

# 《茄子》

# EGGPLANT

Written & Directed by  
Yung Chang 张侨勇





## Logline

A young con-woman in rural China plans one last marriage scam to buy her freedom, but when a former lover resurfaces unexpectedly, he threatens to expose her operation and forces her to choose between survival and self-determination.

# Director's Statement

Since 2008, I've made five observational feature documentaries focused on outsiders—people living at the edges of rapidly changing societies. My work has always been driven by a humanistic impulse: to observe without judgment, and to find complexity within those who exist outside the norm.

*Eggplant* is my first narrative feature, a project that has stayed with me since *Up the Yangtze* (2008). It was developed through the Sundance Institute Labs and the TIFF Writers' Studio, but its origins are deeply personal.

The film follows Yang Meng, a young woman from rural Sichuan who rejects the idea of fate and insists on controlling her own destiny. She is shaped by women I've known—independent, self-determined, and often in conflict with the expectations placed upon them in contemporary China, where the pressure to marry and conform remains intense. Those who resist are labeled *shengnu*, or “leftover women,” their independence recast as failure.

The story is also inspired by real cases of marriage scams, where women manipulate a system that has historically constrained them. In a society shaped by the aftereffects of the One-Child Policy—where gender imbalance and economic pressure have turned marriage into a transaction—these acts become both survival strategy and subversion.

A final image stayed with me: a photograph of a bride attempting suicide, suspended between life and death. In it, I saw the urgency of a woman caught between tradition and freedom. I saw a character willing to risk everything to retain agency over her own life.





*Eggplant* explores performance, identity, and agency within constraint. Yang Meng survives by inhabiting roles—bride, daughter, victim—moving through a system where intimacy is transactional and identity is fluid. The film resists judgment, positioning her as both architect and product of this world.

Wu Kang, a photographer, serves as a counterpoint. He preserves moments, searching for meaning through images, while Yang Meng erases herself in order to move forward. Their relationship is not a romance, but a collision between memory and survival.

My background in documentary shapes the film's language—an attention to lived detail, behavior, and ambiguity. I am less interested in answers than in contradictions, and in allowing space for the audience to sit with them.

At its core, *Eggplant* asks: What does freedom look like when every path is compromised?

— Yung Chang,  
Director, Writer, Producer  
April, 2026



# Synopsis

*Eggplant* follows Yang Meng, a young woman surviving on the margins of contemporary China through a calculated marriage scam. Working under the watch of a manipulative matchmaker, she poses as a bride, enters short-lived marriages with rural men, and stages psychological breakdowns to void the unions—disappearing once the bride price is secured. For Yang, this cycle is not just survival, but a system she has learned to navigate with precision, allowing her to remain unbound in a society that demands conformity.

Years earlier, in a remote northern town, Yang lives a transient life as a petty thief, moving through nightclubs and back alleys, stealing phones and cash with practiced ease. One night, she encounters Wu Kang, a drifting Taiwanese wedding photographer, passed out and vulnerable after a beating. Against her instincts, she brings him home. In his apartment, she discovers a stark contrast to her own existence: black-and-white photographs of empty landscapes—images defined by stillness, absence, and quiet reflection.

Wu Kang is an anomaly—earnest, analog, and disconnected from the digital world. While he photographs staged romance for a living, his personal work seeks something more elusive. Drawn together by curiosity and difference, they embark on a brief, charged journey across rural China. Their connection is tentative and uneven—Wu Kang searching for meaning and intimacy, Yang guarding her autonomy at all costs. Just as their relationship begins to take shape, Yang disappears, stealing his van and returning to her life of motion.





Years later, Yang has become deeply embedded in the marriage scam operation. The pattern repeats: new identities, new husbands, new escapes. But the emotional toll accumulates. During one arrangement, she finds herself unexpectedly drawn to a widower, Gong Ping, and his young daughter. For the first time, Yang glimpses the possibility of stability—not as performance, but as a genuine alternative to her transient life.

Determined to leave the scam behind, she attempts to claim this future for herself. But the past resurfaces when she encounters Wu Kang again at a pre-wedding photo shoot. Their reunion is brief but destabilizing. Wu Kang, still searching for her, sees their connection as unfinished; Yang understands that whatever existed between them cannot survive in her present reality.

As the wedding approaches, tensions close in. Wu Kang's persistence threatens to expose the scam, while Yang faces increasing pressure from those who control her. In a final rupture, the carefully constructed system collapses in public. Forced to confront the consequences of her choices, Yang rejects both the life imposed on her and the illusion of escape offered by others.

In the end, *Eggplant* is a portrait of a woman navigating the narrow space between survival and self-determination—where freedom is uncertain, and every path carries a cost.

# Treatment

## Act I

The year is 2012.

