

X STREAM PICTURES

Presents



FESTIVAL DE CANNES  
2024 OFFICIAL SELECTION  
COMPETITION

# 风流一代

## CAUGHT BY THE TIDES

(Original Title: FENG LIU YI DAI)

A FILM BY  
JIA ZHANG-KE

2024 – CHINA – DRAMA – MANDARIN - 1:1.85 – 111MINS

STARRING  
ZHAO TAO  
LI ZHUBIN

**mk2**  
FILMS

## SYNOPSIS

---

An enduring but fragile love story shared by Qiaoqiao and Bin, set in China, from the early 2000s to the present day.

Caught up in each other, Qiaoqiao and Bin enjoyed all that the city had to offer, singing and dancing. Until one day, Bin finds himself wanting to try his luck in a bigger place than Datong. He left without any notice. Some time later, Qiaoqiao decides to go on a journey to look for him.

Traversing all of his past films, Jia Zhang-Ke delivers an epic look at the romantic destiny of his perennial heroine, Qiaoqiao. Spanning 21 years of a country going through profound transformation, the film gives a new perspective to look into the contemporary China as well as the individual experiences under the turbulent emotional and social changes.

# PRODUCTION NOTE & DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

---

## PRODUCTION NOTE

The earliest footage in *Caught by the Tides* was shot in 2001. More footage was shot in the following two decades, right up to scenes shot in Datong in 2023.

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I'd been travelling to Datong often since 2001, and filming the city with whatever camera I was using at the time. Datong was renowned as a coal-mining city, but by the time I began spending time there the mines were becoming exhausted, and coal-prices were dropping. But China's economy was rapidly opening up, and a new vitality was on display everywhere I looked.

I captured singing crowds with my camera. I swirled with the dancers. I followed the young people to all their favourite places. The camera in my hand overflowed with unknown pleasures.

Over the following twenty years I've followed some of those same people now and again, tracking them to the Three Gorges on the Yangtze River, to Zhuhai in the far south, to China's north-east and south-west. As they have grown older, the cameras I've carried have also evolved: from simple DV to Alexa and to VR.

In my editing room I've often looked back at the footage I've shot over the years. The images grow distant as I can feel the times they record slipping away. Good times in the past become almost dream-like.

All this time, I've looked for the underlying interconnections in this footage. It was only in 2022, during the Covid lockdowns, that I found the stories coming together within the frame of the two decades since I started filming it. It struck me that the footage had no linear, cause-and-effect pattern. Instead, there was a more complex relationship, not unlike something from quantum physics, in which the direction of life is influenced and ultimately determined by variable factors that are hard to pinpoint. I gave the generation shown in the film a name when I chose the Chinese title: the literal meaning of *Fengliu Yidai* might be "A Drifting Generation", but the term *Fengliu* (literally, "Wind and Waves") has a strong romantic connotation. The camera has captured things we thought we'd forgotten, but they are the things which made us what we are today.

# INTERVIEW WITH JIA ZHANG-KE

---

## MUSIC AND SILENCE

**TR:** *Your liking for popular and traditional music is well-known, but this film is closer to a full-scale musical than Platform was. Do you think you'll make an actual musical one day?*

JZK: This film spans the first 21 years of the new century. I've collaborated again with the Taiwanese composer Lim Giong, who already worked with me on *The World* (2004), *Still Life* (2006) and *A Touch of Sin* (2013). His electronic music brings a poetic and melancholy tone to the film's journey. Beyond that, I chose nineteen songs for the film, including some Chinese rock music from different periods.

The opening song "Underground" (the title translates literally as "Wildfire") is by Brain Failure, a Chinese rock band from the early 2000s. The lyrics quote a verse from a famous Tang Dynasty poem ("Not even a wildfire can burn all the weeds, they will grow back in the spring breeze"), which stresses the resilience of life. Another song in the first part, "Kill the One from Shijiazhuang" by the band Omnipotent Youth Society, depicts the dull and despairing life of workers in a state-owned factory in an inland industrial city. The song "Yi Mo Yi Yang" (literally, "The Same") by the band Wutiaoren, which Qiaoqiao and Bin hear outside the supermarket towards the end of the film, is about a pair of lovers meeting and parting over four seasons. It resonates with the protagonists' experience in the film. The ending song "Ji Xu" (literally, "Go On") by the famous rock singer Cui Jian was released during the pandemic lockdowns; it's a roaring call for dignity.

