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Two foreign films premiere in Shanghai

Athlete's story, 'Above the Clouds' screen at film fest

By Maria Trombly
June 15, 2008, 10:55 AM

Complete Shanghai film fest coverage

SHANGHAI -- Two non-Chinese films had world premieres at the 11th Shanghai International Film Festival over the weekend, in a sign that the event is working to live up to its name.

The Shanghai festival, which will screen 270 films through June 22, has long struggled to attract newly finished foreign films. It took nearly a decade, until the ninth SIFF in 2006, before organizers could boast of their first world premiere, German director Chris Kraus' "Four Minutes."

Two years later, producers and directors from Italy and Canada were in Shanghai to promote "Above the Clouds," a historical drama about a small Italian town during WWII, and "Heart of a Dragon," about Canadian wheelchair athlete Rick Hansen's travels to China in the 1980s.

"Heart," which premiered Saturday, was written and produced by debut director Michael French of Vancouver-based Associated Film, in association with the China Film Group. But the \$8 million picture was not a co-production with state-controlled CFG, which means French, not Chinese, censors had final cut.

What's more, in this sports-mad year in the run-up to the Beijing Olympics in August, French said, "Heart" got special treatment and was granted a distribution license for China outside state regulators' 20-film limit on imports.

French has begun talks about distribution and "Heart" next goes to Beijing, where it will screen at the end of June as part of a pre-Olympics movie series at the China Film Archive.

Sunday saw the premiere of "Clouds," which was made for about \$400,000. Focusing on the effect of war on village life, the film lacks sex and is, said producer Sergio Pelone, "very naive, very clean."

"I think it suits the Chinese taste," he said. "We just decided to send the movie here and it was accepted."

Neither the Canadian nor Italian film is in competition for the top SIFF prize, the Jin Jue award, which Germany's "Four Minutes" won in 2006.



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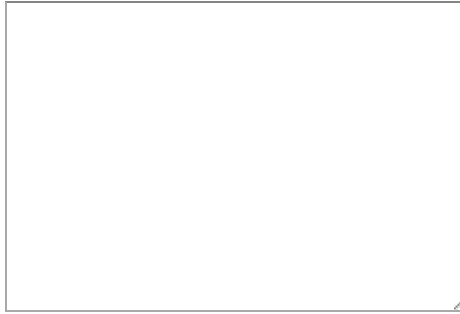
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