

# THE PLUTO MOMENT

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A FILM BY ZHANG MING

QUINZAINÉ  
DES RÉALISATEURS  
CANNES

# Screening Schedule

## **Press Screening**

Wednesday, May 16

11:45 - Théâtre Croisette - JW Marriott

## **Official Screening**

Wednesday, May 16

17:45 - Théâtre Croisette - JW Marriott

## **Screening Reruns - French Subtitles Only**

Thursday, May 17

16:30 - Cinéma Alexandre III

Thursday, May 17

20:30 - Cinéma Olympia

Thursday, May 17

21:30 - Studio 13

For interview request, please contact:

[info@parallaxchina.com](mailto:info@parallaxchina.com)

# THE PLUTO MOMENT

Written and Directed by Zhang Ming

Produced by Shen Yang

Running Time | 110 minutes

Gauge | DCP, 1:2.39 Color

Sound | Dolby 5.1

Language | Chinese

**China**

International Sales – LOCO Films

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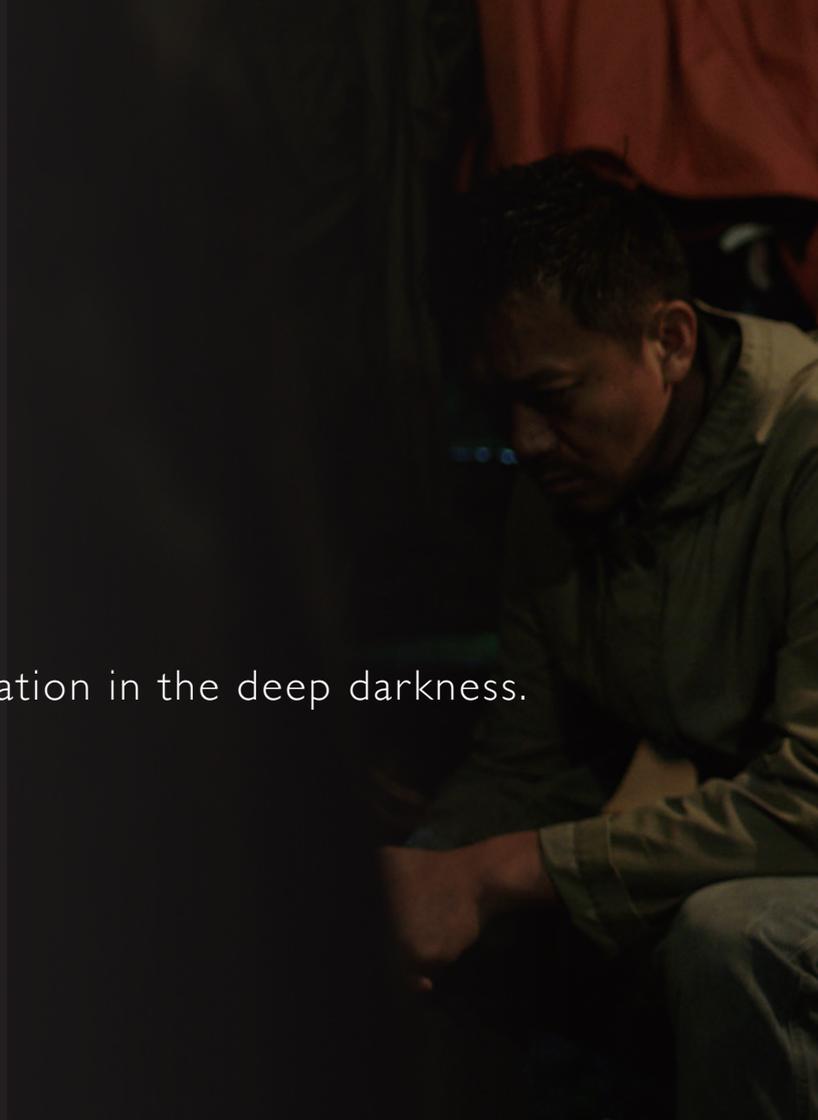
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**LOCO**  
FILMS

视幻文化  
PARALLAX

Imagination leads to the illumination in the deep darkness.







