

**LIN
MURAN**



BRIEF HISTORY OF A FAMILY

家庭简史

PRODUCED BY LOU YING, ZHENG YUE, WANG YIWEN
WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY LIN JIANJIE DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY ZHANG JIAHAO PRODUCTION DESIGN XU YAO EDITOR PER K. KIRKEGAARD MUSIC TOKE BRORSON ODIN SOUND LI RAN MARGOT TESTEMALE JACQUES PEDERSEN FANNY WEINZAPFEN COSTUME DESIGNER EDOARDO REBECCHI
CO-PRODUCERS ZHOU PIN, RIKKE TAMBO ANDERSON PRESENTED BY FIRST LIGHT FILMS BEIJING INTERCONTINENTAL BROTHERS FILM AND TELEVISION CULTURE COMMUNICATION CO., LTD.
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BRIEF HISTORY OF A FAMILY

家庭简史

a film by **LIN JIANJIE**

99 minutes - China, France, Denmark, Qatar - 2024

In Mandarin with English subtitles

INTERNATIONAL SALES

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LOGLINE

A middle-class family's fate becomes intertwined with their only son's enigmatic new friend in post one-child policy China, putting unspoken secrets, unmet expectations, and untended emotions under the microscope.

SYNOPSIS

After an incident at their high school, Wei, an outgoing only son from a middle-class family, and Shuo, his quiet, perceptive classmate, find themselves connected through some mysterious energy that draws them intimately into each other's lives. Wei soon introduces his friend to his father, a cell biologist, and his mother, a former flight attendant. Learning that Shuo comes from a troubled background, Wei's parents welcome this boy with an enigmatic charm to spend more time in their home.

Slowly integrating himself into Wei's family life, Shuo discovers that their comfortable existence is shadowed by unspoken secrets, unmet expectations, and untended emotions. A tragic incident further complicates their lives, putting past wounds and present anxieties under the microscope.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Having majored in biology as an undergraduate, I've always been fascinated by the idea that the micro world often holds a mirror to the macro world. In this film, I examine a family both as a living cell going through changes on multiple levels, and as a cell of our evolving society, which inevitably shapes the psyche and sentiments of its people.

When Wei's family's seemingly harmonious middle-class existence is disrupted by Wei's mysterious friend Shuo, they see a chance to establish new homeostasis. While doing so, the undercurrent of their relationship surfaces; collective and individual needs clash; the boundaries of physical space and emotions are blurred.

Even though I did not set out to make a genre film, genre found its way into my writing and filming — not as boxes to put the film in, but as a way to delve into the characters' minds and their ambiguous relationships; to create a mysteriously seductive tone, and to invite the audience to look beyond what they see, listen beyond what they hear.

INTERVIEW WITH

LIN JIANJIE

THIS IS YOUR FIRST FEATURE FILM AFTER DIRECTING THREE SHORT FILMS. WHY THIS PARTICULAR STORY AS YOUR FIRST FEATURE?

Many ideas come and go, but this one stayed and evolved with me. Starting from a simple premise, I made new discoveries every step of the way, from writing to the sound mix to grading.

WHAT WAS THE BIGGEST INSPIRATION BEHIND THIS FILM?

First it was my interest in the concept of family. Every family is an intimate unit that functions following codes and rituals of their own. They are also very good at keeping a facade. But if you look closer, quite often you will discover something unexpected.

There has also been a big social change in China. For over 30 years, the one-child policy has left a mark on millions of Chinese families who have lived through that era. Now that it is possible to have another child, how will the new policy alter the mentality of the only child and the parents?

There was also my urge for formal exploration. To take a story rooted in reality to a deeper, allegorical level; to play with genre codes.

WHAT WAS THE CASTING PROCESS LIKE? CAN YOU SPEAK ABOUT YOUR CHOICES OF ACTORS FOR THE MAIN ROLES?

Casting for this film was about finding people who could not only capture my attention but also my imagination. The two teenage actors stood out for me in different ways. Muran (Wei) because of how eager he is to show himself, and Xilun (Shuo) because of how little he reveals about himself. I went through a lengthy process to find the two boys, which involved two call-backs. I did pair-auditions for the last round as much as practically allowed. But because of Covid restrictions, the two boys I eventually cast never met in real life before the shoot. It was a leap of faith from my side.

Guo Keyu (Wei's mother) gained fame as an actress at a very young age. But then she got married and quit acting for over ten years. I saw her on a reality TV show she recently appeared on and felt her mannerisms worked well for the role. She didn't talk much about the film when we met. She said reading the script is like peering through heavy fog. That simple comment stayed with me throughout pre-production and shooting.



For the role of Wei's father, I met with many established actors in China. When Zu Feng read the script, the role clicked with him instantly. It took one meeting for me to know he was the right actor. Plus, he knows classical music, is great with calligraphy and plays tennis. It was as if I had written the role for him.

THE FILM HAS A STRONG VISUAL STYLE. WHAT WERE YOUR VISUAL CHOICES BASED ON AND HOW DID YOU WORK WITH CINEMATOGRAPHER JIAHAO ZHANG TO ACHIEVE THIS?

When designing the visual language, Jiahao and I wanted to avoid easy genre labels. Instead, we let the style and tone grow out of the characters and the atmosphere of the story itself. In the story every character has something they didn't share with other characters. They are a family but each is also an island.

The use of zoom shots was inspired by Shuo's character. But it also came from our wish to get closer to the characters, as if we are watching them through a microscope. This eerily unflinching gaze is both observational and intrusive at the same time. We think we are getting closer to their emotions, to the truth, but are we?

There are also montage scenes with the micro world, which was treated in various ways — but all to add another layer to the story. The family is both a living cell, reacting to the changes brought to them by a mysterious outsider, and a cell of our society, affected by its social political changes.

