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presenteren / présenter:



Dam Street

Een film van / un film de Li Yu

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Link door naar PERS en vraag een wachtwoord aan.

DAM STREET – synopsis (NL)

De zestienjarige Xiao-Yun woont in een dorpje in de provincie Sichuan in het Zuid-Westen van China. Het is 1983. De reputatie en de toekomst van Xiao-Yun worden voorgoed verpest als ze zwanger raakt van haar vriendje Wang Fe. Ze worden allebei van school gestuurd. Hij verlaat haar nadat hij zijn zus, een verpleegster, heeft overtuigd Xiao-Yun te helpen met de bevalling en de baby daarna af te staan ter adoptie.

Tien jaar later wordt Xiao-Yun nog steeds gezien als de plaatselijke slet en zingt ze in een bespottelijke zang- en dansgroep. De mannelijke bewoners uit haar dorp vallen haar voortdurend lastig. Ze krijgt een relatie met een getrouwde man. Maar haar enige echte vriend is een nieuwsgierig en ondeugend jongetje dat aan de andere kant van de rivier woont. Hij ontwikkelt een obsessie voor Xiao-Yun en veroverd een plekje in haar leven.



Maar Xiao-Yun moet nog steeds haar verleden leren verwerken. Zelfs haar dierbare vriendje Xiao-Yong kan haar niet helpen om de kwellende beslissing te nemen die daarvoor nodig is...

Dam Street is een ontroerend en meeslepend verhaal over liefde en uitsluiting. Prachtig camerawerk en buitengewone acteerprestaties. De film was eerder te zien tijdens de filmfestivals van Venetië, Toronto en Rotterdam.

DAM STREET

93 min. / 35mm / Kleur / 1:1:85 / Chinees gesproken / China 2005

Kijkwijzer: 12

Nederlandse theatrale distributie: Cinemien
Belgische theatrale distributie: ABC Distribution
DVD uitbreng : Homescreen

DAM STREET - synopsis (FR)

Xiao-Yun, âgée de seize ans, va au lycée d'une petite ville fluviale dans le Setchouen, une province dans le sud-ouest de la Chine. En 1983, le climat social est des plus répressifs. Lorsque son professeur découvre qu'elle est enceinte, Xiao-Yun et son petit ami Wang Feng sont expulsés de l'école. Wang Feng la quitte après avoir persuadé sa sœur, une infirmière, d'assister Xiao-Yun lors de l'accouchement et de donner le bébé en adoption.

Dix ans après, Xiao-Yun s'en trouve réduite à l'existence de 'lead-singer' d'une piètre troupe de chant et de danse. Elle entretient une relation avec un homme marié, mais son seul vrai compagnon est Xiao-Yong, un jeune garçon très curieux et fin. Il fait tout pour gagner la confiance de la jeune femme, devient son ami dévoué, son servent et même, en toute innocence, son intime. Mais Xiao-Yun doit toujours forger son avenir sur la base de son passé non digéré. Même son confident Xiao-Yong est incapable de lui faire prendre la décision fatidique et cruelle qui résoudrait ses problèmes...



Dam Street est une histoire touchante et passionnante au sujet de l'amour et de l'exclusion. La caméra est magnifique et les prestations des acteurs exceptionnelles. Le film a déjà été montré pendant les festivals de film de Venise, Toronto et Rotterdam.

DAM STREET

93 min / 35mm / Couleur / 1 :1:85 / dialogues en chinois/ 2005

La sortie théâtrale aux Pays-Bas: Cinemien

La sortie théâtrale en Belgique: ABC Distribution

La sortie sur DVD : Homescreen

DAM STREET - crew

Regie / réalisation : Li Yu
Scenario / scénario : Li Yu, Fang Li
Origineel verhaal / histoire originelle : Li Yu, Fang Li
Director of Photography : Wang Wei
Muziek / musique : Liu Sijun
Geluid / son : Wang Xueyi
Montage : Karl Riedl
Producent / producteur : Fang Li
Co- producer : Sylvain Bursztejn
Line Producer : Zhao Wei
Set Designer : Cai Weidong
Production Manager : Zu Yimin



