

MIND THE GAP

After filming a documentary and more than a hundred television commercials, director Chung Mong-hong has made an eye-catching foray into fictional cinema with 'Parking'

BY HO YI
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Parking director Chung Mong-hong, second left, likes to keep his distance.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CREAM FILM PRODUCTION

Tastefully dressed in black, commercial director Chung Mong-hong (鍾孟宏) looks relaxed as he sits down for our interview in his studio on Minsheng East Road (民生東路). Decorating his workspace are storyboards pinned on a wall like pieces of art and several vintage bicycles that lean against a spotless glass window.

Chung has just finished a television commercial that took two days to shoot. But the subject of this particular meeting, though, is not the 43-year-old director's successful career as a maker of TV advertisements — he's filmed more than 100 — but his debut feature film *Parking* (停車), which premiered this year in the Cannes Film Festival's Un Certain Regard section and opened last weekend in theaters across Taiwan.

Parking is a black comedy and contemporary fable about one man's Kafkaesque journey through Taipei over the course of one night, and stars a company of fine actors including Chang Chen (張震), Jack Kao (高捷), Leon Dai (戴立忍), Chapman To (杜汶澤) and Kwai Lun-mei (桂綸鎂).

Taipei Times: You were an information technology engineering major at National Chiao Tung University (交通大學) and obtained a master's degree in filmmaking from the Art Institute of Chicago. What inspired you to become a director?

Chung Mong-hong: I had lived in the countryside in Pingtung until high school. Going to a movie was the ultimate form of entertainment. We saw lots of Bruce Lee (李小龍) and Michael Hui (許冠文) films. I was particularly fond of the James Bond movies because they were like pornography for us kids. [He laughs.]

In high school I had a chance to see Nagisa Oshima's *Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence*. There is one scene where David Bowie kisses Ryuichi Sakamoto. It got me to start thinking, "Wow, movies can show so many special things, things I don't understand."

TT: You came back from Chicago in 1994. Why did it take so long for you to make your first film?

CM: Filmmakers born in the 1960s were born under an unlucky star. We were in high school when Taiwan's New Wave cinema started to take off in the early 1980s. We were inspired and had certain expectations and ideals for films. We went abroad, studied film and came back, only for Taiwanese cinema to collapse in

the early 1990s.

Back then all you saw and heard were people selling houses and borrowing money to make movies that no one wanted to see. The only option you had was whether or not you wanted to follow the same road. I chose another way.

TT: Why did you choose to make your entry into the film world with the documentary *Doctor* (醫生)? The subject matter was rather challenging, especially considering you had no previous experience in documentary filmmaking.

CM: To me, it was like taking an oath and chopping off a chicken's head in a temple to show your determination. [He laughs]. Documentary filmmaking is the opposite of commercial filmmaking. By taking a stab at a medium that's foreign to what I know best and doing it right, I can tell myself, "Yes, we are here to stay and make movies," and show others that, besides technique, I do have other abilities required for being a film director.

[Chung and his team spent three years making *Doctor*, which was completed in 2006. Shot in black and white, the award-winning documentary explores the meaning of life and death through the story of a Taiwanese-American doctor who loses his 13-year-old son to suicide and then a young Peruvian patient to cancer. The film was well-received because it refused to fall back on sentimentalism, and looked at its subject matter with a composed and contemplative gaze.]

TT: Do you consciously make a distinction between making films and commercials?

CM: 'Consciously' is not the word. You must divide the two. Have you seen any movies made by television commercial directors? Basically they all fail. It hurts me to see my colleagues fail. The problem is if you look at a 100-minute project with an eye trained for a 30-second ad, you are bound to be crushed.

Styles and forms are not sins in and of themselves. But the most important thing is to return to the basic question: what do you want your audience to see? It would be wrong if a director plays with a [visual] style thinking, "Wow, it's cool!" and repeats it for 100 minutes. As a commercial director, you have to give up what you excel in — images and combinations of images.

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[TECHNOLOGY REVIEWS]

NEXT, A CAMCORDER WILL KNOW IF YOUR HAIR ISN'T COMBED

The Sony HDR-CX12 believes you should never have to say "cheese" again. This small and light camcorder automatically takes still photos whenever anyone in the frame smiles, ensuring that every shot is at least partly a keeper.

The camera records video at 1920 x 1080 pixels — 1080i quality — and records video and stills to an included 4-gigabyte Memory Stick. The camera supports memory cards up to 16 gigabytes.