In a cramped wedding photography studio on the outskirts of Lanzhou, Yang Meng sits in front of a cracked mirror, dressed in a cheap empress costume that weighs heavily on her shoulders. The makeup is thick, layered carelessly to conceal exhaustion rather than beautify. Her headdress pinches. She adjusts it herself, impatient, batting away Godmother Fu's hands when Fu leans in too close. Fu lights another cigarette, smoke curling upward as she studies Yang Meng's reflection with the practiced eye of someone inspecting inventory—calculating value, durability, flaws. Li Dongfei hovers near the doorway, checking his phone, urging them to hurry. Time, here, is always money.

On set, Yang Meng's fiancé Li Wei waits in a matching emperor costume. He has Down Syndrome, and his excitement is unfiltered. He laughs at the backdrops, delighted by the bright colors, delighted by Yang Meng herself. When he sees her, he jumps up, takes her hand, pulls her toward the throne chairs without understanding how precarious the moment is. His parents stand off to the side, watching nervously—beaming with pride, anxious that something might go wrong, desperate for this image to hold.

The photographer enters.

It is Wu Kang.

For a fraction of a second, time stalls.

Yang Meng recognizes him immediately. Wu Kang does too. Neither acknowledges it. Wu Kang lifts his camera, his body going rigid, professional instinct snapping into place. Godmother Fu barks instructions to the assistant. Li Wei grins broadly. The studio lights flare.

The assistant counts down: Three. Two. One. “Eggplant”.

The shutter clicks.

The image hangs—and the story fractures backward.

Four years earlier.

Yang Meng moves through the nightlife of Huan County, weaving between bars and karaoke lounges with practiced ease. She steals phones and wallets from drunk patrons without rushing, without guilt. Her body is light, alert, always angled toward an exit. Theft is not desperation for her; it is mobility. It allows her to remain unattached, unclaimed, untraceable.

One night, she comes across a man passed out on the street, bruised and bleeding. Two young thieves are rifling through his pockets. Yang Meng scares them off, shouting that the police are coming. When they scatter, she checks the man's wallet and pockets the cash, then pauses. Something about his helplessness—his uselessness—gives her pause. Instead of leaving him there, she flags down a taxi and brings him home.

The man is Wu Kang.

Yang Meng explores his apartment while he sleeps.

It is sparse, almost monkish. Photographs are taped to the walls—empty roads, abandoned parks, landscapes stripped of people.

In a makeshift darkroom, she finds a test print: an ox standing alone on a rural road, immovable, unconcerned. She studies it longer than she means to, then slips it into her pocket.

Wu Kang wakes to find Yang Meng sleeping in his bed. Yang Meng wakes and attacks him without hesitation, her body reacting before thought. They struggle briefly. Wu Kang yelps, scrambling backward, knocking over a chair. The violence ends abruptly when Yang Meng realizes he is not a threat. She freezes. He freezes. Embarrassment floods the room.

Wu Kang's face is bruised from the night before. Yang Meng watches him carefully, then wordlessly tends to his wounds—cleaning cuts, pressing gauze against his cheek. The intimacy is practical, unromantic. They talk cautiously. Wu Kang explains how he ended up drunk on the street. Yang Meng listens, curious despite herself.

Wu Kang pours tea and invites her to stay. While he boils water, Yang Meng wanders the apartment again. In the bathroom, she notices more photographs taped to the walls. She studies the ox image once more, then hides it on her person before Wu Kang returns. They drink tea together. Wu Kang talks about photography—shooting weddings to survive, landscapes to feel alive. He avoids smartphones, avoids the internet. He shoots mechanical film. Yang Meng teases him, amused, unsettled.

Wu Kang invites her to join him for breakfast. She agrees.

Wu Kang goes to the bathroom to clean up.

Yang Meng leaves.

She walks to the electronics market, moving through crowded stalls of phones and chargers. She pawns the stolen devices quickly, efficiently. No one asks questions. At a nearby fast-food restaurant, she orders more food than she can reasonably eat and stuffs herself hungrily. Halfway through the meal, she senses eyes on her. A plainclothes policeman from the night before watches from another table.

A younger officer enters.

They approach.

Yang Meng bolts.

She runs through the streets, scattering pedestrians, knocking over chairs. She ducks into an alleyway and is cornered. The plainclothes cop reaches for her arm.

Suddenly, Wu Kang attacks him from behind, mistaking him for a thief. Chaos erupts. The younger officer stumbles. Yang Meng breaks free. Wu Kang and Yang Meng run together, breathless.

Wu Kang pulls her into his wedding photography van and drives.

They flee Huan County, racing into open countryside as a sandstorm gathers.

On the road, Wu Kang talks nervously. Yang Meng listens. They stop at roadside diners, sleep in the van, drift through villages. Wu Kang photographs obsessively whenever the light shifts. Yang Meng watches him work, understanding the impulse even if she doesn't name it.

