

Laurel Films, Dream Factory, Rosem Films and Fantasy Pictures
present

A Chinese – French coproduction

SUMMER PALACE

a film by Lou Ye

with
Hao Lei
Guo Xiaodong
Hu Ling
Zhang Xianmin

2h20 / 35mm / 1.66 / Dolby SRD / Original language: Chinese, German

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Synopsis

China, 1989

Two young lovers play out their complex, erotic, love/hate relationship against a volatile backdrop of political unrest.

Beautiful Yu Hong leaves her village, her family and her boyfriend to study in Beijing, where she discovers a world of intense sexual and emotional experimentation, and falls madly in love with fellow student Zhou Wei. Their relationship becomes one of dangerous games, as all around them their fellow students begin to demonstrate, demanding democracy and freedom.

Lou Ye (SUZHOU RIVER; PURPLE BUTTERFLY) reveals a portrait of a place and a generation - China and liberated Chinese youth - as never seen before in the West.

By turns lyrical and brutal, elegiac and erotic, SUMMER PALACE depicts a passionate love story and the struggle for personal liberty jeopardized by history and fate.

generation tian an men

Tian An Men. Syllables of joy, syllables of terror. For six weeks, from April to early June 1989, the whole of China vibrates to the rhythm of that vast square in Beijing. An incredible wind of freedom is blowing over the city and over the empire of one billion people. A new wind, one that causes the party bosses to totter. A rising desire for liberty, a dance of happiness in which students, parents, workers, and employees stand hand in hand to turn toward the world. On a square of almost 100 acres, under makeshift tents and tarps, in a sea of red flags and parasols, words of emancipation ring out, banners with insolent slogans flap. Thousands of youthful hearts sing, and the heartfelt calls – free elections, democracy, liberty – fly to the heart of the Forbidden City. The people believe, send their standard-bearers, listen to democrats in the party, including Zhao Ziyang, as they encourage the audacious racket. The great walls shake, dogma falters, the Forbidden City trembles.

A stone's throw away, one of my friends, D., a teacher at the arts academy, is watching over the secret work of his students: a copy of the Statue of Liberty, made from four pieces of polystyrene, soon to be erected on the square, under the portrait of Mao. Smearred with paint, the Great Helmsman can't believe his eyes. The people of Beijing have become the spearhead of a revolution, the real revolution, the one that will bury the last of the fortresses. As it is for Lou Ye's lovers, "desire has become reality."

June 3, 1989. A first column of young recruits is sent to the front on the square, without weapons. A provocation that the students do not sidestep. An opportunity for the army to round up its troops, to convince the recalcitrants to impose the flouted order. On the evening of June 4th, a first small tank is sent in. It founders on the barricades, burns under flaming blankets. As I look on, at the entry to the Forbidden City, the three soldiers are lynched by a crowd, drunk with rage, that knows that the hour of vengeance has tolled. Then the troops flood in, from the west. The repression strikes young and old, men and women, mendicants and mandarins. Shots are fired, students fall by the hundred, workers howl, parents cry. Betrayed urchins, the heroes of Tiananmen evacuate the scene of the events. Order reigns once again. An entire generation sees its dreams shattered on the bayonets.

The next day, in front of the windows of my room, in the Beijing Hotel, dozens of the rebels are wounded. A student with plastic bags stops a column of tanks, an ephemeral symbol of a resistance that has given up hope. Rain has come, as well as despair, and the patriots tremble from the cold. The dazibaos are torn down. On the TV screen, films by agents I took for innocent passersby, the faces of the leaders of the revolt scroll past, catalogued as counterrevolutionaries, plainly labeled "traitors to the nation." Denunciations are the order of the day. Fear has taken over.

A grim, heavy door closes. Silence settles in, century-long. Mentioning Tiananmen becomes an offence. Purges take hold. But in the hearts of many Chinese, the desire for freedom is secretly anchored. If they can't change the world, they can dream of a new, more human empire. As if, beyond the empty square, beyond the crematoriums and the jails where the insurgents lie rotting, the spirit still reigned. Behind the bars, memories endure, awaiting a trial that will one day avenge the affront. The family of one victim has already been

compensated, a sign of implicit recognition. The freedom-drunk Rimbauds have not spoken their last. The Beijing Spring is not dead, it lives on in the soul.

Olivier Weber, journalist, writer. Most recent book: *La Bataille des anges* (Albin Michel).

interview - lou ye

What was your inspiration for this film?