The film spans quite a number of years, and you might think of it as a review of contemporary China. It's only when we look back that we realize how much has been forgotten over the last twenty years, and sounds in particular have faded the most. If we want to imagine the Tang Dynasty, more than a thousand years ago, we can look at its surviving buildings and paintings, and the unchanged mountains, rivers, lakes and seas, and visualize how the ancients lived at that time. But it's hard to imagine the *sound* of the Tang Dynasty. Music, however, can now be passed down. Songs from different eras can take us back to their time, like a code or key to unlock the past.

My own memories are often triggered by music. Take the pop song "Genghis Khan", which takes me back to the 1980s when China embarked on its economic reforms; many Chinese acts covered this German song back then. In the third part of the film, an internet celebrity now in his seventies dances to this song and we can picture his youth as a passionate, strong and expressive singer and dancer.

Music from Chinese rock bands in particular expresses the emotions and sentiments

of those who listened to it. The bands broke through social taboos through their music, voicing the feelings and aspirations of a silent majority. In the film, they sometimes feel like Qiaoqiao's inner voice.

*Caught by the Tides* is not a musical in the conventional sense, but I think I will make an actual musical one day. Music is my love.

***TR: I have to ask the big, obvious question: Why do you think Qiaoqiao chooses not to speak?***

JZK: We see Qiaoqiao singing in the first part of the film, so we know that she has a voice; she just never speaks. I want to characterize her as a silent person, partly because she represents a sector of society which has experienced very rapid changes in the last two decades. Those changes present constant challenges and sometimes push people into difficult situations. We have strong and complex emotions when we face such social realities and sometimes don't have the words to express or describe them. You might anyway say that such emotions can never be fully articulated. Qiaoqiao's silence allows the viewer to imagine what's buried deep in the character's mind. The viewer's own experience will help to fill the gap.

These tendencies have been exacerbated in recent years: as the environment becomes more complex, our emotions become more complicated. Good and bad news blend with joy, anger, sorrow and happiness. Unexpected events crop up one after another, and the roller-coaster social environment can leave us with the melancholy sense of having survived a disaster.

Such things are always hard to express. Maybe silence is more eloquent. From a slightly different point of view, Qiaoqiao's silence allows me to go inside everything she's seeing and hearing. The viewer shares her perspective as she traverses such great distances over such a long period. The faces she sees are enormously vital, lined and wrinkled like maps of life, leading us to imagine their journeys across hills and through ravines. Silence becomes a kind of self-protection, expressing a contempt for reality and even a kind of resistance.

***TR: The film feels like a summation for you: there are explicit echoes of images and structures seen in your earlier films. How have your own perspectives changed since you made films like Unknown Pleasures and Still Life?***

JZK: The character 'Qiaoqiao' first appeared in *Unknown Pleasures* in 2002. At that time she was a young woman in a small inland city, inexperienced but rebellious amid social and economic forces that were about to explode. In 2018 'Qiaoqiao' appeared again in my film *Ash is Purest White*, now a woman living on the fringes of the underworld amid China's rapid economic development.

In *Caught by the Tides* I set out to characterize a new 'Qiaoqiao'. Our past and present selves could be entirely different beings, both spiritually and physically. The new 'Qiaoqiao', although she looks and dresses much the same, steps from the chaotic but passionate life of the early 21st century into a time of orderliness and discipline with less and less passion – until the pandemic and its restrictions come along. The changing times always enrich our experience, changing our perceptions and emotions. Time constantly makes us become 'new'.

My last three fiction features have used similar narrative structures. *Mountains May Depart*, *Ash is Purest White* and now *Caught by the Tides* all tell stories that span a long period of time, showing individuals moving from youth into middle age. Obviously this reflects the natural life cycle. Like watching a tree grow, cinema observes the process of life being lived. I think cinema is the only medium that can follow time, flowing with it and capturing it.

This film tells a simple story: a pair of lovers live through changes over the past 21 years. But when I started editing the footage, I found myself trembling. Buddhist thought holds that life is nothing more than a cycle of birth, ageing, illness and death. It seems that the universe has given each of us the same script to follow, but each of us experiences it individually.

The saying goes "There's nothing new under the sun". But we'll always need new cinema.

**TR: *How suspicious are you of robotics and artificial intelligence?***

JZK: In 2006, in a teahouse in the Three Gorges area, Qiaoqiao glimpses an American sci-fi film about robots. Seventeen years later, in the city of Datong, she works in a supermarket and has a robot 'friend'.

These two scenes broadly summarise the way that AI and robotics have entered our lives. What was once sci-fi entertainment has become people chatting with Siri on their iPhones. Robots are now everywhere in China: hotels, public offices, shopping malls. They deliver meals and goods, they clean floors, they provide information. They are beginning to walk amongst us. Nowadays advanced AI is giving us secretaries, singers, poets, chess players. We created the clip from the (non-existent!) film that Qiaoqiao finds herself watching in 2006, using a mixture of live staging, special effects and AI. Tech progresses with the times. When I focus on people at a particular moment in time, I'm struck by the way they're changed by technology.

