



A LITTLE HORSE CROSSING THE RIVER Production  
In Association with AC FILMS and DIAMOND DOCS

# HOOLIGAN SPARROW

**A Film by Nanfu Wang**

Running Time: 84 minutes

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## SYNOPSIS

The danger is palpable as intrepid young filmmaker Nanfu Wang follows maverick activist Ye Haiyan (a.k.a. Hooligan Sparrow) and her band of colleagues to Hainan Province in southern China, to protest the case of six elementary school girls who were sexually abused by their principal. Marked as enemies of the state, the activists are under constant government surveillance and face interrogation, harassment, and imprisonment. Sparrow, who gained notoriety with her advocacy work for sex workers' rights, continues to champion girls' and women's rights and arms herself with the power and reach of social media.

Filmmaker Wang becomes a target along with Sparrow, as she faces destroyed cameras and intimidation. Yet she bravely and tenaciously keeps shooting, guerrilla-style, with secret recording devices and hidden-camera glasses, and in the process, she exposes a startling number of undercover security agents on the streets. Eventually, through smuggling footage out of the country, Wang is able to tell the story of her journey with the extraordinary revolutionary Sparrow, her fellow activists, and their seemingly impossible battle for human rights.

Hooligan Sparrow is Nanfu Wang's feature debut. It's executive produced by Andy Cohen, Executive Producer for *Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry* (Special Jury Prize, Sundance 2012) and Alison Klayman, Director/Producer of *Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry*; co-written by Mark Monroe, an award-winning documentary filmmaker and six time Sundance veteran: *The Cove* (Winner, Best Documentary 2010 Academy Awards & Best Documentary Script, W.G.A. 2010); with original score by Nathan Halpern, *Rich Hill* (Grand Jury Prize, 2015), and graphics by Garry Waller, *Watchers of the Sky* (Special Jury Prize, Sundance 2014).

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I first heard about Ye Haiyan (who is known more widely by her nickname, Hooligan Sparrow, in China) a few years ago when I read an article online about a Chinese woman who was offering to work as a sex worker – for free. I've lived in China most of my life, and I've always been interested in issues related to sex workers' rights, so I was curious to learn more about this woman and what motivated her.

The brothel where she offered to work was one of thousands across China known as "Ten Yuan Brothel," which are frequented by the poorest of China's migrant laborers. The brothels take their name from the average price of a visit with one of their working girls – ten yuan, or about two dollars.

Sparrow had a long history of advocating for women's rights in China, and her offer of free sex in the Ten Yuan Brothel stemmed from a desire to expose the terrible working conditions in the brothel and also the desperate lives of the migrant workers who visited them.

As I researched Sparrow, I learned that like me, she came from a poor farming village with limited access to education. I appreciated her respect for people whom Chinese society rejected, and I shared her desire to understand their lives more deeply. I reached out to her via e-mail in early 2013 to see if she'd be willing to let me film her as part of a larger video project about sex workers in China. She replied, "When you're in China, we'll talk."

On May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2013, I returned to China from the U.S where I had lived for two years at the time. When I landed and got a hold of her, she was in the midst of preparing for a public protest with a number of other activists. Two government officials in southern China had taken six schoolgirls to a hotel for a night, and the local government seemed poised to hand down a perfunctory sentence. Sparrow and her fellow activists wanted justice to be served for the girls and their families, so they planned to stage a public demonstration denouncing the government and the officials, a move that could land all of them in prison.

I knew at this moment that the story I set out to tell – the story of the lives sex workers and Ten Yuan Brothels – had changed. I asked Sparrow and the other activists if I could follow them and record what happened at the protest. They agreed.

The chain of events I witnessed in the months that followed the protest shocked me. I've never had illusions about fairness in China's justice system or the accountability of its government. But I never expected to see ordinary people turn on their neighbors who were fighting for their rights. I never expected to be attacked by screaming mobs just for filming on the street. I never expected to be interrogated by national security agents, and that my family and friends would be harassed and threatened by secret police.

But this is the China I saw.

-- Nanfu Wang

## THE MAKING OF THE FILM

The production began on May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2013 and ended on August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2013. Over the course of those three months, I travelled to Hainan province, Guangxi Province, Guangdong Province, Shanghai, Hubei Province, and Jiangxi Province. I worked as director, producer, cinematographer, and sound recordist. I wasn't able to film with bulky, professional filming equipment, as it would have drawn the attention of police (both uniformed and secret) to the subjects I was filming. To avoid endangering my subjects or myself, I ended up carrying only a backpack with a Canon 60D DSLR camera, a small point-and-shoot, a pair of glasses with an embedded micro camera, and an Edirol audio recorder. With the exception of the interviews, almost every shot was filmed handheld, which allowed me to blend in more easily than if I had been filming with a tripod.