Ever since I finished college in 1989, I'd been thinking about writing a love story. I also had an image of the Summer Palace in Beijing in my mind. The Summer Palace is right next to the university. The starting point for the screenplay was Beijing University, the Summer Palace, and a girl named Yu Hong.

The heroine leaves her home town to go to Beijing University. Where exactly is she from? Tumen, a city in the northeast. We decided on Yu Hong's origins when we were scouting locations for the film. We went to that region to find a place near the border with North Korea, where Russia, North Korea, and China meet. We felt that her geographic origins could have some influence on her character. We originally wanted to start the story in the north and progress along a north-south axis, a parallel of overall development in China. The film was even supposed to end in Shenzhen. As it turned out, it begins in Beijing, stops briefly in Wuhan, and then continues slowly south, a progression linked to Yu Hong's story, as she heads toward more open cities, where development is happening faster.

What do you mean by "more open cities?"

Economically speaking, of course. But generally, the south is freer than the north. Especially in the late 80s and early 90s, the further from Beijing you went, the more freedom you had.

The backgrounds of the other characters are less pronounced...

From the start, the Yu Hong character was pivotal to the story. We based ourselves on her diary to tell her story. Then little by little, we developed the other protagonists, those she meets and those who gravitate towards her. First, the main male character, Zhou Wei. Then Li Ti and Ruo Gu. There's also Dong Dong, Song Ping, and the others... But those characters are peripheral to Yu Hong, they're present because they come into her story, because they touch her life.

How would you define the characters, in a social context?

Among the students living in the dormitory, Song Ping, for example, is of the generation of the Cultural Revolution. As for Zhou Wei, he thinks of himself as very westernized, but he doesn't necessarily understand what those western ideas and ideologies mean. He comprehends the west in a Chinese way. During the 1980s, as China was opening to the world, a lot of western ideas were misinterpreted. Dong Dong is a seventeen-year-old girl. She's like a blank slate, completely innocent of the events. She's interested in everything and is drawn to everyone, like a little girl.

Ruo Go is also from the earlier generation.

And Li Ti is in between. But Yu Hong is apart from the others, living in her own world. In fact, I knew all of those characters...

Are the two main characters romantic heroes?

In the first part of the film, yes. As we follow the destiny of Yu Hong and Zhou Wei, we realize that their love is uncontrollable, that it goes beyond the events, that it can't be restrained. We cannot demand anything of love: not that it bring happiness, nor that it lead to marriage, or to a long and happy life together.

Is the romanticism of the heroes of SUMMER PALACE unique to that time?

Yes, it was a romantic time, and in 1989, young people did have a certain notion of romanticism. China was opening to the larger world after a long period of containment. Young people soaked up all kinds of new ideas all at once. It was the beginning of a period of reform, and students had the feeling that they were freer than their predecessors had been, and that they could do anything. Now we know that it was just an illusion.

In SUMMER PALACE, the young people look like they've been left to their own devices.

The older generations are quite absent, as if there had been a break...

I didn't particularly want to underline that aspect of the young generation, but they really were very independent. The liberal reforms enacted in China at the time transformed them. And they had to adapt to a lot of upheavals. But after having tasted freedom, they could never go back. That's their problem, and that of China as a whole. Once you've started the march toward liberty, you can no longer turn back. For example, once she leaves Tumen, Yu Hong will never return.

Is that also why Zhou Wei ends up leaving China?

(Laughter) Yes.

Why does he go to Berlin?

Berlin is a lot like China, especially Beijing, in terms of the way society is organized. And Berlin is important to me personally, it's the city where I met my wife.

Do you see a parallel between the fall of the Berlin Wall and the opening of China?

I have the feeling there are two dates in history when the whole world seemed to be working together perfectly to achieve certain things, when it beat to the pulse of chaotic events that erupted everywhere simultaneously, as if by chance: 1968 and 1989.

Is it important that it's young people who change the world?

They played a crucial role. In 1989, after the events in Tiananmen Square, I became aware of the reality of things in China. Then I learned what happened in Moscow, in Czechoslovakia, and in Berlin. The movement for freedom was gaining ground. Our understanding of our own actions also changed as things evolved. We realized that it wasn't something we could settle by breaking beer bottles and shouting insults. I actually filmed that scene...

