

## Document Citation

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capital, "Keep Cool" is undeniably fascinating on many levels. Westerners who know little about China will be intrigued by the way the characters dress and decorate their apartments; foreign influences are pervasive, yet the film depicts basic traditions that remain unchanged. Mandarin speakers will discover that the film is spoken in a broad dialect with much use of colorful slang.

Film is essentially divided into two parts. In the first, bookseller Xiao Shuai (Jiang Wen) literally pursues the girl he loves, seriously sexy An Hong (Qu Ying), all over the city. He wants to discover where she lives, but she wants nothing to do with him. He loses her in an area dwarfed by huge apartment blocks, and hires a local peddler (an amusing cameo from director Zhang) to yell her name so that he can locate her. After a while, An is so impressed by Xiao's tireless efforts that she invites him up to her place for a quickie (she's a most uninhibited girl), but their tryst is interrupted.

Unfortunately, the lively An soon drops out of the picture, as Zhang shifts into pic's main theme with the introduction of a tenacious elderly researcher, Lao Zhang (Li Baotian), whose laptop computer is smashed to pieces when he comes across Xiao being beaten up by thugs employed by An's new boyfriend, a wealthy nightclub owner. Lao demands that his laptop be replaced, but Xiao can think only of revenge against his rival. Lao sets up a meeting between the enemies in a restaurant that doubles as a karaoke bar, and it's in this setting that most of the remainder of the film unfolds.

The narrative is wafer-thin, and it's only by repetition that it is stretched to the 94-minute running time. Scenes are allowed to play on long after the point has been made, and while this gives the film an engagingly loose feeling, it also drags things out interminably, especially in the climactic restaurant scene.

Acceptance of the in-your-face visual style adopted by Zhang and cameraman Lu Yue will be a matter of taste. After a while, many viewers may become turned off by the constantly swinging hand-held camera and the crazy angles. This is certainly a long way from the pristine visuals of Zhang's earlier films, and is perhaps influenced by visual trends in Hong Kong cinema, especially in the films of Wong Kar-wai. But unlike the best of the H.K. school, Zhang's camerawork seems forced and not as integrated with the material.

Performances are fine, with popular star Jiang Wen in excellent form as the dogged Xiao and Li Baotian very funny as the tenacious Lao. Sharper cutting would, however, have enhanced both performances. As the alluring An Hong, Qu Ying breezes confidently through her too-few scenes. When she disappears from the film, she leaves a major gap.

Among a host of sharply drawn minor characters, standout is a large woman who gets furious when her mobile phone is "borrowed" during the lengthy climax.

Several songs are integrated into the slender storyline, to appealing effect. The final scene, which reportedly was added after principal shooting at the behest of the authorities, wraps things up with a satisfying neatness.

The film's moral is included in a couple of scenes in which a young policeman gently lectures characters who have just spent time in prison, advising them how to become better citizens and keep cool in these heady times of change and progress. Close observers of Chinese society will doubtless be able to read between the

lines and see the film as an allegory of the bewildering changes taking place, with the nightclub owner (whose club is called Underworld) a representative of the newly emerging wealthy class, the old man repping the intellectuals and the protagonist standing for "ordinary" citizens coping with the changes. The oppressive visual style thus perhaps represents the chaos of everyday life.

Technical credits are all first-class.  
—David Stratton

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**(YOU HUA HAO HAO SHUO)**  
**(CHINESE)**

A Guang Xi Film Studio production. (International sales: Sun Prods., Hong Kong.) Produced by Wang Qipeng. Executive producers, Zhang Weiping, Wang Wei.

Directed by Zhang Yimou. Screenplay, Shu Ping, based on his novel "Evening News." Camera (color), Lu Yue; editor, Du Yuan; music, Zang Tianshuo; production design, Cao Jiuping; costumes, Tong Huamiao; sound (Dolby), Tao Jing; line producers, Zhang Zhenyan, Hu Xiaofeng; assistant director, Shen Xuebin. **Reviewed at Venice Film Festival (competing), Sept. 1, 1997. (Also in Toronto Film Festival.)** Running time: 94 MIN.

Xiao Shuai .....	Jiang Wen
Lao Zhang .....	Li Baotian
An Hong .....	Qu Ying
The Policeman .....	Ge You
The Peddler .....	Zhang Yimou

**F**or the many Western followers of Zhang Yimou, who, for better or worse, has come to represent the new Chinese cinema with his classical dramas "Raise the Red Lantern" and "Ju Dou," his latest will come as something of a shock. In a major shift from the elegant, subversive period pieces for which he is known, Zhang has come up with an aggressively modern comedy in "Keep Cool," set in contemporary Beijing and shot entirely with hand-held camera. The result will be alienating for many, but will probably also delight and impress those able to adjust to the director's flashy style. While Zhang's fans will be intrigued with this stylistic departure, general international arthouse chances look to be on the cool side.

Filmed on the streets, in the apartments and eateries of the Chinese