Getting the footage out of China was one of the biggest challenges. Because we were constantly on the run, I couldn't leave my hard drives anywhere. I carried all of my footage with me everywhere I went. I always was afraid that my footage would be seized and destroyed, or that it would be seen by the authorities and used against my subjects. At one point, I tried to ship a drive to the US, but I realized I was followed on the way to the shipping office, and I was afraid that my drive would be taken. I rushed back to the office and retrieved my drive. Luckily, I had a few friends who were traveling to the US who were willing to bring the drive back in person.

The postproduction started in September 2013. I had to take a day job, so I edited the film in my spare time. When I had a rough cut, I realized that I needed financial support to finish the film. After a slow start, I managed to secure funds from a few organizations and individuals. Editing was a discovery process not only in terms of storytelling, but it also gave me a deeper understanding of the events I witnessed in China. For example, I learned, after hours and hours of watching and re-watching the material, that one of the people who followed the group of activists in one scene actually showed up again in a later scene in a totally different location. Poring over the footage for so long gave me a sense of the scale and intensity of the surveillance my subjects (and myself) were experiencing. Editing the film myself has been challenging, but it has helped me see the story in a way I otherwise might not have.

## **SUBJECT BIOGRAPHIES**

### **YE HAIYAN, AKA HOOLIGAN SPARROW**

*Women's Rights Activist*

Known as Hooligan Sparrow, Ye Haiyan has a long history of activism related to women's rights, child abuse and sex work in China. Under the name Hooligan Sparrow, she blogs avidly about women's rights and is most known for her protest in 2012 as a free sex worker at a "Ten Yuan Brothel" to expose the poor working conditions of migrant sex workers.

While her work has won her the respect of international organizations, she has constantly come under attack at home in China. In 2009 after establishing a website that served as a forum for sex workers to speak out and founding "The China Grassroots Women's Rights Center in Wuhan," police began to take notice of her protests and advocacy work for women and sex worker's rights. In 2010, Ye organized what is believed to be the first sex workers rally in China and afterwards suffered several attacks at her home, presumably orchestrated by local authorities. Most recently, Ye protested against a primary school principal in Hainan who took six girls to a hotel room.

A thorn in the side of local authorities concerned with maintaining social stability, Sparrow has been harassed, detained, physically assaulted, evicted, driven from various cities in China and experienced travel bans for her advocacy work. She is 37 years old and from the rural village of Wuhan in Hubei province; she is a single mother and has a teenage daughter.

Ye currently lives in Wuhan City and continues her activism despite being placed under residential surveillance. Her passport has been confiscated by the government since November 2014, and she is restricted from travelling.

### **WANG YU**

*Human Rights Lawyer*

Based in Beijing and one of only two female lawyers who specialize in human rights in China, Lawyer Wang Yu has been involved in cases ranging from disability discrimination to religious freedom to land rights, and most recently she has been a key player involved in cases around illegal restriction of personal freedom by government and law enforcement officials and activists' cases. Her most prominent cases include Li Tingting, a feminist activist arrested in March 2015 and human rights activist Cao Shunli, who died in 2014 after not being given medical treatment while in detention. In 2011, Lawyer Wang shifted her focus from commercial law to primarily human rights law after experiencing for herself the corruption of the Chinese legal system. In 2008, Wang was arrested on false charges of allegedly beating a railway worker until the man was deaf. These kinds of charges are common in China when authorities want to detain human rights activists.

Wang is a 1994 graduate of one of the top law schools in China and has been internationally lauded by colleagues for her work as a human rights lawyer. However, starting in 2015, state owned Chinese media began a smear campaign accusing Wang of faking her educational and professional credentials. On July 9th, 2015 authorities came to Wang's house at 4:00 am and arrested her.

Wang has been detained without trial along with her husband Bao Longjun, a fellow human rights lawyer. Both of them have been accused of "subverting the government," punishable by up to 15 years in prison. Wang's son fled to Burma but was kidnapped by Chinese secret police and brought back to China where he is currently under house arrest.

