
Hu Jie has been working on independent documentaries for nearly thirty years and has completed more than thirty films. The topics of his work range from independent artists, miners, matchmakers and independent-minded intellectuals, to the Cultural Revolution, the Great Famine, the rightist and faith in China. But Hu’s camera does not just show the suffering of the victims, but focuses mainly on those who have the ability to resist and reflect on history. As a contemporary independent documentary filmmaker, Hu believes that ethics and morality are the bottom line for documentary filmmakers, and that documentary filmmakers should have a sense of historical responsibility, the ability to analyse society and a sense of humanitarian concern.

This interview was conducted at Hu Jie’s home in Qingdao on 15 November 2020.

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**Sun**: How did you start filming *Yuanmingyuan Artist Village*?

**Hu**: I went to the Yuanmingyuan in 1993 to paint and stayed there for two or three years until 1995 when
they expelled all the artists from the Yuanmingyuan. In 1994, Ji Dan came back from studying in Japan and we met in the Yuanmingyuan. She said to me, ‘Since you are physically strong, why don’t you make documentaries?’ Then she told me how to make a documentary, just like a preacher, and she was full of enthusiasm. After Ji Dan said this, my sister saved some money and helped me buy a Super 8. I didn’t have the camera until 1995. At that time, I didn’t know how to use it. I knew all these painters relatively well, but the most significant ones, such as Fang Lijun (方力钧), had already moved out, so some of them were not filmed. The ones I did capture thought they were innocent and did not challenge the social system, and they thought the police would not evict them. In the end, they were expelled too.

Sun: Your first film is very good, although some of the audio-visual language seemed a bit unsophisticated. How long did it take for the film to be completed?

Hu: When I was making the film, I didn’t know anything about shot and camera movement. I just shot it first. After I finished filming, I didn’t edit anything. I was expelled together with them. Then I thought of the coal miners I had seen when I was in Qinghai, but Qinghai was too far away, so I wanted to find the coal miners around here. Because I was very shocked when watching them carrying a basket and digging coals like dogs.

Sun: There was no documentary about coal miners at that time?

Hu: No, there wasn’t. I went to the small coal mine in Qinghai, where I used to paint. When I got there and started filming, I realised that I didn’t know anything about filmmaking and film language, and then I remembered the slogan of the Cultural Revolution: Eat, live and work together (同吃同住同劳动). I had to live with them, otherwise I wouldn’t have had a place to live. But the good thing was that we lived in different rooms. At that time I kept thinking about how I was going to shoot. I went through the films I had seen in my head, such as Little Soldier Zhang Ga (小兵张嘎, 1963) and Fighting North and South (南征北战, 1952), scene by scene. Sometimes when I saw the miners climbing out, I didn’t know how to shoot them. I would observe them for a long time before I got the idea of how to shoot them climbing out.

Sun: What did you think was the most important thing about filming a documentary at that time?

Hu: I think it’s the attitude, the way you treat the camera. The Japanese journalist who helped me buy the camera at that time said [translated by Ji Dan], ‘If you treat the camera well, the camera will treat you well.’ Hence, I take special care of the camera, as he said that the camera is part of your body. I think he gave a
sense of religion to the camera. With the kind of devotion, he was able to worship the camera on his knees. The relationship between the camera and him is different from all sorts of techniques we see in textbooks.

**Sun:** What was the name of the Japanese journalist?

**Hu:** Akihiro Nonaka, who teaches journalism and documentary at Waseda University. He used to work for a very big media company in Japan and he thought Super 8 (handheld camera) could change the world, so he gave up his career decisively. He trained Asian students like Ji Dan, Feng Yan and then me. He was influenced by Shinsuke Ogawa’s documentaries and acknowledged the purity of documentaries.

**Sun:** Did the footage you shot in Qinghai later become a film?

**Hu:** It was called *Remote Mountain*. The miners had a very good relationship with me. I wanted to follow them home and film their wheat harvest and their pneumoconiosis. Many people had pneumoconiosis, just waiting to die at home. I wanted to film that.

**Sun:** You filmed pneumoconiosis so early.

**Hu:** I only knew it after I started filming. They told me that many miners couldn’t work anymore after a few years [of working in the mines]. I didn’t know that pneumoconiosis was an occupational disease, a disease that society was not allowed to talk about. One day, out of the blue, a miner said, ‘Someone says they’re going to kill you. Run!’ That ended up forcing me to run away, which was actually halfway through the film.

**Sun:** When did you finish the editing of *Remote Mountain*?

**Hu:** After a long time, Ji Dan set up an editing machine. Feng Yan, Ji Dan and I took turns to edit. Ji Dan found a basement where she could edit and also sleep. Then each of us edited for a month. I lived there to edit. It was a linear editing machine. Ji Dan taught me how to use it, which was quite difficult to learn. No one taught me how to edit. I remember discussing it with Ji Dan. It seemed that I knew in my head how the shots should be connected. Maybe it was my mind as a painter.

**Sun:** Your films have a kind of fearlessness and purity. What do you think is the essence of a documentary?
Hu: Truth. Of course there is something else behind the truth. When I started making *Lin Zhao*, I gained a deeper understanding of the truth of documentary and slowly realised what kind of country I am living in. I can say it’s still a totalitarianism system, right? Our parents fought for this system and we live in it. Now many people reflect on it and criticise it, and even give up their lives in confronting it. You find yourself wondering where China stands in the whole process of world culture or world history. I came to this point slowly. While making *Remote Mountain*, I still wanted to make more truthful things, but the pursuit of the truth ended up being closer to the essence of the social system, and it made me slowly understand that there was a term called totalitarianism.

Sun: Where did you first learn the term totalitarianism?

Hu: In an article by Lin Zhao. This was a very shocking experience for me. When I read Lin Zhao’s writing, she used the term totalitarianism to summarise the social system, and I was very shocked. But I had to ask Gao Hua for advice on how to understand this word. In Lin’s writings, she repeatedly uses the term totalitarianism to criticise the society and the system, and this had a great impact on me.

Sun: When you were making *Lin Zhao*, it was a documentary you made for her on the one hand, and on the other hand, it also presented your own intellectual growth.

Hu: Yes. In the process of filming *Lin Zhao*, I had to go through Lin’s thoughts and the ideas she put forward, otherwise how could I grasp her spiritual trajectory? In fact, before I made Lin Zhao, I was very unfamiliar with the term *jiquan zhuyi* (极权主义) [totalitarianism] and thought *ji* meant concentration.

Sun: In *Lin Zhao*, you have fully expressed how dazzling Lin’s thoughts and spirit were at the time. I’m curious how much time and effort you spent in researching the archival materials about her during the process of filming Lin Zhao?

Hu: For a long time I didn’t find any information on Lin. I just interviewed some of her classmates, but I couldn’t find any information, even just a few words. But once I was able to obtain a lot of information at once, namely Lin Zhao’s 140,000-word writing and the appendices at the back. That was after finding Mr Gan Cui, who gave me all the information he had on Lin Zhao. The whole process was very dramatic, so I won’t go into that. After giving me the original material, he said he had also made a copy by hand, and he gave me a copy of that. As some of the original version was unclear, his copy added to the original. I kept reading his copy and the original to research Lin Zhao. What was her spirit? Was she mentally ill or was she
a person with a normal mind? What stage of history could her mind fit into? I had to find out these things about her from my very poor historical knowledge, which was actually quite difficult.

Sun: I could feel from the film that you were very emotional at times during the shooting.

Hu: I was very emotional. I don’t remember how many words Ganzui copied by hand, but I told him that I would return it to him in two days, and then I read it day and night. Lin Zhao’s writing really moved me. Firstly, I had never thought Chinese writing could be expressed in a way she did it. Secondly, her critique of the system is very thorough and impressive. I had never seen such glare in the prisoners and death row inmates I had faced in the past, and after reading those materials, I didn’t know what to say. After reading it, I quickly returned it to Gan Cui to ensure that I kept to my words so he could lend it to me again. After interviewing a lot of people, I was often in tears when editing the film, both when I was listening to the interviews and when I was narrating myself. When the first version came out, I was very excited. I tried to keep my emotions down so that I didn’t get too emotional. But it was very obvious in the first version that I had too much emotion in the film, and I slowly revised it later.

Sun: I could feel the suppression of your emotions in the final film.

Hu: During this process, my understanding of Lin Zhao was growing. At first when I read some of her accounts of Christianity, I didn’t understand them at all and even wanted to skip them, as I was looking for her discourse on democracy and freedom. Later on her uncle Xu Juemin had a point that Lin was not a Christian, but a democratic freedom fighter. But as I read Lin Zhao’s stuff over and over again during the editing, I found that Christianity had a much greater influence on her. Although I didn’t quite understand it, I hadn’t been exposed to Christianity at that time, so I started reading Bible. But I didn’t understand Bible at all at that time. I read it once without knowing what it was saying, but then I attended church and talked to Christian friends. Gradually I came to feel its spirit of love, which is to use great love to solve the most difficult and insoluble situation for human beings. The spirit of Christianity is not about asking others to devote, but to devote oneself. These are things that were not in my knowledge structure in the past, so I hoped to express such spirituality of Lin Zhao in the film.

Sun: In Lin Zhao, you have presented her spirit and made the most profound reflection on that period of history that I have seen in a documentary so far, without slipping into a story about a woman on death row during the Cultural Revolution or re-enacting the narrative of an event. I lost two days of sleep after watching this film. I was very struck by the fact that I did not expect Lin to be so forward thinking at that time. My
exposure to Christianity was a little earlier, and I could understand the nourishment it gave her and its role in the construction of her mind, and that this great love enabled her to continue fighting fearlessly.

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**Sun:** How did *Spark* begin?

**Hu:** I knew about [the story of] *Spark* when I was filming the interviews for *Lin Zhao*. I wanted to extend *Lin Zhao* a bit and also to let people know that there were still people thinking about these issues in those days. It wasn’t just that a rightist was arrested and then put into the camp, and then went silent - these people never spoke again. I want to say that people like Lin didn’t just grow their thoughts from books, from some ideas, or from individuals, but they were actually connected to the social formations of the time. I had the idea of making *Spark* when I was working on *Lin Zhao*, but I didn’t find any specific materials for *Spark*. It didn’t go very well. Although everyone in the interviews mentioned this publication, I didn’t see it myself, so the film couldn’t go ahead. In the end Tan Chanxue found these materials so we could make the film. After the first draft of the film came out, we showed it to some of the interviewees and they made many comments. I considered those comments because everyone’s memory was different. Then I made many more changes. After Gu Yan watched the film, he came up with a lot of his opinions and added some key points, such as the fact that they had two printers to print *Spark*, whereas I had always thought that there was only one. He also mimeographed *Spark* in Shanghai. *Spark* was shot earlier, but it was finished until later.

**Sun:** As an independent documentary filmmaker, you are very pure. What does independence mean to you?

**Hu:** Personally, I think the so-called independence is about presenting how much you understand a certain stage of human society by filming the social system. If you don’t have an understanding of the system, then your work is not independent.

**Sun:** Your understanding is reflected in the film, which has a strong intellectual self-consciousness and a social analysis of the subject.

**Hu:** I think that the practice of following the subject without judgement is influenced by the Western concept of the ‘fly on the wall’. This method depends on the context. The fly needs to have a basic judgement to feel something. In a free country, where everyone has the right to speak and not be arrested, you can be a ‘fly on the wall’. But in a totalitarian state where you pretend to be a fly on the wall, you are actually trying to cater
to both sides.

I also strongly felt that I had to move forward on my own and not worry about what other people thought. One thing that alerted me to this was that when the editing of *Lin Zhao* was done, it was shown at Cui Weiping’s place. Cui Weiping invited Ding Dong (丁东), Qian Liquan (钱理群), Hao Jian (郝建), Zhang Xianmin (张献民), Zhang Yaxuan (张亚璇) and a few others. After watching the film, Cui Weiping wrote an article entitled *Searchinging for Lin Zhao’s Soul*, which was published in *South Reviews* on 28 April 2004. The article says that after the screening, there were two very different poles of thoughts: one was from documentary filmmakers, saying, ‘Why did you make this film, Hu Jie? You are not even a Christian. They even said, ‘Hu Jie, this film seems to be a CCTV film, you have been a paradox.’

**Sun**: There is no way CCTV could make a film like this.

**Hu**: A friend happened to have a CCTV reporter with them at the time. This reporter said that CCTV could not make such a film, as it was not in line with the style of CCTV at all. He defended me from my point of view. The debates were very interesting. Zhang Xianmin said something that stung me. He said, ‘You are filming a hero.’ He thought there was something wrong with my perception, saying that I was portraying a hero and it was CCTV’s perception. I think if there are no more rebels nor thinkers in this country and if you don’t make heroes out of the rebels and thinkers, then you have to give them a name, right? I’m not saying she was a hero, but I know her spirit was very shocking at that time. That was the alert which made me think how I face those thinkers of history who were fighting for the people.

What I wanted to say in particular is that there are people in our nation who are really flighting for the people. Whatever you call them, we must respect them, so that it is meaningful. It’s like Sisyphus rolling a boulder. The boulder will fall again, but you have to keep rolling upwards, otherwise what is the meaning of your life? Our current state and so-called hope are like a set of prints I made: Sisyphus keeps rolling the boulder up the hill, rolling it up and falling down again, forever. I particularly like the Sisyphus in Camus’s writing that when he’s rolling that boulder, his face is covered in mud, and the mud on his face and on the boulder is so integrated that you can’t tell from a distance whether it’s his head or the boulder; he’s always rolling up.

**4**

**Sun**: How did you contact the old man in *Though I Am Gone*? It’s almost impossible to find written information about that period of history.
Hu: After *Lin Zhao* came out, an American scholar, Wang Youqin (王友琴), contacted me and said, ‘Hu Jie, you should make some films about the Cultural Revolution.’ She also gave me a copy of the book she wrote, *Victims of the Cultural Revolution* (文革受难者) [published in 2004 by Hong Kong Open Press]. She collected information on the victims of the Cultural Revolution and wrote out their history. She also suggested which themes I could film. I did consider it after talking to her. I contacted Wang Jingyao (王晶垚, Bian Zhongyun’s husband), but he rejected me immediately. It was about 2004 when he rejected the interview, but a year later he suddenly called me again and said he could meet with me. I went to Beijing from Nanjing. He was very cautious and even asked Ding Dong to come to his place to prove that I was the real Hu Jie. When I entered his house and saw Dingdong there, Dingdong confirmed with him and he believed me. From then on he said he could accept my interview.

Sun: How long did it take to make *Though I Am Gone*?

Hu: I filmed it from 2005 to 2006. I wanted to have a film that could facilitate a dialogue with history on the 40th anniversary of the Cultural Revolution. I was living in Nanjing at the time and the old man was in Beijing. He didn’t just say everything within one interview. He just said a bit at a time.

Sun: Why? Was he wary or was it something else?

Hu: There was wariness. One reason is wariness, and the other is that he probably had not found all the information. He sometimes called me, saying ‘I can think of one thing.’ Then I just quickly travelled from Nanjing to Beijing and shot him for this one thing. I thought he might be talking about several other things, but he only talked about this one thing.

Sun: At that time you didn’t know that he had a camera and so much information? When was the structure of the film formed?

Hu: I didn’t know any of that. He gave it to me bit by bit, like squeezing toothpaste. This old man had seen *Lin Zhao* and requested to make a film that would stay like *Lin Zhao*. That was his request on the first day. I later found out that he had some materials taken away by a Chinese living in Australia who never returned them, so he stopped trusting people so easily. I could understand that. Gradually I knew he had photos and hoped to publish a photography collection for him, which he didn’t agree to in the end. But this old man had a good habit of keeping all his things, even the little medicine bags, so he had everything in that little room. He had to go through it bit by bit, but he wouldn’t let you do that. Well, I would just film him going through
it. By the time he showed me those photos, I had this structure, and all of a sudden it came into my head.

**Sun:** He had been keeping that camera?

**Hu:** Yes. When he was telling me about it, I thought of using this camera and these photos as a structure. When that clock in his house rattled, I thought, this is the footsteps of the times. Then I was reading a poem by Pasternak, and a line occurred to me: ‘Though I Am Gone, I must rise after three days, like the flowing water, like the incessant caravan; generations will come out of the darkness, bear my judgment.’ His wife, Bian Zhongsheng, was killed by her students. But by the time I was filming, no one had been interviewed and none of her students had apologised. When I called them, they all said, ‘We’ve forgotten about it. It didn’t happen. We don’t have time right now.’

**Sun:** People were killed in the Cultural Revolution, but there was never a historical trial.

**Hu:** There never was. I even set something up. After a version of the film was completed, I found a teacher called Lin Mang (林莽) who was the only teacher agreeing to be interviewed. He had contact with the students. I said, if you show the film at your place, I will be there, and after the screening, I could discuss with everyone. I wanted to shoot some footage of people reminiscing, discussing, and reflecting. He made all the contacts, but he told the students that I was also going. None of them went, except that they allowed me to attend a gathering many years after this film was finished. I met Song Binbin (宋彬彬) and Liu Jin (刘进) on that occasion. I talked to them and asked for their views on the film. They all said they had no opinion. They thought the film was fairly truthful and that they could accept it. They also talked about their experiences of what they thought happened at that time, but of course, in their conclusion, they had nothing to do with this tragedy.

**Sun:** When he told you that he had Bian’s hair and bloody clothes, was it at the last visit?

**Hu:** Until the last visit, he told me that he had these relics, and he then pulled out a box. When he pulled it out, I had a feeling that the film could end, because I had travelled around numerous times and I was really tired of travelling. I kept thinking, ‘How is this going to end?’ Then he pulled out the box and opened all those things. While he was opening them, I felt like I was suffocating as I was filming, and I couldn’t go on. I asked him what kind of song Bian liked. He then said ‘The Goddess of Liberty’, which is from *On the Taihang Mountains* (在太行山上). Then I drew him into the song and asked him to sing it, so I could relax myself a bit. I thought I had shot enough stuff, it was weighing me down, and I thought the audience was
overwhelmed too, so I had to release it. The lyrics of that song are particularly apt: ‘The Goddess of Liberty is singing.’ That generation actually had the Goddess of Liberty in their minds, and they were singing on the Taihang Mountains!

**Sun:** When I saw the film and heard that song, it was so ironic that it even felt surreal.

**Hu:** I think history is that so many people, in their pursuit of freedom, end up digging an abyss or a graveyard for themselves. It is inhumane and they just died. I hadn’t read *How the Red Sun Rose* by Gao Hua at the time, nor did I know that this had already started during the Yan’an rectification period. These people had been young and they had ideals and pursuits. They wanted to make this society a good one, but look at how they ended up. It seems like doom, and there is nothing you can do when this doom comes. But it is also strange that whenever I make a similar film, there is always a Christian presence. In fact, this old man was not a Christian, nor did he have any faith. But after this incident, he found that he had to carry this cross for the redemption.

**Sun:** Comparing Lin Zhao’s extraordinary resistance and sacrifice, Bian Zhongwei in *Though I Am Gone* is a victim. Filming her is an exposure of the Cultural Revolution, while her husband Wang Jingyao is the one who rolls the boulder.

**Hu:** In fact, during the process of filming about Bian, after I understood the whole story and read what Wang Youqin wrote about it, I felt that I definitely couldn’t film it from this angle. Because from this angle, she was just a victim. I could never finish filming the victims. I had to find something else among them. So I just shoot how her partner recorded the history.

**Sun:** Yes, he is a historical vigilante.

5

**Sun:** Can you tell us about *Food Ordeal*?

**Hu:** *Food Ordeal* took quite a long time to film. One reason was that the large amount of research, and the other was that it was also very difficult to find people to interview. We went to their home in Xinyang (信阳) and [the interview] was agreed, but they changed their mind, so I couldn’t get anything. This happened quite a lot, so the interviews took quite a long time. Usually a friend provided some information and I went
there, but it’s hard to say whether I could get a shot or not. It was completed at the end. At first I wanted to shoot Wu Yongkuan (吴永宽) who built the first memorial for the victims of the Great Famine in Guangshan County. After him, I wanted to make it a multi-dimensional film. Since Guangshan County is close to the Chaya Mountain People's Commune, I started interviewing people there. A lot of people helped me, and a lot of the people I interviewed have passed away and they haven’t seen the film.

**Sun:** *Food Ordeal* is a very complex film. From your research and the structure of the film, I can tell that you made a lot of effort. The film is very subjective in terms of the structure and audio-visual language. You intertwined the Henan opera *Qin Xianglian* (秦香莲), memories of the Great Famine, and scenes of the local people growing and selling food on the street. Did you have this in mind when started editing the film or it was since you started filming?

**Hu:** It was formed during the filming process. Regarding the use of the Henan opera *Qin Xianglian*, I think sadness is the soul of Henan opera, but nowadays people don’t understand Henan opera from this perspective, which is a shame. Unlike the resounding northern Shanxi folk songs on the Loess Plateau, Henan opera is a desolate outburst of soulful repression to the extreme, which makes you feel agitated when you hear it. The storyline of *Qin Xianglian* is exactly the same as my film, with the same tone. I thought of this Henan opera during the shooting process.

**Sun:** Apart from interviews and archival documents, on-the-spot footage is mainly about food and some road signs.

**Hu:** I think these are the basic shots for a documentary. You have to shoot the life and work of the people wherever you go. These are basic shots. In fact, during the whole interview process, I tried to capture all levels: from the lowest level of the people who were starving, the village leaders, the town leaders, the county leaders, the regional leaders, the provincial leaders, to the national leaders, so that each level can show the state of each one of them. This way, you might be very sad and angry, and unable to step out of this grief and pain, but you can still somewhat objectively illustrate the state of the country at that time. I think one of the major flaws of this film is that I couldn’t find out how the CPC Central Committee, especially Mao Zedong, corrected mistakes at that time. He corrected the mistakes for a period of time, but I don’t know the motive of this correction and to what extent he tried to do so. I couldn’t find any specific information, as they all glorified him, which is a big flaw. I know that I can only briefly mention it. This is not something that can be solved by our generation. We have to wait until the next generation or the archives to really opened up, when people can really objectively understand this person and this period of history, they might have a kind
of judgment.

Sun: The film is as logical as an expository essay, from the start of organising cooperatives, then the communist wind, the great steel-production, to the widespread starvation, plucking away layer by layer, and finally it was actually a human disaster. Two of your interviewees were particularly expressive. One was the former director of the Women’s Federation called Zhang Lanying (张兰英). Her talk was very vivid and she was able to talk frankly in front of the camera. How did you manage to get her to talk like that?

Hu: She was the director of the Gushi County Women’s Federation at the time, and her husband was the secretary of the county party committee. They were all arrested during the ‘democratic revolution’ and were not allowed to return to their original positions. They had some reflections, despite being superficial, and wanted to express themselves. They thought they had followed the orders of their supervisors but still got arrested, so they actually had complaints. But her husband wouldn’t say the way she did. After all, so many people died of starvation within her husband’s jurisdiction. He still told me what was going on at the time, and I just wanted him to say what happened at the time and that’s enough.

Sun: From a female point of view, she spoke of women in the People’s Commune being so tired that their wombs fell off and they couldn’t have children. The way she put it was very arresting. What she said also unconsciously brought out the Chinese patriarchal thinking; that she could only take care of her father and her brother, but not her sister, who was left to starve to death. As a woman, this patriarchal ideology was also very strong, and you have left historical evidence in this film. There is also a shocking narrative from an ordinary Chinese woman.

Hu: One day, a local said someone’s mother was from the area, so we went to visit her. What she said was very powerful and quite a lot, some of which I didn’t know how to edit into the film. Her own brother was killed and then eaten by her stepfather who later ran away. I don’t know if anyone would seriously study that period of history and the state of those people at the bottom of the society.

Sun: Where did you get the footage of the extreme poverty in rural Henan?

Hu: From the documentary Jiao Yulu (焦裕禄), which was shot around the 1960s when the economy had just recovered. We saw that the villages were still in a state of decay, people were wearing rags like fishing nets, many children didn’t wear anything, and all the houses had earthen walls. I found out what the countryside was like at that time through a film that glorifies [the CCP].
**Sun:** *Liaoxi Chronicle* looks at the fate of the rightists through the family’s search for their father as a clue.

**Hu:** My idea at the time was to tell the story of the rightist labour at that time through the perspective of an upper-class family, but in the process of filming, I found that their children or grandchildren had not studied their father’s or grandfather’s generation at all. It was just an emotional connection. In this process of searching, it revealed what kind of path his father had taken. In fact, at that time, there were concentrated labour camps for rightists in every province. People paid a lot of attention to them, in particular the Jibiangou Labour Camp (夹边沟劳教农场), but I have presented the situation of this labour camp in Liaoning.

**Sun:** When did you know that Liaoning had buried so many people under the bridge piers when they were building the bridge?

**Hu:** I only found it out during the interview. We just wanted to go and find the place where his father died. After we went there, we lived with the people there and they told me what they saw at that time.

**Sun:** In this film, I saw some of the scenes you set up, such as the archives of his father and other prisoners and the list of the dead on the snow. Then He paid tribute to his father and laid the photo of his father under the bridge pier. Did you have those scenes in mind before you went there or did you design them on site?

**Hu:** It was something that I thought of before I went there. I found it very interesting that the labour camp would use cartoons to draw down the stories of his father as evidence of criticism. It would be very interesting to see these cartoons presented in a documentary, because in those days they didn’t take pictures of rightist labours. As there were many literary artists among these rightists, so they let them expose and criticise each other via cartoons and plays. I think these cartoons serve as a visual narrative and also give a sense that these rightist artists could also use art to serve the politics of the time, which is quite intriguing.

For the photos, I had a plan to go to that place to find out where his father died. I enlarged those photos and took them with me. When I arrived, I came up with the idea to put them on the ground in the area where his father died, and then asked his son to talk about it.

**Sun:** In the final scene of *Spark*, Xiang Chengjian (向承鉴) sets a fire under an open loess cliff to pay tribute to Zhang Chunyuan (张春元) who was shot dead. Did you also design that shot?

**Hu:** Yes. It was in the same place where Zhang Chunyuan was shot. It wasn’t a cliff. It wasn’t that high.
But now it’s been bulldozed and there’s this flat area with some camel thorns. I was supposed to go there to do an interview and get him to say what they were like at the time, from a place where his friend was shot. At dusk, I thought it would be a good time to go and pay respects to him. When the fire started, because the shape of camel thorn looked like a sphere, I suddenly thought that it was like a spark, a fire in a sphere, and that is the name of the film, Spark. So, I took special attention to the visual and colour during the shooting. Then, as the birds fly, the music enters. Lin Zhao’s poem came to me when I was editing, which is quite lyrical.

**Sun:** I can see your self-consciousness in Songs from Maidichong. At the beginning you asked him standing there holding a photo of Wang Zhiming (王志明), and there are a few other scenes where I can see your careful design.

**Hu:** Because the time for filming was very limited.

**Sun:** I heard a man in the film say ‘I’ll give you a local history book’ and you said back that I ‘only shoot singing’. You had a very clear idea of how to shoot.

**Hu:** When I got there, I got into the state of filming very quickly. The workload was saturated every day, and every shot felt like it was already edited in my head. Almost every shot is good enough to be used in the film. For example, when the pastor took us to interview Wang Zhiming’s brother, the grandmother started humming during the interview. I immediately panned the camera over, and after I did, I knew that this would be the opening of the film. Just two days into shooting, I already had the opening of the film. I went to Wang’s grave last because I knew I couldn’t shoot it first. If I went there first, I won’t be able to shoot the rest.

**Hu:** Songs from Maidichong was shot within just one week.

**Sun:** But the content of the film is quite comprehensive and rich.

**Hu:** It’s like God’s arrangement. Why did I want to become a Christian during the filming? While I was filming them, I thought, those faces looked so modest, but they sang such wonderful songs that could move you. As I was filming, I thought I would go back and get baptized. Since Lin Zhao, several other films of mine consciously or unconsciously had something to do with Christianity. I didn’t know that, when making the films, for example, My Mother Wang Peiying. Then it occurred to me that the people I filmed are people
who were very defiant and reflective. Christianity was their spiritual resource, so they could maintain a clear understanding in a chaos status.

**Sun**: Did you know about Wang Zhiming before you went there?

**Hu**: I didn’t know at that time. But one thing I did know was that Burghley was a missionary and Shimenkan (石门坎) was so famous that I thought I might connect the history together. When I arrived, I realised it had such a rich history.

**Sun**: You only went there once, but from the multi-dimensional interviews in the film, it feels like you had done a lot of research.

**Hu**: It was just a week at this village in Maidichong.

**Sun**: In the film, you interviewed the former official Zhou Ziren（周孜仁）. I was a bit resistant to him when he first appeared. But later I saw his analysis and reflections and thought he had some understanding.

**Hu**: He was a self-conscious researcher of the Cultural Revolution and later worked as a secretary to a leader of the Yunnan Provincial Party Committee, so he knew a lot of inside stories and had a lot of notes. He had reflections on the Cultural Revolution, so he accepted my interview and brought out his diary.