# SYNOPSIS

WANG Zhun, a film director living in Shanghai, travels to the deep mountains of southwest China seeking the inspiration for his film in the traditional song of mourning *The Tale of Darkness*. He is accompanied by DING Hongmin, the savvy producer; BAI, a handsome young actor just beginning his career; and DU Chun, the videographer and an admirer of WANG Zhun. Over time, the crew, even though they are led by the knowledgeable local guide LUO, not only get lost in the distant mountains, but they also encounter difficulties with their lodging and transportation.

The tough situation keeps reminding WANG Zhun of a image, that is his estranged wife GAO Li, a famous actress. He confirms her participation in his new film. However, GAO makes fun of WANG Zhun saying that his script is impossible.

Along the trip, the relationships among the crew members change and the trip begins to lose its direction. WANG Zhun's rootless, fearful emotions are stripped bare.

They finally get to watch the aging singers performing *The Tale of Darkness* at a funeral. The song brings them into an extraordinarily different world.

The next day, WANG Zhun wakes up in the early morning on a hilltop, looking down at the village and the illusion he has always been seeking unveils in front of his eyes.



# DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

*The Tale of Darkness* is a mourning song sung at funerals, one that recounts the origins of Heaven and the Earth, and the genesis of the human race. A rare case in Chinese folk arts, *The Tale of Darkness* is preserved as a “living epic” in the mountainous southwestern regions of China. Ten years ago, I traveled to the mountains there for creative research, and then tried to write a script. It was a failed attempt, and I was never able to rid myself of the spiritual suffering of the journey. Now the nightmare has become the inspiration for a new story today. Of course, by now, I have gotten funding to make the film.

The protagonists are trapped in a dilemma of action and inaction, just like the people from ancient times who were trapped in darkness and looking for answers. Unfortunately, these men and women do not possess the mental strength of the ancients. Even compared with the villagers, these urbanites appear to be weakened by inertia. The film tries to depict their actions and hopes for an escape from a dim future; this effort per se is also like probing in darkness.

# STYLE

Regarding the metaphor of Pluto, I am deeply impressed by the description of how Pluto is illuminated by the Sun. It is a kind of weak luminosity, one that lies in between darkness and light, which echoes the characters' anxiety and defines the film's visual tone. My creative practice has always been extremely reliant on visual circumstances. I have always imagined the surface Pluto to be a half-lit, half-gloomy gray. To achieve this in the film, I used mostly natural light sources during production. I hoped that my film could capture everything as it was naturally lit under the Sun and the Moon, and the subtle shifts between the day and the night... It is a contradiction, but I wanted to grasp this feeling.

In addition, some scenes have a free-flow rhythm between different times and spaces. On the screen, it might take the form of a daydream, a fantasy, a nightmare, or even a new discovery.

The light-weight camera (the only extra piece of equipment was the M15 camera platform) moves with a gaze that transcends a human point-of-view. It could be the perspective of God, or of the author, or just a follower of the protagonist. The perspective of the lens runs parallel with the characters, not from above, nor from below. Unlike in my previous works, there are more talented, professional actors in my cast this time, instead of non-professionals. But I forced them from time to time into an improvised, naturalistic mode of acting. At the same time, as the camera moved, I pushed them to keep their focus. There were many scenes in which hundreds of extras showed up who had never seen a camera. It drove me crazy. But we were fortunate enough to make it work. Under the insistent scrutiny of the camera and crew, the protagonists and the extras mingled naturally.

