



76. Internationale  
Filmfestspiele  
Berlin  
Berlinale Competition

We  
Are  
All  
Strangers



我们  
不是  
陌生人

A film by ANTHONY CHEN





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We Are   
All  
Strangers

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Anthony Chen

2026 | SINGAPORE | DRAMA | 157 MINS | MANDARIN, ENGLISH WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES

Presented by GIRAFFE PICTURES in association with 127 WALL PRODUCTIONS & JASPER PRODUCTIONS

with the participation of SINGAPORE FILM COMMISSION

in co-production with RED SEA FUND, a Red Sea International Film Festival Initiative

international sales

**PARADISE CITY**  
SALES

福



A young man is lying on a bed in a room. He is shirtless and wearing purple shorts. The room has a window with metal bars and a desk with a chair. The lighting is soft and natural, coming from the window. The overall mood is quiet and contemplative.

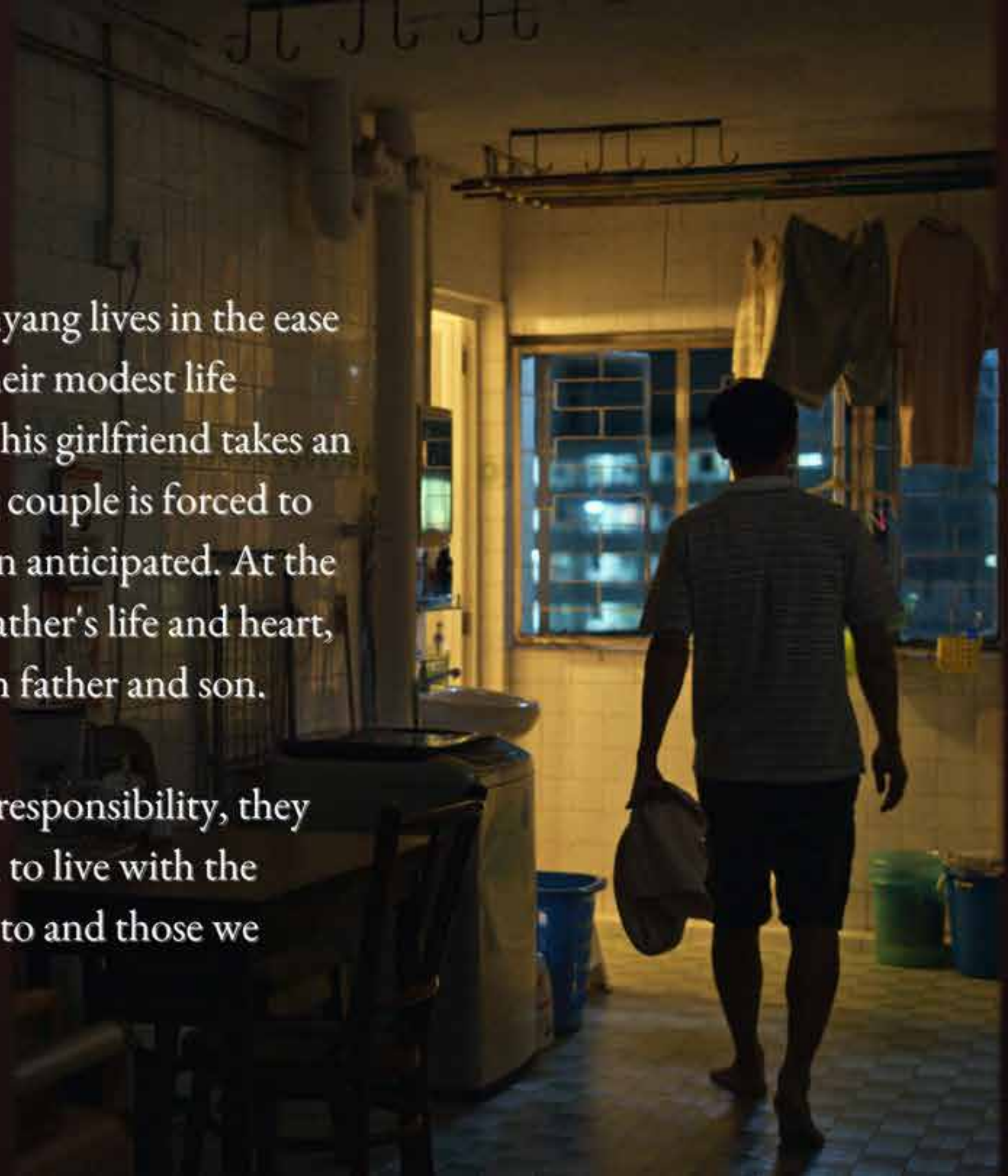
# LOGLINE

*We Are All Strangers* marks the final chapter of Anthony Chen's 'Growing Up' trilogy following *Ilo Ilo* and *Wet Season*. Set against contemporary Singapore, the film offers a poignant exploration of class, inequality, and the fragile dynamics between inherited and chosen family

# SYNOPSIS

In contemporary Singapore, 21-year-old Junyang lives in the ease of youth while his father struggles to hold their modest life together. When Junyang's relationship with his girlfriend takes an unexpected and life-altering turn, the young couple is forced to face the realities of adulthood far sooner than anticipated. At the same time, an exuberant woman enters his father's life and heart, quietly reshaping the fragile balance between father and son.

As both generations confront love, loss and responsibility, they must redefine what family means - and learn to live with the imperfect bonds between those we are born to and those we choose.



# DIRECTOR'S NOTE

It is rare in cinema for life and film to truly intersect.

In 2012, while searching for the young lead of my debut feature *ILO ILO*, we auditioned over 8,000 children. That was when I first met Koh Jia Ler—a precocious 11-year-old with no prior acting experience, yet possessed of a quiet confidence and presence that lingered long after.

