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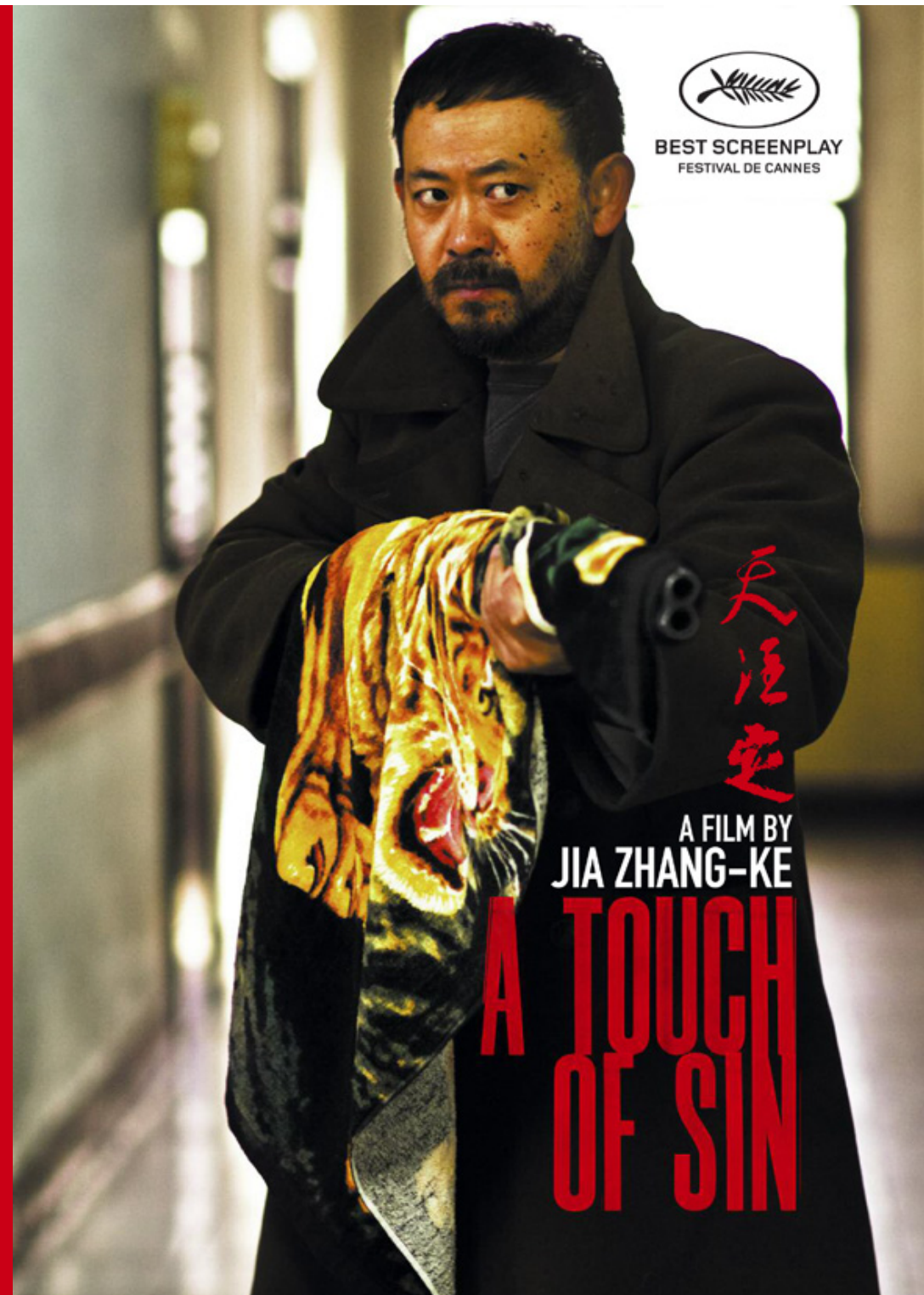
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Xstream Pictures (Beijing), Office Kitano
Shanghai Film Group Corporation & MK2
present

A TOUCH OF SIN

A FILM BY
JIA ZHANG-KE

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BEST SCREENPLAY
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

133 min / Color / 1:2.4 / 2013

Xstream Pictures (Beijing)
Office Kitano
Shanghai Film Group Corporation
Present

In association with
Shanxi Film and Television Group
Bandai Visual
Bitters End

SYNOPSIS



An angry miner revolts against the corruption of his village leaders.

A migrant worker at home for the New Year discovers the infinite possibilities a firearm can offer.

