

MIRA FILM and LOWIK MEDIA  
present

**THE** **AND**  
**BEEKEEPER**  
**HIS SON**

养蜂人家

翁蝶蝶 作品

A FILM BY DIEDIE WENG

[www.thebeekeeperandhisson-film.com](http://www.thebeekeeperandhisson-film.com)



## SYNOPSIS

Disillusioned from his experiences as a migration worker, Maofu returns from the city back to the village in northern China, where his family lives. His father, an ageing beekeeper, hopes that his son will learn the handcraft of beekeeping from him. As they collaborate two different life plans run into each other, which leads to tensions and wearing, mostly speechless argued out conflicts. Even the animals on the farm react on this atmosphere and comment the behaviour of the human protagonists in a partly bizarre and funny way.

THE BEEKEEPER AND HIS SON reveals the inner sight of a family in the country in today's China, where millions of other families experience breaks between the generations and try to overcome the deep gap between tradition and modernity.

Length: 85 min

DCP with English and German subtitles available

## DIRECTORS STATEMENT

After finishing my documentary study in the US in 2009, I moved back to China. First I worked in Beijing for a year and a half and then followed my interest in working on a community video project in the countryside in Northern China. Whilst living there, I met the beekeeper Lao Yu and his family.

In my spare time I would often visit the beekeeper's family and became close friends with them. Fascinated by Lao Yu's close relationship with his bees, I began filming his craft and exploring the environmental threats to his bees' health. The return of the beekeeper's son Maofu, however, shifted my focus for the film towards the father and son relationship.

Whilst living in this region I was struck by the fact that there were hardly any young people left in the villages. Most of them, like Maofu, had left for the big cities as migrant workers or opening canteens and restaurants. Traditionally the younger generations are supposed to take over family property and care for their ageing parents, but these days the old are left behind to take care of grandchildren, the land and themselves. While the younger generations struggle to find their direction and their new identities, the older generations are following the old ways; spending their savings to help their children build new houses and pay for their weddings. Living close to these families, I began to observe the tension among the generations and became concerned about how they would communicate their needs and connect with each other.

Once he had returned home, Maofu showed more passion for sales and marketing than understanding the bees. Lao Yu, already in his early seventies, feared that he would not have the capacity to build a new house for his son. He hoped that he could help him establish his career as a beekeeper. Both father and son had considerable anxiety and fear, but could not communicate, sometimes choosing to talk about their feelings and thoughts to me and my camera instead of to each other.

Despite the tension between the father and son, I felt that the limited time they shared together was still very valuable and rich. I sought to capture the personal ways in which their worlds and times met and crashed into each other. I kept searching for the love and tenderness inside them and possible bridges between the two generations.

In 2012, I left China again to join my husband who was studying for his PhD in Canada. Making this film has enabled me to better understand my own longing for home and understand my issues about communication with my parents. Although my parents came from rural China, where my grandma still lives, I grew up in the city. Now I am the only person from my family who lives abroad. Like Maofu and many other young people, I have been searching for my own identity and struggle to communicate with my parents. This film has brought me closer to the perspectives of both generations and helped me better understand the dynamics of the relationships within my own family.

# VADIM JENDREYKO ON THE COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE SCREENWRITERS

I first met Diedie Weng in Beijing in May 2010 whilst leading a documentary film workshop organised by Swiss Films and Caochangdi (CCD) Workstation. She told me about a film project she was working on involving a beekeeper in a province in northern China. When I met her again two years later we discussed how she had progressed with the project.

She showed me some of her footage and that's when I became really interested. She had very tactfully portrayed a cranky old man and his son, who has a very different character. By exploring their relationship she described a more general generational conflict. This insight into Chinese society was very new to me.

In the beginning, Diedie worked and filmed on her own. I was very impressed both by her commitment and her work with the protagonists of her film. When she asked me for advice therefore, I agreed to help her despite my being abroad. At first, our discussions focused on the film concept as well as artistic and dramatic questions, e.g. the development of the plot. To help the project reach professional documentary standards the production company Mira Film got involved. As time went on, the collaboration between Diedie and me intensified to the point where we collaboratively edited the film.

Artistically, I wanted to make sure that the film would still carry her signature despite our close collaboration. I consider myself as the co-screenwriter and editor.