# CREW BIOGRAPHY

## ZHANG Ming *Writer/Director*

ZHANG Ming (Chongqing, 1961) is an established Director and Writer; Professor of the Department of Directing in Beijing Film Academy. He finished the debut *In Expectation* in 1996, which was premiered in the Berlin Film Festival. It won prizes at the Pusan International Film Festival, Vancouver International Film Festival, Torino International Film Festival, etc. The film then opened in over 20 countries and regions. In 2001, ZHANG directed the film *Weekend Plot*, which was invited to film festivals in Tokyo, Pusan, Berlin, Rotterdam and so on. His subsequent films include *Before Born* (2005), *The Father* (2006), *The Bride* (2008), *Folk Songs Singing* (2011) and *China Affair* (2013). Director ZHANG Ming is regarded as one of the Sixth Generation of Chinese directors, along with JIA Zhangke and LOU Ye.

## SHEN Yang *Producer* Film Producer, Festival Curator.

CREDITS:

*Long Day's Journey into Night*, 2018 – selected for “Un Certain Regard” at the 71st Cannes Film Festival.

*Kaili Blues*, 2015 - won the Best Emerging Director Award at the 68th Festival Del Film Locarno, the Montgolfière d'Or Award at the 37th Festival des 3 Continents International Competition in Nantes, and 11 other international film festival awards, in addition to being selected by more than 70 film festivals.

*Black Coal, Thin Ice*, 2013 - won the Golden Bear and Silver Bear for Best Actor at the 64th Berlin Film Festival in 2014, and was selected by more than 100 film festivals around the world and distributed in more than 40 countries.

*North by Northeast*, 2014 - was selected by 5 Category A film festivals and 8 other international film festivals.

*Ne Zha*, 2014 - was selected by more than 13 international film festivals, including New Currents of the 19th Pusan international film festival and the 37th Festival des 3 Continents International Competition.

**SONG Jia** Co-producer Film Producer.

Song Jia is the General Manager of iQiyi Film Copyright Cooperation Center, and selected to the "International Women's Impact Report 2018." She is in charge of both the international film acquisitions and business cooperation with non-theatrical films. She leads the team to build exclusive strategic partnerships with Fox, Lionsgate, Media Asia, and Filmnation. She also distributes arthouse films on iQiyi, exploring the possibility of streaming arthouse cinema online. In terms of non-theatrical films, she has published a list of top box-office theatrical films, contributed to the healthy development of the industry, in order to have non-theatrical films regulated and industrialized.

**ZHU Dan** Co-producer Film Producer.

CREDITS:

***North by Northeast***, 2014 - was selected by 5 Category A film festivals and other 8 international film festivals.

***Ne Zha***, 2014 - was selected by more than 13 international film festivals, including New Currents at the 19th Pusan international film festival and the 37th Festival des 3 Continents International Competition.

Dan is the former Program Manager of the Shanghai International Film Festival, in charge of SIFF Project Market and Mobile Short Film Festival. Since 2012, she has become involved with foreign film distribution, including ***Black Gold*** (France) and ***A Little Thing Called Love*** (Thailand). Then she was overseas agent for ***Black Coal, Thin Ice*** (2013).

# GREETINGS FROM THE PLUTO

Q&A with writer-director ZHANG Ming

*This project, originally named THE TALE OF DARKNESS, first appeared in the catalogue of the 2005 PPP (Pusan Promotion Plan). What was your motivation to tell this story? Why did it take so long for you to begin filming? And why did you go through so many pitching platforms?*

In the original script, the male protagonist and his girlfriend set off to find her girlfriend who has escaped from Beijing. They find the corpse of the friend in the remote mountains. The story happens in the summer of 1989. The plot was based on some formal news reporting and misleading rumors. Later on, I went to the southwestern mountains where I got to learn more about **The Tale of Darkness**, the mourning song sung

at funerals. I was inspired by the primitive simplicity of the funeral rituals there, and conceived of the idea for **The Tale of Darkness Trilogy**, which is divided into three parts: **Girlfriend's Girlfriend**, **The Bride**, and **The Darkness**. What I originally conceived were three films that were independent of each other in terms of their stories, characters and historical backgrounds. What links them are the funeral rituals. I wanted to find one funeral singer to perform the mourning song—**The Tale of Darkness**—who would appear in all three films.

