

Cinematographer Xincong Zhao Brings Autism Stories to the Big Screen in Uniquely You



Shanghai, China Feb 19, 2026 (IssueWire.com) - *Uniquely You*, a new documentary about Chinese families raising children on the autism spectrum, opened in theaters across China on World Autism Awareness Day. The film marks the first feature-length documentary in China to focus on the autism community and features the work of noted cinematographer **Xincong Zhao**.

Zhao, who studied cinematography at the New York Film Academy and has more than a decade of experience in feature films, documentaries, and commercials, served as director of photography on *Uniquely You*. His earlier credits include narrative films such as *Off-Road Heroes* and *Searching for Goddess Jiao Ai*, as well as award-winning festival documentaries *Two Mothers* and *Autism's Eyes*.

A Documentary About Families and Resilience

Directed by Weng Yu and shot by Zhao, *Uniquely You* profiles three Chinese children with autism and their families: Cheng Rui, a talented young artist whose mother organizes an art exhibition after his father's death; Keke, a non-verbal girl whose parents teach her daily living skills; and Wang Junli, a teenager whose parents reconcile to help him find work. The film aims to "shine a light on the unwavering strength of [the children's] mothers and the challenges this community confronts in the modern world".<https://news.qq.com/rain/a/20250323A047C500>

At a premiere event in Shanghai on March 22, director Weng told audiences that the film's goal is to reduce prejudice by showing the real lives of autism families. Viewers at the screening said the stories deepened their understanding of autism and inspired them to support the community. The screening was organised with support from local disability groups and was followed by a discussion with the filmmakers.

Duke Kunshan University later hosted a screening on April 8, describing *Uniquely You* as "China's first documentary exploring the autism community". The university's synopsis noted that the film highlights systemic factors behind the struggles faced by families raising autistic children.

Recognition and Impact

Uniquely You was nominated for the Best Feature-Length Documentary in the main competition at the 18th FIRST International Film Festival. Its nationwide release on World Autism Awareness Day and subsequent screenings at universities and community organizations have helped stimulate public discussion about autism in China.

Speaking about his role, Zhao said he sought a balance between observational realism and cinematic storytelling. "We used long takes and natural light to respect the families' everyday environment," he explained in a statement. Zhao's filmography also includes commercial work for brands such as JD.com, Hisense, and BYD, showcasing his versatility across documentary and advertising formats.

The release of *Uniquely You* underscores the growing visibility of autism stories in Chinese cinema. By focusing on the dignity and resilience of families, the film invites audiences to better understand and support the autism community.

It is worth noting that *Uniquely You* was initiated as a public-interest project at the earliest stage of development. The creative team set out to use film to foster greater public understanding of the autism

community. The documentary ultimately not only received recognition at film festivals but also secured nationwide theatrical distribution, bringing socially driven storytelling into the mainstream public sphere.

Industry observers have noted that Xincong Zhao's cinematography reflects a consistent visual language and a mature command of technique. In addressing socially grounded subject matter, he demonstrates restraint, sensitivity, and a strong sense of responsibility. Serving as Director of Photography on films selected by major international festivals and on productions that achieved nationwide theatrical distribution, Zhao has played a central creative role, underscoring his professional influence and recognition within the field of cinematography.

Among emerging Chinese filmmakers of his generation, Zhao continues to explore how cinematic language can respond to pressing social issues. Through sustained creative practice and an international perspective, he seeks to strike a balance between artistic expression and social engagement.



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