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Fu-Zung Cen

(Hibiscus Town)
(CHINESE)

A Shanghai Film Studio production. Directed by Xie Jin. Screenplay, Jin, Ah Cheng; camera (color), Lu Junfu; music, Ge Yan; art direction, Jin Qifen. Reviewed at Karlovy Vary Film Festival (competing), July 17, 1988. Running time: 150 MIN.

Hu Yuyin	Liu Xiaoqing
Qin Shutian	Jiang Wen
Gu Yanshan	Zheng Zaishi
Li Guoxiang	Xu Songzi
Wang Qiushe	Zhu Shibin
Li Mangeng	Zhang Guangbei
Li Guigui	Liu Linian
Wu Zhaola	Xu Ning

■ **Karlovy Vary** — The well-deserved blue ribbon winner of the Karlovy Vary Festival was Xie Jin's splendid "Hibiscus Town," already briefly released in London and certainly deserving playoff in specialized situations wherever Chinese films are shown.

This riveting, often astonishing and very moving account of the dramatic hardships endured by ordinary people under the "four purges" and subsequent Cultural Revolution can't be beat for acting, comprehensibility and impact. It comes close to being a contemporary masterpiece in veteran helmer Xie Jin's distinguished filmography.

Although pic took the Grand Prix at Karlovy, it was probably not screened in its full-length version, which is reputed to be nearly three hours long and to contain some amazingly frank — and comic — love-making scenes between two of the villains, party leaders in the small Hibiscus Town. Fest catalog advertised 110 minutes, but 2½ hours were actually shown, indicating that multiple versions exist.

Heroine is Hu Yuyin (played skillfully by Liu Xiaoqing), making a modest living when film opens with her husband Guigui. Their little sidewalk restaurant allows them to save up to build a house — which they do, lugging stones uphill on their own backs and constructing it themselves.

All is well till a dogmatic party woman arrives and begins the first purge. Hu Yuyin's pretty face, as much as her nice new house, excites the leader's envy, and the couple is publicly denounced as enemies of the people. Hu flees, their house and money are confiscated and her weak husband commits suicide. When she returns to the village, she

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is ignominiously put to work sweeping streets, along with an intellectual, Qin Shutian (the very appealing Jiang Wen).

Film relentlessly uncovers the bigotry and horror of the times (the bad guys always coming out on top), the people's fear and unhappiness. A moment of joy appears when Hu and Qin fall in love; their street sweeping and daily humiliation as village pariahs draw them together in several romantic, touching scenes.

When Hu gets pregnant, however, Qin gets a 10-year sentence in a labor camp and Hu is made to repair roads. Her son is born during a stormy winter night. Film ends on an upbeat note, with Qin coming home after Party changes make for a more moderate society, and he launches a warning against any more turnarounds.

Lensing by Lu Junfu is of top international quality. — Yung.