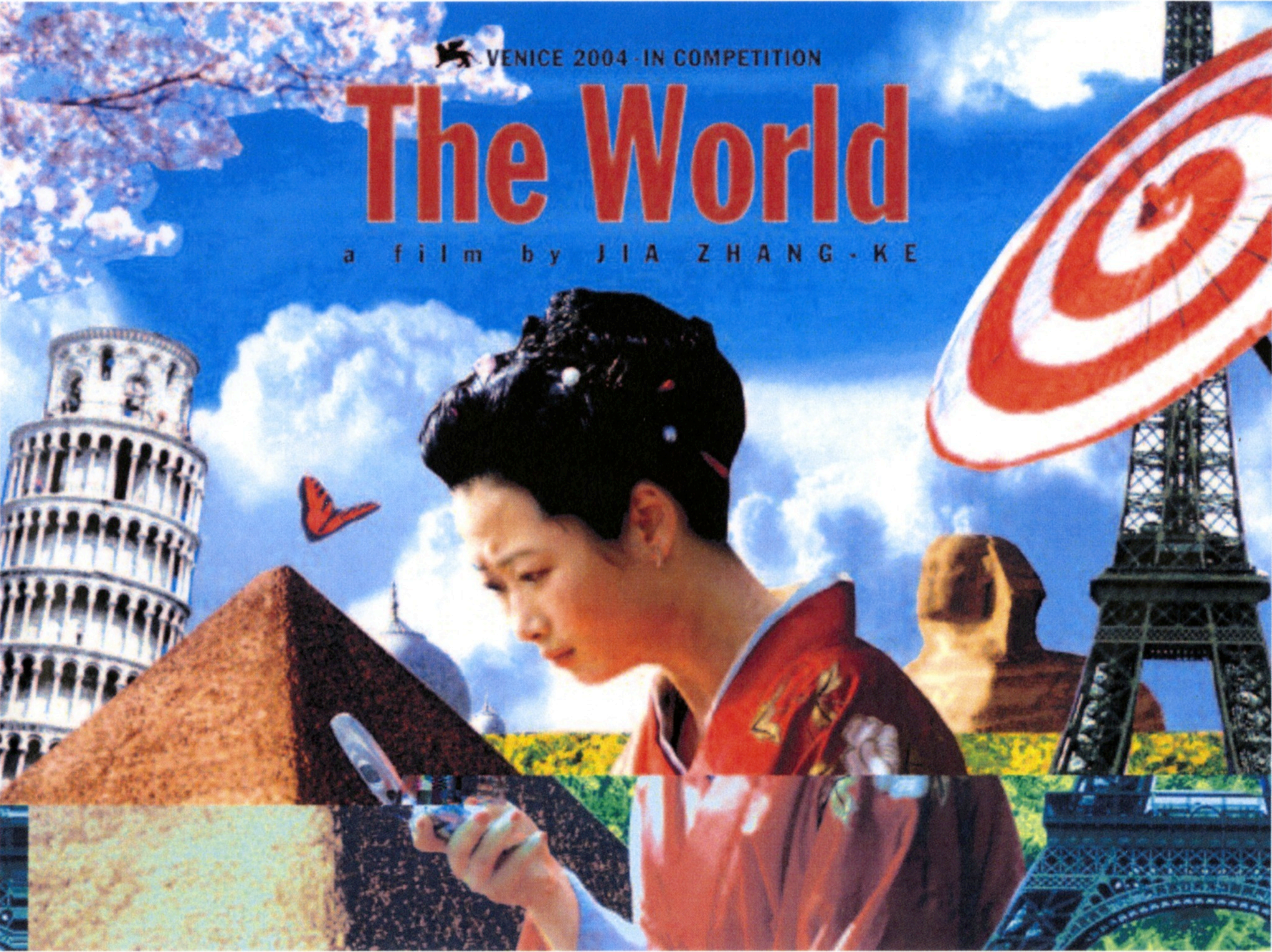


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VENICE FILM FESTIVAL - IN COMPETITION

The World

B Y J I A Z H A N G - K E

China - 2004 - 138mins - 35 mm - Color - 2:35 - Dolby Digital

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Synopsis

Tao is living out her dreams at World Park where visitors can see famous international monuments without ever leaving the Beijing suburbs. The pretty young dancer and her friends perform daily in lavish theme park shows among replicas of the Taj Mahal, the Eiffel Tower, St Mark's Square, Big Ben and the Pyramids.

Tao and her boyfriend, security guard Taisheng, moved to the big city from the northern provinces a few years ago. Now their relationship has reached a crossroads. Taisheng becomes attracted to Qun, a fashion designer he meets on a trip back home.

Tao's fellow dancers are on sentimental journeys of their own. Xiaowei questions her future with irresponsible boyfriend Niu. Meanwhile, Youyou uses romance to the advantage of her professional ambitions.

Not everyone who comes to Beijing with high hopes can land a job where SMS games are accepted parts of daily life. Many, like manual laborer Erxiao, experience a much harsher reality.

But, despite the fun and magic, even theme park microcosms are vulnerable to change. For Tao and those around her, there will be marriage and break-up, loyalty and infidelity, joy and tragedy.



Jia Zhang-ke (director, writer)

Chinese director Jia Zhang-ke 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 Zhang-ke was born in 1970 in Fenyang, a small town in the northern province of Shanxi. Fenyang, a one-hour drive from China's famous Yellow River. At the age of 18, Jia Zhang-ke studied painting in Taiyuan, the capital of Shanxi province. 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 film school graduation in 1997, he made his first feature, **XIAO WU (PICKPOCKET)**.