DAM STREET - cast

Yun : Liu Yi
Xiao Yong : Huang Xingrao
Lerares Su : Li Kechun
Wang Zhengyue : Wang Yizhu

DAM STREET – Director's statement

I have been engaged in shooting documentaries on the spiritual life of women, as well as writing novels on the same theme. In 2000, I filmed "Fish and Elephant", a feature film examining the relationship between women and the society they live in. In 2004, I wrote a screenplay for a tragedy about men, entitled "Dam Street". In fact, the script still paid close attention to women. It looked at the dilemma of women, the quandary that they face in this society. However, as I talked over the script with the producer Mr FANG Li, who has a genuine artistic sensibility, we changed the original hero into a heroine, and the original story thus also changed. As a result, my script has gradually evolved into its present form. During the following six months, the script was constantly revised until, finally, it became purely a woman's film. I believe that this resulted from the fact that I have always been subconsciously interested in female subjects.

Xiao-Yun is a regular girl. At the age of 16, she experiences a nightmare, something that should never happen to any normal 16-year-old Chinese girl: she got pregnant. As far as she is concerned, the pregnancy is a nothing but a minor tremor in her life. However, in the eyes of others, her pregnancy is not taken so lightly. It is something that violates social norms, that threatens social morality. As a result, she has to suffer for her "sin". She is branded a "slut". Anything she does from that point on is considered to be wrong. No longer sure of her own values, and faced with her fellow citizens' malicious denunciation, she becomes totally disoriented. Superficially, society appears tolerant of Xiao-Yun, who has grown up. At the age of 26, she becomes a Sichuan Opera performer and is promoted to lead actress. However, her life has never essentially changed: everything remains the same as it was 10 years ago. She still remains an object of scrutiny, the centre of attention for the people of her town. Regardless of whatever stage she performs on, she is not free to choose. She can only live the way others wish her to. When she became pregnant, she was expelled from school; now, she must sing pop songs on stage in traditional opera costume, in order to please the audience, or more precisely, to submit to their demands. Tragically enough, Xiao-Yun has become inured to this; her strongest reaction is simply to curse. She can do nothing to cope with her situation. She keeps her silence after she is insulted and beaten up in public by the wife of the man with whom she has an affair, even in the face of the bystanders who mock and denounce her. Since she is labelled a slut, a so-called "famous businessman" in her town molests her with impunity. No one will object, since it is socially and ethically acceptable and for a "slut" to be treated in this way. Xiao-Yun seems to be trapped in a dead end, with no way out.

However, I always maintain that this is a film full of hope. I say this because it tells a story about searching for a way out. In this regard, the film has a clearly positive meaning. Moreover, the appearance of her son Xiao-Yong brightens Xiao-Yun's life somewhat. Though she spends only a short time with the boy, she in a sense liberates herself, even if it is only temporarily. Metaphorically speaking, she is like a thirsty person suddenly finding a cup of water.

Xiao-Yong and Xiao-Yun, are a 10 year old male and a 26 year old female. 10 years ago, before Xiao-Yong's birth, he of course could not be aware of his mother's pain and the dilemma she was in. But 10 years later, when every man was fatally prejudiced against Xiao-Yun (the prejudice of men is in fact that of the society), Xiao-Yong has become the only "man" who is able to understand Xiao-Yun. He is the only one who feels protective towards her, though he is still just a precocious and clever teenager.

