

m y s t e r y

A film by Lou Ye

Dream Author Pictures and Les Films du Lendemain
present



OFFICIAL SELECTION
UN CERTAIN REGARD
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

m y s t e r y

A film by **Lou Ye**

starring

Hao Lei, Qin Hao and Qi Xi

China / France / Running time: 1h38 / Image:1.85 / Sound: Dolby

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SYNOPSIS

Lu Jie has no idea her husband Yongzhao is leading a double life, until the day she sees him entering a hotel with a young woman. Her world crumbles - and it's just the beginning. A few hours later, the young woman dies beneath the wheels of a car. The police officer in charge of the case refuses to believe her death was accidental..

LOU YE BIOGRAPHY

Lou Ye , born in 1965, is a Chinese screenwriter, director and producer.

The son of actors, Lou Ye graduated in 1983 from the Shanghai School of Fine Arts (in animation) then joined the Beijing Film Academy (Filmmaking Department) in 1989. Lou Ye is part of a new generation of Chinese filmmakers who are open to the West and ready to tackle themes issuing from all cultures.

He worked as an assistant before directing his own debut film in 1994: WEEKEND LOVER. A portrait of disaffected youth in Shanghai, the film was banned for two years in China, but received the Werner Fassbinder Award for Best Direction at the Mannheim-Heidelberg International Film Festival in 1996.

Also interested in production, Lou Ye initiated the "Super City" project for television, with contributions from 10 of the most promising Chinese directors of the time, and established the production company Dream Factory.

In 2000, western audiences discovered Lou Ye through his second feature, SUZHOU RIVER, which he wrote, directed and co-produced. Secretly shot on the streets of Shanghai, the film attracted widespread international acclaim and was banned in China for having been presented at the Rotterdam Film Festival without permission from the Chinese authorities.

In 2003, Lou Ye was recognized for the ambitious PURPLE BUTTERFLY, with Zhang Ziyi, which portrayed the conflict between China and Japan in the 1930s. The film was selected in Official Competition at the Cannes Film Festival, as was SUMMER PALACE three years later. In this latter film, Lou Ye revisited the Tiannnmen Square events through the erotic relationship of two students. For breaking this taboo, the director was banned again from making and producing films in China for five years.

Shot clandestinely in China and bearing French and Hong Kong nationality to avoid censorship, SPRING FEVER received the Best Screenplay Award at the Cannes Film Festival in 2009. Two years later, Lou Ye returned with LOVE AND BRUISES, shot in France, and starring Tahar Rahim. The film was presented at the Venice Film Festival.

In 2012, MYSTERY is selected for the opening night of Un Certain Regard in Cannes. MYSTERY confirms the official return of Lou Ye in China, after 5 years of censorship. Like all of his recent films, MYSTERY is a French coproduction.

A CONVERSATION WITH LOU YE

Could you remind us what your situation was as a filmmaker after SUMMER PALACE in 2006?

After SUMMER PALACE I was banned from making films for five years. So I left and went to the USA, to Iowa University. I was the guest of Nie Hua-Ling, a Chinese writer who teaches there, and I worked with the screenwriter Mei Feng on the project that would become SPRING FEVER. Because of my ban I was also looking for films I could shoot abroad; I read a lot of scripts but didn't find what I wanted. We shot SPRING FEVER in Nanking in near clandestine conditions, with a small DV camera. Next I went to Paris to work with Liu Jie Falin on adapting her novel, BITCH, which became LOVE AND BRUISES. By the time the film was completed the five years had passed and I was able to go back and work in China...

Does that mean that after the five years everything went back to as it was before?

To be banned from filming for five years is a terrible thing to go through when you're a filmmaker. At the time I was hit by this measure, I thought about showing my refusal publicly, by publishing a collective letter of protest that many filmmakers and artists would certainly have agreed to sign. But in the end I decided to do nothing: continuing to make films was the best response. For five years that's what I devoted my energy to. Shooting SPRING FEVER in China was my way of showing that their ban was unenforceable.

What is the origin of MYSTERY?

After LOVE AND BRUISES, Mei Feng, my co-writer, looked on the Internet for stories of everyday life in China that could be possible material to use as a starting point for a screenplay. We used three stories he had found, allowing us to show each layer of society, by combining the different aspects: double-life, crime, the nouveau riche, etc... The scriptwriting work consisted of unifying these aspects. I find interesting,

the fact that crime results from a double-life. The double-life is a very real phenomenon in China. There are numerous cases of men who are found to have two wives, but it is also symbolic of a much more general relationship to life: when you're unhappy about what's happening in your life, you create another one. When there is nothing to be found on the ground, you look elsewhere, underground. In China, there are multiple forms of dual personalities confronting reality.

Could the same film be made with a woman who has more than one man?

No! It is possible that a woman has more than one man of course, but it's rare. The situation of women offers less freedom. Society accepts that a man has more than one woman, it's even implicitly recognized as a sign of success, whereas a woman with multiple lovers would be regarded with hostility.

Is it important that the film is set in the city of Wuhan?

Wuhan is a megalopolis; it is the result of the meeting of three medium-sized cities, each with very different histories and social compositions. The city itself has no unity. A Chinese person would recognize in which area the action in the film is taking place and what it entails; different worlds exist side by side. Moreover, Wuhan is symbolic of the whole of the country, being located exactly at its centre.

The couple around which the film revolves has a similar lifestyle to that of the urban middle classes in Tokyo, Paris or Philadelphia...

