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Faye Yu shares some quiet time with her father, Henry O, before he returns to China in Wayne Wang's "A Thousand Years of Good Prayers."

contrasting short features, "A Thousand Years of Good Prayers" and "The Princess of Nebraska," which are making the fest rounds together. The more traditional of the two, "Prayers," which focuses on communication difficulties between a Chinese father and his American-resident daughter after 12 years apart, is a quiet work with Ozu-like structure and concerns, but remains more an intellectual exercise than one from the heart. Mainly concerned with generational and cultural issues, very modest entry possesses equally modest commercial potential.

Even from the opening scene, in which coldly attractive, thirtysomething divorcee Yilan (Faye Yu) greets her elderly father, Mr. Shi (Yank character actor Henry O), at the Spokane Airport without so much as a hug, it's rather alarming how unwelcoming she is to her old man. He seems a genial enough chap, but, after an initial dinner, she leaves him alone at her antiseptic suburban condo during the day while she works as a librarian and at night as she pursues her social life.

Left to his own devices in a strange country and with very limited English, Mr. Shi gets along all right. He's the type of guy who can fall into conversation with just about anyone, and he particularly engages with a Farsi-speaking woman in a park; they can barely understand one another, but communicate extremely well.

Which is more than can be said for Mr. Shi and his daughter who, just to add another element to the linguistic mix, is dating a Russian. It seems very odd that she has absolutely nothing planned for her father to do, either with or without her. Their limited conversations are strained, especially when he presses for details of her private life, of which he adamantly disapproves, and it doesn't help when he correctly assesses that she's unhappy.

One pivotal and intriguing exchange has Yilan admitting she can express her feelings much more easily in English than in Chinese, as she was not brought up to state her feelings in her native language. In her acquired language, she insists, she feels free, just as she's at liberty in virtually every other aspect of her life.

However, from the perspective of her father, who's still a red-blooded, if not at all doctrinaire communist ("It's not easy to find a true believer nowadays," he quips), these boundless freedoms seem to carry a heavy price, a suspicion underlined by the airless anonymity of Yilan's home and the lack of social fabric in her life.

When push finally comes to shove, some troublesome aspects of Mr. Shi's past are finally aired, although the way he dealt with them illustrates the pride and discretion he maintained through an admittedly modest life.

The interests of Wang and writer Yiyun Lee lie more with cultural discrepancies than with building narrative momentum or emotional heft, meaning the film barely has enough steam to power it through its brief running time. There's certainly not enough here to motivate many viewers outside the Chinese-American community to make an evening of it.

Much of the film is devoted to Mr. Shi shuffling around in search of something to do or someone to talk to, so, fortunately, Henry O makes him a relatively amusing character to watch. Yu, who had a supporting role in Wang's "The Joy Luck Club" 14 years ago, is unostentatiously foxy, dramatically effective in both Mandarin and English but constrained by the sometimes maddening recitiveness of her role.

Shot on high-end HD, the pic looks and sounds fine.

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P71 A THOUSAND YEARS OF GOOD PRAYERS

An Entertainment Farm presentation of a Good Prayers production. (International sales: The Match Factory, Cologne, Germany.) Produced by Yukie Kito, Rich Cowan, Wayne Wang. Executive producers, Yasushi Kotani, Taizo Son.

Directed by Wayne Wang. Screenplay, Yiyun Lee, based on her short story. Camera (color, HD video), Patrick Lindenmaier; editor, Deirdre Slevin; music, Lesley Barber; music supervisors, Deva Anderson, Delphine Robertson; production designer, Vincent de Felice; set decorator, Dan Beyer; sound (Dolby Digital), Tom Taylor; supervising sound editor/re-recording mixer, Lewis Goldstein; assistant director, Rich Cowan; casting, Todd Thaler, Philip Huffman. **Reviewed at Toronto Film Festival (Masters), Sept. 9, 2007. (Also in Telluride, San Sebastian film festivals.)** Running time: 83 MIN.

Mr. Shi Henry O
Yilan Faye Yu
Madame Vida Ghahremani
Boris Pasha Lychnikoff
(Mandarin, English, Farsi dialogue)

By TODD McCARTHY

After a run of impersonal commercial projects, Wayne Wang has returned to his indie roots with a pair of