

MOMO PICTURES, FABULA ENTERTAINMENT
Present



不止不休

(BU ZHI BU XIU)

THE BEST IS YET TO COME

A Film by Jing WANG

Produced by JIA Zhang-ke

2020/China/Drama/115 min/1:1.85

Mandarin with English subtitles

International Sales

REDIANCE

SHORT SYNOPSIS

China, 2003. In the aftermath of the SARS epidemic. The Internet is in its infancy, newspaper is still king, and bright-eyed journalism intern **Han Dong** holds the fate of 100 million people in the balance with a single article. Inspired by true events.

LONG SYNOPSIS

China, 2003. In the aftermath of the SARS epidemic. The internet is in its infancy and newspapers are still king. 26-year-old middle school dropout Han Dong dreams of being a journalist, and lucks into an internship at one of Beijing's most powerful dailies. After earning the respect of his editor with plucky reporting on a disaster at a local mine, he throws himself into another explosive investigation, this time, into the high stakes world of medical fraud. Han Dong knows the story is of national significance and could land him a front-page byline and a permanent job with the paper. However, as publication draws near, Han Dong is forced to confront the cost his story's success may have on millions of citizens, and on those whom he holds most dear. Inspired by true events.



DIRECTOR

Jing WANG born in Taiyuan City, Shanxi Province, People's Republic of China on June 20, 1984. Jing Wang started his career in 2007 as a director of advertisements and documentaries, he served as an assistant director for several of JIA Zhang-ke's films, including *A Touch of Sin*, *Mountains May Depart* and *Ash is Purest White*. *The Best Is Yet to Come* is his feature length directorial debut.

FILMOGRAPHY

The Best is Yet to Come (Bu Zhi Bu Xiu) , 2020, 115min

- 77th Venice Film Festival, Orizzonti Competition
- Toronto International Film Festival

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Due to the pandemic, post-production took place online.

The editor and I were 1300km apart.

Distance sparks reflection.

The story is set in Beijing, 17 years ago.

Han Dong's story is a footnote in an era of endless possibilities;

it was a time where society was still finding its footing.

China has developed so fast that even decade-old archives are alienating.

I chose to focus my lens on human faces.

Their yearning, hesitancy, agony and dignity,

stand out the most to me in an era's collective memory.

This film is based on real events.

Who knew that history would repeat itself with the coronavirus pandemic?

The changes that Han Dong dreamt of in the film,
would they come true?

Time will tell.



INTERVIEW WITH JING WANG

How did you begin making this film?

In 2017, through my mentor director JIA Zhang-ke's recommendation I met Mr. Tang Yan (presenter of this film). He used to be the editor-in-chief of a major Chinese news media company, and later on moved to social media platforms where he had huge success. He had an idealistic streak that attracted me. Through him, I got to meet many journalists who experienced firsthand the heyday of paper media. Now in our time of flux, these people have all been carried onto new futures by the enormous current of the internet, but their names, will be ever-bound to that 'golden era' of journalism.

Realistic subject matters have always been the most integral part of my aesthetic. When we all decided to make a film about an idealist, the renowned journalist Mr. Han Fu Dong, we chose to reveal the story from his perspective - what better perspective from which to scrutinize society, the world around us

and beyond us than realist's - a journalist's? In this context, to reflect on the past in creating our work in the present totally made sense. Three years later, this film has become what it is now.

You have told a story of an investigative reporter who is decidedly a civilian hero. What are the virtues and vices of that? Do you consider journalists to be civilian heroes?

The term "civilian hero" to me is rather a general description like a type of genre film. In this movie, the character Han Dong is indeed a civilian, a "naked" entity with nothing to rely on whatsoever. The idea of a "hero" is only bestowed upon him by the audience when he's achieved success at the end of the film. However, from what I see, Han Dong isn't the kind of guy who would ascribe himself heroic motives. He is merely your average man who walks around without a halo on his head. He only tried his best to adhere to his own

principles while growing up, and in the end, triumphed in self-actualization - which happened to come with success on the social level. But Han Dong didn't plan for any of it. For an idealist, it was just a surprise reward that was never asked for.

We followed the "real" Mr. Han Fu Dong's life experience quite closely in completing the script. His growth from a small town nobody becoming one of the most important journalists in China through pure passion and valor is one that can only be told in that era. It was a time full of possibilities. In the words of New Yorker's China correspondent Evan Osnos, it was the "Age of Ambition", when the swarming crowd helped one another upstream in full expectation of a better tomorrow in a better place, and full belief in the power of change and of the individual. So, from the very beginning, we were already telling a story not only about the "civilian hero" Han Fu Dong himself, but about the entirety of the time he lived in.