**Sun**: This film shows the power of religion and at the same time its crisis and destruction.

**Hu**: Burghley spread the Gospel to Shimenkan in Guizhou as well as the area I filmed, where a church was built. After the victory of the Anti-Japanese War, according to the government education census, it ranked in the first place in the country in terms of the level of education per capita. After the Cultural Revolution, not many people in that area could read or write. The children of those old priests were illiterate. You can see in the film that I interviewed the children of the old priest who couldn’t read and write, which is very sad.

**Sun**: Did you arrange the scene that the grandson of Wang Zhiming’s brother is standing outside the house holding up a photo of Wang?

**Hu**: No, it was too dark in his room and there wasn’t enough light, when he brought it out for us to film. Some scenes were quite magical. You may think they were arranged, but they weren’t. How magical were
they? When we were taking a break at the halfway, we saw an old man walking up the hill carrying something on his back. He was the brother of the priest we had interviewed the day before, and he used the money we gave him to buy a bag of grain which he struggled to carry back. So I think a lot of the shots in the film are divine.

Sun: The completeness and contingency of the film sometimes feels like it’s not a documentary, but an organised shoot, like the scene in which they carry with the hoe while singing.

Hu: That scene was a once-in-a-century occurrence. When we got there, we came across a group of people repairing the road from the village to the church. It’s quite rare to see that many people working together. She [Hu Jie’s wife] helped with the cooking and I filmed them. The pastor and the villagers didn’t care [about the camera]. We were not sent by the official nor came here to donate money, and we lived in a small ramshackle warehouse. The local villagers were very kind. They didn’t close their doors at night. I picked someone who seemed cheerful and easy to approach. I talked to her, visited her house, and asked her to sing. Then she said she had to work on the field and I said if I could go with her. She said yes. Her skirt swayed like a little bird’s tail as she walked.

Sun: Like a proud little bird.

Hu: I always felt amazed and surprised during the filming. I asked casually if you two could sing a song. They took it very seriously. They were singing in tune, one high and one low. I thought, ‘Great! Thank you!’ In fact, I asked them to sing a song, because I thought it would be useful in this film. When I got there, I found out that they sang day and night. I didn’t expect that they would spend such a long time singing.

Sun: Between what you present in your film and their real life, do you think you romanticised their lives?

Hu: Definitely. We didn’t come into contact with a lot of the villagers, and the ones we approached were the ones who were friendly and accessible. The main characters in the film were my neighbours.

Sun: What do you think about the ethics of documentaries?

Hu: Regarding the ethics of documentaries, an article written by a scholar said that my films focus too much
on morality. It seems that he was critical and saying that documentaries should not be too moral. I don’t think morality is actually something we present intentionally; it’s our bottom line. No matter you criticise the society, totalitarianism, or the ugly social phenomena, your aim is to build a virtuous and pleasant society, isn’t it?

**Sun:** What do you think is the direction of Chinese independent documentaries?

**Hu:** What you focus on always has something to do with the land where you grew up, and also with the authoritarian culture and totalitarianism. To soberly reflect the stories that rooted in this culture is probably a clear direction for independent documentaries in China.

**Sun:** What kind of books do you tend to read?

**Hu:** I like contemporary poetry, both foreign and domestic. I also like history, for example, Russian history and Chinese history written by Ding Dong and Gao Hua, which can dig out the historical truth. If you don’t know much about history, it will directly affect your films. When I made *The Female Matchmaker*, I went straight into how she talked about matchmaking. What was it like for rural young men and women? What was the rural culture like? What was the reality of the situation in the rural area? And then what were their financial interests in this matchmaking process? Although I did interview the matchmakers about their history, I didn’t have the historical knowledge or historical judgement at the time, so I left some of the profound content out of the film. What history? Before 1949 when this matchmaker was still a young woman, she was the leader of the women’s association in that village. She led the fight against the landlords, and she told me how they fought them. She said that there was a river in her village called the Qi River. When they took the landlords to the river, they thumped them on the head with a wood, so their heads broke and they fell straight into the water. This is what they did when they were criticising the landlords. Then suddenly one day a matchmaker came and her parents set her into a marriage. She was dragged to another village to get married. This is a very impressive part of her story, but at the time I had a limited understanding and I thought it had nothing to do with matchmaking, so I didn’t edit it into the film.

**Sun:** Her fate was determined by a matchmaker, and then she became a matchmaker herself.

**Hu:** After the reform and opening-up, she continued matchmaking and she got involved with traffickers transporting girls from Yunnan to Shandong. The police arrested her to stop them from doing that. I interviewed these people, but I didn’t use the footage. I thought this had nothing to do with matchmaking. This
is the limitation of my early films. Although *The Female Matchmaker* looks interesting, you can see that I lacked historical knowledge and judgement at that time.

Another [limitation] is the ability to analyse society. If you don’t have a clear historical understanding of the subject matter, it will affect your editing. When we talk about how unbiased documentaries are, I think it reflects documentary filmmakers’ effort, in other words, their perspective and analysis, in the search for truth. How are you going to make a film about the famine if you don’t research the topic? You have to research it. You have to have materials. As these materials are taboos, the filming progress can be quite slow. You have to read materials by all means and then identify their authenticity. This is particularly important. Only then do you form your ideas, which should be close to the truth and at the same time reflect your humane care.

**Sun**: This is the core of your films.

**Hu**: The term ‘humane care’ may be a bit old. But if contemporary art doesn’t reflect humane care, I would find it suspicious. I think contemporary Chinese people have no spiritual resources, and this was a problem that came to my mind during my filming process. Look at Wang Zhiming in *The Song of Maidichong* and the group of people in *Spark*, they really contemplated and they were not afraid. They felt that it was sincere and right to do that and that they could give their lives for it. I don’t think there are people like that anymore. The main reason is that our society doesn’t respect this spirit anymore.
胡杰, 一九八六年毕业于上海空军政治学院, 一九八八年入解放军艺术学院油画班进修两年。从军十五年。一九九四年开始拍摄第一部纪录片《圆明园的画家生活》, 一九九九年辞去公职成为独立纪录片人。主要作品有《圆明园画家村》、《远山》、《媒婆》、《在海边》、《寻找林昭的灵魂》、《星火》、《我虽死去》、《我的母亲王佩英》、《文革宣传画》、《辽西纪事》、《辽阔之痛》、《麦地冲的歌声》等。

胡杰导演从事独立纪录片创作近三十年, 完成作品三十余部, 拍摄的内容从独立艺术家、矿工、媒婆、独立思想的知识分子到关于“文革”、“大饥荒”、“右派”以及信仰等中国现代历史上一些隐痛和创伤, 但胡杰的镜头不是展示受害者的苦难, 而主要聚焦于那些有反抗和历史反思能力的人。作为当代一位独立纪录片人, 胡杰认为, 纪录片的伦理道德是纪录片创作者应守的底线, 纪录片人要有历史责任心、社会分析的能力和人道主义关怀的境界。

本此采访时间为二〇二〇年十一月十五日, 于青岛胡杰家中完成。

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**孙红云（以下简称孙）**：你是如何开始《圆明园画家村》的拍摄？

**胡杰（以下简称胡）**：一九九三年我就到了圆明园画画, 在那一直待到九五年, 两三年的样子, 一九九五年他们把圆明园的所有艺术家都赶走了。九四年季丹从日本留学回来, 我们在圆明园认识, 她跟我说：你身体那么好不如拍纪录片。然后她就告诉我拍纪录片的方法, 就像现在的传教一样, 她充满了热情。季丹说了这个以后, 我妹妹当时存有点钱, 她帮我买的超 8。到了一九九五年这个摄像机才买回来, 当时我还不太会使用, 这时候圆明园就开始驱赶了, 我想反正是练习就去拍吧。我跟这些画家相对来讲都比较熟, 但当时最主要的画家像方力钧等已经都搬走了, 所以有一些人就没拍到。我拍到的那些人本来以为他们是无辜的, 也不挑战社会体制的, 他们认为警察是不会赶他们的, 结果这些人也全都被赶走了。

**孙**：第一部片子你那感觉非常好, 虽然有些视听语言看起来有点青涩。拍完多久片子成型的?

**胡**：当时拍这片子的时候, 我根本不懂什么叫镜头, 也不懂什么叫推拉摇移, 什么都不知道。我就是先把
它拍下来再说。拍完了以后也没编，我就和他们一起全部被赶走了。赶走以后我想我上哪去，就想到了原来在青海写生时看到的那些煤矿工人，但是青海太远了，我就想找这附近的煤矿工人，因为我当时看了以后很震撼，他们都是驮一个筐像狗一样挖煤。

孙：那个时候还没有矿工题材的纪录片？

胡：没有。几经周折后我去了青海我原来画画的那个小煤窑。到那里我开始拍的时候才想我一点都不会拍电影，什么叫电影语言，根本不知道，然后我就想起文革的一句口号“同吃同住同劳动”。我必须和他们住在一起，否则的话我连住的地方都没有。但好在他们在一个小屋里住，我住在另外一间。那时我一直在想我怎么拍，什么叫镜头，然后就回想我看过得电影，比如《小兵张嘎》、《南征北战》，在脑子里就过这些电影，一个场面一个场面得慢慢地去想。有时候看着工人们爬出来了，我却不知道该怎么拍。我就先观察好长时间，才想到我该怎么拍他们爬出来的过程。

孙：当时你觉得拍摄纪录片最重要的是什么？

胡：我觉得是态度，你对待机器的态度。当时帮我买机器的那个日本记者，他说了一句话，当然都是季丹翻译的。他说“你对机器怎么样，机器就对你怎么样”，所以我对机器特别爱护，他说机器就是你身体的一部分。我觉得他对机器赋予了一种宗教感。他是跪着拜机器的那种虔诚，所以机器和他之间就不是我们教科书所说的各种技巧。

孙：那位日本老师叫什么名字？

胡：野中章弘，在早稻田大学教新闻和纪录片。他原来在日本一家很大的媒体公司工作，他认为超8（手持摄像机）可以改变世界，他就果断地放弃了自己得职业，他培养亚洲的学生，像季丹、冯艳，然后我，他受到小川绅介纪录片的影响，认可纪录片的纯粹性。

孙：你在青海拍的那些素材后来成片了吗？

胡：成片了叫《远山》。我拍到最后越拍越有感觉，矿工就和我关系非常好，我本来想跟着矿工回家再拍他们去麦收和他们的矽肺病，很多人都得了矽肺病，在家等死，我都想去拍。

孙：你那么早就拍尘肺病。

胡：我拍的时候才知道有这么多事，他们说很多矿工干几年就干不了活，我也不知道矽肺病是一种职业
病, 是一种社会上不允许说的病, 这些都不知道。有一天, 突然有个矿工说: 有人说要杀你, 你赶快跑, 最后就把我逼跑了, 其实这个片子就等于拍了一半。

孙：《远山》什么时候完成剪辑的？

胡：过了很久, 季丹搞了一个编辑机, 冯艳、季丹, 我, 三个人轮流编辑。季丹找了一个地下室, 既可以编辑, 又可以睡觉。然后我们就分工一人一个月, 我就住过去编辑。那时候是单机, 季丹教我怎样使用, 挺难学的, 也没人教你怎么编辑叙事, 我还记得和季丹一起讨论, 但我脑子里好像就知道镜头该怎么接似的, 可能是画画的思维起作用吧。

二

孙：你的片子有种无畏的纯粹性, 你觉得纪录片的本质是什么？

胡：真实。当然真实背后还有其他, 我是从开始拍《林昭》的时候才对纪录片的真实有了一种更深的看法, 其实是慢慢明白了我生活在一个什么样的国度之中。我可以说这依然是一种极权的制度, 是吧? 我们的父辈为了这个制度奋斗过, 我们生活在这个制度中, 现在很多人对这个制度进行反思和批判, 甚至为此对抗出了生命。你会发现, 在整个世界文化或者世界历史的进程中, 中国所处的位置是什么? 我慢慢才思考到这个程度, 开始的时候就是我跟你说拍《远山》的时候还是希望拍更多真实的东西, 但是追求真实, 最后就更靠近了社会体制的本质, 让我慢慢明白, 那时候才知道有一个词叫极权主义。

孙：“极权主义”这个词你是从哪里第一次知道的？

胡：在林昭的文章中。这是令我非常震撼的一个经历, 当时读到林昭写的东西, 她用极权主义来概括社会的体制, 我非常地震撼。但是对这个词怎么理解, 我专门为这个词去请教高华。在林昭的文章中, 她多次用“极权主义”来批判社会和当时的体制, 这对我的影响非常大。

孙：等于你在拍《林昭》的时候, 一个是你为她做的一个纪录片, 另一个是你在拍的过程对你自己的思想的成长过程。

胡：是。就是在拍《林昭》的过程中, 林昭的思想, 她提出来的那些观点, 你都要认真地去想过一遍的, 要不你怎么去把握住林昭精神上的脉络? 其实在拍林昭之前, 我对“极权主义”这个词是非常陌生的, 还以为是集中的“集”
孙：在《寻找林昭》这个片子里，你充分地表达出了林昭的思想和精神在当时是如此的耀眼。所以我好奇你在摄制《林昭》的过程中花费了多少时间和精力做资料文献的研究，然后从中提炼出来的？

胡：是这样的。在很长一段时间里，我没有找到林昭的资料。只是采访了林昭的一些同学，但是找不到林昭的资料，甚至是只言片语都很难找到。但有一次一下子就获得了很多资料，就是林昭的十四万言书和后面的附录，那是在找到甘粹先生后，他把他手里林昭的资料都给了我。整个的过程是很戏剧性的，这就不说了。给了我资料以后，他说他还手抄了一份，他把他抄的那份也复印给我了。因为原稿有些是不清楚的，他抄的就对原稿有补充，那么我就对着他抄的和原稿不断地进行弥补和校对，也在研究林昭，她的精神到底是什么样的？她是精神病还是一个有着正常思维的人，她的正常思维到底符合哪一个历史阶段？这些东西都是我要从我很贫乏的历史知识当中去找到林昭的那个点，其实挺难的。

孙：从片子中我能感受到你在拍摄过程中有时会非常地激动。

胡：激动得不得了。甘粹抄的多少万字我记不清了，我跟他说我看两天就还给你，然后我就夜以继日地看，林昭的文字让人非常地感动。首先，我觉得她的文字表达方式，我从没想到中国的文字可以用这样一种方式去表达。第二，她对于制度的批判是非常透彻和令人震撼的。我过去面对的那些牢狱犯乃至死刑犯，他们的生命中从没有透露出这样的光辉，那些资料看完后，我不知道说什么，那几天我不知道说什么，只是看！看完了以后赶快就还给甘粹，还给他以保证你说话有信用，他才会再次借给你看。另外，在我采访了很多后再剪辑时，经常地我只是那种泪如雨下地在剪辑，不管是在听采访别人说的，还是我自己配解说词的时候，都是在那种状态下进行的。第一版片子编出来的时候我很亢奋，使劲压自己的感情，让自己不要太激动。但第一个版本还是那种让人明显感觉到我的情绪在片子里太多，后来慢慢修改。

孙：成片里能感受到你情绪的克制。

胡：这个过程中，我对林昭的认识在不断地加深。刚开始读到一些她对基督教的叙述时，我完全不理解，甚至都想要跳过去。我去找她对民主、自由这些的论述。后来她的舅舅许觉民也有一个观点，他认为林昭不是一个基督徒的思想，她就是一个民主战士，民主的自由的战士。但是我在剪辑片子的过程中反复地读林昭的东西，我发现基督教对她的影响是更大的。虽然我不是很理解，那时候我还没有接触基督教，于是我就开始读《圣经》。但我那时读《圣经》根本不理解，读了一遍不知道《圣经》在说些什么，后来参加教会和基督教的朋友聊，逐渐才感觉到它的那种爱的精神，就是在人类最困难最无法解决的时候，用一种大爱来解决。基督教的精神不是让别人去献身，而是让自己献身。这些东西都是过去在我的知识结构中没有的，所以我希望在影片中能够把林昭这样的一种精神状态表达出来。

孙：在林昭这个片子里你表现了林昭的精神，并对那段历史做了目前我所看到纪录片中最深刻的反思，
没有滑进对一个文革中女死刑犯猎奇的故事中, 或者对一个事件还原的叙事中。这个片子看了以后我失眠了两天, 非常地震撼, 我没有想到在那个时候林昭的思想是那么地超前。我对基督教的接触稍微早一些, 我能理解基督教给她的人格的滋养和在思想建构中的作用, 这种大爱使她无畏地坚持斗争下去。

### 三

**孙**：《星火》是怎么开始的？

**胡**：我在拍林昭的采访时就知道《星火》的事情, 想把《林昭》延伸一下, 同时也想让人们知道, 在那个年代还是有人思考这些问题的, 并不是把一个右派因为言论抓起来, 然后进行改造以后就无声无息了, 这些人可能永远不说话了。我是想说, 林昭这些人的思想其实并不是仅仅来源于书本, 来源于一些理念, 也不是仅仅来源于个人, 他们其实是和当时的社会形态发生了一种联系。我在拍《林昭》的时候就有了拍《星火》的想法, 但一直没有找到《星火》的具体资料, 所以进展不太顺利。虽然采访中大家都说有这个刊物, 但是你没有看到, 这个片子成立不了, 最后谭蝉雪找到了这些资料, 所以这个片子就可以成片了。片子初稿出来以后给一些当事人看, 他们提了很多很多的意见, 我就针对这些具体的意见进行思考, 因为每个人的记忆是不一样的。然后, 我又做了很多的修改。顾雁看了片子后又提出来很多自己的看法, 他又增加了一些很关键的内容, 比如说他们印刷《星火》当时是有两台印刷机, 原来我一直认为就一台印刷机, 而且他在上海也油印了《星火》。《星火》拍得比较早, 但是一直没有完稿。

**孙**：你作为独立纪录片导演很纯粹, 独立对你来说意味着什么？

**胡**：我个人认为, 所谓的独立就是你看对拍摄的社会制度展现的人类社会的哪个阶段的认识程度, 你不对这个制度有认识, 就谈不上独立的创作。

**孙**：你的这个认识体现在片子里, 有种强烈的知识分子的自觉和对拍摄对象的社会分析。

**胡**：我觉得, 那种在拍摄中完全跟着拍摄对象走而不加判断的做法是受到西方什么“墙壁上的苍蝇”那种电影观念的影响。这种方法得看是在哪个国度, 这个苍蝇感到了什么, 它有基本的判断才能发现, 在一个自由的国度, 每个人都有说话的权利, 并且不被抓起来, 你才可以是“墙壁上的苍蝇”。但在一个极权国度, 你还把自己装成墙壁上的苍蝇, 实际上就是想两面都讨好。

还有一个, 我强烈地感到我必须要自己往前走, 不去在意别人的看法。有件事引起了我的警觉, 就是《寻找林昭》刚编好的时候, 在崔卫平家放映。崔卫平找了丁东、钱理群、郝建、张献民、张亚璇, 还有其他几个人。看完片子以后崔卫平写了一篇《寻找林昭的灵魂》的文章发表在《南风窗》 (2004年4月28日)上, 文章
说映后分成了截然不同的两派：一派就是搞纪录片的，他们说胡杰你凭什么拍这个片子，你又不是基督徒？他甚至说胡杰你这片子好像是央视的片子，你在用你的矛扎你的盾。

孙：央视不可能做出这样的片子。

胡：当时有一个朋友正好带了一个央视的记者，这记者说央视拍不出来这种片子，你完全不是央视的调子，他是站在维护我的角度上说的。当时的争论很有意思，张献民说的一句话对我是有刺痛的，他说，“你是在拍英雄”，他说我的观念有问题，说我是在塑造英雄，是央视的观念。我觉得这个民族如果没有了反抗者，没有了反思者，你不把反抗者反思者当作英雄，你必须要给他们起一个名字，对吧？我也没说她是英雄，但是我知道她的精神那个时候是非常震撼的。这就是那次的警觉，我怎样面对那些为民请命的历史反思者。

我特别想表达的就是在我们这个民族里有这么一些人，他们真是叫“为民请命的人不管你称他们是什么，但这是我们要特别尊重的生命，这样才有意义。就是像西西弗斯滚石头，这个石头还会落下来，但你还要继续往上滚，要不你的生命有什么意义呢？我们现在状态和我所谓的希望就像我做的一套版画：西西弗斯不停地向山上滚石头，滚上去掉下来再滚上去再掉下来，永远是这样。我特别喜欢加缪写的西西弗斯，他说他顶那块石头的时候，脸上全是泥巴，和石头上的泥巴都融为一体，你在远处看不出来是他的头还是石头，他一直在往上顶。

四

孙：《我虽死去》你是怎么和这个老人联系上的？关于那段历史几乎是找不到文字资料的。

胡：《寻找林昭》出来以后，一个美国的学者王友琴，她看到后主动和我联系，她说“胡杰，你应该拍一些文革的片子。”她还给了我一本她写的《文革受难者》（香港开放出版社 2004年出版）的书。她搜集文革受难者的资料，并把他们的历史写出来。她还建议说你可以拍哪个哪个，她说了很多的题材。她说过之后我也确实是在考虑，其中就有卞仲耘，我当时和王晶垚（卞仲耘的丈夫）联系了，但是这个老人一口回绝我了，不接受采访。大概是二〇〇四年的时候不接受采访，一年以后，他突然又给我打电话说可以见一面。我就从南京去了北京，他很谨慎，为了证明我是真胡杰，他还找了丁东到他家。我进他家后看见丁东也在，丁东就跟他说，这就是胡杰，他才相信。从那开始他说可以拍，可以接受我的采访。

孙：《我虽死去》拍摄了多久？

胡：《我虽死去》是二〇〇五年开始拍的，二〇〇六年拍完的，我希望能够在文革四十周年的时候，有一部片
子来和历史进行对话。这个片子拍了一年，我当时住在南京，老人是在北京，而且老人不是你采访一次他就会全都说出来，他每次就说一点。

孙：为什么？他是有戒备心还是别的原因？

胡：有戒心。一个是有戒心，另外一个他也可能没有找到……那些资料对他来讲也不是一下子全都能拿出来的。他有时候给我打电话说“我想起来一件事”，那我赶快就从南京跑过去，就拍他这一件事。拍完这件事以后，我肯定还想好几件事，顺便再拍一拍，可他就说这一件事。

孙：那个时候你还不知道他有多么多资料和有相机？影片的结构什么时候形成的？

胡：这些都不知道。他是一点一点就像挤牙膏似地给你。这个老先生看过《寻找林昭》，他说他的要求是拍得跟《林昭》一样能够留下来，这是他第一天的要求。后来我才知道，他原来有一些资料被一个住在澳大利亚的中国人拿走了，再也没有还回来，然而他就不轻易相信人了。我能理解，他一点点地给我，后来我就知道他有照片。我希望还能给他出一个摄影集，最后他也没同意。反反复复的，但这个老人有一个好习惯，他所有的东西都留着，连吃药的小药袋都留着，所以他的那个小屋里面乱七八糟什么都有，他得一点一点地翻，他又不让你翻。我觉得也好，那我就拍你翻吧。到后来他给我看那些照片的时候，我就有了这个结构，一下子我脑子就出现了。

孙：那个相机他一直保存着？

胡：对。他给我讲的时候我就想到了以这相机和这些相机照片为结构，他家的那表嘎拉嘎拉响的时候，我就想，这就是时代的脚步。然后我在读帕斯捷尔纳克的一首诗的时候，突然想到有一句诗叫“我虽死去，三日之后必须复活，就像流水湍急，就像那络绎的商旅不断，世世代代将走出黑暗，承受我的审判。”他的夫人卞仲耘被打死，那么多的学生，到我拍摄的时候没有人接受采访，没有人道歉。我给她们打电话，她们都说“我们忘了，没有这事，我们现在也没时间，我们都忘记了。”

孙：文革打死人，从来没有历史审判过。

胡：从来没有。甚至我还做了一个局，就是片子编了一个差不多的版本以后，我找到了一个老师，这也是唯一接受采访的老师，叫林莽。他和学生有联系，我说你把这个片子在你家放，我就去。放完片子以后和大家聊天，顺便我想拍一些大家回忆的镜头、讨论的镜头、反思的镜头。他都联系好了，但是他把我也去的消息透露给学生，马上学生都不去了，只是在那个片子完成了很多年以后，她们有一次聚会允许我参加。那次我见到了宋彬彬、刘进她们，我也跟她们谈了，让她们谈对这个片子的看法，她们都说没看法，认为
拍得还算属实，她们能接受，也谈了她们对那段事情的她们认为的经历，当然结论肯定是和她们没关系了。

孙：他最后一次才告诉你他存有卞老师的头发和血衣吗？

胡：最后一次他才告诉我他有这些遗物，他就拉出来一个箱子。当他拉出来箱子的时候，我就预感到这个影片可以结束了，因为也跑了无数次了，真是也跑得很疲劳。我一直在想这个结尾怎么结？后来他把箱子拉出来，把那些东西都打开，在打开的过程中，我拍着拍着就感觉快要窒息了，我不能再拍下去了，我突然问卞老师喜欢什么歌？他就说自由女神，就是《在太行山上》里的。然后我就把他引到这首歌上，让他唱歌，我也舒展一下。当时就想我拍的这些东西已经够了，沉重的都快要把我压死了，我觉得观众也压得受不了，一定要释放。那首歌的歌词又特别贴切，就像神来之笔一样，“自由女神在纵情歌唱”，那一代人居然他们心目中自有女神，而且还是纵情歌唱在太行山上！

孙：当时看片子听到那首歌，那种强烈的反讽并置感，甚至让人觉得很魔幻。

胡：我觉得历史就是这么多人在追求自由的过程中，最后给自己挖掘了一个深渊、墓地，是毫无人性的，就这么死掉了。我当时还没有看高华写的《红太阳是怎样升起的》，也不知道在延安整风时期这个基因已经开始了，这些人的牺牲，他（她）们曾经有过年轻，有过理想，有过追求，想让这个社会变成一个好的社会，但他们的结局就是这样，好像就是一个劫数，这个劫数走不掉的时候你也没有办法，但也很奇怪，我在每次拍摄类似的片子的时候，总会有基督教的出现，其实这个老先生以前不是一个基督徒，也没有信仰，但是通过这件事后，他发现他必须要背这个十字架，他要用救赎来做这件事情，所以他说他自己是背着十字架的。

孙：林昭的那种抗争和牺牲精神令人夺目，但相对而言，她的丈夫王晶垚则是这个滚石头的人。

胡：其实我在拍卞仲耘时，当我把这个故事了解完整以后，我看了王友琴写的这事儿，我觉得我肯定不能从这个角度去拍，从这个角度她仅仅是一个受害者，我觉得受害者你永远拍不完的，你必须要在受害者当中提找到另外一些值得拍的东西，所以我就拍她的老伴记录历史就够了。

孙：对，他就是一个历史的守灵者。

五

孙：谈谈《辽阔之痛》？
胡：《辽阔之痛》持续了很长时间，一个是资料调查量特别大；一个也是特别难，你找这些当事人采访经常会碰钉子，我们跑到信阳到人家去，本来是说好的，到了他就变卦了，然后你就什么都拍不到。这种情况挺多的，所以采访相对来讲就拖得时间很长。一般都是朋友提供一个信息，你就去，去了以后能拍到拍不到都不好说，但是还好终于做完了。我最初就想拍在光山县建第一个粮食关死难者纪念碑的老乡叫吴永宽。拍了他以后，我就想把它拍成一个多角度的片子，加上光山县就离那座嵖岈山人民公社挺近的，都是一个地区的，所以就开始不断地采访。有很多人在帮我，有很多我采访过的人现在都去世了，他们也没有看到这个影片。

孙：《辽阔之痛》这个片子内容特别复杂，从你的调研和影片的结构上能看出来花费的功夫特别地大。这个片子在结构上和视听语言上主观性很明显，你把豫剧《秦香莲》，当时粮食关的回忆，以及现在当地人种粮食和街上卖食物交织在一起，这个思路是你在剪辑台上形成的还是拍摄的时候就已经有想法了？

胡：是在拍摄过程中形成的，比如说用《秦香莲》那个豫剧，河南的豫剧我觉得它的灵魂就是悲凉，用灵魂在诉说，但是现在大家不会从这个角度去理解豫剧，我觉得这是挺遗憾的。豫剧不像陕北民歌，在黄土高原上高亢的那种东西，河南豫剧就是灵魂的压抑到了极致的那种苍凉地爆发，听了以后让你觉得心惊胆战。《秦香莲》里的故事情节跟我拍的片子完全是一回事儿，而且它的那种腔调，拍摄过程中，我很快就想到用这个豫剧很恰当。

孙：除了采访和资料片，你实拍的镜头主要是围绕粮食和一些路标的镜头。

胡：我觉得这些都纪录片基础性的镜头，你到了哪里都要拍那里的生活、工作劳动，这些都是基础性的镜头。其实在整个的采访过程中，我考虑尽量能够把各个层次都拍到：有最下层的挨饥饿的那些老百姓，也有村一级的领导，乡一级领导，县级领导，地区的领导，省级的领导，国家的领导，让每一个层次都展示出来各自当时的状态。我觉得这样做，可能你很悲愤，无法跳出这种悲愤和疼痛，但是毕竟还可以稍微客观地说明当时国家的那种状态。我觉得这个片子有个大缺陷是：我找不到中共中央当时尤其是毛泽东当时是怎么纠错的，他有一段时间是纠错的，到底这个纠错的动机和他努力到哪种程度，都不知道，找不到具体的资料，都还是维护他的光辉形象什么的，这是一个很大的缺陷。我也知道，只能一笔带过，没办法的，这不是我们这一代人能解决的，等着下一代人或档案真正的开放，人们真正冷静地去了解这个人和这段历史的时候，可能才会有一种判断。

