



OFFICIAL SELECTION
CANNES FILM FESTIVAL 2002
NEW YORK FILM FESTIVAL 2002
TORONTO FILM FESTIVAL 2002

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CREDITS

Crew

Director	Jia Zhang-Ke
Screenwriter	Jia Zhang-Ke
Director of Photography	Yu Lik Wai
Sound	Zhang Yang
Art Director	Liang Jiang Dong
Editor	Chow Keung
Producers	Shozo Ichiyama / T-Mark (Japan) Lit Kit-ming / Hu Tong Comm. (China) Masayuki Mori / Office Kitano (Japan)
Executive Producers	Hengameh Panahi / Lumen Films (France) Paul Yi / E-Pictures (Korea)

Cast

Qiao Qiao	Zhao Tao
Bin Bin	Zhao Wei Wei
Xiao Ji	Wu Qiong
Yuan Yuan	Zhou Qing Feng
Xiao Wu	Wang Hong Wei
Bin Bin's Mother	Bai Ru
Xiao Ji's Father	Liu Xi An
Sister Zhu	Xu Shou Lin
The Hairdresser	Ren Ai Jun
Mr. Ren	Xiao Dao
The Concubine	Ying Zi
The Karaoke Customer	Wang Li Min

A NEW YORKER FILMS RELEASE

www.NewYorkerFilms.com

China, 2002	113 min
Color	
In Chinese with English subtitles	1:85, Dolby
SR	

SYNOPSIS

China's "birth control generation" is entering their twenties during a promising period of social transition. Coupled with China's entry into the WTO, the eruption of satellite television and internet accessibility helped Beijing celebrate its successful bid for the 2008 Olympics and new highways are shortening the distance from the provinces to larger cities like Beijing, Shanghai and Canton.

While the entire country is seemingly committed toward following the path of speedy development, state resources aren't as readily available in the provincial cities, allowing the gap between rich and poor to grow steadily and leaving many young people in China unemployed. In the city of Datong, jobless best friends Xiao Ji and Bin Bin are growing restless. With nowhere to turn, the boys spend their time wandering around Datong on motorbikes and hanging out at the pool hall. Sparks fly when Xiao Ji meets the beautiful Qiao Qiao, a dancer for Mongolian King Liquor, and Bin Bin's romance with a young student helps to alleviate his struggle, but without hope love doesn't prevail and desperation sets in. Taking a cue from American crime movies and Monkey King animation, the temptation of easy money becomes too difficult to resist and in a final attempt to break free from life in Datong, Xiao Ji and Bin Bin embark on half-baked plan to rob a bank.

Although *Unknown Pleasures* is a harrowing account of disillusioned young people living in China, director Jia Zhang-ke (*Platform*) still finds plenty to laugh about. Beautifully photographed by famed cinematographer Yu Lik-wai, *Unknown Pleasures* cements Zhang-ke's reputation as one of China's most important filmmakers.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

THE YEAR 2001 IN CHINA

I don't think that anyone concerned with current events could remain indifferent to China in the year 2001. During that year, in the north of China, an unemployed factory worker exploded the plant residence in which he was living. Shortly afterwards, Beijing was elected host city of the 2008 Summer Olympics. In Southern China, a bank robber was arrested. This man had three mistresses. Before being executed, he received countless love letters from young students. On one hand, China is successfully entered into the World Trade Organization. On the other hand, the incident of the collision of an American plane with a Chinese plane in Hainan revived Chinese nationalism. It's difficult to know which of these events marked people's thinking the most. As far as I am concerned, all of them profoundly affected me. That year, reality was more theatrical than anything we could see at the movies. It even leaned toward surrealism. The entire population got worked up. This strange excitement gave me a worrisome feeling. The anger of society's inner layers was beginning to come out and show itself.

GENERATION "UNKNOWN PLEASURES"

In 1982, the moment when the young people in PLATFORM close their windows at night and huddle around to listen secretly to Western music, the young people of the "new new generation" in UNKNOWN PLEASURES have just been born. They are part of the birth control generation. They'll never have any brothers or sisters. Destiny has doomed them to a solitary existence. This generation also finds itself confronted with an existential crisis of individuality. Society doesn't know how to position itself in face of the individual experience. Culturally speaking, we haven't had the time to prepare ourselves to face this crisis. The system is already bringing this crisis toward another game almost as cruel. The enormous boost to the country's development exerts a disconcerting pressure on young people. Confronted with this, they find themselves completely powerless.

UNKNOWN PLEASURES

The English title of my film is the result of an observation I made about contemporary China. To avoid falling into hopelessness, people throw themselves

into the frenzied search for pleasure. And luckily, they have time to waste their money! The Chinese title of my film, "Ren Xiaoyao," means "free of all constraints." This is taken from writings by Taoist philosopher Zhuangzi, in which he suggested enjoying life's pleasures and searching for absolute freedom. In 2001, a song with the same title was very successful among Chinese youth. It became one of the most requested karaoke hits.

