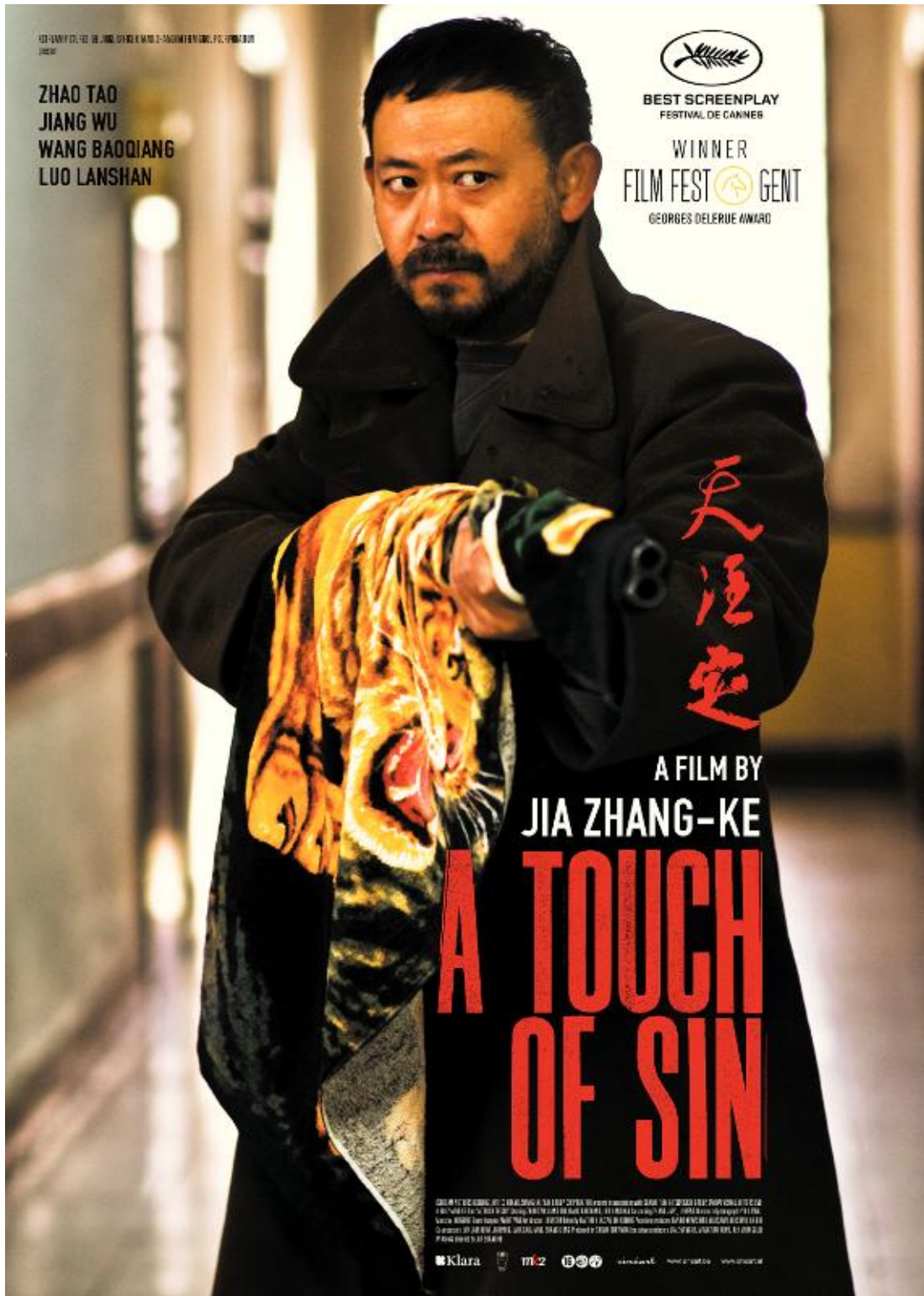


Persmap



A TOUCH OF SIN

Een film van Jia Zhangke

Een mijnwerker die boos is op de corrupte dorpsbestuurders besluit om over te gaan tot actie. Een migrantenarbeider ontdekt de oneindige mogelijkheden van zijn vuurwapen. Een receptioniste in een sauna wordt tot het uiterste gedreven door de beledigingen van een rijke klant. Een jonge fabrieksarbeider gaat van baan naar baan en probeert zijn leven te verbeteren. Vier personen, vier provincies, één en dezelfde reflectie op het hedendaagse China; een economische reus die langzaam wordt uitgehold door geweld.