The videocamera is available now and costs about US\$900. It can shoot photos at 10-megapixel resolution and records audio in 7.1-surround sound, adding a bit of realism to your next birthday party. It also has a 2.7-inch screen and optical stabilizers that reduce jitter while recording.

Interestingly, the camera can distinguish between adult and child smiles, ensuring that you shoot only the group you intended. The camera takes the photos automatically, even while recording video. And for those subjects who won't smile? Just wait: Sony's working on a newer model that dispenses free lollipops and hugs.



Sony's HDR-CX12 videocamera.

PHOTO: NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

A CASE FOR FILLING THE IPHONE 3G'S POWER VACUUM

The iPhone 3G boasts its share of worthy features, but a durable battery life isn't one of them, at least not if you consider yourself a power user. For an alternative to the midday charge, Incase has created the Power Slider Case for iPhone 3G.

The 71g case simultaneously protects and charges your iPhone 3G. Housed in a protective shell, the power slider has an integrated lithium-ion polymer battery that provides up to five hours of extended talk time, up to seven hours of added video playback life and up to 26 hours of additional audio playback time. The slider also gives users an additional five hours of Web access (six hours on Wi-Fi).

Your iPhone's battery will start to drain only after the power slider's battery has been fully depleted. Incase has also added a five-light LED battery status indicator on the back of its case to help you keep track of your juice. The slider also comes with an integrated sync mode that allows the iPhone to sync with Apple's iTunes program. Heavy users won't have to wait long to get one.



Incase's Power Slider Case.

PHOTO: NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

QUICK SNAPS, AND THEN INSTANT PRINTS

While Polaroids might be fading away as the film used to make the instant photos is phased out, Fujifilm is introducing a new instant film camera, the Instax 200.

Aimed at real estate agents, law enforcement officers or just the impatient, the new Instax format allows photo prints to be produced on the spot. The US\$70 Instax 200 features an automatic-adjusting flash, a large viewfinder and two range options for shooting (0.9m to 3m and 3m to infinity).

In the meantime, Fujifilm has introduced a smaller companion instant camera, the Instax Mini 7. The Mini 7 prints instant color photos the size of credit cards in minutes. The Instax Mini costs US\$130 from UrbanOutfitters.com (tinyurl.com/5qnmcc).



Fujifilm's Instax 200.

PHOTO: NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

A TABLET PC THAT LETS THE USER DECIDE WHETHER TO TYPE OR TOUCH

The TX2Z from Hewlett-Packard is the first multitouch convertible tablet PC, which means you can turn the screen to hide the keyboard and use only your fingers on the laptop's 12-inch display.

The computer can hold up to 8 gigabytes of memory and comes with a DVD burner and up to 500GB of hard drive space.

Multitouch, which first reached the mainstream with the iPhone, allows the computer to register two individual points of contact on the laptop screen and allows you to pinch, spread and drag items, virtually. HP's special Touchsmart software improves the overall experience by adding multitouch to the laptop's media and photo functions.

The 2.3kg laptop is 30.5cm wide and 23cm long and about 2.5cm thick. It starts at US\$1,150 in its base configuration. It runs Windows Vista and tops out at a 2.4 gigahertz AMD Turion dual-core processor. It also includes a stylus, in case you don't feel like smudging your screen.



Hewlett-Packard's TX2Z.

PHOTO: NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

YES, IT'S A PORTABLE PROJECTOR, AND NO, YOU AREN'T HEARING THINGS

Ever wonder what your gadgets would say if they could talk? Toshiba's TLP-X200U mobile projector answers that question for you via a built-in voice technology system.

The 2kg projector orally guides you through its operating instructions and also speaks up when it needs a tune-up. The X200U's female voice says "check the lamp for dirt" when it is time for you to clean its air filter.

When the lamp needs to be replaced, the projector will state (cheerfully), "The lamp life is ending. Please change the lamp." If the cooling fan needs attention, you'll be the first to know with the following prompt: "A problem has occurred to the cooling fan. Please look at the owner's manual."

Should you grow impatient, the projector will kindly admonish you by saying, "The lamp will turn on shortly. Please wait a moment." The X200U comes with closed-caption capabilities, 3,000 ANSI lumens of brightness, a 600:1 contrast ratio and a projection distance of up to 11m.

The TLP-X200U is available for US\$1,740. It seems all that talk doesn't come cheap.

— NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE



Toshiba's TLP-X200U mobile projector.

PHOTO: NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE