



a film by Geng Jun



轻松+愉快

Free and Easy





FREE AND EASY

SYNOPSIS

A crook visits a gloomy, snowbound town in northeast China bringing magic soap used to incapacitate the unaware so that he may rob them of money and property. A man is intent on re-uniting with his mother by meeting people through his religion. Two police officers set out to solve a case without any clues. A fake monk begins to work on the issue of solidarity through common pursuit. A forest ranger pursues a tree thief. In the midst of this, a murder takes place. *Free and Easy* is a farce in which crime is the new normal.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Free and Easy tells an absurd story set in a fictitious town in northeast China, where a bunch of hooligans chill and kill each other while hugging each other, caring and suspecting each other while fraternizing with each other. They burn themselves into ash with the hope they raise for each other. In the film, the police officers are kept busy capturing the criminals, the fraud deceiving for money, the forest ranger chasing the tree thief, the Christian believer looking for his lost mother, and the fake monk devoted to group unity, coincidentally all come together and perform the story. The film is featured with typical dongbei style (literally, Northeast Chinese style) humor, full of twists and turns and magnificent mountains and rivers.

DIRECTOR'S BIO

Geng Jun was born in 1976 in Heilongjiang Province, China. Geng Jun has directed and written many films including *Hawthorn* (2002), *Diary in Bulk* (2003), *Barbecue* (2004 Festival of 3 Continents, 2005 International Film Festival Rotterdam), *Youth* (2009 Rome International Film Festival), and *The Hammer and Sickle are Sleeping* (2013 Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival best short film winner). Geng Jun also directed *Poetry and Disease* (2011).



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GENG JUN'S INTERVIEW

Why name the film *Free and Easy*?

Geng Jun: *Free and easy* is an idiom in northeastern China. It's commonly used in our childhood, meaning to be provocative and joking. For example, you and I fall in love with the same girl. If you give up the girl, I would say it's free and easy to pursue her. The idiom can also be applied to the following situations: A guy from a school in the neighborhood stands out quite a bit so to teach him a lesson, I break his leg. Afterwards, I would say: It's free and easy. If I were the mayor of the city, and the police chief had always been against me, it would be free and easy if I could knock my opponent off. Honestly, the generation who uses the idiom has grown up, so these jargons always remind me of our bygone past.

Why did you choose the city in northeastern China as your location?

Geng Jun: The northeast dialect is widely known in China and the dialect is easy to understand. It is easy for viewers of all spectrum to catch the humor in the film. In my eyes, winter in northeast China is lovely. Snow covers the rubbish, and everything except for the buildings. The outline of the trees and snowy roads, all look extremely simple. Besides, I feel close to northeast China in winter. I prefer freezing winter, wearing warm clothes and making myself warm by walking in freezing weather. It's really nice and cool.

Regarding the people in northeast China, Lu Xun puts it best: "I love them as much as I pity them." I share his insight as I sometimes feel I myself am also "pitiful." I feel the same for the people in Hegang (my hometown). I relocated to Beijing from Hegang in my twenties. Every time I travel back to Hegang, I am struck by its parochialism and decay. But I'm intrigued by the people up there. They are aware of the absence of freedom, yet they feel quite lost and gradually get used to that sense of being lost. It is the sense of being deprived of the power in coping with the establishment.

What was your source of inspiration for this film? Why did you want to make it?

Geng Jun: In the film, the plotline of the young Christian man in search of his

mother, is based on a true story: A man of faith is looking for his mother gone astray. During that process, he crosses paths with fraudulent people and other various kinds of people. The soap salesman and the fake monk belong to the same category of people whom we may encounter or hear of in our daily life. The administrator chasing the tree thief, and the two policemen also belong to this particular group I know in Hegang. I'm interested in their state of being and the sense of guilt, which inspired me to write a story like this.

Free and Easy is my reaction against the age of mutual destruction. It's a self-expression of the comedy based on an absurd reality.

Can you talk about the characters in the film?

Geng Jun: The soap salesman is a modern fraud with a soap which dopes his victims. In the meantime, he is awed by the power of faith. The fake monk is a con man long associated with a deep rooted tradition in Asian countries. He's lonely and looking for friendship. The young Christian man seeking his mother is a pure-hearted person. His religion tells him what to refuse and what to accept. He is just a messenger. The tree-chasing civil servant and his mysterious wife reveal the anxiety and twisted personality working for the establishment. They are both the victims as well as victimizers. They lose their identities in their use and abuse of power, thus rendering themselves terribly evil.

The film has a feel that is similar to a cartoon film for adults. For example, the criminals are vaguely non-threatening, making them each a-typical as criminals. Why?