This project was for me like a journey deep into China and it opened up new ways of understanding the country and its people. It was also interesting to see how certain human qualities, as well as generational and family conflicts, seem to have a universal validity beyond language and culture borders. Many things became clear despite the fact that I don't understand a word of Chinese. Maybe this was the reason why I easily identified with the secret protagonist, the goose.

I'm convinced that, with her talent and her fine sense of cinematography, Diedie will succeed in making more films which will give us further insights into the omnipresent, yet foreign China.

# INTERVIEW WITH DIEDIE WENG

**What was your motivation to make this film?**

My parents came from rural China, but I grew up in the city. Since my early twenties, I had felt an increased longing for rural landscapes and my home, and kept undertaking short projects in different parts of rural China. This was the first time, however, that I had lived and worked so closely with villagers on a daily basis. I came to realise that the reality of the villager's personal lives were far more complex than I had understood. These ideas led me to give up my own agenda, and instead begin filming the family and the bees on a daily basis. It was like a new search for the questions that really matter to both me and the characters.

Once I opened up my camera to the daily rhythms, I began to see the richness and originality of everyday life and how it revealed the conflicts both between the characters and within themselves. I also saw myself asking these questions about family relationships in the film: How do these two generations with different values live and work under the same roof? How will they manage to communicate about their own confusion and fear in their different life stages?

**Why did you choose a beekeeper family?**

I was living in the same village as the beekeeper Lao Yu and his family while working for a community project. His honey was well-known in the area, so I went there to buy some. He and his wife Chang Nuo Niang were always very warm towards me. Before they

settled down with their hives in this region, Lao Yu spent more than twenty years travelling with the bees around China, to follow the seasons. Perhaps their itinerant past made Lao Yu and Niang feel kindly towards me, a young woman far away from home, and they kind of "adopted" me, often inviting me to their home for meals. I grew to love the surroundings of the homestead with the bamboo forests, animals and the mountains in the distance. Lao Yu has kept bees for almost 50 years, and I thought it would be interesting to make a film about his beekeeping craft and how his bees struggle with the challenging environmental factors. I was also interested in the potential to develop a poetic layer with certain bee activities or the bee life cycle, which would resonate with the essence of the story.

**Have there been any unexpected events during the shoot? Have these events been an advantage or disadvantage?**

It took me a while to get access to proper film equipment. As I had been observing Lao Yu's routines with the bees and his daily life without any shooting for a few months, he mentioned that his son would be coming home to learn beekeeping from him. I thought about filming his son in the city, but unexpectedly, the first footage I would ever shoot for the film ended up being Lao Yu's visit with his mother, joined by the son.

The beekeeper's hometown was in another province. He had to spend the whole night sitting on a train and then switch buses several times. After more than 24 hours of travel, it was a bit of

anti-climax for me to find out that his mother could no longer recognize him. She had become senile. For those few days with his mother, the beekeeper tried to do everything he could to care for her, and the personal moments between the beekeeper and his mother revealed a very tender side of him underneath his strong personality.

After the son Maofu came home, Lao Yu expected him to be a diligent apprentice on the bee farm. However, Maofu was more interested in being a honey salesman, spending his time reading marketing books. There was very little interaction between them at the farm, but the tension was palpable. I was initially planning to film their work and interaction whilst working with the bees. Instead I had to modify my approach and observe the delicate moments between the father and the son. I waited for them to open up to me instead of pushing them with my questions. Taking the time to observe the tension in their relationship has made me more sensitive to the emotional needs of the characters, and made the whole film richer and more personal.

**Were the protagonists willing to do the film with you from the beginning? What is their opinion of the film? Have they already seen it?**

The beekeeper was very supportive from the beginning, and I also got along quite well with his son. His wife was a bit ambivalent about my filming; sometimes she would half-jokingly mock me, saying "Diedie, aren't you lucky playing with your camera all day long?" But gradually we became close friends, and if I didn't show up in their yard one day, they would wonder where I had gone.

When the beekeeper and his son were having difficulty communicating with each other, they would often speak to me on camera about their thoughts. The beekeeper would even ask me about Maofu's thoughts on camera. It didn't feel right to intervene in their relationship, but in some ways the beekeeper expected me to be a mediator between him and his son.