Alongside actress Yeo Yann Yann, I could never have imagined then that our paths would intertwine for more than a decade. What began as a single casting decision became a 13-year journey across three films, culminating in the completion of a trilogy I never consciously set out to make.

*WE ARE ALL STRANGERS* grew out of my concern for Jia Ler after we wrapped *Wet Season*. He had just turned 17 and decided to quit school. Beneath the charm of his naivety and recklessness, I worried about him being thrust into the brutality of the adult world. This film is about a young man forced to grow up, and about confronting the realities and harshness of life head-on.

The idea of constructed families is a theme I have explored throughout my work: in *ILO ILO*, between a Filipino domestic worker and the young Singaporean boy she cares for; in *WET SEASON*, where a female teacher and her student form a fragile family with her half-paralysed father-in-law; and now, in this film, where two couples—one younger, one older—are compelled to become family.

Completing my Singapore “Growing Up” trilogy has been a profoundly personal journey. This film also reflects my own evolution—as a son, a husband, and now a father. *ILO ILO* was made in my late twenties, *WET SEASON* in my thirties, and *WE ARE ALL STRANGERS* in my early forties.

Through these films, we’ve grown together; our 11-year-old young boy has grown up, and I have grown older. And in many ways, his transformation mirrors the heart of these stories: how we become strangers to who we were, and how we find our way back again.

ANTHONY CHEN





# INTERVIEW

Your new film *WE ARE ALL STRANGERS* forms a loose trilogy with your earlier works *ILO ILO* (2013) and *WET SEASON* (2019), chronicling life in Singapore over almost 30 years. Do you see yourself as something of a visual historian of your home country?

I never thought this was intentional at all. Some filmmakers make films with their head, it's a very logical rational process, but I make my films with my heart. It's always very emotional and one often fraught with anxiety and a sense of burden.

Consequently, the Singapore captured across these films is ultimately a collection of very personal observations—memories of self, family, home, and society. It stems from a place of love, disappointment, confusion, and, at times, heartbreak. Yet somehow, through channeling these emotions onto a cinematic canvas, a distinct sense of Singapore's time and place has taken shape on screen.