A pretty receptionist at a sauna is pushed to the limit when a rich client assaults her.

A young factory worker goes from job to job trying to improve his lot in life.

**Four people, four different provinces.
A reflection on contemporary China: that of an economic giant slowly being eroded by violence.**

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

This film is about four deaths, four incidents which actually happened in China in recent years: three murders and one suicide. These incidents are well-known to people throughout China. They happened in Shanxi, Chongqing, Hubei and Guangdong – that is, from the north to the south, spanning much of the country. I wanted to use these news reports to build a comprehensive portrait of life in contemporary China.

China is still changing rapidly, in a way that makes the country look more prosperous than before. But many people face personal crises because of the uneven spread of wealth across the country and the vast disparities between the rich and the poor. Individual people can be stripped of their dignity at any time. Violence is increasing. It's clear that resorting to violence is the quickest and most direct way that the weak can try to restore their lost dignity.



For reasons I can't fully explain, these four individuals and the incidents they were involved in remind me of King Hu's martial arts films. I've drawn on inspiration from the martial arts genre to construct these present-day narratives. Throughout the ages, the predicaments that individuals face have changed very little – just as their responses to those predicaments have also changed very little. I also see this as a film about the sometimes hidden connections between people, that make me want to question the way our society has evolved. In this 'civilised' society that we have taken so long to evolve, what actually links one person with another?

Jia Zhang-Ke (April 2013)

INTERVIEW



Violence in Chinese society is clearly the core subject of the film. Are there any specific reasons for that?

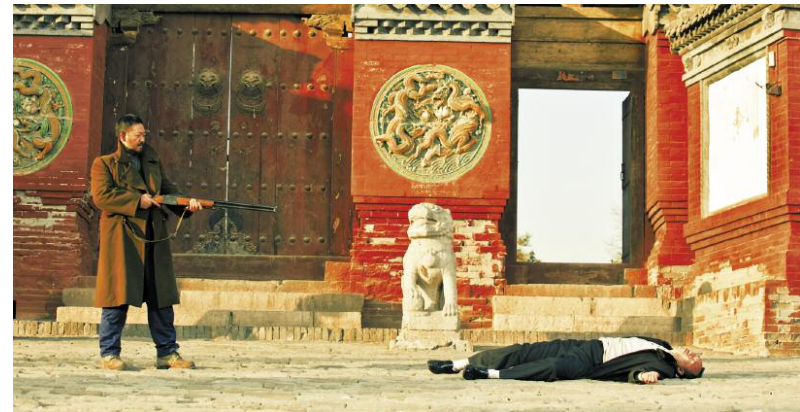
When I scan the enormous amount of information posted on Weibo (*Chinese equivalent to Twitter*), I feel uneasy whenever I come across reports of violent incidents – incidents, that is, in which violence should have been avoided. China's breakneck speed transformation has benefitted some regions at the expense of others, and the gap between rich and poor is widening all the time. People get depressed when they're confronted by examples of enduring privilege and social injustice. Weibo aside, our society lacks channels of communication; when people don't have the habit of communicating with each other, violence becomes the fastest and most efficient way for the weak to protect their dignity. Hearing about such violent incidents makes me feel that it's necessary to face the problem of violence in a film. This is perhaps the only way that we can reduce the amount of violence in our lives.

That's why I began to conceive of a film that would comprise multiple portraits of violence rather than just telling one story about one protagonist. I chose four shockingly violent news stories to present an image of contemporary China as I understand it, and used the methods of fiction to dramatize them.

How much in the film's stories is invented? Did you research these incidents and try to stay close to the reported facts?

Before writing the script, I visited the places where the incidents took place. I wanted to see the actual locations and to collect more information. I also conducted some interviews. This was what got me started on the project, but I didn't shy away from using elements of fiction. I think that we need fiction to reveal the social factors behind the incidents and the deep motivations of the characters. So I didn't hesitate to use fictional elements either during the writing process or during the location filming.

The incidents themselves seemed very dramatic, full of conflict and contradiction. Chinese literature offered me a way of adapting them to my purpose. The tradition of the historical novel is to take one basic fact and then build characters and situations around it. While I was working on the script, I also watched a lot of traditional Chinese operas. One filmed opera in particular inspired some of the film's narrative methods: the Peking Opera *Wild Boar Forest*, filmed by Chen Huaikai and Cui Wei in 1962.



The film's four stories are set in different parts of China, and feature a variety of regional dialects. Some of the characters are seen looking for work far from their hometowns. Is the film's geographical spread important to you?