Van de Chinese maker Jia Zhang Ke (24 CITY en I WISH I KNEW) die voor deze film de prijs voor Beste Scenario won op het Filmfestival van Cannes 2013.



Land: China – Jaar: 2013 – Genre: Drama – Speelduur: 129 min.
Releasedatum: 13 februari 2014
Distributie: Cinéart

Meer informatie over de film:

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*Persmap en foto's staan op: www.cinéart.nl
Persrubriek - inlog: cinéart / wachtwoord: film*

Cast

Xiao Yu
Dahai
Zhou San
Xiao Hui

Zhao Tao
Jiang Wu
Wang Baoqiang
Luo Lanshan

Crew

Director & Script writer
Cinematographer

Jia Zhang-Ke
Yu Lik-Wai



Director's note

This film is about four deaths, four incidents which actually happened in China in recent years: three murders and one suicide. These incidents are well-known to people throughout China. They happened in Shanxi, Chongqing, Hubei and Guangdong – that is, from the north to the south, spanning much of the country. I wanted to use these news reports to build a comprehensive portrait of life in contemporary China.

China is still changing rapidly, in a way that makes the country look more prosperous than before. But many people face personal crises because of the uneven spread of wealth across the country and the vast disparities between the rich and the poor. Individual people can be stripped of their dignity at any time. Violence is increasing. It's clear that resorting to violence is the quickest and most direct way that the weak can try to restore their lost dignity.

For reasons I can't fully explain, these four individuals and the incidents they were involved in remind me of King Hu's martial arts films. I've drawn on inspiration from the martial arts genre to construct these present-day narratives. Throughout the ages, the predicaments that individuals face have changed very little – just as their responses to those predicaments have also changed very little. I also see this as a film about the sometimes hidden connections between people, that make me want to question the way our society has evolved. In this 'civilised' society that we have taken so long to evolve, what actually links one person with another?

Jia Zhang-Ke (April 2013)



Interview with Jia Zhang-Ke (director)

Violence in Chinese society is clearly the core subject of the film. Are there any specific reasons for that?

When I scan the enormous amount of information posted on Weibo [*Chinese equivalent to Twitter*], I feel uneasy whenever I come across reports of violent incidents – incidents, that is, in which violence should have been avoided. China's breakneck speed transformation has benefitted some regions at the expense of others, and the gap between rich and poor is widening all the time. People get depressed when they're confronted by examples of enduring privilege and social injustice. Weibo aside, our society lacks channels of communication; when people don't have the habit of communicating with each other, violence becomes the fastest and most efficient way for the weak to protect their dignity. Hearing about such violent incidents makes me feel that it's necessary to face the problem of violence in a film. This is perhaps the only way that we can reduce the amount of violence in our lives. That's why I began to conceive of a film that would comprise multiple portraits of violence rather than just telling one story about one protagonist. I chose four shockingly violent news stories to present an image of contemporary China as I understand it, and used the methods of fiction to dramatize them.

How much in the film's stories is invented? Did you research these incidents and try to stay close to the reported facts?

Before writing the script, I visited the places where the incidents took place. I wanted to see the actual locations and to collect more information. I also conducted some interviews. This was what got me started on the project, but I didn't shy away from using elements of fiction. I think that we need fiction to reveal the social factors behind the incidents and the deep motivations of the characters. So I didn't hesitate to use fictional elements either during the writing process or during the location filming. The incidents themselves seemed very dramatic, full of conflict and contradiction. Chinese literature offered me a way of adapting them to my purpose. The tradition of the historical novel is to take one basic fact and then build characters and situations around it. While I was working on the script, I also watched a lot of traditional Chinese operas. One filmed opera in particular inspired some of the film's narrative methods: the Peking Opera *Wild Boar Forest*, filmed by Chen Huaikai and Cui Wei in 1962.