In 2005, Hubert Bals Fund of Rotterdam Film Festival gave us the award of 10,000 USD for script development. With that award I started to develop and write the scripts for the trilogy. After that I took this project to financiers

but was unable to get it financed. In 2007, I used a DV camera and a very low budget to finish ***The Bride***. In 2014, I started to write ***The Darknes***. Also in 2014, Ms. SHEN Yang got on board and our project received some funding and secured investors. In 2016, we finally started to shoot ***The Darkness***, since renamed ***The Pluto Moment***. After almost 10 years, the singer who performed the mourning song in ***The Bride*** has died. So we had to find another elderly singer for ***The Pluto Moment***. Shortly after the shoot began, one of the investors pulled out and we even had to bring production to a temporary halt. Even under these harsh conditions we did finally finish production. In 2017, we started post-production

***What is the influence of THE TALE OF DARKNESS, this oral saga of the Han Chinese, on your works and your life? Why did you change the title to THE PLUTO MOMENT? What is the relationship between THE PLUTO MOMENT and THE TALE OF DARKNESS?***

***The Tale of Darkness*** is a major mourning song in the region, and the locals call it “the nocturnal song.” This traditional folk song was discovered, studied and anthologized in the 1980s. The 5000-line saga describes

the beginning of the Heaven and the Earth, the birth of God, the creation of humans, the reproduction cycles, and the vicissitudes of a society. It is a grandiose depiction of the history of the Han ethnicity from the ancient times to the Ming Dynasty. The tradition of singing ***The Tale of Darkness*** is kept alive in eastern Chongqing and western Hubei Province, a rare case of conservation in today’s China. The performance of the song is regarded as a “living epic.”

It is a tradition in the southwestern mountains that elderly singers would sing ***The Tale of Darkness*** at funerals. My hometown, Wu Mountain, is located right in the center of the region where this tradition prevails. The customs and rituals I grew up with remain there. ***The Pluto Moment***, like ***The Bride*** and my other films, takes place in the Wu Mountain region. Although it is called ***The Tale of Darkness Trilogy***, the film is not about the song ***Tale of Darkness***, per se. The films are intended to depict the different individuals at their moments of being overpowered by “darkness.” In this film, when the characters reach the funeral, the lights are not yet lit, and the day is about to break. It is a time between the light and the dark. That is ***The Pluto Moment***.

*The characters in your film do not usually have clear goals, or, in other words, they are clear that they cannot achieve these so-called goals. Directors of your generation, including JIA Zhangke, have all depicted characters that have no hope and nowhere to go. But your characters and your way of presenting them are different. There is more waiting, observing and testing. Also, they are not purely subalterns, but intellectuals or people who have some other established social status. And yet, their fates share the same destiny, though via different routes, in comparison with JIA Zhangke's characters. We learned that you are also from a third or fourth-tier county town like JIA. Why did you adopt a different style from your peers of the Sixth Generation who share the same reality?*

The comment that my characters don't have clear goals or are clear that they cannot achieve their goals reminds me of the famous notion of Milan Kundera: ***The Unbearable Lightness of Being***. In the 1980s, Chinese intellectuals once had abundant hope and burning idealism, which shed light on the directions of their lives and their communal goals. But their ideals were swept away by the materialism of the 1990s. In the next 20 years, intellectuals in China

have nearly lost all of their spiritual pursuits. The "lightness" of being is a metaphor. The moment between brightness and darkness is also a metaphor.

China, with its thousands of years of history, is still substantially similar to the ancient times; and the concept of modern civilization lies only in the act of consumption. There are no collectives of intellectuals in big cities. They are always scattered in the corners of the city, in small towns, in the countryside. It is a permanent fate of Chinese intellectuals to be socially and geographically marginalized. The state-employed scholars are all in the imperial city or the capital, but they are not the real intellectuals.