Over the road trip, an attraction grows, uneven and unresolved. Wu Kang is drawn toward romance and meaning. Yang Meng is drawn toward movement and escape. They find a watering hole along the road. Yang Meng strips down and swims. Wu Kang watches from shore, unsure whether to join her or preserve the image. Desire lingers without alignment.

At a village funeral, they join a banquet and watch a shadow puppet performance—historic, tragic, ancient. Yang Meng is unexpectedly moved.

The next morning, Wu Kang leaves the van to buy cigarettes.

Yang Meng takes the keys and drives away.

She doesn't get far. The van runs out of gas on a rural stretch of road. Yang Meng waits, stranded, then hitchhikes with a trucker family. Inside the cab, she watches a young daughter living on the road with her parents, asleep against blankets. The sight unsettles her. She turns away, emotional, as the truck drives on.

## Act II

Two years later. 2011.

Yang Meng returns to Lanzhou, back into the orbit of Godmother Fu. Fu runs a match-making operation. She speaks gently but carries herself like a boss. Everything has a price. Everything has a purpose. Yang Meng is folded back into the system without ceremony.

The film opens this section with a rural wedding banquet.

Yang Meng is the bride. Zhang Yong is the groom. The celebration is loud and sincere. Guests drink and toast. The marriage appears real.

That night, Zhang Yong lies beside Yang Meng, hopeful and awkward. She turns away.

Days pass. Yang Meng performs domestic routines mechanically. Then, slowly, something shifts. She stops responding. She stares blankly. She soils herself. She howls. Zhang Yong's family panics. They summon a doctor. No explanation is found. Whispers spread. Fearing misfortune, the family dissolves the marriage.

Godmother Fu arrives, furious and theatrical. She accuses the family of abuse and storms out with Yang Meng.

Back in Lanzhou, Zhang Yong kneels before Godmother Fu and Li Dongfei, begging for the return of the bride price. Li Dongfei refuses and drags him out violently. Yang Meng witnesses the violent interaction but does nothing. Only now does the scam fully reveal itself.

Four years pass. It is 2012.

Yang Meng continues working under Fu. Other marriage arrangements follow. Each variation reveals more of the machinery: studio photos, bride prices, weddings, brief domestic experiments, ruptures. The scams bring in profit. Yang Meng collects her money, growing numb.

Another assignment arrives: Li Wei.

Before the wedding, Yang Meng and Li Wei come to the studio for photographs.

Wu Kang is the photographer.

We have seen this moment before. Now we understand it.

Wu Kang watches Yang Meng carefully, confused by what he's seeing. Yang Meng recognizes him immediately. After the shoot, they meet later that day. The encounter is brief and physical. It doesn't lead anywhere. It confirms that whatever they shared before cannot be recovered.

The marriage to Li Wei proceeds.

This time, the tone shifts. Li Wei's parents are controlling and violent. They lock doors. They shout. They strike Yang Meng when she resists. The house becomes a cage. Li Wei watches helplessly.

This is the breaking point.

Godmother Fu stages another extraction, accusing the family of abuse.

Yang Meng escapes, shaken.

Afterward, Yang Meng finds Wu Kang again. He is alarmed by her injuries. He asks her to meet him later. They sit in a park. Wu Kang tells her he's hitting the road on contract to teach wedding photography across the region. He wishes she could come with him. Yang Meng listens, noncommittal. The woman he fell for exists only in his imagination.

Wu Kang sings karaoke in the public square, drunk and earnest.

Yang Meng disappears.

Yang Meng goes to Pingliang, a city several hours away. There, she meets Gong Ping. He is older, steady, thoughtful. He has a young daughter. He treats Yang Meng with quiet respect. With him, Yang Meng glimpses a viable exit from her criminal life—not through romance, but through stability.

Yang Meng tells Godmother Fu she wants out of the scams. She asks for her money back. Fu responds coldly. She reminds Yang Meng of everything she knows and everything she can expose. There will be consequences.

Yang Meng chooses Gong Ping anyway.

## Act III

Yang Meng and Gong Ping prepare for their wedding in Pingliang. Godmother Fu oversees the arrangements. Li Dongfei manages logistics. Everything is polished and expensive.

The pre-wedding photo shoot takes place.

Wu Kang, now a traveling instructor, enters to observe the photographer.

Recognition flashes between them. Yang Meng understands now that he will keep appearing, misreading coincidence as fate.

They meet later that evening. Wu Kang is drunk. He shows her photographs he kept. He insists their past matters more than her present. Yang Meng tells him she is marrying Gong Ping as an exit, not a love story. Wu Kang refuses to accept this. He frames himself as a hero. He becomes aggressive and desperate.

Yang Meng begs him—on her knees—to keep the scam a secret.

Wu Kang is stunned.

The wedding banquet unfolds in a luxury hotel ballroom. Red banners hang from the ceiling. Guests eat, drink, applaud. The ceremony begins.