The film's four stories are set in different parts of China, and feature a variety of regional dialects. Some of the characters are seen looking for work far from their hometowns. Is the film's geographical spread important to you?

Yes, the stories take place in very different parts of China. The opening story of Dahai happens in Shanxi, where I was born, a cold, vast agricultural province in northern China. The second story happens in Chongqing, a south-western city on the Yangtze River, close to the Three Gorges. The third story takes place in Hubei, in central China. And the last story happens in Dongguan, a town in Guangdong Province, China's South coast sub-tropical "free enterprise" zone. The way that these four stories span so much of the country reminds me obliquely of traditional Chinese landscape painting. Classical painters were always trying to display panoramas of the whole country. I share that aesthetic impulse, and I'd like the film to play as a flowing visual tour of China. Chinese society these days is in a phase of internal migration. People move away from their original homes in search of jobs or a better life. A lot of young people from inland areas now work in the 'international' factories in Dongguan. The flow of people has brought about new social connections. My hope is that the film shows how disparate people have hidden connections.

The film captures moods of individual discontent, which take several forms. How widespread do you think these moods are in 2013?

Dissatisfaction with one's circumstances is a common phenomenon. It's one of the things that drives human progress. China was cut off from much of the rest of the world for many years, and during that period collectivism prevailed. As a result, most people lacked self-consciousness. The last thirty years of reform have awakened many people to a new self-consciousness. At the same time, the last three decades have seen a pile-up of new social problems, including inequality and corruption, and these issues have not been tackled in a timely way. The accumulation of social problems and the growing awareness of personal freedom have created a climate in which we Chinese expect more and more from the country's changes.

To what extent does the film refer to the wuxia genre? Your characters here take decisive actions to change their situation. Is your work taking on a sharper 'political' focus?

I think of *A Touch of Sin* as a *wuxia pian* (martial arts film) about contemporary China. The *wuxia* genre is very popular with Chinese audiences. Many *wuxia pian* have a political thrust. One basic theme is repeated over and over again: an individual struggle against oppression in a harsh social environment. Most of my earlier films focus on ordinary daily life in China. Since *Still Life*, though, I've come to realize that some people choose extreme violent methods to change their situations. That gives me the feeling that violent revolt is not only a political issue but also a problem in human nature which is worth examining.

The film features a mixture of well-known actors and non-professionals. Can you explain the thinking behind the casting?

I knew from the start that it would be a film with strong dramatic action. It contains conflicts of interest between people, conflicts between people and their environments, and also characters with their own inner conflicts. As I wrote the script, I thought of various professional actors who might play these roles. Jiang Wu, who plays Dahai, has appeared in Zhang Yimou's *To Live* and Zhang Yang's *Shower*. Wang Baoqiang, who plays Zhou San, starred in Li Yang's *Blind Shaft*. Zhao Tao, who plays Zheng Xiaoyu, has appeared in many of my films over the years. On the other hand, the actor who plays Xiao Hui is a 19-year-old newcomer; I found him in an acting school in Hunan. I still cherish a documentary-like aesthetic. I used many non-professional actors who were cast as we shot on location right across China over a period of five months. I hope my film manages to extract dramatic excitement from the natural everyday conditions we found and filmed.

The English title evokes memories of King Hu's A Touch of Zen...