Geng Jun: The criminals in the film do look more adorable. I like every character in this film, no matter who they work for, they work within or out of the system; no matter who they are, good or bad. I don't like stereotypically dualistic films made with a formula. No matter which class you belong, every person in the society has his own sense of guilt. Some people manage to cover up their sense of guilt with their 'success stories'. Everyone has to live with their sin which, however, can't be taken for granted. We all are accomplices making our society the way it is today, even though the way we contribute to the making of it might vary. Here, I want to discuss the world I'm familiar with. In the world, people don't purely commit crimes. In the mean time, they are looking for friendship as well. They are fragile and eager for love and warmth, struggling between survival and guilt... I hope to show the adorable side

of the characters. It's a comedy about crime.

Could you please talk about the absurdity and humor in the film?

Geng Jun: The absurdity in the film is in the reflection of real life. Absurdity is everywhere in our daily life. It is the interaction between the system and the public. It is the puzzle we are faced with every day, bringing us cynicism and anger. I myself prefer humorous expression. My sense of humor defines me and distinguishes my film from others. China is a country full of humor. The humor is a kind of code between the audience and me.

The actors in the film all are non-pros. Could you talk about your decision to cast them?

Geng Jun: The advantage of non-professional actors is similar to being a stranger in town. I like films with familiarity and strangeness. I prefer actors with quirky characteristics. Their acting in the film shows a kind of beauty and a sense of mystery which I find fascinating. The actors and I have been working together for over 10 years. We are familiar with each other and trust each other. They are the best actors and I rely on them.

Could you please talk about your background and filmmaking career?

Geng Jun: I was a Russian major at a three-year program at a community college. When I was 19, I graduated from the college and didn't want to continue on that track. At that time, I liked literature and films a lot. It was an age of videotape. I liked Charlie Chaplin, *Farewell My Concubine* and Stephen Chow. I thought that it was difficult for non-professionals to make films. Coincidentally I found the script of *Black Snow* at the library. I thought I might be able to join the filmmaking community through screenwriting. I wrote my first screenplay at 19. When I was 20, I showed the script to some professors at Beijing Film Academy and Central Academy of Drama in Beijing. They told me it wasn't a script. It only had a fascinating plot. One of the teachers, Dan Zhang, allowed me to audit her lectures. Then I started sitting in on her classes at the film





academy. I joined the club of film fans and filmmakers in Beijing and took part in their club activity in early 2000. That was the age of DV. Many were able to finish their work within a short period of time. I was proud and thought I could do better than them. In 2002, I finished my first short film, *Hawthorn*, in my hometown. However, my friend commented that the work was immature both in form and content. I felt disheartened, for half a month I couldn't do anything. I wrote down the comment in my notebook. Then I directed *Diary in Bulk* in 2003, and *Barbecue* in 2004. The copyright income for *Barbecue* covered the cost, and the film was nominated to compete at Festival des 3 continents, and the Rotterdam International Film Festival. As a non-professional director, I was inspired. The film was also well received in China when it screened around the country. I finished *Youth* in 2008, and then the documentary *Poetry and disease*. Following those films, I made *Hammer and Sickle Are Sleeping*, and *Free and Easy*. This is how I changed from a non-professional film lover to a quasi-professional

creator. Of course, I still don't think of myself as a professional one, just a quasi-professional filmmaker.

As an independent film director, how do you create your work?

Geng Jun: I would first consider the issue of feasibility of a film project when I begin to write the script. If it was a small budget film, I wouldn't write many night scenes which may need many lights during shooting, nor conversation scenes in cars which need to be shot within a trailer. I always try my best to maximize the space where I can make full use of my imagination and freedom. For me, independent filmmaking calls for more flexibility and mobility, not subject to the control by the existing studio system and limitations as a result of commercialization. This way, visual images created by indie filmmakers tend to be more diversified. When more independent films are available, quality works will emerge, which will promote the interaction between the commercialized filmmaking and indie film creation.



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CAST

PRODUCERS

Wang Zijian

Wang Xuebo

CO-PRODUCERS

Guo Dong

Wu Leilei

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

Zhang Xianmin

SCREENWRITERS

Liu Bing

Feng Yu hua

Geng Jun

CINEMATOGRAPHY

Wang Weihua

SOUND

Du Chunfeng

LIGHTING ENGINEER

Xu Bo

COSTUME DESIGNING

Tang Xiaoshan

EDITORS

Guo Xiaodong

Zhong Yijuan

PRODUCTION MANAGER

Du Chunfeng

MUSIC

Second Hand Rose Band

SCRIP HOLDER

Tan Bo

ENGLISH LANGUAGE CONSULTANT

Teng Jimeng

STARRING

Xu Gang

Zhang Zhiyong

Xue Baohe

Wang Xuxu

Gu Benbin

Zhang Xun

Yuan Ligu

INTERNATIONAL SALES MANAGER

Xie Meng