Wu Kang interrupts.

Chaos erupts. Guests restrain him. Li Dongfei fights back. Godmother Fu attempts to flee and is stopped. The grift is exposed in public.

Yang Meng takes the microphone. She names the scam. She refuses to hollow out Gong Ping's life to pay for her freedom. She walks toward the window.

She climbs onto the ledge and tries to jump.

Wu Kang grabs her.

They lock eyes.

Cut to black.

The ox from the photograph comes to life. A young girl guides it over a hilltop and down toward a riverbank.

The End.



# The Characters

## Yang Meng 杨梦 (28)

Born in the Year of the Sheep—an omen of misfortune for women—Yang Meng has spent her life defying fate. Raised in rural Sichuan by strict grandparents while her parents laboured far away as migrant workers, she learned early that survival meant self-reliance. Brash, sharp, and unyielding, she rejects the life prescribed to her: marriage, motherhood, and submission.

At thirteen, she was recruited into a state gymnastics program, a rare path out. By sixteen, she had fled—stealing from her coaches and disappearing into the margins of Northern China. There, she was taken in by Godmother Fu and trained into a highly skilled grifter, operating a marriage scam that exploits the very institution meant to contain her.

Yang lives by a personal code. She steals, but without cruelty; in her mind, her victims will recover, while she cannot afford to fail. Her ambition is simple and absolute: to escape poverty and build a life of autonomy. In another world, she might have led a corporation. In this one, she bends the rules to survive.

Emotionally guarded and quick-witted, Yang treats love as a liability. But when Wu Kang re-enters her life, he disrupts the logic she's built to protect herself. For a moment, she glimpses the possibility of something else—before shutting it down, convinced that survival and love cannot coexist.

Back in the cycle of scams, Yang grows increasingly fractured. The system she's learned to manipulate continues to close in around her. When a final con forces her to confront the human cost of her actions, Yang is pushed to a breaking point.

For the first time, she faces a choice: remain within the life that has sustained her, or risk everything to believe she can shape her own fate.

# The Characters

## Wu Kang 吴康 (27)

Wu Kang is gentle, passive, and deeply non-confrontational—a man who moves through life without resistance. Once a photographer in Taiwan, he abandoned his former life to search for a woman he fell in love with—someone who disappeared without explanation. That search brought him across mainland China, eventually stranding him in Gansu province.

Now an itinerant pre-wedding photographer, he drifts from town to town, documenting other people's happiness while quietly carrying his own unresolved longing. His personal work—bleak, empty landscapes—reflects a world defined by absence. Wu lives day-by-day, avoiding confrontation, surrendering to circumstance, and placing his faith in coincidence. For him, life is something that happens, not something he shapes.

When Yang enters his life, she disrupts his inertia. Their connection—brief, charged, and unresolved—lodges itself in his imagination. When she disappears, Wu does not pursue her; instead, he absorbs the loss, folding it into the same unresolved space as the woman he once searched for. Years later, when Yang reappears, Wu interprets it as destiny. He convinces himself their reunion carries meaning—that he is meant to intervene, to save her. But his belief in fate blinds him to Yang's reality, projecting desire where there is none.

Well-intentioned but emotionally limited, Wu's passivity evolves into a quiet form of control. His attempt to impose meaning—on love, on loss, on Yang—ultimately undermines whatever connection they might have shared.

# The Characters



## Godmother Fu 傅干妈 (60s)

A well-known matchmaker, Godmother Fu has learned to bend tradition into profit. Using the trust and authority of her role, she manipulates the marriage system to serve her own ambitions—transforming desperation into opportunity.

A product of Mao-era China, Fu's ruthlessness is rooted in survival. During the Cultural Revolution, her intellectual parents were sent to the north for reeducation. As a child, she witnessed her father's suicide and her mother's institutionalization, then took on the burden of raising her younger siblings. Living on the streets of Lanzhou, she did whatever was necessary to survive. Through *guanxi*, she built connections and eventually established herself as a successful matchmaker.

As China's Reform era accelerated the pursuit of wealth, Fu adapted. Recognizing the transactional nature of the bride price system, she engineered a scam that exploits it at scale. For Fu, morality is secondary to security—she is a survivor above all else, determined to protect the power and stability she has built.

## Li Dongfei 李东 (30s)

Li Dongfei was kicked out of his family home when he was six. Or rather, he took to the Lanzhou streets when his abusive father wouldn't let up from his drunken beatings. Li's mother left when he was just a baby, having met another man. Li dropped out of school when he was 13. He became skilled in pickpocketing and stealing bicycles. He joined a gang and roamed the city, hunting for ways to make a buck. He was caught trying to rob a magazine stand and spent two years in prison stuffed in a small cell elbow to elbow on a concrete floor with inmates and rats and a bucket as a makeshift toilet. When he got out, he tried to follow a life on the up and up. But once a thief, always a thief.