As a film director, I don't consider myself to be a real intellectual. Because, for example, I do not dare to have the freedom of working outside the system. My film has to be approved by censors in order for me to make it. I do feel that the style of my film, or my mode of expression, is closely tied to the fact that I cannot escape this system. The style of my film is deemed obscure because there is something reserved that I want to say that can only be expressed through ambiguity. If any people regard it as

poetic, it is because they have recognized the something specially rendered in my film.

*You are regarded in China as the most accomplished director for camera movement. The long takes in your film FOLK SONG SINGING are textbook classics. It is said that you are from an art background and you often shoot your own films. Did you shoot THE PLUTO MOMENT yourself? The relationship between camera positions and the characters are a lot different from your previous works. Did you pre-plan before shooting? Are there special meanings?*

Every time I make a film, I cannot help but take the camera into my own hands, especially when the camera has to move. I never shy away from my obsession with how the moving camera can probe the depth of space. It is an exploration that was impossible to achieve when I painted in my early years. It is true that so far, a film, like a painting, is limited in a space within the frame. But we are lucky that with a film, the camera can “enter” the landscape and the characters like a specter, whereas in painting, the paint brush cannot break open the canvas and enter the painted landscape. I can imagine that in the

future, film might overcome the limitations of a frame. VR, for example, has anticipated this future. This is going to be a new filmmaking aesthetic. In any case, the camera plays a role in the film, and should not be deemed invisible. This will always be the case.

Although it was right before the shoot of **Folk Song Singing** that I decided to use long takes in the film, I was driven by the compulsion that every scene should be shot within one take. In **The Pluto Moment**, however, every shot serves the purpose of following a character. Once it was confirmed that the camera plays the role of a follower, the length of the moving shot, its angles and heights, were all established accordingly. In this film, each character plays the temporary protagonist in different phases. Therefore, the camera follows the focal character in each phase in the same style. Each time I make a film, I decide on the shots on location, so I have never used shot-lists or storyboards. It is most fun when the director improvises on location.

*After IN EXPECTATION, you have rarely appeared on the international festival circuit, but you keep making art films and auteur films. It is quite a hard situation. Why have you*

*persisted? How do you view your state of creative practice and your position in the industry? Is WANG Zhun, the protagonist, a projected version of yourself?*

It is always true that the film you want to make is hard to get financed, and the film that reaches out to you is not the one you want to make, or one that you have to work hard to transform into something closer to your own interests. So almost all the films I have made after *In Expectation* have been ones that others wanted me to make for various reasons, and I then transformed them to suit my tastes in some way. But the goals of those who initiated those projects did not cater to the international circuit. The only thing I was interested in was how to make the process of shooting or adaptation something that could creatively stimulate me. This is the only persistent tendency I have. In the midst of the film industry in China, I often felt that I was not making films, or there was no film for me to make. Those riding the bandwagon are the ones making films, because their films cater more to what the mainstream of this era looks for. But vulgar things will always have the right to exist. This has nothing to do with my “persistence,” but is just my natural instinct.

In *The Pluto Moment*, the quest to make the film is both WANG Zhun's long march and his martyrdom. Khyentse NORBU has emerged into a secular life and has even made several films; he has become the idol of many women. On the other hand, I, a secular being, should stay detached and watch from the other shore. Maybe it is only in this way that monks and secular people can have a clearer view and understanding of each other. A director might always project something of himself into every film that he makes. WANG Zhun in *The Pluto Moment* is similar to me only because he is also a director struggling to find investors. As the creator of the film, I need to grasp the details of the character and the plot. The details of WANG Zhun are something I'm familiar with.