The beekeeper and his wife watched the first rough cut. I was very nervous about showing it to them because the film has so many strong personal moments of family drama, but they ended up liking it a lot, seeing it almost like a home movie. It was bittersweet for the beekeeper to remember the time he spent with his mother—she passed away one year after the filming. When he saw the conflict scenes with his son, he said: "Yeah, we did fight a lot that year." He added: "Maofu did a good job digging the new bee farm site." The beekeeper's wife added: "Family life is like this, it has its ups and downs."

**How do you think the family conflicts reflect the conflicts between the city and countryside, the modernity and tradition, which are going on in China?**

I debated with myself for a long time about whether I would need to film Maofu's life in the city in order to highlight Maofu's dilemma - the divide between rural and urban life. But I came to realize that Maofu's modern values are already shown through his interest in branding and marketing, his lack of engagement with the bees and farm work, and even in the way he dressed. I became more interested in how he dealt with the value differences with his father at home, and how the two generations

managed to work together in the rural homestead.

After Maofu returned home, I continually wondered how long he would stay. Later on, it became clear to me how he felt a lack of belonging to both the city and the village, perpetually drifting between the two. This personal experience can be seen as reflecting a general struggle among the new generation of young farmers and migrant workers.

At the same time, Lao Yu represents a caring but controlling father. He saw that times had changed in ways he might not comprehend, but still wanted to establish a future for his son using what he knew. In the end, he opened up and let Maofu leave again to find his own way, giving the film its open ending. At the end of the movie, it is not yet clear whether Maofu will return, but Lao Yu has become warmer to his son and their relationship is slowly improving.

**Which role do the geese take? Especially the one which seems to have a special relationship with Lao Yu and Maofu?**

At the beginning of my shooting, the goose was often poking into the view, and sometimes would come to bite my leg, stopping me from getting close to Lao Yu or Maofu. I often asked Lao Yu to drive the goose away or tried to distract him with some corn seeds. But I grew to understand that the goose is a special companion for both the father and the son, resonating with their emotions. I once saw the goose walk into Maofu's cave and listen to music with him quietly for quite a while. He also tended to follow Lao Yu like a body guard and bouncer, echoing Lao Yu's loud voice. After this,

I decided to let him remain and become a character in the film. The role of the goose is his gift for the film.

**How did collaboration with Mira Film, a Swiss production company, come about?**

I met the co-founder of Mira Film, Vadim Jendreyko, when he was teaching a documentary workshop in Beijing in 2010. I was very moved and inspired by his films and thought he would be a good mentor for me. I met him again in 2012 for a similar workshop, and had the opportunity to show him some footage from the film. He liked it, and offered to support the film with his company. Later that year he introduced me to his colleague Susanne Guggenberger at RMDI Montreal, with whom I also felt a good understanding during discussions about the film. Since then, we have worked very hard together across China, Switzerland and Canada to complete the film.

**How would you describe the work with Mira Film, what has been different from your other collaborations?**

This is my first feature length documentary, and my first time working with a film company. I feel very lucky to be able to work with Mira Film; the people there have given me so much inspiration and genuine support. It is a company with a small group of people that share great sensitivity and a strong passion for artistic documentaries.

Before I began working with Mira Film, I spent 15 months alone in the mountain valley shooting footage. It has been valuable to be able to slowly

deepen the connections with first Vadim and then Susanne through the project over time. We formed the core of the team with a good understanding of each other and the film, and they have been very supportive of me in developing my own vision for the film. They are both quite humorous which has definitely helped loosen me up during this long journey.

While I was in the process of editing the film, I became pregnant, and we had to finish the editing while I was still breast feeding my baby son. Susanne and Vadim have both been extremely patient and supportive of my needs.

### **How was it working with Vadim Jendreyko, who was co-writer in this project?**

When I watched his films and attended his workshops in Beijing, I appreciated the sensuality, poetic sense and humanistic values in his films – the trust and connection were there from the beginning.

He was generous to offer his guidance to me when I began filming, long before Mira Film officially joined the project. During our editing process we didn't have time to go through all the 150 hours' worth of material together and I am the only one who has seen all the footage. We had to base our collaborative work, therefore, on the latest rough cut and some core material selected with a previous editor. I would then add some other material based on the new requirements that we had defined together for the editing. I was a bit nervous about this way of editing, but trust is the key for this process to work.