This unconscious chronicle was felt by our crew as well. I've worked with my assistant director, Charlotte, since my first film, *ILO ILO*. About three weeks into shooting *WE ARE ALL STRANGERS*, during a scene where the camera panned from an emotional Jia Ler inside a taxi to the moving landscape of the Singapore skyline, just as the sun was setting perfectly behind the buildings. Charlotte, who is Malaysian, turned to me and said, "I'm not even Singaporean, but I already know this will be an important film for Singapore."

Somehow, this was a sentiment that was shared by others working on the film. Our sound supervisor, Tingli, was exceptionally meticulous about capturing the precise ambient and background sounds for each location and scene. She was driven by a strong conviction that this film would serve as a kind of 'time capsule'—a pivotal and meaningful visual and aural document for the country in the future.

So, I suppose we were capturing history without ever consciously setting out to do so. That, perhaps, is one of the most profound powers of cinema.



**Was it always your plan to connect your films as a trilogy, or did that develop while you worked on them?**

It was never a conscious plan. I vaguely remember cracking a joke on the set of *ILO ILO*, saying that this might be the start of a trilogy, and that perhaps one day I'd film Jia Ler as an adult. At the time, I certainly didn't take myself seriously.

For *ILO ILO*, we cast a wide net to find an eleven-year-old protagonist. We auditioned over 8,000 children, shortlisted three hundred, and put them through a ten-month process of workshops and elimination. Koh Jia Ler was chosen from the final ten. When casting my second film *WET SEASON* 6 years later, I was searching for a sixteen-year-old boy. We again embarked on a long and arduous search for new talent, but after months of workshops, we still hadn't found our actor. Then, one day, a random scroll through Instagram led me to rediscover Jia Ler. We brought him in, and he sparkled like a diamond.

Still, it took a long period of reflection before I could commit to casting both him and Yeo Yann Yann as a teacher and student developing an intimate relationship. After all, they had played mother and son in *ILO ILO*, I can't help but think it somewhat incestuous. But in the end the emotional truth of their chemistry was undeniable.

By the time we wrapped *WET SEASON*, it had become quietly clear to me that I would make another film with both of them. Fate brought us together the first time, and somehow guided us back a second time. It felt only natural that we complete the circle. In that way, the Singapore "Growing Up" trilogy was born—less by design, and more by a kind of creative destiny.

It reminds me of how François Truffaut continued working with Jean-Pierre Léaud, the boy he discovered in *THE 400 BLOWS*, across many films. In a serendipitous way, Jia Ler is my own version of that.



While set in the microcosm of Singapore, *WE ARE ALL STRANGERS* reflects upon the wider world in many of its aspects, e.g. trade and tariffs in the storyline of smuggling medicine, the rising importance of Chinese buyers in the real estate market. Does its position at the crossroads of global changes make Singapore especially interesting as a subject to you?

Absolutely. Singapore's identity is, in many ways, a distillation of global forces. It is a city-state built on the premise of being a vital crossroads—for trade, finance, and ideas. This means that global shifts don't just happen *to* Singapore; they are amplified and reflected in the intimate details of daily life.

Therefore, Singapore isn't just interesting as a subject—it's an incredibly potent microcosm. To tell a local story here is inherently to tell a global one. The anxieties of my characters—about affordability, belonging, and maintaining a foothold in a rapidly changing environment—are local expressions of universal modern disquiet. The city becomes a character in itself, one whose very soul is constantly being negotiated between the intimate memories of home and the immense, impersonal pressures of the global market. That tension, where the world literally washes up on our doorstep, is where the deepest human dramas unfold.

I hope the Singapore canvas makes for a universal tale that connects and resonates across cultures and borders.

The way your characters talk tells us much about who they are – your storytelling feels closely tied to the multi-lingual, multi-ethnic nature of Singapore. How do you approach these layers of languages, dialects and sociolects when writing your scripts?

