

## Interview: Director Steve Chan Hits a Home Run with ‘Weeds on Fire’

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- [1980s](#) [2]
- [AMC River East 21](#) [3]
- [Asian Pop-Up Cinema](#) [4]
- [Baseball](#) [5]
- [Chicago](#) [6]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [7]
- [Hong Kong](#) [8]
- [Interview](#) [9]
- [Kai Chi Liu](#) [10]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [11]
- [Sing-Pui O](#) [12]
- [Sophia Wong Boccio](#) [13]
- [Tony Wu](#) [14]
- [Weeds on Fire](#) [15]

CHICAGO – The most American game of baseball gets a new spin in the film “Weeds on Fire,” directed by Steve Chan. The story explores a youth team in the 1980s whose exploits coincided with a renaissance in Hong Kong. The film is screening on Sep. 21st, 2016, at the AMC River East 21 in Chicago, part of the Asian Pop-Up Cinema series (details below).

“Weeds on Fire” is the second film of the Fall Season in the 2016 Asian Pop-Up Cinema series. This year-round film festival, based in Chicago, is a revolving showcase of diverse Asian films, highlighting Cantonese, Mandarin, Japanese and Korean offerings with English subtitles. Screenings occur at the AMC River East 21 in downtown Chicago and at the Wilmette Theater in Wilmette, Illinois. For full schedule of the 2016 Fall Season, [click here](#). [16]



The Hong Kong Boys of Summer in ‘Weeds on Fire,’ directed by Steve Chan

*Photo credit: AsianPopUpCinema.org*

Filmmaker Steve Chan (Chi-Fat) – who also wrote the story and screenplay – was financed through “Create Hong Kong” government funding, in their initial First Feature Film Initiative. When he began writing the film, the 26 year-old Chan knew nothing about baseball, so the film looks at the game through a fresh perspective. The producer and cinematographer, Sing-Pui O, worked with Chan to create some new camera angles on the ball field, and the result is a lyrical and balletic landscape that redefines the baseball-as-a-metaphor-for-life genre. Steve Chan talked to HollywoodChicago about his approach to the story.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** You are 26 years old, and was born well after the incidences of the film took place. How did you get interest in this based-in-truth story, and how did you develop it?



**Steve Chan:** The first story I had was about the two boys in the public housing project in Hong Kong. After I developed that, I read an article about the first youth baseball team in Hong Kong. It was very surprising to me, and I thought the story was very special.

The league development happened at the same time that Hong Kong was going through a golden age in the 1980s, as far as the development of their society. Everything blossomed economically, and there was a positive state of mind. So the film has two meanings – the baseball team and this time in Hong Kong, which was important to me to portray.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Remarkably, you didn't know anything about baseball when you were formulating the story. How much of the mechanics of the game did you have to learn to properly shoot the movie?

**Chan:** There are comic books that teach the game, and I had some coaching that taught me and filled me in, and I did learn to hit and pitch.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Did you get good enough to play the game?

**Chan:** No! [laughs] But I learned to be a knowledgeable spectator.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** We always hear the saying that baseball can be a symbol or metaphor for life. Where in your film does that notion emerge strongest?

**Chan:** In my study of the game, I observed that baseball is a game of defense. To compare that to life, you always need a good defensive strategy. Also when you are on base, to move forward you need to anticipate the right moment, rather than running randomly. That also serves as a good metaphor for life.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** You filmed perspectives within the actual playing of baseball that used sound design and unusual camera moves to show something a one-of-a-kind interpretation. What inspired you to shoot it in that certain way, and which sequence was your favorite?



Director Steve Chan Discovers Some Local Baseball  
Photo credit: [AsianPopUpCinema.org](http://AsianPopUpCinema.org)

**Chan:** I credit most of the unique angles to our producer and cinematographer, Sing-Pui O. He's an expert both in independent and commercial film. Our objective was to use the game, and the way we shot it, as a basis for the emotion of the scene. The mind state of the characters were front and center, so we did things that perhaps didn't match how baseball is played or portrayed, but it was the way we wanted to tell the story.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What about your experiences growing up in Hong Kong did you most want to express in the film?

**Chan:** One of things I wanted to point out, through the main characters, is that one-third of the Hong Kong population live in public housing. I grew up there, and wanted to share a bit of my personal experience in the film. Because of the way the project was funded, I got the chance to freely express my feelings about being a Hong Kong citizen, and one of those points was about the public housing lifestyle.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** You portrayed the public housing in the film as almost like a paradise – the building itself was exploited for the

beauty of its angles and light. What was the thinking behind that point of view?

**Chan:** The cinematographer was also from public housing, and we shared the common thread of that emotion and culture. Although it was portrayed differently in the film, my experience there was more negative, but I wanted to tell a positive and uplifting story – the way the housing was portrayed was part of that atmosphere. If the story was different, then I probably would have portrayed it more negatively.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Which previous baseball films inspired you, and did you place any tributes to them within the story of 'Weeds on Fire'?

**Chan:** For the combination of baseball and story, the main inspiration was the recent film '42' [the Jackie Robinson biography]. The second film, interestingly enough, was not even about baseball, but sports and emotion in general, and that was 'We Are Marshall.'

**HollywoodChicago.com:** In your study of the game of baseball, did you focus on any one player to inspire you, or was it just a combination of energies from the game itself?

**Chan:** It was actually one of my cast members, who is an actual professional baseball player, Tony Wu. It was the first time he ever acted in the film, and had a key role [one of the boys in public housing]. He gave a great performance, and he helped me on the field with a lot of the baseball set ups.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What will your next film project or story be, and how did you go about finding it?

**Chan:** Every filmmaker is in search of the right story to tell, and I'm deciding between several scenarios right now. The only thing I'll say is that it will be completely different from this film, I don't want to repeat myself.

*"Weeds on Fire," part of the Asian Pop-Up Cinema series, and will screen on Wednesday, September 21st, 2016, at 7pm, at the AMC River East 21, 322 East Illinois Street in Chicago. Director Steve Chan will make an appearance at the screening. For more information, [click here](#). [17]*



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- [2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/1980s>
- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/amc-river-east-21>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/asian-pop-up-cinema>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/baseball>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/chicago>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hollywoodchicagodotcom-content>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hong-kong>
- [9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/interview.html>
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