Like many others, I have concerns about AI. Is Elon Musk right that we, as carbon-based life forms, are just a booster program for silicon-based life? Does the dawn of AI mean that we're ultimately destined to become robots? There's a mysterious theory doing the rounds which gives me pause: in some East Asian countries like China and South Korea, where the birth-rate has hit all-time lows, people now seem to have less

enthusiasm for producing offspring. Is there some unknown force behind this to propel the rise of AI? Could AI actually replace human intelligence? Certainly the rise of AI forces us to reflect differently on humanity. I believe that whether we embrace or reject AI, we should do so based on our considered understanding of it. We should take the time to work alongside AI before we reach our decision.

***TR: Qiaoqiao is more of a survivor than Brother Bin. Do you think that's generally true of women in China?***

JZK: If we describe Qiaoqiao as a “survivor”, her survival should be attributed to her resilience. By contrast, Brother Bin could be called a “broken man”. In the final part of the film, when Bin returns to Datong in diminished health, Qiaoqiao goes running in the heavy snow.

Our society is competitive, and men seem keener on competition than women do. As a result, men are more prone to losing their way and ending up shattered by changes in the social tides. Bin travels far from Datong in his pursuit of ‘success’, while Qiaoqiao follows her heart for love. In my own life I’ve witnessed many men sacrificing principles and even dignity in their quest for personal gain. Conversely, I’ve seen many women staying true to themselves and maintaining a distance from social currents. While men are eager to play social roles, women tend to focus on other goals besides career, such as emotions, family, environment and even nature. In the tides of social currents, men are more likely to become alienated, while women tend to be more independent.

***Q&A by Tony Rayns (April 2024)***

# ABOUT JIA ZHANG-KE

---

## **DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY**

Jia Zhang-Ke was born in Fenyang, Shanxi, in 1970 and graduated from Beijing Film Academy. His debut feature *Xiao Wu* won prizes in Berlin, Vancouver and elsewhere. Since then, his films have routinely premiered in the major European festivals. *Still Life* won the Golden Lion in Venice in 2006, and *A Touch of Sin* won the Best Screenplay in Cannes in 2013.

## **DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY**

### **Swimming Out till the Sea Turns Blue (documentary)**

Berlin 2020, Special Screening

### **Ash Is Purest White**

Cannes 2018, Competition

### **Mountains May Depart**

Cannes 2015, Competition

### **A Touch of Sin**

Cannes 2013, Best Screenplay

### **I Wish I Knew (documentary)**

Cannes 2010, Un Certain Regard

### **24 City**

Cannes 2008, Competition

### **Useless (documentary)**

Venice 2007, Venice Horizons Documentary Award

### **Still Life**

Venice 2006, Golden Lion Award

### **Dong (documentary)**

Venice 2006, Horizon

### **The World**

Venice 2004, Competition

### **Unknown Pleasures**

Cannes 2002, Competition



**In Public (documentary)**

Marseilles 2001, Grand Prix

**Platform**

Venice 2000, Competition

**Xiao Wu**

Berlin 1998, Wolfgang Staudte Award & Netpac Award

# CAST

---

## STARRING

ZHAO TAO (As Qiao)

LI ZHUBIN (As Bin)

## CAST

PAN JIANLIN (As Pan)

LAN ZHOU (As Blondie)

## SPECIAL APPEARANCE

ZHOU YOU (As Zhou)

REN KE (Singer in Datong supermarket square)

MAO TAO (Guitarist in Datong supermarket square)

## ZHAO TAO (AS QIAO)

Graduated from the Department of Chinese Folk Dance of Beijing Dance Academy, Zhao Tao has been acting in films since 2000. The film *Still Life*, which she starred in, won the Golden Lion in Venice in 2006. She then won the Best Actress Award at David di Donatello Awards in 2010 for her leading role in the Italian film *Io Sono Li*. She's the first Asian actress awarded this prize. She was later awarded the Grand Jury Prize for Best Performance for *Mountains May Depart* in Miami in 2015, and the Best Actress Award for *Ash is Purest White* in Chicago and at APSA in 2018. She is also one of the producers of Jia Zhang-Ke's documentary *Useless* and *Swimming Out till the Sea Turns Blue*, among which *Useless* won the Venice Horizons Documentary Award.