Despite the nature of their relationship, Xiao-Yun and Xiao-Yong's meeting is quite dramatic. Instead of a reunion of mother and son, they met each other as if they were a completely unrelated young man and a mature woman. Xiao-Yong is very much obsessed by this beautiful woman, while Xiao-Yun for her part welcomes his warmth and affection, something she can get from no other man. Both of them, for the first times in their lives, receive something unique from each other. So their relationship develops steadily and happily. As soon as Xiao-Yun discovers, however, that Xiao-Yong is actually his son, she finds it hard to adjust to the sudden role change: she goes from being his girlfriend to his mother. She is bewildered yet again. Confronted with such an unexpected understanding of the past decade of her life, Xiao-Yun feels lost, without any sense of who she is and where she belongs. This is actually a feeling that resonates with all Chinese women. Caught in this dilemma, Xiao-Yun finally decides to run away. This decision is, in fact, a spiritual escape. The love and warmth she has received from this teenager is beautiful; it is something that she can keep in her mind as a cherished memory. The film shows us a rather obvious reason for Xiao-Yun's departure: Xiao-Yong has a loving mother. For the sake of his own life, she has decided to leave him. Deep in her heart, though, lie the even more secret and profound motivations that I have alluded to above. The Chinese expression "hong yan's" life, which makes her the centre of attention in her town. Judged by the norms and moral strictures of the society she lives in, her fate can be considered fair and reasonable.

Nevertheless, it is precisely because of Xiao-Yun's departure that the film is permeated with hope. Fleeing one's home and departing are the same, provided that she leaves to seek a spiritual home that can satisfy the needs of her soul.

It is because of this that I chose a popular style to shoot a strongly narrative film. I use a method quite close to traditional narrative to relate a contemporary story about a woman subject to the overwhelming pressure of an unchanging tradition. It is the story of a woman's predicament, and the story of a woman who receives spiritual comfort from an innocent boy.

DAM STREET – Interview with the director

Regarding the main character we wonder if it is something unusual in China to give a portrait of such an independent and sort of rebellious woman. Or if this is still an exception.

There are many different images of women in Chinese cinema. Even lesbians and prostitutes appear. But what is relatively new is to look at the situation of modern Chinese women from a woman's point of view. The female lead in *Hongyan* is a Chinese woman who has overcome the physical difficulties of her life, but not the spiritual ones. Because of mistakes in her past, everyone especially men thinks she's promiscuous. But she feels no sorrow because of this. She is simply perplexed, not understanding what has gone wrong with her life. This is an issue most Chinese women face.

The fact that the public likes more modern music than the traditional art of Chinese Opera leads to the question if the Chinese society in general is at the moment more in search of western lifestyle. Or if the appreciation of ancient culture is now reserved only to some circles.

The Chinese people have gone through the stagnation and pain of the 60s and 70s, the hurried development of the 80s, and by the 90s they were at loss. They hoped for success but found it meaningless, and became restless. And because traditional culture was associated with the pains of history they subconsciously discarded in many ways. It also aims to show what we have lost in modern society, and what we are looking for...

As the story is situated in the 80s/90s, we wonder if this kind of exclusion of a young pregnant non-married woman would still be possible in the country. Or if the film shows more problems of the past.

In the 80s and 90s I saw the tragedies that women older than me went through. Some were expelled from school, some married very young, some even committed suicide. Pressure from family and society drove a neighbour's sixteen-year old daughter to kill herself after she was found to be pregnant. It was a very unusual time, and one that is worth examining. But it's also the past. Now schools, society and families deal with the problems more wisely and that kind of tolerance and acceptance means we have said good-bye to those times...

Regarding the story we wonder if there are autobiographical elements of the author. Or if the film is perhaps an adaptation of an autobiography or a novel.

Part of it is the result of the director's observation of women and society, but it's not autobiographical. The attitudes are true but the story is invented.

How did you become a director/filmmaker?

I used to be a TV host, but in China this doesn't involve much freedom. You are more of a puppet so I quit and directed documentaries. At the time I was constantly writing scripts. I suppose it was philosophical issues of life and love which always mystified me that drove me to direct. In my films I can express and explore these uncertainties.

Where was the movie shot?

In a small town in Sichuan, in China. A very simple, peaceful place that hasn't been discovered by tourists yet. It's beautiful.

Why did you choose to set the story in the 80s/90s?

Because this story is about the changes in a 16 year old girl's life after she becomes pregnant. Social pressure in China was at its greatest in the 80s. Women then had to make all kinds of sacrifices. I was only in my teens and my mother had already forbidden me to have anything to do with boys. This is where the reality of the film comes from. And for Chinese people of the nineties were both anxious and exciting and at this point the protagonist finds it even more difficult to master her fate and her choices.

How did you find the children actors? Have they acted before?

