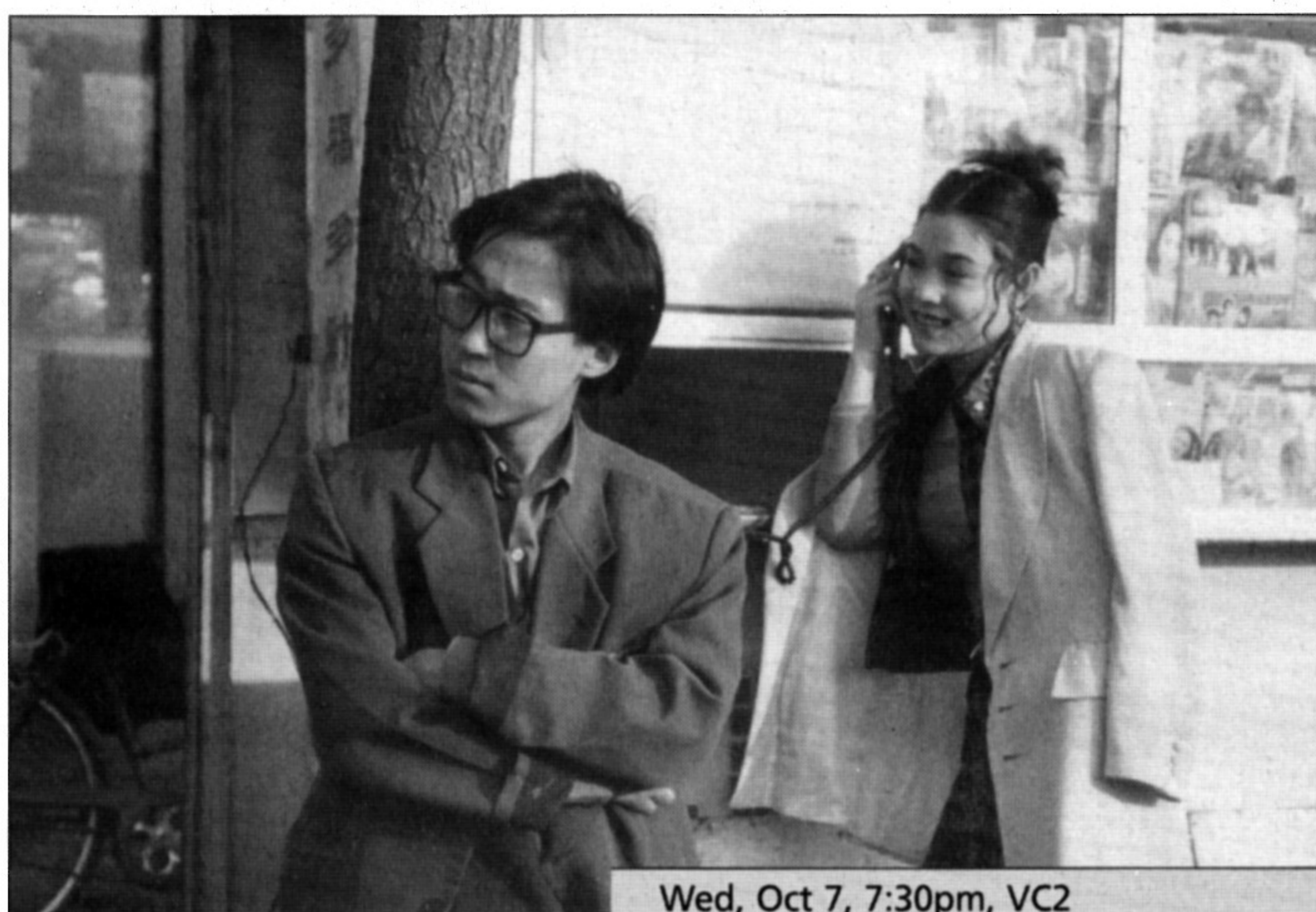


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CHINA

DRAGONS & TIGERS



Wed, Oct 7, 7:30pm, VC2
Fri, Oct 9, 1:00pm, VC2 <XIAOW>

Xiao Wu

VIFF 198



China/Hong Kong, 1998, 108 minutes

Director: Jia Zhangke

Cast: Wang Hongwei, Hao Hongjian, Zuo Baitao **Producers:** Li Kit-Ming, Jia Zhangke **Screenplay:** Jia Zhangke **Cinematographer:** Yu Lik-Wai **Editor:** Lin Xiaoling **Production Company:** Radiant Advertising / Hutong Communications **Print Source:** Jia Zhangke **Sales Agent:** Hutong Communications

North American Premiere

Fresh out of the Beijing Film Academy, Jia Zhangke has made a no-budget debut feature which starts out looking like an exercise in grungy social realism but gradually reveals itself to be something much more special. Xiao Wu is a pickpocket, a scummy-but-likeable petty criminal, preying on visitors to Fenyang, the dirt-town he calls home. But times are hard and getting harder. His best friend is suddenly a "model entrepreneur" who doesn't want to know him anymore; a visit to his family in the countryside reawakens old feuds; the leggy Mei-Mei, a hostess in the karaoke bar, seems to be stringing him along; and the cops are launching a crackdown on street-crime . . .

Working outside what remains of China's studio system and with a brilliantly chosen cast of non-professionals. Jia steadily exposes the very core of this man's being, stripping away layer after layer of his loser's armour until he's left as "naked" as a person can be. (The turning point is a bath-house scene in which Xiao Wu does what he's always refuses to do in the karaoke bar: he sings his heart out.) To call this process "Bressonian" is to make the film sound pretentious, but the fact is that it does work in much the same way as such films as *Mouchette* and *Au Hasard, Balthazar* do. The spectacle of its protagonist's abasement becomes a truly exalting experience.

Tony Rayns