

the WORLD

世界

—Jonathan Rosenbaum,
Chicago Reader

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Zetland

A ZEITGEIST FILMS RELEASE

THE WORLD

A FILM BY JIA ZHANGKE

Acclaimed Chinese director Jia Zhangke (*Platform*, *Unknown Pleasures*) casts a compassionate eye on the daily loves, friendships and desperate dreams of the twenty-somethings from China's remote Provinces who come to live and work at Beijing's World Park. A bizarre cross-cultural pollination of Las Vegas and Epcot Center, World Park features lavish shows performed amid scaled-down replicas of the Taj Mahal, the Eiffel Tower, St. Mark's Square, the Pyramids and even the Twin Towers. From the sensational opening tracking shot of a young dancer's backstage quest for a Band-Aid to poetic flourishes of animation and clever use of text-messaging, Jia pushes past the kitsch potential of this surreal setting—a real-life Beijing tourist destination. *The Village Voice* called Jia Zhangke “the world's greatest filmmaker under forty,” and THE WORLD is his funniest, most inventive and touching work to date.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

TAO

A dancer at World Park who has come to Beijing from Shanxi province in Northern China three years previously with hopes of becoming a star.

TAISHENG

Tao's boyfriend, also from Fenyang, who works as a security guard at World Park.

WEI

Also known as Xiaowei. Tao's friend and fellow dancer at World Park.

NIU

Wei's possessive boyfriend who also works as a performer at World Park.

QUN

A clothing designer who Taisheng accompanies on an out-of-town trip as a favor to a friend. Her husband has emigrated to France years earlier. Taisheng visits and grows increasingly attracted to Qun.

ANNA

A Russian dancer who has left her family behind to work in Beijing. Anna befriends Tao despite the fact that they cannot understand each other's languages.

LIANG

Tao's ex-boyfriend, who shows up at the Park one day on his way to the airport.

ERXIAO

Taisheng's cousin who also works as a security guard at World Park. Taisheng is looking out for him for his uncle. Erxiao is fired after being caught stealing from the dancers' purses backstage.

SANLAI

A family friend from Taisheng's home town who comes to Beijing looking for work and finds employment on a construction site.

LITTLE SISTER

Real name Chen Zhijun. Another family friend of Taisheng's who comes to Beijing with Sanlai and is killed in an accident while working overtime at the construction site. Known as Little Sister because his parents had wanted their second child to be a girl.

SANMING

A relative of Little Sister's who comes to Beijing with his family to collect Little Sister's accidental death compensation.

YOUYOU

A dancer at World Park who is promoted to troupe supervisor while having an affair with Park Director Mu.

YANQIN

Another dancer and friend of Tao's.

ZHANG

A businessman who propositions Tao at the karaoke club.

FEI

Works as an elevator operator in World Park's Eiffel Tower. Is fond of Erxiao.

SONG

Friend of Taisheng whom he plays cards with. Introduces Taisheng to Qun and asks him to accompany her on a trip to visit her gambler brother Bing.

WORLD PARK

—provided by the Beijing Foreign Affairs Office

Located in the Fengtai district of Beijing, 16 kilometres from the city, World Park features 106 of the most famous sites from 14 countries and regions the world over. The park, encompassing 46.7 hectares (115.4 acres), consists of two parts : the scenic area in miniature displayed according to the position of its country on the map, and a shopping, dining and entertainment area. The entertainment area is situated in an international folkloric village characterized by buildings in the American and European styles. Tourists can take an electric train and a motorboat through the park to simulate a trip around the world.

The park includes most of the recognized spots of interest on the globe. Among these is the Wooden Pagoda in China's Ying County, the world's oldest and best preserved wooden pagoda; the Leaning Tower of Pisa; the Great Pyramid of Egypt and the Eiffel Tower of Paris. China's Qingyingjing Park, Japan's Katsura Imperial Villa, and an Old Style US garden are grouped together to represent the splendor of the world's different gardening styles and in recognition of the many distinctive forms which landscape gardening has taken in China.

Great efforts were made to build the structures out of the same materials as the real ones. Marble and granite surfaces, together with copper and gilded sculptures, help produce a realistic effect. For instance, the Great Pyramid is made of 200,000 white marble bricks, each as large as a bar of soap. Moscow's Red Square is paved with over 5 million red bricks, each smaller than a mahjong tile. Lawns in the park are dotted with 100 well-known sculptures, among them the Statue of Liberty, Copenhagen's Little Mermaid, Michelangelo's David and the Venus de Milo.

