

WXS PRODUCTIONS, CHINESE SHADOWS & FULL HOUSE PRESENT

tiff. toronto
international
film festival.

OFFICIAL SELECTION 2011

DOMOSTIA ZINFMALDIA
FESTIVAL DE SAN SEBASTIAN
1988 - 2011

11 FLOWERS

A FILM BY WANG XIAO-SHUAI

我 11





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CHINA – FRANCE / 2011 / 110 MINUTES / 1.85 / DOLBY SR

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SYNOPSIS

Wang Han, 11 year old boy in the province of Ghizhou is confronted with a runaway murderer. Hiding in the woods, the wounded man takes Wang Han drying shirt and persuades him to help him out. Frightened and fascinated at once, Wang Han and his friends accept to keep it secret from the police. Strange things are happening at school and the police is everywhere.



WANG Xiaoshuai

Director's statement

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STORY

11 FLOWERS is an autobiographical film. This child, his friends, his parents, the painting classes, the Cultural Revolution and the factory born from the Third Front movement all come from my childhood memories. There are obviously new narrative elements but I did meet this runaway murderer and I saw him being arrested.

The story of 11 FLOWERS is infused with the memories of my life in Guiyang, in the province of Guizhou. In the mid '60s, my parents followed the Chinese government's call asking families to move the main factories in charge of national production inland in order to defend China against a potential attack from the USSR. We left Shanghai to go and live in this poor province. I grew up in this countryside with my older sister, while our parents hoped to rapidly be able to go back to Shanghai. This period of my life left a profound mark on me. We lived in a small village that had been built for us near the Shanghai factory, then dismantled, then put together again. We felt the burden of the obligations my parents – and all other grown-ups in society – were tied down with. I saw how this movement and the Cultural Revolution changed them.

When I became an adult, I realized that very few people knew about the Third

Front movement, which pushed these city-dwellers to live with their family in the middle of the countryside.

In my films, it was important for me to speak about these people and their lives. I even started a documentary on the subject so that my parents and their friends could tell us why and how they lived there. One of my previous films, SHANGHAI DREAMS, already had my life in the Guizhou province as a background. The film recounted these workers' children awakening to the world, until their adolescence and their desire for independence. In 11 FLOWERS, the children are still young and do not understand the world that surrounds them. They do not question the situation they live in. This creates a gap between their point of view and the social and political backdrop.

When the mother is cooking, and the father and the son paint, or when the children play, I see my 11-year-old self, in 1975, in my village. When I started this film, I didn't know whether I'd be able to recreate my childhood with images. At the early editing stages, I showed my mother a few scenes from the film. Without knowing what the film was about, she instantly recognized the locations and the people, and was quite moved.

THE TITLE 11 FLOWERS

The Chinese title for 11 FLOWERS, WO 11, means "I am 11". This title uses the first-person pronoun to underline the fact that it is a personal story told in the first-person singular, by "me, Xiaoshuai." This is the story of my being 11, my memories, and my vision of this time period at the end of the Cultural Revolution. The international title 11 FLOWERS, encompasses my being 11 and the idea that I was in the spring of my life. The flowers are a kind of metaphor, and as it is, the father compares human beings with a bouquet of flowers. This also conveys the idea that we aren't in the city, but in the middle of the countryside.

THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

There are so many stories and different points of views concerning the period of the Cultural Revolution. For this film, I adopted a specific, and different, stance: subjective narration, as seen through the eyes of this child. WANG Han does not have a point of view on the Cultural Revolution. At the time, the Chinese also were the spectators of what was happening; they didn't know what to say about that movement.

Similarly, young WANG Han, who has no opinion, doesn't pass judgment and only watches what is happening until he decides to no longer follow the herd and takes his life in his hands. Suddenly, he's grown.



CHINESE CINEMA AND THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

Many Chinese films take place during the Cultural Revolution. They speak about the anti-right wing campaigns, the red guards. These are films in which we can feel that the director is looking – today – at what happened then: present-day adults looking back. I think it is sometimes interesting to forget the contemporary vision of the past and make films about what we experienced, what we felt at the time. This amounts to adopting an artistic point of view on history. This is why I didn't want to make a historical film about the Cultural Revolution. 11 FLOWERS is a film about a child and a murderer, about their destinies crossing paths, the problems they encounter and the consequences on their lives at the time. The child is a witness of 1975 Chinese society. The Cultural Revolution is merely a set, a backdrop. The world is seen from the level of children's eyes, WANG Han's eyes.