CAN YOU SPEAK MORE ABOUT THE GENRE ASPECTS OF THE FILM?

When I first wrote the script it was a straightforward drama. But the more I thought of Shuo's character, the more I wanted to know about him, the more I was drawn to the idea of not knowing much about him. Even after making the film, one of the most fulfilling things for me is how each viewer can interpret Shuo in their own way.

When we prepped the film, the creative collaborators and I never really tried to follow the convention of a specific genre, but rather I was looking for a specific tone, in camerawork, in set design, in the performances.

Perhaps now the film can be called a psychological mystery thriller, because it relies greatly on the delicate and ambiguous relationships between characters and on the complexity of their own minds. But what I hope was simpler: I just hope the audience will come along for the ride while sitting on the edge of their seats.

YOU HAVE A VERY INTERNATIONAL GROUP OF CREATIVE COLLABORATORS ON THE FILM. PLEASE TELL US MORE ABOUT THEM AND THEIR WORK ON THE FILM.

Since my short films, I have always enjoyed the dynamics of different creative perspectives. For my first feature I was lucky to work with very talented people both from China and around the world.

Editor Per K. Kirkegaard is a veteran in documentary film editing. He brought a strong sensibility to the emotional and psychological evolution of each character. With him we tried to construct the film in such a way that it maintains the most tension by revealing the least. We also embraced and developed its genre potential. We think of the audience as "partners in crime" and we invite them to tag along in the journey, to create their own meanings.

Danish composer Toke Brorson Odin's atmospheric, quietly epic score for *Winter Brothers* left an impression on me. I know I wanted the music to bring out a sense of extraordinary in the everyday setting. I wanted it to grow out of Shuo's presence. We started bouncing ideas even before pre-production but since I had not really worked with music before in my first two short films we took time to find what was right for this film. Gradually he built a world of music with predominantly electronic, glass and metal sounds. Our music supervisor Tin Soheili's additional tracks also added a delicate touch of suspense into the mix.

I discovered sound designer Margot Testemale through her work in the 2020 French film *Gagarin*. On our first call I told her she'd made a film which blurred the line of sci-fi and everyday life, which is what I was looking for, but more subtle, more psychological. She composed the overall soundscape with distorted modern city noises and specially made ambience, which became music to my ears and works seamlessly with Toke's score. Jacques Pederson is behind some very intriguing genre films, like *Vivarium* and *Koko-di Koko-da*. With him we also tested the genre dosage we wanted to inject in sound but without falling into clichés. The sound designers crafted a unique sonic universe for the film, which, contrary to the observational, almost clinical, camera work, is often subjective and psychological.

LIN JIANJIE

WRITER & DIRECTOR



After obtaining a bachelor's degree in bioinformatics, Jianjie Lin's passion for deciphering human existence led him to filmmaking. He received his MFA degree in filmmaking from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. His short films, *A Visit* (2015), a satire about corruption and vanity, and *Gu* (2017), about a family's last reunion at court, were screened at many international film festivals. *Hippopotami*, his latest short, which he shot before the feature, is in post-production. It looks at the harshness and absurdity of life through the eyes of a little girl. *Brief History of a Family* is his feature film debut.

PRINCIPAL CAST

ZU FENG (Wei's Father)

With an acting career spanning more than two decades, Mr. ZU Feng is one of the most recognizable names in Chinese films and TV dramas. He has worked with many well-known Chinese directors including Zhang Yimou, Wang Xiaoshuai and Lou Ye, whose works have brought him to Cannes, Tokyo and Golden Horse, among other international film festivals. In 2019, his directorial debut, *Summer in Changsha*, was selected for Un Certain Regard at the 74th Cannes International Film Festival.

GUO KEYU (Wei's Mother)

Ms. GUO Keyu was the youngest best actress award-winner in China, at 16 years old, with her debut film *Red Cherry*, which won her the award at the 2nd Shanghai International Film Festival in 1995 and the 19th Hundred Flowers Awards in 1996. The film was selected for the Berlinale Panorama in 1996. After nearly a decade of hiatus, Ms. Guo returned to the public eye with the reality show "See You Again" in 2021. *Brief History of a Family* was her first film role after returning to acting. She is also a prolific songwriter and singer and performs regularly with her band Star Chasers.

SUN XILUN (Shuo)

At 19 years old, SUN Xilun is already a seasoned film and TV actor with numerous works under his name. He made his feature film acting debut in 2015's *Jian Bing Man*, which made 1.2 billion RMB at the box office. He then worked with the acting-directing duo DENG Chao and YU Baimei in their films *Looking Up* (2019) and *Ping Pong of China* (2023). His most notable TV works include *Word of Honor* (2021), which remains one of the highest ranked costume dramas ever. A college freshman, Xilun's interests are basketball and music.

LIN MURAN (Wei)

LIN Muran first started acting when he wasn't even two years old and has practically grown up on film and TV sets. While his roles were small, his works were numerous, with the most notable ones being *Detective Chinatown* (2015) and *The Lost Tomb* (2016). Muran is in his last year of high school, where he is studying for his exams into acting school.

CREDITS

Writer & Director

Lin Jianjie

Producers

Lou Ying

Zheng Yue

Wang Yiwen

Co-producers

Zhou Ping

Rikke Tambo Anderson

Director of Photography

Zhang Jiahao

Production Designer

Xu Yao

Editor

Per K. Kirkegaard

Composer

Toke Brorson Odin

Sound Design

Margot Testemale

with Jacques Pedersen

Re-recording Mixer

Fanny Weinzaepflen

Production Sound Mixer

Li Ran

Colorist

Edoardo Rebecchi

Production

First Light Films

Coproduction

Films du Milieu

Tambo Film



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