The park also has a fountain operated by laser beams, a plant maze and a fairyland in which children and adults alike can enjoy themselves. Regular international folklore parades are planned to provide tourists with a chance to view folk customs from different countries.

BIOGRAPHIES

JIA ZHANGKE (DIRECTOR, WRITER)

Chinese director Jia Zhangke turns to Beijing city life in *THE WORLD*, after confronting urbanization in Northern China in his first three features: *UNKNOWN PLEASURES*, *PLATFORM* and *XIAO WU (PICKPOCKET)*. Jia Zhangke was born in 1970 in Fenyang, a small rural town in the northern province of Shanxi, one-hour's drive from China's famous Yellow River. At the age of 18, Jia studied painting in Taiyuan, the capital of Shanxi. He developed an interest in fiction, and wrote his first novel, *The Sun Hung On The Crotch*, in 1991. Two years later, he was admitted to the Beijing Film Academy. In 1995 he founded the Youth Experimental Film Group, the first independent production organization of its kind in China. With the group, he directed two award-winning videos, *XIAO SHAN (GOING HOME)* and *DU DU*. Upon graduating from film school in 1997 he made his first feature, *XIAO WU (PICKPOCKET)*. However, *XIAO WU* and his subsequent features, the epic *PLATFORM* (2000) and the DV-shot *UNKNOWN PLEASURES* (2002) were all banned by the Chinese government. *THE WORLD* is the first of his films to be screened in theaters in China. [For more on Jia Zhangke see James Quandt's essay in this pressbook]

FILMOGRAPHY

1997 **XIAO WU (PICKPOCKET)**

2000 **PLATFORM**

2002 **UNKNOWN PLEASURES**

2004 **THE WORLD**

YU LIKWAI (CINEMATOGRAPHER)

Yu Likwai has served as cinematographer on all four of Jia Zhangke's features. Yu Likwai is also an acclaimed director in his own right. Both his first feature, *LOVE WILL TEAR US APART* (1999), and the futuristic *ALL TOMORROW'S PARTIES* (2003) were presented at the Cannes Film Festival. He also directed the 1996 documentary *NEON GODDESSES*. Born in 1966 in Hong Kong, Yu is a graduate of Belgium's INSAS (Institut National Supérieur des Arts de Spectacle). He is actively involved in productions both in Hong Kong and mainland China.

ZHAO TAO (LEAD ACTRESS)

Zhao Tao appeared in Jia Zhangke's *PLATFORM* and *UNKNOWN PLEASURES*. She met the director during auditions held at Shanxi University, where she was studying and teaching dance. Her dancing talent is featured in *THE WORLD* and *UNKNOWN PLEASURES*.

THE WORLD OF JIA ZHANGKE

BY JAMES QUANDT

Not since Hou Hsiao-hsien has an Asian auteur produced a body of work of such poetic density and formal authority as Jia Zhangke—and, given the recent emergence of numerous important directors in Thailand, South Korea, and China, that is saying a great deal. Though the 35-year-old Chinese director has made only four feature films and a clutch of short video works, Jia already stands with Hou, Wong, and Tsai in the elite of Asian cinema, his each new work anticipated with the fervour once accorded the giants of European cinema.

Like Hou, a bard of his country whose tone tends to the bereft, Jia has charted China's transformation from communism to a market economy (from Mao to Thatcher, dialectical to brute materialism, as it were) in a quartet of superbly exploratory films, from the low budget, underground XIAO WU (1997) through his most recent work THE WORLD (2004), the first Jia film to be approved by Chinese officials. (Ironically, the latter is as subversive and arguably more damning a critique of the new China as Jia's three previous features, all banned and available only on pirated DVDs in his home country, the source of a bitter in-joke in UNKNOWN PLEASURES.)

Born in 1970 in Fenyang, a small rural town in Shanxi province, Jia has always been attuned to those "left behind" by the convulsive changes in Deng Xiaoping's go go China. Jia's first films, set in dusty, peasant outposts far from Beijing, portray a series of luckless provincials—a pickpocket, a young theatre troupe, two unemployed teenagers—oblivious to or uncomprehending of the invisible forces that buffet their lives. Bewildered or merely benumbed, they change with the styles of pop culture (karaoke bars and the influx of consumer products in XIAO WU, bell bottoms, perms, and breakdancing in PLATFORM, Taiwanese pop and international fashion in UNKNOWN PLEASURES), constantly revising their identities (like Qiao Qiao's succession of wigs in PLEASURES), even as they are trapped in helpless stasis—a point made by THE WORLD, in which Jia's characters finally make it to Beijing only to be immured in the artificial world of a theme park.