## SELECTIVE FILMOGRAPHY

**Ash is Purest White** by Jia Zhang-Ke, 2018

Chicago, Best Actress

APSA, Best Actress

NSFC 2019, Best Actress (Runners-up)

**Mountains May Depart** by Jia Zhang-Ke, 2015

Miami, Grand Jury Prize for Best Performance

**A Touch of Sin** by Jia Zhang-Ke, 2013

**Io Sono Li** by Andrea Segre, 2012

David di Donatello Awards, Best Actress

**I Wish I Knew** by Jia Zhang-Ke, 2010

**Ten Thousand Waves** by Isaac Julien, 2010

**24 City** by Jia Zhang-Ke, 2008

**Still Life** by Jia Zhang-Ke, 2006

**The World** by Jia Zhang-Ke, 2004

**Unknown Pleasures** by Jia Zhang-Ke, 2002

**Platform** by Jia Zhang-Ke, 2000

### **LI ZHUBIN (AS BIN)**

Line producer, actor. Li has been working as line producer with Jia Zhang-Ke since 2001, including *In Public* (2001), *Unknown Pleasures* (2002), *All Tomorrow's Parties* (2004) and *A Touch of Sin* (2013). In 2002, he acted as "Brother Bin" in *Unknown Pleasures*, and he started acting since then.

### **APPEARANCE IN**

**Mountains May Depart** by Jia Zhang-Ke, 2015

**A Touch of Sin** by Jia Zhang-Ke, 2013

**Still Life** by Jia Zhang-Ke, 2006

**Unknown Pleasures** by Jia Zhang-Ke, 2002

## CREW

---

A film by **JIA ZHANG-KE**  
Written by **JIA ZHANG-KE**  
**WAN JIAHUAN**  
Produced by **CASPER LIANG JIAYAN**  
**SHOZO ICHIYAMA**  
Coproduced by **ZHANG DONG**  
**YU LIK-WAI**  
**WANG LI**  
**STEVEN XIANG**  
Associate producer **JOSIE CHOU**  
**JIANG YUXIA**  
**LIU ZHE**  
Directors of photography **YU LIK-WAI**  
**ERIC GAUTIER, A.F.C**  
Sound designer **ZHANG YANG**  
Art directors **YE QIUSEN**  
**LIU QIANG**  
**LIU WEIXIN**  
**LIANG JINGDONG**  
Original Music **LIM GIONG**  
Editors **YANG CHAO**  
**LIN XUDONG**  
**MATTHIEU LACLAU**  
Executive producers **JIA ZHANG-KE**  
**TANG YAN**  
**DONG PING**  
**ZHU WEIJIE**  
Production **X STREAM PICTURES**  
**MOMO PICTURES**  
**HUANXI MEDIA GROUP LIMITED (BEIJING)**  
**WISHART MEDIA (QUANZHOU)**  
In association with **MK2 FILMS**  
**AD VITAM**  
**BITTERS END**

## INTERNATIONAL PRESS & SALES

---

### INTERNATIONAL PRESS

**Claudia Tomassini PR**

Claudia Tomassini  
[claudia@claudiatomassini.com](mailto:claudia@claudiatomassini.com)

Lorenzo Ormando  
[lorenzo@claudiatomassini.com](mailto:lorenzo@claudiatomassini.com)

Paola Schettino Nobile  
[paola@claudiatomassini.com](mailto:paola@claudiatomassini.com)

### US PRESS

**Cinetic**

Ryan Werner  
[ryan@cineticmedia.com](mailto:ryan@cineticmedia.com)

Charlie Olsky  
[charlie@cineticmedia.com](mailto:charlie@cineticmedia.com)



### INTERNATIONAL SALES

Fionnuala Jamison, Managing Director  
[fionnuala.jamison@mk2.com](mailto:fionnuala.jamison@mk2.com)

Olivier Barbier, Head of Acquisitions  
[olivier.barbier@mk2.com](mailto:olivier.barbier@mk2.com)

Quentin Bohanna, International Sales  
[quentin.bohanna@mk2.com](mailto:quentin.bohanna@mk2.com)

Elise Cochin, International Sales  
[elise.cochin@mk2.com](mailto:elise.cochin@mk2.com)

Anne-Laure Barbarit, Festival Manager  
[anne-laure.barbarit@mk2.com](mailto:anne-laure.barbarit@mk2.com)

Alya Belgaroui-Degalet, Head of Marketing  
[alya.belgaroui@mk2.com](mailto:alya.belgaroui@mk2.com)

Pauline Maghnaoui, Marketing Product Manager  
[Pauline.maghnaoui@mk2.com](mailto:Pauline.maghnaoui@mk2.com)

[www.mk2films.com](http://www.mk2films.com)