孙：这个片子像一篇论述文一样逻辑严谨，从开始组织合作社，然后是共产风、大炼钢铁、到大面积饿死人，一层一层地拨开，最后其实是人祸。你采访对象中两个女的特别生动，一个是原来的妇联主任叫张兰英，她的讲述特别生动，并且能够很坦率地面对镜头，你之前怎么做她的工作的？
胡：她当时是固始县妇联主任，她的丈夫是县委书记，后来在“民主革命补课”的时候把他们全抓起来了，以后也没让他们再回到原来的职务上，所以他们会有种不好说是深刻的反思，但起码是有一种表达的愿望。他们认为自己是跟着上级工作做的，但还被抓起来挨整，他们其实是有点怨的，所以她就能说。但她的丈夫就不会像她这样说的，毕竟在她丈夫权限管辖范围之内饿死了那么多人，虽然不很理直气壮，但他会说当时是怎么回事儿，我就是想让他再说当时发生了什么就够了。

孙：她的女性视角讲人民公社的女人都累得掉茄子，子宫脱落不能生育，语言很生动。她说的内容还不自觉地带出来中国人对重男轻女思想的体现，她当时只能管她爸和她弟，管不到她姐就饿死了，她作为一个女性，这种重男轻女思想也挺重的，你这个片子留下了历史的证明。影片里还有个普通女人的讲述也令人震惊。

胡：那是一个很偶然的机会，当地人说谁的妈是当地人，我们就去找她，她说的内容很厉害，也说的挺多的，有些我都不知道该怎么编辑进片子里。她的亲弟弟被她的继父打死以后吃了，这个继父后来贫困潦倒没有粮食吃，逃跑了。我不知道将来有没有人会去认真研究那段历史，研究那些最底层人那时的状态。

孙：影片中关于当时河南农村特别贫穷的影像资料从哪里来的？

胡：从纪录片《焦裕禄》里来的，那个片子的素材大概是六几年拍的，而且是经济已经有所恢复后拍的，我们看到村庄还都是一片凋零，穿的像渔网一样的那种破衣服，好多孩子都是光着屁股，全是土墙土房子。我通过一个歌颂的片子找到了当时农村的景象。

孙：《辽西纪事》是以一家人寻找他的父亲为线索来看右派的命运。

胡：我当时的想法是，通过一个官宦家庭的视角来讲述当时右派劳改的事情，但在拍摄过程中我发现，他们的子女或孙子辈对于他们父辈或祖父那一代人的研究完全是不够的，就是一种情感上的东西。在这个寻找的过程中，展示出他的父亲走过了一条什么样的道路。其实当时右派集中劳改在每个省都有，大家关注多的像夹边沟劳教农场，我把辽宁的这个劳改农场的情况呈现出来了。

孙：你是什么时候知道辽宁修那座大桥的时候把那么多人直接填在桥墩下了？

胡：这个是当时采访的时候才知道。当时呢，我们就是想去找他爸爸死的那个地方。去了后我们就和那里的老百姓住在一起，他们就跟我讲当时他们看到的情况。
孙：这个片子里我看到有你设计的一些场景，如他父亲和其他劳改犯的档案，死者的名单放在雪地上，然后他祭奠他的父亲，还有把他父亲的照片放在桥墩下，这些设计的场景是你当时现场想到的去之前就有设计？

胡：这是在去之前想到的。我觉得一个非常有意思的事情，劳改场居然会用漫画，把他爸爸的那些故事作为批判证据都画下来了。这些漫画用纪录片表达出来会非常有意思，因为那时候不会给右派分子的劳动和生活拍照片的。他们让那些右派互相揭发、互相批判，而这些右派中有很多文艺工作者，就让他们以漫画、演戏来揭发和批判，我觉得这些漫画既起到了一个视觉叙述，又能够让人感受到这些右派的艺术工作者也可以用艺术为当时的政治服务，挺有意思的。

照片我是有计划要去的那个地方寻找他爸爸死的地点。我事先把这些照片放大带上就出发了，到了以后，我灵机一动，就在他爸爸死亡的那块儿把它摆在地上，然后让他儿子去说这些事情。

孙：《星火》最后的场景，向承鉴在一个空旷的黄土崖下燃了一堆火，祭奠被枪毙的张春元，那个镜头也是你设计吧？

胡：对，他就是在枪毙张春元的那个地方。那个地方被推土机推过了原来不是个悬崖没这么高现在被推过，有这么一块平地，正好那里有一些骆驼刺还是什么的。我本来是去那里进行采访，让他来说当时他们的情况，我觉得起码他在一个同伴被枪毙的地方去说会很有感觉。到了黄昏的时候，我觉得正好去祭祀一下他，那个火一烧起来时，因为骆驼刺是圆球形的，我突然就想起来这个就像星火，一个圆球的火，就是这个名字《星火》，马上就想到把这个当成开头或者结尾，当时没有想是开头还是结尾。所以，拍摄时的画面感或是色彩感相对来讲就很注意。然后，鸟儿在飞，音乐进入，林昭的诗是我在编辑的时候，面对屏幕时才有的这些想法，挺抒情的，我在尝试。

孙：从《麦地冲的歌声》里面我看到你拍片的自觉性，一开始你让他捧着王志明的像站在那里，还有几个场景也能看出你的精心设计。

胡：因为可以拍摄的时间很有限。

孙：我听到影片中一个人说“我给你一本地方志”，你回话说我“只拍唱歌”，从这里能看出导演的拍摄思路非常清晰。

胡：到了那里我很迅速地进入了拍摄状态。每天的工作量都很饱和，而且每拍一个镜头都感觉在大脑里已经编辑好了，几乎每次拍摄都觉得这个镜头太好了，都是可以用的。比如那个老奶奶，牧师带我们
胡：《麦地冲的歌声》就拍了一个星期。

孙：但影片的内容相当完整和丰富。

胡：我觉得这就好像是神在安排你，问什么说拍的过程中我就想成为基督徒呢，再我拍他们那些脸的时候就想，那些脸这么朴实，怎么就能唱出来这么好的歌，这些歌就能打动你。我一边拍一边想，我回去就受洗。你想我拍了林昭，还有好几个人，有意无意地都有基督教有关系，我不知道，比如说拍《我的母亲王佩英》。后来我才想到，我拍的这些人都是一些很有反抗和反思能力的人，而这些人的精神资源就是来自基督教，所以他们可以在混乱的状态下能够有一个清醒的认识。

孙：去之前你知道王志明吗？

胡：那时候还不知道。但是有一点我是知道的，就是伯格里是传教过去的，石门坎很有名，我觉得可能会把历史串起来，所以我过去了。到了以后才发现它有这么丰富的历史。

孙：你就去了一次，但片子中多方面的采访感觉是做过大量调研的。

胡：在麦地冲这个山寨就一个星期。

孙：影片中采访原来官方的那人叫周孜仁，他刚开始出现的时候我对他是有些抵触的，但后面看到他的分析和反思，他还是有一定的认识高度。

胡：他是一个自觉的文革研究者，后来在云南省委一个领导那里当秘书，所以了解很多内情，他有大量笔记。他对文革是有反思的，所以他对我的采访，并且能够把日记拿出来。

孙：这个片子让人看到宗教的力量，同时又看到它的危机和被毁灭。

胡：伯格理传教传到了贵州石门坎，还有我拍的那个地区，在那里建了一个总的教堂，抗战胜利后，国民政府在教育普查时那个地方人均受教育水平在全国是第一。而文革以后，那个地方识字的人都已经不多了。那些老牧师的孩子都是文盲。你看片子中我采访那老牧师的孩子都不识字，很让人痛心。
孙：王志明弟弟的孙子举着王志明的画像站在屋外，那是你设计的场景吧？

胡：不是，他那个屋里太黑，光线不够，他就拿出来让我们拍，有些场景挺神奇的，你觉得是安排的，其实不是，神奇到什么程度，你看我们在半路休息的时候，路远就看着一个老人背着东西走上山坡，他就是我们前一天采访的那牧师的弟弟，他用我们前一天给的一点钱买了一袋粮食很吃力地背回来。所以我觉得片子里好多镜头都是神来之笔。

孙：这个片子的完整性和偶然性有时候让人觉得好像不是纪录片，感觉像是组织拍摄，譬如扛着锄头唱歌的那个场景。

胡：那个场景真是百年不遇。我们去的时候，正好遇上他们集体在修村头到教会的公路才聚在一起，平常很难遇到那么多人在一起劳动。她（胡杰的太太）帮他们做饭，我就跟他们在一起拍摄。所以那里的牧师也好，村民也好，对我们都无所谓，我们不是官方派来的或者捐款的，我们就住在一个小破仓库里。当地的村民很善良，夜不闭户。我会挑一些看起来很开朗、容易接触的人，我就和她套近乎聊天，到她家里去坐坐，让她唱唱歌，然后她说她要下地了，我就说我跟你下地行吗？她就说可以。她那小裙子像个小鸟尾巴一样走起来一摆一摆的。

孙：像只骄傲的小鸟。

胡：我在拍的过程中处处感觉到新奇和惊奇，其实我是很随意地，说你们两个唱个歌，她们就非常认真，而且还是重声的，一个高一个低和得很好，我一边拍一边内心就“感谢！太好了！”其实我让她们唱的就是一首歌，我觉得肯定在这个片子里用上。我当时就是想去冲着这首歌去拍的，到了那里以后发现他们晚上唱歌，白天唱歌，用这么长的时间唱歌，这真是没有想到的。

孙：我在想，你片子中呈现的他们与现实生活之间，就说你对他们的生活有浪漫化处理，你觉得有没有？

胡：肯定有。我觉得那个村子里很多村民我们都没接触，接触的都是我觉得很友善的、能接触的。片子里的这几个主要人物，都是我住的邻居。

六

孙：你怎么看纪录片的伦理道德？
胡：对于纪录片的道德，有个学者写的文章里说，我的片子太偏重道德，大概是这个意思，好像他是用批判的态度说纪录片不应该太道德。我觉得道德其实不是我们故意呈现的，它是我们的底线。你说什么好说什么不好，你说你批判社会，你批判极权主义也好，批判社会的丑恶现象也好，不就是想建立一个良善、美好的社会形态吗？

孙：你觉得独立纪录片的方向是什么？

胡：你聚焦的什么，它总是和你生长的这片土地有关，和专制文化、极权主义有一定关系，是在这种文化下产生出来的东西，这是有一定关联的。清醒地反映这种文化形态下产生的故事，我觉得这可能是一个比较清晰的中国独立纪录片的方向。

孙：你读书大概是什么样的脉络？

胡：一个是我喜欢当代诗歌，无论是国外的还是国内的；另一个是历史，对于俄罗斯的那段历史，还有中国的像丁东、高华这些能够把历史真相挖掘出来的历史书。如果对历史不太了解，会直接影响你的片子。我拍《媒婆》的时候，直接进入她是怎么说媒的。农村男女青年是怎么样，农村的文化是什么样子，农村的现实情况是什么样子？然后这说媒的过程中，他们的经济利益是什么？虽然我也采访了媒婆的历史，但当时我没有历史知识和历史判断，所以就把一些深刻的内容没编到片子里去。什么历史呢？就是这个媒婆在一九四九年之前，她还是一个姑娘的时候就参加了妇女会，是那个村里的妇女队长。她带领大家批斗地主，她告诉我她们怎么打地主的。她说她们那里一条河叫齐河，她们把地主带到河边，就拿根棒子朝头上“砰”一下，脑袋夯碎人直接就掉进水里了。这是她们批斗地主时干的事情。然后突然有一天她就被说媒，父母给她许了一个亲，她就被拉到别的村成亲了。这是她讲的一段很精彩，但是当时我认识有局限，就觉得这个和说媒没关系，就没编辑到片子里。

孙：她的命运被媒婆主宰过，然后她自己又变成媒婆。

胡：还有一段是在改革开放以后，她继续在说媒，她和人贩子有了交往，把云南那边的女孩弄到山东，公安局就把她抓起来办学习班什么的，就是不让她们再干这些事了。这些人也采访了，但居然也没用上，我就觉得这个和说媒没关系。这就是我早期拍片的局限，虽然《媒婆》这个片子看起来也很有意思，但是当时我认识有局限，就觉得这个和说媒没关系，就没编辑到片子里。

还有一个，是对社会的分析能力，如果你对议题没有清醒的历史认识，会影响你的编辑。所以你说纪录片多么公正，我觉得它其实是一个纪录片导演在寻求真理的过程中的一种努力，就是他在寻求真理的过程中，他的视角和分析。你不研究大饥荒，你怎么拍？你要研究它，你必须要有资料，这些资料又是禁区，
所以就拍得很慢, 你必须要千方百计读资料, 然后还要辨别它的真伪, 这是特别重要的。最后才形成你的思路, 而这个思路要接近于真实, 同时要体现出你的人道关怀。

**孙**：这是你片子的核心东西。

**胡**：“人道关怀”这个词可能会老了一些。但如果当代艺术不去体现人道关怀, 我觉得它就很可疑。我觉得中国当代人没有精神资源, 这是我拍摄的过程中想到的一个问题。你看《麦地冲的歌声》中的王志明, 我拍的《星火》里有一批人, 他们真是去思考, 他们不害怕。他们觉得那样做是真诚的, 是对的, 并且他们可以为此献出生命, 我觉得现在没有这样的人了。我说的没有这种人, 主要是我们的社会不崇尚这个东西了。
Wang Libo (王利波), born in Harbin in 1973, began to make films in 1999. His works include the multi-media drama *The Wall* (墙), and political documentary films *Buried* (掩埋, 2009), *Oh! The Sanxia* (三峡啊, 2013) and *Entropy* (熵, 2016). He currently lives in New York. His three political documentaries deal, in plain cinematic language, with impactful disasters in Chinese history, namely the Tangshan earthquake (唐山大地震), the Wenchuan earthquake (汶川地震), the Three Gorges Project (三峡工程), and the Cultural Revolution. He intends to generate reflections upon how these disasters were inevitable in a seemingly well-run political system.

This is an online interview from February 16, 2021.

1

**Sun:** Let’s start with your films, as there is almost no information about yourself on the internet. Could you first introduce briefly *Buried*’s production process?

**Wang:** I started to film *Buried* in 2008. I read a lot of information on the internet after the Wenchuan earthquake. Shortly after that some original and unprocessed images with huge visual impact were released from the epicentre of the earthquake.

**Sun:** Like the scenes of school collapsing?

**Wang:** Yes, all kinds of scenes of school collapsing and many children being crushed underneath. At that time I thought they might have no ideas what these images would incur? Or they intended to attract more support with these heart-breaking images.

**Sun:** No concern for the ethics of the images?

**Wang:** No! They probably wanted to use the images to generate sympathy. Or from the point of view of
conspiracy theory, they meant to attract more donations. However, a social backlash was unexpectedly produced and the outcome was the reverse: people were questioning the construction quality of the school buildings; the question of why the buildings were destroyed so badly was raised. Then they started to retrieve the tragic images and post the rescue scenes. I was overwhelmed by the earlier devastating images and started to search for more information on internet, till one day I came across some information about the Tangshan earthquake.

Sun: Did you know about the Tangshan earthquake before?

Wang: Yes. But at that time I didn’t know about the book *A Warning Record of the Tangshan Earthquake* (唐山警示录, 2005). Later, I interviewed the author Zhang Qingzhou (张庆洲) in the film. I had no knowledge about earthquakes before; for me it was a natural disaster that no-one could have known about and just bad luck. I had never experienced an earthquake, neither had I thought about whether one was predictable or not. After I read this book, I came to think about whether there were similar problems of prediction regarding the Wenchuan earthquake as with the Tangshan earthquake? I started to research and found out that such voices, despite the accuracy and credibility of these sources, did emerge before the Wenchuan earthquake.

Sun: There is a film, *The Thirtieth Anniversary of the Tangshan Earthquake* (唐山大地震三十周年祭), which I watched in 2008 and have been unable to forget since. Do you know this film?

Wang: I didn’t know about it back then. When I finished my film, people told me about it. In fact, when I was filming *Buried*, Zhang Qingzhou told me that someone had asked him to participate in the production of a film on the Tangshan earthquake for an official TV station. That person was a female director and possibly for the purpose of commemorating the ‘thirtieth anniversary’?

Sun: Yes! The film was not shown on TV, but finally somehow reached the public.

Wang: Right. The director showed the film by herself. I came to realize later that it was the film by the female director that Qingzhou had told me about.

Sun: Your path to filming *Buried* was circuitous. Before that you also produced some material on the Wenchuan earthquake, with the intention to make a film. But finally you decided to focus on the Tangshan earthquake. How and when did you come to change your mind?
**Wang:** As I mentioned earlier, after I found out about the problem of earthquake prediction related to the Tangshan earthquake, I wondered if the same occurred to the Wenchuan earthquake. Later I did discover that some scientists had sent pre-warnings and reminders of anomalies. Originally I planned to make two episodes, one on the Tangshan earthquake and the other on the Wenchuan earthquake, through which I intended to say that history was always repeating itself.

In the process of filming, it was easy to get adequate material about the Tangshan Earthquake which had been relatively well documented, but difficult in terms of the Wenchuan earthquake. I did meet some experts, such as Geng Qingguo (耿庆国), who made it very clear that there were materials he could share in private, but not on film, because otherwise either he or I would have to take on the responsibility and the risk. I started filming immediately after the Wenchuan earthquake, when all information was released only after being presented to and approved by the higher-ups. As a result, I could collect very little material on the prediction of the Wenchuan earthquake. I put the important material on the Wenchuan earthquake at the end of the final version of *Buried*, which is the version you see now.

**Sun:** Yes. *Buried* is quite different from other works on the same topic—setting aside the Tangshan earthquake and only talking of the Wenchuan earthquake—such as *1428* by Du Haibin (杜海滨) and *Alive* (活着) by Fan Jian (范俭). Your argument focuses on one question: could the earthquake have been predicted and could the deaths have been prevented? Did you intend to seek answers for these questions during filming, or did you later decide to highlight the questions during the process of editing? The film is grand and argumentative. When were you decide to make the documentary film in the style of an academic paper?

**Wang:** When I first wanted to make this film, I saw that Mr. Zhang Qingzhou had already presented comprehensive research on this topic in his book. I based my film on the structure of his book, but not completely, because some of the witnesses had passed away, some had disappeared, and some simply were not accessible. For example, Mei Shirong (梅世蓉), a seismologist from the China Seismological Bureau (中国地震局) stopped talking after the Wenchuan earthquake.

**Sun:** Did you try to contact her?

**Wang:** I contacted her through somebody else, who said he could help to coordinate instead of giving me her contact details. She was ultimately not reachable. I thought it was OK: even though she was a very important figure, the only thing I could have done if I had really had the chance to meet her was embarrass her on camera. So, I felt fine when she rejected an interview.
Sun: That means that the structure of *Buried* was set in advance?

Wang: Through producing the kind of expository documentary that you mentioned, I wanted to explore how information was buried. Regardless of the accuracy of the information, or whether it could have been used, the public should have the right to access it. That is to say, first, the information should be revealed to people, then you can say that from a scientific perspective this information would not be used because it’s not solid enough as a warning ... All in all, people must have access to this information.

That is, the burial of such information could cause more severe damage and unnecessary injury and casualties. In the same way, the burial of information about the current pandemic will very likely cause more devastating secondary disasters than the pandemic itself.

This is what I wanted to explore: the institutional burial of information. I think such a big topic could not be illuminated by individual stories; in fact, it was hard to locate relevant individuals, and the result would have been very problematic if the coherence of individual stories was not established. So, I decided to explore the topic chronologically: about one or two years before the Tangshan earthquake, Geng Qingguo sent a pre-warning to the National Earthquake Administration (国家地震局). This event served as the beginning of the film: in other words, moments in time stood in for individuals and together made the whole film. This was my thinking throughout the process of making the film.

Sun: But the rhythm of the film is slow at the beginning: it takes a long time to go through the list of the names of victims of the Tangshan Earthquake, and to shift from one scene to the next. The most powerful parts appear in the later part of the film. I can see that you are not technically trained in the cinematic language. However, this is also a feature of your work.

Wang: You are right.

Sun: Without the constraints of cinematic rules, the visual effects of your film are fresh yet quite basic. How did you first start to make films? What films have you watched and been influenced by?

Wang: I did some video art before I started to make documentaries. I like video art very much.
Sun: Video art?

Wang: Yes, making videos. It’s part of contemporary art. I like it very much and have made quite a lot of videos, which were my unexpected bridge into the field of documentary films. I came to like this form of art and started to watch a great number of documentaries.

Sun: What is the documentary film that’s impressed you most?

Wang: Back then, I knew nothing about documentaries, so I went online to find out which were good, and thus accessed masterpieces, such as Shoah, the works of Michael Moore, and those of Wiseman. Because I was not trained in this field, I had no background knowledge and had to search online. That was how I found out about these masterpieces.

Sun: Which one was your favourite? Or whose work did you like best?

Wang: I didn’t like Shoah at the beginning. Maybe I was new to this field.

Sun: Or maybe you didn’t understand the context, the historical context of the Holocaust. It is an extended interview of over nine hours.

Wang: Yes, and the way he edited that interview ... At that time, I was more attracted by Michael Moore.

Sun: Michael Moore’s works are political satires and entertaining at the same time.

Wang: Yeah, his works are very relaxing, but also direct and get right to the heart of every problem. He has an easy, straightforward manner and at the same time is very pleasant to watch.

Sun: Yes.

Wang: I preferred to watch Michael Moore’s works at the very beginning. But in the past two years or so, I have watched Shoah again and realized how good and precious it is. Now I understand it and realise how marvellous it is. I underwent the same experience with some other films like Night and Fog, which I did not think highly of the first time, but later came to understand deeply. I have been influenced by these various films of different genres.
Documentary film was an effective means of expressing myself back then. With my youthful courage I thought documentary film was the best way to face problems that I wanted to explore. Also DV became popular, and one of my friends, Liang Long (梁龙), a member of the rock band Second-hand Rose (二手玫瑰), had a DV camera that he seldom used. We lived together, and I often went to his performances with the DV camera and took videos. I used that DV camera as if it were mine, and I thought that I could also make films with it.

Sun: Did the filming go well at the start?

Wang: That camera was a small one for household purposes, and mostly I used it for fun. I tried to focus on some certain subjects, but frequently quit after recording something. No complete work was made until I started to film Buried. Then I was determined that I must finish it. I had to cover this topic, and I was in possession of a lot of material, therefore, I must complete it. About one year later, the film was finished.

Sun: How long did you spend on editing?

Wang: I edited very quickly. It was during the Chinese New Year and I was in Beijing by myself and had nothing else to do. Between New Year’s Eve and the seventh day of the first lunar month in the new year, I finished the first two-hour version. Later I did minor revisions on the basis of the twenty hours of total material. In chronological order, it was easy to cut and edit the material.

Sun: Initially, it seems like you are discussing the predictability and unpredictability of earthquakes in Buried, but in fact you are exploring whether there is a law governing occurrence of disasters like earthquakes, and what’s its inherent mechanism. The beginning of the film is slow, and in black and white. The topic was also a particular interest of me, so I kept watching the film and felt it was like you were turning the screw with gradually increasing intensity towards the later part of the story. I would also like to know how you decided on the colour of the film?

Wang: I have a personal preference for black and white images, so I like to take photographs in black and white. Originally, I intended to produce a black and white film. But when it came to the part of the Wenchuan earthquake, it became bloody: the half-mast national flag and the earthquake scenes were blood tainted, which must be highlighted visually to remind the audience. Also, it was a bloody fact: the blood-coloured half-mast flag was reminiscent of the deceased children and other victims.
Sun: Well, you can see the metaphor immediately.

Wang: Yes, the bloody reality.

Sun: Now that you have completed three films, what do you most want to say about making documentary films?

Wang: I was not trained in this field. You can see there is a continuity, a kind of coherence, in my three films. There was a change of my own role: in *Buried*, my interviewees spoke to the audience and relayed to them what I wanted to say and to achieve in the film; while in *Oh! The Sanxia* I was the person speaking.

Sun: In *Oh! The Sanxia* you were the narrator in front of the camera?

Wang: Yes. I stood in front of the camera in the Three Gorges reservoir area (三峡库区) and by the Three Gorges Dam (三峡大坝). I wanted to see with my own eyes what it was really like instead of only listening to other people. So it was a process of change, from *Buried*, where other people talk, to *Oh! The Sanxia*, where I became the narrator, and finally *Entropy*, with a third, different style.

Sun: How did you come up with the name *Entropy*? It’s a very unusual word.

Wang: ‘Entropy’ is first of all a physical concept, indicating inescapability in the face of destruction. I found this explanation on the Internet.

Sun: How did it become the title of your film?

Wang: Totally by chance. I saw this word and its explanation and thought it would be a perfect title for my film about the Cultural Revolution. This is also a concept from communication studies. In the film I was not simply telling a story about the process of the Cultural Revolution. Like in *Buried*, I was not just talking about how many people died in the earthquake and whether the earthquake could have been predicted, but about how the information was buried by the system. What the film really focused was the tremendous damage that was caused by the burial of important information. The way that the system runs might cause, though not directly, disasters like the Wenchuan earthquake. As long as the system functions in this way,
disaster is inevitable. Similarly, Entropy is not simply about what happened in the Cultural Revolution, but about its inevitability. Why was a catastrophe inevitable? It was bound to happen in such a system: when the system reaches a certain point, disaster will result. It was in the same way that when entropy accumulates to a certain level, destruction follows.

Sun: How did you discover the sources for Entropy? The old man’s diary had been published, hadn’t it?

Wang: Yes. But I did not plan to film the old man at the very beginning. At first I thought it would be a film like Oh! The Sanxia, very comprehensive and encompassing, covering the origin, the process, the end of and reflections on the Cultural Revolution. It was meant to be an overall representation of the Cultural Revolution. I started to prepare for this film in 2013, immediately after I finished Oh! The Sanxia. By then I had already interviewed some Red Guards (红卫兵) who were students at Peking University (北京大学) and Tsinghua University (清华大学), and students and workers who participated in the armed battle in Chongqing, and had filmed the red guard cemetery in Chongqing. The cemetery had been closed, and I sneaked inside to film it. I kept on collecting more materials while continuing to film till one day I came across the material about this old man. Actually the filming plan and direction had been in constant flux as I had kept asking myself if I was capable to telling why the Cultural Revolution had happened and how it was actually took place. There were already many other people who had more information and were more capable than me, so it would be pointless if I was only to repeat this. In the end I decided to focus on an individual by filming how one particular person was making choices in that particular period of history.

Sun: In my opinion you just asked the old man to read out his diary in front of the camera. There was no reflection in the film; those occasional comments are not reflections. Of all his diaries, what made you choose the pieces for him to read?

Wang: Entropy was filmed in only two days. I spent longer choosing the diaries, but don’t remember exactly how long I had spent on that. For some time I was reading his diaries all day and picking the entries that I needed, which I thought were more important and would possibly provide some insight. I asked the old man to read out all of the diary selections and he did so in two days. Also, I did not spend much time cutting and editing. All in all, it was a precise process from choosing the diaries to the completion of the final film. But why did it only come out three years after I had finished the previous one? Because in the first two and half years I was collecting other material and filming other people, and only at the end did I decide to give up all I had made and to focus on this old man and his diaries.
**Sun:** He wrote over ten diaries. What considerations did you base your selections on, apart from a clear account of the timeline?

**Wang:** Another consideration was to include those big events, such as Wang Guangmei’s (王光美) visit to Tsinghua University, the calls from the Central Government, and major armed conflicts. And the other consideration was filming him, his family, and his personal feelings, such as his mother coming home on Sundays and his own views and reflections on some issues. From these three angles he was truer to himself in the film. If I’d only selected big events, without making the personal details known to the audience, he wouldn’t come across as a real person. Though he didn’t make any remarks in the film, he said at the end when he finished reading all the diaries: ‘This generation is so funny and absurd.’

**Sun:** At the end of the film, he said for some while he did not write a diary, not because he was tired, but because he was fed up with speaking against his own will.

**Wang:** I think this is his best reflection. Perhaps most of his generation only thought that the Cultural revolution was funny and absurd, without any real and serious reflection. They thought they were also victims. I also thought they were, in a certain sense.

**Sun:** They were complicit as well.

**Wang:** Yes. I think I am more concerned about ‘the banality of evil’, as Arendt said, in which evil does not necessarily mean killing people but is more an accumulation of all kinds of banal wickednesses. Though a lot of people died during the Cultural Revolution, only a small fraction of people were killers. So, I would like to film a person who didn’t kill, nor beat other people, who only wrote and shouted slogans and fought in a peaceful manner. Those banal wickednesses, rather than violent fighting and killing, added fuel to the fire of the disaster. This is what I wanted to say in my film.