On the outside, a former inmate introduced him to Godmother Fu. She anointed Li Dongfei as her nephew. She groomed him and taught him *guanxi*. He did his best to learn from her but she knew that he would bring his own skills to the business, and that is what she wanted. Li is cunning and patient but also has a hair-trigger temper and a willingness for violence that compliments Godmother Fu's wedding scams. When plans go awry, Li steps into the picture to set things straight. He's devoted to Godmother Fu and will do anything to please her.



# The Characters

## Gong Ping 龚平 (40s)

Gong Ping was an elite student from Pingliang who rose through China's most competitive system to graduate from Peking University in engineering. There, he met his first wife, Jing, a pre-med student. They built a life in Beijing—successful careers, a young daughter, and the comforts of a rising middle-class dream.

That life ended abruptly when Jing was killed in a hit-and-run accident. Gong was left inconsolable. Unable to remain in Beijing, he returned to his hometown with their daughter, Dingding, choosing a quieter life closer to his parents. The loss reshaped his priorities—ambition gave way to presence, and he found meaning in raising his daughter and caring for his family.

Content to remain a widower, Gong relents to his parents' insistence on remarriage out of filial duty, never expecting it to lead anywhere—until Yang Meng appears.

Like Wu Kang, Gong's life is marked by rupture. But where Wu drifts, Gong endures. He absorbs his grief and moves forward, grounded in responsibility, stability, and the quiet determination to rebuild.





# The Look

*Eggplant* will have the look and feel of an observational documentary if it were soaked in neon light and then hung to dry in the brittle sunlight of the Gobi desert. The film will crack with a hyper-real visual style that has the energy of hand-held camerawork but with distinct pregnant moments to catch our breaths and reflect on the realism unfolding.

At its core, the film is an intimate character study of a woman navigating independence within a system that constrains her. Yang Meng moves through a society that does not fully see her, making choices that are both strategic and instinctive in her struggle to survive. The film asks: what does it mean to be truly independent within a “capitalist society with Chinese characteristics”?

This contradiction is expressed through a fully subjective lens. The film remains with Yang Meng at all times—her perspective shaping every frame, movement, and cut. The camera reflects her inner state: alert yet uncertain, bold yet guarded. We experience a world filtered through someone who is both street-smart and emotionally unformed. The result is a visual approach that operates subconsciously as much as it does narratively—where film noir meets *cinéma vérité*, evoking a fusion of Wong Kar-Wai and Andrea Arnold within a crime drama framework.





The film draws from a wide range of influences, including *Blow-Up*, *Chungking Express*, *Fish Tank*, *Badlands*, *Nomadland*, *Burning*, *Hale County This Morning*, *This Evening*, *American Honey*, and *Spring Breakers*. It combines the spontaneity and unpredictability of documentary with the precision and control of narrative cinema.

Building on my experience with non-professional participants, I aim to merge documentary immediacy with crafted performance. This approach seeks a heightened realism—where the authenticity of lived experience meets the emotional precision of actors—resulting in a world that feels both immediate and cinematic.

The film also engages with themes of photography and perception, particularly through Wu Kang's images. His gaze—and the audience's relationship to it—contrasts with Yang Meng's lived experience, complicating how we interpret what we see.

Ultimately, the cinematographic language of *Eggplant* is driven by Yang Meng—by her impulses, her contradictions, and the forces that shape how she sees the world.

# Sound

Like the film's hyper-realistic visual style, the soundscape will capture the diegetic ambiance of Northern China. Wind, construction, bleating car horns, and the vast silence of the landscape will form recurring sonic motifs. The sound design will subtly underscore the characters' emotional arcs, working on a subconscious level.

