

GONG LI

SHANGHAI TRIAD

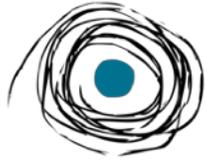
搖啊搖 搖到外婆橋

A FILM BY
ZHANG YIMOU



OFFICIAL SELECTION
FESTIVAL DE CANNES





FILM MOVEMENT[®]
CLASSICS

presents

SHANGHAI TRIAD

搖啊搖 搖到外婆橋

a film by
ZHANG YIMOU

starring
GONG LI LI BAOTIAN LI XUEJIAN
SUN CHUN WANG XIAOXIAO

“Visually sumptuous...unforgettable.”
—*New York Post*

“Crime drama has rarely been this gorgeously alluring – or this brutal.”
—*Entertainment Weekly*

1995 | France, China | Mandarin with English subtitles | 108 minutes
1.85:1 Widescreen | 2.0 Stereo

Rated R for some language and images of violence

DIGITALLY RESTORED

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SYNOPSIS

Hired to be a servant to pampered nightclub singer and mob moll Xiao Jinbao (Gong Li), naive teenager Shuisheng (Wang Xiaoxiao) is thrust into the glamorous and deadly demimonde of 1930s Shanghai. Over the course of seven days, Shuisheng observes mounting tensions as triad boss Tang (Li Baotian) begins to suspect traitors amongst his ranks and rivals for Xiao Jinbao's affections.



STORY

Shanghai, 1930. Mr. Tang (Li Baotian), the godfather of the Tang family-run Green dynasty, is the city's overlord. Having allied himself with Chiang Kai-shek and participated in the 1927 massacre of the Communists, he controls the opium and prostitution trade. He has also acquired the services of Xiao Jinbao (Gong Li), the most beautiful singer in Shanghai.

The story of *Shanghai Triad* is told from the point of view of a fourteen-year-old boy, Shuisheng (Wang Xiaoxiao), whose uncle has brought him into the Tang Brotherhood. His job is to attend to Xiao Jinbao. Ultimately, Shuisheng becomes the only person to whom her relationship is not motivated by power or greed.

By 1930, however, new alliances are forming and Greens' number two man, Song (Shun Chun), tries to take control of the gang, the city and Xiao Jinbao. In secret, Xiao Jinbao becomes Song's mistress, and together they set a trap for Mr. Tang. Their plan fails, and Mr. Tang believes that his deputy will try to eliminate Xiao Jinbao for she was the only witness and accomplice.

Using Xiao Jinbao as bait, however, Mr. Tang banishes her to a heavily guarded island. There, she gradually understands her role. She has used her charms and talent to obtain wealth and status, but now she is of no further use to any of the men in her life.

CAST

Xiao Jinbao (Bijou).....Gong Li
Tang, the Gang Boss.....Li Baotian
Liu Shu.....Li Xuejian
Song, Tang's No. 2.....Sun Chun
Shuisheng.....Wang Xiaoxiao



CREW

Director.....Zhang Yimou
Screenplay.....Bi Feiyu
Editor.....Du Yuan
CinematographerLu Yue
Sound.....Tao Jing
Music.....Zhang Guangtian
Production DesignCao Jiuping
ProducerJean-Louis Piel
Executive Producers.....Wang Wei, Zhu Yongde

PRESS

“*Shanghai Triad* concludes the sublime seven-movie collaboration of Chinese filmmaker Zhang Yimou and actress Gong Li with a bang worthy of the most jubilant New Year's Eve.”

–Mike Clark, *USA Today*

“Compelling and beautifully made – it was shot in dreamlike soft focus by award-winning cinematographer Lu Yue – *Shanghai Triad* shows an enclosed, separate world that looks incredibly plush and inviting, almost like a storybook palace, but of course is laced with perils.”

–Edward Guthmann, *San Francisco Chronicle*

“In its bold take on a subgenre that’s every bit as resonant as ’30s U.S. gangster pix, Zhang Yimou’s seventh feature is as assured and attention-grabbing as his 1988 bow, *Red Sorghum*. Poised somewhere between the visual flamboyance of that movie and the interior tension of the later *Raise the Red Lantern*, *Triad* oozes a confidence that carries the viewer almost without pause to its shocking climax and ironic close.”

–Derek Elley, *Variety*

“It has impeccable flow and balance. And Gong Li's performance – a portrait of a capricious and indulgent woman who gains depth as we watch her – is one of her finest.”