## FILMAKER BIOGRAPHIES

### **NANFU WANG**

*Director, Producer, Cinematographer & Editor*

Nanfu Wang is an independent filmmaker based in New York City. Wang was born in a remote farming village in Jiangxi Province, China. After losing her father at the age of 12, Wang was forced to forgo formal education and take whatever work she could to support her family. Unable to afford high school, she studied at a vocational school until she secured work as a teacher at a primary school at the age of 16, teaching herself English during her spare time.

After several years of working, Wang was admitted to a university's Continuing Education Program, where she studied English literature. At the age of 22, she was awarded a full fellowship to attend a graduate program in English Language and Literature at Shanghai University. Realizing that she wanted to help tell the stories of people who came from backgrounds like hers, Wang decided to pursue graduate film studies, first in the journalism school at Ohio University and later at New York University's documentary program. Wang holds three master degrees from New York University, Ohio University, and Shanghai University.

Since completing her studies, Wang has produced short films that have been distributed on many platforms and translated into several languages. Her work often features the stories of marginalized or mistreated people. Wang continues to seek out and tell the stories of people who have been ignored by their societies.

Hooligan Sparrow is Wang's feature debut. Wang is a recipient of the Sundance Documentary Fund and Bertha Britdoc Journalism Fund, and a Sundance and IFP supported filmmaker.

### **ANDY COHEN**

*Executive Producer*

Andy Cohen has produced and co-written award-winning films that have premiered at Sundance Film Festival, Toronto International Film Festival, Berlin Film Festival, including *Dealers Among Dealers*, *Killing Kasztner: the Jew who Dealt With Nazis*, *Ai WeiWei: Never Sorry*, and *The World Before Her*, with broadcast on PBS' P.O.V. And BBC Storyville. As a film director, Mr. Cohen directed and wrote a series of short films on China's leading contemporary artists, and is in post-production on three feature length documentary films: *Talking Tacheles*, the infamous art house in Berlin, *Criminals of the Nation*, the AIDS villages in Xincui, China and *Beijing Spring*, the story of the first public art movement and protest march in Post-Mao China. He is also a contributing editor for *Art Asia Pacific Magazine*, and writes critically on *Contemporary Asian Art* for many other publications.

### **ALISON KLAYMAN**

*Executive Producer*

Alison Klayman's feature documentary *AI WEIWEI: NEVER SORRY* won a Special Jury Prize at the 2012 Sundance Film Festival. The film went on to be released theatrically around the globe and shortlisted for an Academy Award, nominated for two Emmys and two Cinema Eye Honors, and earned Alison a Director's Guild of America nomination. She is a regular contributor to the New York Times' Op-Docs series, and was named one of the "20 Directors to Watch" on A.O. Scott and Manohla Dargis' list of international filmmakers under 40.

### **PETER LUCAS**

*Creative Producer*

Peter Lucas teaches at NYU and the New School. His courses focus on human rights with an emphasis on participatory media, documentary practice, the poetics of witnessing, human rights

education, and youth media. He is also a filmmaker and a photographer and in 2012, he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship for his documentary film projects.

### **MARK MONROE**

*Co-Writer*

Mark Monroe is an award-winning documentary filmmaker whose theatrical writing credits include: "Under The Gun" (Sundance 2016); "Racing Extinction" (Sundance 2015); "Fed Up" (Sundance 2014); "The Summit", (Winner, Best Editing Sundance 2013); "Who is Dayani Cristal?", (Winner, Best Cinematography, Sundance 2013); "Sound City" (Sundance 2013); "The Cove" (Winner, Best Documentary 2010 Academy Awards & Best Documentary Script, W.G.A. 2010); "The Tillman Story"; "Chasing Ice" (Winner, Best Cinematography Sundance 2012); "Stolen Seas"; "Last Play at Shea"; "Once in a Lifetime: The Extraordinary Story of the New York Cosmos", (W.G.A. nomination "Best Documentary Script", 2007); "Amazing Journey: The Story of The Who", and writer/director, "Morning Light", Disney Pictures. Monroe was the writer of Dave Grohl's "Sonic Highways" (HBO) and he's currently working on an untitled Beatles documentary with Imagine Entertainment, White Horse Pictures, Apple Corporation and director Ron Howard.

### **MICHAEL SHADE**

*Co-Producer*

Michael Shade is an independent documentary filmmaker. He currently works as a multimedia specialist at New York University. He also worked as a freelance video editor for MSNBC and HBO. His work has appeared on Al Jazeera Empire, MSNBC, HBO and The New York Daily News.