Yes, the stories take place in very different parts of China. The opening story of Dahai happens in Shanxi, where I was born, a cold, vast agricultural province in northern China. The second story happens in Chongqing, a south-western city on the Yangtze River, close to the Three Gorges. The third story takes place in Hubei, in central China. And the last story happens in Dongguan, a town in Guangdong Province, China's South coast sub-tropical "free enterprise" zone.

The way that these four stories span so much of the country reminds me obliquely of traditional Chinese landscape painting. Classical painters were always trying to

display panoramas of the whole country. I share that aesthetic impulse, and I'd like the film to play as a flowing visual tour of China.

Chinese society these days is in a phase of internal migration. People move away from their original homes in search of jobs or a better life. A lot of young people from inland areas now work in the 'international' factories in Dongguan. The flow of people has brought about new social connections. My hope is that the film shows how disparate people have hidden connections.



The film captures moods of individual discontent, which take several forms. How widespread do you think these moods are in 2013?

Dissatisfaction with one's circumstances is a common phenomenon. It's one of the things that drives human progress. China was cut off from much of the rest of the world for many years, and during that period collectivism prevailed. As a result, most people lacked self-consciousness. The last thirty years of reform have awakened many people to a new self-consciousness. At the same time, the last three decades have seen a pile-up of new social problems, including inequality and corruption, and these issues have not been tackled in a timely way. The accumulation of social problems and the growing awareness of personal freedom have created a climate in which we Chinese expect more and more from the country's changes.

To what extent does the film refer to the *wuxia* genre? Your characters here take decisive actions to change their situation. Is your work taking on a sharper 'political' focus?

I think of *A Touch of Sin* as a *wuxia pian* (martial arts film) about contemporary China. The *wuxia* genre is very popular with Chinese audiences. Many *wuxia pian* have a political thrust. One basic theme is repeated over and over again: an individual struggle against oppression in a harsh social environment.

Most of my earlier films focus on ordinary daily life in China. Since *Still Life*, though, I've come to realize that some people choose extreme violent methods to change their situations. That gives me the feeling that violent revolt is not only a political issue but also a problem in human nature which is worth examining.

The film features a mixture of well-known actors and non-professionals. Can you explain the thinking behind the casting?

I knew from the start that it would be a film with strong dramatic action. It contains conflicts of interest between people, conflicts between people and their environments, and also characters with their own inner conflicts. As I wrote the script, I thought of various professional actors who might play these roles. Jiang Wu, who plays Dahai, has appeared in Zhang Yimou's *To Live* and Zhang Yang's *Shower*. Wang Baoqiang, who plays Zhou San, starred in Li Yang's *Blind Shaft*. Zhao Tao, who plays Zheng Xiaoyu, has appeared in many of my films over the years. On the other hand, the actor who plays Xiao Hui is a 19-year-old newcomer; I found him in an acting school in Hunan.

I still cherish a documentary-like aesthetic. I used many non-professional actors who were cast as we shot on location right across China over a period of five months. I hope my film manages to extract dramatic excitement from the natural everyday conditions we found and filmed.

The English title evokes memories of King Hu's *A Touch of Zen*...

I love King Hu's films very much. Our English title *A Touch of Sin* is a direct tribute to his *A Touch of Zen*. In our film, the story of Zheng Xiaoyu (played by Zhao Tao) and even the clothes the character wears are references to Hsu Feng in *A Touch of Zen*. The opera performance featured in our closing scene is called *Yu Tang Chun*. It's about a young woman who is framed for murder but finally wins back her freedom. It's a well-known opera in China, and, yes, King Hu directed a version of it for his second feature. I used it because I like the sense it gives that the same story can happen again and again in different times and different social conditions.

I can see plenty of parallels between the pressures of survival in contemporary China and the situations in which the Chinese found themselves in earlier centuries. It's natural to me to associate this perception with works of Chinese literature and films which have broached these issues in the past. The difference for me is that I'm working in the internet age, at a time when some people own private planes, when the high-speed rail network is spreading everywhere and when people are closer to each other on Weibo than they may be in real life. That's why I wanted the four stories in the film to interweave. I want to understand how we are all evolving, to see how people 'restructure' their lives in our time, and to grasp how we form associations with each other in the world we're building.

