

A FILM BY  
MIDI Z

# NINA WU





# SYNOPSIS

After eight years toiling in bit-parts, aspiring actress Nina Wu finally gets her big break with a leading role in a spy thriller set in the 1960s. The part is challenging, not least because it calls for full nudity and explicit sex scenes, and the film's director is often hard on her. But both the industry and the press are confident that the results are sensationally good. On the brink of triumph, though, Nina's psychological resolve begins to crack. She rushes back to her family home to deal with two crises: her father's business has gone bankrupt and her mother has suffered a heart attack. She dreams of rekindling a close relationship with her childhood friend Kiki but is haunted by paranoid fantasies that a mysterious woman is stalking and attacking her. As Nina clings to memories of happier times, it seems that there is one crucial memory that she is repressing...







# DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

That night after I read the script of *Nina Wu* written by Wu Ke-Xi, I couldn't fall asleep until dawn. While drifting in and out of sleep, I had a dream. I dreamt of the woman whom I saw when picking firewood in the scorched mountains in my childhood back in Myanmar. Having gone mad, that beautiful woman was running in the wild without any clothes on.

- Midi Z

## SCRIPT

In 2018, on a freezing February night in Berlin, I received the script of *Nina Wu* written by Wu Ke-Xi via email. Having read it in one go, I was left in a state of shock. A year before that, I seemed to remember Wu telling me that she was

writing a script, and now it took me by surprise that she did finish it. It is an original, unique and dramatic story about a woman and her private thoughts. In the story, the heroine went to Taipei alone to realise her dream of becoming an actor, leaving her family and her closest friend behind. In order to make her dream come true, she paid a very high price.

On the night after having read the script, I had a dream. I dreamt of the woman whom I saw when picking firewood in the scorched mountains in my childhood back in Myanmar. Having gone mad, that beautiful woman was running in the wild without any clothes on. No one knew what had happened to her.

We have heard numerous inspiring tales in the world. In an encouraging story like those, the protagonist always manages to overcome all the ordeals in the end and enjoys the fruit of his hard work. However, in reality, some people suffer endless hardship all their lives. The gender, sexuality and family backgrounds they were born with leave them much fewer choices than others. The restriction on the choices they can make brings them countless obstacles, which they spend all their lifetime fighting against and they might be defeated in the end.

For me, *Nina Wu* is more than a story about the #MeToo movement. It depicts all the women who have been fighting bravely against the deeply rooted unfairness and restraints put on them in the workplace.





## SHOOTING

After I finished *The Road to Mandalay*, I wanted to have a break; after all, I made six features in six years. For the global film market, those films I made might be regarded as low-quality works with shoestring budgets. But for me, they are undoubtedly the artworks that I have created. They represent the different stages and the different resources I had in my life and the different methods I adopted to convey my private thoughts and care for my home country, Myanmar.

For many people, film is a form of entertainment and a commercial product. But for me, “making films” is not only my work but also a spiritual practice that allows me to strike a balance between my mind and my body. As a result, I love taking a simple camera with me and going into a remote area to make a film. Especially after having finished a high-quality film with a large crew and budget, I always long to make a small film with a simple digital camera. Following my instinct to a place where I have never been, I switch the camera on and record my observation and feelings.

Since its invention, film has become more and more like a “commercial product”; maybe it has always been a “commercial product”, and as a “commercial product”, it could be copied unlimitedly and packaged in countless ways. Therefore as artist, we have the duty to stop “making or copying a product” becoming what prompts us to make films. To maintain the pureness, the privacy and the uniqueness of our creation, we have to keep the “direct cinema” alive. It is easy to make a “direct cinema” film; with a digital camera costing less than one thousand US dollars, one can observe and instinctively capture what he sees and makes a film on his own. The “direct cinema film” referred in this article is definitely more than a “documentary”.





In addition to making “direct cinema films”, which I regard as a spiritual practice, I would like to make something opposite to it – a film that requires a complete and flawless script, meticulous planning and an efficient professional crew. In an extreme case, it would be perfect if I was supported by a bank and an army. **Nina Wu** is a small attempt to make something like that. By the global standards, its budget is extremely low, but at least it is much higher than those of my previous films.

Since the story of **Nina Wu** is highly dramatic, I was so worried that I would turn it into a B-movie, and thus I wondered if I could shoot it in a method similar to making a direct cinema film. The restriction imposed by the shooting method might stop it becoming as cheesy and melodramatic as those mainstream movies.

