The second film in Ann Hui's 'Vietnam Triology', this realist drama explores the struggles of Chinese-Vietnamese in 'post-liberation' Vietnam. When a Japanese photojournalist, travels to the port city of Danang to document the country's feted reconstruction, he uncovers the sinister aspects of a new political order. Seen by some critics as a metaphor for Hong Kong's own precarious future at the time, Hui has insisted the film is grounded in experiences of the 'boat people' fleeing to Hong Kong during the 1970s—with whom she conducted interviews when shooting the television documentary A Boy from Vietnam (1979).

*Boat People* was a breakthrough drama for the New Wave, reflecting real social issues and politics in a conventional narrative genre. This film is a seminal example of Hui's ability of conveying universal themes through local, personal experiences; it also foreshadows her interest in border crossing stories, perhaps a result of her own background—born in Liaoning, northeastern China, to a Japanese mother and Chinese father, in 1947.