

LUXURY CAR

A film by Wang Chao

88 minutes, color, 2006
Chinese w/English subtitles



FIRST RUN FEATURES

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SYNOPSIS

At the request of his dying wife, an elderly country schoolteacher goes to the big city of Wuhan in search of his missing son. He is met by his daughter Yanhong, who hides the fact that she is working as an escort in a seedy karaoke bar and that her boyfriend is a mobster. Yanhong introduces her father to a policeman who sympathizes with his plight and agrees to help him to find his son. However, when the policeman meets Yanhong's boyfriend, he realizes that the boyfriend might be tied to the son's disappearance.

CREDITS

Written and Directed by

WANG CHAO

Photography

LIU YONG HONG

Editing

TAO WEN

Art Directon

LI WEN BO

Mix

DOMINIQUE VIEILLARD

Sound

WANG RAN

Music

XIAO HE

Cast:

The Father, Li Qi Ming

WU YOU CAI

The Daughter, Li Yan Hong

TIAN YUAN

He Ge

HUANG HE

The Old Policeman

LI YI QING

BIOGRAPHIES:

DIRECTOR WANG CHAO

Born in 1964 in Nanjing, China.

After graduating, Wang Chao worked for 5 years as a factory worker. Writing poems in his spare time. In 1994 he received his university diploma from the Beijing film academy. From 1995 to 1998 he was the assistant to the film director Chen Kaige (*Farewell My Concubine, The Emperor and the Assasin*). At this time he was also a cinema critic specialising in foreign films.

PRODUCER SYLVAIN BURSZTEJN

Sylvain Bursztein is the president of Rosem Films, who have produced more than twenty critically acclaimed films including *Halfaouine* by Ferid Boughedi, *The Oak* by Lucian Pintilie, *Le Cri de la soie* by Yvon Marciano and *The Perfect Circle* by Ademir Kenovic. For five years Sylvain Bursztein has been developing his activities in China where he collaborates with both established and upcoming talent. His efforts have resulted in the production of six films including *Hollywood Hong Kong* by Fruit Chan and *Day and Night* by Wang Chao. Rosem Films' other Cannes presentation *Summer Palace*, by Lou Ye will be premiere in Official Competition 2006.

PRODUCER MAO YONG HONG

Mao Yong Hong is the director of Bai Bu Ting Media who produce television series, publish books, and have substantial real estate holdings in Wuhan. *Luxury Car* is their first feature film produced by Zhou Wei Si, for the company.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Spring Festival (Chinese new year) is the most important holiday of the year for the Chinese people. Last year, I was unable to go home and spend the holiday with my family like most Chinese people do.

I'm still not married, and last year my girlfriend and I separated. My parents are worried about me. They would like me to have a family soon, but I haven't always lived up to their expectations. My parents live in Nanking, a charming city in Southern China. I left fifteen years ago, to study and then to make films in Peking. Up until 2001, before I shot *The Orphan of Anyang*, my work in Peking took up all my time. I only went home twice in ten years. I was also uncomfortable about seeing my parents before I'd succeeded at something.

I came home in spring of 2001, and curiously this was directly related to the fact that *The Orphan of Anyang* had been selected for the Directors' Fortnight in Cannes. According to Chinese law, I had to return to my place of birth to apply for a passport. When I saw my parents that year, I realized just how much they had aged since I'd been gone. My parents have great hopes for me, as all Chinese parents do for their children. But I don't pay enough attention to them.

In Spring of 2002, I couldn't go to Nanking because I was in France for the release of *The Orphan of Anyang*. It was the first time I'd spent Chinese New Year in Paris. I thought of my two old parents back in Nanking, so far away from me. I knew they were thinking a great deal about me too. They missed me, though they took solace in the fact that I was in Paris for the screening of my film. They'd waited for this moment for so many years. But I finally made it back to Nanking in Spring of 2003 and was able to spend time with my parents after eight years of being apart.

Last year, I was editing *Night and Day* in Peking. Before New Year, I called my parents because I wanted to spend three days with them to celebrate the holiday. But they told me my work came first, and I shouldn't fall behind to come see them. A few phone calls would be enough. Over the following months, I was totally wrapped up in post-production work for *Night and Day*. Then, when I was back in China waiting to hear from the Cannes Film Festival, I forgot all about my parents. In late April, when I learned the film would not be going to Cannes, I became very depressed and thought even less about them.

In mid-May, my sister called me from Nanking with the news that my mother was sick, she had cancer. This news greatly worried me. My sister told me my mother had had an operation. Her condition was stable and she was convalescing. I was by no means reassured. I interrogated my sister, I did not understand why I hadn't been informed about my mother's

illness before the operation. My sister told me it was my parents' decision to keep it from me, to wait until the operation was over and my mother was out of danger. They were afraid that if I learned the news, I'd be so worried I would neglect my work.

This gave me a shock that was both subtle and violent. Fifteen years ago I left Nanking, but what meaning could my work possibly have in comparison to my mother's illness? I had created and filmed *The Orphan of Anyang*, which was widely regarded as a work filled with compassion for the suffering of the Chinese people. But, after my mother's operation, I realized that I had actually never shown an ounce of concern for the people I cared about most. I began to doubt my supposed humanity. I'm the unworthy son of wonderful parents.

