



## **CHINA HEAVYWEIGHT** 千錘百煉

*Qiānchuí-bǎiliàn*

(lit. 'a thousand hammerings, a hundred refinements',  
i.e. steeled and tempered through many trials)

Director Yung Chang 张侨勇 (*Zhāng Qiáoyǒng*)  
Canada-China, 2012. Documentary, 94min.

Cinematography: Sun Shaoguang 孫少光. Music: Olivier Alary

**Best Feature Film** (Milan FF). **Best Documentary** (Golden Horse).  
**Best Cinematography - Documentary Feature** (Los Angeles Asian Pacific FF)

You won't need to be a boxing fan to find yourself drawn into this extraordinary documentary, which follows a state boxing coach and former champion as he identifies teen-age village talent in the tobacco-growing region of Sichuan, and then trains the best of them for the provincial competition from which they may be selected to be nationally trained for possible sports careers and Olympic competition. The film focuses on the coach over a period of two years as he struggles with an urge to return to the professional ring, and mentors two of his most promising young athletes as they persevere through excruciating training and face soul-searching decisions about their future. There is no intrusive explanatory voice here: the film's characters and situations speak for themselves.

Officially released in 200 mainland Chinese theatres, *China Heavyweight* became the most widely screened social-issue documentary in Chinese film history.

### Main Characters

The filming took place 2009-2011 with occasional flashbacks, and is set in Sichuan 四川 Province: Huili County 会理县 (*Huìlǐ Xiàn*), Fushun County 富順县 (*Fùshùn Xiàn*); Xichang City 西昌市, Sichuan Provincial Team Training Camp; Chongqing 重庆, National Men's Boxing Competition Training Camp; Chengdu 成都 Sports College; Dalian 大连 (Liaoning 辽宁 Province), National Boxing Tournament.

**Coach Qi Moxiang** 齊漢絳: Boxing since elementary school and a 1992 graduate of Huili #2 High School (中学 *zhōngxué*), Qi is in his late 30s and retired from professional boxing. Now he recruits and trains poor rural teens for boxing competitions that may win them training for Olympics and a future beyond tobacco farming. Qi's family wants him to find a girlfriend, get married, and start a family; even his friends tease him about still being single. But since he lost the Olympic qualifying match in 1999, the same year his father died, Qi is plagued by a pressing need to regain his honor both for himself and for his father. If he decides to go back into ring, he will face a Japanese champion for the Golden Belt.

**Zhao Zhong** 赵忠 teaches boxing curriculum in Huili #2 High School and is Qi's mentor.

**He Zongli** 何宗禮, one of Qi's trainees. Qi worries about He's psychological condition: He lacks self-confidence and fears failure, but Qi but believes in him and counsels him to work on his mental game: don't be afraid of failure, he says, "the more you fail, more courageous you become!" The men in He's family encourage him to keep advancing, but when he returns home with bruises on his face his mother cries. Qi advises him not to go into the professional world where he would only be third-rate, but rather to stay on provincial team, which offers him a better path to the future through the national competitions.

**Miao Yunfei** 繆雲飛, another of Qi's trainees; he is from a farm family in Liangshan (涼山州 *Liángshānzhōu*, an autonomous prefecture in southern Sichuan, home of the Yi 彝 minority). Miao

is competitive; he doesn't see future at home, wants to explore world and develop his own career; Nor does his family want to keep him at home to endure a difficult future as a farmer. His parents have endured hardships in hope that he and his brother will succeed. They tell him he has a bright future with boxing if he perseveres. In turn, Miao promises that if he succeeds he will turn the family farmland into an orchard so they can enjoy a good life. When Miao is chosen for the provincial team, he continues advanced training with coach Ye in Xichang 西昌 (seat of Liangshan Prefecture). But after winning the provincial championship, he is tempted to go to Kunming to try professional boxing instead of following the national route, an idea that worries his mother.

**Ye Xinchun** 葉新春: coach of the Sichuan Provincial team in Xichang and Chengdu.

### Boxing in China

Western-style boxing first appeared in China in the 20s as a street sport in the port cities, but Chairman Mao banned it in 1959 after several boxers died. Not only was boxing deemed to be too violent, all competitive sports were banned during the Cultural Revolution (文化大革命 *Wénhuà Dàgémìng*, 1966-76) because the emphasis on competition and individualism was seen as a characteristic of capitalism. But with Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms in the late 70s, competition began to be seen as a training ground for achieving respect and success in the new economy. In 1986 the ban on boxing was lifted, and the sport was even touted as a vehicle for teaching traditional Confucian values such as perseverance, forbearance, kindness, and harmony, preparing children to succeed in a fiercely competitive society. The director himself sees the heart of this film as a metaphor for nationalism vs. individualism.

On a practical level, boxing (and other sports) can provide a tempting path for talented young athletes to lift themselves and their families out of rural poverty while offering prestige and identity as national heroes.

Director Yung Chang 张侨勇 (*Zhāng Qiáoyǒng*) (b. 1977, Oshawa, Ontario, Canada)

Yung Chang is a 1999 BFA graduate of Concordia University's Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema (Montreal) with post-graduate study at the Neighbourhood Playhouse School of the Theatre (New York City, 2003), the Canadian Film Center (Toronto, 2009), and the Sundance Institute (2015, and has been an invited, active member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences since 2013. The award-winning *Up the Yangtze* (2007) was his first feature-length documentary; *China Heavyweight* is his second.

### Further Insights

"Artist Talk with Yung Chang," Cinema Politica, 2012. 25 min. Vimeo <https://vimeo.com/44998671> (accessed 4/23/2020). Although most of the talk focuses on *Up the Yangtze*, Chang talks candidly about his approach to filmmaking, and toward the end references *China Heavyweight*, and his third film, *The Fruit Hunters* (2012).

Amazon Prime Video

YouTube search: "China heavyweight" at China heavyweight [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptk4\\_gRLzbQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptk4_gRLzbQ)