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# LIVING DREAM

(QIAN'NIU HUA)

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(CHINESE)

A China Network Group production in association with Shanghai Film Studio. (International sales: Celestial Media Organization, Pasadena.) Produced by Jimmy Wu. Executive producers, Wu, Zhu Yongde, Hu Ningyi.

Directed, written by Hu Xueyang. Camera (color), Qu Jiazhen; editor, Zhu Xiaopei; music, Su Junjie; art direction, Xue Jianna; sound, Feng Deyao; visual effects, Lisa Atkinson; associate producers, Xu Jianshu, Zhu Ping. Reviewed at Cannes Film Festival (market), May 13, 1996. Running time: 104 MIN.

Rabbit ..... Jindao Xinxin  
Auntie Lotus ..... Zhang Mengxi  
Shiu Chuan ..... Chang Rong  
Great-uncle ..... Chen Duo  
Wei Gu ..... Zhang Jing  
Shui Zhuzi ..... Zhou Tao

**"Living Dream" is a visually potent, tender childhood drama about a seemingly frail boy drawn into the events surrounding a rape and murder in a fishing village in early 1970s China. Though writer-director Hu Xueyang's attempts to harness the story to the winds of cultural and political change blowing through those years are somewhat irresolute, the clean, linear narrative and intense presence of the central character make this ideal for upscale foreign-language TV.**

With his father confined to a labor camp for acting in defiance of Cultural Revolution principles and his mother earning a living with a touring theater group, 9-year-old Rabbit (Jindao Xinxin) is sent to stay with his Aunt Lotus (Zhang Mengxi) and his great-uncle (Chen Duo) in their isolated home on the banks of the Yangtze River. Lotus immediately becomes a mother figure for the sickly boy.

Prone to sleepwalking and frequently lost in daydreams, Rabbit

nonetheless notices when the disreputable local boatman, Shiu Chuan (Chang Rong), starts lusting after his young aunt. He develops a double-edged rapport with the irascible man, who, despite his taunts about Rabbit's father, appears to invite friendship. But the boy is impertinent with him, pointing up his negligible chances with Lotus and getting beaten and humiliated as a result.

Long meditative stretches pave the way for the violent episode when Lotus is returning from town and Chuan attempts to rape her. When she faints, Chuan believes her to be dead, and buries her. Lotus' uncle goes looking for her and is killed by the panic-stricken Chuan.

The climactic violence and its repercussions unfold in virtual silence and semi-darkness, like an increasingly fantastic dream that Rabbit wanders through. He follows Lotus' pet water buffalo to the spot where she lies half-buried, and in a strange, hypnotic sequence, the huge, solemn creature nuzzles her back to consciousness before heading for the boatman's cabin to avenge the violence against her.

Director Hu conjures an atmospheric, deceptively tranquil stage for tragedy from the misty river-



**RIVER DREAM:** *"Living Dream" is set in an isolated area on the Yangtze and stars Jindao Xinxin as a 9-year-old sleepwalker.*

bank setting, aided by superior technical backup. The smattering of news broadcasts and other references to political events happening elsewhere, such as the Vietnam War and hydrogen bomb tests, could perhaps have benefited from more substantial development, but the folk-style story functions amply in its own right.

Young actor Jindao's sorrowful features and unblinking gaze effectively create a direct bond with the audience. —David Rooney