# THE PROTAGONISTS



## The Old Beekeeper Laoyu

In his early seventies, Laoyu has deep wrinkles and bright eyes. He is a loving and quick-tempered man, who seldom shows his affection towards his family, but lavishes it on his bees and other animals. He has many expectations, but never voices any needs or requests to his son. He expects Maofu to focus, observe and figure it out for himself. When Maofu doesn't do what

he expects, he gets grumpy and does the work all by himself until he is completely worn out.

## The Son Maofu

In his early twenties, Maofu is tall, handsome and sensitive. He doesn't like talking about his feelings, but he likes sharing quotes from books that resonate with his life. As the youngest child of the family, Maofu tends to rely on his parents in making decisions for their family, but he doesn't like that Laoyu is always giving orders.

Maofu is increasingly aware of the need to support and care for his aging parents, but he feels disconnected from his family since his return. Meanwhile, he doesn't see any future for himself as a migrant worker in the city without higher education. He looks out into the rain from his cave room without a sense of belonging to anywhere.



## Chengnuo Niang, the wife of the beekeeper

Bony but strong in her late fifties, Chengnuo Niang plays the person in the middle, between Laoyu and Maofu. She tends to protect Maofu, but also tries to speak for Laoyu. However, she doesn't put up with Laoyu's harsh words and says to Laoyu: "Don't think you are always right." As Laoyu focuses on helping Maofu establish his career, Niang feels more anxious about Maofu's marriage. When villagers mention their sons' weddings, Niang can't help feeling envious and says to Laoyu: "Look, their son is getting married..."

## The Goose

One of the two geese in particular likes walking into Maofu's cave bedroom to listen to Maofu's music, and accompany Maofu when he is alone. The goose adores both Laoyu and Maofu. He would follow the angry and sad Laoyu, though Laoyu tends to yell at him. But when Maofu is depressed after a fight with Laoyu, the goose would make a low croaking sound and stand quietly with Maofu. All the animals in Laoyu's family are characters, including the bees, the pigs, the dogs, the cat and the chicken. They observe the reality of the family and navigate among the family members with their own 'politics' and humour.

# CAST & CREW

## **Protagonists**

Yangui Yu, Maofu Yu, Chengnuo Chang,  
Maomei Yu, Maolan Yu, Jiayi, Jiaqi, Mingzi

## **Director, Author, Cinematography**

Diedie Weng

## **Dramaturgy, Co-Writer, Cinematography**

Vadim Jendreyko

## **Producers**

Susanne Guggenberger, Vadim Jendreyko,  
Lucie Tremblay, Diedie Weng, Hercli Bundi

## **Production Manager China**

Ding Pingjun

## **Editors**

Vadim Jendreyko, Annette Brütsch, Diedie  
Weng, Mahi Rahgozar

## **Original Music**

Daniel Almada

## **Sound Design and Mix**

Daniel Almada / TSL Studio  
Pascal Dominique

## **Original Sound Recordings**

Diedie Weng

## **City- and Sound Recordings**

Vadim Jendreyko

## **Postproduction and DCP**

Hannes Rüttimann, Simon Allard

## **Postproduction Manager Canada**

Nguen-Anh Nguyen, Roxane de Koninck

## **Consulting**

Deborah Palloway, Ding Pingjun

## **Translation & Subtitles**

submarines–subtitling & translation  
Lowik Media, Roxanne de Konnick

## **Production**

Mira Film GmbH, Zürich

## **in Coproduction with**

Lowik Media, Montréal  
SRF Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen

## **Commissioning Editor**

Urs Augstburger

## **National Coordination SRG SSR**

Sven Wälti

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## **Distribution Switzerland**

Vinca Film GmbH

## **Distribution Canada**

Kinosmith



## DIEDIE WENG

Diedie Weng grew up in Guangdong, Southern China and is currently based in Toronto, Canada. She received her MFA in documentary production at the State University of New York at Buffalo. Diedie studied creative approaches that enable community people to actively participate in the filmmaking process and have their own voices represented in the stories about them.

As these filmmaking processes deepen, she often finds strong connection between her own life questions and the stories she wants to tell. After a few short documentary projects, *The Beekeeper and His Son* is her first feature documentary project.