After auditioning 300 kids, both rural and urban, we found they'd all been made dull by computer games. They weren't natural like kids should be. Some of them never even been in a fight. The country's rapid development has sent us to another extreme, and we're producing clever but robot-like children. In the end we found our male lead, a ten year old boy. He's like a tiger cub, natural and naughty but with a melancholy in his eyes that makes him appealing. We were very lucky to find a kid not yet ruined by computer games. None of them had acted before; it was the first time for all of them.

When you think about the whole film, you might feel the storyteller is cold, even cruel.**How can a director as young as you have such a bleak outlook, or is this due to a sense of responsibility?**

I think responsibility is one of the most important qualities in a director, especially in a developing China. Everything is full of hope, anxiety, uncertainty. It's very easy for young people to lose direction and faith in this kind of environment. Telling one girl's story, expressing and exploring human nature, challenging society it all comes from a sense of responsibility. China for me has always been a restless society.

What is the meaning of 'water' in the picture?

Water flows, and it's feminine. It's both soft and resilient. It's kind of emotion – an unbreakable, unfathomable warmth, just like Xiao Yun's fate...

Is there any special meaning of the inclusion of 'fishes'?

The fish represents the female lead. Chinese people often see fish killed for the pot, and the struggling fish reflect Xiao Yun's fate – admired, then slaughtered. And the hundreds of fish spilled on the road when a vehicle overturns represent the complexity of a woman's soul. The accident transformed the fate of the fish, as an accidental pregnancy transformed Xiao Yun's fate.

Apparently after watching the film many viewers feel incredibly moved, and many cry. Now the story itself is a very ordinary one, so where does this power come from? And was your original motivation to move people like this?

I don't avoid moving people. It's something I always try to do with my films. Not in a simple way though I want the power of the film to affect them, to change their understanding of life. When they cry for life, that's when I feel I have achieved what I set out to do... I think this film moves people because they see a kind of liberation of human nature under pressure, in this cold world we all hope for true love, for warmth, to be loved...

DAM STREET – over regisseuse & scenarioschrijfster/sur la réalisatrice & scénariste

Li Yu is geboren in de Chinese provincie Shangdong in 1973. Op haar zestiende is ze, op aandringen van haar moeder, begonnen als gastpresentatrice bij de televisie. Na haar afstuderen aan de universiteit werd ze een professionele presentatrice bij een lokaal televisiestation. Hoewel haar nieuwe beroep haar zowel bekendheid als een goed inkomen verschaftte, kwam ze er na een aantal jaren achter dat ze aan een nieuwe uitdaging toe was. Ze nam vervolgens ontslag en verhuisde naar Peking. Nadat ze een tijdje commentaar voor documentaires had ingesproken, werd ze gegrepen door het maken ervan. Li Yu voegde ze zich bij het team van de CCTV (Chinese Centrale Televisie) en werd documentaireregisseur van het belangrijke programma "Life Space". Bij dit programma leerde ze de kneepjes van het vak. Naast haar werk als documentaireregisseur heeft ze een aantal boeken en scripts geschreven. In 2000 heeft ze haar eerste speelfilm gemaakt: *Fish and Elephant*.

Beknopte Filmografie:

- 2005 **DAM STREET** (HONG YAN) Geselecteerd voor het Filmfestival van Venetië
- 2002 **FISH AND ELEPHANT** (JIN NIAN XIA TIAN) Prijs voor Beste Aziatische Film tijdens het 36^e Internationaal Forum voor Nieuwe Cinema van de Berlinale
- 2001 **FISH AND ELEPHANT** (JIN NIAN XIA TIAN) Elvira Notari Prijs, Filmfestival Venetië
- 1998 **HONOUR AND DREAMS** (GUANG RONG YU MENG XIANG) documentaire, Gold Prize tijdens de All China Documentary Competition
- 1997 **SHOU WANG**, documentaire, Gold Prize of CCTV (China Central Television) Oriental Horizon
- 1996 **SISTER** (JIE JIE), documentaire, Grand Prix tijdens de All-China Documentary Society