2004 **THE WORLD**

2002 **UNKNOWN PLEASURES**

2000 **PLATFORM**

1997 **XIAO WU (PICKPOCKET)**







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 on Beijing, on 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

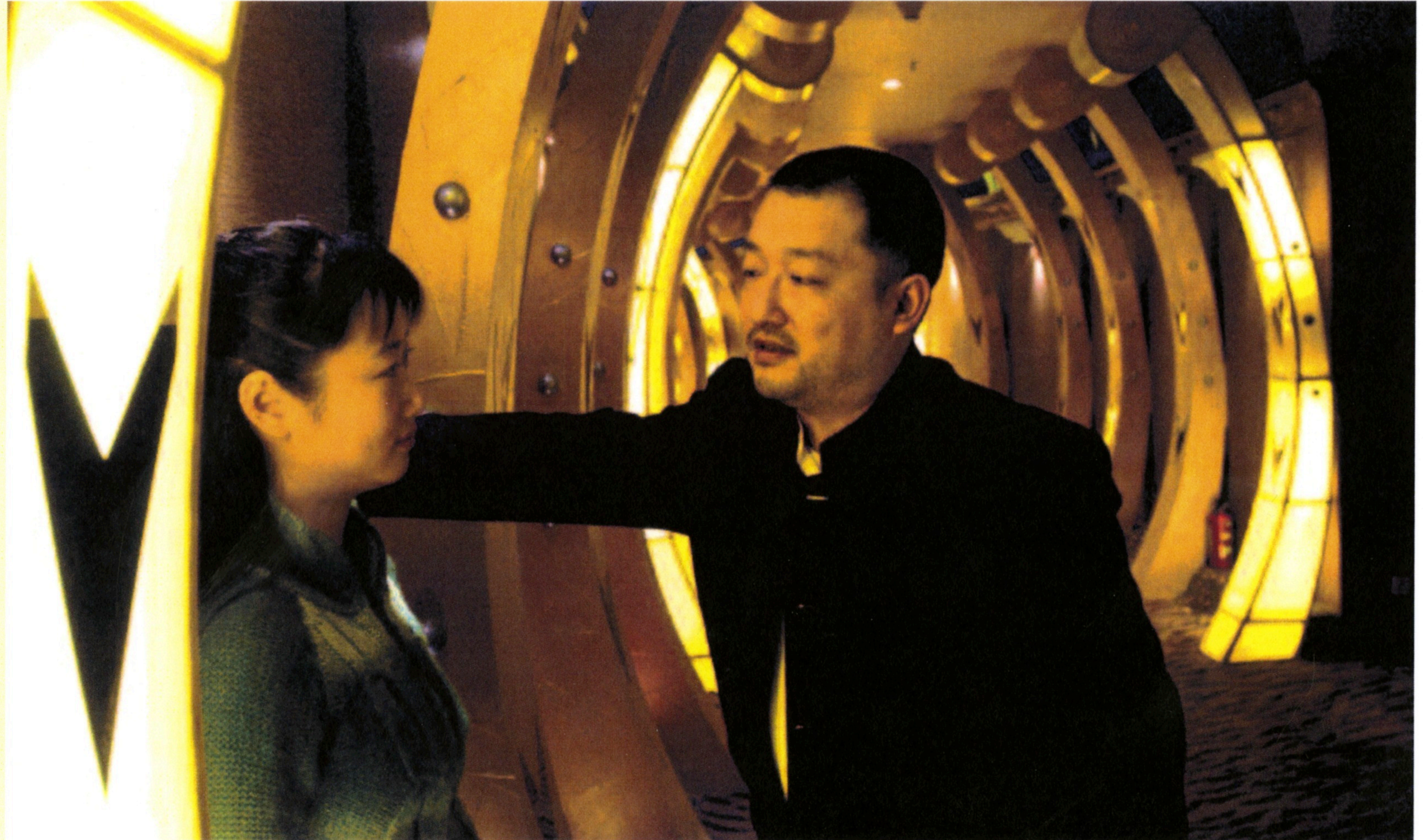
The animation sequences in *THE WORLD* show the virtual world which becomes Tao's interior life. Many young people turn to the Web or virtual worlds created by video games. These are non-physical worlds that cannot be ignored. They connect here and there with the real world. I wanted to show an atmosphere 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.





World Park

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 of the are grouped together to represent the splendour 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.

provided by the Beijing Foreign Affairs Office





Cast

Tao
Taisheng
Xiaowei
Niu
Qun
Sanlai
Tao's ex-boyfriend
Youyou
Yanqing

ZHAO Tao
CHEN Taisheng
JING Jue
JIANG Zhongwei
WANG Yiqun
WANG Hongwei
LIANG Jingdong
XIANG Wan
LIU Juan

Crew

Director-Writer
Cinematography
Art Director
Sound
Editor
Music

JIA Zhang-ke
YU Lik wai
WU Lizhong
ZHANG Yang
KONG Jinglei
LIM Giong

Yu Lik Wai (cinematographer)

Yu Lik Wai has served as cinematographer on all three of Jia Zhang-ke's features, UNKNOWN PLEASURES, PLATFORM and XIAO WU (PICKPOCKET).

Yu Lik Wai is also an acclaimed director. 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 Lik Wai 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 (as Tao)

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