Moreover, I was afraid of turning **Nina Wu** into a film about grievance, and therefore it was very crucial to detach the highly dramatic moments from “the reality” or the “realist portrayal” since after all, it tells a story of a damaged and fragile mind. A number of veteran filmmakers suggested to me that turning it into a genre movie might be a way of avoiding being too realist. After all, very few audiences would accept the truthfully depicted reality in the film, and film cannot carry the weight of the reality either. It goes without saying that turning it into a genre movie was also a huge challenge to me. After having pondered over it during those months while revising the script, I decided to make it similar to a genre movie, but in terms of aesthetics, image and camera work, I would keep them as close to those I adopt when making a “direct cinema film”.



# SCREENWRITER'S STATEMENT

I'm an actress. I never thought I would become a scriptwriter one day and wrote a screenplay.

I was a hip-pop dancer when I was sixteen and began to appear in theatre at the age of twenty-one. When I was twenty-three, I starred in my first (short) film. Meanwhile, I worked as extra in TV dramas and feature films. At the age of twenty-eight, I had my first major role in a feature film.

In the beginning of 2017, some shocking news about the entertainment business in Korea began to be heard. Korean actress Jang Ja-yeon hung herself since she could no longer bear being treated as sex toy for the rich and powerful. In her suicide note, she stated that threatened by her agent, she had to sleep with rich businessmen to get work. Soon after that and also in Korea, a scandal was revealed that an internationally renowned director asked an actress to touch the actor's genitals on the set without any notice in advance, and when the actress refused, the director slapped her on the cheek. The actress was shocked to such an extent that she not only left the production but retired from the entertainment industry. Four years later, as she had suffered from serious depression, she decided to tell the truth to the public. In the same year, a Taiwanese female writer published a book about a high school girl being seduced into having a sexual relationship with a male teacher. Less than six months after the publication, the writer killed herself.







From the suicide note, we learned that the heroine was actually the writer herself, and she had lived with the trauma since high school and never managed to overcome the shadow cast upon her. When the novel was published, it had been ten years since the relationship ended, but she still lived with the agony, which eventually became too painful to bear and led to her suicide.

When I read about these true stories, I understood why they couldn't get over with it; how could the wounds be healed easily when their bodies and minds had been tortured to such a degree? It reminded me of a humiliating experience I had when I worked as extra. In that case, I was cast as the female lead in a TV commercial. I never appeared in commercials before and it was my first leading role, and therefore I wanted to seize this rare opportunity to deliver my best performance. During the shooting when my part was coming up, I raised my hand and asked the director and the cinematographer a question to prepare myself for the take. I asked, 'Excuse me, is it going to be a long or medium shot or a close-up?' To my surprise, the director and the cinematographer suddenly flared up. The director shouted out loud, 'What do you know about shooting? Do you have the right to ask this question?' Then the director burst out laughing, and so did the cinematographer, and some of the crew members followed suit. The director shouted again, 'A newbie who knows nothing asks me this question?' I just felt rather embarrassed at that moment and didn't think much. Then the director said that he wanted to add an extra shot. He ordered everyone on the spot to hand him all the banknotes they had with them and arranged the notes into a fan. He handed the fan made of banknotes to the actor who was starring with me in the advert. The director asked the actor to hit my face hard with the fan and told him it was a very important shot. The cinematographer laughed, saying, 'It's a close-up!' The director snatched the notes back from the actor's hand and hit my face with them a few times. He said, 'You're slapped by money! You must feel so good. You smile like a slut because you feel so good!' At that moment, a silence descended on the set; no one dared to speak a word, and no one stood up for me. My agent wasn't there on that day, and the actor was stunned into a stupor. Then a few crew members called out to the actor in a

light-hearted tone. 'Come on, slap her! Or you want us to keep shooting till tomorrow morning?' Pressurized by the crew, the actor apologised to me in a low voice. 'I'm sorry.' He started slapping me on the cheek with the banknotes over and over again until the director got the "close-up" he wanted.

It was my first leading role in a TV commercial. Back then I did my best to stop myself bursting into tears; after all, it was supposed to be a jolly video game advert. At some point on the set, I really wanted to tell them that I didn't want to continue shooting, but I didn't want people to mistook me for being unprofessional; I tried my best to be a professional actor even when I realised that I was being insulted.