To compare Jia with Hou runs the risk of detracting from the younger director's originality, but the similarities of their respective approaches is often striking, especially the combination of poetry and analysis, tenderness and dispassion, embodied in a visual style that emphasizes the long, observational take. Hou remembers intuitively telling his

cinematographer, “Pull back! More detached!” In Hou, history inheres in the everyday, and the aim of his remote camera, which moves laterally or parks itself at a distance to observe, is, paradoxically, empathy and intimacy. Similarly, Jia’s watchful style, which suspends time and forces attention to social detail in *XIAO WU*, imposes tableaux and frieze-like compositions on the restless itinerants of *PLATFORM*, and conversely roves and floats in the weightless DV mobility of *UNKNOWN PLEASURES*, is employed with almost ethnographic objectivity, but achieves greater emotional effect than any heavy editing or close-up. “If I were to break up a scene which lasts for six or seven minutes into several cuts,” Jia has said, “then you lose that sense of deadlock. The deadlock that exists between humans and time, the camera and its subject.” To the impatient, Jia’s “deadlock” will translate as aloofness or aesthetic impasse, but his withholding pays off, as we shall see, in poignancy.

One could list many other similarities between Hou and Jia, including their marked sympathy for unmoored youth—though Jia’s is more autobiographical, Hou’s more distantly empathic—and concern with identity (national, individual); their elliptical narratives, complex employment of offscreen space, and acute awareness of how history impinges upon the personal; their vivid sense of landscape, use of pop music as both catharsis and commentary, neo-Brechtian emphasis on performance (Jia’s films are full of dances, songs, shows), and—most markedly—their tragic sense of life as an accrual of loss and injury, of broken or vanished ideals and irretrievable loves. Some of their films could profitably be paired to reveal affinities of theme, shooting style, or narrative approach: Hou’s *THE PUPPETMASTER* with Jia’s *PLATFORM*, *GOODBYE SOUTH GOODBYE* or *THE BOYS OF FENGKUEI* with *UNKNOWN PLEASURES*, *MILLENNIUM MAMBO* with *THE WORLD*.

Though Jia lists, along with Chen Kaige’s *YELLOW EARTH*, Bresson’s *A MAN ESCAPED* and De Sica’s *THE BICYCLE THIEF*, Hou’s *FENGKUEI* as one of his formative influences and pays homage to it with an intertitle “The Boys of Fenyang” in the version of *THE WORLD* released in China, Jia’s debt to Hou can be overstated. Jia’s aesthetic, at least in the early films, owes more to neorealism and documentary, even reportage, than does Hou’s, and his singular, designed audioscapes, which incorporate copious amounts of stray or found sound in their inquisitive richness are markedly different from those of Hou. Neither does Jia’s interest in history have the magisterial reach of Hou’s epics; the younger director sticks mostly to what he knows from direct observation. One cannot quite imagine in a Hou film the welter of contemporary political references in *UNKNOWN PLEASURES*: the bombing of a textiles plant, crackdowns on Falun Gong, China’s entry into the World Trade organization, a collision between US and Chinese

military planes, the 2008 summer Olympics coming to Beijing. Likewise, though Hou is not immune to homage (to Ozu in *GOOD MEN GOOD WOMEN*, for example), he would resist the blunt insouciance with which Jia invokes *PULP FICTION* in *UNKNOWN PLEASURES*.

Perhaps accounting for their popularity in Japan—both directors' recent films have Japanese producers, including Takeshi Kitano—Jia and Hou, like Ozu and Naruse, are subtle chroniclers of societal transition whose rigorous visual and narrative styles are aesthetic accomplices to sentiment. Emotion in their films, particularly melancholy, nostalgia, and longing, is heartfelt, unstinting. Hou's films can fell a viewer with their blinding sadness or their sudden release of hoarded sorrow—e.g. the conclusion of *GOOD MEN GOOD WOMEN*. Jia's are no less poignant. The pickpocket naked in a bathhouse and singing his soul out, or his presence crowded from the image altogether to express his humiliation in *XIAO WU*; the All Star Rock and Breakdance Electronic Band performing by the side of a highway near the Yangtze, literally and metaphorically sidelined by the setting, by time and history, in *PLATFORM*; Qiao Qiao doing a doleful dance after she breaks up with her boyfriend or Bin Bin being forced to sing his favourite song by a policeman in *UNKNOWN PLEASURES*; the peasant father tearfully stuffing the money he has been paid for his dead son into his coat in *THE WORLD*—the catalogue of such moments and images in Jia's films, from the merely forlorn to the outright anguished, is ample. Datong, Fenyang, Beijing—all cities of sadness.