For 15 years now, economic development in China has given birth to a middle class whose morals are similar in many ways, particularly in appearances, to their equivalent throughout the world. But within this global framework there is some behavior particular to the Chinese.

What do you think is most representative of a Chinese attitude?

The way a man tries to run different aspects of his life, the way he never stops trying to manage contradictory elements, always in search of a balance that suits him.

Without this being specific to China alone, the behavior of the younger generation, children of the nouveau riche, and the attitude of the police, who come to an agreement with those in power, is also significant of the present situation in that country.

Precisely. But it's the same thing really, and this is what I find representative of Chinese mentality. Rich kids and the police who drop investigations live in the same mental world, the world of permanent *modus vivendi*. In China today, the law alone has no strength; everything is negotiated. Therefore there are no morals. And that is why the main character ends up committing murder, in order to maintain this balance. The way he deals with his feelings is similar to the way the police deal with the investigation, and that's particularly Chinese.

Everyone is looking for a compromise, instead of building his or her behavior on love, or justice, law, loyalty, etc. There's nothing that resembles principles, and it all ends in murder.

That's right. Of course, on a scale as big as China's, this can produce far more serious tragedies. Nobody worries about the truth any longer. The result is the mystery of the title.

Is the film identical to the screenplay?

The narrative structure is the same but I changed many things during preparation, particularly while we were doing readings with the actors, then during the shoot, according to what we felt in the moment, and again during editing, when I worked again with Mei Feng. The finished film is different to what was written but it recounts the same thing: the main ideas remained.

Who are the actors and how do you work with them?

Hao Lei, who plays the wife, was the lead actress in *SUMMER PALACE*, and Qin Hao, the husband, had one of the main roles in *SPRING FEVER*. I know these actors well, they feature regularly in Chinese auteur films, but they are not film stars. Qi Xi, who plays the mistress, is a theater actress; this is the first time she has appeared in a film. We had group readings; I also talked with each actor individually, at length. I love to discuss with the actors beforehand but as little as possible during shooting. Then, I like the acting to come from within each actor. I often leave the camera running until the actor does what seems right to him, what he feels, without me having given indications. As a result, I shoot a lot; there are a lot of rushes, and consequently, editing is a big job.

Did you decide the film's visual style in advance?

Yes, I knew it would be very mobile, with handheld camera, allowing for a blurred focus and even sometimes seeking it. Shooting *SPRING FEVER* with a small DV camera was such a rewarding experience, and I drew inspiration from that to shoot *MYSTERY*, even if I used a bigger camera this time. I try to leave things open to visual coincidences. There is an important preparation, with a storyboard, defining the best conditions to shoot like a documentary later. I seek what I call "natural time": there's an interior rhythm that corresponds with each situation that you have to find. Above all it depends on the actors. It's impossible to foresee.

Rain and water are important aspects of MYSTERY.

The Yang-Tse River bathes the city of Wuhan; its presence is everywhere, that probably had an influence on me. And I love the rain. Rain makes everything happening a bit less certain, it allows the unexpected into the shoot more easily. I also find human faces more human in the rain, more moving. But actors don't much like shooting in these conditions...

Can you talk about the music and the songs in the film?

For the music, we worked again with our regular collaborator Peyman Yazdanian, as well as with independent Chinese musicians or bands: Zhao Ze, Li Zhi, Yao Shi-San and Wang Wen.

How was the film produced?

I founded a new production company, Dream Author Pictures, which carried the project to start with. But I needed partners, whom I found in France with Les Films du Lendemain. It's easier to work with France thanks to the coproduction treaty between the two countries. I couldn't have done this film properly without the involvement of other producers.

Did the film encounter any problems with the Chinese authorities?

The screenplay was examined for five months! It normally takes 30 days but after 30 days I would be told to come back in 30 days... Other directors only have to submit a thousand-word treatment but from me they demanded the whole screenplay. The censor didn't demand cuts or make openly hostile comments: they have administrative forms where everything is written in a very civilized fashion, you have to know how to read between the lines. All Chinese directors know how to play this game; it's vital. If not, films would be banned. I hope MYSTERY will be released; small alterations might have to be made. Then we have to confront economic censorship: it's very difficult for a film like this to exist in China, in the face of commercial films that invade the screens, from either China or Hollywood. Chinese filmmakers have to face government censorship, huge official productions and American films - it's not easy.

CAST

LU JIE HAO LEI (SUMMER PALACE)
YONGZHAO QIN HAO (SPRING FEVER)
SANG QI QI XI
TONG MINGSONG ZU FENG
QIN FENG ZHU YAWEN
XIAOMIN CHANG FANGYUAN
HAN HUI QU YING

CREW

DIRECTED BY LOU YE
SCREENPLAY MEI FENG (SUMMER PALACE,
SPRING FEVER)

YU FAN
LOU YE
PRODUCED BY LOU YE
CHEN XI

PRODUCERS NAI AN
KRISTINA LARSEN

PRODUCTION COMPANIES DREAM AUTHOR PICTURES
LES FILMS DU LENDEMAIN

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY ZENG JIAN (SPRING FEVER)
ART DIRECTOR PENG SHAOYING (SPRING FEVER)
DU LUXI

SOUND ENGINEER FU KANG (SUMMER PALACE,
SPRING FEVER)

EDITOR SIMON JACQUET

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WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF ARTE FRANCE

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