Do you mean you really lived that scene in "Summer Palace" when a student shows up after the repression and collapses crying in Zhou Wei's arms?

Indeed, in those circumstances, all we could do was holler and break bottles, no more. We were powerless. I had an experience similar to that one.

In the film, we see students leaving for their military service immediately after the events in Tiananmen Square. Was that an easy way of restoring order?

In fact, the goal of that military training was to establish a closer relationship between students and soldiers, to encourage reciprocal comprehension, because during the June 4th events, they were the main adversaries. They learned to respect each other. The students ended up seeing that the soldiers were okay. They showed a lot of respect for each other. That's how things happened in reality. But I agree, it was also useful in restoring order.

After the events in June 1989, there's a change of tone in the film that clearly marks a break. Is there a before and an after in the way you filmed?

There had to be. It was impossible to avoid that break simply to maintain the cohesion of the story. One of the challenges in the narrative is that the climax of the story is actually in the middle of the film and not at the end. But it wasn't possible for the story to end there. That moment had to be in the middle of the film.

By following Yu Hong's life, its progression both emotionally and professionally, did you also want to show the evolution of life in all of the big cities in China?

Maybe, but what was most important to me was to show the evolution of Yu Hong's character. If she had died during the events, that would have been simpler. But most of the students weren't killed, so the story had to continue. That's something I thought a lot about. In the film, we didn't show a single death during the events. Death came later. That's what I wanted to get across.

Is it the end of hope?

It's possible. Death isn't caused by any one event. What I wanted to say is that personal feelings are more complicated. Exterior chaos is more easily resolved. Emotional torment is hard to resolve because it requires time.

Does that mean that the characters met up again too soon?

Yes, I agree. (Laughter) I would have needed a film at least three and a half hours long!

Your work is essentially urban, in contrast to the work of filmmakers of the fifth generation. Do you need to use cities to talk about today's China?

I don't have much experience of life in the country. The fifth generation filmmakers almost all do because of the Cultural Revolution.

Did the lead actors, in particular the principal actress, know there would be so many sex scenes?

I told them during our first meeting. I needed them all to agree.

Less than fifteen years ago, even an onscreen kiss was problematic. Has that taboo been completely overcome now?

In my opinion, it is in the nature of this work not to copy what was done fifteen years ago. (Laughter)

Is it easier to tell a story of contemporary China?

It's more complicated, because reality is too close. There are lots of problems to resolve, and that takes a lot of time. SUMMER PALACE doesn't really reflect today's China, but rather the China of ten years ago.

What do you think about Chinese cinema today? And how do you see its evolution?

In my opinion, in its current condition, we still have a lot of problems. First and foremost, Chinese cinema still isn't free, either in terms of creativity, management, or regulations. If

you can't express your opinions freely, you can't accurately judge the value of other people's words. We need to be able to express what we really think before we can judge the form or soundness of another expression.

May 5 interview, in Paris

Filmography

- 1965 Born in Shanghai, China.
- 1983 Graduated from Shanghai Art School, majored in cartoon production.
Admitted by Shanghai Art Film Studio, engaged in cartoon production.
- 1985 Admitted by Direction Department of Beijing Film Academy, majoring in Film Direction.
Started experimental productions of short films.
- 1987 Produced 16mm black-white short film, "Driving Without a License".
- 1989 Graduated from Direction Department of Beijing Film Academy, BA.
Directed 16mm color short film, "Earphone".
- 1993 Started shooting feature films.
Directed the first feature film WEEKEND LOVER.
Rainer Werner Fassbinder Prize winner for Best Director 45th Mannheim - Heidelberg International Film Festival of Germany, 1996.
- 1997 Produced a 5-episode TV-film collection "Super City" as Independent Producer, made by five Chinese new directors and photographed by their own Directors of Photography and Art Directors.
- 2000 SUZHOU RIVER, writer and director credits.
VPRO Tiger Award winner at the 29th International Film Festival Rotterdam 2000
Grand Prix and Best actress in the 15th International Film Festival in Paris
Winner of the FIPRESCI prize at Viennale
Grand Prix winner at Filmmax Festival in Tokyo 2001
Selected by Time Magazine (Asia) as one of the best movies 2000.
- 2001 Directed DV short film "In Shanghai",
(for the DV-Project "On Waterfront", International Film Festival Rotterdam 2001).
- 2002-2003 PURPLE BUTTERFLY, writer and director credits.
In Competition, Cannes 2003.
- 2006 SUMMER PALACE
In Competition, Cannes 2006.