DOES WHAT FEELS GOOD

"Dreams of Being a Butterfly" is one of the writings of Zhuangzi. One day, while sleeping in a garden, he dreamed he had become a butterfly and floated among the flowers. According to the philosopher, life should be a joyful process that should not be weighed down by reality. In UNKNOWN PLEASURES, young people lack discipline. They don't have any goals for the future. They refuse all constraints. They run their own lives and act independently. But their spirit is not as free. Is Qiao Qiao's butterfly tattoo an emblem of revolt or a wound resulting from the price paid for freedom? If the slogan "Do What Feels Good" is today's young people's interpretation of Zhuangzi's writings, then it's also their sigh of relief at facing an illusive search for so-called freedom.

YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE PROVINCES

Like in UNKNOWN PLEASURES, the majority of China's young people live in medium-size cities or small communities, where reality is tough. Highways are under construction to unblock contact with the "outside." Isolation is only now being broken. On one hand, telecommunications are rapidly advancing - satellite television and internet connections are now part of daily life. On the other hand, traditional industries are collapsing and the state economy is relying on new mechanisms. This is accentuating the gap between rich and poor, thus reinforcing the problem of unemployed workers, etc. What about the difficulties that these provincial young people are faced with? The big problem rests in the unequal development of the country. The rhythm has accelerated on the national level. The gap is increasing between regions. Cities like Beijing, Shanghai or Canton are very advanced, but still rest rare examples of modernity rendered possible by a strong concentration of state resources. Young people see their minimum needs are hardly insured. They're losing hope. The lifestyles presented by the media are the opposite of what they are living. Television doesn't stop showing them proof of this. What's troubling is that many of them are slowly losing confidence in their cultural identity. At the end of UNKNOWN PLEASURES, Bin Bin sees on television that Beijing is now easily accessible from his city thanks to the opening of a new highway. The whole country is strongly committed toward following the path of speedy development without worrying about those left behind in the process. Walk among the streets of Datong, and you'll see the taciturn

temperament of young people. The surface indifference that they show allows them to distinguish themselves from others. That's their only method of protecting themselves against outside aggression when they actually are very, very sensitive.

LIVING UNTIL 30 IS ENOUGH

Nineteen-year-old Xiao Ji says living until 30 would be enough for him. I don't believe he really feels that way, but that's his way of expressing his anxiety toward the future. In his city, people marry and settle down toward 30. At that point, days go by and all seem the same in respect to social order. No more surprises or hopes. Xiao Ji understands that. He would like to escape such a fate, but he doesn't know how. That's why he says that living until 30 is enough for him. In fact, he's already searching for a way to escape from a routine existence. He'll choose delinquency as the only solution to his feelings of helplessness.

ADOLESCENT REBELS

No one person can represent an entire generation, but the character of Xiao Ji best presents a general phenomenon. Watching American films and having the newest gadgets is the way that young people keep up with the latest trends. That's also their way of distinguishing themselves from the generation before them. But fads pass because they must quickly confront life's rude constraints. In American cinema, one never gives in to the establishment and individual heroism is a component that seduces young people confronted by an identity crisis. In China, the older generation wants to monopolize moral values. They don't trust young people. One could say that all Chinese adolescents are rebels. In *UNKNOWN PLEASURES*, the reason for the heavy family atmosphere is the older generation's lack of confidence in young people. I'm always surprised to see father-son relationships. There's so little enthusiasm in trying to understand one another. Dialogue is limited only because they share the same blood.

IN CONFLICT WITH HERSELF

There are many young women like Qiao Qiao in contemporary China. They present at the same time a great modernity without having departed from the inertia of tradition. They're in conflict with themselves. They are waiting for the day when they will finally feel free. Qiao Qiao lives in a world of diversion and loves to be on stage. Qiao Qiao stands out in a city like Datong, through her show business profession and through her way of acting and wearing makeup. She does what she wants with contempt for the norm. In reality, her eccentric appearance

allows her to conceal her true, more conservative nature that she is embarrassed of. She cannot come to terms with her relationship with gangster boyfriend Qiao San because she cannot assume the role of the unfaithful mistress. In the bus stop scene after she has a violent confrontation with Qiao San, Qiao Qiao has taken off her wig. We see her true face for the first time.

MUTUAL ASSISTANCE

The relationship between Qiao Qiao and Xiao Ji is based on mutual assistance. Qiao Qiao leans on Xiao Ji to turn her back on the past, which she has difficulty letting go of. Xiao Ji leans on Qiao Qiao to prove to himself that his life has changed and to find confidence in himself that will allow him to face his destiny. Between them, it's probably not love with a capital L. But they share moments of great sentimental sincerity... These young people torture themselves to help relieve their torments and awaken numb feelings. Qiao Qiao just can't come to terms with her past, which stops her both from looking toward the future and taking advantage of the present.