One's profession is only the key that opens the door into one's social system. In my view, the idealist Han Dong is a figure of more impact than the journalist Han Dong. The cause of the advancement of society cannot be attributed simply to a specific individual or event; it is the result of a matrix of countless seemingly irrelevant dots at work all at once. Profession is just an entryway for an individual to find one's place in the social system, and to embed oneself into the society. But the progression and height of

humankind takes place precisely when one refuses to stay put, when one runs away from one's lodged spot in the system, and when one does so under outright courage refusing to fear consequences. And more importantly, every one of those refusals has stemmed from good will.

You have inserted interviews with real HBV (Hepatitis B) carriers into the film. Could you talk about the thinking behind that?

Mr. Han Fu Dong, on whom the film is based, has accomplished numerous outstanding investigative reports during his lifetime as a journalist. In the beginning stage of our script, we have read through all of these reports in search for a point of entry into the story. When the subject of HBV discrimination first showed up, everyone immediately identified it as the story we wanted to tell. The circumstance that HBV carriers are in forms a perfect intertextual relationship with that of Han Dong, a "dreamer" with a mediocre diploma.

After we determined our topic, I visited many HBV carriers, who call one another "comrades", though it's hard to describe what kind of war they are actually fighting. I tried to concentrate all of their stories into the character Zhang Bo, but there was always something missing. Not satisfied, I called out to these "comrades" during shooting, inviting them to

participate in our shoot as themselves, where they would be interviewed by the protagonist Han Dong and share their real experiences onscreen.

I scheduled the “HBV comrade” interviews in the last few days of our shoot. At that point, White K, the actor who plays Han Dong, was already in character completely. So I decided for everyone to withdraw from our fictional storytelling, and return to documentary shooting, which was script-free and straight shooting in order to allow the fictional Han Dong and these real “comrades” to lead the camera onward. The result is very effective. These interactions under no presets brought us many valuable moving moments, which to me have formed another beautiful intertextual bond between the fact and fiction of the film.

It is also because of these intertextual relationships that during the editing process, Matthieu (Laclau) and I decided to use the documentary storytelling method as our narrative structure. We have interwoven these tender moments into the whole film in our attempt to touch the boundary between fiction and reality along with our audience.

White K gives a stunning performance as the leading role. How did you take him on board?

Earlier I talked about how the internet has flooded out many cornerstones of

traditional industries and White K is one who caught the wave. He Graduated a broadcasting major and his homemade funny dubbing videos swept the Chinese internet in 2010. Then he went on to become an actor, and the skit web series he starred in has had nearly 2 billion views. In those series he played a character called “*Sledgehammer Wang*”, a young guy as common as any guy can be, facing the difficulties, embarrassments and choices that a common guy has to face every day, and dealing with them with a smile.

I was one of those 2 billion views, and after I finished writing the story of the “ordinary Han Dong”, I immediately thought of him. People around me worried about whether White K, whose expertise is in comedic characters, would be able to build himself into this rather realistic film. “But isn’t the soul of our story just about someone ripping off labels that others stuck on him?”

From the very first shot White K has brought surprises, reassurance and inspiration time after time. Shooting the scene where Han Dong bids farewell to his best friend, I was behind the monitor, utterly speechless. The two actors’ performances brought me right back to my childhood into those painful separations and scars that I did not wish to be dug up again. After the take, I went to them only to discover that they too had sunken into their own sorrows. During those few minutes, the three of us just

stood there in silence. I then wiped my tears and tucked away my emotions, and without saying a word, turned back to the front of the monitor.

“Standby! Roll camera! Action!”

In that moment, all doubts and labels had been torn to pieces.

How did you work towards your visual designs with your DOP Yu Lik Wai and lighting designer Wong Chi Ming?

The process was very simple. We each brought the images we had in mind to the table, found a point of integration, and just acted on it without further hesitation.

Director JIA Zhang-ke's debut feature *Xiao Wu* was my first introduction to film, and I was just a high schooler by then. Ten years after seeing *Xiao Wu*, I miraculously became director Jia's assistant. Almost another ten years go by, and I have gotten acquainted with all of his creative partners, who are now both my mentors and friends.

Being a member of this group, I've come to feel very strongly about how valuable an asset it is for an author to have a committed creative assembly. It will save so much cost of communication, and the emotional closeness breeds ever new creative sparks.

When I discussed and decided with Yu Lik Wai that this film would be told singly from



Han Dong's perspective, just like *Xiao Wu*, and so the camera should be carried forth in developing the logic of space and time of the film, everyone immediately established mutual understanding on our camera language. At the same time, Yu Lik Wai proposed to add a shotgun-like chase and uncertainty element during certain scenes so as to echo the spiritual disposition of that age as depicted in the film.