### **NATHAN HALPERN**

*Music Composer*

Nathan Halpern is a Brooklyn-based composer, recently named as one of Indiewire's "Composers to Watch" for 2015. His film scores include RICH HILL, winner of the 2014 Sundance Film Festival Grand Jury Prize for Best Documentary, MARINA ABRAMOVIC: THE ARTIST IS PRESENT (HBO Films), winner of the Emmy Award for Best Arts and Cultural Programming, the George Foster Peabody Award, the Panorama Audience Award at the Berlin International Film Festival, and numerous additional festival awards. Other recent film credits include the Kiernan Shipka-starring narrative feature ONE AND TWO (IFC Films), THE WITNESS, which premiered at the 2015 New York Film Festival, THE POISONER'S HANDBOOK (PBS/American Experience) and KEHINDE WILEY: AN ECONOMY OF GRACE (PBS), winner of the 2014 South by Southwest Grand Jury Prize.

### **CHRIS RUGGIERO**

*Music Composer*

Chris Ruggiero studied Media and Electronic Music at Brown University, and since 1998 he has worked as a composer and music producer. Ruggiero has composed music for documentaries including Ivy Meeropol's INDIAN POINT, which premiered at the 2015 Tribeca Film Festival, and Jeff Dupre's KEHINDE WILEY: AN ECONOMY OF GRACE which premiered at SXSW was awarded that festival's Grand Jury Prize. His music currently appears in dozens of television series including The Voice, Pawn Stars, and American Pickers, and his commercial credits include music for brands such as Coke, HSN, Imodium, Dewars, and Liberty Mutual. Upcoming scores include the documentaries WIND RIVER and OUT RUN. Ruggiero is a partner in Gold Coast Recorders, a recording studio located in Bridgeport Connecticut, and he lectures on semiotics, film, and sound at the University of Bridgeport.

### **GARRY WALLER**

*Graphic Designer*

Garry Waller is an award winning motion designer working in New York City whose art direction and graphics work on documentaries has helped secure numerous accolades. His work for the documentary "Watchers of The Sky" received the Special Jury Award for Animation at the 2014 Sundance premiere. The documentary "Trashed" which Garry Art Directed, received a Palme d'Ore nomination at the Cannes Film Festival in 2012.

Garry's work within film and network TV is always informed by the belief that graphics can serve to heighten storytelling and that good design is an invaluable tool that can be used to play out in thoughtful and unique ways. Through his company Momentist, Inc., Garry continues to work independently for world renowned clients and film directors using his experience to design and create compelling animated content.

**COMPLETE PRODUCTION CREDITS**

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AC FILMS  
DIAMOND DOCS

**Executive Producers**  
ANDY COHEN  
ALISON KLAYMAN

**Produced by**  
NANFU WANG

**Creative Producer**  
PETER LUCAS

**Co-Producer**  
MICHAEL SHADE

**Music by**  
NATHAN HALPERN  
CHRIS RUGGIERO

**Written by**  
NANFU WANG  
MARK MONROE

**A Film by NANFU WANG**

----end credits----

**Directed, Produced, Filmed, and Edited by**  
NANFU WANG

**Executive Producers**  
ANDY COHEN  
ALISON KLAYMAN

**Creative Producer**  
PETER LUCAS

**Co-Producer**  
MICHAEL SHADE

**Graphics by**  
GARRY WALLER

**Music by**  
NATHAN HALPERN  
CHRIS RUGGIERO

**Written by**  
NANFU WANG  
MARK MONROE

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NANFU WANG

**Sound Design & Re-recording Mixer**  
RON BOCHAR

**Dialogue Editor**  
PHILIP STOCKTON

**Sound Effects Editor**  
ALLAN ZALESKI

**Assistant Sound Editor**  
CHRIS FIELDER

**Digital Intermediate Colorist**  
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**Digital Intermediate Online Editor**  
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NANFU WANG  
PAUL STEPHEN

**Original Score**

NATHAN HALPERN  
CHRIS RUGGIERO

Courtesy of Copticon Music and Jasper vs Sanchez (ASCAP)  
Cello, Viola, & Violin Performed by ROBERT PYCIOR

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**A Very Special Thanks**

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MILTON TABBOT  
XIZHE WANG  
JUDITH WOLFF  
HAO WU  
RUNZE YU  
TITI YU

NYU NEWSDOC PROGRAM 2013

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ALL OF MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS IN CHINA WHOSE NAMES HAVE BEEN WITHHELD FOR THEIR SAFETY

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HOOLIGAN SPARROW

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