TWO DIFFERENT COUPLES

Yuan Yuan, Bin Bin's girlfriend, is different than Qiao Qiao. She has set objectives for herself. She sacrifices her present life for the construction of her future. She enthusiastically adheres to the rules of the game of our negotiating society. She doesn't put her feelings for Bin Bin first. Bin Bin and Yuan Yuan are more reserved. They sit next to one another listening to karaoke songs. They feel their love will never survive the test of time. Bin Bin and Yuan Yuan are in despair over their love. Qiao Qiao and Xiao Ji try to love one another because they are in despair.

THE MONEY KING

Sun Wukong, the Money King, is a mythological character known by everyone. His adventures are told in Wu Cheng Nen's JOURNEY TO THE WEST (originally written in 1950, still a popular Chinese opera). He's a monkey born out of stone. He has no father and mother. He lives as free as the wind. With great contempt for celestial order, he opposes the Emperor and creates trouble in the palace. His magical powers allow him to control the clouds and makes leaps thousands of kilometers long. No one can overcome him, yet he won't escape the hand of Buddha, who holds him prisoner of the mountain, limiting his freedom. This ancient story reflects the fatalism of my film. Young people struggle desperately. They pull themselves out of difficult situations, but they always fall back into new

problems because no one can escape the rules of the game. True freedom doesn't exist in this world.

EASY MONEY

In 2001, in my hometown province, I heard loudspeakers announcing the lottery. It was a voice that gave people the illusion of getting rich quick and maybe new hope to the most discouraged. Now, lottery announcements are heard all over China as if money solved everything. Will money be the only method of solving society's problems? People's lives are invaded by these countless promotional campaigns. How many of them will actually have the luck to share these superficial riches?

LAST ROMANTIC EXPRESSION

In committing a crime, Xiao Ji and Bin Bin want to make a break with a life that gives them no hope at all. I feel like it's a psychic need of theirs. They are looking to find their own value by committing extreme acts. They want to leave their mark on a stagnating youth. Robbery allows them to bring a chance to a frozen existence. That's why I say that violence is their last romantic expression.

SHOOTING ON DIGITAL VIDEO

UNKNOWN PLEASURES was shot in Datong, an industrial city in the native province of Shanxi. The name Datong means "Great Harmony" and designates an equitable society. However, it's just the opposite there. The situation is very troublesome. Walk among the cities buildings and you'll constantly be reminded of industry. It reeks of confusing and strange surrealism. I immediately thought about digital video. The sight of color discrepancy of digital video corresponded to the tonality I wanted. I started shooting only three weeks after I had the idea of the film. The work was very improvisational and filming on digital video gave me lots of freedom in movement. With my digital Beta camera, I had the impression of being a poet from ancient times who was observing the surrounding landscape while listening to the sound of his own inner music. Not to mention all the less technical hassles! I don't think that digital video will ever replace film. For directors, it's simply an additional choice offered to us.

JIA ZHANG-KE

Writer/Director

Chinese director Jia Zhang-Ke has received international attention for his first two features, PLATFORM and XIAO WU (PICKPOCKET). His work has been praised for filmmaking technique as well as its confrontation of everyday life in contemporary urban China.

At the age of 18, Jia Zhang-Ke studied painting in Taiyuan, the capital of Shanxi province. He developed an interest in fiction, and wrote his first novel, "The Sun Hung On The Crotch," in 1991. Two years later, he was admitted to the Beijing Film Academy. In 1995, he founded the Youth Experimental Film Group, the first independent production organization of its kind in China. With the group, he directed two award-winning videos, XIAO SHAN GOING HOME and DU DU. Upon film school graduation in 1997, he made his first feature, XIAO WU (PICKPOCKET).

Jia Zhang-Ke was born in 1970 in Fenyang, a small town in the northern province of Shanxi. Fenyang, a one-hour drive from China's famous Yellow River, was the primary location of PLATFORM. Jia Zhang-Ke also shot XIAO WU (PICKPOCKET) and UNKNOWN PLEASURES in Shanxi province.

2002 UNKNOWN PLEASURES

Official Selection
Cannes Film Festival
New York Film Festival

2000 PLATFORM

Venice (Netpac Award), Nantes (Best Film, Best Director),
Singapore (Young Cinema Award), Buenos Aires (Best Film),
Fribourg (Don Quixote Award, FIPRESCI Prize)

1997 XIAO WU (PICKPOCKET)

Berlin (Netpac Award), Brussels (Prix de l'Age d'Or),
Pusan (New Current Prize), Vancouver (Dragon & Tiger Prize),
Nantes (Best Film), San Francisco (Skyy Prize), Rimini (Grand Prize)

YU LIK WAI

Cinematographer

Yu Lik Wai served as cinematographer on all three of Jia Zhang-Ke's features, UNKNOWN PLEASURES, PLATFORM, and XIAO WU (PICKPOCKET). He was also the cinematographer on Ann Hui's QIAN YAN WAN YU (ORDINARY HEROES). Yu Lik Wai is also an acclaimed director. His first feature, LOVE WILL TEAR US APART, was presented in Official Competition at the 1999 Cannes Festival. He is currently in production of his next feature, ALL TOMORROW'S PARTIES.