**Sun:** It’s the first time I have seen a film of someone reading his diaries from the beginning to the end. The director stepped away, hardly interfering with the material or the subject. We as audience will be curious, what are his thoughts about that part of his life decades later? Did you follow up on that and why didn’t you want to include in? Now it’s just him reading the diaries on camera with a complete absence of the director’s reflection on the Cultural Revolution, which is rather monotonous in terms of the style of the documentary film.
**Wang:** I think my ultimate goal is to generate reflection in the audience, to make the audience think what they can do now. The Cultural Revolution is history, the past. Whether people from that time reflect on that part of history does not really matter as time can never be turned back. I want to show through this old man how people make decisions and what people do in a particular period of history, which as a matter of fact continues to now. Currently we are still in a particular time of period, just like the old man when he was young. Therefore, I want the audience to make their own reflections, otherwise, they just watch and think it’s all about history and has nothing to do with them.

By having him read out his diary, I give an account of the era and the circumstances, of the psychological state of university students at that time, what they thought and what they did. I think the process of the old man reading his diary creates a closed time and space, which is relatively complete. If the audience can enter into it, they can experience some degree of empathy, placing themselves in that particular era and thinking about how they would make decisions in this situation. I want to generate deep thinking in every audience member, rather than asking the old man questions like, ‘Do you think it was right? Do you have any regrets and thoughts...?’ I don’t think those kinds of interviews are of any interest.

We always feel that the Cultural Revolution was a special period in history, but as I said earlier, special times never end, and to this day we still have to face the question of how to make choices. In watching this film we are habituated to think first about this old man, but could we, through him, think about ourselves? What would I do if I had been in his shoes? What would we do if our present was no different from his? This is the goal I want to achieve in my film. But I don’t know how near I have come to reaching this goal and how many people will understand my intention. Anyhow, this is what I intended with my film.

**Sun:** There is little director’s creativity in the film in terms of script, but documentary should not be constrained to one form. After watching all three of your documentaries, I feel that you have redefined the relationship between the content and style in documentary. In this media age, every year a great number of stylistically very different documentaries are produced. Do you have some concerns about your own simple filming style? Is it that you haven’t found the best style yet or do you actually think this is the most suitable one?

**Wang:** I received a lot of photos in making this film, all taken by the old man himself. He had a camera and took photos of all that he was involved in: events happened at Tsinghua University, such as Wang Guangmei being denounced there with a ping pong ball necklace hanging round her neck. He had the copyright of all these photos.
Sun: Did you think about using some of the photos in the film?

Wang: I put these photos in the right spaces and time slots in the first edit, and later removed all of them from the final one. The reason was that I think an enclosed and independent historical time and space was formed as the old man reads his diaries, with photographs becoming redundant and being devalued as objects of consumption, which would finally destroy the integrity of the film. The current version of the film is more of what I intended, from which I also removed all colour and only retained the red, a symbol of the red culture that still exists in our life today. The red colour is a purposeful element of the film to make it more noticeable. Of course, Chinese people will understand as soon as they see it what this colour stands for.

I really didn’t care too much whether this film is pleasant to watch or not. For this type of film, even it is a pleasure to watch, the audience is still limited. Those who are not interested in this topic will not come to it regardless. As far as historical materials are concerned, I would like to include those that are directly relevant and properly representative. Redundant material might make the film more enjoyable to watch, but might be harmful to the essence of the film. That is why I am very conservative in using historical materials: I hesitated for quite a few days and then finally deleted all the photos.

Sun: Did anyone else also film this old man? When were you filming? His diary was published in Hong Kong in 2008.

Wang: Yes, but his book didn’t receive much attention. People may feel it was not interesting because there were no big events in that book.

4

Sun: Let’s talk about Oh! The Sanxia. What I like most is its substantial and forceful argumentation. It is like a stirring brainstorming, penetrating in its analysis and echoing in its conclusion. How did you start this film? I know the relocation and immigration of the Three Gorges Project was a popular subject of many independent documentaries. Bing’ai (秉爱) by director Feng Yan (冯艳) was one of them.

Wang: After Buried, I started to look for the subject of my next film. A producer, a lady older than me, recommended me the book Water from Tibet Saves China (西藏之水救中国) (Li Ling 李伶, Huawen Publishing House 华文出版社). She said I should make a film on China’s water problem, a very serious one.
The book describes the severity of China’s water problem. How should I present it in the film? I first researched this topic on the internet, and immediately came upon the problem of the Three Gorges Dam. The more I read, the more I understood the construction process of the Three Gorges Dam, and I decided that I must film on this subject. The film Bing’ai you mentioned is an example of a documentary featuring the story of an individual. For me, I am more interested in tracing problems back to the political system, which might be their origin. Of course, to focus on an individual is a kind of perspective, but I think to explore from the point of the political system would be a more relevant argumentative approach. The problem of the Three Gorges has been put forward since before the founding of the People’s Republic of China, which means that the Three Gorges Dam has been discussed, designed, and constructed all these years in tandem with the development of New China: the idea was first proposed in 1949, and construction work started in 1992 and continued till its completion in 2009. That is to say, the construction of the Three Gorges Dam follows the development of New China, with each key step of the dam’s construction echoing an inflection point in Chinese politics. The problem of the Three Gorges Dam is also the problem of China’s political system in that it reflects the outline of China’s politics since 1949. This is exactly what I want to investigate in my new film.

Sun: A scholar in the film discusses the relationship between centralization of power and project construction, saying that centralisation needs major project construction, and project construction highlights political centralization. Who raised this question, you or him?

Wang: The scholar was Lu Yugang (卢跃刚). But I am not sure who raised question.

Sun: How long did you prepare for the film?

Wang: I spent three years on that film, collecting material and revising the filming plan accordingly. I filmed the new material immediately after I received it, and then went on to look for more material and do more filming. If I found the previous information and data inadequate or inaccurate, I would revise the plan. This was my filming method during that three-year period: filming while keep collecting new materials and revising the plan at the same time.

Sun: So you have invested enormous time, energy, and money in these three years.

Wang: Yes, for more than three years I was basically only working on this film, occasionally producing some commercial work for a living.
Sun: When did you read Dai Qing’s (戴晴) book *The Yangtze River* (长江长江)? I think her book had a great influence on you.

Wang: Yes. In fact, there could not have been this film without Dai Qing. In her interview with me on *Buried*, Cui Weiping (崔卫平) asked me what would be the next film? I said I am interested in the Three Gorges Dam, and she said I should consult with Dai Qing, who had a very close connection with it and was in possession of an enormous amount of material and connections on this topic. Then I went to see Dai Qing. She asked how many people I have in my team, I said only myself; she continued to ask about the source of the funding and discovered that I had none. At this point Dai Qing said, ‘Libo (利波), it’s not that I don’t want to help you, but this is supposed to be a project of a national team, how will you do it without money and on your own?’ I couldn’t reply her and just left. Later I talked to Xu Yuping (徐玉萍) about the meeting with Dai Qing. Xu said, ‘Dai Qing was questioning how can you do this project only by yourself?’

Later, a friend called Dai Qing again and said that I was trustworthy and asked if she could help me as she could. Dai Qing said, ‘Alright, he can film whatever he wants or interview me whenever in needs; I can give him all materials that are relevant as long as he will finish it.’

Sun: Your interview with Li Rui (李锐) is of key importance to the film.

Wang: Dai Qing had been in close contact with Li Rui and connected me with him directly. I interviewed him lots of times. Also, Dai Qing provided me with a lot of information regarding people who together with her were intimately related to the Three Gorges Dam back in the early years.

Sun: The interviews in the film are loosely connected, but the arguments of the scholars are impressively solid and all-encompassing.

Wang: Yes! Wu Jiaxiang (吴稼祥), Lu Yugang, and Mao Yushi (茅于轼) were very important and influential scholars. Some other scholars spoke from their own professional points of view, like the geologist Fan Xiao (范晓) and experts from the reservoir area. Of all the experts, I knew how many I should film and who were most representative. I had read their papers and knew their opinions. I did not include all the interviews that I had shot in the film.

Sun: A different voice in your film from Dai Qing’s *The Yangtze River* was *The Three Gorges Diary* (三峡...
Wang: Yes. I thought I should have an official voice. I read Li Peng’s *The Three Gorges Diary* a long time ago, and I know that this diary was quite comprehensive. His purpose in publishing it was very obvious: to record everything; to show that the project was not solely his responsibility by recording other people’s involvement. Of course, some special facts must have been carefully excluded from the diaries, but everything recorded in them must be true facts. Since I was not able to reach a high-level official, Li Peng’s diaries were the most authoritative materials available. I present his diaries, together with the interviews and the scenes of the local places in the film, and the audience can draw their own conclusion.

Sun: The film is very substantial and encompassing with all sides of the story. The young official from the Three Gorges Group (三峡集团) spoke so ironically. How did you persuade him to speak in front of the camera?

Wang: To get to film in the reservoir area was a real story. I was short of funds when making this film. A cinema space in Chongqing invited Zhu Rikun (朱日坤) to show his films there. Knowing that I was about to film *Oh! The Sanxia* but lacked money, he asked me to screen *Buried* at that cinema. From there I could travel to the Three Gorges, expenses covered. I arrived in Chongqing, showed my film and said, ‘Don’t buy me the return ticket and give me the money.’ Later, Chen Ping (陈平) of Sunshine TV (阳光卫视) became interested in this film and provided some investment together with an official letter saying that I was a staff member to cover the Three Gorges Dam. As a result, I managed to film and interview at the dam. I would have never been able to do so as an independent documentary filmmaker.

Sun: That letter from the Sunshine TV also enabled you to interview in the Three Gorges Group and to cross the dam lock, was that right?

Wang: With that official letter I made an appointment with the Three Gorges Group for an interview, waiting for one week at the Three Gorges Dam before it was approved. A technician was sent to me to talk about some technical issues, but he didn’t know anything beyond that. The technical issues were also important, though, and after all, he was representing the Three Gorges Group. The lock exit was filmed on a cruise ship. Only with the official letter was I allowed to board the ship, which departed from Wuhan with boarding prohibited on the way. I managed to get on board on the lock and get off immediately after the ship exited the lock, using the official letter for a third time. The shots I took on board were very important for the whole film.
Sun: Those shots are quite metaphorical.

Wang: Yes, and they go through the whole film.

Sun: How many times did you interview local people?

Wang: I can’t remember now. Three to four or five times? Usually I did research on the internet in advance and found serious problems, such as landslides and the resettlement of immigrants. I discovered problems of various kinds and then visited the intended locations. I did further research and filmed in those specific places. Sometimes, I just happened to come across some incidents that later appeared in the film.

Sun: The woman from the Wen Family Compound (温家大院) sang brilliantly. Did you find her or did you meet her by chance?

Wang: It was a pure coincidence. Director Chen Fu (陈富) from Chongqing was filming a drama No Tears in the Three Gorges (三峡别哭) and came to the Wen family compound when choosing film locations. Seeing the film crew with a camera, the old women thought they must be from the TV station and insisted they film her ancestral home and what she wanted to say. Not being able to reject her, Chen Fu had to film her story, knowing though that it won’t be part of his own film. The woman presented the history of her family compound, singing and crying. Chen Fu gave me the footage as he knew that I was filming this documentary. Later I interviewed the woman a second time, but the scene of her singing in my documentary was filmed by director Chen Fu.

Sun: The tone of the film is not consistent.

Wang: Yes. The scenes which are very poor quality were made by a local video production company at the request of this old woman, who wanted to have a video recording of this old compound. She gave me a copy, from which I took some footage of this place in the past.

Sun: She said that this compound, which has been passed down for twelve generations, was owned by the Wen family (温家) during the Qing Dynasty (清代) till the Kuomintang period (国民党时期), and now it is no longer in the family’s possession. This is truly poignant.

Wang: Exactly!
Sun: This documentary is a good political satire, which is rare in China, while in the West it is a popular genre, such as the works of Michael Moore. You didn’t have music in your previous two films, while there is music in two scenes in this one. Could you talk about music in Oh! The Sanxia?

Wang: I mentioned earlier that me and Liang Long from the rock band Secondhand Rose are good friends, and I know his music very well. I decided to use his ‘Jump God’ (跳大神) when I was making the trailer. At the end of the film, Cui Jian’s (崔健) ‘The Last Shot’ (最后一枪) was used. As the film ends with the Tiananmen Square Protests, what could be better than ‘The Last Shot’? After all these years, I’m still quite satisfied with the selection of the music for the film.

Sun: Yes, the first piece, being satirical, playfully deconstructed the seriousness of the subject. It is a story about pretending to play God right up to the last shot.

Wang: Yes. It epitomizes China’s history from 1949 to 1989. I think China’s politics is all about playing God. The process of the construction of the Three Gorges Dam and China’s politics are like two trend lines on the stock market charts.

Sun: The film makes the Three Gorges Dam project the symbol of China’s politics.

Wang: Right. The film ends with a pitch black and a dim light in the distance, indicating the future of China and Chinese politics. What we are facing now is that you don’t know what’s in front of you, neither do you know what you’re facing up to and where the ship is going. No one knows how bright the light could become or, on the contrary, when it’s going to disappear. Everything is unknown.

Sun: Oh! The Sanxia is your only film made with financial support, right?

Wang: Yes. I was under little pressure when making this film.

Sun: Could I say that, according to your previous work, you have an obvious preference for certain subjects?

Wang: I think intuition plays an important role in my selection of subject matter. But definitely there is a general direction for my choice: I prefer subjects on historical catastrophes and events, and those related to politics.
Sun: What are the books that have influenced you?

Wang: *The Origins of Totalitarianism* by Hannah Arendt, from which comes the idea of the banality of evil which directly influenced *Entropy*. Also, I read books on political and historical disasters.

Sun: Have you encountered many obstacles in China?

Wang: No, not at the time of filming. But *Buried* was later banned on the internet: all its information was deleted from Douban（豆瓣） and other platforms, neither could it be posted on Baidu Netdisk（百度网盘）. After *Oh! The Sanxia* won an award at the Hong Kong International Film Festival, staff from the Beijing Security Bureau（北京安全局） approached me and said their leaders wanted to find the film but none was available on the internet. I gave them a CD of *The Three Georges* and *Buried*. They kept in touch with me for over six months, meeting regularly for a coffee and a chat, asking what I was filming and which film festivals I was going to, and so on, trying to find out what I was up to. As I wasn’t doing anything at that point, they stopped calling me.
王利波, 一九七三年生于哈尔滨, 一九九九年开始从事影像创作, 作品有多媒体戏剧《荒诞的墙》。纪录片作品主要有《掩埋》(2009)、《三峡啊》(2013)、《熵》(2016), 现居纽约。王利波导演的三部政治纪录片《掩埋》、《三峡》、《熵》以质朴的电影语言处理了中国历史上发生的唐山大地震、汶川大地震、三峡工程以及文化大革命等这些灾难。由此来引人思考这些灾难是如何在看似正常的体制运作模式中必然发生的。

此次访谈为网络访谈, 时间为二〇二一年二月十六日。

一

孙红云 (以下简称孙)：咱们从你的几个片子来聊，我查网上关于你的资料几乎是缺失的。你能先稍微介绍一下《掩埋》的创作过程吗？

王利波 (以下简称王)：《掩埋》是二〇〇八年开始拍摄的。汶川地震发生后, 我从网络上看了很多信息，有关汶川地震的信息。有些画面在刚开始的时候, 没有经过处理的画面从震中发生的地方流传出来了, 那视觉冲击力时非常很大的。

孙：学校倒塌的场景？

王：对，各种学校倒塌的视频，很多孩子被压在下面的画面，当时我觉得他们可能是没有想到这些画面的影响吧，他们可能觉得这些很惨的画面可以得到更多的支持吧。

孙：没有影像伦理的概念？

王：对，所以他们可能想用这个来煽情或怎么样，我觉得从一个阴谋论的角度，他们可能为下一步的捐款来做准备。但是后来他们发现社会出现一种反弹的效应，这种煽情就走到了反面：大家都在质疑和质问工程的质量，就是学校建造的质量，或者问为什么房子塌得这么严重之类的。然后他们就开始把这些画面都消除掉了，再然后就开始发布各种救灾的画面了。最早看到的那些画面对我的冲击力...
特别大，我当时就想做一部有关地震的片子。我就在网上不断地去搜集这些资料，有天，我突然搜索到了唐山地震。

孙：之前你知道唐山地震吗？

王：知道，但是不知道还有这么一本书。就是我的片子里采访的张庆洲（二〇〇五年出版了报告文学《唐山警示录》），还不知道有这么本书，没看过。我以前对地震真的没有任何的概念，就觉得地震就谁也不知道嘛，或者说那就是倒霉嘛，我从来没想过这个事情，也没经历过地震，就是这样。看到这本书后，我觉得这次汶川地震会不会也存在着像唐山地震这一系列的问题。我就开始查找一些资料，后来发现在汶川地震之前，先不说这些预测资料的准确度和可信度，但确实有类似的声音出现。

孙：我插一句，有个片子叫《唐山大地震三十周年祭》，记得我是在〇八年左右看的，就非常地忘不掉，你当时还不知道这个片子吧？

王：我不知道，没有看过，后来我做完我的片子以后，有人跟我说到这个片子。其实我在拍《掩埋》的时候，张庆洲跟我说过有个人找他拍，但是以电视台的身份来拍，好像是个女导演，”三十周年祭“？

孙：对，后来电视台也没播出，但后来这个片子还是被看到了。

王：对。导演自己拿出来了。后来我才发现这就是庆洲跟我说的那个女编导做的片子。

孙：你创作《掩埋》绕得还是蛮远的。关于汶川地震也出了一些纪录片，你本来是想做汶川地震的片子，最后把重心转移到唐山地震。这个思路的调整，你是在从什么时候做的决定？

王：刚才说到，发现唐山地震的问题后，我觉得汶川是不是也存在这个问题，后来真的搜索到了一些科学家在汶川地震之前的一些提醒，发现的一些异常现象。我当时计划是做两个部分，想以唐山和汶川分别做上下两部，一部说唐山地震，一部汶川地震。通过这样一个对照，想说历史没有任何变化，它不是在不断地重演嘛。

起初是这个架构，但在制作过程中发现唐山的资料比较充足，相对完整。而汶川这部分，当时我找到了一些专家，如耿庆国，他跟我说得很明白，他说有些东西我可以私下告诉你，但是你拍我就不能说。那些东西说出来以后，不是你就是我要承担责任和风险的。所以汶川这部分，我拍得比较早，汶川地震后我马上开始启动拍摄，那时他们觉得可能有些话还不能说出来，要通过正常渠道反映上去以后才能说。所以当时关于汶川地震的预测资料，我能拍到的很少。后来综合一下做成一部片子，把汶川能拿到的重要
资料放到片尾, 这样就成了现在看到的片子。

孙：对。你的《掩埋》跟其他的同类的作品, 我们先不说唐山大地震, 就汶川地震, 如杜海滨的《1428》, 范俭的《活着》等来看, 你的片子着眼很不同, 注重论证, 你就聚焦在一个问题上: 地震可不可以预测, 这些遇难者能不能被避免。这个过程是你在做纪录片的时候就想解决的问题, 还是说在剪辑中形成的思路？片子的格局很大, 是一个论证性的纪录片创作思路, 这种论文体纪录片形态, 你是从什么时候确定的？

王：一开始想做这个片子的时候, 我看到张庆洲老师在那本书里已经把这个东西做得很完整, 其实我是借他之力来做。当然我做的还没有他的调研完整, 因为他调研过的有些人去世了, 有些人找不到了, 还有一些不愿意说了。对, 像梅世蓉（中国地震局地震学家）, 汶川地震发生后她就完全不说话了。

孙：你有试图联系过她吗？

王：我通过中间人联系过, 中间人说可以帮我联系, 但不能给我她的联系方式。后来也没有联系成功, 我觉得那也就算了, 虽然她是很重要的人, 我当时想可能让她面对镜头尴尬一下, 可能就是我所能得到的, 但是她不同意也就算了。

孙：那就是说《掩埋》这个架构, 基本在拍之前已经有了？

王：你刚才说那种论证体的纪录片, 因为我知道我想要的就是信息的被掩埋。我们先不说这个信息的准确性, 它的能被采用度有多高, 但是让大家知道是应该的。首先得让人知道, 然后你可以说从科学的角度上我们无法采用这个信息, 可以说它没那么准确, 不能作为预警的依据……但是这些信息要让人知道, 这是要必须的。

就说, 整个信息的被掩埋可能会造成更大的一些伤害和不必要的伤害和伤亡, 包括这次疫情信息的被掩埋, 可能造成很大的次生灾害, 超过了疫情本身的伤害。

这就是我想说的, 而且是我想做的, 针对体制对信息的掩埋。我觉得从一个个个体身上很难去把它放这么大去做片子, 而且这样的个体也太难找, 最后如果整合不到一块去可能很麻烦。所以我最后采用这种时间的线索, 其实就是说从唐山地震两年前, 能公开查到最早的信息是一到两年前, 耿庆国还是谁在国家地震局发布的一个信息, 然后一步一步地到唐山大地震发生, 我用时间来贯穿, 其实这个时间本身就代替了一个个体, 它作为一个个体出现, 就是说整个所有的事情都靠时间来穿梭, 我当时是这么个想法。
孙：不过这部影片开头的节奏慢，唐山地震的遇难者名单，时间的转换，节奏比较慢，最有力量的是到后面，前后的剪辑思路有点反差。我能看出来你是没有受过完整的电影语言的训练，这也是你作品的特征。

王：是的。

孙：没有这些语法规则的约束力，看的时候视觉感觉是蛮新鲜的，但也能看出来那种粗糙感。你是怎么开始纪录片创作的，受到什么电影的影响，看了什么样的片子？

王：其实我在做纪录片之前，做过一些影像艺术。我比较喜欢影像。

孙：录影艺术？

王：对，就是录像艺术，当代艺术里才会有录像艺术。我比较喜欢，那时候尝试做了一些这种作品，在这个过程中无意间接触到纪录片，挺喜欢这种形式，就开始看了很多。

孙：你印象最深的是什么片子？

王：当时不懂纪录片，就上网查哪些纪录片好，当然都是大师的片子。比如说《浩劫》、迈克尔·摩尔，还有美国直接电影大师怀斯曼。因为我没有这个基础，只能去上网查哪些人的片子好，就查到这些大师的作品。

孙：你最喜欢哪一部？或者你最喜欢谁的作品？

王：当时看《浩劫》不是很喜欢，可能我刚接触这行。

孙：可能没有理解它的语境，关于大屠杀的历史语境。九个多小时的影片完全由访谈构成。

王：对，而且他那个访谈的剪辑方式……，我当时那种心态和状态，更喜欢迈克尔·摩尔的东西。

孙：迈克尔·摩尔的作品有很强的政治讽刺和娱乐气质。

王：对，有非常强的娱乐性，还有他真的直击每个问题的痛处，而且给你一种非常放松随意的感觉。他对
素材的把握就让你看起来非常随意放松，直击痛处，又有非常高的可观赏性。

孙：是。

王：我当时看迈克尔·摩尔的多一些，但这一两年，又看了一遍《浩劫》，才看出它的好和珍贵。看懂了才知道它的好。当时陆陆续续看了不少好片子，包括《夜与雾》，当时也不觉得它有多好，看《浩劫》似的，现在反观来，我才理解到一些。虽然当时不觉得好，但也受了一些潜移默化的影响，各种片子各种类型。纪录片这个形式特别适合当时想表达的那种心情那种状态。直接面对面，可能我当时那种冲动或者那种年轻的状态，纪录片是最适合我的，就觉得想去做。正好DV流行起来了，我有个朋友，就是“二手玫瑰”（摇滚乐队）的梁龙，我们那时候关系特别好，住在一起，他不知道从哪儿弄来个DV。他也不怎么用，就在他演出的时候，我拿着DV去给他拍一拍。然后那DV我就可以随便用，那时候我就想拍一些东西。

孙：一开始的拍摄顺利么？

王：当时那DV就是一个家用的，很小，拍着玩儿，找感觉。也找过一些选题，拍一点，停下来，拍一点，停下来，最后也没有完成的作品出来。到拍摄《掩埋》时，我觉得不管怎么样，我一定要完成。因为这个题材我必须要做，也拿到那么多资料了，我一定要完成。大概用了一年时间吧，片子终于做完了。

孙：《掩埋》剪辑用了多长时间？

王：非常快。我记得是春节，我在北京没有回老家，一个人也没什么事可做。我从大年三十剪到初七，整个就剪完了，那是初剪版本，大概是两个小时吧，后来稍微修一修，它是按时间线索剪辑，资料也少，只有二十个小时的资料，要不要，按照我的想法，顺着时间往下剪就出来了。

孙：《掩埋》看起来是围绕地震的可预测和不可预测展开的，但其实是在讨论地震这类灾难的发生是否有规律可循，它的机制是怎么形成的。《掩埋》前面的叙事节奏很慢，黑白画面的。因为我特别关注这个事件我就一直看下去，到后面的叙事就像在拧螺丝，那个劲儿越来越大。这个片子关于色彩的选择，你是怎么把握的？

王：我个人比较喜欢黑白影像，包括拍照片我也喜欢拍黑白的。当时本来想做一个纯黑白的电影。但在剪到汶川的部分时，我觉得汶川这些资料和最后的降国旗，那真的是血淋淋的事实，这些是要让它跳出来做一个警醒，让人觉得特别突然。从视觉上我需要让它跳出来，第二个这真是一个血淋淋的事实，它需要有颜色，降半旗那段就是孩子或者其他死难人的血的色彩。
孙：嗯，能一眼看出来它的隐喻性。

王：对，血淋淋的现实就是这样。

三

孙：你现在已经完成了三部片子，纪录片创作上你最深的体会是什么？

王：我没有受过专业的教育。你看我三个片子它有种延续的东西。它首先是连贯性，还有就是我个人在片子中的转变。我在拍《掩埋》的时候，我是让别人来说，每个采访对象你经历了什么，你来给我讲讲，用他们来达到我想说的和我想要的目的，但是到《三峡》就转变成我出来了，我要说。

孙：在《三峡》中你出镜是为了引导叙事？

王：对。我出镜。我走进三峡库区，走进三峡大坝，看看到底是什么样，而不是别人说这不好那不好，这好那好，我要去看看它是什么样。从《掩埋》让别人说，听别人说，到我自己说，然后到了《熵》它又是一个转变。

孙：《熵》这个名字你怎么来的？很冷僻的一个字。

王：“熵”首先是一个物理概念，有面对毁灭不可逃避的意思。这解释是我在网上查到的。

孙：这个字是怎么成为你这个片名的？

王：非常偶然，我看到这个字和它的解释，就觉得做我有关文革这部片子的名片很适合。这个字也被用在传播学上。因为我确实不是在简单地讲述文革的一个过程。就像《掩埋》，我不是在讲大地震发生中死了多少人，这个地震能不能预测，其实它背后是说这个信息体制真实的运作过程如何让信息被掩埋掉，它所造成的危害是《掩埋》真正想说的。所以说这种运作模式就可能造成了可能，也不能说直接造成，可能间接地造成了汶川地震的这种灾难。只要这种模式运转下去，灾难就是无法避免的。《熵》也不是在简单地讲述文化大革命发生了什么，而是说文化大革命说不可避免，一场灾难为什么不可避免？就是说在这种体制运作模式下它必然会发生的，它积累到一定程度，就像熵积累到一定程度必然会发生毁灭。

孙：《熵》的选题是怎么发现和确定的？这老人的日记好像正式出版过，是吧？
王：是这样，最早这个老人并不是我想拍的。我一开始想它的结构和《三峡》差不多，非常庞大，从文化大革命之前，到文革的发生，发生的过程，到文革结束，到文革结束后的反思。就是对文化大革命做一个非常全面的调查也好，展现也好。拍完《三峡》后从二〇一三年就开始着手做这个片子了，那时我已经采访过一些北大或清华当年的红卫兵，以及重庆参加武斗的学生和工人，也拍摄了重庆被关闭的那个红卫兵墓园。那时墓园已经被关了，我想办法进去偷偷地拍。我是边拍边整理收集这些资料，随着资料不断地扩大。突然有一天我看到这个老人的资料，那时我一直调整我拍摄的计划和方向，我问自己，能不能讲明白文革到底怎么发生的以及发生过程，以我个人的能力能不能讲明白？关于文革已经有那么多的人做了，他们的资料比我多，能力比我强，我再去做就没有意义了。所以最后我选择了个体的反思，就是说一个独立的个体在特殊的年代中怎么做选择的。

孙：我个人观点《熵》恰恰是以没有任何反思的方式让他面对镜头读出自己的日记，偶尔一两句话点评，并不是反思。你在他大量的日记中，依据什么来选取让他在镜头前念出来的内容？

王：《熵》其实就拍了两天。前面选日记的时间长一些，具体我记不太清了。他那一摞日记我每天都看，然后选择我需要的就整理出来。我想要的那些相对重要的并且有一个线索，然后让他读，他就读了两天，后期制作也不长，其实这个片子从选日记拍摄到剪辑时间都不长。为什么这个片子三年才出来？因为前两年半我在收集其他的资料，在拍摄其他的人，到最后了，我才决定把那两年半甚至三年所做的资料全部放弃掉，最后选择了这个。