I love King Hu's films very much. Our English title *A Touch of Sin* is a direct tribute to his *A Touch of Zen*. In our film, the story of Zheng Xiaoyu (played by Zhao Tao) and even the clothes the character wears are references to Hsu Feng in *A Touch of Zen*. The opera performance featured in our closing scene is called *Yu Tang Chun*. It's about a young woman who is framed for murder but finally wins back her freedom. It's a well-known opera in China, and, yes, King Hu directed a version of it for his second feature. I used it because I like the sense it gives that the same story can happen again and again in different times and different social conditions. I can see plenty of parallels between the pressures of survival in contemporary China and the situations in which the Chinese found themselves in earlier centuries. It's natural to me to associate this perception with works of Chinese literature and films which have broached these issues in the past. The difference for me is that I'm working in the internet age, at a time when some people own private planes, when the high-speed rail network is spreading everywhere and when people are closer to each other on Weibo than they

may be in real life. That's why I wanted the four stories in the film to interweave. I want to understand how we are all evolving, to see how people 'restructure' their lives in our time, and to grasp how we form associations with each other in the world we're building.



Biography

Jia Zhang-Ke was born in 1970 in Fenyang, Shanxi Province of China. He graduated from Beijing Film Academy and made his first feature film *Xiao Wu* in 1998. He is now settled in Beijing and actively involved in the filmmaking scene throughout China. *Still Life* won the Golden Lion Award (Best Film) at the 63rd Venice International Film Festival in 2006.

Filmography

- 2010 I Wish I Knew (documentary)
- 2008 24 City
- 2007 Useless (documentary)
- 2006 Still Life
- Dong (documentary)
- 2004 The World
- 2002 Unknown Pleasures
- 2001 In Public (documentary)
- 2000 Platform
- 1998 Xiao Wu

Cast members

ZHAO TAO (AS XIAO YU)

Biography

Graduated from the Department of Chinese Folk Dance of Beijing Dance Academy. She obtained several awards in domestic dancing competitions and began to work with director Jia Zhang-Ke in 2000. The film *Still Life*, which she starred in, won the Golden Lion Award of the 63rd Venice International Film Festival. She is also one of the producers of Jia Zhang-Ke's documentary *Useless* (2007), which won the Venice Horizons Documentary Award of the 64th Venice Int'l Film Festival. In 2012, as the leading actress of an Italian film *Io Sono Li*, she won the Best Actress Award of David di Donatello Award, the first time an Asian actress has been awarded the prize.

Filmography

2011 *Io Sono Li* By Andrea Segre
2010 *I Wish I Knew* By Jia Zhang-Ke
Ten Thousand Waves By Isaac Julien
2008 *24 City* By Jia Zhang-Ke
2006 *Still Life* By Jia Zhang-Ke
2004 *The World* By Jia Zhang-Ke
2002 *Unknown Pleasures* By Jia Zhang-Ke
2000 *Platform* By Jia Zhang-Ke

JIANG WU (AS DAHAI)

Biography

Chinese actor. Graduated from the department of acting of Beijing Film Academy in 1994.

Filmography

2011 *Let The Bullets Fly* By Jiang Wen
Wu Xia (Dragon) By Peter Chen
1911 Revolution By Jackie Chan
2010 *Snow Flower And The Secret Fan* By Wayne Wang
2009 *The Robbers* By Yang Shupeng
2000 *Zou Dao Di* By Shi Runjiu
1999 *Shower* By Zhang Yang
1997 *A Beautiful New World* By Shi Runjiu
1993 *To Live* By Zhang Yimou

WANG BAOQIANG (AS ZHOU SAN)

Biography

Chinese actor, has aroused attention since his debut role in *Blind Shaft* in 2003. He won several international prizes for Best Actor with the film *Mr. Tree*.

Filmography

- 2013 The Iceman Cometh By Wing-Cheong Law
- 2012 Lost In Thailand By Xu Zheng
Fairy Tale Killer By Danny Pang
- 2011 Mr. Tree By Han Jie
- 2010 Lost On Journey By Wai Man Yip
Fire Of Conscience By Dante Lam
- 2008 The Equation Of Love And Death By Cao Baoping
- 2007 The Assembly By Feng Xiaogang
- 2003 A World Without Thieves By Feng Xiaogang
Blind Shaft By Li Yang

LUO LANSHAN (AS XIAO HUI)

Born in 1994, Luo lives in Heng Yang, Hunan province. He studies at Hunan Mass Media Vocational College. *A Touch of Sin* is his debut.