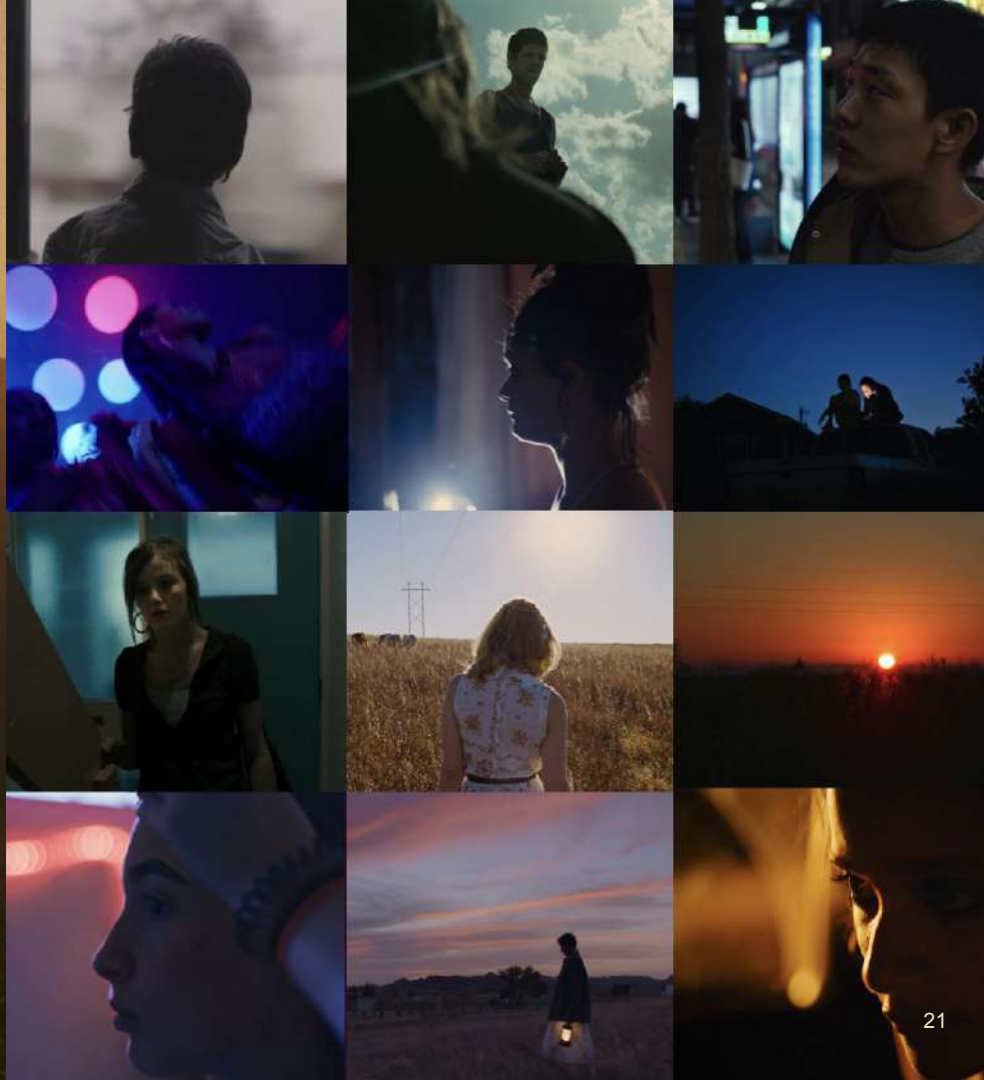
I hope to commission an original score by Marisa Anderson, whose albums *Still*, *Here* and *Cloud Corner* were deeply influential in conceiving the film.

The soundtrack will also draw from local Chinese musicians, infusing the film with both hope and pathos. The band Hualun—whose work featured in my film *Wuhan Wuhan* and Hu Bo's *An Elephant Sitting Still*—offers cinematic, propulsive compositions that can elevate key sequences.

I'm also drawn to Mainland Chinese post-punk bands like New Pants and Gong Gong Gong, whose music captures the millennial angst of the protagonists.

In contrast, select 1980s and 1990s Chinese pop classics will introduce a Wong Kar-Wai-esque mood. The film directly references a song by Teresa Teng, as well as Andy Lau's "Ten Thousand Years," which I previously used in *Up the Yangtze*.

While I believe in a "less is more" approach to sound design, I'm equally interested in pushing beyond strict realism—using sound to heighten emotion, tension, and atmosphere.



# Comps



**Title:** Perfect Days (2023)  
**Director:** Wim Wenders  
**TRT:** 2 hr 4 min  
**Country:** Japan  
**Language:** Japanese  
**Genre:** Drama  
**BO:** \$23 million (Worldwide)

2024 Oscar Nominee for Best Int'l Feature Film  
2023 Winner, Best Actor, Cannes Film Festival

**Creative:** For its documentary aesthetic, nuanced character depictions, and character-driven story.



**Title:** Better Days (2019)  
**Director:** Derek Tsang  
**TRT:** 2 h 15 min  
**Country:** China  
**Language:** Mandarin  
**Genre:** Crime, Drama, Romance  
**BO:** \$226 million (Worldwide)

2021 Oscar Nominee for Best Int'l Feature Film

**Creative:** For its engrossing look at modern, urban China and the emotional performances by the lead actors.



**Title:** Burning (2018)  
**Director:** Lee Chang Dong  
**TRT:** 2 h 28 min  
**Country:** South Korea  
**Language:** Korean  
**Genre:** Drama, Mystery, Thriller  
**BO:** \$7.6 million (Worldwide)

2018 Winner, FIPRESCI Prize, Cannes Film Festival  
2018 Winner, Best Foreign Language Film, Toronto Film Critics Association

**Creative:** For its tone and style and slow-building thriller that culminates in a mysterious and obtuse denouement.



# Map of China

Inset: Detail of the three major locations beginning from L to R with Lanzhou City to Pingliang City to Huanxian in Gansu Province.