When it was rumoured that Jia's new film, *THE WORLD*, was to be made in "the system"—i.e. with the approval of the Chinese Film Bureau—many claimed that the underground radical had sold out. Some erstwhile supporters contend that the film is more conventional than his previous three, either because of its comparatively lavish production values, its tonal sophistication, or its determinist narrative. Hardly. From its first plaintive, repeated cry, "Does anyone have a Band Aid?" to its ghostly final question about beginnings and endings, *THE WORLD* takes great aesthetic and political risks, extending in every way Jia's formal methods and thematic preoccupations, and offers his most devastating critique yet of China's rush to erect a shining facsimile of civilization over the broken hopes of a generation.

– James Quandt, Cinematheque Ontario

JIA ZHANGKE ON...

LIFE IN THE BIG CITY

My previous films dealt with and were shot in my native northern Shanxi province. As I've now been living in Beijing for over a decade, I decided to make a film that reflected my impressions of Beijing, of urban life. A couple of years ago I went to visit my cousin who still lives in my hometown. He felt more alone than ever, because most young people have left the countryside to work in big cities or in the South, where the economy is much better. Mostly old people and the disabled remain in the village. The land is not being farmed; the streets are practically deserted. My cousin asking me about life in Beijing made me think about the crowds and liveliness of the city's streets. It's too difficult to explain what goes on in the big city. I felt I had to show it by making a film about Beijing.

THE REST OF THE WORLD

The park's monuments are meant to satisfy people's longing for the rest of the world. The park demonstrates the Chinese people's strong curiosity about the world and their interest in becoming a part of global culture. I think our impressions about the world are actually only our impressions about our own life and the environment we live in. I think people can only see their own lives, can really only look at things from where they stand. This thing we call "the world" is really just our own little corner of the world. I thought the World Park environment would give a particular universality to the film. The story wouldn't be only Chinese, it would sort of take place visually in different parts of the world.

FAKE LANDSCAPE, REAL PROBLEMS

The landscape in the theme park is fake, but the problems the characters face are very real. The characters who live and work there appear to easily travel from one country to the next in a world without borders. But in reality, they are isolated in a secluded world of miniature replicas of the Eiffel Tower, Lower Manhattan, Mount Fuji, the Pyramids. Replicas can be physically built, but not lives, nor societies, nor traditional cultures. The characters in THE WORLD must face their past pain. Increased globalization won't reduce the gap created by history. It won't diminish the complications of our awakening age.

ACCELERATED URBANIZATION

The past decade has been the most violent in terms of urbanization in mainland China. The upcoming 2008 Olympics in Beijing have boosted even more urbanization. The city has become a giant construction site, a shopping mall, a parking lot. Human contact changes enormously in an economic boom. Large social gaps are created between people

of different income levels, especially between the big cities and rural areas. Resources are concentrated in a handful of big cities. The modern idea of making one's own life can only be found in the big cities. A plus is that entertainment activities have found their place and clientele. On the other hand, thousands have lost their jobs. Skyscrapers are shooting up like mushrooms, but human bodies are dropping at the same speed. Workers arriving from rural areas sacrifice their health, even their lives.

SURREAL BECOMES REAL

More and more, I get the feeling that the surreal has become reality in Beijing. This is what I kept in mind during the making of THE WORLD. Because of urbanization, I think the city has lost its notions of the differences between night and day, the four seasons. We have gained speed by completely losing slowness. It's the same in all of China's big cities. This led me to thinking about our connection to the virtual network. From one word to another, from one person to another. Relationships both free and restricted, deep and superficial. All part of our perception of this world.

TEXT MESSAGING

SMS text messaging by cell phone is the preferred means of communication of young people. It's used for greetings, making appointments and even things it's hard to say face-to-face. I think inserting such messages into the film gave me the chance to work a little like the directors of the silent era. Title phrases can be like an inner voice or password to move the story along. We are living in the digital age. As important in communication as in other areas, like the format used in the making of THE WORLD.

