

Document Citation

Title	Chan is missing
Author(s)	Todd McCarthy
Source	<i>Variety</i>
Date	1982 Mar 31
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	Wang, Wayne (1949), Hong Kong, Hong Kong
Film Subjects	Chan is missing, Wang, Wayne, 1982

Caught At Filmex In L.A.

Chan Is Missing

(U.S.-16m-B&W)

Hollywood, Feb. 28.

A Wayne Wang production. Produced, directed, written, edited by Wayne Wang; camera (b&w), Michael Chin; music Robert Kikuchi-Yungojo; sound, Curtis Chong. Reviewed at the Barnsdall Park Gallery Theatre, L.A., Feb. 18, 1982. (No MPAA Rating.) Running time: 80 MINS.

Cast: Marc Hayashi, Wood May.

"Chan Is Missing" is the sort of film that justifies film festivals and makes them essential — a small, indie effort which would have difficulty securing a venue otherwise and which displays an unusual sensibility in the first throes of extended expression. Iconoclastic mystery is a look at San Francisco's Chinatown from the inside, and loosely uses genre conventions for its own sociological means. Even more than such previous American Film Institute mini-features as "Hot Tomorrows" and "Eraserhead," pic exists as a means of signaling the talent of its director rather than as a widely exploitable item in its own right.

Rather roughly lensed in b&w, tale traces the odyssey of two Chinese taxi drivers as they search for an older partner who's vanished with their funds. As in Antonioni's "L'Avventura," the object of their quest is never found, but suspense in this regard couldn't be further from the point. Instead, Chan's relatives, local businessmen, politicians and citizens-at-large who are interviewed by the pair constitute a fascinating and often amusing gallery of portraits of contempo Chinese Americans, the likes of which has seldom been seen in a fictional context.

Joe, the elder cabbie who serves as narrator, is like a solid working stiff of any race, aware of the rules of the game but irrevocably set in his ways. His youthful cohort, Steve, seems to have fashioned his looks after Burt Reynolds, hiply speaks in a sort of black jive lingo and has little patience for the caution, moderation and discretion widely found in the older generations of Chinese immigrants.

A general idea of the missing Chan's difficulties in adapting to Yankee life is sketched in, and he is more than once referred to as "too Chinese" to fit in here. Continuing animosity between Taiwan and the People's Republic of China provides a backdrop for the action, as at one point the duo runs across the case of how one old man shot another in a dispute concerning which flag would be flown at a Chinatown New Year's celebration, and later meet up with a young activist.

For those who think that the Chinese have fared better than most ethnic groups in the U.S., certain aspects of the film provide a bracing antidote, and the work is convincing to the extent that it makes one see whites and blacks for the tourists they are once they enter Chinatown.

Any filmmaker who can so thoroughly force the viewer to look at the world through his eyes possesses a talent to reckon with. Aside from having some good ideas on his mind, Wayne Wang displays a flair for eliciting naturalistic performances from his mixed pro-non-pro cast.

To be sure, film is rough around the edges and suspends a mere clothesline plot on which colorful vignettes are hung. But in the enterprising low-budget tradition, Wang has done well on limited means and will hopefully find the opportunities to refine his storytelling techniques on further projects.

—Cart.