# CAST BIOGRAPHY

**WANG Xuebing** (as **Wang Zhun**) is a famous, prolific and outstanding actor since he graduated from the Central Academy of Drama. His long list of credits include: ***The Road Not Taken*** (2016); ***A Fool*** (2015, directed by CHEN Jianbin, awarded Best New Director and Best Actor at the 51st Golden Horse Awards); ***Black Coal, Thin Ice*** (2014, directed by DIAO Yinan, winning the Golden Bear Award and the Silver Bear Award as 'Best Leading Actor' at the 64th Berlinale); ***White Haired Witch*** (2014, produced by YU Dong, Hark Tsui, HUANG Jianxin; Mainland Chinese box office receipts of \$61,500,000); ***Beijing Love Story Movie*** (2013, directed by CHEN Sicheng, Mainland Chinese box office receipts of \$63,100,000); ***The Silent War*** (2012, directed by Siu Fai MAK and Felix CHONG, nominated for Best Actor, Best Actress and Best Screenplay at the 32nd Hong Kong IFF); etc.

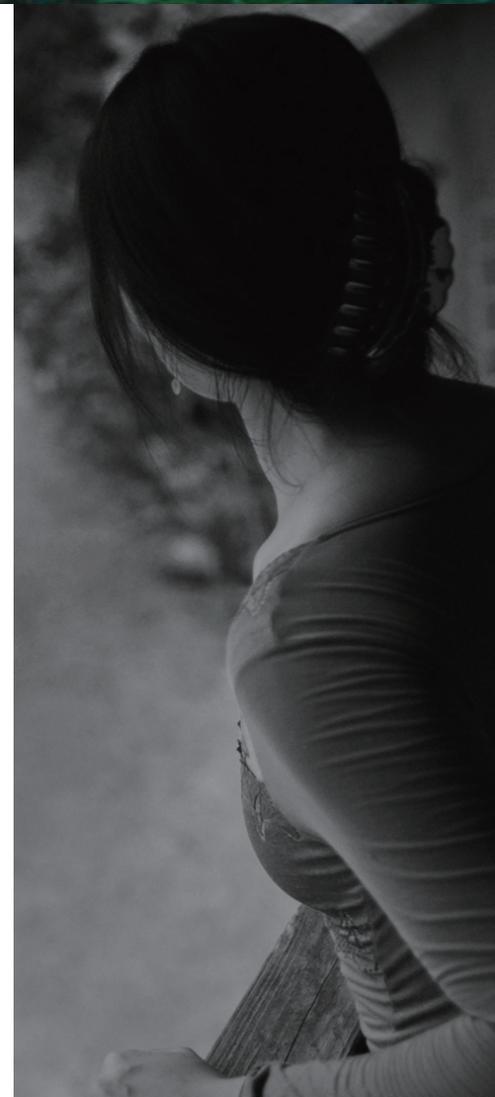




**LIU Dan** (as **Ding Hongmin**) is an actress at the National Theatre Company of China. In 2008, she received the Best Actress award at the 10th Buenos Aires IFF for DIAO Yinan's film *Night Train*, which was also selected to 'Un Certain Regard' at the 60th Cannes International Film Festival. In 2015, she performed in WANG Yichun's film *What's In The Darkness*, which was nominated for the Generation Section at the 66th Berlinale and selected for more than 20 international film festivals. LIU Dan is also an active and excellent actress on stage, having performed in such theatre festivals as the Beseto Theatre Festival, the Hong Kong Arts Festival, the Singapore International Theatre Festival, etc.

**ZENG Meihuizi** (as **CHUN Tai**) made her debut in the film *The Summer Palace* directed by LOU Ye, which was nominated in the 59th Cannes Film Festival main competition. She also starred in *Lost In Beijing* directed by LI Yu, which was nominated for the 57th Berlinale main competition. ZENG Meihuizi showed her talents with her natural and authentic acting style in later films and TV series, such as *The Founding of a Republic*, *Cell Phone*, *Hot Mom*, *Bitter Flowers* and *The Pluto Moment*.