This is a story based on a true figure in life. Therefore, we also tried to find a balance between a sense of realism and drama in our scene designs and lighting designs. I'm very happy that with our rapport, we have realized the imageries that we had in mind.

In your statement, you've talked about using the camera's focus onto people's faces to bring forth the collective memory of their time period. Could you elaborate on that?

Subconsciously, I'm very keen on portraying the relationship between people and the land they stand on. I shot a short film in college that focused on a young man who yearned to leave his family and hometown. In retrospect, *The Best Is Yet to Come* actually seems quite like an extension of that short.

Instinct told me that spaces in this story would become very important. I left my

hometown and came to Beijing for college in 2003, which coincidentally is the same timeline as Han Dong's. Beijing is like a magnet exerting a mysterious attraction upon the young men living in northern China. However, the Beijing in my memory is barely existent today. In the past dozen or so years, everything around us has undergone rapid change.

I once tried to leave Beijing in search for a replacement city space, but the more I looked, the more I found Beijing irreplaceable. This city is the center of China. It completed its urbanization process during the 80s and 90s and those residential high rises built on total Russian aesthetics and dotted across the roadside of the second ring are nowhere to be found in any other city.

The years that the film wants to illustrate are precisely the peak years of China's development. Those who lived in them embraced these leaps and bounds with high hopes for the future. Nowadays, we can hardly rummage through our wardrobes and find a piece of clothing we used to adore ten years ago. The things we like now are also totally different from those we liked then. An even more drastic example is that, a suburban neighborhood we initially picked out as one of our scenes had undergone a renovation so comprehensive that when we returned to it by the end of our two-month pre-production, we barely recognized the place.

In the depth of the concrete jungle and midst of developments and changes, doesn't the true attractive power of a city originate from every one of the vivid faces of its inhabitants?

Times will change. The world will change. And so will cities. But underneath it all are these everlasting brilliant faces. New York will change, but the New York defined by numerous generations of New Yorkers will not change. Likewise, for Beijing. Likewise, for China. In contrast with the changes, these individuals are what's maintaining our inner orders and sense of constancy during turbulent times.

There are two surrealistic scenes in the film where pens and newspapers all fly up into the air. Could you talk about the concept behind that?

These two surrealistic scenes weren't part of the original script. In the initial stage of

the script, I tried to find a way of expressing the one of a kind experience of being a journalist. Then a friend's description appeared, in which he offered the term "thickness". This friend used to be a TV reporter, and for a very long time he led a lifestyle in which he'd catch a morning flight all by himself with a camera and fly from Beijing to a city thousands of miles away, then take a bus ride to a more remote village, where he'd shoot some news materials and upload them through the satellite, and at the end of the day catch the last flight back to Beijing. "In the cab ride from the airport back home, I'd look outside the window and think that, I'm a guy who traces across the thickness of this country every day," he said to me.

The term "thickness" hit me. It was so vivid and accurate a way to describe the depth of connectivity. Han Dong is an idealist. His heart is filled with desires and dreams. And when this individual's dreams



coexist with this country's collective dreams, a certain kind of thickness is also formed.

In the original script, Han Dong was to finish up his article in his office all alone in the middle of the night. The article he was working on was a chance for him to realize his dream of becoming a journalist. Then he looked up and saw the first Chinese astronaut traveling across the universe on the TV screen. He dropped his head, feeling small again. However, such a scene only established a comparative relationship between those two types of dreams. Yet when I accidentally found that both men were holding a pen, I suddenly found a way to connect them together.

These dreams were not to be put up for comparison and had nothing to do with anything big or small, but rather to be connected. That is why we changed the script on the spot. And the surrealistic part that appeared at the end of the film would then make sense as well.

What do you think about the connection between the SARS outbreak in 2003 and the current COVID-19 situation?

In 2003 my mother was a doctor, and when SARS broke out she was quickly transferred to the isolation ward. My high school asked that students in doctor's families should consider homeschooling,

just in case. Stuck at home I spent a lot of time watching movies, I drew the curtains to make the room dark, the TV in my bedroom was a bit old, with a VCD, so the whole picture was an undersaturated light blue. The curtains behind the TV would be illuminated by the setting sun, turning a dark red, the color I'd seen in Munch's paintings. This is my strongest memory of SARS at 19 years old.

The discrimination against hepatitis B carriers depicted in the film is largely based on an outbreak of hepatitis A in Shanghai in 1988 that left people with a deep fear of the disease. Fear is the human instinct that keeps us alive, but isn't the ability to think rationally and empathize also important to distinguish us from animals? During the COVID-19 pandemic, constantly reading the news and social media, the estrangement and distance is almost more frightening than the virus itself. It's easy to be swept up into the panic.