WANG HAN

WANG Han, the main character's name, was my name when I was a child. I wanted to keep it as such in the film. And it is my voice which opens and closes the story. It was a way for me to assert my link with the film without changing the audience's relation to it, because they don't know that it's me. In a novel, it is easy to write in the first-person, and as a matter of fact, this is the way in which I had written the first version of my screenplay. But in cinema, it is more complicated. I therefore sought to keep Xiaoshuai's "I/me" approach while creating a fictional work. Then I had to choose the actor. Who could be the double for 'me at age 11'? I chose Liu Wenqing for the way he looks, the way he moves. I thought he didn't look like the other children. When I was a child, I felt I was different from the others, even from my friends. I found in him this impression of feeling different. This is why I chose him.

CASTING CHILDREN

The children in the film are all professional actors and they've been in many productions, for television as well as cinema. The biggest challenge was to find children who looked like they were both city children and country children. Peasants. Once on filming location, I taught them the games I played when I was a kid. We children were very sheltered; we played with whatever we could find, for there was nothing. Our

world was little more than "Long Live Chairman Mao, Long Live the Chinese Communist Party." We knew nothing about the outside world. We were quite naïve. This is how I envisioned WANG Han and his friends.

A COPRODUCTION WITH FRANCE

I had worked with France before, for some of my previous films, but 11 FLOWERS is an official coproduction between China and France; in addition, it is the first film coproduced by the two countries since the agreement signed by the two governments in April 2010. One of the highlights in the coproduction was the editing stage with Nelly Quettier. The challenge was for us to be able to understand each other, to agree on the visual form as well as on the essence of the film. We sometimes ended up speaking with our hands when our interpreter wasn't there. An additional difficulty for Nelly was that the rushes were in Chinese, a language she doesn't speak.

During sound editing, we had to recreate, in France, the sound atmosphere of the 1970s Chinese countryside. We spent some time looking for crickets or Chinese birds. The French team who joined me for the postproduction of the film was truly professional. It was especially interesting because they came after a Chinese team, for a film shot in Chinese and in China. This gave rise to really interesting exchanges.

WANG Xiaoshuai

Director & scriptwriter

Graduated from the Beijing Film Academy WANG Xiaoshuai wrote and directed his first feature **THE DAYS** (1993) when he was 27. Acclaimed at first, the film is soon after black listed and its distribution banned in China. The film depicted the last days of a deteriorating relationship between two artists in Beijing.

Two years later, he directed **FROZEN** (1995) under the pseudo Wu Ming (Without a name); the film got selected at many International festivals and was awarded with *Special Mention of the jury* in Rotterdam in 1995. The film offers a look at the Beijing avant-garde art world, where a young artist organizes a set of performances culminating in his own suicide as the final act.

The same year, he directed **A VIETNAMESE GIRL** for the Beijing Film Studio. The film was refused by the censorship committee and it took 3 years of re-editing and a change of title (*So close to paradise*) to be finally approved for a (limited) screening in China. **SO CLOSE TO PARADISE** tells the story of two rural migrants, a naive young boy and a small-time con man, trying to make ends meet living in the city of Wuhan, and falling in love with a female bar singer they abducted. In 1998, it was selected for *Un certain regard* at the Cannes Film Festival.

His fifth feature, **BEIJING BICYCLE** won the *Grand Jury Silver Bear Award* at the 2001 Berlin International Film Festival and its two leading male actors received the *Best Young Actor Prize*. The film had a great international career.

In 2003 **DRIFTERS** was screened in *Un Certain Regard* at the 2003 Cannes Film Festival.

In 2005, his following film, **SHANGHAI DREAMS** was selected for competition in the 2005 Cannes Film Festival where he won the *Jury Prize*.

In 2008, **IN LOVE WE TRUST**, won the *Silver Bear for the best screenplay* in Berlin.

In 2010, **CHONGQING BLUES** was selected in competition at Cannes Film Festival. The film received the *Chinese Director Association award for Best Director*.





CAST

LIU WENQING	Wang Han
WANG JINGCHUN	Father
YAN NI	Mother
ZHANG KEXUAN	Louse,
ZHONG GUO LIUXING	Mouse
LOU YIHAO	Wei Jun
MO SHIYI	Jue Hong
WANG ZIYI	the murderer
QIAO RENLIANG	Brother of Wei Jun
YU YUE	School teacher
ZHAO SHIQI	Sister of Wang Han
CAO SHIPING	Father of Jue Hong
CAO GANG	Policeman

CREW

Director **WANG XIAOSHUAI**
Screenplay **WANG XIAOSHUAI / LAO NI**
Cinematographer **DONG JINSONG**
Production Designer **LU DONG**
Editor **NELLY QUETTIER**
Sound **FU KANG**
Sound Editing **JEAN GARGONNE**
Mixing **JEAN-PAUL HURIER**
Music **MARC PERRONE**
Producers **WANG XIAOSHUAI, ISABELLE GLACHANT, DIDAR DOMEHRI,
LÜ DONG, LAURENT BAUDENS, GAËL NOUAILLE**

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