

Director's Statement for Lee Feigon The PASSION OF THE

MAO

With *The Passion of the Mao*, I have made a movie that reflects in style as well as content the impact of Mao Zedong's life. The movie is irreverent, deadly serious, playful, obscene, tragic—all at the same time.

My film mixes rare documentary footage with madcap animation, in something of the way that Mao and his wife Jiang Qing combined old cultural forms with new ones, turning traditional genres like Peking Opera into revolutionary films. And what better subject for such a mix of genres than the life of a man viewed by millions as a savior and by others as a tyrant?

In the 1960s Americans disillusioned with U.S. policies in the Cold War and in Vietnam accepted inflated Chinese views of

Mao and made him into a revolutionary hero, only to take a 180-degree turn in later years to label Mao as China's Stalin or Hitler. In China, Mao's successors tried to magnify their own achievements—and draw attention away from their failings—by debasing the leader they once called “the sun in the sky.”

Complicating these views of Mao is the huge gap between Mao the passionate political leader and Mao the man—a man with outsized peculiarities and peccadilloes in sex, hygiene, and just about everything else.

To set the record straight, *The Passion of the Mao* examines the myths and realities of Mao's life and the period of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). While some accuse Mao of having created a backward, illiterate nation, Mao's achievements speak for themselves. To name just a few:

- . During the 1960s Mao was the only governmental head in the world to actively encourage students to protest his own regime and criticize its officials.**
- Mao did more than anyone in Chinese history to enhance the position of women.**

- **Under Mao's reign the literacy rate increased from 15 to 80 percent, while 90 percent of the people in China were covered by at least some kind of public health programs, a percentage that has since plummeted to 4 percent.**

By uniting the sometimes conflicting themes in Mao's complex life with humor, I have created a movie that will appeal to people interested in Chinese history and culture, biography nuts, Mel Gibson-haters, anti-war folks, leftists, feminists, and anyone who wants to see a compelling, entertaining film in which an extraordinary icon is revealed to be a not-quite-ordinary human being.

When I'm not making films, I teach and write about East Asia. I have written for The Wall Street Journal, Barron's, Nation, the Chicago Tribune, the Atlantic, and the Boston Globe. I have also appeared on MacNeil Lehrer, CNN, Hardball CNBC, and the **NBC Nightly News.**

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