**MIYA** (as **GAO Li**) is a famous professional Yoga instructor , having made distinct contributions to the international promotion of Yoga. In 2015, she began an acting career, which has attracted much attention. With her debut in *The Monkey King 2*, she starred along with GONG Li. In 2015, she starred as the female lead in Jackie CHAN's new film *Kung Fu Yoga* by Stanley TONG. Her yoga skills blended perfectly with Kung Fu in this China-India co-production, marking her as one of the new generation of Chinese Kung Fu actresses with a great future.



# THE PLUTO MOMENT

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY ZHANG MING  
PRODUCED BY SHEN YANG

## FILM SPECS

Production Country(s): China  
Shooting Location(s): Hubei & Shanghai, China  
Year: 2018  
Language: Chinese  
Genre: Drama  
Format: DCP  
Running Time: 110 minutes  
Color/Bw: Colour  
Ratio: 1:2.39  
Frame Rate: 24fps  
Sound Ratio: Digital Dolby 5.1  
Originally Shot on: Digital 2k

## CREDITS

PRESENTED BY  
iQIYI Motion Pictures  
Way Good Entertainment Co., Ltd.  
Yung Park Culture Co., Ltd.

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS  
GONG Yu,  
ZHANG Xiang,  
Jun MA

DIRECTOR  
ZHANG Ming

PRODUCER  
SHEN Yang

PRODUCTION SUPERVISOR  
YANG Xianghua,  
YA Ning

CO-PRODUCER  
SONG Jia  
ZHU Dan

SCREENPLAY  
ZHANG Ming  
GONG Yuxi

CINEMATOGRAPHY  
LI Jinyang

PRODUCTION DESIGNER  
WANG Daxiong

SOUND DESIGNER  
SUN Xiaogang

EDITOR  
LI Jin

COMPOSER  
CHEN Guo

## STARRING

WANG Zhun  
DING Hongmin

WANG Xuebing  
LIU Dan

## CO-STARRING

CHUN Tai  
GAO Li  
BAI Jinbo  
DU Chun  
LUO

ZENG Meihuizi  
MIYA  
YI Daqian  
LI Xinran  
YI Ping

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# COMPANY PROFILES

iQIYI, who pioneered video services in China, was established on April 22nd, 2010. Currently, iQIYI has successfully built a video eco-business that includes e-commerce, game, and movie ticketing, building key connections between people and services. iQIYI has established itself as a leader in the diversified development of a video website business model.

Since 2016, iQIYI has expanded business to film production and distribution, with successful credits include: ***The Summer Is Gone*** by ZHANG Dalei, ***Three*** by Johnny TO, ***The Monkey King 2*** by Pou-Soi CHEANG, ***What's in the Darkness*** by WANG Yichun, ***Tharlo*** by PEMA Tsenden, etc.

