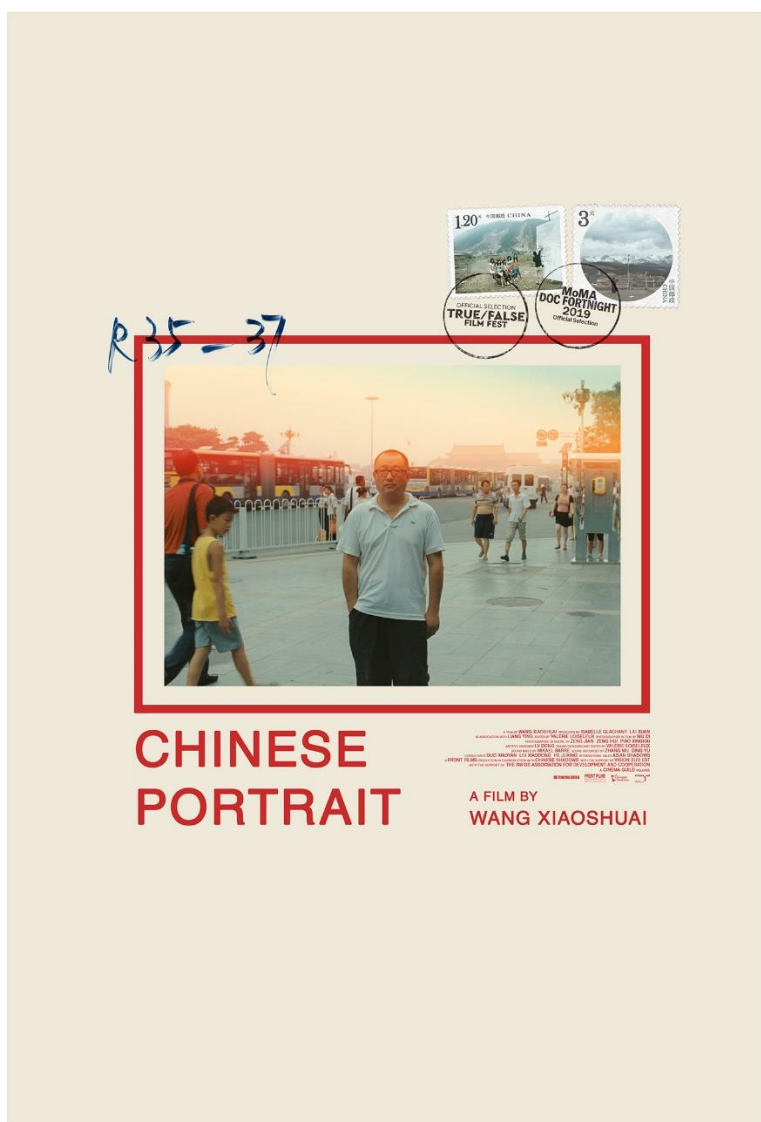


a Cinema Guild release



2018 / 79 min / 1.85:1 / DCP / Dolby Digital 5.1 / No dialogue

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http://www.cinemaguild.com/theatrical/chineseportrait_press.htm

SYNOPSIS

From acclaimed director Wang Xiaoshuai (BEIJING BICYCLE; SO LONG, MY SON) comes a personal snapshot of contemporary China in all its diversity. Shot over the course of ten years on both film and video, the film consists of a series of carefully composed tableaux of people and environments, each one more extraordinary than the last.

Pedestrians shuffle across a bustling Beijing street, steelworkers linger outside a deserted factory, tourists laugh and scamper across a crowded beach, worshippers kneel to pray in a remote village. With a painterly eye for composition, Wang captures China as he sees it, calling to a temporary halt a land in a constant state of change.

CREW

Director	WANG Xiaoshuai
DoP	WU Di, ZENG Jian, ZENG Hui, PIAO Xinghai
Editor	Valérie LOISELEUX
Art Director	LV Dong
Sound Design	Valerie LOISELEUX
Sound Mixing	Mikaël BARRE
Presented by	WANG Xiaoshuai
Producers	Isabelle GLACHAT, LIU Xuan
Associate Producer	LIANG Ying
Executive Producer	QIAN Yini
Presented by	FRONT FILMS COMPANY LIMITED
Production	FRONT FILMS COMPANY LIMITED, Chinese Shadows
International Sales	Asian Shadows
U.S. Distribution	Cinema Guild

SELECT FESTIVALS

Official Selection – Busan International Film Festival, 2018
Official Selection – MoMA Doc Fortnight, 2019
Official Selection – True/False Film Festival, 2019
Official Selection – CPH:DOX, 2019

DIRECTOR BIO

After graduating from the Beijing Film Academy, Wang Xiaoshuai (王小帅) wrote and directed his first feature, *THE DAYS* (冬春的日子, 1993), when he was 27. After initial acclaim, the film was soon blacklisted, its distribution banned in China. The film depicts the last days of a deteriorating relationship between two artists in Beijing.