–Edward Guthmann, *San Francisco Chronicle*

“Movingly affirms the magnitude of Zhang Yimou’s storytelling power.”

–Janet Maslin, *The New York Times*

“Some of the most stunning screen images ever.”

–Jack Matthews, *Newsday*

“Director Zhang Yimou fashions a magnetic thriller using the exquisite talents and beauty of his favorite leading lady, Gong Li, who plays Bijou, an imperious moll who gets caught in an escalating war between rival gangs in the dangerously flashy demimonde of 1930s Shanghai. *Shanghai Triad*’s lush color, sound, and movement amount to a perfect excuse to invest in a large-screen stereo TV. Total immersion is the only way to experience this ugly world made strangely lovely, where the sharpest knives come sheathed in softest velvet.”

–Melissa Pierson, *Entertainment Weekly*



AWARDS & FESTIVALS

WINNER – BEST FOREIGN FILM
National Board of Review

ACADEMY AWARD NOMINEE
Best Achievement in Cinematography

GOLDEN GLOBE NOMINEE
Best Foreign Language Film

L.A. FILM CRITICS CIRCLE
Best Cinematography

NEW YORK FILM CRITICS CIRCLE
Best Cinematography

CANNES FILM FESTIVAL
Best Cinematography

INTERVIEW WITH ZHANG YIMOU

The first version of the script told of the struggle between the different factions of the Shanghai Mafia fighting for control of the opium market. The final film differs greatly from the original screenplay. Could you tell us why you changed it?

Violence is very fashionable in the cinema today. I want to get away from it. That is the basic reason for changing the original script. The first version of the script concentrated – ultimately in a rather conventional manner – on violence between Mafia gangs. Now the film deals primarily with the fate of a woman living in a society controlled by the Mafia. The struggle between the Mafia gangs is relegated to the background of the story.

Could you describe for us the three main characters in the film? The Boss (the Godfather), Xiao Jinbao, played by Gong Li, and Shuisheng (the youth)?

The Boss is a cruel Chinese Godfather. He will adopt any means to satisfy his ends.

Xiao Jinbao is a woman living among the Mafiosi. She lives in the lap of luxury and seems able to satisfy any whim. But, in fact, she is on leash and has no freedom. She is a victim. She seems hard and cruel but underneath lies a generous woman.

Shuisheng is a young fourteen-year-old who arrives in Shanghai straight from the boondocks. He sees Shanghai and its environment in a naive way. I use his viewpoint rather like a witness.

Are these Mafia types based on real people? In particular Xiao Jinbao. How did you choose the actors to play these parts?

No. The character of the Godfather has no real life counterpart. However, we did not create this character by guesswork: we drew upon several people who really existed. He is partly a synthesis of several real characters.

It is the same with Xiao Jinbao, bearing in mind that we had decided on Gong Li for this role.

LI Baotian is one of China's best living actors. I had already worked with him in my film *Ju Dou*. He is not tall but he is lean, corresponding exactly to the character of the Godfather. So I picked him for this role with no hesitation.

We discovered the boy to play the role of Shuisheng (the fourteen-year-old) from among more than 100,000 kids. As the boy acts as a witness in the film it was important for him to have an intense look. He had to be expressive.

What's at stake in this film? Is the film a warning to the Chinese people with regard to their increasingly materialistic lifestyle?

Absolutely. This story is the first time I have depicted a life of luxury and material wealth. In effect, I just wanted to say to my countrymen and to others that there is something more important than power and mere material possessions. What counts most in life is man's capacity for love and generosity. That is why I did not want to make a traditional Mafia film. To my mind, this film speaks up for important issues.

In the film *Raise the Red Lantern* you used a documentary style. And in *To Live* you filmed in real settings. For *Shanghai Triad* have you chosen a style closer to *Ju Dou* and *Raise the Red Lantern* than *The Story of Qiu Ju* and *To Live*? In other words, were you more concerned in this film with visual style?

Yes, it's true. I paid a great deal of attention to the images. Shanghai in the thirties is a vanished era that has passed into myth. It is impossible to shoot it in a realistic manner. It no longer exists and in a sense, it exists more in dreams than reality. That is why I wanted to evoke it through living colors rather than realistic images.

On the other hand, in the section set on the island, far from Shanghai, I put the accent on the purity of natural formations.

