

# Lights of Darkness (working title)

China

## ZHAO Ye



Genre: Drama, Thriller  
Format: 35mm  
Estimated Running Time: 90 min.

Budget:  
US\$ 1,000,000 (HK\$ 7,800,000)

Producer:  
Helen CUI

Writing Credits:  
Helen CUI  
ZHAO Ye

Production Company:  
Tianlin Film Productions

HAF Goals:  
Funds, Co-producers,  
Sales agents

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## INTRODUCTION

Based on a true story, this tale of murder and kidnapping is about how ordinary people react to an extraordinary situation. As China presents a proud and sophisticated image to the world, how does this image reflect, refract, amplify and contradict the ordinary story of its average citizens? As the actual parents who lost their daughter said in their television interview, after they found her remains it was Chinese New Year and the fireworks they watched on TV were so bright, so beautiful, it was as if she was sending them a message. As if this national celebration was also a private moment that belonged to them alone.

## SYNOPSIS

Beijing, China. A perfectly ordinary family: a mother, who is semi-retired, a father who is a few years from retirement and their daughter who just graduated from university. Her boyfriend is one of the fortunate few who have landed a good job with a foreign company. But when the daughter moves in with her boyfriend, she has a huge fight with her parents and they do not talk for several months. Finally, the mother goes to her new apartment to make peace. There she learns from the boyfriend that her daughter moved out weeks ago.

Crime always goes up at the end of the year and with the New Year approaching, her parents fear the worst. They report their daughter missing but the officer in charge tells them that their case is common and their daughter will be back when she runs out of money. Mother teaches herself to use her daughter's old computer and offers a reward for information. A stranger contacts them claiming to have information, but he turns out to be a scam artist.

Unexpectedly, the boyfriend shows up at the house of the old couple. The police have cleared him as a suspect, and they tell him about the conman who stole their money. During the New Year, the parents get a phone call from the police to identify a body. Terrified it's their daughter, they go to the station but find out the dead body is of the conman, instead.

By now both parents look far older than their age. They have quit their jobs to sell newspapers in the morning and search for their daughter the rest of the day. A stylish young woman, a regular customer at their newsstand, follows the mother home one day, taking off her sunglasses to reveal that she has lost one of her eyes. She says that her boyfriend often mentions the old couple and claims that he used to date their daughter. When they fight, he threatens her fate would be similar to that of his ex-girlfriend.

The mother goes to the police, but the stylish young woman is nowhere to be found and the officers refuse to investigate the boyfriend again. Using all their savings, they investigate the boy themselves, and discover him living in a suburban home. The appearance of the mother puts pressure on him,

and he lashes out, shocking her when he says that he's the one who tracked down and killed the conman. But when the mother reports this to the police, the boyfriend disappears and suddenly she becomes their prime suspect in the murder of the conman. She's on the edge of falling apart when a note arrives leading her to a construction site where she finds a plastic bag. Inside are her daughter's remains.

It is Chinese New Year again. CCTV news reports that the police have successfully resolved a double murder case with the help of the victim's parents; the murderer is the ex-boyfriend of the female victim and he is wanted by police throughout the country. The sound of fireworks outside drowns out the news report. The mother looks out the window. The lights in the darkness of the sky wink as though waving at her, like a spirit.

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The economic and urban development of China is advancing rapidly, even in the face of the global economic crisis. The normal, everyday life of ordinary people as it is portrayed in this film shows a different side to the media image of China. The protagonist loses her only daughter and the police officer doesn't have enough leads to conduct his investigation; it is only one case of thousands that happen every day. This story crosses all the different groups in the urban population of present day China: the promising, well-educated young generation, migrant laborers struggling to survive, older parents who should be thinking of retirement but are instead forced to give up everything to rescue their child. They all seem at a loss, even the justice system, when confronted with this complicated situation, appears to break down. The key point of the movie is not the solving of the case, but the emotional ordeal all these people undergo, focusing on the angst and resignation of people in the face of tragedy.

## DIRECTOR

ZHAO Ye was born in 1979 and graduated from the Beijing Film Academy in 2004. That same year he directed his first short animated film, *Cai Wei*. His debut feature, *Ma Wu Jia* (2007) screened at numerous international film festivals and won the Best Picture Award at the China Independent Film Festival. His second feature *Jalainur* (2008) won the Fipresci Prize at the 13<sup>th</sup> Pusan International Film Festival

in 2008, New Currents Sections; Best Cinematography at the 23<sup>rd</sup> Singapore International Film Festival; and the Distribution Award at the 2009 IndieLisboa International Independent Film Festival, among many others.

## PRODUCER

Born in China, Helen CUI, an American citizen, holds a Master's Degree in film studies. She co-founded Tianlin Limited (Hong Kong) in 2000 and has served as Managing Director of Tianlin Film Productions (Beijing China) since 2006. She was a committee member for the 2008 China Independent Film Festival with Tianlin Film Productions as one of the collaborators. She financed and produced *Jalainur* and *Tattoo* (by director WANG Liren). She was also involved in the film *Good Cats* directed by YING Liang, handling world sales.

## PRODUCTION COMPANY

Tianlin Film Productions includes Tianlin Limited (Hong Kong) and Tianlin Film Production (Beijing, China); Helen CUI is the founder and the Managing Director of the companies. She is the sole financier and producer of both *Jalainur* and *Tattoo*. She is also involved in the development of *Lights of Darkness*, *Soup*, an official selection of the Film and TV Promotion Plan of the Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival. Other projects include the documentary *Neon City* and the feature films *Don't Expect Praises* and *New Policeman Story*.