

'Red Light' shines on China indies

By Jonathan Landreth

Scoring a sexy stride forward for independent Chinese cinema, "Red Light Revolution," a comedy about a laid-off Beijing cabbie who sells dildos to make ends meet, will see its world premiere in competition at Brazil's Sao Paulo International Film Festival on Sunday.

Written and directed by actor

Sam Voutas, "Red Light" follows Shunzi, a luckless Beijinger played by Zhao Jun, who risks it all to open a shop selling marital aids, sparking a sexual awakening in his conservative neighborhood in the Chinese capital.

Shot by Wang Yifan, the low-budget film also stars Japanese actor Masanobu Otsuka ("City of Life and Death"), Vivid Wang, *continued on page 20*

'Red Light'

continued from page 3

Jiang Xiduo, Tess Liu, Tian Huimin and Ji Qing.

Melbourne-born and Beijing-raised actor Voutas, whose last role in a major film was in Lu Chuan's "City of Life and Death," says he hopes "Red Light," produced by his partner-producer Melanie Ansley, will get a theatrical release in China, where the government limits the portrayal of sexual activity on film.

At a time when China's box office is booming and moviegoers are demanding greater variety from an industry that plays to the middle because of the lack of film ratings, Beijing's leaders are set on promoting media that is in synch with their own views of "harmonious society."

Filmmakers who wish to capture modern Chinese city life as it actually is, with humans being human — swearing, procreating and hustling to get ahead — face a challenge if they wish their work to be seen.

So Voutas, 31, and Ansley, a half-Chinese Canadian reared in Shanghai, knew that in order to make "Red Light" ring true as a Mandarin-language film, they'd have to shoot it following a well-worn indie path: sans official approval and with an eye on foreign film festivals as a means to exposure.

Brazilians viewing "Red Light" with Portuguese subtitles might still be amused by Zhao, a Chinese Jack Black in manner and shape. As Shunzi, he is frequently foul-mouthed, seen suction-cupping a rubber male prosthetic to his forehead and selling both condoms to minors and an anti-impotence drink to the elderly.

"One Chinese producer we saw suggested we set the movie in a tea shop," Ansley said. Voutas chimed in: "Nobody wants to see a film about a tea shop and I wanted to make a commercial movie."

Voutas is convinced Chinese would want to see his movie about an everyman of sorts in a city where there are now more than 2,000 licensed sex shops —



up from just one in 1994 — and scores of restaurants selling virility soup made from deer antler or tiger penis.

Although there is no nudity in "Red Light," and Shunzi's clothed arousal is blocked from view by old-fashioned intertitles announcing "This Shot Has Been Deleted," the film, still might offend Chinese censors who bar "obscenity" and "prurience."

"If there was no hope of getting 'Red Light' screened in

China, I wouldn't be trying to work with Chinese companies," said Voutas. "Sex toys have been used since imperial times.

Nothing we're discussing in the film is illegal these days, it's just not talked about on screen."

Voutas, Ansley and executive producer Jane Zheng ("Gasp") are hoping exposure at Sao Paulo, which runs until Nov. 4, will convince a Chinese partner to take a risk on distributing a version of "Red Light" at home, even if it has to be cleaned up. **THR**