Actors of local movie The Ultimate Winner prefer to take a gamble on life instead of casino chips

rachael boon

Do not ask the cast and crew of local gambling-themed movie The Ultimate Winner about gambling – they do not do it, they are only in a movie about it.

At least the stars, including veteran actor Li Nanxing and Taiwanese artiste Aaron Chen Chao-jung, say they do not gamble now.

Li says: “Don’t get addicted or become greedy and you have to know your own limits. Some get lured into it by success stories, thinking that gambling will give them a comfortable life. But even if you win, just take it as something extra to have.”

He speaks as someone who gambled overseas more than a decade ago and once even racked up a debt of more than $100,000 because of the habit. One of his most popular roles on television was that of a professional high-stakes gambler in The Unbeatables (1993) and its two sequels.

His only gamble in recent years is taking on the role of a first-time director in Dai Yangtian, Constance Song, Aaron Chen, Li Nanxing, Rebecca Lim, Rayson Tan and Huang Shinan star in The Ultimate Winner but say no to gambling offscreen.

PHOTOS: WANBAO

Bet on life

The Ultimate Winner, which cost $1.5 million to make. The movie opens in cinemas here tomorrow.

He was speaking to Life! at the Fullerton Hotel last week, along with fellow cast members.

In The Ultimate Winner, the 46-year-old actor plays Shi Tiancai, an incorrigible gambler.

Befitting a movie about the dangers of gambling, the rest of the cast sing the same anti-gambling tune right on cue. However, all have made a few big bets in their lives.

Taiwanese actor Chen, who plays a tycoon out to destroy Li’s character in the movie, says his biggest risk in life is investing in his own business, Internet shopping mall Yooler.com.

The 42-year-old says candidly: “I’ve always been acting and it’s what I’m good at, but it is a risk you take every day, so I have to prepare for life beyond acting. I have yet to reap the profits, but I’m still working hard at it.”

Dai Yangtian, who plays the assistant to Chen’s tycoon character, reveals that coming to Singapore from his hometown in Shanghai, China, to pursue his career was a risk he needed to take, “because opportunities don’t come twice”.

But that is all the 26-year-old is willing to gamble on, because he is extremely terrified of what mahjong does to people, having witnessed the ugly consequences of gambling back home.

Similarly, actress Rebecca Lim, who plays Li’s long-suffering wife onscreen, took a gamble on her acting career.

The 24-year-old accountancy graduate from Singapore Management University says of her choice to become an actress: “Although people saw it as wasted potential, life is too short to let society dictate what you should or shouldn’t do and I have already fallen in love with acting. Besides, the degree will always be there, should this not work out.”

Perhaps actress Constance Song, 35, who plays a socialite and Tiancai’s admirer, sums up the sentiments of the cast and crew best. Sounding like an ambassador for the National Council on Problem Gambling, she says: “By choosing not to gamble at all, I am a winner because I don’t lose anything.”

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The Ultimate Winner opens tomorrow