They're like parents all over the world, they have high hopes for their children, but at the same time, they do their best to conceal their expectations, their worries, their deterioration and their death. *The Orphan of Anyang* couldn't even offer them any consolation as it was made without authorization, and so it couldn't be seen in China. Since I left Chen Kaige's film company to make my own films, I've had no stable job or address. I often think that if I were to disappear

one day, my parents would have no idea how to find me. Even if they came to Peking, they'd be completely lost.

In China, since 1949, through rural exodus and political upheavals like the 1989 events in Tiananmen Square, tens of thousands of families have lost track of their children. My precarious lifestyle, the exploding cities, my lack of closeness with my parents – these things got me thinking about all the missing young people out there, and the parents who have lost their children, and I decided to make *Luxury Car*. One day, while I was working on my screenplay alone in a house I was renting in Peking, I began to cry. This film tells the story of a father who leaves the mountainous region where he lives and sets out for the big city in the hopes of tracking down his lost son. His wife, who has terminal cancer, wants to see her son again and asks her husband to find him. In the city, the father joins his daughter, who has become a prostitute, though he doesn't know it. The two of them decide to bring the lost boy home.

This year, I went home to Nanking in the spring. I saw my mother. She's no longer simply an old woman, but a sick woman. She'd lost her hair to chemotherapy, so she found a wool bonnet that she had knitted for her own mother when she was little. The bonnet looks very nice on her. "Mom, that bonnet is really pretty on you", I told her. She laughed. She was so innocent. I lowered my head so she couldn't see my tears.

From the bottom of my heart, I dedicate this film to all the Chinese parents who have lost a child, and to the ghosts of the lost youngsters.

And I dedicate it most of all to my father and my mother.

INTERVIEW WITH WANG CHAO

How does “Luxury Car “fit in with the rest of your work?

The film is the last chapter in my trilogy about China, after *The Orphan of Anyang* and *Night and Day*. *Luxury Car* looks at reality and historical and political allegories in contemporary China, continuing the reflections and criticisms already present in my first two films. In China today there are many problems, and I feel them keenly as a Chinese citizen. The huge gap between the rich and the poor, the elusiveness of happiness, the contradictions between the old social system and the current system - all these things inspired me to make the film.

What's your take on the way parent-child relationships are evolving in China today?

The traditional, cultural and historical structure of the family has been shaken up by the rapid transformation of the social system. Families suffer the negative effects of distance, setbacks and failure, and the inability to help each other. I wanted to explore these new and difficult situations through the father-daughter and father-son relationships in the film. I wanted these last vestiges of family bonding to come across as a form of resistance to the changes taking place.

In your film, the father is the most out of step with these changes?

Yes, the rapid changes in China have affected rural families - who are more traditional and less protected than urban families. The losses suffered by rural populations were swifter and more dramatic. And as most rural people lack education, they had neither the time nor the tools to prepare themselves adequately for these new shockwaves. They have no choice but to accept, endure, submit to the new difficulties. The father tries to find a way to deal with his unfortunate circumstances. Though the emotional price is high and he is lost in unfamiliar surroundings, he ultimately accepts the burden of his own suffering and is able to express his deep love for his daughter, who has become a prostitute, through memories and the search for harmony within the family.

How did you choose your actors?

I found my four leading actors in Wuhan and Changsha, two large cities in China. The three male actors work in theatre and had never done a film before. The actress is a student, rock musician and writer who had already been in two films. This is the first time I've given my actors complete trust and really let them express their individual personalities and creativity. For me, this is like a return to a more classical form of cinematic expression. I'm very pleased with the remarkable job they've done.

How did you work with the producers?

I had already worked with Sylvain Bursztein on *Night and Day*, so *Luxury Car* is our second film together. Our first collaboration was a success and we've continued to work in a climate of absolute trust. He warmly encouraged my desire to try out a classic form of cinematic narration for the first time. Rosem Films did a wonderful job with post production, as did my Chinese producer, Bai Bu Ting Media, with the shoot. I also want to thank Michel Reilhac from Arte for believing in me and Fonds Sud Cinéma for their continued support.

How does your film fit in with current Chinese cinema? How do you feel about the way Chinese cinema is developing?

I'm part of the «Chinese Realism» movement, and I'm convinced that every Chinese film director has a responsibility to examine the realities of today's China. And yet, as a writer and a director, I cannot be completely satisfied with simply observing and questioning what is real. My trilogy, particularly the second installment, *Night and Day*, examines the dark side of human nature and the absurdity of the human condition from an Asian point of view. *The Orphan of Anyang* and *Luxury Car* explore the depths of human misery and the concepts of redemption and hope. It's very difficult to make films like this in China. The film industry is far more interested in churning out broad comedies. Though I'm not optimistic about the direction Chinese cinema is taking, I'll never lose faith and I will continue my work.

What are you working on now?

I'm writing a screenplay, which I expect to start shooting sometime during the first half of 2007. The working title is *Everything Can Begin Again*. It's a love story that nobody would ever want to experience, except perhaps through a film.