THE SILENT EXPRESSION OF DEEP FEELINGS

My films have always had scenes dealing with performance. The stage is always present. I'm very attached to that lifestyle because when I was in high school, I traveled with a theater group. THE WORLD has some elements of a musical, but it's not a musical. The stage shows are linked to changes in the characters' states of mind and the things they are experiencing in daily life. For me, dance is the silent expression of deep feelings. In THE WORLD, the main characters experience pain inexpressible in the spoken word. They must resort to gestural language. I created outlets of silent expression for them. In the snow dance number, Tao doesn't say a word, but the public can share her feelings. Expression is important, but so is silence.

MUSICAL BACK-UP

The original music of THE WORLD was composed by Taiwanese musician Giong Lim. He composed music for Hou Hsiao-Hsien's GOODBYE SOUTH GOODBYE and MILLENIUM

MAMBO. In my previous films I never used long pieces of music, but for THE WORLD I thought of Giong Lim's electronic music. The artifice of World Park and the film's ever-present solitude and silent nights seemed to be calling out for musical back-up. The important stage shows are also accompanied by Giong Lim's music. These luxurious, but sad dance numbers signify the real emptiness of the lives of Tao and her friends. Life's heaviness fades when confronted by the silky lightness of dance and music.

TAO'S ANIMATED INTERIOR LIFE

The animation sequences in THE WORLD show the virtual world which becomes Tao's interior life. Many young people turn to the Web or virtual worlds created by video games. These are non-physical worlds that cannot be ignored. They connect here and there with the real world. I wanted to show an atmosphere of a very Asian-digital age by combining the animation sequences with SMS text messaging and electronic music.

NO CHANGE IN THE CREATIVE PROCESS

THE WORLD is my first film shot with state approval. As of 2004, the five-year government ban against my filmmaking was lifted. The State Film Bureau has also announced many new progressive policies. This more relaxed atmosphere in Chinese cinema is the result of a decade of hard work by independent filmmakers. The Chinese government, the public and the media are all trying to understand and welcome so-called "outside" projects into the official system. As for me personally, government approval did not markedly change my creative process. My basic principle as a filmmaker stayed the same – to protect the independence of my research on society and people. Whether I shoot openly or in secret, my work cannot be influenced because during the shoot I am a filmmaker and nothing else.

FREELY REACHING THE CHINESE AUDIENCE

The biggest change that comes with state approval is that THE WORLD will be my first film allowed open distribution in China. It will be released with the support of the state-run Shanghai Film Studio. I have waited seven years for this moment. My previous three features, XIAO WU (PICKPOCKET), PLATFORM and UNKNOWN PLEASURES did not receive permission to be shown publicly. They were seen only on pirated DVD. I traveled around to major Chinese cities for projections in restricted circles, usually in cafés or universities. But now my films can freely reach the Chinese audience. Now people will be able to see my movies in theaters.

THE WORLD

CAST

Tao	ZHAO Tao
Taisheng	CHEN Taishen
Wei	JING Jue
Niu	JIANG Zhongwei
Qun	HUANG Yiqun
Sanlai	WANG Hongwei
Liang	LIANG Jingdong
Er Xiao	JI Shuai
Youyou	XIANG Wan
Anna	Alla CHTCHERBAKOVA

CREW

Director-Writer	JIA Zhangke
Cinematography	YU Likwai
Art Director	WU Lizhong
Sound	ZHANG Yang
Editor	KONG Jinlei
Music	LIM Giong
Associate Producers	YU Likwai XU Penge
Executive Producers	MASAYUKI Mori Hengameh PANAHI CHOW Keung
Producers	TAKIO Yoshida SHOZO Ichiyama REN Zhonglun
Produced by	OFFICE KITANO, LUMEN FILMS and XSTREAM PICTURES in association with BANDAI VISUAL, TOKYO FM DENTSU TV ASAHI BITTERS END SHANGHAI FILM STUDIO CHINA FILM COPRODUCTION CORPORATION with the support of FONDS SUD CINEMA, Ministry of Culture and Communication-CNC, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (France)

China - 2004 - 139 mins - 35mm - Color - 2:35 - Dolby Digital
In Mandarin and Shanxi dialect with English subtitles

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