Li Yu est née dans la province chinoise Shangdong en 1973. Quand elle avait seize ans, elle a commencé à travailler comme présentatrice invitée à la télé, sur les instances de sa mère. Après avoir achevé ses études à l'université, elle est devenue une presentatrice professionnelle chez une station de télévision locale. Bien que sa nouvelle profession lui ait procuré en même temps une célébrité et un bon salaire, elle s'est réalisé après quelques années qu'elle avait besoin d'un nouveau défi. Elle a remis sa démission et a déménagé vers Pékin. Après avoir enregistré des documentaires pendant quelque temps, elle a été saisie par la réalisation. Li Yu a joint l'équipe de la CCTV (la télévision centrale chinoise) et est devenue réalisatrice de documentaires pour le programme important "Life Space". En travaillant pour ce programme, elle a appris les ficelles du métier. À côté de son travail comme réalisatrice de documentaires, elle a écrit plusieurs livres et scénarios. En 2000, elle a fait son premier long métrage: *Fish and Elephant*.

Filmographie concise :

- 2005 **DAM STREET** (HONG YAN) Sélectionné pour le Festival de Film de Venise
- 2002 **FISH AND ELEPHANT** (JIN NIAN XIA TIAN) Prix du Meilleur Film Asiatique pendant le 36^e Forum International du Nouveau Cinéma au Berlinale
- 2001 **FISH AND ELEPHANT** (JIN NIAN XIA TIAN) Prix Elvira Notari, Festival de Film Venise
- 1998 **HONOUR AND DREAMS** (GUANG RONG YU MENG XIANG) documentaire, Gold Prize pendant la All-China Documentary Competition

- 1997 **SHOU WANG**, documentaire, Gold Prize of CCTV (China Central Television) Oriental Horizon
- 1996 **SISTER** (JIE JIE), documentaire, Grand Prix pendant la All-China Documentary Society

DAM STREET - Cast



LIU Yi (als Yun) studeerde aan de Sichuan Provincial Opera School. *Dam Street* is haar speelfilmdebuut.

HUANG Xingrao (als Xiao Yong) zit op de lagere school in Chengdu. Hij heeft de Tibetaanse nationaliteit en speelde in *My Love for the Red Scarf*, *Dam Street* en *The Miracle of Ge Da*.

LI Kechun (als lerares Su) studeerde aan de Central Academy of Drama. Ze was te zien in: *The Women of Huang Tu Po* (1988), *The Last Aristocrat* (1988-89), *The Lost Dream* (1989), *Chinese Mother* (1994), *There is a Bed in Prague* (1998), *Dance Anyway without Music* (2004) en *Dam Street* (2004).

WANG Yizhu (als Wang Zhengyue). Eerder was hij te zien in de film *Flying Jaguar*.

LIU Yi (Yun) a étudié à la Sichuan Provincial Opera School. *Dam Street* est son premier long métrage.

HUANG Xingrao (Xiao Yong) est élève à l'école primaire à Chengdu. Il a la nationalité tibétaine et a joué dans *My Love for the Red Scarf*, *Dam Street* et *The Miracle of Ge Da*.

LI Kechun (professeur Su) a étudié à la Central Academy of Drama. Elle a joué dans: *The Women of Huang Tu Po* (1988), *The Last Aristocrat* (1988-89), *The Lost Dream* (1989), *Chinese Mother* (1994), *There is a Bed in Prague* (1998), *Dance Anyway without Music* (2004) et *Dam Street* (2005).

WANG Yizhu (Wang Zhengyue). Il a joué dans le film *Flying Jaguar*.

DAM STREET – Awards

Filmfestival van Venetië 2005 / Festival de Film de Venise 2005

C.I.C.A.E. Award (Confédération Internationale des Cinémas d'Art et d'Essai Européens).

Internationaal Filmfestival van Vlaanderen - Gent 2005 /

Festival de Film International de Flandres - Gand 2005

Li Yu, de regisseuse van *Dam Street*, ontving de Robert Wise Prijs voor Beste Regisseur /

Li Yu, la réalisatrice de *Dam Street*, a reçu le Prix Robert Wise pour Meilleur Réalisateur.