孙：他有十多本日记，你选择的依据除了时间线交代清楚，还有什么考量？

王：就是一个所谓的大事嘛。就比如王光美到清华两次，或者中央号召他们怎么样了，发生了大的武斗，这个大事肯定是你要选的；第二个是他和家人以及他个人情感的东西，比如他的妈妈周日回家了；还有就是他有时候写写他对一些事情的看法和感慨。主要是这三个方面组织起来的。我其实是想让他这个人更立体一些，如果都选那些大事，可能会把个人情感的一些细节舍弃掉了，我觉得他不是很立体。片子里看他貌似没有任何反思，但是到片子结尾他读完全部日记，他自己苦笑了一声，说了一句“这一代人好玩又好笑”。

孙：在片子结尾的日记中，有一段他说他那些停掉一阵子写日记，实际上不是因为累，而是因为违心话没说够了。

王：我觉得这就是最好的反思，就是他们这一代人可能更多的觉得好玩又好笑，没有一个真正的反思。那一代红卫兵我觉得真正能够反思的不多。他们觉得是受害者。从某种意义上，我觉得他们是受害者。
孙：他们其实也是共谋者。

王：对，我觉得可能说更关注那种就像阿伦特说的“平庸的恶”，你不是说杀人他就是恶，那种平庸的恶可能集结起来，才促成了这种大的恶。虽然文革死了很多人，毕竟杀人的还是少数。所以我想选择一个没有杀过人，没有打过人，就是喊喊口号写写标语的个体，他就喜欢文斗。我想说没打人没杀人这种平庸的恶，可能都会为这场灾难加火加油，这是我想说的东西。

孙：我第一次看到一个片子全部让一个人来读他过去的日记。导演完全置身于外，对素材和拍摄对象的干预度都降到很低。我们会好奇几十年过去了，现在他读这些日记，他自己关于当时发生一些事情的反思，你有没有追问，为什么不想放进去？现在就是他出镜读日记，从纪录片的形式来看也比较单调，导演关于文革的思考完全没有表达。

王：我想我最终目标是想把“反思”这两个字抛给观众，让观众去反思在当代社会我们能做什么。因为那个已经是历史了，过去了，这些人反不反思，说实话时间倒不回去了。我只想通过让这个人说在特定的历史年代，我们应该怎么选择，怎么做，而这个特定的历史一直延续至今，我们当今也处在某个特定的历史年代。我们就像这个当年的老人年轻时一样，我想把这个反思交给观众。否则，观众看完了就觉得跟自己没关系，认为都是历史了。

我通过让他把日记读出来，交代年代和环境，交代大学生那时的心理状态，他们怎么想的，怎么做的。我想老人读日记的过程，他本身就形成一个封闭时空，它是相对完整的，我想观众如果能进到这种相对完整的时空里，观众能不能产生某种共鸣，觉得他自己也处在某种特殊的年代，他会思考如果是我，我怎么选择，就是我想让每一个观众自己去反思。我不想问老人说你觉得你当时这么做，现在觉得对不对？或者你有没有后悔、反思……我觉得那个真的没什么意义了。

我们总觉得那是一个特殊的历史年代，但就像我刚才说的，特殊的年代从来没有结束过，到今天我们依然要面对怎么选择这个问题。我们习惯性先反思这个老人，我觉得是不是可以通过这个老人反思自己。如果我在那个年代，我会怎么做？如果我们现在与那个年代没有任何变化和区别，我们应该怎么做呢？这是我想要的效果，但是这个效果能达到多少，能有几个人明白这一点，我也不知道，但这是我想设计的一个东西。

孙：这个片子单纯从文本上来说，导演或者说作者的创造性很少，但纪录片不只是一个形式。看完你的三部片子，整体感觉是重新诠释了纪录片形式和内容的关系。尤其在这个媒介时代，纪录片每年产出的量那么大，大家在美学形式上可谓花样奇出，你做到这么朴素这么单调的电影语言上来，有没有担心，或
者说觉得还没有找到最合适的，或者说这就是最合适的？

王：这个片子在制作的时候我有很多照片，都是老人自己拍摄的，在那个年代他有个照相机，他把所有
他参与的那些事情，清华大学发生的事情，包括王光美在清华，在清华大学被挂上乒乓球项链来批斗，
他都拍照了，版权都是他的。

孙：你没有想过在影片中使用一些照片？

王：在第一版剪辑的时候，这些照片我都已经按时间和地点穿插到片子里了。但后来成片的时候我全部
拿掉了，因为我觉得刚才说了老人在读日记的过程，他已经构成了一个独立的封闭的历史时空，照片在这
时候出现，就从历史资料转变成了一种多余的景观消费，会打破一种纯粹性。现在这样更接近我想要的，
包括你看我在那里还设置了一个色彩，就是后期剪辑的时候留色。把所有的颜色去掉，只留下了红色，
其实这个红色，这也是我想说的红色文化，一直伴随着我们从头到尾，到今天它也不消失。这种东西我
是想刻意地让它伴随着整部影片，也是为了让它多一些吸引人的注意力。当然中国人一看这个红色代
表什么都明白了。

我真的不太考虑它的可看性。这种片子你做的可看性再强，也没有多少人会去看，不喜欢的人也不会看。
对历史资料的采用，我喜欢用那种有直接关联的和有相对代表性的历史资料，一旦多余的历史资料放
进来，可能会提高可看性，但我觉得这种可看性可能对影片本身会产生某种危害，所以我对历史资料选
择上比较慎重。最后成片的时候，我把所有照片都删掉了，当时也是思想斗争了好几天吧。

孙：你拍摄的时候还有人拍过这老人吗？他的日记二〇〇八年在香港出版过。

王：对，但他那个书关注度不高，还是说可看性太低了，没有大的事件。

四

孙：我们谈谈《三峡》。这个片我最喜欢的是片子论证的丰富性，甚至有种头脑风暴的激荡性的酣畅淋滴。
这个片子你是怎么开始的？三峡搬迁那阵子是独立纪录片创作的一个热门题材，如冯艳的《乘爱》等。

王：做完《掩埋》之后，我就找下一个选题，当时有个制片人，一个大姐，她给我推荐了一本书叫《西藏之
水救中国》（李伶，华文出版社），她说你可以拍中国的水问题，这个问题很严重。

书中讲了中国的水问题很严重，但是怎么拍呢？我先在网上搜索这些有关中国水问题的资料。搜索中国
水问题时，三峡大坝的问题就出来了。资料越看越多，我就大概了解了三峡大坝建造过程，我就确定了这个选题。其实就像你刚才说的，大家都在选择个体来阐释三峡，因为我个人的习惯，我就是想针对这个体制。选择个体也可以去做，但是我觉得我选择这种论证式的方式更直接一些。三峡从新中国建立之前，就在说这个事情，就等于三峡大坝的讨论、论证到建设，贯穿了整个新中国。从一九四九年开始提出到一九九二年开始建设，到结束，新中国的过程跟三峡密切相连，每次三峡大坝的决策过程都能体现出中国政治的某个拐点，或者说它背后的政治问题，这个太是我想要的东西了。一个大坝，能把整个中国从四九年到现在的政治脉络梳理出来，我觉得这个选题太好了。

孙：片子中有一个学者论证了集权和工程建设的关系，这个是他先讲的，还是你问过他相关的问题？他说集权需要工程，工程体现集权，大概是这个意思。

王：卢跃刚吧。这个是我问到还他说出来的，我也想不起来了。

孙：调研用了多长时间？

王：片子一共拍了三年多，我不断地收集资料，不停地在调整方向，拿到一部分资料后能拍就先把它拍下来，然后又拿到新的资料，再拍……如果以前得到的信息和资料不太完整，或者不太科学客观的话，我就会把整体的方向做一些调整，不断地调整，这三年多的过程一直都是边拍边补充资料边调整方向。

孙：那这三年下来，你的时间精力和资金的投入挺大的。

王：对，三年多基本都是在做这个片子，也不做别的，偶尔出去拍点商业的活来生活。

孙：你什么时候拿到戴晴的《长江长江》那本书的？她那本书对你的改变应该是蛮大的。

王：对，其实没有戴晴就没有《三峡》这部片子。做完《掩埋》后，崔卫平给我做了一个有关《掩埋》的采访，她就问我下一步想做什么？我说想做三峡大坝，她说你要去请教戴晴，她跟三峡大坝的关系太密切，而且她有很多的资料和人脉，有关三峡大坝的人脉。然后我就去找戴晴，跟戴晴见面后她问，你团队几个人啊？我说现在就我一个，然后问资金哪儿支持，我说现在我手里还没钱呢，然后戴晴就说，“利波，不是我不想帮你，但这个事是国家级别的团队来完成的，你说你现在一个人，也没有钱，你怎么完成？”我也没办法就走了，后来跟徐玉萍又说这事，我说见了戴晴了，他说，戴晴说这个东西你一个人怎么完成得了？

后来有个朋友又给戴晴打了个电话，说利波值得信赖，能帮就帮他一下。戴晴说那行，你想拍什么或者你想采访我都没问题，你想知道谁的资料我都给你，你能完成就行。
孙：李锐的采访在片子中特别有份量。

王：戴晴跟李锐一直有联系，直接就采访了，而且不止一次的采访，拍了好多次。然后戴晴又给了我很多的信息，当年跟她一起与三峡大坝有关系的人。

孙：你这个片子的采访内容很发散，论证得非常饱满，得益于几个学者。

王：对，吴稼祥、卢跃刚、茅于轼这些学者他们的份量都非常重。还有一些专家是纯从专业角度来讲的，像地质学家范晓以及库区的专家，哪些专家，我需要几个，谁更有代表性，我知道他们说过什么，他们的文章都读过，我是这么选人的，当然有一些选了后来也没有用。

孙：片子中跟戴晴的《长江长江》不同声音的，你引用了李鹏的《三峡日记》。

王：对，我觉得应该有一个官方的声音。李鹏的《三峡日记》我早就看了，我知道他的这个日记比较全的，他出版这两本日记目的应该是非常明显，他把所有的事情都记到里面，这不是我一个人的事，你们都干什么了都在这里记着呢，所以我觉得比较全面，有一些极特殊的，当然他也不会记到日记里。所以我觉得日记里边记得的事肯定是真实发生过的。我不能去采访或者拍摄一个比较高级别的官方的声音，李鹏对三峡来说那他是最权威的了。用他的日记和我的采访以及现实拍摄的景象并置在一起，让观众去判断。

孙：这个片子非常的饱满，各方面的观点都有，包括三峡集团的那个年轻官员，他讲得太讽刺了。你是怎么说服他站到那去讲的？

王：库区的拍摄其实是这样的，我拍《三峡》时，没有钱，重庆有个放映空间，他们找朱日坤几个片子来放，朱日坤他知道我要拍《三峡》但是没钱，他就说你去放《掩埋》吧，他们给你出路费，完了你去三峡。我就去重庆放《掩埋》，我说不要给我买回来的车票，你们把钱给我。后来阳光卫视陈平对这个项目感兴趣，就给了一些钱，阳光卫视还给我出了一个公函，说我是阳光卫视的工作人员来三峡大坝采访，这样才能完成坝区的拍摄和采访。如果我作为一个独立纪录片导演去，肯定是完不成拍摄的。

孙：三峡集团的采访和过闸都是公函起的作用吧？

王：三峡集团也是我拿公函去预约，约了一周，我就在三峡大坝那儿住了一周，最后才批准的可以采访。其实就是派了一个技术人员来给我说了一些技术问题，技术之外的他就不知道了。但是我觉得那个也
很重要。毕竟他代表三峡集团。过闸是在游轮上拍的。我上船是用的公函, 因为那个船从武汉出来, 它中途不让上人, 我是在三峡大坝, 就是在船闸上的, 过了船闸我就下船了, 也是靠公函。上船拍了那么几个镜头, 现在看也很重要。

孙: 这个镜头的隐喻性挺强的。

王: 对, 而且它穿插整个片子。

孙: 当地居民的生活和采访, 你大概去了几次拍摄？

王: 我现在记不清了, 三四次? 四五次? 有很多我都是在网络上先查, 找到一些问题比较大的, 比如说这个地方滑坡比较严重, 某个县移民安置比较严重, 各种问题网上都有, 我就直接奔这几个地儿去, 住下来慢慢地找和拍, 有的完全就是碰上了。

孙: 那个温家大院那个女的很出彩地唱起来了。那是找的还是遇到的？

王: 那个非常巧, 重庆有个导演叫陈富, 他当时是拍剧情片《三峡别哭》去选景走到那里, 老人看他们拿着摄像机, 就以为他们媒体电视台的, 一定要让他们拍她的祖传宅宅和她想说的话, 陈富没有办法了, 虽然他们知道没有用, 但还是拍了, 这个女的就哭啊, 唱啊, 唱完讲了温家大院的事情。陈富知道我在拍这个纪录片, 就把这段素材给了我, 我后来也找到她进行了第二次采访, 唱歌什么的不是我拍的, 是陈富导演拍的。

孙: 色调不太一样。

王: 对, 里边那种画质非常差的资料, 是这个老人自己找当地的影视制作公司给摄制的一个光盘, 她想给这个老院子留一个影像的记录, 她就给了我一份, 我从那里采了几个老院子过去的镜头。

孙: 她说我们十二代传的大院, 清朝时期是温家的, 国民党时期是温家的, 到现在不是温家的了……, 真是让人感概万千。

王: 对。

孙: 你这部片子是一部不错的政治讽刺纪录片。这种类型的纪录片在中国纪录片比较缺失, 在西方比较流行, 如迈克尔·摩尔等。你前面两部片子没有用音乐, 这个片子用了两处音乐。谈谈关于《三峡》的音乐?
王: 前面说过“二手玫瑰”梁龙, 我们是多年的朋友, 所以我对他的音乐特别熟悉, 用的就是他的《跳大神》这首歌, 做片花的时候我就决定用这首歌了。结尾用的崔健的《最后一枪》, 这个片子的结尾就落在八九事件上, 所以我觉得除了《最后一枪》好像没有别的音乐能代替它吧。这么多年过去了, 我觉得这两首音乐我选得还是挺满意的。

孙: 对, 第一处音乐和影像之间形成讽刺叙事, 戏谑解构了这个事件的严肃性, 从装神弄鬼到最后一枪。

王: 对, 就是从装神弄鬼的《跳大神》到那个多事之秋的《最后一枪》, 这就是中国从一九四九年到一九八九年的一个缩影。我觉得中国的政治就是在装神弄鬼。三峡大坝整个的建设过程和中国政治之间, 就像股票分两条线一模一样。

孙: 《三峡》将三峡变成一个具象化的政治。

王: 对, 你看影片结束在漆黑一片, 远处有个小灯, 那个画面就是预示中国或者中国政治, 我们现在面临的就是你不知道前面是什么, 你不知道你面对的是什么, 你不知道这船开向哪里去, 一片漆黑可能会有一点点小闪光, 你不知道光有多强, 它什么时候消失, 一切都是未知的。

孙: 你这三部片子《三峡》是唯一的有资金支持的片子吧?

王: 对, 所以完成起来也压力小。

孙: 从目前你的纪录片来看, 你的选题方向还是挺明确的?

王: 我觉得直觉可能对我选题还是比较重要的, 但我的选题肯定是有个大的方向, 譬如历史灾难的事件, 和政治有关, 这个是我比较感兴趣的。

孙: 对你影响较大的书籍有哪些?

王: 汉娜·阿伦特的《极权主义的起源》, 平庸之恶的观念直接影响了我的《熵》的创作。也看一些其他的反思政治历史灾难的书籍。

孙: 你在国内受到的阻挠大吗?
王：阻挠，在拍摄的时候没有，但是《掩埋》后来在网络上被禁了，豆瓣之类相关的信息全部被删除，片子在百度网盘也发不出去了。《三峡》拍完之后在国际电影节上得了个奖。得奖后回到北京，北京安全局找到我，说有人想看这片子，他们领导想找片子，但是网络上没有，找不到，就想管我要一张光盘。然后我就给了一张光盘，顺带我还给了《掩埋》，我说这也是我拍的。他们断断续续找我大概有半年多吧，定期约个时间见个面，喝咖啡聊一聊，问最近在拍什么，准备去哪个电影节，了解一下我的动态。后来看我也没干什么，然后他们再不找我了。
WOMEN AND THE SELF 女性和自我

Ji Dan: Every Subject That I Have Filmed Gives Me Power
季丹 : 每个被拍摄者都给了我力量
Interviewer: WANG Xiaolu 王小鲁  Translator: WU Bo 吴波

Yang Lina: My Life Experience Made Me A Feminist
杨荔钠 : 是生活让我变成了女性主义者
Interviewer: WANG Xiaolu 王小鲁  Translator: WEN Hua 温华

Nanfu Wang: I Don’t Want to Accept Things Passively
王男栿 : 我不愿被动地接受世界上的事情
Interviewer: CHEN Ping 陈平  Translator: WU Bo 吴波
Ji Dan (季丹) lives alone in Duijiuyu, Changping (昌平碓臼屿), in the remote suburbs of Beijing, deep in the mountains. I have been here twice, and this time I found out that there is a Manchu village near her home, and that Ji Dan is three-eighths Manchu, so I asked her if she felt a sense of belonging living here. She said she didn’t really know these villagers, and that:

One day, when they have to hand over an alien, they will definitely hand over me first. I don’t have such sweet fantasies, such as the countryside is more adorable, the people are simple and honest and all that—people are all the same.

I think Ji Dan is the most articulate director in the independent documentary world in terms of her ability to put subtle and complex thinking into words. I remember the last time I watched a rough cut of Baya (芭雅, in production) at her place and talked about feminism, she said that male power is like a house that has been smoked in, a house that smells of smoke, but the men probably don’t feel it themselves. I’ve always raved about that line.

Ji Dan’s experience is legendary; she was born in 1963, but she says she now only feels like she’s thirty. She has made some ten documentaries, with Baya being her latest. Her former lover Sha Qing (沙青) was also a documentary filmmaker and they used to work together. But now that they have separated, which has made Ji Dan rethink the connection between women and romantic relationships. Baya is a woman who has suffered a lot, and she went to film Baya, in fact, to see how another woman faces her own dark night.

This interview was not only about her work, but also more about the relationship between her personal life experience and documentary filmmaking. This led me to discover a more complex interaction between documentary filmmakers and their subjects and work. In film theory, documentaries are more objective than dramas, but I saw from Ji Dan how the subjectivity of documentaries is revealed, and how her filming of others is in fact a reflection of herself. Ji Dan gave me a deeper understanding of the subtle path of communication between the subject and the author/filmmaker. This conversation took place on July 10, 2021, in Duijiuyu village.
Wang: I’ve read other people’s interviews with you before, and you’re particularly expressive.

Ji: Language is in fact magical, and different scenarios have hidden purposes. The professional interviewer is particularly annoying because he has a purpose. If you have a purpose, I will be purposeful too. Because you are on the offensive, I have to defend. Then it brings out the utilitarian in people, I have to behave well, I have to talk well, which is particularly annoying.

Wang: In fact, documentary filmmaking also involves interviewing.

Ji: I never interviewed my protagonists in my early films. Later, as my father was getting old and he liked to talk, he would continue to talk for hours and continue even after his listeners fall asleep. OK, since I have to keep him company, let me film him talking. In fact, the camera is very interesting, because it gives you a sense of ritual when you pick it up, and I feel that I am watching a film instead of merely listening to my father with a camera in my hand. It occurred to me when I was filming Baya that I might be able to have Baya tell me about her life. It was the kind of interview that lasted for four hours a day for a whole week, which was very satisfying.

Wang: You said it was with Baya that you started to interview your protagonists, which means your previous films were Direct Cinema documentaries. Yesterday I watched two of your earlier films, Gongbu’s Happy Life (1999) and The Elders (1999), and I found that both were very important examples of Direct Cinema.

Ji: Right. I did not do interviews before Baya. When I was filming Baya, I had the feeling that her past life, which was long gone, could not be represented through images, and it was only through language that her past life could be retrieved.

Wang: How did you first develop your ideas about documentary films?

Ji: To me, whether something is called a documentary or not, it is still an image. It turned out that I was in possession of a camera which recorded images. I had no idea at all what the images were going to become. When I first watched TV programmes in Japan, I had no idea what a documentary was, neither did I have any idea about a film or editing. If Gongbu’s Happy Life is good, then it is because it’s produced by an
amateur filmmaker—it’s particularly straightforward. I just used the camera the way it was intended to be used, without any further thought.

**Wang:** How many years did you stay in Tibet?

**Ji:** Three years in total. These two films were made in the third year. A lot of the footage I filmed in the first two years was useless, and I didn’t find real protagonists to be filmed. It was only in the third year that I came to realize that I should film these old people and the family. The theme of the old people is death and the family is about life. I thought they could be included in one film; finally, it turned out to be two.

**Wang:** Did you live in Gongbu’s house throughout?

**Ji:** I lived there in the third year. In the first two years I lived in someone else’s house.

**Wang:** It’s also quite interesting the way you got along with the family: you are deeply integrated with the family.

**Ji:** The Gongbu household had a lot of daughters, who carried me back to my childhood. I didn’t have enough fun when I was little. I was actually particularly wild and loved to run around, yet I ended up having to stay at home every day to practice the violin. Then, at the age of almost thirty, I was unexpectedly encountering young girls with whom I should have hung out in my childhood, and I had such a happy time playing with them.

**Wang:** One of the accounts I’ve seen of your time in Tibet is that you were actually influenced by Akira Nonaka (野中章宏), the Japanese scholar, and eager to make a film. Last time I saw Jiang Yue (蒋樾) we talked about him meeting you in Tibet. Jiang Yue felt at that time that life in Tibet was foreign and inaccessible to him. He admired you very much when he heard that you were there learning Tibetan, which, he said, was beyond him. So, did you go to Tibet with the intention of making a film?

**Ji:** When I was a child, I liked to read Soviet adventure literature about exploring the Arctic. I always yearned for remote places.

**Wang:** It is Romanticism. It’s about being interested in natural, wild, and passionate things that are far from home.
Ji: Adventure, the frontier, things like that. Tibet had a very important relationship with university life in the 1980s. Jiang Yue and Duan Jinchuan were my predecessors. I also wanted to go to Tibet upon graduation but did not make it. The Temptation of Japan was greater, and I had the opportunity to go, so I went.

Wang: You went to Japan right after you graduated from Beijing Normal University. What did you study?

Ji: I enrolled in a university, majoring in Sociology and taking part in some Tibetan activities. I always had a fantasy about Tibet. I went to Tibet once before my graduation from Beijing Normal University. For me, Tibet meant adventure and romanticism, just like you said.

Wang: Which year did you go to Tibet?

Ji: In 1986. Lhasa was so beautiful then.

Wang: Mou Sen and some other people were all in Lhasa, working for the Tibetan Repertory Theatre.

Ji: Exactly. I went there with Mou Sen for the first time. We came back and later in the winter of the same year went back to Lhasa again by way of Qinghai. The 1980s were like the endless unexploited black land of northeast China: fertile, wild, and full of vitality. The 1980s were evanescent, gone in a flash, but the root of everything that followed. Oh, this makes me cry!

Wang: After your first time visiting Tibet, you went back there for the second time after your return from Japan, inspired by Akira Nonaka, right?

Ji: Yes. The second time I were there, I wandered around Lhasa. Friends told me not to do that because the Khampa people might be brutal. Some of our classmates were working at the Tibetan TV station after graduation. They confined themselves indoors, cooking instant noodles for meals and playing mahjong every day after work. They had no interaction with Tibetans. But I especially liked to go out and wander around. Lhasa had a special smell. Did I have a predestined relationship with Lhasa? I don’t know; I liked it so much anyway. I went up to the Potala Palace by myself, where there were very few people and almost no tourists. Many people came from far away to make pilgrimage to the Buddha, and I just followed them.
and kept walking and walking until I reached the statue of Princess Wencheng. I had known a little bit about
the story before, but when I saw the statue, I suddenly felt that it had something to do with me. I was full of
emotions and started to cry. The statue leads to an open balcony where I had an overview of the whole city. I
made a wish that that I would establish some connections with this land.

Wang: That feeling was unusual.

Ji: Yes, it was particularly wonderful. I think so many things that happen in our life are seeds planted at
moments like that.

Wang: Your connection with documentary film started in Japan. At Beijing Normal University you had no
plans to make documentary films, right?

Ji: Yes! What I’d always wanted to do was to write. But I didn’t dare to: I had no life experience, so what
would I write about? I had never been an independent person, deciding on my own life while living in this
world. I didn’t know how to judge my father and mother, I didn’t know how to see myself: everything was
unknown to me. So how could I write?

It was in that state that I went to Japan, and there I had all kinds of opportunities to pick up a camera.
Suddenly I saw life from another angle. In other words, I need to put something between me and life,
otherwise I wouldn’t be able to face up to it. Because real life, which I was not able to accept, was totally
different from the one that I encountered while reading. It’s like when I ordinarily cannot bear to listen to my
dad talk, but when I begin to film him talking, I am able to keep him company. The camera frames the scene
and make it temporal. This is the charm of the film: it makes the happening temporal.

Wang: With a camera, you can switch perspective. You consciously look at life from a cultural rather than
an everyday perspective.

Ji: Right. Besides, you are not allowed to choose in real life, while with a camera, you can choose what to
film and what not to. Thus, you find a way to get along with the reality, a way to live in China.

Wang: When did you first start to use the camera? Was it the one you showed me last time the first one you used?

Ji: It was a small camera brought by Akira Nonaka, smaller than the one you saw. I don’t know where it is
now. Akira Nonaka stayed at the Yuexiu Hotel (越秀宾馆) and I went to visit him from Xidan as a friend of photographer Lü Nan (吕楠). Akira Nonaka said he would teach me how to use the camera when we met. I went there wearing a blue dress, the kind of clothes you’d expect from a very artistic young woman. Upon seeing me, he said, ‘Go back and change your clothes, you can’t film wearing this.’ Haha. I knew then an artistic dress up would never be fit for real work. I went back home and changed into jeans. He taught me to how to turn on the camera, take a picture, zoom in and zoom out. It was an automatic camera and quite easy to use. Now I knew how to use it and went to the northeast with it. I used the camera and immediately fell in love with it. Did I say that I particularly love painting exhibitions? There are a lot of impressionist paintings of being in the rain or after the snow. I’m particularly fascinated by certain landscapes, such as those of autumn and after the snow. That little camera has a finder, through which I could see the scene in special weather, namely the type of landscape that fascinates me. In fact, I was looking for beauty with that camera, the kind of beauty I had always been yearning for.

**Wang:** When did you first get to know Akira?

**Ji:** About the spring of 1991. I went to Japan in 1988 and returned to China for the first time three years later, staying at Lü Nan’s home, and later went back to Japan with Lü Nan’s photographic works. There was a very famous Japanese leftist photographer and social activist, Hirose Ryuichi (广河隆一), who had been focusing on photographing Palestine. He was a good friend of my friend and I brought the pictures to him. He then introduced me to some magazines and other friends, among whom was Akira Nonaka. When I met Akira, we talked about Lü Nan as well as myself. I told him I liked Tibet and then I went to Tibet to film.

**Wang:** Did you have much interaction with Akira Nonaka in Japan?

**Ji:** Yes, very frequently. There was a group of photographers reporting Asia, may young photographers majoring in reportage photographing, and some others making art photographs. They often had meetings, and I was there listening to the discussion. Nonaka said that the age of video images was coming, the distant thunder was approaching, and we must get ready to face this change.

**Wang:** Akira Nonaka encouraged people to use video cameras to make films and report the world.

**Ji:** Yes, at first it was the traditional camera. Shortly after I met him, Asahi TV showed a video programme. A small video camera was able to make a programme which in the past could only have been produced by a team. He gave me such a small video camera when I returned to China.
Wang: That machine was an Hi8 type, wasn’t it?

Ji: It was! Only type 8 video cameras were used for household purposes at that time. But that Hi8 type video camera produced high quality images. And there was a matching editing machine.

Wang: Then you went to make films in Tibet for Japanese TV?

Ji: Yes. I send the films back to Japan. Those films were good. Akira had established good connections with a TV station that paid us 150,000 yen for a film of three or four minutes. Akira gave all the money to us, which was the equivalent of over 10,000 RMB, a large sum. I taught Hu Jie how to make films of this type. When I filmed a barber’s shop, I recorded one day in the life of a barber who came from out of town. I made a lot of films of this type for Japanese TV. We made a fortune and had lots of requests for such work, but I got tired of repeating myself.

Wang: What you made at that time resembled China Central TV Station’s show Living Space.

Ji: Yes, it was like that. It was the type of programme telling the story of a man who worked every day, shopping for groceries, coming home for dinner, and taking care of his son. As the photographer, I would ask him about how his son was doing at school, and that was all. It was very superficial. Everyone is able to make a film like that. And that was the only type that we could make, that is, to make the people in the film look natural and talk about their life. When I had some money, I said I would go to Tibet, and I did not return. Akira was mad and wrote me a very long, angry letter. He needed me to provide substantial films for the TV programme, with which, as a matter of fact, he had an agreement. Yet I quit and ran away.

Wang: You thought it was pointless to repeat yourself.