After the shooting, my mind had gone blank and I couldn't really remember what happened. In the following months, I had nightmares every night, and when I woke up, I found myself crying my eyes out. For a while, I turned down many cases because I often found my mind drifting away; I would forget to turn the stove off while cooking; I burned the pot and found myself back on the set of the advert; the director kept hitting my face with the banknotes and all the others coldly watched me, no one showing any support. Again and again, I lived through the painful experience. Sometimes, I would keep hearing the director's voice and words and seeing his face distorted in hallucination. The situation continued for several months, and then I terminated my contract with my agent and left the so-called entertainment business.

After having rested for half a year, I couldn't forget my dream in acting, and therefore I began going to auditions for short films. Soon I met director Midi Z and started participating in his films. At first, acting in his films felt more like a spiritual practice and learning how to live. In addition to reading the large number of books and watching so many films Midi assigned, I spent a long time living in Myanmar and learning the local dialect, turning myself into a Burmese peasant woman. Like farmers, we rose at dawn and rested at dusk, working in the desolate mountains. Under the scorching sun, I got tanned; letting go of the acting methods





and forgetting about “performance”, I let myself live in the film, and sometimes also took part in the work behind the scene. Through participating in Midi’s films, I gradually came to understand cinema and found myself falling in love with acting again and the trauma I suffered healed with it.

In October 2017, the Harvey Weinstein scandal in the Hollywood was unveiled; for many years, he abused his power and sexually assaulted numerous actresses. I couldn’t stop myself following the reports closely; I felt I understood the victims. I spent long hours reading the analysis in the media and the interviews with those brave victims who decided to make their voices heard. I couldn’t agree more with those issues affecting women raised by the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements since as a woman working in the film industry, I can relate to the unfair treatment they disclosed. While the #MeToo movement gathered momentum, I was getting more and more emotional. I felt that I had power as well and should do something to make a small contribution, telling my own #MeToo stories. Therefore, I opened my diary and began thinking, aiming to write a story for those traumatised women and myself. Every day, I spent a huge amount of time reading the reports and listening to those women’s brave statements on #TimesUp and another three hours in the early morning working on the plot. Those courageous women inspired and encouraged me to write about my feelings. Consequently, “writing” calmed me down, allowing me to re-examine the feelings I had accumulated as a female since I was little. I turned how I had felt into words and then into a story before finishing the script of **Nina Wu**.



The completion of the script of **Nina Wu** was a learning process for me. Apart from learning how to write a film script, the most important thing is to learn how to face myself. To the girl who had once practised hard to force a sweet smile on her face before the mirror, who had once tried to look cute, sweet and innocent just to realise her dream or to be accepted in a world controlled by men, I want to say. ‘Actually, that’s not you. You should try hard to find the real look of your soul. You should be confident and proud of the colours of your skin, eyes and hair. You have dignity and the opportunity to become what you want to be as a result of your hard work and others should respect you and give you a chance to compete fairly even if you’re nobody. You have to be brave and pursue your dream without fear because we’re all here with you, me too!’



# ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

**MIDI Z** was born in Myanmar and arrived in Taiwan at the age of sixteen. He studied Design and Art before obtaining a master's degree from the National Taiwan University of Technology and Science. In 2006, his graduation film, *Paloma Blanca*, was invited to several international film festivals such as Busan and Gothenburg. In 2011, *Return to Burma*, his debut feature, was nominated for the Busan New Currents and Rotterdam Tiger Competitions. In 2014, *Ice Poison* won Best International Film at the Edinburgh Film Festival and represented Taiwan at Foreign Language Oscars. In 2016, *The Road to Mandalay* won Best Feature Film FEDEORA Award at the Venice Film Festival. Midi's latest feature, *Nina Wu*, is selected for the Un Certain Regard at the 2019 Cannes Film Festival.

In addition, Midi has made three documentaries, including *Jade Miners* (2015), which premiered at the International Film Festival Rotterdam, *City of Jade* (2016) and *14 Apples* (2018), which was invited to the 2018 Berlinale. Notably, *City of Jade*, which world premiered at the 2016 Berlinale, was nominated for Best Documentary at the Asia Pacific Screen Awards as well as the Taipei Golden Horse Awards in 2016 and won the Special mention award at the 2017 Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival.