Below: Primary locations within Greater China



# Location

Lanzhou, the capital of Gansu province in northwestern China, is a city of nearly four million people and the home base of Godmother Fu, Li Dongfei, and Yang Meng. Situated along the Yellow River, it is defined by both its striking natural surroundings—such as the Bingling Temple Grottoes—and its layered cultural history.

Gansu is marked by stark environmental and economic challenges. Desertification, water scarcity, and frequent droughts have reduced agricultural productivity and deepened poverty. Industrial activity along the Hexi Corridor has led to severe air and water pollution, further compounding these issues. As one of China's least economically developed provinces, Gansu struggles with limited infrastructure and a reliance on resource-intensive industries, making sustainable growth an ongoing challenge.

This landscape complements *Eggplant's* neo-noir love story, where survival and perseverance are shaped by the environment itself.

The film unfolds across three primary locations within Gansu.

The region's terrain ranges from the towering Qilian Mountains and the vivid formations of the Zhangye Danxia Landform to expansive plateaus, valleys, and the winding Yellow River. Historic oasis cities like Dunhuang and Jiayuguan—once vital hubs along the Silk Road—underscore a deep connection between history and geography.

*Eggplant* begins and ends in Pingliang, a second-tier city known for the scenic Kongtong Mountain. Yang Meng's life as a petty thief unfolds in Huan County, a place steeped in the tradition of shadow puppetry—an ancient performance art combining music, storytelling, and intricately crafted figures. This cultural form is woven directly into the film's funeral sequence.





Rural Wedding Banquet



Huanxian



Pingliang



Huanxian



Pingliang



Pingliang



# Wu Kang's Photography

Sample photography references for Wu Kang's artistic practice.

On this page and next: Photos by Kai Caemmerer whose work captures Wu's emotional guardedness and his focus on seeking isolation amongst urban sprawl.

On page 30: Photos by Stefano Cerio also document, with tongue-in-cheek humor, the empty spaces of amusement parks that appear haunting and painful devoid of life.







# Yang Meng's Water Ox

A sample inspiration for Wu Kang's water ox photograph that Yang Meng steals from his dark room and becomes a metaphor/dream for her nostalgic past.





# Team Canada

## Yung Chang

Writer, Director, Producer

Yung Chang is a multi-award-winning filmmaker whose feature documentaries include *Up the Yangtze* (2007), *China Heavyweight* (2012), *The Fruit Hunters* (2013), and *This Is Not a Movie* (2019). His most recent film, *Wuhan Wuhan* (2021), was nominated for an Emmy® for Outstanding Current Affairs Documentary and qualified for the Academy Awards®.

His first narrative feature, *Eggplant*, was developed at the Sundance Institute Screenwriting and Directing Labs and the TIFF Writers' Studio. His films have screened at major international festivals and broadcast worldwide.

A graduate of the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York and Concordia University's Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema, Chang is known for humanistic storytelling and emotionally complex characters. He is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the Directors Guild of Canada, and the Writers Guild of Canada.

## Dan Montgomery

Producer, MDFF

Dan Montgomery co-founded MDFF in 2009 with longtime collaborator Kazik Radwanski. His work—both short and feature-length—has screened at leading international festivals including the New York Film Festival, Cannes Critics' Week, Berlinale, Venice, Locarno, SXSW, and TIFF. His feature *The Maiden* (2022) premiered in competition at Venice's Giornate degli Autori, where it won the Cinema of the Future Award, and his latest film, *Matt and Mara*, premiered at the 74th Berlinale.

Over the past 15 years, MDFF has established a distinct presence in the Canadian film landscape as both a production and distribution company. Through MDFF Selects, the company has championed independent cinema in Toronto, building a dedicated screening platform—from grassroots venues like Double Double Land to partnerships with TIFF Lightbox and Cinema Scope—while fostering a vibrant community for adventurous filmmaking.

## Christina Piovesan

Producer, First Generation Films

First Generation Films (FGF) is a leading independent production company responsible for award-winning, internationally distributed productions. Founder and President Christian Piovesan was named Producer of the Year in 2022 by Playback Magazine. Recent productions include Brandon Cronenberg's *Infinity Pool*, Azazel Jacobs' *French Exit*, starring Michelle Pfeiffer, *The Nest* directed by Sean Durkin and *Alice, Darling* directed by Mary Nighy and starring Anna Kendrick. On the television front, FGF worked with best-selling author Kate Beaton to adapt her book to series called *Pinecone & Pony* for DreamWorks Animation and Apple TV+. Other productions include *Home Sweet Rome!* for HBO Max and WildBrain and an adaptation of Jeff Lemire's cult graphic novel *Essex County* starring Molly Parker for CBC/ITV Studios. Christina is a member of the CMPA, PGA and the AMPAS.

