A FILM BY HEATHER WHITE AND LYNN ZHANG

directed by 
HEATHER WHITE • LYNN ZHANG

written by
CHRISTOPHER SEWARD

executive producers
DIANA HOLTZBERG • DAL LAMAGNA • DALE RODRIGUES

associate producers
XIN LIU • BING WANG • KATH DELANEY • ERIK JOHNSON • MARIA SNYDER 
GREG HEMMINGS • STEVE FOSTER • DWAYNE MENEZES • DANIELLE TURKOV • STEPHANIE VON STEIN

CINEMATOGRAPHY BY SUN SHAOGUANG  MUSIC BY FREDDIE BRYANT

COMPPLICITFILM.ORG
SYNOPSIS

Yi YeTing is struggling with occupational leukemia and trying to obtain compensation from his employer. Wanting to help others, he begins working for a non-profit that assists workers with occupational illness and injuries. He discovers there are dozens of workers in his local area who were poisoned while making smartphones. Through research in the community, he discovers a leukemia cluster in the neighborhood surrounding Apple’s main supplier Foxconn. Yi’s research leads him to several workers and their families trying to survive while burdened with their health care costs. Powerful forces are unleashed as he confronts local factories, putting his own safety at risk.

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

The film takes the audience on an 8000-mile journey to the world’s electronics factory floors, revealing the situations under which China’s youth population has shifted by the millions in search of a better life.

LOGLINE

Yi YeTing is battling to survive occupational leukemia, while helping other workers in similar situations, poisoned by benzene and n-hexane. He brings his fight against benzene from his hospital room, where he helps other workers, to Silicon Valley and the international stage. Against huge odds Yi directly confronts corporate and government interests, while empowering and inspiring the people around him.

“Complicit is a fantastic film!”

–Maya Wang, Asia Division, Human Rights Watch
In early 2013, I was a Network Fellow at Harvard University’s Safra Center for Ethics and had recently arrived in China researching a book on the rise of China’s mega-factories in the Pearl River Delta region. I had read a news article describing dozens of Chinese teenagers who were paralyzed and in comas due to occupational poisoning in the newly established export factories in that region.

I was assigned a videographer named Lynn Zhang to accompany me for two weeks and film my research. We began visiting hospitals in Shenzhen and Guangzhou to find out if the situation was ongoing. Lynn and I discovered dozens of hospital rooms filled with young Chinese workers being treated for benzene and n-hexane poisoning from workplace exposures—the majority from electronics factories.

We heard about a young man suffering from occupational leukemia who had decided to assist others also suffering from occupational diseases. We first met Yi Yeting—COMPLICIT’s main protagonist—when he invited us to join him on a visit to Ming Kunpeng, a 26-year-old former worker with late-stage occupational leukemia.

Kunpeng had developed cancer linked to a cleaning solvent containing benzene, a known carcinogen. He entered the factory when he was 19 years old and—by age 22—was diagnosed with leukemia. During our many interviews with electronics workers as well as those from other industries, we discovered that the incubation period for occupational leukemia in China’s electronics factories typically occurred after 2-3 years of exposure in the workplace.

For 18 months, Kunpeng’s family had unsuccessfully tried to get his medical expenses paid for by his employer, Dutch semiconductor manufacturer ASM Pacific—one of Holland’s largest producers of components and semiconductor equipment for the electronics industry. The family and ASM were at a stalemate when we arrived in 2013.

Yi was helping Kunpeng’s family petition for an acceptable settlement from ASM. They weren’t able to pay for chemo or surgeries without the company’s support, which eventually they received. Ultimately, Yi’s help led to a much higher settlement agreement (US $100,000) than the industry average. However, early treatment is critical, and doctors said Kunpeng had no chance of survival. Not wanting to be a burden on his family he committed suicide in 2015.

Over the next three years, we filmed Yi as he assisted numerous other stricken workers and their families, underwent many chemotherapy treatments, unsuccessfully attempted to obtain compensation from his employer, experienced two government imposed evictions from his apartment, and went home to visit his family and mother’s grave. We also filmed happy times with his family and a joyous celebration at a 12-course Chinese rural banquet.

In addition, we met dozens of other workers allegedly poisoned by benzene and n-hexane, all working for contractors and subcontractors for global electronics corporations. A few are featured in COMPLICIT.

COMPLICIT was filmed in several provinces in China—something we cannot imagine trying to do under today’s Chinese government crackdown on civil society. We also filmed in the U.S. and Netherlands. I decided the public interest would be better served by a film which powerfully conveyed all that we discovered, and put the book on hold to make a feature length documentary.

I hope that after watching COMPLICIT viewers will feel a sense of increased connection to the workers that make the devices we as consumers can’t live without, and understand the risks associated with chemicals used during their production.