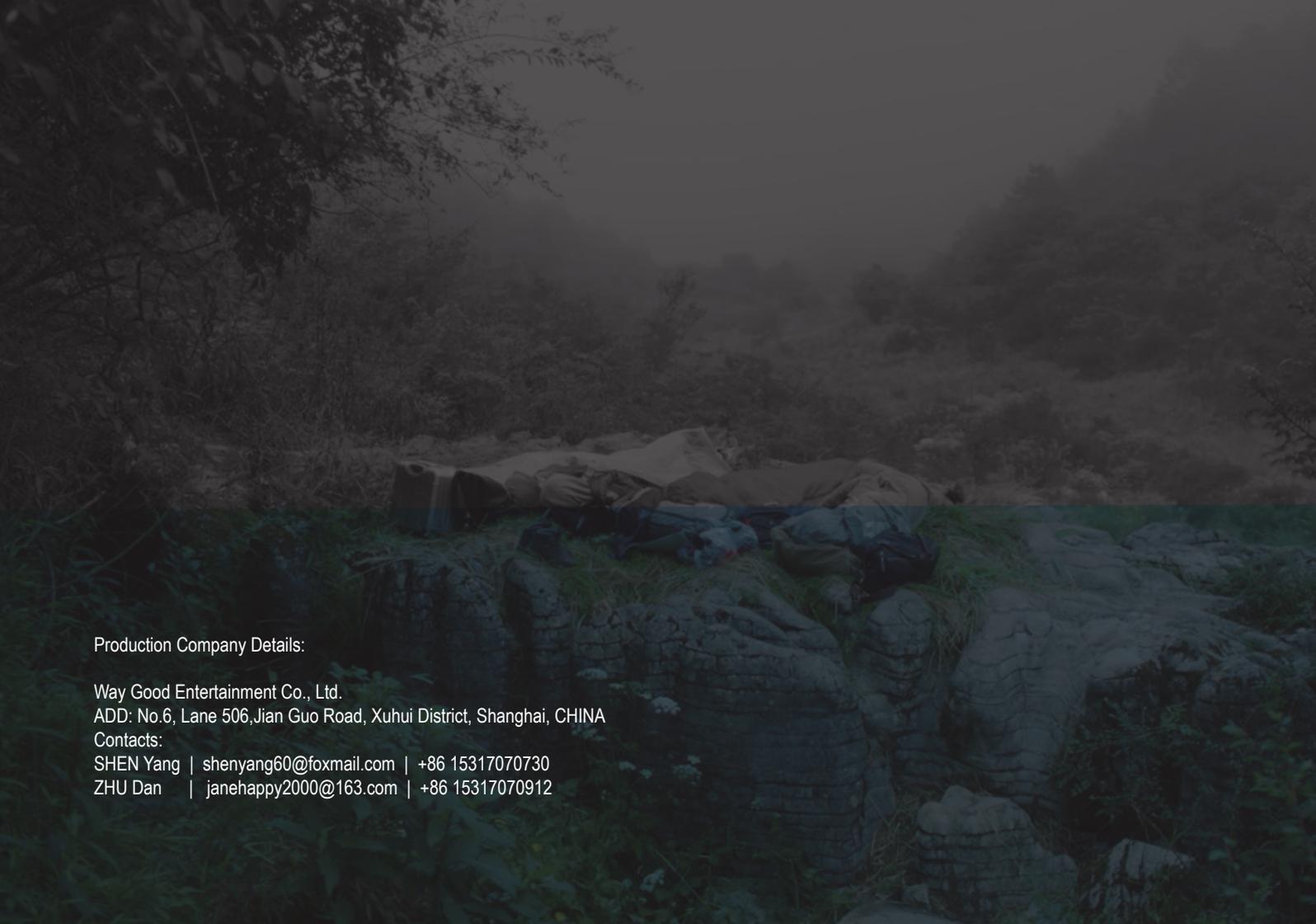


维格文化  
WayGood

Way Good Entertainment Co., Ltd. is a company specializing in Chinese Art House Film production and international distribution based in Shanghai. The head of the company participated in the production of ***Black Coal, Thin Ice***, which won Golden Bear and Silver Bear for Best Actor at the Berlin Film Festival, and then produced film ***Ne Zha***, which was selected by more than 10 international film festivals, such as Festival des 3 Continents, Busan International Film Festival, Golden Horse Award, etc. SHEN Yang, the main driving force in Way Good, is a famous Chinese film producer.

The new project ***The Pluto Moment*** just finished shooting in the beginning of 2017.

The future projects in preparation include: ***Just Kidding*** by ZHANG Bingjian and ***Shan Shui*** by YONG Xiao.

A dark, atmospheric photograph of a mountainous landscape. In the foreground, a rocky outcrop is covered with green vegetation. A tent and various pieces of gear are set up on the rocks. The background shows a misty, mountainous terrain with sparse trees. The overall tone is dark and moody.

Production Company Details:

Way Good Entertainment Co., Ltd.

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