Jia Zhang-Ke

Interview by Tony Rayns, April 2013

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JIA ZHANG-KE

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- 1997 **XIAO WU** by Jia Zhang-Ke

FILMOGRAPHY AS DIRECTOR

- 2008 **PLASTIC CITY** - In Competition, 65th Venice Int'l Film Festival
- 2003 **ALL TOMORROW'S PARTIES** - Un Certain Regard, 56th Cannes Int'l Film Festival
- 1999 **LOVE WILL TEAR US APART** - In Competition, 52nd Cannes Int'l Film Festival
- 1996 **NEON GODDESSES** (documentary)
 - We Love Cinema Award,
 - Yamagata Int'l Documentary Film Festival, Japan

XSTREAM PICTURES (BEIJING), OFFICE KITANO, SHANGHAI FILM GROUP CORPORATION present
In association with SHANXI FILM & TELEVISION GROUP, BANDAI VISUAL, BITTERS END
A JIA ZHANG-KE film "A TOUCH OF SIN"

Starring ZHAO TAO, JIANG WU, WANG BAOQIANG, LUO LANSHAN
Co-starring ZHANG JIAYI, LI MENG Director of photography YU LIKWAI
Music by LIM GIONG Sound design ZHANG YANG

Art director LIU WEIXIN Edited by MATTHIEU LACLAU, LIN XUDONG
Associate producers KAZUMI KAWASHIRO, YUJI SADAI, LIU SHIYU, JIA BIN

Co-producers EVA LAM, QIAN JIANPING, GAO XIAOJIANG, ZHANG DONG Produced by SHOZO ICHIYAMA
Executive producers JIA ZHANG-KE, MASAYUKI MORI, REN ZHONGLUN Written & directed by JIA ZHANG-KE



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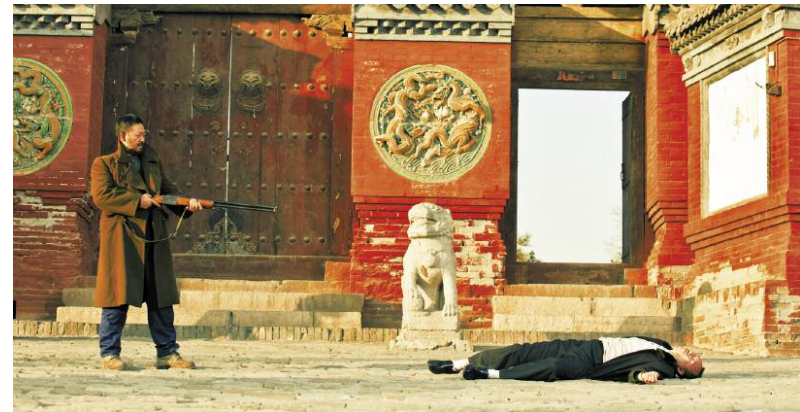
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- 2004 **THE WORLD** by Jia Zhang-Ke
 - Best Cinematography, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria Int'l Film Festival
- 2002 **UNKNOWN PLEASURES** by Jia Zhang-Ke
- 2000 **PLATFORM** by Jia Zhang-Ke
- 1998 **ORDINARY HEROES** by Ann Hui
- 1997 **XIAO WU** by Jia Zhang-Ke

FILMOGRAPHY AS DIRECTOR

- 2008 **PLASTIC CITY** - In Competition, 65th Venice Int'l Film Festival
- 2003 **ALL TOMORROW'S PARTIES** - Un Certain Regard, 56th Cannes Int'l Film Festival
- 1999 **LOVE WILL TEAR US APART** - In Competition, 52nd Cannes Int'l Film Festival
- 1996 **NEON GODDESSES** (documentary)
 - We Love Cinema Award,
 - Yamagata Int'l Documentary Film Festival, Japan

XSTREAM PICTURES (BEIJING), OFFICE KITANO, SHANGHAI FILM GROUP CORPORATION present
In association with SHANXI FILM & TELEVISION GROUP, BANDAI VISUAL, BITTERS END
A JIA ZHANG-KE film "A TOUCH OF SIN"

Starring ZHAO TAO, JIANG WU, WANG BAOQIANG, LUO LANSHAN
Co-starring ZHANG JIAYI, LI MENG Director of photography YU LIKWAI
Music by LIM GIONG Sound design ZHANG YANG

Art director LIU WEIXIN Edited by MATTHIEU LACLAU, LIN XUDONG
Associate producers KAZUMI KAWASHIRO, YUJI SADAI, LIU SHIYU, JIA BIN

Co-producers EVA LAM, QIAN JIANPING, GAO XIAOJIANG, ZHANG DONG Produced by SHOZO ICHIYAMA
Executive producers JIA ZHANG-KE, MASAYUKI MORI, REN ZHONGLUN Written & directed by JIA ZHANG-KE