As a matter of fact, I did not want naturalistic shots in this film. And I agree with you. It is closer to the appearance of *Ju Dou* and *Raise the Red Lantern* than to *The Story of Qiu Ju* and *To Live*. It is an aesthetic more in keeping with dreams and the imagination than with reality.



Compared with your other films, have you directed this one in a different way? Have you employed new techniques?

Yes my direction is constructed around Shuisheng's point of view. It is the first time that I have used a subjective angle – that of a young lad – to tell a story.

That is also why I used a Steadicam. But sparingly, in order to keep it looking natural. I discovered that Steadicam equipment is hard to operate. If you get carried away by it, you fall into a real trap.

Were the sets natural or made in the studio?

Both.

And what about the exteriors? Did you find suitable buildings and streets in Shanghai? Or were they built in the studio? How was the shoot?

For the exteriors I deliberately tried something new: except for the Bund, I didn't attempt to show Shanghai outdoors. The sets are predominantly interiors, bathed in darkness. Since the Mafiosi live indoors, that is how I depict their wealth.

In this film, Shanghai serves as a backdrop. I had no wish to show Shanghai just for its own sake. Moreover, even if I had, the restoration work on real exteriors would have been very long and laborious.

You always devote a lot of thought to the soundtrack. Could you speak about the soundtrack for this film?

I am happy with the soundtrack for this film.

Part of the music is subjective, accompanying Shuisheng's narration.

As far as atmospheric music is concerned, I did not follow the traditional practice of using music to underscore the action in a violent scene, for example, or to build up suspense. Instead I wanted the background music to be soft, simple, sung by children's choirs and played on traditional Chinese instruments. Through this music I want to portray the generosity of human beings.

As for the songs sung by Gong Li, they are in the style of the thirties.

It seems the film had some production problems. Compared with your previous productions, what new constraints did you experience?

On production matters ask the producers. The way the film was made was the only way possible. I was under pressure and had to accept. I don't want to go over that again.

You have the reputation of being a director who listens a great deal to suggestions from actors and crew. Do you consider yourself a “democratic” director?

That’s the way I work. Film is a collective effort. The director is empowered to allow everyone to exercise his talents. To my mind that is a sensible way of working.

I believe some directors behave like leaders. The crew follow their orders. I don't like that method – it's not my way. Moreover, I think that therein lies the essential difference between a cineaste and a writer or painter.

Do you alter the script on set? Do you tell the actors how to perform or let them improvise?

I usually tinker with the script on set.

Any film can have all sorts of problems and difficulties to overcome during production. You often have to adapt to unforeseen situations. But the major modifications to the script come from the actors. The players have to feel comfortable with the dialogue and the action. The screenplay is something written. In performance, the actor can sometimes feel awkward or ill at ease.

So it has to be amended. Regarding actors, I give the explanations at the script run-through so that they can understand their role better. But on set I leave the actors to themselves, partly because explanations on the set take time and partly because it can disturb and upset them. To me, acting is an art of feelings. It is hard to put it into words. What’s more, I do not like to put the actors under stress by talking too much. Clarity and simplicity is more my style.

You had no luck with the censors over *To Live*. How do you think the Film Bureau (the censorship body) will react to *Shanghai Triad*?

I don’t think there will be any problems because the subject does not seem to me to be delicate.

Did Alpha Films and UGC-Images ask you to adapt a novel or was it your idea?

The suggestion came from me. Usually the producers let me choose the subject. That’s the right approach in my opinion. I think it’s essential that the director feels comfortable with the subject. Otherwise, even with a good subject, it will not turn out to be a good film. This respect and confidence are vital in creative work.



ABOUT FILM MOVEMENT

Founded in 2002, Film Movement is a North American distributor of award-winning independent and foreign films based in New York City. It has released more than 250 feature films and shorts culled from prestigious film festivals worldwide. Its catalog includes titles by directors such as Hirokazu Kore-eda, Maren Ade, Jessica Hausner, Andrei Konchalovsky, Andrzej Wajda, Diane Kurys, Ciro Guerra and Melanie Laurent. In 2015, Film Movement launched its reissue label Film Movement Classics, featuring new restorations released theatrically as well as on Blu-ray and DVD, including films by such noted directors as Eric Rohmer, Peter Greenaway, Bille August, Marleen Gorris, Takeshi Kitano, Arturo Ripstein, Sergio Corbucci and Ettore Scola. For more information, visit www.filmmovement.com.

