China Institute University of London, Nov.27, 2017. www.soas.ac.uk/china-institute/events/27nov2018-angels-wear-white--director-vivian-qu-2017.html

Zhang Xinxin (Xin) 张新新**,** Wen's classmate, who joined her in going to the motel with the Commissioner, and afterward confessed to her mother.

> **Xinxin's Mother** and **Father** 新妈爸**;** they are willing to accept hush money in order to protect the girls' future reputations.

Commissioner Liu 刘处长 (*Liu Chuzhang*)**,** a high-ranking district official and Wen's godfather, who is not above colluding with thugs and police to save his public face.

Attorney Hao 郝估 (*Hao Gu*)**,** a compassionate lawyer determined to get justice for the girls as she tries to get the truth from Mia and Wen.

<div align="center">Notes</div>

- Although the color white is not part of the Chinese title, its diegetic appearances in the movie provide subliminal associations with contradictory cultural norms and expectations that continually surround women and girls. Although white is the traditional color of mourning in China, the iconic Marilyn's sexy and revealing dress is white, and so is the virginal dress of the modern brides having their wedding pictures taken on the beach. The dodgy doctors appointed to assess the girls' violation wear coats of antiseptic white. And Mia wears white as, in the end, she gambles on a path forward.
- While writing the script, the director saw a news photograph of the gigantic "Forever Marilyn" sculpture that appears in the film.[2] An unauthorized copy of the original by American artist Seward Johnson (2011), it was made for a shopping mall in Guigang 贵港 Guangxi 广西 Province, but later dismantled.
- Like all independent films in China, *Angels Wear White* required approval by state censors before it could be officially released to theatres. Some problems did need to be worked out because of its controversial topic and social commentary.
- China's unofficial motto on the police station wall 为人民服务 (*wèi rénmín fúwù*; 'Serve The People') can be taken as sarcasm.

<div align="center">Director: Vivian Qu 文晏（Wén Yàn) (b. Beijing)</div>

In the 1990s, Qu came to New York to study art history and fine arts, and discovered that filmmaking integrated all her interests, "writing, photography, music…together in one art form"[3] She returned to Beijing in 2003 to pursue a career as an independent producer and filmmaker, and made her directorial debut in 2015. *Angels Wear White* is her second film as director.

<div align="center">Related Film</div>

Hooligan Sparrow 海南之后背 *Hǎinán zhīhòu bèi* ('after Hainan'), Nanfu Wang 王男袱 (*Wang Nanfu*, 女, debut), China/USA, 2016. Documentary, 83 min.

> The 2013 case in Wanning 万宁, Hainan Province attracted a notorious 38-year old women's rights activist, Ye Haiyan 叶海燕, popularly known as Liumang Yan 流氓燕 ('rogue sparrow'), who had spent a decade advocating for sex workers and victims of violence and sexual abuse, including children. Largely fueled by social media, Sparrow's protests drew public outrage and resulted in police surveillance and raids, harassment by gangs, and evictions from cities in which she attempted to resettle. This inspired the fledgling videographer Nanfu Wang to document Sparrow's peripatetic life over the next several months, at significant risk to her own safety as she herself unexpectedly becomes a target. Wang's gripping documentary is shot entirely through her various portable lenses, and includes jumpy and incoherent sequences taken on the run or from awkward positions, and later over-voiced.

> Sparrow had appeared in artist/activist Ai Weiwei 艾未未's nude group portrait "One Tiger, Eight Breasts" (2010), and he included her abandoned household possessions in his 2014 exhibition "According to What?" (Brooklyn Museum). Wang later founded the Sparrow Future Educational Fund (https://h-china.org/sparrow-fund/) to provide resources for children of human rights activists.

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[2] *Ibid*.

[3] *Xin Zhou*. "ND/NF Interview: Vivian Qu" FilmComment.com. 28 March 2014.