## FILMOGRAPHY

### Feature

- 2019 *Nina Wu*
- 2016 *The Road to Mandalay*
- 2014 *Ice Poison*
- 2012 *Poor Folk*
- 2011 *Return to Burma*

### Documentary

- 2018 *14 Apples*
- 2016 *City of Jade*
- 2015 *Jade Miners*

### Short Film

- 2014 *The Palace on the Sea*
- 2013 *Silent Asylum*
- 2009 *Hua-xin Incident*
- 2008 *Motorcycle Driver*
- 2006 *Paloma Blanca*

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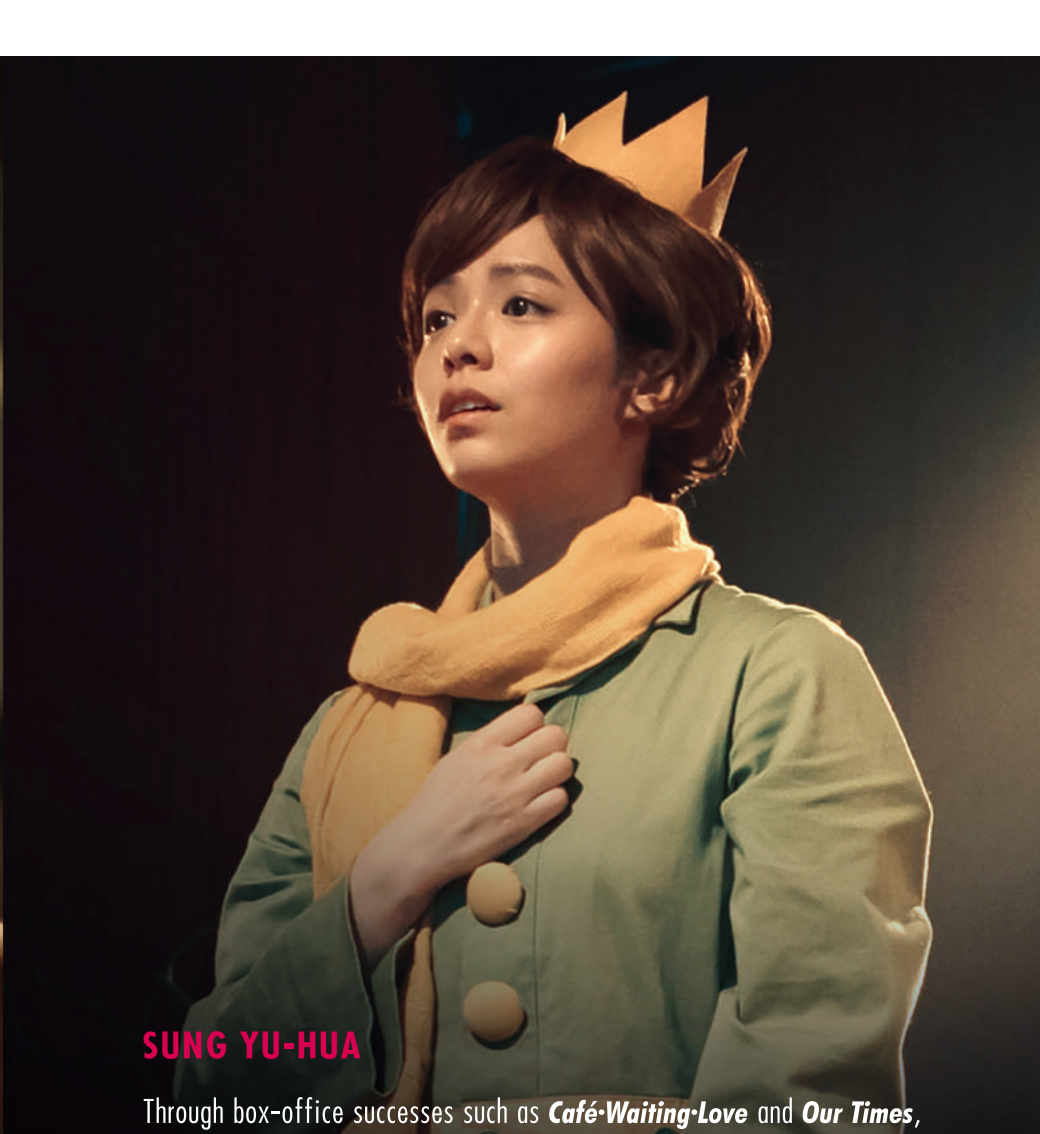




## CAST

### WU KE-XI

Cast as the heroine in Midi Z's *Nina Wu*, Wu Ke-Xi also played the leading roles in Midi Z's other feature films. *The Road to Mandalay* won her Best Actress nominations at the 2016 Golden Horse Awards and the 2017 Taipei Film Awards. Her performance in the critically acclaimed *Ice Poison* won her Best Actress at the 2015 Canada International Film and Television Festival. In addition, *The Bold, The Corrupt and The Beautiful*, in which Wu appeared as one of the female leads, was the winner of Best Feature Film at the 2017 the Golden Horse Award.