Two years later Wang directed *FROZEN* (极度寒冷) under the pseudonym Wu Ming ("without a name"); the film was selected for many international festivals and was awarded a special jury mention jury at Rotterdam. *FROZEN* looks at the world of avant-garde art in Beijing. In it, a young artist organizes a set of performances that culminates in his own suicide.

That same year, Wang directed *A VIETNAMESE GIRL* (扁担·姑娘) for the Beijing Film Studio. The film was refused by the censorship committee and it took three years of re-editing and a change of title (*SO CLOSE TO PARADISE*) before it was finally approved for a limited run in China. It tells the story of two rural migrants, a naïve young boy and a small-time con man, trying to make ends meet living in the city of Wuhan and falling in love with a female nightclub singer they abducted. In 1998, it was selected for *Un Certain Regard* at the Cannes Film Festival.

His fifth feature, *BEIJING BYCICLE* (十七岁的单车) won the Jury Grand Prix Silver Bear at the 2001 Berlin International Film Festival and its two lead actors received the Best Young Actor Prize. The film went on to earn great critical claim and was a hit internationally.

In 2003, *DRIFTERS* (二弟) was screened at *Un Certain Regard* at the Cannes Film Festival. In 2005, Wang's following film, *SHANGHAI DREAMS* (青红), was selected for the competition at Cannes and won the Jury Prize.

In 2008, *IN LOVE WE TRUST* (左右) won the Silver Bear for the best screenplay in Berlin. In 2010, *CHONGQING BLUES* (日照重庆) premiered in competition at Cannes. The film received the Chinese Director Association Award for Best Director. Wang's following film, *11 FLOWERS* (我11), was the first official Sino-French coproduction. The film was presented at Toronto and in competition at the San Sebastian Film Festival.

RED AMNESIA (闯入者) premiered in competition in Venice in September 2014. Wang's latest film, *SO LONG, MY SON* (地久天长), won Silver Bears for Best Actor and Best Actress when it premiered in Berlin in 2019.

FILMOGRAPHY

SO LONG, MY SON (地久天长), 2019

- Silver Bears for Best Actor and Best Actress, Berlin
- Official Selection, Toronto

CHINESE PORTRAIT (我的镜头), 2018

- Busan International Film Festival

RED AMNESIA (闯入者), 2014

- Competition, Venice
- Special Presentation, Toronto

11 FLOWERS (我11), 2012

- Toronto
- San Sebastian Film Festival, Competition
- Busan

CHONGQING BLUES (日照重庆), 2010

- Competition, Cannes
- Best Director Award, Chinese Director Association

IN LOVE WE TRUST (左右), 2008

- Silver Bear for Best Screenplay, Berlin

SHANGHAI DREAMS (青红), 2005

- Jury Prize, Cannes

DRIFTERS (二弟), 2003

- Un Certain Regard, Cannes

BEIJING BYCICLE (十七岁的单车), 2001

- Grand Jury Silver Bear Award and Best Young Actor Prize, Berlin

SO CLOSE TO PARADISE / A VIETNAMESE GIRL (扁担·姑娘), 1995

- Un Certain Regard, Cannes

FROZEN (极度寒冷), 1995 (under the pseudonym Wu Ming)

- Special Jury Mention, Rotterdam

THE DAYS (冬春的日子), 1993

INTERVIEW

The following interview was conducted by Daniel Christian, who spoke with Wang Xiaoshuai for the website No Film School at the True/False Film Festival in March 2019. It has been slightly condensed. You can find the conversation in its entirety here: <https://nofilmschool.com/wang-xiaoshuai-interview>

No Film School: It took you eight years to make the film. I'm curious if your ideas or goals for the project changed over time. One way it feels the film was shot over many years is this change from film to digital.

Wang Xiaoshuai: It began with an artist friend of mine [Liu Xiaodong, featured in the film] who asked me to film him painting. And then, as I was filming that, I realized, "This isn't that interesting." And so, I decided, over time, "Well, maybe what I can do is use the camera like a paintbrush and take these portraits," and through that experiment was a new way of using the film camera. In the past, when we first started making these, the film that we used came in a canister and we could only shoot four minutes a reel, and so that was part of the idea: that each portrait would be four minutes long. When we started using digital, we didn't have that length limitation.

