

MOSAIC PORTRAIT

A Film by Zhai Yixiang

Presented by

BLACKFIN PRODUCTION

International Sales

REDIANCE

LOGLINE

A rape takes place in a rural village, setting the hillbilly father, the local officials and a city journalist on restless hunts for the villain, while the truth and the girl behind it seem to become ever more obscure.

SYNOPSIS

Migrant worker Xu comes back home upon finding out about his 14-year-old daughter Ying's sudden pregnancy. He seeks for justice in vain, when Ying's school and local authorities promise an investigation but prevaricate over Ying's accusation against her teacher. Jia, a journalist from Shenzhen, shows interest in the case as he scrutinizes the misty town. When he gets lost in trailing into the rebellious girl's real life, he lingers around, waiting for the shocking truth to be revealed only after childbirth...

At the center of the whirlpool, Ying endures the spotlight shone on her body with indifference. Shortly after labor, the young mother leaves town to receive social assistance in an effort to heal her past. Will she find peace in her future? Will her inner voice be heard one day?

DIRECTOR'S BIO

Zhai Yixiang

Born in 1987, Zhai Yixiang is a young director and screenwriter living in Beijing. His debut feature film *This Worldly Life* (2014) was selected as one of the official finalists in the 11th Chinese Independent Film Festival, and awarded Best Artist Contribution in the 9th FIRST International Film Festival, as well as K26 Best Feature Film in the 15th Filmfest Hamburg. His second feature *Mosaic Portrait* (2018) won several significant funds before completion, including the Grand Prize in the Golden Horse Film Project Promotion and the White Light Post-Production Award in the WIP Lab of Hong Kong-Asia Film Financing Forum.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

This is a story about a victim and her living environment.

As China's large population and rapid economic development lead to an imbalanced distribution of resources, the cities and villages are turning into two parallel worlds that nonetheless stay entwined and affected by each other.

In the film, a frustrated urban journalist engages himself in a sexual assault investigation in a rural village. Everyone connected to the case only cares to find the culprit by his or her own judgment, deserting the victim in her plight. As each character behind the case is born with a different space-time coordinate, the misalignments of these coordinates in turn create gaps in what they see and feel, like how a piece of portrait is essentially a mosaic composition of countless distinctive pixels.

This is also a story of binary oppositions. Beside the narrative itself, it portrays the relationship between the urban and rural, the civilized and savaged, the male and female, the abusers and abused, and all in all, the differences between you and me.

INTERVIEW WITH ZHAI YIXIANG

What inspired you to make this film?

I always find all kinds of dramatic twists in the social events showing up on my newsfeed. What I hear and read are often steered by their reporters in ways that totally subvert my expectations, and among which is a teenage pregnancy story. The suspect convicted in the case had changed time after time, that in the end the girl had to give birth to the child to find out who the real father was. That's when I had a desire to know what it is like to be in the center of it all.

The film obscures the truth as well as the attitudes of the perpetrator and the victim. What led to this approach of storytelling?

Bystanders care more about finding the truth, while the victims are sinking into their own troubles. Thus, we play down the dramatic and moral conflicts in order to cultivate a space in which the audience can feel the breath of the environment that the wounded girl lives in. Perhaps to say that "the truth is the absence thereof" would be more in line with the reality.

You used the word "mosaic" in the film's name to define the protagonist, whose eyesight also encounters problems inside the film. How should we interpret it?

Both myopia and a vague awareness of herself set the tone of the character Ying. Ying is not a typical victim and her own will has been blurred in the objective sense of the film. Such is also reflected in the external pressures she endures. The moral ordeal she is put through by onlookers, including those in the film, in front of the screen and even the ones in the censorship offices, turns themselves into the ones who "mosaickize" the public opinion of the case.

The journalist brings an outsider's view into this countryside story. How did you go about portraying him?

The journalist's perspective is more like my own perspective. Meanwhile, portraying him as a frustrated individual also speaks for the journalists' situation in

China. He undergoes several changes, from being a rational truth seeker to an emotionally-driven supporter, and eventually to becoming a bystander in the void.

The protagonist eventually starts her new life in the city. What was the thinking behind that?

The population flow from rural areas to urban cities is always happening in China. Yet the mixing of the two has not eliminated the barrier between them. The protagonist has been brought to the city to start afresh after the awful crisis, but her new environment is actually more complicated. Essentially, this is a one-way route with an indefinite end. The film does not provide a clear solution of how to avoid repeated damage after the first trauma takes place. However, at present, raising the question is perhaps more crucial than obtaining an answer.

There are many scenes full of mist and fog echoing the theme of the story. Could you talk about the process of location scouting?

We travelled along the eastern coastal region from Sichuan to Guizhou, Yunnan, Guangxi, and finally arrived in Shenzhen. After exploring across thousands of kilometers, I eventually picked the peripheral areas of Guiyang for the village scenes of the film because of its unique terrain. Wet and misty, it has both open plains and rolling mountains on the plateau, which is very close to what I had in mind for the characters' living environment.

The location's dense atmosphere resonates with the film's mysterious tone. How did you go about developing the visual style?

We wanted to create a contemporary village scenery that rarely appeared before. We focused on highlighting the atmosphere which in turn sculpted the characters. Based on the landscape of the village, we customized our own handheld shooting methods to deliver a natural and flowing vibe, whereas for the city scenes, we chose a more stable and objective take. Our cinematographer Weihua has a gift for creating atmospheres. His methods included handheld, shoulder-mounted and using stabilizers, and sometimes even handcrafted suspension bars for his camera to adopt a sense of life while on the track.

We also put a lot of thoughts into the style of realism and the sense of defamiliarization. Authenticity was crucial as it is the soil from which the atmosphere of the story grows. But viewers' understanding of what's true usually lags behind their understanding of what's real. When we conducted extensive field research and found the lives in the villages more modern and complex than imagined, the foundation has thus been established for speculating on what level of realism shall we adopt into the story, giving rise to the process of creating defamiliarized village scenes in the film.

CREW

Director: Zhai Yixiang

Screenplay: Zhai Yixiang

Producers: Wang Zijian, Cheng Rui

Cinematography: Wang Weihua

Sound Director: Li Danfeng

Editors: Matthieu Laclau, Yanshan Tsai

Production Designer: Peng Shaoying

CAST

Wang Yanhui As Xu

Wang Chuanjun As Jia

Zhang Tongxi As Ying

FILM QUALIFICATION

Original Title: Ma Sai Ke Shao Nv (马赛克少女)

English Title: Mosaic Portrait

Year: 2019

Country: China

Language: Mandarin

Runtime: 108 minutes

Camera: ARRI ALEXA SXT

Format: Digital, Color

Screening Format: DCP

Aspect Ratio: 2.66:1

Sound: 5.1

INTERNATIONAL SALES

REDIANCE

2701, Block B, Star City International Tower, Jiu Xianqiao Rd.

Chaoyang District, Beijing, China

www.rediancefilms.com

CONTACTS

Sales: Meng Xie meng@rediancefilms.com

Festivals: Xu Jing jing@rediancefilms.com