Cast

guo xiaodong
(zhou wei)

1974 Born in Shandong.
2000 Graduated from Beijing Film Academy,
majoring in acting.

Filmography:

2000 LOVE BLUE
2001 17H51M
2002 NUAN, Tokyo Grand Prix Winner, TIFF 2003
2003 BEAUTIFUL TASK
2004 BRILLIANT PEACH BLOSSOMS
2006 SUMMER PALACE

hao lei
(yu hong)

1978 Born in Jilin.
2000 Graduated from Shanghai Academy of Drama, majoring in acting.

Filmography:

2002-2003 RHINO IN LOVE
2003 PUPPET LOVE
2006 SUMMER PALACE

crew

fu kang
(sound engineer)

1978 Born in Beijing.
2002 Graduated from the Sound Department of Beijing Film Academy.

Filmography:

2000 SHAN LING XIONG MENG
2001 SI SHI YAN,
Grand Pix of Hawaii International Film Festival
2002 SHAO NIAN YING XIONG, Best Children's Picture
of China
2003 KEKEXILI: MONTAIN PATRO, Special Jury Prize
2006 SUMMER PALACE

liu weixin
(art director)

1964 Born in Guangxi.
1983 Admitted by Beijing Film Academy, majoring in Art Direction.
1987 Graduated from Beijing Film Academy.

Filmography:

1994 ONCE UPON A TIME IN SHANGHAI
2002 PURPLE BUTTERFLY
2003 NANXI RIVER
2006 SUMMER PALACE

hua qing
(director of photography)

1964 Born in Zhejiang.
1983 Admitted by Beijing Film Academy, majoring in Cinematography.
1987 Graduated from Beijing Film Academy.

Filmography:

1994 ONCE UPON A TIME IN SHANGHAI
2003 NANXI RIVER
2006 SUMMER PALACE

production

laurel films

Laurel Films is an independent film production company based in Beijing, China. Founded in 2000 by independent producer, Mr. FANG Li, the company has produced four feature films. Laurel Films also has the capacity and resources for financing of the local production. Laurel Films focuses on China's young talents.

The Orphan of Anyang (by WANG Chao, 2001), Day & Night (by WANG Chao, 2003), Dam Street (by LI Yu, 2005), and Summer Palace (by LOU Ye, 2006).

dream factory

Dream Factory is a film production company of young Chinese filmmakers founded by NAI An and Lou Ye in early 1998. In 1993, NAI An has started to produce films as an independent producer. DREAM FACTORY dedicates itself to promising Chinese young directors.

Weekend Lovers by Lou Ye 1995
Suzhou River by Lou Ye 2000
Purple Butterfly by Lou Ye 2003
Summer Palace by Lou Ye 2006

rosem films

Sylvain Bursztejn, president of Rosem Films produced more than twenty critically-acclaimed films including Halfaouine by Ferid Boughedir, The Oak by Lucian Pintilie, Le Cri de la soie by Yvon Marciano and The Perfect Circle by Ademir Kenovic.

For five years Sylvain Bursztejn 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 Luxury Car, by Wang Chao will be premiere in Un Certain Regard 2006.

fantasy pictures

Fantasy pictures was founded 2005 by the young Chinese photographer, Lin Fan. The first project of Fantasy Pictures was the coproduction of Lou Ye's Summer Palace. The company aims to find international as well as mainland Chinese coproduction opportunities for promising young Chinese director and also produces their works independently.

Cast

Hao Lei	Yu Hong
Guo Xiaodong	Zhou Wei
Hu Ling	Li Ti
Zhang Xianmin	Ruo Gu

Credits

Produced by Laurel Films, Dream Factory, Rosem Films and Fantasy Pictures

With the participation of FONDS SUD CINEMA
Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication-CNC
Ministère des Affaires Etrangères
France

Producers Fang Li, Nai An and Sylvain Bursztejn

Co-producers Lin Fan, Helge Albers and Lou Ye

DOP Hua Qing

Production Manager Liu Weixin

Sound Fu Kang

Music Peyman Yazdanian

Editing Lou Ye and Zeng Jian

Written by Lou Ye, Mei Feng and Yingli Ma

Directed by Lou Ye

Location Tumen, Pékin, Wuhan, Chongqing and Berlin

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