Ji: Right. All of a sudden Nonaka fell ill with hepatitis A, a very dangerous disease. I wrote him a long letter, apologizing to him and explaining why I chose to stay in Tibet. I didn’t like filming news stories. Instead, producing documentary films had been my childhood dream and I was asking for his understanding.

2

Wang: I know at the beginning you made some TV documentaries to be shown in Japan. Japanese Women Left in China after the Second World War won an award. Gongbu’s Happy Life
and *The Elders* are your early independent documentary films. Can you talk more about what it was like back then?

**Ji:** In those days, I treated Tibetan people with respect, to me they were people in the camera, that was how I saw them. The world is a projection of your vision, and I saw them at their best and purest, so that’s how they were to me. They would appear totally different seen from another angle: in fact, the village was messy and dirty, and people talked bad things about others. The film would be a totally different one if you included footage of this kind.

**Wang:** Yes. In *Gongbu’s Happy Life* you somehow embellished the story.

**Ji:** Certainly there was embellishment, but not the kind of glorification found in advertising, because it was not purposeful. They are totally different. For me, I did see and feel the beauty. I presented exactly what they seemed to me in my eyes, which was beauty *per se*, not embellishments. I found the belief in life that I had never encountered in other parts of China. There was the traditional beauty of the people sitting around a fire pit, talking and laughing like a big family. I found real relationships between people in seeing a group of elderly people going together to someone’s funeral. I saw and was moved by the beauty of this kind of relationship. So why shouldn’t I film and present it?

**Wang:** In fact, *The Elders* is quite profound, showing how these old people live a communal life and how they go about running the temple. The film is profound in that it shows how people make efforts to protect their spiritual world in an era of moral and ethical decline.

**Ji:** Yes. I don’t know what’s going on in their lives now! Back then, many people in their thirties and forties would occasionally participate, saying that in another ten years they would join them, and that would be part of their life when they get old. How wonderful that village was, just imagine.

**Wang:** What struck me most was how capable people in that village were at facing up to death, dealing with corpses, and things of that kind. A system of life of their own was well established in that village.

**Ji:** I experienced the beauty of religion in life, it just came so naturally. Two young girls argued about who would go to the temple and kowtow inside: one said, ‘You go and herd sheep, you’ve worshipped Buddha this morning, and I haven’t gone round to worship Buddha yet.’ That year I lived peacefully in this family, and if you didn’t have to write a book or film a film, it would have been hard to bear that kind of life. But
because I was there with a camera, I was able to stay there in peace.

Wang: Did the Gongbu family really understand why you were filming?

Ji: No, they didn’t. But every time I went there, I took big bags full of necessities that the family was short of.

Wang: It was so far away. How did you get there?

Ji: Later I sometimes took a plane. At first, I took the train to Xining (西宁), there I rode in a train for one day and one night to Golmud (格尔木). That train was particularly dangerous and you had to take the soft sleeper, otherwise most likely robbers would come and loot the place. On that train the feeling of being on the edge of the world and that of dark uneasiness started to set in. In Golmud, I stayed at the local hotel, with no food but only noodles. There I prepared for the next three-day-and-night trip in an almost floorless bus, waggling all the way to Lhasa. The Khampa people next to me on the bus felt so hot and opened the window to sing in the strong winter wind. The smell of ghee on their hair floated in the air, together with the odor of their toes. In Lhasa I could have a good rest, eating delicious food in Indian restaurants, and fat sausage noodles in Sichuan restaurants. I left for Shigatse (日喀则) after getting fully prepared in comfortable hotels in Lhasa. The journey was over six hours and when I arrived I met friends, drank wine, and had some fun. Finally, it was a couple of hours bus ride to Lhaz (拉孜), from there I walked three hours to Old Lhaz (老拉孜), my ultimate destination.

Wang: I remember once you said that videos made by Hi8 camera were not accepted by European TV stations because of their poor picture quality. Were they accepted by Japanese TV stations?

Ji: It was an experiment. Later TV stations found that the content was very interesting, despite the poor quality. For instance, editors and directors at NHK wondered how I could approach such in-depth family conflicts in Japanese Women Left in China after the Second World War? For them it was unbelievable! Of course, how could they usually approach their subjects in such depth? A big group of people rushing to film with fixed budgets and a purposeful rationale; their subject knew what the film maker wanted and acted accordingly. In two hours, how could they film something in-depth? The outcome could only be for show.

Wang: Have these two documentary films been shown anywhere since?
**Ji:** *The Elders* was shown at the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA). There, some old people were quite moved and thankful to me for spending so much time on this topic. I made the first cut of *Gongbu* by myself and took it to NHK. Editors there watched it for three days and became extremely impatient. They thought it was a mess and impossible to cut it into a neat version. They went to their boss and showed him my version. However, their boss thought it was very interesting and quite different from the usual NHK documentary films made by their own filmmakers. We began to talk about Tibet, and their editors continued to edit on *Gongbu*, and after ten days, they became very polite and respectful to me. In the end, two separate films were produced from my original one, receiving very positive feedback and a lot of letters from the Japanese audience, for whom that might have been the first chance to get to know the life of Tibetan people so closely.

3

**Wang:** After filming in Tibet, you then started to make films in the north of Shaanxi (陕北) province, right?

**Ji:** The starting point of the long period of darkness arrived. It is still scary to talk about it even at this moment. I think it was a standstill, that kind of absolute standstill penetrating each and every aspect of my life. It was more destructive than the Cultural Revolution, or being thrown into prison. Because in prison, you are physically restrained, but your inner being is particularly active. However, for me that period was a state of complete stagnation, as if I was stuck in the slush pile, spinning in circles and unable to stand up. That period lasted for ten years.

**Wang:** What was the reason?

**Ji:** I used to live a particularly traditional life under the influence of my mother, who was a very capable woman outside the home, but in the shadow of her husband and children inside it. It was the same with me when I was in a relationship with Sha Qing; I did not move when he was lying still. It was like a dog with its master: the dog was circling around the master when he was asleep, round and round in circles, unable to awaken him. I couldn’t do without him, felt like the world was gone without him. I was the dog and Sha Qing was my master: I circled around him for ten years.

**Wang:** Was that stagnation lasting throughout the whole period when you were in the relationship with Sha Qing?
**Ji:** The whole period of the ten years when I was with him. Even after 2003, with the emergence of the documentary film festivals, Sha Qing still remained inactive. Later on, he thought that I was the reason that he was unable to move forward, because at least he could develop a romantic relationship without me being around, bringing ripples to his dull life. Unfortunately, because of me, his ultimate impetus to become active, namely, to start a romance, was completely blocked. It was also true with me: I could have moved forward without circling around him like a dog.

**Wang:** When did you first get to know Sha Qing?

**Ji:** In 1997? Or 1998?

**Wang:** Wow, 1997 or 1998! I think Sha Qing was also producing films in Tibet in the early years.

**Ji:** To be frank, I think my relationship with Sha Qing was the most important and beneficial lesson for me. It was ten years of stagnation, which, in fact, was destined to be a period of dormancy. It was right that I should stay there for ten years. Later I separated from Sha Qing and broke free from the loop. A woman must at least once in her life break out of the loop with a man. Now Sha Qing and I are very good friends. Times are changing: people are moving forward with all kinds of opportunities; making films and going abroad, and so on. Those ten years was some of the best times ever, and in those good old days, we ‘lay flat’ (躺平) for ten years. That was also good!

**Wang:** It was from 1997 to 2007, right?

**Ji:** Yes, it was about that period. In 2008 I started to film *The Spiral Staircase of Harbin* (哈尔滨回旋阶梯) and came back to myself. All my work produced before 2008, such as *Dream of the Empty City* (空城一梦) and *The Flowing Clouds on the Ground* (地上流云), was sloppy and not worth mentioning. For those ten years, every day all I could think about was writing love letters to Sha Qing; I had him in my mind all the time, and wished to make a film together with him. But he couldn’t do it with me. He did a good job on *Wellspring* (在一起的时光), while I was only fooling around him during the process. That ten years was really incredible, as if being stuck in a spell.

**Wang:** So the only way out was to get beyond it and become independent.

**Ji:** Yes! You can see that whoever won or lost in that mud puddle, he or she was still in it. Even if you won,
you won in the mud. So what was the point of winning?

**Wang:** That is right. You have to be independent.

**Ji:** You’re right. Without the experience of that ten years, I would not able to live in this world as well as I do now. How does it come that one person is in such bad need of another? How good it is to be alone and autonomous! If I want to have a new table, I buy it immediately.

**Wang:** So you are not happy with all your work produced in that ten years?

**Ji:** Not at all.

Wang: This means you are completely rejecting your works produced in that ten years. But will you agree if I say in those ten years you kept reflecting on yourself?

**Ji:** I was too dependent on Sha Qing. First, I didn’t know how to edit, and he was such a good editor that he could achieve whatever effects he desired. Then, he had a sense of judgement, and now I understand that was because he remained an observer. If you act both as athlete and referee, how can you be a good athlete? Of course, Sha Qing is sensitive and talented, which I think I am not. So, I was always there wondering whether he loved me or what was really going on between us. I had a big question mark in my mind about Sha Qing. Was there something wrong with me? A lot of people spend their whole lives wondering about their spouses.

**Wang:** I think I know the main problem of those ten years: you were enchanted by him.

**Ji:** Yeah. When he cut a film, he was subconsciously skillful, and so he was in real life: now close to you, and then indifferent, very unpredictable. He was there to tease you in such a manner, not intentionally, but instinctively.

**Wang:** Did he treat you in the same manner?

**Ji:** Exactly, like he was cutting a film. He would grab you when you were about to leave. He was like that all the time.

**Wang:** Actually, it was not that he wanted you to stay, it was subconscious: I don’t want to let you go; even
when there is no love, there is affection. But he still wanted to have his other requirements satisfied. Thus, there was the awkward relationship between you.

**Ji:** He was the kind of person who wanted to be loved by his partner heart and soul but would get bored if he really had such a partner. Sha Qing is that kind of person. He also needed to have someone who could inspire him as he himself was lazy and didn’t want to do things. He wanted someone who could inspire his passion and enthusiasm for life. But I am a totally different type, I get inspiration from inside. I read a book and get excited. Different people’s sources [of inspiration] are different.

**Wang:** I understand. Was *Wellspring* both of your work?

**Ji:** It was filmed and edited entirely by him. He did it independently. I only helped a little in establishing social connections.

**Wang:** What was the situation with *Dream of the Empty City*?

**Ji:** As I was filming *Dream of the Empty City*, I realized that those years were too chaotic. I was not capable of facing that kind of chaos myself during that period. Now I know what to do with every film I make. At that time I was not capable of facing this wholly corrupt society: hospitals were corrupt, schools for immigrant children were corrupt, charity organizations were corrupt, the whole of society was rotten. I was not capable of dealing with such a complicated situation.

**Wang:** When the time came to film *The Spiral Staircase of Harbin*, and when we did that small exhibition together, I felt suddenly you broke free from your old shackles. You did not film as you had used to: though you were still a silent observer of your film, you began to get deeply involved in the material.

**Ji:** It was by that time that I had my own understanding of life and of Chinese society.

**Wang:** I remember in that film there were two main characters who had no connection with one other.

**Ji:** One was a classmate of mine whose husband was in prison, and the other was a scammer who later dropped to the bottom of the society. He was a character like Xiao Wu [the protagonist in Jia Zhangke’s film *Xiao Wu*]. One film was about the mother-daughter conflict, and the other was about the father-son conflict. Both were actually what I should have experienced by that age, but I hadn’t. It was from their lives that I
experienced such a parent-child relationship, and then I became interested in the theme of children, which led me to film *When the Bough Breaks* (危巢).

**Wang:** When I was selecting films for YunFest, I watched *When the Bough Breaks* at Yi Sicheng’s (易思成) home in Kunming, and was extremely moved by its tremendous power. It’s an important work of Chinese independent film and I wonder how its overwhelming forcefulness came about.

**Ji:** It was also a very special film for me. I spent much effort on it, which also has a great impact on myself. Some people joked with me: ‘Why don’t you stay in Japan? What a good life you will have there!’ But what is the meaning of living in Japan? China is my home, I came back and travelled everywhere, getting to know people from all walks of life. I found I was not able to move upward, so I moved downward and travelled around to see how other people lived their life in the hope of escaping my own predicament. As a result, I got stuck making documentary films. Is there really such an industry? Does China have one? Then why you film documentaries?

**Wang:** Indeed, there is no such independent documentary film industry and currently it might be gradually taking shape.

**Ji:** I was talking to my dad the other night and I said, ‘Dad, you’ve looked down on me all my life. I am always poor and rely on you and mom to take care of me. What do you think I should do? If under normal circumstances my films could be accepted by TV stations, would I still be in this situation? Do you think there are also social factors here?’

**Wang:** Of course you are right. What does *When the Bough Breaks* mean to you?

**Ji:** I think it represents a family in deadlock, and I was tied up in the deadlock of my own life at that time. *The Spiral Staircase of Harbin* was also a deadlock. Did you find out that it was also a kind of human relationship, which is again a deadlock, trapping the whole of Chinese society. The latter looks like it’s flourishing and changing every day, but in fact is in the process of tying itself into a huge knot, which today finally is tied tight.

**Wang:** Thus everyone is finally facing reality. It’s another kind of peace, and it’s good that we’re no longer trying to expend unfruitful effort.
Ji: Totally true.

Wang: The predicament in *When the Bough Breaks* was unresolvable. Now I begin to understand why it touched me so much: it was the determination of those two little girls to change their fate, which made me feel overwhelmed in particular. When looked at from the perspective of structure, the family structure in fact appears to be exactly the same as the broader social structure: the father is such an absurd dictator; that is also the patriarchal social structure in China.

Ji: That family, I stayed with them until last summer. Later I told them not to turn to me anymore if they had any more problems. I was not able help, as I was also getting old, like the father of their family. I had been going through every hardship and conflict in every place together with them. Then I felt deeply that there was no room or need for me to intervene in other people’s destinies and life, otherwise, it would be a complete waste of time. I painstakingly immersed myself in their life, helped, and persuaded them to move to Changping; I would help to scrub the floor of their place, throw away the rubbish, buy old furniture, and pack up their things. I did everything to change the life of this family.

Wang: Did the children see the film? What did they say about it?

Ji: They have watched it and I think they just didn’t care. For them it didn’t matter if the film was good or bad, they just thought how overbearing their father was when watching it. When I was filming it, I said, ‘Is it because I’m filming that your dad is overly excited and behaving like this?’ They said, ‘Auntie, thank you for coming with the camera, otherwise he would have made even bigger fuss.’ I felt a little relieved hearing the answer. Compared with the intensity of the pain that they experienced in real life, what is represented in the film was a piece of cake.

Wang: What really shocked me was the strength and determination of the two sisters.

Ji: And the missing big sister of the family were actually the motivation of two younger sisters. The big sister’s story is so brutal, and I suspect now that someone was on to her before her final disappearance because the years she disappeared were the peak for organ transplants in China. The school teacher introduced her to a job in far-away Inner Mongolia and she made one last phone call on the long distant bus. No news from her since. I even suspect that the school teacher knew she didn’t have an ID card, and tricked her into leaving. It was a huge trauma for the younger sisters, because if they didn’t improve their situation, they will repeat the fate of their eldest sister.
Wang: I understand why the girls have those kinds of strong personalities. They were struggling to save themselves.

Ji: On the day of their eldest sister’s departure, they helped pack her luggage. They have been feeling guilty about that and for many years they kept trying to commit suicide. How many times they tried they don’t remember. I was not doing enough either in making this film or in relation to other issues. I was far from doing well because I was neither competent nor tough. You can never imagine how hard it is to live a life in China. For me it is like a sea. Every Chinese person is a sea, and he or she is in possession of a sea of agony, self-contradiction, isolation, and loneliness, which, as a whole, is beyond expression in language. The ultimate way out for them is to be forgotten after death. This is how they have gone through life. In my other film *Baya*, I save the old grandmother Baya by saving her memory. Knowing many other people’s memories are fading in vain, I felt a sense of penetrating pain. Do you understand? (Crying)

4

Wang: *Baya* is the film completed after *When the Bough Breaks*?

Ji: The only one. Of the three films, one is about the dark underbelly of the city, the urban poor; another, immigrant workers in the city, the garbage collectors; and the other was about those who were left behind in the countryside. These are the three main groups composing the bottom strata of Chinese society. Isn’t that right? I always wanted in my heart to wander through China, and now I have done so. That is why I think I am only thirty years now because I have just got to know society.

Wang: I remember that you made *When the Bough Breaks* in 2011. And it has been ten years since then. Actually you haven’t shown your new film these ten years.

Ji: Do you mean *Baya*? It’s so interesting, but I’ve been living a fulfilled life all these years: every minute, every day, I was walking, feeling, and thinking, living a life of my own. I have never felt so fantastic because I have started to live independently. I separated from Sha Qing when I started to film Baya, and then went through what Baya was going through: her son’s death, her death, and then the death of my mother. I was with my mother in her last eleven days, and I was also with Baya’s grandson in the hospital in his last eleven days. It was during that period when I was with them at their death beds that I became a vegetarian. I have been a vegetarian for six years now, which completely changed my life in that I gradually develop my own
understanding of Buddhism, body and mind.

Wang: Let’s talk a little about Baya. What was your motivation to film her?

Ji: In When the Bough Breaks, the kids do odd jobs in cities. Meanwhile, I have always been concerned about the left-behind children in the countryside, I was eager to know what their life was like. One day I attended a talk on this topic at Luoguxiang (锣鼓巷) by a doctor from China Academy of Social Sciences. It was on Du’an (都安) in Guangxi. In a book by this doctor was the story of Baya’s family.

She had seven sons and one daughter. Her five sons died of pneumoconiosis, and one son and her son-in-law died in mine accidents. There was a large audience at that talk, and I stayed there till the end. Then I went to see the doctor and read his book. One week later, I was in Baya’s home. I had to meet her. What was she like?

Finally I saw her place and family, which was not as primitive or visually pleasing as I had thought. It was just very ordinary. When I saw Baya’s grandson lying in bed, at such a young age, I felt this is the right place I want to come.

Wang: Did you stay with them?

Ji: Yes, I lived in her home. They didn’t have internet there, and then I went back to the town and rented a small flat. I stayed in the flat for three days and went back to stay with them for four or five days a week. When I was with them, I was simply hanging out with them, doing nothing, not even reading books.

Wang: Did she understand what you were doing?

Ji: Sometimes I got up very late when she had already finished cleaning the place. Once I captured her saying scornfully in the film: ‘Just got up!’ Going downstairs there was about going down forty to fifty steps of small rocks and mud; it was not a path, but only small rocks and mud, very dangerous. Every time I went there with two portions of food, one for the old grandma Baya, and the other for the grandson. At the beginning I stayed with her grandson because I did not dare to move into the Grandma’s place. Later I dared to move to the Grandma’s.

Wang: Why?
Ji: It was too scary. So many people had died in the old place where only the Grandma now lived alone.

Wang: What, according to you, was her support?

Ji: Her lovely great grandchildren! Those lively kids stayed around her; and she, in contrast, was like a big tree that kept bearing new sprouts. That is the strength of the traditional Chinese family: no matter how many people die, new members are born and the younger generation grows up. So today she still has may children with her. She said, ‘I have so many grandsons and great grandsons, what is the point of missing those dead kids?’ In the film, you don’t see her crying in front of others when both her eldest son and her eldest grandson die of pneumoconiosis. She brought up the kids of her deceased children. However, the orphans never talked to her; in fact, they looked down on her as they thought she preferred boys rather than girls, and so on.

Wang: How long did you stay there making the film?

Ji: One year and eight months. That was the period I lived with death for. During the time I separated with Sha Qing and thus lost my love. Before I would have tried to look for another lover, but then I knew I would never. I would live a lonely life from then on.

Wang: When you went to Baya, you were actually looking for a demonstration, or a way to get through this. You wanted to see how she could get through such catastrophes in life. In fact, you were dealing with your own problems. You were there with your own dilemma and confusion.

Ji: Yes, I was trying to deal with or run away from my own problems. I was stuck in my personal predicament while filming those three documentaries.

Wang: Did you feel relieved or sort out your problems?

Ji: Of course they helped a lot.

Wang: Did Baya give you strength?

Ji: Tremendously! Each film gave me huge strength, unconsciously. Look at Baya, she had a beautiful smile and was always laughing and talking; She was so happy weeding the fields. That kind of power of life, how
incredible! But what really empowered me was finally I finished this film all by myself, while at the same
time chewing over my own life trauma and supporting my old parents, both in their eighties. I supported my
parents as a dutiful daughter, and survived and finished the film despite not being able to earn any money.
Last year, in the pandemic, I finally found the ending for Baya.

Wang: Was the ending the same as what I saw the year before? What is it like now?

Ji: It’s different, very plain and simple. The focus is on the children. People die quietly; children come
into the world and grow up. It is simple, not ambitious. I had no ambition in the process of filming, but
became somehow ambitious while cutting it. Because Mr. Liao said it was good and many people saw it
and thought it was good, I thought it might become a great work. But in the end, when I looked at the film,
I saw the limitations that did not justify that kind of ambition. It was still the same type of film as Gongbu’s
Happy Life: no cinematic imagination, nor adequate artistic expression of talent on the part of the film. I
was straightforwardly presenting Baya’s life, which was not enough to support grand ambitions. So now its
returned to this simple, plain state: I present what I have filmed. This was my original intention in filming
Baya: life goes on continuously; people face disasters in life, one after another. At the end of the film, I
revealed how many in this family had died of pneumoconiosis. Six million families in China are like this,
and Baya’s family is only one of them. All her sons died of pneumoconiosis, which is why I captured this old
woman on film, otherwise, who would know her story?

Wang: Was how the old woman talked to the camera different from Gongbu’s Happy Life?

Ji: Completely different! It was Baya’s narration of her own life, not through my eyes, which was the most
different point. Now Baya in the film had the kind of ‘subjectivity’ that you always mention. Now I couldn’t
go back and make a film like Gongbu’s Happy Life; I couldn’t do that again, that period is gone forever.
I now begin to talk, to express, both me myself and my protagonists. Finally, I know how to talk. Having
experienced such upheaval in Chinese society, the ups and downs, I see it clearly for what it is.
季丹一个人住在昌平碓臼峪，在北京郊区遥远的深山里。我去过这里两次，这次我发现她家附近有一个满族村，而季丹有八分之三满族血统，我问她是不是住在此地有归属感？她说她其实不了解这些村庄，“有一天要交出一个异类，他们肯定先交我。我没有那么甜美的幻想——农村怎么样，人淳朴什么的，人都是一样的。”

我认为季丹是独立纪录片界语言表达能力最强的导演，她能将微妙复杂的状态用语言呈现出来。记得上次在她家看《芭雅》的粗剪版，还谈到女性主义，她说男权就像抽过烟的屋子，一屋子的烟味，但男人可能自己并不觉得。我一直对这句话赞不绝口。

季丹的经历很传奇，她一九六三年出生，但她说她现在才活到三十岁的状态。她目前已创作十部左右纪录片，《芭雅》是她最新的作品。她以前的爱人沙青也是纪录片导演，他们曾经在一起创作，现在他们分开了，这让季丹重新去思考女性和恋爱的关系。而巴雅是一位饱经苦难的女性，她去拍摄巴雅，其实也是去看另一个女人如何去面对自己的黑夜。

这次交流除了谈她的作品，还更多地谈到她的个人生活经验与纪录片创作之间的关系。这让我发现纪录片导演和拍摄对象、作品之间更为复杂的互动。在电影理论里，无论如何纪录片都比剧情片更为客观，但我从季丹这里看到纪录片的主观是如何展现的，她拍摄别人其实是拍摄自己。季丹让我对拍摄客体和作者微妙的交流路径有了更深的了解。此次谈话时间为二〇二一年七月十日，地点在碓臼峪。

王小鲁（以下简称王）：之前我看过别人采访你的文章，你的表达能力特别强。

季丹（以下简称季）：语言其实是一种魔术的，不同的场景有潜在的目的。职业采访者特别讨厌，因为他有目的性。你有目的性，我也有目的性了。因为你是进攻方，我就得防守。然后就把人的功利心都激发起来了，我得表现得好，我得说得好，就特别烦人。
王：其实拍纪录片也面临采访这个问题。

季：我早期拍纪录片从来不采访。后来因为我父亲他年纪大了，然后他特别喜欢说话，拉着一个人说几个小时，把人说睡着了他还接着说。后来干脆，反正也得陪着你，拿着摄像机拍你说吧。其实摄像机特别有趣，就是拿起摄像机就有一种仪式感，你就发现是在看一个电影了，而不是单独听你父亲在唠叨了。我拍《芭雅》的时候才想起，没准可以把芭雅的一生让她讲出来。也是那种方式，就是一天四个小时，连续一星期，这种采访特别过瘾。

王：你说拍《芭雅》这个片子后才开始采访，说明你之前的片子都是直接电影。昨天又看了你早期拍西藏的《贡布的幸福生活》，还有《老人们》，我发现两部都是早期非常重要的直接电影。

季：对。我从来都没有采访过。拍巴雅的时候，就是因为我觉得影像真的无法表达她过去的生活，因为过去已经没有了，就只有从语言里面才能找到过去的痕迹。

王：你最早的纪录片观念是怎么形成的？

季：对我来说都不叫纪录片不纪录片的，就是影像。就是突然手里就有个机器了，这个机器可以摄制影像。它要变成什么，我根本就不知道。最早在日本看电视节目，对于什么是纪录片，什么是电影，什么是剪辑，完全没有概念。所以要是《贡布的幸福生活》好看的话，就正因为这一点——它的业余性，特别直接，摄像机就是干这个用的，我就这么用了，没有任何多余的想法。

王：你在西藏几年？

季：前后三年，这俩片子是第三年拍的。前边拍了很多影像都坏了，也没找到一个真正的核心人物或者团体。第三年我才发现，这一群老人和这一家人应该是核心。这群老人是死亡，而这家人是生活，我本来想这两个主题剪在一个片子里，后来成了两个片子。

王：你那时候一直住在贡布家吗？

季：第三年住在贡布家，之前住到别人家。

王：你那种相处的方式也挺有意思的，是深度相处。
季：贡布家一大群女孩儿好玩，所以我就又回到了童年。因为小的时候我就没有玩够，我其实是特别野性的，爱玩爱跑，结果天天憋在家里让我练小提琴。那个时候我都快三十岁了，突然找到了小时候跟同龄女孩儿们一起玩的那种感觉，就过得特别愉快。

王：关于你在西藏的那段时光，我见过一个叙述是，其实你受日本野中章宏的影响，也是的确想拍一个片子出来。好像上次我见蒋樾还说到，在西藏遇到你，蒋樾当时觉得藏族是外人的生活，他介入不了，他听说你在那儿学藏语，他说这个我干不了，他很佩服你。所以你开始也是带着目的要去拍个片子出来？

季：我小时候就挺喜欢看前苏联的那些冒险文学，去北极探险啊那些，就对非常非常远的地方非常感兴趣。

王：浪漫主义。就是对远在他乡的大自然的、野性的、充满激情的东西感兴趣。

季：探险，边界啊那种……西藏它跟八十年代的大学生活有着非常重要的关系，蒋樾、段锦川他们是我的前辈。我当时也想毕业去西藏，然后没去成，日本的诱惑更大，我又有条件去日本，就去了日本了。

王：你从北师大毕业就去了日本，学什么呢？

季：重新进了个大学。学的是社会学。我在日本参加了一些西藏的活动。本来我对西藏有一种幻想，大学没毕业的时候就去了一次西藏，那个时候的西藏对我来说有探险啊，浪漫主义，像你说的。

王：你说大学期间去西藏是哪年？

季：八六年，那时候的拉萨美极了。

王：像牟森谁的那时候都在拉萨，西藏话剧团。

季：对呀，我就跟牟森去的，完了回来了一趟，冬天的时候又要回去，我就跟着牟森一路上从青海进到拉萨去。现在想起来，八十年代就像一块沃土，东三省似的，原来没被开发出来的黑土地，特别肥沃，特别荒凉，但是特别有生命力。八十年代太短了，一下子就过去了，
你说得我都要哭了，其实一切都是从那里来的。

王：原来你之前去过一次西藏，后来再次去的时候，是从日本回来去的，那个时候是受野中章宏的启发，对吧？

季：对。那次去西藏在拉萨乱转，他们说你别出去转，康巴人挺野蛮的。我们有同学毕业后在西藏电视台里头，天天煮点方便面啊，自己在那打麻将啊，不跟藏族人接触。可是我特别喜欢出去转，拉萨有一种特别的气味。这是我前世的关系？我也不知道，反正喜欢得不得了。一个人上布达拉宫，那时布达拉宫人很少，没有游客，从很远的地方来朝佛的人特别多，我就跟着他们走，一直走，一直走到文成公主的像那个地方。过去我知道一点点那个故事，但是我看到那个像，突然就觉得跟我有关系，就开始哭。正好出去以后是一个平台，能看到整个拉萨。我当时就发愿，我说我要跟这片土地发生一点关系。