That's when I had the idea of turning it into a movie. The first time we showed it to an audience was as an exhibit with the projectors shining on walls, and they were life-sized with the sound coming from all different directions.

NFS: I think one of the most interesting things about the film is that in any given shot there are so many layers of observation going on. There are the people who are looking at the camera and in a way are giving a performance; and then there are the people who know the camera is there, but they're trying to not acknowledge it; and then there are people who don't know the camera is there at all. And there all these other layers just existing at the same time. How does that potential for spontaneity compare to fiction work?

WXS: So when you're making a fiction film, you really do need to control everything. If there's just one person who's not looking where they're supposed to, you have to start all over again. In a way, [documentary] is not as anxious; it's more relaxing. I asked some of them to look at the camera, but if they don't, there's nothing you can really do about it. I just hit the record button and let it go and see what happens. For example: That one scene where they're standing on the dry ground with the water buckets, there's a little child there who you can't control. They're going to do what they're going to do, and the audience found that to be kind of funny. I feel this, in a way, breaks through a barrier. Is it a movie? Is it a picture? What is it?

NFS: In the past, like with *Beijing Bicycle* for example, you've explored some of the troubles faced by ethnic minorities in China. This film also has a wide range of Chinese cultures represented. But where [*Beijing Bicycle*] was a morality tale, this is a much more delicate approach. I'm wondering about the changes in your formal approach when considering these social and political issues in film.

WXS: Clearly this movie is totally different from a fictional story. But, with this film, part of it is looking at all of the changes in China that have happened over time, and I wanted to very deliberately capture that—with a photograph, with a video camera. In filmmaking circles, looking at these aspects of reality is happening less and less. More and more, the films are about entertainment—where the purpose of making a movie is to make money—and that's a concern. There are so many things that are happening in reality, and if we don't take advantage of the opportunity to record these things, then they will be lost. When I'm not busy in between the fiction films that I'm making, it was very easy [to shoot this]. I can just go out and hit record and continue this process of documenting.

NFS: When you were actually making the film—I'm sure you at least had a loose structure in mind—but were you just stopping at the side of the road at anything interesting or did you have a strict itinerary? How much spontaneity was there?

WXS: We had a broad idea of what we wanted to go see sometimes. We're from Beijing and we knew we wanted to go to places outside of Beijing. What we would find when we got there, of course we didn't know, so that's where it became more spontaneous. In China, if you want to film something that's in a

particularly sensitive place, it's very difficult. But in this case, I was not going out to film anything especially political, but rather to film things that are every day, standard. And it's in this, in the everyday, that there really is a significance.

NFS: As far as editing goes, what was the process for parsing out a structure after you spent eight years shooting?

WXS: From the beginning, there was no idea of necessarily making it into a movie. It was more like taking a bunch of postcards and throwing them down on the bed to take a look at them. The thing with this movie is it isn't necessarily the best, most complete movie. It could change.

NFS: Yeah, I was wondering if you wanted it in a super specific structure, or if you think the parts could be interchangeable?

WXS: I want to break through the idea of structure. We could have put all of the people in the countryside together, all of the minorities together. But we deliberately wanted to avoid having that kind of a structure. We wanted it to be much more random. So after 10 minutes of watching the film, you can figure it out: "I don't need to figure out what the story is." You can just look at it frame by frame.

NFS: What drew you to the idea of leaving the frame up there for a while and letting the viewers see all the different layers and giving them time to explore one particular image?

WXS: If every regular old Chinese person just has a camera and takes a picture, you don't have to go out of your way to find some kind of meaning in it. Rather, over time, the meaning will become evident. I'm thinking about the film I saw earlier today, *Apollo 11*—it had footage from 1969, where it was a whole bunch of different kinds of footage that was brought together to make this film today. But at the time that people were filming it, they weren't aware of the significance [of how the images would be used]. And yet, now it's a very meaningful film. So, this is the real significance of meaning of this kind of documentary film.

NFS: Could you talk about your decision to put yourself on camera and include yourself in this portraiture project?

WXS: This was also according to opportunity. I joked earlier that I couldn't find somebody who was willing to stand there, so I'd just go ahead and put myself in. My decision to put myself into the film is also to let the audience know that these are all places that I've visited. I'm here, I'm the one pressing play. The title in Chinese is *My Lens*.