–HEATHER WHITE
ABOUT THE FILM TEAM

Co-Director/Producer: Heather White began working on COMPLICIT while a network fellow at Harvard University’s Safra Center for Ethics (2011-2014). She is the founder of verite.org, a non-profit organization recognized for its groundbreaking research on global supply chain monitoring of labor standards and risk management.

Co-Director/2nd Cameraperson: Lynn Zhang is a videographer who previously specialized in short documentaries for the Center on U.S.-China Relations, The New York Times Beijing Bureau and TV Channel 3–Catalonia, Spain, in Beijing.

Executive Producer: Diana Holtzberg is the president of East Village Entertainment. Her projects have won Emmys and received Academy Award nominations.

Cinematographer/DOP: Sun Shaoguang is the cinematographer of three documentaries: widely acclaimed Last Train Home, China Heavyweight and Fallen City.

Music Director: Freddie Bryant is a jazz guitarist in the New York jazz scene. Bryant is on the guitar faculties of Berklee College of Music and Prins Claus Conservatorium in Groningen, Holland.

Screenwriter and Film Editor: Christopher Seward is an editor and producer, best known for Fahrenheit 9/11 (2004), Sicko (2007) and Fat, Sick & Nearly Dead (2010).

Sales Agent: Kathryn Bonnici, Java Films; kathryn@javafilms.tv
OFFICIAL SELECTIONS

2017

Human Rights Watch Film Festival
London, March 11

TIFF/Human Rights Watch Film Festival
Toronto, Mar 29–April 6

Festival del Cinema dei Diritti Umani di Napoli
Naples, Italy, November 6–11
Special Mention Documentary Award

DOXA Documentary Film Festival
Vancouver, May 4–14
Alliance of Women Film Journalists EDA Award

Cinema Nova
Melbourne, Australia, June 29

Melbourne Documentary Film Festival
Melbourne, Australia, July 14

Workers Arts & Heritage Centre WAHC
Ontario, August 25

Ashfield Film Festival
Ashfield, Massachusetts, September 14–15

Princeton University
Princeton, New Jersey, October 12

Amherst Cinema
Amherst, Massachusetts, November 8

Amherst College
Amherst, Massachusetts, November 9

Bertha DocHouse Theatre
Curzon, London, November 28

Leeds University
United Kingdom, December 4

Sheffield University
United Kingdom, December 11

Human Rights Film Festival FIFDH
Paris Alliance Cine, December 3–4
Grand Jury Prize, Best Documentary

2018

Movies That Matter
University of Calgary, January 31

Human Rights Watch Festival Weekend
Amsterdam, February 4

San Diego State University
San Diego, February 7

Human Rights Film Festival
Valencia, Spain, February 9–18
Best Feature Documentary Award, EDHV Journalism Prize for Best Development and Investigation

Cinema Politica
Montreal, February 5

San Diego State University
February 8

Sedona Film Festival
Sedona, Arizona, March 2–3

Havens Center for Social Justice
University of Wisconsin
Madison, Wisconsin, March 7

Millenium Film Festival Brussels
Belgium, March 21

Docudays UA International Human Rights Documentary Film Festival
Kyiv, Ukraine, March 23–30

Human Rights Film Festival
University of San Francisco, April 5–7

ACT Human Rights Film Festival
Colorado State Univ., April 13–14

Solidarity Human Rights Film Festival
Tel Aviv, Israel, April 26–May 1

Documentary Edge Film Festival
Wellington, New Zealand, May 9–20

Graduate Institute Geneva
Switzerland, May 8

Human Rights Nights Film Festival
Bologna, Italy, May 5

Addis International Film Festival
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, May 1–5

Brazilian International Labour Film Festival: Mostra CineTrabalho
Campinas, São Paulo, May 21–25
Manília, São Paulo, Brazil, June 4–8

NYC Workers Unite Film Festival
New York City, May 4–22

SF DOCFest
San Francisco, June 5 & 9

Human Rights Nights Film Festival
Bologna, Italy, May 5

Addis International Film Festival
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia May 1–5

Friday Harbor Film Festival
Friday Harbor, Washington, November 3–4
COMPLICIT is a shattering comment on inequality and the forces that work to maintain the unjust status quo.” – filmdoo.com

“COMPLICIT, A Shocking Film On Global Outsourcing Featured At Human Rights Watch Film Festival.” – faze.ca

“In this year’s festival, the most complex film to assess was COMPLICIT, a doc about Chinese activists struggling to help factory workers poisoned by the chemicals used to make cellphones and computers.” – theglobeandmail.com

“COMPLICIT...forces one to ponder how much a life is truly worth in our profit obsessed world.” – the-platform.org.uk

“COMPLICIT reveals the human costs of global outsourcing while highlighting the choices made by a group of inspired activists seeking change.” – povmagazine.com

Nominated for an EDA Award for best female-directed film by the Alliance of Women Film Journalists, partnering with DOXA Documentary Film Festival May 4–14, in Vancouver, BC.