王：这个感觉很奇怪。

季：对，特别奇妙。我觉得命运好多事情都是在那样的瞬间种下了种子。

王：你与纪录片的渊源还是从日本开始的，在北师大肯定没想到要去拍纪录片对不对？

季：对，其实我一直想的是写作。但是不敢轻易写，我的人生经历都没开始呢，我写啥？我从来没有做一个独立的人，生活在世界上决定我自己的人生，我的人生根本没有开始。我都不知道怎么去评价我父亲母亲，不知道怎么看我自己，一切对我来说就是不知道，我怎么写啊？

可能在这种情况下，去日本了以后有各种机会，能拿起摄像机来，突然我可以换另一种方式来看生活。或者说在我和生活之间隔一个东西，要不然我无法接受它。因为它跟我阅读的世界是两个世界，我不认可它。就像我跟我爸平时说话，我听不下去，但当我拿起摄像机来，我突然就能听他讲了。因为有一个框在那儿了，能留下来了，有时间性了，这就是电影的魅力，就突然变成了一个有时间性的东西了。

王：拿起摄像机，你忽然就换了一个角度，你有自觉性了，你在使用文化眼光去看它，已经不再是日常生活的看了。

季：对。还有一种，就是你可以选择了。你在生活中是无法选择的，但是当你有一个框子的
时候，你可以选择他说这个不说那个，你可以选择拍这个部分，不拍那个部分。然后就找到了和现实相处的方式，在中国活下去的方式。

王：你说的最早拿起摄像机是什么时候？是上次你给我看的那个吗？

季：野中章宏拿来的一个小机器，比你看到的那个还小，早没了。他住在越秀宾馆，我当时在西单，跟摄影家吕楠是朋友。野中章宏说你过来我教你用摄像机，我就穿着一个蓝色的裙子去了，就是很文艺青年的那种。他一看见我，他说把衣服换了，这没法拍，哈哈。我就知道工作的时候不能这个样子，回到家换了一身牛仔裤。然后他就告诉我，开机，拍摄，远景，远景，很简单，那个特别容易掌握，全都是自动的，我学会了，就拿着这个去东北了。一用它，我就喜欢了。我不是说我特别爱看画展吗？印象派里有很多雨中的或者雪后的，我会特别对某一些风景着迷，比如秋天的风景，雪后的风景。那个小机器有一个寻像器，我可以在特殊的天气里看到那个东西了，就是让我着迷的风景。其实我是拿摄像机去寻找美，我一直渴望的那种美。

王：你跟野中是什么时候认识的啊？

季：差不多在一九九一年的春天。我是八八年去的日本，三年后第一次回到中国，住在吕楠家，后来拿着吕楠的摄影到日本去。我有一个朋友的好朋友叫广河隆一，他是日本非常著名的左派报道摄影家，也是社会活动家，一直拍巴勒斯坦，我就拿给他看了，他才介绍这些人和杂志给我，一个杂志又介绍野中章宏，就这样我跟野中章宏见了面聊天，聊到吕楠，又聊到我自己。我说我喜欢西藏，后来去西藏拍。

王：野中章宏在日本，你跟他交往多吗？

季：多，他们是一个亚洲报道团体。很多年轻摄影师主要以报道摄影为主，也有些人是艺术摄影。他们经常开会，我就在里面听，野中讲说，影像时代来了，这是一个遥远的雷鸣，雷声已经近了，我们要改变了。

王：野中章宏鼓励大家用摄像机去拍，去报道世界。

季：对，一开始是照相机，认识他没多久，日本朝日电视台就有一个影展的节目了。小机器可以做原来电视台或者电影一个团队才能做的事情了。后来我回国了，他才开始把这个小机器给我。
王：那个机器也是 Hi8是吗？

季：就是 Hi8。那时候家庭录像一般都是一个 8，但是这 Hi8影像就很不错了，当时有相应的剪辑机什么的。

王：后来你去拍西藏，然后拍完了是给日本播吗？

季：对，就拿回日本去播。当时那几个片子不错，野中那时候就跟电视台建立了关系，三四分钟能给十五万日元，野中都给我们，就很多。十五万日元相当于那时候一万多块钱。我再教胡杰，让胡杰也拍，我也拍。像街边的一个理发店，我就去拍外地来的理发师一天的生活，这就是一个片子。还拍了很多，拿到日本去，一下就赚了一大笔钱。然后就源源不断地说有很多这种活儿。但是我觉得没意思了。

王：你这很像央视当时的《生活空间》啊。

季：是，就是这样。就讲一个人的故事，他天天在那儿干活，回家吃饭，去买菜。跟儿子对话，完了你问问儿子，儿子上学什么的，就这点东西，表面的那一层油，刮起来谁都能拍，只能那么拍。就是让你说点真话，自然一点儿。这个时候有点钱了，我就说我到西藏去，结果我去西藏就不回来了。野中就特别生气，给我写了很长的一封信，他正需要我的时候，可以大量拍的时候，那边栏目都说好了，我就不干了，跑了。

王：你觉得重复没意思。

季：对。一下子野中就病倒了，得了甲肝，很危险的一种病。我给他写长信，向他道歉，讲我为什么要留在这儿，我不喜欢做那些新闻式的东西，还是喜欢做长一点的纪录片，能实现我从小的一个梦想，请他理解。

二

王：你最早给日本拍摄了一些电视纪录片，还拍了《日本战后残留妇女在中国》，据说还获奖了。但《贡布的幸福生活》、《老人们》应该是你最早的独立作品。能否再谈一下当年的感受？
季：那个年代，我在西藏会对每一个人都怀着敬重，他们在我眼睛里出现的时候都像镜头里面的人，因为我是那样看他们的。这个世界就是你的眼光的投射，我看到的是他们最美好最纯净的一面，所以他们就是那个样子。可能换一个角度又不是那个样子了，那村子里乱七八糟脏的，人说人坏话，你要把那些东西剪出来，又是另外一个样子了。

王：对。你在《贡布的幸福生活》里面还是一定程度上在美化。

季：肯定是美化。但是那个美化不是广告的美化，它不是有目的性的美化。这个不一样吧？美化和美化完全不同。我真的是看到和感受到了他们的美，那个不是美化，那个就是美。我心中没有的信仰我找到了，我在中国没有找到那种大家庭的温暖，我找到了，那些人烧着火，围在火塘坐，一家人说说笑笑的那种传统生活的美，我在那儿找到了。那种一群老年人为一个人去送葬，相互之间的那种关系，人和人之间的关系我找到了。我看到的就是这些美，打动我的就是这些美，我干嘛不把它拍出来呢？

王：其实《老人们》还蛮深刻的，拍了这群老年人如何过公共生活，如何去管理寺庙。如何在一个礼崩乐坏的时代尽量去维护精神世界，其实那个片子更深刻一些。

季：对，现在都不知道怎么样了！当年很多三四十岁的偶尔也会参加，说将来再过十年我就加入他们了，将来老了我们就来啦，那个村庄多美好，你想想。

王：打动我的在于，那些人很知道怎么处理死亡，处理尸体，各种事情，游刃有余，村庄这套生活的体系建立得很好。

季：我体验到了宗教在生活中的美好，它就那么自然而然。俩小姑娘会为要去祠庙里面磕头，俩人争执，说你去放羊，今天早上你都拜过佛了，拜佛我还没绕一圈呢。那一年我安安定定地生活在这个家庭里，如果没有要写书，或者拿一个摄像机要拍，其实你是很难忍受那种生活的。但因为我拿着摄像机，我就能在那踏踏实实地待着。

王：贡布家真的理解你这个拍摄行为吗？

季：不理解。但是每一次回家去，我都大包小包的，他们家缺啥了我就拿啥，就帮着他们买。

王：好远啊，你是用什么交通工具？
季：后来有时候坐飞机了。一开始坐火车坐到西宁，西宁坐一天一夜火车到格尔木，据说那个火车特别危险，一定要坐软卧，要不然经常有强盗上来洗劫一空。世界边缘的感觉，就是那种黑暗的不安感就开始有了。到了格尔木了，就住那边的宾馆，没有吃的，饭馆里只有面条子。然后就开始准备坐三天三夜的大巴车，恨不得都没有地板的那种，哐当哐当的大巴车，旁边的人怕热，大冬天把窗户一打开就唱歌。那个头发飘荡的全是酥油的味道，脚丫子的味道，三天三夜坐车到了拉萨。到了拉萨以后可以休整了，拉萨有好吃的印度菜，还有四川人开的肥肠粉店，宾馆也比较舒服，在那儿准备好了再去日喀则，日喀则就坐汽车了，六个多小时。到日喀则有朋友，喝喝酒，玩一玩啊，然后再搭车又几个小时到拉孜。到了老拉孜，还要再步行三个小时。

王：我记得有一次你说 Hi8拍的素材，去欧洲电视台，他们是觉得画质太差，他们电视台不会接受。在日本是可以的吧？

季：就是实验，后来电视台发现，这个内容好，虽然画质差一点，内容有意思。好像是我拍的那些残留妇女，据说 NHK好多编导一看，说这是不可能的，她怎么能拍到家庭矛盾这么深入的影像呢？这不可思议。他们那种拍摄方式不可能拍到这种东西，一大帮人，多少预算，去的目的很明确，要跟你谈，我要拍什么什么，然后人家就准备好，OK，下午俩小时，拍完了走了，怎么可能进入那种状态呢？都是一个秀的状态。

王：你这两部长片后来在哪儿播过吗？

季：《老人们》在阿姆斯特丹 IDFA播过。有一些老人家挺感动的，说难得陪一群老人那么久，谢谢你。贡布，我自己初剪了一个版本，然后就拿到了 NHK去了，他们的剪辑师看了我的素材，看了三天，态度极其不耐烦，这什么玩意儿啊，没法剪。然后就把他们上司找来了，把我剪辑的那个版本拿给他看以后态度就变了。上司说多有趣啊，就不是一般专业摄影师拍的一般意义上的 NHK纪录片。我们俩就开始聊西藏，后来剪了十几天以后，那个剪辑师态度完全变了，对我特别客气了。最后分开剪出两个片子，反响还非常好，好多信件。可能也是很少有的片子，让日本观众那么近地看到西藏人的生活。

三

王：拍完了西藏后，接下来就去陕北拍摄了是吗？

季：那个漫长的黑暗点就来临了，想一想都可怕，我就觉得是整体的停顿。从各个方面的一
种停顿，都不如文化大革命，或者进到监狱里头了。进到监狱里头吧，身体受到约束，但是内在会特别活跃，而这个是整个陷入一种停滞状态。烂泥堆里一种停滞状态，原地打圈圈，我觉得长达十年吧。

王：为什么呢？

季：我过去的生活特别传统，因为受我妈妈的影响。我妈妈就是外面特别能干，一回家就相夫教子，就觉得自己不重要，男人重要。那我跟沙青好，他不动，我就动不了。就像主人躺在那儿不动，那个狗绕着他，一圈圈地转，一圈圈地转，叫也叫不醒他。我自己又离不开他，离开他我就觉得这个世界就没有了，我是他的狗啊，就转了十年。

王：就跟沙青的十年。

季：一开始的十年。到二〇〇三年有了电影节之后也是，沙青经常停在那儿不动，后来他认为他停在那儿不动是因为我在他身边。没有我，他也不会停在那儿，起码他可以去恋爱，生活就会有波澜，但是有我，他唯一的动力——就是恋爱的动力给切断了，就更动不起来了。而我，如果说没有像狗围着他，我可能还会慢慢慢慢往前走，但是整个就停在那儿。

王：你跟沙青什么时候认识的？

季：九七年？九八年？

王：都九七、九八年了。沙青早年好像也在西藏那儿拍东西。

季：但是我是觉得跟沙青这个关系，是我最重要的课程，我最受益无穷的一段经历。现在说那十年停在那儿了，但是那十年就应该停在那儿，就对了。后来才彻底让我从他那个套里面解下来，一个女人必须要和男人解过一次套。我现在跟沙青变成了一种非常好的朋友关系。时代也在变，在往上走，各种活儿可以做，可以出国，可以拍电影，好多事情都可以做的时候，我们躺平在那儿，躺平了十年，也挺好的。

王：九七年到〇七年是吧？

季：差不多吧。我觉得是从〇八年我拍《哈尔滨回旋楼梯》我才醒过来，又开始自己做东西了。那中间做的所有的东西都是心不在焉的，《空城一梦》、《地上流云》，都不值一提，
也确实不好。因为我每天想的都是给沙青写情书啊，都惦记着他呢，就希望拉着他来拍，他跟我一起又拍不了，他自己《在一起的时光》拍得很好，我自己就跟着他后边。那些年真的，不可思议，一个人就被下了咒一样的在那儿待着。

王：所以说，唯一的就是超脱，独立。

季：对呀，你说你在那个泥潭里谁输谁赢都是泥潭，谁能赢呢？就是赢了以后你会发现自己赢的就是这么个玩意儿啊，赢它干嘛啊，是不是？

王：是，就必须独立。

季：你说对了，所以没有那十年，我没法像现在这样利利落落活在这个世界上。人怎么会需要另外一个人呢，你就发现，一个人独裁多么好啊，我想买个桌子，立马我就买。

王：那几年的作品你都不满意？

季：不满意。

王：你等于说一下子把那十年创作基本都否定了，当然这十年肯定也是你在修炼的过程，对吧？

季：首先是我不会剪辑，我太依赖沙青的剪辑。因为沙青一剪辑，有效果，然后他看东西有判断力，现在我就发现了，因为他只旁观，所以他有判断力。你当裁判员的时候还得当运动员，那运动员你能当得好吗？当然他也是很敏感，他有他的天赋，我就觉得自己没这个部分，我就坐在那儿，就开始琢磨沙青到底爱不爱我，到底怎么回事儿。我心里有个大的问号，就是沙青咋回事儿。你说我这不有毛病吗。很多人一辈子都在琢磨配偶。

王：我发现，这十年主要是什么问题啊，你被他迷上了。

季：是呢。他剪片子的时候特别会下意识地使手腕，都不是故意的，他就会那种，时冷时热啊，不下定论啊，老是这样挑逗着你啊这种。他也不是有意识，他是下意识这样做。

王：他对你也是这样的？
王：其实不是他有意识地要抓你一把，这是人的一个潜意识，你走掉我又不舍得，没爱情也有亲情。但他又需要其他部分的满足，所以这个固定的关系就很拧巴。

季：你要全心全意对我，我又觉得无聊，我又找一个那样的人，他希望有一个能激发他热情的，因为他本来就懒洋洋不想做事情，需要有什么东西来激发他的那种热情，对生命的热望。他不像我，我从内里找，我看一本书就来劲儿了，每个人来源不一样。

王：我理解。《在一起的时光》是你们共同的作品吗？

季：《在一起的时光》都是他拍他剪的。他独立的，我只是帮他建立关系，帮帮忙。

王：你导演的《空城一梦》是什么情况？

季：《空城一梦》拍着拍着就发现那几年太混乱了。那个时期的我自己没有能力去面对那种混乱。现在我每拍一个片子，我知道该怎么办了。那个时候我没有能力去面对这种整个腐败的社会，连医院都是腐败的，打工子弟学校都是腐败的，公益机构都是腐败的，整个社会是烂的。我没有能力去处理那么复杂的情况。

王：到了《哈尔滨旋转楼梯》的时候，当时我们一起做那个小展览，就觉得你一下子跳脱出来了。你不再是以前传统的那种方式了。虽然你看着也是没说什么话，也是静静地旁观，但是你开始深度介入素材的处理。

季：就是对生活、对整个中国社会都有了我自己的认识了。

王：我记得那个片子，有两个主角，但他们彼此无关。

季：一个是我的同学，她老公进监狱了，还有一个是混混，后来没落了，家里穷的。他像《小武》里的小武一样的人。一个是母女的矛盾，一个是父子的矛盾。其实都是我生活中到那个年龄应该经历的，但我没有经历过。等于是从他们的生活中经历了这样的父子母子关系，然后对孩子感兴趣了，这样才延续了下面的《危巢》。

王：《危巢》是那年为“云之南”选片，在昆明易思成家看的，我极其震撼。影片中的力量
十分巨大。中国独立电影里面有这么大力量的，那是重要的一部，我也不知道为什么。

季：对我来说也是特别特别的一部，用了很大力气，重拳打了我自己一下的作品。有时候有人开玩笑，说你怎么不在日本留着，日本生活多好，我说我在那儿干嘛啊？这是我的地方啊，我回来中国真的在游历，上上下下，左左右右，上面我上不去，没人接受我。我就往下走，到处游历，看看别人怎么生活的，来逃避自己的困境。把自己困在那儿，哪儿有纪录片这个行业啊？中国有吗？你拍了干嘛呢？

王：真没形成，到现在试图形成。

季：那天晚上跟我爸感概，我说爸爸你一辈子看不上我，穷困潦倒，老靠父母照顾，那你说我该怎么办呢？要是正常情况下，我能拍片子电视台能用，那我至于像现在这个样子吗？你说是不是有社会的原因？

王：当然。《危巢》对你意味着什么？

季：我觉得《危巢》是一个家庭的死结，当时我也在我的死结里头，《哈尔滨旋转楼梯》也是个死结。你发现了吗？它也是人际关系，也是个死结，你看整个中国社会就在那个死结里头。表面上看着蒸蒸日上，每天都在变化，其实我觉得就是在打一个巨大的结的过程，今天这个结，终于，死死地系紧了。

王：大家踏实了，这是另外一种平静，也不折腾了，挺好。

季：真的是。

王：《危巢》那个困境没法处理，我现在开始明白为什么那么打动我了，那两个小女孩一定要改变命运的意志，让我特别震撼。后来你把它放在一个结构里，其实家庭结构和社会结构一模一样，他父亲居然是这样的独裁，我觉得真是太荒唐了，那是中国的父权社会结构。

季：那一家人，我陪伴他们一直走到去年的夏天。后来我说再有事儿你们就不要找我了，我没有能力再帮你们了，这个家里面父亲也老了，我也老了。我一直在陪伴他们家的每一个困境，每一个矛盾，每一个地方。后来我深深地感觉到，他人的命运，他人的世界，我没有任何插手的余地和必要性，完全是浪费时间。我苦口婆心地介入，帮助，劝他们搬到昌平来，我会帮他们家擦地，扔垃圾，买旧家具，收拾东西，我就想去改变他们家的命运。
王：片子拍出来之后那些孩子看过吗？他们是怎么评价？

季：看过，我觉得他们就是无所谓吧，片子好坏无所谓，就是觉得你看我爸有多霸道。我拍的时候说，是不是因为我拍，你爸过分兴奋，就表现成这样。他说阿姨，多谢你来拿摄像机拍，要不然他会闹得更凶。我才放心了。他们真实的生活里体验的那种痛苦的强度、激烈性，我这个片子比起来简直就是小菜一碟。

王：当时挺让我震惊的就是这两姐妹，极其强大坚定。

季：还有失踪的大姐，她们的动力来源于那个大姐。大姐的故事太残忍了，而且我现在怀疑，她失踪那几年是中国内脏移植高峰期。就有人盯上她了，那个学校的老师给介绍工作，介绍到那么远去。她在去内蒙的长途车上打了最后一个电话，然后从此消失。我都怀疑是那些老师知道她没有身份证，有这种可能性，把她骗走，她再也没有音信了。这个痛苦对她们姐妹俩来说是巨大的创伤。因为她们不往上走，她们家就继续大姐的命运。

王：我明白为什么形成那一种个性，那种要强的性格，那是自救。

季：姐姐走那天，她们还帮着收拾行李，她们觉得自己有罪过，多少年她们俩的目标就是要自杀，死了多少次。我就觉得这个电影也好，什么也好，我做的太差，远远不够，我没有那个狠劲儿，没有那个能力，就是真正中国生活的那种强度，你是不可想象的。我形容它是一个大海，每个中国人都是一大海，他的痛苦，他的自相矛盾，他的孤立性，他的寂寞感全都是一个大海。而且他自己没有办法用语言去表达他自己，就靠最后死亡的时候被遗忘，一个个就这样就过去了。像我拍的那个《芭雅》的老奶奶，我救起了一个老奶奶，我救起了她的记忆，多少人的记忆就这样过去了，强大的痛苦，你知道吗？（哭）

四

王：《危巢》之后成片的就是《芭雅》了？

季：就《芭雅》了。这三个片子，一是城市黑暗的部分，城市贫民；然后是进城打工的人群，在城市里面捡垃圾的；还有留在乡下的。中国底层社会的三大块。是吧？我潜意识里面想要游历中国，所以我说我现在才三十岁，我刚刚游历完。
王：《危巢》我记得是二〇一一年左右，到现在十年了。十年你这个新的片子其实还没有真正拿出来。

季：你说《芭雅》是吗？太有意思了，可是这些年我好充实啊，每一分钟，每一天，每一个月，都在活着，都在走路，都在思考，在感受，从没有这么好，因为我变成一个人了。从《芭雅》拍的时候，我就开始变成一个人了。我跟沙青分开，然后开始经历芭雅的经历，她儿子的死，她的死，然后是我母亲的死，我母亲的最后十一天，芭雅孙子在医院也是十一天，都是我陪伴的，那两个十一天。我开始吃素，今年到六年了，吃素改变我整个生活。对佛教，对各种身心灵的那种一点儿一点儿的认识。

王：咱们说回《芭雅》，什么机缘让你去拍芭雅？

季：《危巢》这些孩子在城市里打工，乡下的留守儿童我一直挺关心的，想知道他们是什么样子的。有一次锣鼓巷有一个讲座，我就去了，讲的就是广西的都安，一个社科院的一个博士写了一本书，就讲到了这一家人。

她有七个儿子一个女儿，其中六个儿子都去世了，有一个死于矿山事故，其他死于尘肺病，女婿也死于井下事故。现场人特别多，二三百人就挤满了，我整个听下来了，听完了就去找那个博士，看完了他的书，一个星期以后我就到了那个地方了。我就觉得这个女人我一定要见见她，她什么样儿啊？

最后看到她家，她家那个村子不是我想象的那么原始，或者视觉上那么好看，特别特别普通。看到阿雅那个孙子年纪轻轻的躺在床上，一想就是它了，就是这儿了。

王：你是住在她家吗？

季：住在她家啊。他们那没有网络，然后我就回到县城，租了一个小房子。在小房子里住三天，下去待四五天，这样的一个节奏。在那儿的时候连书都不看，二十四小时跟他们待在一起。

王：老人家她能理解你的行为吗？

季：有的时候我会起得很晚，她都打扫回来了，有一次我在影像里看到她很不屑地说，才起。下楼相当于四五十阶台阶，而且没有路，都是那样的小石头或者泥什么的，还挺危险的。我每次都买两份吃的，给老奶奶一份，给她孙子家一份。我住在她孙子家，因为老奶奶家我不
敢住，后来我才敢住。

王：为什么？

季：太害怕了，死了那么多人，而老房子就老奶奶一个人。

王：是什么支撑着她呢？你后来了解到。

季：可爱的重孙。那些活生生的孩子们围着她，她真的就像大树一样，不停地滋出新芽了，这就是中国传统家族的强大，死多少人都无所谓，又长出新的了，一批就起来了。活在今天，她有这么多孩子呢，她也回答了，她说我这么多孙子呢，想他们又有什么用。片子中她的长子长孙因尘肺病去世。她从没在人前哭过，一直把死去儿子们的孩子养大。她带着那些孤儿跟她住在一起，那些孤儿从来不跟她说一句话，看不上那个奶奶，就觉得她重男轻女什么的。

王：你在那儿待了多久，拍了多长时间？

季：一年八个月。与死亡共生的一年八个月。这个过程中我经历了失恋，跟沙青分开，巨大的创伤，你就知道人生从此你就孤独了，跟以前不一样了，以前是你还会找下一个，这次从此就孤独了。

王：你去找芭雅，其实你是想找一个示范，或者找一个方法，你想看她面临如此的灾难是怎么度过的，其实你是处理自己的问题。你带着自己的困境和困惑。

季：处理自己的问题或者逃避自己的问题。这三部片子都是这样，都是在那个漩涡里面。

王：那你拍完了后，你有没有缓解或者解决这个困惑。

季：当然有了。

王：芭雅给你力量了。

季：太有了，每一部都有。那种力量我觉得是潜移默化的。看到芭雅，她每天特别爱说笑，跟大家在一起，笑得可甜美了，她在地里拔草，你能感觉到她很快乐，不可思议。生命的那种强大！但最后真正给我力量的是，我把这个片子拍出来了，剪出来了。我同时面对自己个
人生活一团糟的那种创伤，拍芭雅的时候我两个老父母都八十多岁了，几乎我一个人承担着。这边肩负着老父母，我作为一个女人来行使自己的职责。挣不着钱的情况下，我活过来了，这边还把片子拍出来了，《芭雅》尽管没有最终完成，但是在去年疫情的时候，我终于把它结尾完成了。

王：跟我前年看的一样吗？现在是一个什么样的形式和结尾？

季：不一样了。特别淡，特别简单，结尾还是落在孩子们身上。淡淡的人就走了，孩子人就活起来，长大了。就很平淡，去掉了野心，我拍这个片子的时候也没有野心，但是在剪的时候产生过野心。因为廖老师也说这个好，很多人看过了也觉得好，我就产生了野心，觉得它可能变成一个很棒的东西。但到最后我怎么看那些素材，都是有局限性的，完成不了那样的野心，它还是一个和拍《贡布的幸福生活》一样的方式拍出来的东西。没有更多的电影的想象力，或者电影方面过多的艺术表达的才华的展现，都没有。我真的就老老实实地拍巴雅的生活，它支撑不了那么大的一个东西。所以现在又回到这个简单的没有野心的状态，拍到了什么，我就呈现出什么。这是我拍他们的初衷，生命生生不息，他们这样面对痛苦，一点一点过去了，淡淡地把他们家尘肺病死了多少人，这些情况放在结尾。中国六百万家庭都是这样，这是其中的一个。她儿子死了，一个一个全都是尘肺病，所以才捞出来这么一个老奶奶，要不然早就淹没了，谁会记得她的故事。

王：老太太对镜头的讲述，还是和《贡布的幸福生活》不一样了？

季：完全不同了。就是芭雅自己的讲述，巴雅讲她的人生，已经不是我看他们了，这跟以前完全不同了，这个人物，你爱说的那种“主体性”有了。现在再让我回过头拍《贡布》那样的片子，我不能拍了，那个时期永远都过去了。我开始说话了，我要表达，不管拍摄对象也好，我也好，都要说话了。她知道该怎么说了。经历了中国社会这种动荡，这样起起落落，我现在很清楚地看到它是什么。
The first DV production in China, *Old Man* (老头，1999), was filmed by Yang Lina (杨荔钠). As a then actress in a drama troupe, Yang’s path into documentary filmmaking was unique. Seeing from the perspective of performance and characters, she discovered the beauty of a group of elderly people chatting on the street, and then started filming. Yang’s work draws heavily on the power of her intuition, and as a result is often able to break out from established film patterns. Her rich filmmaking ideas, coming out of her practice, impressed me a lot during this conversation.

Around 2001, I showed her *Home Video* (家庭录像带，2000) and Wang Fen’s (王芬) *More Than One Is Unhappy* (不快乐的不止一个，2000) together in a film festival and called them the ‘twin jades’ of Chinese family private videos. I was extremely impressed by *Home Video* and the creative way in which Yang used the camera. In her early years. Many people thought that as an actress, Yang was just making films on a whim and would soon leave the field. However, Yang has persisted and had a wide range of works to her credit, with her third feature film *Song of Spring* (春歌, later changed to *Mama*, 2022) already on location search and half a dozen documentaries completed, including *Old Men, Home Video, Weeds* (野草，2009), *My Neighbours and Their Japanese Ghosts* (我的邻居说鬼子，2008) and *The Love Story of Mr. An* (老安，2008).

On 18 July 2021, I met Zhu We (朱文) and others for lunch in a restaurant on the shores of Beijing’s Roman Lake. By the time I talked with Yang alone after the meal, we were all a bit tired, but this conversation still outlined the contours of her filmmaking, and Yang did a good job in summarising the features of her own work.

1

**Wang**: In the past ten years, you have shifted your focus from documentaries to feature films. I remember we met when your *Longing for the Rain* (春梦，2013) was screened at the Rotterdam Film Festival in 2012. When did you start making that film?

**Yang**: Yes. That film was started in 2010 and came out in 2013, and it took us a long time to complete it.
Wang: I remember watching your last documentary in your house called *The Temple* (寺庙), a rough-cut version, but I forget when.

Yang: In 2008, the year of the great earthquake.

Wang: After that, you shifted to make feature films, right? Did you still make documentaries after that?

Yang: All the time. One day, I might stop making feature films, but I will not stop documentary filmmaking. I’ve worked on many documentaries before, such as *Sorority Director* (妇女主任) in Changchun, in which the directors of four institutions—Women’s Federation, Family Centre, Family Planning Centre, and Marriage Registration Office—were filmed in their daily work. However, it has never been finished. The regulations related to family planning have kept changing and I still want to pick it up.

Wang: When did that happen?

Yang: In 2004, when I just had my baby. I filmed it in Changchun.

Wang: When did you start making films?