The Best Is Yet to Come takes place in the fall of 2003, I had no intention of describing the plague, but by then China was already buzzing. SARS has only just been beaten, but people were starting to believe that everything will get better. They turned fear and pain into energy. COVID-19 is not over, and no one knows what will happen next. In Chinese, there is a word called "impermanence", which roughly means that everything in the world is changing. Change brings the unknown, and the unknown inspires fear or awe. We

can't change the way the world works, but in the face of uncertainty, we can make choices that follow our internal order, as Han Dong did. I hope that the belief and desire that appeared in the fall of 2003 will come soon.

Could you talk about your collaboration in this film with director JIA Zhang-ke?

As the producer of the film, Director Jia was often on set with us. He always sat in an inconspicuous corner where our crew would set up a 7-inch monitor for him. Looking in the monitor is a work habit he developed over the years, and something

that everyone knew to prepare without saying.

After I finished a shot, I'd look over to him, but he'd usually keep quiet and I would then continue with the shooting. After a couple of more shots, he'd get up to leave, when he'd walk over to my side and pat on my shoulder,

“Go for it, kid, go on...”

Just like Huang Jiang did when he looked over Han Dong hard at work in the film.



PRODUCER

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, *A Touch of Sin* won the Best Screenplay prize in Cannes in 2013 and *Mountains May Depart* was in competition in Cannes 2015, *Ash Is Purest White* was in competition in Cannes 2018. Several of his films have blurred the line between fiction and documentary. He has also produced films by many young directors.

DOP

Born in 1966 in Hong Kong, **Yu Lik Wai** graduated from Institut National Supérieur des Arts de Spectacle (INSAS) in Belgium, majoring in cinematography. He has been actively involved in productions both in mainland and Hong Kong China. As a cinematographer, he has worked with directors like JIA Zhang-ke, Ann HUI On-wah, WANG Kar-wai, LOU Ye, ZHANG Yang and others for films including *Xiao Wu*, *Platform*, *Still Life*, *Mountains May Depart*, *A Simple Life*, *Love and Bruises*, *Our Time Will Come* and so on.

COMPOSER

Yoshihiro HANNO is an internationally renowned musician/composer whose field of work has been expanding from movie soundtracks to orchestral pieces, as well as electronics music. He has collaborated with leading Asian directors such as HOU Hsaio-Hsien, JIA Zhang-ke, etc.



CREW

<i>Executive Producers</i>	TANG Yan, JIA Zhang-ke
<i>Director</i>	WANG Jing
<i>Producer</i>	JIA Zhang-ke
<i>Co-Producers</i>	LIU Xiaozhao, ZHANG Dong
<i>Associate Producers</i>	ZENG Li, Josie CHOU WEI Xidi, SHI Yuhua
<i>Script Consultants</i>	HUANG Zhangjin, ZHONG Yuting, WEI YI
<i>Screenwriters</i>	HUANG Wei, HWONG Minmin CHEN Chengfeng, LI Jingrui
<i>Director of Photography</i>	Yu Lik Wai
<i>Lighting Designer</i>	Wong Chi Ming
<i>Production Designer</i>	LIU Weixin
<i>Costume Designer</i>	LI Hua
<i>Sound Designer</i>	ZHANG Yang
<i>Composer</i>	Yoshihiro HANNO
<i>Editor</i>	Matthieu LACLAU
<i>Special Effects</i>	Maxdream Pictures (Beijing) Co., Ltd.



CAST

Starring

White K	as <i>HAN Dong</i>
MIAO Miao	as <i>Xiao Zhu</i>
ZHANG Songwen	as <i>HUANG Jiang</i>

with

SONG Yang	as <i>ZHANG Bo</i>
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and

Leo WANG	as <i>Biao</i>
ZHOU Yemang	as <i>Chief Editor</i>

Special Appearance

JIA Zhang-ke	as <i>Coal Mine Owner</i>
QIN Hailu	as <i>Mrs. Huang</i>
Fox	as <i>Sunglasses Boy</i>

FILM QUALIFICATION

Original Title	Bu Zhi Bu Xiu (不止不休)
English Title	The Best Is Yet to Come
Year	2020
Country	China
Language	Mandarin
Subtitle	English
Runtime	115 min
Camera	Sony Venice
Format	Digital, Color
Screening Format	DCP
Aspect Ratio	Flat (1.85:1)
Frame Rate	24 fps
Sound	5.1
Resolution	2K



PRODUCTION

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