### FILMOGRAPHY DIEDIE WENG

- 2013 THE BEEKEEPER AND HIS SON, Directed and shot, 85 Min.
- 2012 MING DAY AND NIGHT, Directed and shot, 45 Min.
- 2009 BUILD ON PAST FOR OUR FUTURE, Director, 22 Min.
- 2007 MOSUO SONG JOURNEY, Director, 37 Min.



MIRA FILM (Production Switzerland) was founded in 2002 by Vadim Jendreyko and Hercli Bundi. With the founders Susanne Guggenberger and Peter Zwierko belong to the permanent producer team. Mira Film is producing films with a strong commitment to form and content for cinema and television. "Every film of ours should broaden one's horizons, it should question our view on things and invite to a change."

For more Information about us see: [www.mirafilm.ch](http://www.mirafilm.ch)

#### **FILMOGRAPHY DOCUMENTARIES (SELECTION)**

- 2016 KINGS OF THE AIR – NOTES ON A FRIENDSHIP by Ivo Zen, coproduction with SRF, 76 Min.  
CALABRIA by Pierre-François Sauter, coproduction with Le laboratoire central and SRF, 110 Min.  
THE BEEKEEPER AND HIS SON by Diedie Weng, coproduction with Lowik Média and SRF, 85 Min.  
AMA-SAN, documentary by Claudia Varejao, coproduction with Terratrema Filmes (PT), 112 m
- 2015 34 short films about the UNESCO world heritage in Switzerland, various directors
- 2014 PADRONE E SOTTO Michele Cirigliano, coproduction with ZHdK, RSI, SRF, 75 Min.  
THE CHIMPANZEE COMPLEX by Marc Schmidt, coproduction with Basalt Film NL, SRF
- 2013 EVERYDAY REBELLION by Arash & Arman T. Riahi, coproduction with Golden Girls Filmproduktion (Vienna), ORF und SRF, 108 Min.  
JOURNEY TO THE SAFEST PLACE ON EARTH by Edgar Hagen, Coproduction with SRF, 100 Min.
- 2012 WHERE THE CONDORS FLY by Carlos Klein, Coproduction with TM Film, CK Film, SRF und BR, 90 Min.
- 2010 THE HOUSE IN THE PARK by Hercli Bundi, coproduction with China Film Coproduction Corporation Beijing, 83 Min.
- 2009 THE WOMAN WITH THE 5 ELEPHANTS by Vadim Jendreyko, coproduction with Filmtank Hamburg, SRF and ZDF/3Sat, 93 Min.

#### **DOCUMENTARIES IN PRODUCTION**

THE HUNGRY HALF / LA PARADOXE DE LA FAIM by Mathieu Roy

REVOLUTION REVISITED by Andreas Hoessli

WELCOME TO MY HOME by Maria Müller



LOWIK MEDIA (Production Canada) was founded in 2008 by Lucie Tremblay. Previously Lucie Tremblay produced successfully Performances like "Cirque du Soleil" and the "Grand Orchestre du Splendid". In the 90s she applied herself to the documentary film production. The films reveal Tremblays strong interest for popular science, social issues and the environment.

For more information about Lowik Media see: [www.lowikmedia.com](http://www.lowikmedia.com)

### **FILMOGRAPHY (SELECTION)**

- 2015 UN MATIN SUR TERRE, Documentary by Laurent Joffrion, coproduction with Arte France und Bonne Pioche Télévision, 90 Min.
- 2011 NOU, LES ÉCRIVAINS, Documentary by Simon Trépanier and Abraham Lifshitz, 52 Min.
- THE WAY OF TAI CHI, Documentary by Giles Walker, coproduction with Central Newsreel & Documentary Film Studio (China), 88 Min.
- 2009 PAX AMERICANA, Documentary by Denis Delestrac, coproduction with Les Films Du 3 Mars, Kinosmith and Transit Films, 85 Min.
- 2007 LE VOYAGE D'UN VIE, Documentary by Maryse Chartrand, 91 Min.

### **FILMS IN PRODUCTION**

LE NEZ / THE PLEASURES OF THE SCENTS, Documentary by Kim Nguyen

BRASILIA: LIFE AFTER DESIGN, Documentary by Bart Simpson

LA GRANDE SOIF, Documentary by Delphine Piperni

PLACIDE GABOURY OU L'EX-PÈRE SPIRITUEL, Documentary by Simon Tépanier and Abraham Lishitz

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**[www.vincafilm.ch](http://www.vincafilm.ch)**

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