# Team China

## Yimin “Fanfan” Zhuang

Producer, Flying Sparrow Films

Based in Beijing, Fanfan is a producer and director with 14 years of extensive experience in international and local productions delivering important stories about China to the world. She has completed over 50 documentary projects in various subjects with top Chinese and international talents like Yung Chang (*Up the Yangtze*), Zhou Hao (*Chinese Mayor*), Lixin Fan (*Last Train Home*), David Singleton (*The Secret History of Writing*) and Oscar-winner Jerome Maison (*March of the Penguins*), among others.

Fanfan’s recent producing and directing work includes *Shadow of Gold* (ARTE, SVT, TVO), *Toy Stories* (CBC), *I am Here* (China theatrical release), *The Realm* (Tencent), *Lingo Tango* (Starhub), *Pandemic 19* (PBS, Tencent) and *Lin Dan: The Final Fight* (Youku). She produced *The Secret History of Writing* (ARTE, BBC, PBS) and *Way to School* (*Sur le chemin de l’école*, France 5 & UNESCO).

In 2018, she founded Flying Sparrow Films together with Yung Chang in Beijing. In 2022, she was invited to sit on the jury at the 16th First International Film Festival in 2022, to judge entries under its Documentary Lab section, as well as entries under its main feature documentary competition.

## Nai An

Producer, Dream Factory

A graduate of the Central Academy of Drama (1991), Nai An has worked as an independent producer since 1993 across feature films, television, commercials, and music videos. Her first feature, *Weekend Lover*, won the Rainer Werner Fassbinder Prize at the Mannheim-Heidelberg International Film Festival.

In 1999, she founded Dream Factory Beijing, producing internationally acclaimed films including Lou Ye’s *Suzhou River* (Tiger Award, Rotterdam; Grand Prix, Paris International Film Festival) and subsequent titles *Purple Butterfly* (2003), *Summer Palace* (2006), and *Spring Fever* (2009), all selected in Competition at Cannes, with *Spring Fever* winning Best Screenplay and the Grand Prix at the Chinese Independent Film Festival. Her later works include *Love & Bruises* (Venice), *Mystery* (Cannes Un Certain Regard opening film; Asian Film Awards winner), and *Blind Massage* (Silver Bear, Berlinale 2014).

As an actress, Nai An has received Best Actress awards at Locarno, Filmets Badalona, and the Asia Pacific Screen Awards.

She is a member of AMPAS.



# HISTORIC & CULTURAL CONTEXT

## PRE-WEDDING PHOTOS

China's pre-wedding photography industry is a thriving and elaborate sector that caters to engaged couples seeking to capture their love and create lasting memories before their actual wedding day. It involves couples arranging professional photo shoots at scenic locations or in studio settings, often with multiple outfit changes and meticulously styled hair and makeup. These photos are typically used for wedding invitations, displays at the wedding ceremony, and personal keepsakes. The industry offers a wide range of services, including professional photographers, makeup artists, wardrobe stylists, and location scouts, all aimed at providing couples with a visually stunning and romantic experience that celebrates their impending union.

## ONE-CHILD POLICY (1979-2015)

China's One-Child Policy was a government-imposed population control measure implemented from 1979 to 2015, aimed at curbing the country's rapid population growth. Under this policy, most couples in urban areas were allowed to have only one child, while exceptions were made for rural couples, ethnic minorities, and families with disabled children. The policy involved strict enforcement through fines, forced abortions, and sterilizations, which resulted in numerous human rights violations and gender imbalances. While the policy initially achieved its intended goal of reducing population growth, it had significant social, economic, and demographic consequences, including an aging population, extreme gender imbalance, and social unrest. In recent years, the Chinese government has gradually relaxed the policy, allowing couples to have two children, in an effort to address these issues.





## THE BRIDE PRICE / 彩礼

China's Bride Price tradition is a cultural practice where the groom's family provides a sum of money or valuable gifts to the bride's family as a symbol of gratitude and respect for accepting the marriage proposal. This longstanding tradition, deeply rooted in Chinese society, is seen as a way to compensate the bride's family for the loss of a daughter and to demonstrate the groom's ability to financially support his future wife. The amount of the bride price is often negotiated between the families, and while it was historically a way to establish social status and strengthen family ties, it has evolved in modern times to become a complex issue that can sometimes lead to financial burdens, gender inequality, and societal pressures.



## THE MARRIAGE SQUEEZE

In the rural countryside, single men are grappling with gender imbalance, expensive marriage customs and rapid urbanization, complicating the search for a spouse. There are more than 30 million more men than women in China. This imbalance is known as the "Marriage Squeeze". In 2020, there were 108 men for every 100 women born in rural China, compared with an urban gender ratio of just under 103 men for every 100 women.