Yang: In 1996, actually the earliest time was in 1995 when I shot *Wild Grass* in an orphanage, even before shooting *Old Men*. I did this as my homework for the acting department in my university. Wandering around in a mountain in Qingdao, I found there are the institutions such as welfare houses, mental houses, as well as nursing homes, which attracted me a lot. Those poor kids were just there as I entered. I remember in 1995, when I borrowed a video camera from the navy publicity station to shoot their daily life in that winter. For various reasons, I only shot some bits and pieces and did not use them, but I knew these were precious. After I finished making *Old Men*, I went back to continue making *Weeds*, so it has been more than twenty years since this documentary about the orphanage.

Wang: You used DV in 1996 when you made *Old Men*, didn’t you? Is it Beta recorder?

Yang: Yes, big video camera. Actually, the first time I used a video camera was in 1995 to when I shoot the footage in the orphanage.

Wang: Where did you buy the DV used in 1996?
Yang: I bought it from Jiannong Co., one of a few private video equipment rental and sale companies at the time, and they did not import a lot. I also bought my editing machine later from that company. There were not many big working stations at that time, even at Central China Television Station. I regretted selling it later. I should have kept it.

Wang: A DV editing machine?

Yang: Not just DV ones. Shen Xiaomin (沈晓闽) and many others came to me for this machine, and then computers appeared, so I sold it.

Wang: We seemed to have discussed the price of this machine back then. You got it for 150,000 RMB, right?

Yang: Over 200,000 RMB. Old Men came out in 1999, so this machine must have been bought in 1998.

Wang: This EZ1 of yours is Panasonic, right? I can feel that the image is cooler and greener, and Sony’s ISO [photosensitivity] is higher, and thus looking brighter.

Yang: Yes, it’s Panasonic. That machine is very portable. The tapes were expensive, a hundred dollars per reel of sixty minutes. I have had a habit of writing diary since I was a teenager. People always say that documentary is just like a pen and the third eye. I am not that conscious. For someone like me who knew very little about it, documentary is a mirror. I just shoot what I see like a mirror, and that is the best way to do it. At that time, I did not have the ability to edit and choose, but I knew I had to film those old men, that is, to reflect them. They always call it ‘reflect’, ‘Yang is reflecting us again; you will reflect us until we die’. Maybe the word ‘reflect’ is also suitable to be used in my current feature film. I am just acting like a mirror; to reflect beautiful images I see, and then I finish the initial shooting.

Wang: After you finished shooting with the camera day by day, did you have the equipment to view the footage when you got home?

Yang: I just watched it on this little machine, rewinding the tapes. Once upon a time, I was quite a crazy girl. But my mother said I got cured after I had this ‘toy’. I still believe that there is just a very good seed in me, and that this seed has not well grown-up on stage, so it sprouted in this place. I could see the difference. The camera gives me comfort, and I can find the value of my own existence in it.
Wang: I remember you talked about why you decided to make Old Men. You found those old people around your home very interesting, so the idea of filming them emerged, right?

Yang: Yeah, I saw them every day when I passed by. At the very beginning I also asked the husband of my comrade to come and help. I hadn’t decided to buy my own camera. After two days, I didn’t think it would work. At that time there weren’t that many films to refer to, but I knew the way I was filming was wrong. Those old men weren’t comfortable when my friends intervened, and neither was I. It wouldn’t work, so I decided to disband my friends and buy my own camera. After that, all of us became at ease, and the environment became more comfortable.

Wang: When you were making it, what kind of film was in your mind? Did you have the concept of documentary at that time?

Yang: I was not sure at all. I shot for over half a year. At that time, I did not go there once a month, like I do now. Instead, I was stuck with those old men every day, day and night, so I had already accumulated a lot of footage in half a year. At one time I was crying against the wall. I knew nothing about the professional way of making a film. Only CCTV showed zhuantipian (专题), but I did not watch its Oriental Horizon. I knew for sure it would not be a fictional film. I was once an actor and knew that a fictional film was meant to be performed by actors. But I could not figure out what it was exactly. Later I asked Wu Wenguang for some advice. He told me it was a very good film and worth continuing to do. That was a moment for me. At least I was not idling away the past days. I did something serious.

Wang: It was shown to Wu in 1997?


Wang: So you showed it to him after you finished filming? If you did not know what it is and where it would be screened, how did you have the courage to start it?

Yang: I think it was just something that whispered in my ears. You know I was totally a lay person; I did not even know what a film festival was, or what TV broadcast was. There was not that much design at first. I just wanted to film it and there was an important reason. I was also an actor, but the rehearsals and performances were all related to collectivist culture, a way of acting that bored me and made me feel that my talent and
ability were restricted. Seeing old men’s world made me feel real and that reality calmed me down, so I had no great plan but to document it. It was a very interesting start, without any utilitarian element. Nowadays when a film comes out, you have to consider distribution companies, film festivals, and so on. Looking back to the whole process of making *Old Men*, I miss the simplicity of myself at that time, which was very important.

**Wang:** Were you influenced by any underground culture at that time, such as early underground publications?

**Yang:** Actually, I have no idea. I was an actor in a drama troupe, inside the system, so I had no access to underground culture. I was surprised when someone later categorized *Old Men* as an independent film and said it was the earliest DV work. But such title meant nothing to me; it had nothing to do with my filmmaking. One thing was certain back then, that is, what I was making was certainly not a TV documentary, and I would not add a voice-over. I think I benefited from my stage experience. Those old men were individual theatre characters for me, living in a real space, not on a stage. I was also thinking: would not it be good to do a stage play? I even discussed it with my classmates, ‘Can you play an old man well?’ This also worked for filming the orphanage. I was looking at these people through the stage space, and these people are essentially different from the deliberate performance on stage. It was only after this film came out that I heard about the Practice Society. It was only when I arrived at the first screening at the Goethe Institute that I experienced the sense of achievement as well as solemnity that comes with watching your own film.

**Wang:** Had you seen documentaries before that? *Bumming in Beijing* (流浪北京, 1991), for example.

**Yang:** No, I had not.

**Wang:** Then how did you know about Wu Wenguang?

**Yang:** I can’t remember who introduced him to me then. Anyway, Mr. Wu was very famous at that time. It was amazing that I could find him. I can’t remember how, yet I found him in the end.

**Wang:** Did you ask for advice during the editing process?

**Yang:** I had invited a lot of people to see the film and everyone would give me advice, but I spent most of a year editing it on my own. Wu definitely gave me a lot of specific ideas and encouragement, helping me to
persist. In any interview at any time, I would always mention his guidance and help with *Old Men*.

**Wang**: You have almost two hundred hours of footage. Probably no one could watch everything. You still had to count on yourself.

**Yang**: Once on the phone, Wu said that I was now ‘weaned’. He must have been joking. Has he ever nursed me like a mother? If a young director comes to me now and asks me to view their footage, I would be happy to do so and offer some advice. It feels great.

**Wang**: I remember Wu Wenguang saying that it was because of your inspiration, he started to use DV to make documentary.

**Yang**: Yes, he did say so, and said that shooting with DV freely made him feel relaxed. He came to my house to watch *Old Men* when I was living in a big suburb, now around Wukesong. There was a show in a big tent next to it. I had already shot thirty or forty tapes in it at that time. Wu watched my tapes and the performance, and it did not take him long to make *Jianghu* (江湖, 1999). Then I thought I would not bother to film my version.

**Wang**: A lot of things were influenced by each other and people were learning from each other. Wu started earlier when there were few people making documentaries, so many authors would turn to him for help. For example, Wu gave some advice on Hu Xinyu’s *(胡新宇)* Man (男人, 2002), but this also stimulated Wu to make *Fuck Cinema* (操他妈的电影, 2005). The tone in this documentary belongs to a young man. In the early days of Chinese independent documentaries, the small circle learned from each other and there was a sense of mutual growth.

**Yang**: I’ve heard that *Fuck Cinema* may also have been influenced by Zhu Chuanming’s *(朱传明)* Extras (群众演员, 2001). But I am not sure about the detail.

**Wang**: When it comes to the influence of early films, I talked to Hu Jie earlier and he said that he hadn’t seen any documentaries before. When he was making the film, the one he thought about the most was *From Victory to Victory* (南征北战, 1952). At that time, the environment for documentaries had not yet been formed, and the concept of documentary films did not exist, especially among the general public.

**Yang**: If we talk about subtle influence, I studied stage acting and did solid job in training myself. I have a
sense of the characters, the scenes and the story. I might have some ability in those areas. I can distinguish between good and bad too. When I was shooting Old Men, a good friend was with me, looking at the old men from a distance. I said what a nice picture it was. I shot the poster of Old Men on my own. My friend, who was the director of a theatre company, said to me, ‘how wonderful it would be if you buy a camera and make a video. I said, ‘Good idea.’ I was quite rich then, so I thought, why not give it a try?

To some extent, what I could not practice or express on the stage, I could do it via filmmaking. If a countervailing force really exists, then I was pushed from false mouthpiece of the government and a propaganda background to a realistic, beautiful, humanistic field—even though I did not know much about humanism at that time. Besides, I am attracted by the elderly and have always liked them. The film I am making now, Song of Spring, which is also related to people in their old age. It is very much like a reincarnation. I filmed a bunch of old men when I was young, and an elderly mother and her daughter when I was old. I also plan to make some documentaries about the elderly now. I would rather look at my relationship with Old Men from this perspective. As for the portrait of people, I can catch its core very quickly.

Wang: How long did you shoot Old Men in total?

Yang: Two and a half years, and six months for the editing. I missed the acknowledge part in the end for I did not know that there was such a formality. Of course, there were many people to thank, including Mr. Wu Wenguang, Situ Zhaodun, and maybe Duan Jinchuan. I had invited a lot to view it, who all gave me valuable suggestions.

Wang: What was your state when you were editing?

Yang: I was confused and wasn’t sure how to deal with the footage. It was 200 hours in total, which is a lot even seen from today’s point of view. I picked out each old man first. I spent twelve hours on Uncle Song, twelve hours on Uncle Cao. For footage like the spring group activities and the autumn activities, I sorted them out in the same way.

Wang: And then interweaved them together?

Yang: Yes. To be honest, there were foreigners who came to me and asked, ‘Are you using direct cinema approach?’ I did not understand what direct cinema meant back then. Someone also asked, ‘Do you adopt
a female position?’ ‘What is the female position?’ I asked. I did not understand the concept. It was really beyond my range of knowledge. In fact, just like some people who are born to sing and others to dance, I probably just have an instinct for image, knowing what is good and what is not. Although I was confused, I know exactly why I picked these ten hours out of those two hundred. When I was rehearsing a play, I knew which scenes were good, which scenes were the climaxes, and which characters were important. It was not difficult for me. That’s how I filmed it and that is how I edited it. At least I had to know when the old men came out and when they went back every day. I would like to shoot them in spring, summer, autumn and winter, in old age, in sickness and in death. When I look back at these things now, I do not even feel capable of making *Old Men* again. In my current works, there is something speculative, but in *Old Men*, everything was so simple, beautiful and pure.

**Wang:** There was no non-linear editing at that time, so it must be hard for you. What did you learn from that process?

**Yang:** I have learned two things. Firstly, I started to believe that I could do this in the future, and there was a push for me to be more professional. There came *Home Video* and other documentaries. I also quit my job as an actor, which I thought was meaningless. Secondly, when seeing people pass away in front of me one by one, I could feel life pass by and had a more direct understanding of death. Years later it led to my anxiety and fear for death, but it also gave me a better understanding of what life is and what death is. These issues have actually been bothering me for many years.

2

**Wang:** Your quit as an actor was related to your decision to make documentaries?

**Yang:** I worked in the army and was not allowed go to the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival even though I won an award. Another award I won in Germany was given to me through the Goethe Institute. I was forbidden to go overseas. It would be a troublesome issue to make this kind of documentary in that place.

**Wang:** So, you were brave to quit your steady job when the prospect for documentary filmmaking were not particularly clear.

**Yang:** I expected no tangible rewards. Thanks to Jia Zhangke’s recommendation, *Old Men* could be
presented in Yamagata. When Asako’s group came to Beijing to select the film, I declined the offer as I was not good at dealing with people. Jia said you should go and meet them. So, I went. Asako is still a very good friend of mine, and she is important in promoting Chinese independent documentaries.

**Wang:** Did you first not know that there were foreign film festivals where you could show your works? Or did you learn about it gradually?

**Yang:** My earliest screening was actually at the Goethe Institute. At that time, an old German professor, who was also a documentary scholar, came on exchange. I had then just half-finished the film. It was not yet finalised but enough to be reviewed. They said, ‘Don’t you have a film too, why don’t you show it to me?’ After viewing it, that professor was shocked and said that it was so well-made. He brought the film to Leipzig, and the film was circulated gradually.

**Wang:** Your next work was *Home Video*, right?

**Yang:** Yes. In *Home Video*, there is a scene in which the three of us are watching a home video.

**Wang:** Yes, watching film in the film. Seeing someone’s narration of their own family affairs is meaningful. I remember how impressed I was when watching *Home Video* for the first time. I always think it was your best documentary. You were very brave to bring out the cruel side of the family.

**Yang:** In fact, *Home Video* was made at the same time as Wang Fen’s *More Than One Is Unhappy*. Mr. Wu watched both and said nothing at the time. But more than a decade later, he said *Home Video* is a very good first-person documentary. I was wondering why he did not tell me this years ago. At that time, Kazuo Hara’s first-person documentaries influenced many people.

**Wang:** I was still very impressed after watching it again this day. I went to Douban.com to give it a highest score.

**Yang:** Is *Home Video* on Douban? I guess only a few have seen it.

**Wang:** Yes, only few have given a score. Some of those people watched the film at Fangjia Hutong last time. *Home Video* and *More Than One Is Unhappy* were shown together, I remember. I think yours is a kind of forced therapy for the family and it works. You showed the filmed stuff to your families. You even pushed
everyone to be filmed and to watch it. I noticed your dad did not want to be filmed but your mom was very cooperative.

**Yang**: Yes, but my mother saw this as a revenge. I had a very tense relationship with my mother afterwards, and this is interesting. This forced therapy you’re talking about works sometimes. For example, when my brother finished telling his story, he was somewhat relieved; when my father finished watching this, he was very angry, so this film is very *Rashomon*. There are three people and three positions, and who you believe depends on whose position you stand for. Young people feel that they understand my brother, and the middle-aged and older people feel sympathetic with my father. For me, I was questioned as one with no position. I don’t dare to have a position and I am unwilling to totally believe any story. None of them fits me. I think at a certain point we were in harmony as a family, because we all speak out a hidden problem that had been there for so many years. There was an exhibition of my films in England and I was sitting there with my daughter. After watching *Home Video*, she touched my hand and said, ‘now I know that I was from such a family.’

**Wang**: I remember at the screening that year, you told us that the film had contributed to the reconciliation of your family.

**Yang**: Yes, but that reconciliation was very short-lived. We can’t say this film made the reconciliation difficult. Not really. I think life is sometimes very cruel. My father did not accept my brother back then. One year my father almost died in the hospital, but when he saw my brother, he was still criticising him. The first thing he said when he woke up was ‘why did you come’. This was very cruel.

**Wang**: So that’s where we never understood. You still avoided it when you were filming. After all, the reality was so cruel. What we did not understand after watching it was why your father always hold this attitude towards your brother. Even after your brother testifying to the father and helping him through his divorce at a young age, your father still told your mother that your brother was heartless and does not deserve being treated well. It is hard to understand.

**Yang**: I attribute this to the complexity of human nature, really. I do not think it is hard to understand. We see this from the perspective of a normal person with normal feelings. But the complexity of human nature cannot be ignored. If you do not become more tolerant, it would be hard to explain.

**Wang**: Or were there any other reasons that could explain your father’s anger and disappointment towards...
your brother?

Yang: That is not easy for me to answer. Perhaps it is destined. My dad treats me well. He spent a lot of money on me, but not a cent on my brother. In his eyes, my brother was a loser, far from that kind of success story for men—to be independent and to be able to support himself. My brother has achieved nothing up to now because of what he experienced around eleven. He used to say, ‘I’ll do nothing; I’ll give nothing; see if I can be loved.’ One day I told him, ‘You have won. At least you are loved by me and our mother. You are nobody, yet we still love you.’ I used to be confused by his words. ‘Why should we love you, while you are doing nothing?’ Nevertheless, now I am in my middle age and I accepted the fact that there is no reason for love. He deserves to be loved and respected. Love cannot be defined in words.

Wang: Your brother’s thoughts are deep, and this shows his personal tragedy too. He proved to your father that your mother had cheated on him, yet after the divorce, your father did not keep his promise to take the son with him. He left the boy to his ex-wife. This was a total tragedy. Actually, the brother is the one that touches the audience’s heart most. Denied by his beloved father, the boy’s world was cracked down. He lost his faith in people, which led to his endless demand for emotional compensation. He needs to pick himself up from where he fell, from his family nightmare when he was around twelve.

Yang: He is still unmarried. Some girls tried to woo him for two or three years and just asked him to take care of the family, but he still refuses marriage. He worked for me and I gave him my car so that he could become a ride-hailing driver, but he later crashed my car into pieces. He looked so frustrated. Then he worked for my mum as a courier. He worked very hard, doing heavy work that others did not want to do. I think he has a heart full of mercy. He said, ‘Although I did not enter a society with the law of jungle, I am a good person.’ I agree. I showed him all my plays as soon as I finished writing them. He is a wise man who spent most of his life fighting against his father. ‘One can’t make a mistake, and once you do, there is no going back.’ I used his words in Song of Spring, depicting the redemption between a daughter and her father.

Wang: It was so difficult for him to say that, because what he went through hit him so hard.

Yang: That is why he is willing to give anything he has to our mother. He is guilty of what he did to her. Yet it is our mother who provided him with a shelter. He relies on us for financial support. He called me the other day, saying that he had done enough delivery job, and I said you could come and help me sort out the documentary footage.
Wang: In fact, you are avoiding sometimes in *Home Video*, not just avoiding the audience, but also avoiding yourself. As for family affairs, it would be too cruel if you analysed them in detail. When you show your shooting to your mother and brother, as we have seen in the documentary, your mother watches it through with tears and laughter.

Yang: That was harsh on them.

Wang: Right! But I do understand why you did in this way. That wound was not stitched up properly and you had to open it up to make another stitch. If you do not force them to look, they would not have talked about that even if they want to. The other scene worth mentioning is that your mother realised one day why her son kept asking her for the bike after the divorce. The bike was always there. It was just her son had already made up his mind to go to Changchun with her father, which might make her feel more hurt.

Yang: I think this is a kind of exploitation of children by adults, and even of the whole family. When I watched that scene later in England, I found that one of my earliest interventions into female subject matters actually started here, from my mother.

Wang: Indeed, in *Home Video*, the gender difference comes out very clearly. For example, the look on the father’s face and attitude inspires us to think about men. Why is he so pushy? Is it individual or universal? Of course, the younger brother is also quite special.

Yang: Later I found it strange that my mother was actually the one who struck me most. In a way she thought I had reached a kind of reconciliation with my father. When I was young, she felt that the three of us were together. But when I grow up, I love Dad a bit more in her eyes, which hurt her feelings. For a long time, she abused me emotionally. It was very complicated. It is not a one-day or two-day job to sort out all these complicated relationships. Some deep understandings of life come in exchange of accumulated experiences.

Wang: Yes, many of your later works came from what you have been through. I think *Home Video* was very distinctive and pioneering in its form at that time. Was that made in 1999?

Yang: In 2000, actually, after I shot *Platform* (站台, 2000). I agree with you on that. After I made *Old Men*, there was something in my mind. Actually, it had been there when I was an actor. I am sick of repeating myself. I try to find a way to be different. Even though it looked all the same, perhaps, and it cannot be
regarded as a breakthrough. It became fun and different when I turned the camera to my own family. After I finished this film, I found that a whole bunch of similar films started to appear on Phoenix Radio and so on, such as *My Father and Mother*, which became a TV series later.

**Wang:** How long did it take you to make this film?

**Yang:** It took me a long time, almost two years. I shot a lot of outdoor scenes, my father’s life, my mother’s life, and my brother’s life, but I deleted all outdoor scenes and presented them directly in communication.

**Wang:** Have you ever seen a documentary in this way before?

**Yang:** No, I really hadn’t. This film has a lot of footage too, close to two hundred hours.

**Wang:** You had some ideas about the documentary by then, right?

**Yang:** Yes. Once in an interview with Yu Yu, I mentioned that sometimes I expressed my opinions, and then a group of old men would say, ‘Tut, Yang Lina says she has an opinion.’ They did not say it to my face. I heard it from someone. They said with assertion, ‘When you want to express some ideas, your film would be boring.’ I wondered how they can be so confident.

**Wang:** After some research, I found a lot of distrust towards you from male directors. They said that this director was good-looking, and *Old Men* was well-made, but it was just by chance, and who knows whether she would insist on it or not? However, it turns out that is not the case at all. It’s an arbitrary judgement.

**Yang:** There is no need for me to prove anything to them.

**Wang:** Right. *Home Video* was not shown much later, right?

**Yang:** It was screened in Leipzig. Still that old German professor introduced it. First-person documentaries like this have already existed in foreign countries. When it was shown in Germany, audience reactions were polarised. Some liked it very much and the other disliked it. Those who did not like it said, ‘Why are you showing me your family’s private life?’ while others, and also the audience from China, said, ‘It’s not just about your family. It’s universal.’ I was intrigued by such controversies. By the way, I expect nothing from this film. Firstly, I was not doing it as the line of work. Secondly, I was not doing it for the film festival. I
told myself, ‘I will take it back if I am not happy, and it does not really matter.’

My most widely distributed documentary is *Old Men* because it is available on Internet and many people have access to the pirated edition. In fact, many of my works have never been shown in China, such as *Weeds, Longing for the Rain* and *My Neighbours and Their Japanese Ghosts*. *The Love Story of Mr. An* has only been shown a few times.

I found *My Neighbours and Their Japanese Ghosts* very interesting. I only played it once in Hong Kong, exactly on the Victory Memorial Day for the War of Resistance. I almost finished *Old Men* and had just got *Schindler’s List*. At the beginning of this film, I wrote, ‘I had just finished watching *Schindler’s List*. At the end of the film, a group of old people lay flowers to Schindler. This reminded me of my elders, so I went downstairs and listened to them talking about the past.’ They looked particularly attractive to me.

Without hesitation, I went downstairs with my camera. At their leisure, old men and women stayed in the courtyard, eating noodles, chatting…on such cool night. I went to talk with them and it took me only a week to finish filming. I was particularly shocked by their calm and humour even when telling me the cruellest stories. ‘Gosh, that morning, ah, a group of Japanese came by their motorbikes and set fire to our whole house. All three of my brothers lost their lives.’ There would be no problem if one or two told me in that way, but it turned out that many of them told me stories like that. I saw some films about the Jews in World War II, and they were all very gloomy and contemplative. I wondered why our old people were like this. At the end of the film, an old man sits in front of a kindergarten and says, ‘Japanese, ah, maybe they had come, but I can’t remember. Don’t ask me that. It’s quite a scramble. I am deaf. You can find someone else to talk. Well, yes, it happened, probably, but forgive my poor memory!’

Such are our old people, who have gone through so many hardships that even their worst memories became vague. I can only understand it in this way.

**Wang**: This is an interesting point of view. These old people have suffered a lot. There is no tradition of dealing with sufferings in a proper way. This was also the case with the Cultural Revolution in China, which probably ended up creating a sense of detachment and numbness.

**Yang**: That is why I think our old people are very adamant. We live in a peaceful time, yet so many of us have suffered from depression. People of that generation, including the mother in *Spring Tide*, had no access to treatment or someone who listen to them. They have overcome madness and depression. They live well,
dancing happily in the square. I think that is quite good.

Wang: You’ve made a lot of films during that time, including *The Love Story of Mr. An*, *My Neighbours and Their Japanese Ghosts*, *Weeds*, and so on. When was *Weeds* completed?

Yang: I finished editing it in France in 2009, but I was not happy with it.

Wang: Why?

Yang: I did not edit it well, so I never showed it. It was chosen by a few film festivals abroad. The kids in it are really like weeds. In fact, some kids with families nowadays are still like floating weeds, who were born with miseries. The one who was picked up on the riverbank was named Hedong [meaning the eastern side of a river]. The other who was sent to the Public Security Bureau was named Gong’an [meaning the Public Security Bureau]. I would love to turn it into a fictional film in the future so that I can monetize it and pay these children. They always borrowed money from me during the pandemic. I showed them my bills that I had borrowed more than 300,000 RMB during that time. But usually, I would give them several thousands of Yuan. They sometimes ask my mother for money, and I understand it all very well. No one can protect them, and it is great that they have grown into what they are today. I also hope that turning into a fictional film will get well-paid and thus making their lives a little more stable. Maybe the change is minor but I wish to help overcome their hardships.

3

Wang: You have been making films all along, but later on you were less visible in the documentary world. After 2003, when film festivals were booming, you gave us the impression that you just disappeared. Has *Love Story of Mr. An* been shown at the Independent Film Festivals?

Yang: It was once shown in Amsterdam. Yes, I tried to stay away from the public eye. I am not totally immersed in my work even nowadays. After all I need to raise my child. I shoot very spontaneously. I go to work when I want. I do not have a timetable. I throw a lot of footage away after shooting, without cutting it. After I finished *Dancing Together*, I thought I would switch to fictional films, because the fictional nature makes it easy for you, while documentaries usually touch on heavy subject matters. That would exhaust you, and can become a burden over time. I thought fictional films might be appropriate for me, and then I looked for funding. With two million RMB, I started shooting it on myself. Later on, it seemed to me that even
fictional films cannot get rid of the observation of the reality.

**Wang:** After watching *Longing for the Rain*, I can see the huge influence documentaries have had on you. Can you comment on how documentaries have helped you?

**Yang:** It’s the long-term self-training, self-observation, and judgement of people, all of these. Moreover, I shoot all my documentaries and hold the camera all by myself. These trainings accumulate, so when I turned to fictional films, I have my own characteristics and style. *Longing for the Rain* was also said by critics then to be very much like a documentary, but it is not a documentary. In fact, I did not combine it well enough, so half of it is like a documentary and half of it is like a fictional film. *Longing for the Rain* touches on a lot of taboos, don’t you think? It is probably the last batch of independent films. Themes like eroticism, religion and ghosts that can’t be expressed are just there.

If we talk about *Longing for the Rain*, *Spring Tide* and now *Song of Spring*, I think the most enjoyable one I have done would be *Longing for the Rain*. All the taboos are not taboos for me anymore. All the expressions do not need to be carefully considered, and I did not think about submitting it to the censor. The actress is great. She showed her body to me and the cinematographer with all her trust. I did not have a script, just a piece of paper and I started shooting. That was something that could only be done on the basis of full trust among us.

**Wang:** I did find a lot of characteristics of documentary when watching it. For example, a lot of documentary techniques are used when shooting the scenery and the outside world. Of course, I have seen your *Temple*, and I know how it relates to *Longing for the Rain*. The latter touches upon your personal disturbance, and has your personal life experiences in it, right?

**Yang:** Yes. In fact, this is like a writer writing novels. Many authors write about people and lives they are familiar with. In fact, I would love to put *Song of Spring* out of my own shadow, otherwise people would say that she always makes a film about her own life.

**Wang:** That is fine; we can see the author’s own experience in many films.

**Yang:** In 2010, the word ‘depression’ was still new to people. Now depression is everywhere, and there is something prophetic in the film *Longing for the Rain*. 
Wang: You have captured the state of depression quite well; falling into a kind of mental confusion and not being able to sort out the outside world clearly. After *Longing for the Rain* came *Spring Tide*, which also contains a lot of your own experiences, right? You should not think that incorporating your own experiences is a curse. I think it guarantees the truth.

Yang: Thanks. But my mum is definitely not the prototype of the one in *Spring Tide*. As our generation, I value the defamiliarization in our familiar daily lives. I have always valued that. Some old people look so average, yet I would like to find out something special in them. The mother in *Spring Tide* represents thousands of tamed mothers of that generation all over China. How can I foreground the characters’ difference? The family and relationship between mother and daughter in *Spring Tide* is very typical. We have seen too many loving mothers who devote their life to their families, but the number of families in which people treat each other like enemies is not small. I think I tend to look for something like that.

A group of square dancers is no big deal, it is very mundane, but I see that beauty of love in it. There are wonderful things everywhere around me, and I just really want to train myself to have eyes to see them. In *Song of Spring*, we can see the image of an old generation of intellectuals who are often found on buses, on university campuses, in parks, but such figures are slowly disappearing. Their voices are being silenced. In fact, they are living around us. I want to focus on them. How would they spend their old age after being through so many turbulences? My understanding of politics is that it is weaved into our daily lives. It might not be grand but exists in our everyday bowl of porridge, in a cup of tea, in a bed. I want to look for it from these details.

Wang: Why is this subject matter so attractive to you? To express a female intellectual rather than a male one?

Yang: Well, I have always said it was the life experience that turned me into a feminist. After I bore a baby, the first documentary I made was *Sorority Director*, which is about housework agencies, marriage registration offices and family planning departments. Why did I run off to make *Sorority Director* as soon as I gave birth to a child? Some people would ask: were you influenced by some experience? No. It was my body telling me to look at the most important stage of a woman’s journey in her life. It was the same case with *Old Men*; those people were attractive enough to me to turn their lives into a piece of work.