### SUNG YU-HUA

Through box-office successes such as *Café·Waiting·Love* and *Our Times*, Sung Yu-Hua has become one of the most popular actresses in romantic movies in Asia. Moreover, she was nominated Best Leading Actress at the 2015 Golden Horse Award for *Our Times*. In 2018, she took up a very different role in *Hello Mr. Billionaire* and in 2019, she made a huge breakthrough performance in *Nina Wu*, which is her first collaboration with director Midi Z.



## HSIA YU-CHIAO

Hsia Yu-Chiao started her career at the age of fifteen and is best known for hosting the popular Taiwanese TV cooking show, *Stylish Man - The Chef*, for which she won the Comprehensive Show Host Award at the 2011 Golden Bell Awards. With her passion for acting, she starred in several films, including *Zone Pro Site*, *Turn Around* and *The Rope Curse*. A versatile artist, her first illustration book will be published next year.



## SHIH MING-SHUAI

A graduate in Theatre Arts, Shih Ming-Shuai has been working in dance, theatre, television and film since he was a student. He was nominated Best Actor and Best New Talent for *Ye-Zai* at the 2014 Taipei Film Awards and Best Actor in Mini Series category for *The Free Man* at the 2014 Golden Bell Awards. At the 2018 London Filmmaker Festival, Shih was as nominated Best Lead Actor in a Foreign Language Film for the short film, *Fight*.





# CREDITS

<b>Director</b>	Midi Z
<b>Scriptwriter</b>	WU Ke-Xi Midi Z
<b>Principal Cast</b>	WU Ke-Xi as Nina Wu
<b>Supporting Cast</b>	SUNG Yu-Hua as Kiki HSIA Yu-Chiao as Girl No. 3 SHIH Ming-Shuai as Director
<b>Executive Producer</b>	Midi Z KO Yao-Zong Joanne GOH
<b>Producer</b>	LIN Sheng-Wen Molly FANG Claudia TSENG Andi LIM
<b>Co-producer</b>	Leonard TEE Jessica CHAI WANG Shin-Hong Isabella HO
<b>Director of Photography</b>	Florian J. E. ZINKE (BVK)
<b>Production Designer</b>	KUO Chih-Da

**Costume Designer**

Jelly CHUNG  
CHAN Cheuk-Ming

**Editor**

Matthieu LACLAU  
 TSAI Yann-Shan

**Composer**

LIM Giong

**Sound Designer**

LI Den Feng  
CHOU Cheng

**Location Sound**

CHOU Cheng  
Morgan YEN

**Cast**

TAN Chih-Wei as Producer  
LEE Lee-Zen as Mark  
HSIEH Ying-Xuan as Casting Director  
Rexen CHENG as Nina's Assistant  
HUANG Shang-He as Director's Assistant  
Fabian Tzzy-Chyn LOO as Producer's Assistant  
CHENG Ping-Chun as Nina's Father  
Moon WANG as Nina's Aunt  
WANG Chuan as Nina's Mother  
SUNG Shao-Ching as Nina's Uncle  
YU An-Shun as Uncle Wang  
Marcus CHANG as Dong Fu  
WANG Shin-Hong as Fisherman  
Vicci PAN as Audition Girl's Mother

CHIU Yi-Si as Audition Girl  
Yoko YOUNG as Girl No. 1  
CHOU Hsiao-Han as Girl No. 2  
HUANG Hsu-Wei as Girl No. 4  
LIN Tzu-Xi as Girl No. 5







# INFORMATION

<b>Genre</b>	Thriller/Drama
<b>Completion Date</b>	May 2019
<b>Running Time</b>	103 min.
<b>Format</b>	DCP 2K cinema scope 2.39:1
<b>Sound</b>	Surround 5.1
<b>Shooting Format</b>	2.8 K
<b>Country</b>	Taiwan Malaysia Myanmar
<b>Presented by</b>	Seashore Image Productions Harvest 9 Road Entertainment Jazzy Pictures
<b>Produced by</b>	Seashore Image Productions Harvest 9 Road Entertainment
<b>Co-produced by</b>	Star Ritz International Entertainment Myanmar Montage Pictures Jazzy Pictures



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