I'm an observer of life. And someone that is obsessed with detail. I might be on a bus and overhearing a conversation, a tender, hushed conversation between lovers, or elderly folk nagging at each other. These vignettes and moments stay with me. My filmmaking, I like to think, is to draw poetry from ordinary life.

For me, the texture of speech—its accents, its cadence, the specific mix of languages, and even its hesitations—is a profound map of identity. It reveals more than just ethnicity; it can speak volumes about a person's background, their education, their social class, and the communities they navigate. I often find I can guess the kind of school someone attended just by listening to the way they form their sentences.

And it is this ear for authenticity that I seek when writing my scripts. I don't approach language as a technical layer to be added. I approach it as the very fabric of the character and the scene. The goal is for the dialogue to feel unearthed, not constructed—to have the listener recognize not just the words, but the truth of the person speaking them.





There is a lot of continuity over the years in the actors that appear in your films. Tell us about your casting process and the way you work with your actors.

Since *ILO ILO*, I have established my own methodology for casting, one that has been shaped over a 14-year collaboration with my casting director, Koo Chia Meng. That first film was our foundational experience—we auditioned over 8,000 children across 21 primary schools. From there, we engaged in a painstaking, months-long process of workshops and elimination. That's how we discovered not only Koh Jia Ler, but also many of the young supporting actors in the film. It taught me the value of rigorous, almost archaeological discovery.

In Singapore, I typically build an ensemble that blends experienced, trained actors with non-actors. This creates a specific texture—the craft of the former grounding the raw, unvarnished authenticity of the latter. There is no single rule for how I work with an actor, as every individual requires a different key to unlock their performance. Ultimately, everything hinges on trust, and I will use every tool at my disposal to build it. I see my role as that of a conductor, striving to recreate the symphony of real life: it must feel organic and never overly polished, yet it requires a precise emotional rhythm to resonate truthfully.

And rehearsals are a huge parcel of my process. These sessions are where I workshop extensively with the non-actors to find their natural tone and cadence, and where I carefully build the shape and chemistry of the entire ensemble.

I am uncompromising when it comes to performance. I am known for running takes until we capture the specific, genuine moment that moves me. This pursuit can make for an emotionally charged set, but that intensity is a reflection of how deeply and personally I am connected to the characters I have written. Their truth is the only thing that matters.

Your story has a grand sweep over many different locations – restaurants, churches, military barracks, luxury hotels, glitzy real estate developments, humble housing complexes. Did any of these locations prove especially challenging during the shoot?

Every single location presented its own unique set of challenges. While the film is, at its heart, an intimate family drama, we had over 50 locations when you account for every scene big and small—an incredibly ambitious scale for a production of our nature. For *WE ARE ALL STRANGERS*, my team and I literally begged all around town to land the spaces we needed. There were places that rejected us ten times over, but we persisted. During pre-production, I found myself writing emails and texts into the early hours, trying to open any door that might lead to a "yes".

I suspect it might be a particular Singaporean reflex—a tendency for the first instinct to be "no," driven by a culture of caution and a desire to avoid unnecessary work and trouble. It highlights a critical need for us, as a society, to more fully recognize the value of supporting our local film and television industries by facilitating these creative endeavors. This journey made the victories all the more meaningful. I'm grateful and thankful to all the strangers we met along the way, who chose to believe in and support this rather crazy vision, especially to those who first said no, but whose minds we were ultimately able to change. Their trust was our greatest permission.



One of the important topics in all your work is family. Your protagonists experience the whole range of family constellations, from a stifling and restrictive force to the positive role they can play as support systems, both emotionally and economically. What fascinates you about family life, both as a universally human phenomenon and in its specific Singaporean variety?

An emphasis on family is deeply woven into the fabric of Asian societies. Our structures are shaped by a more Confucian ethos of community over the individual self, which is probably the reason why there is such a rich lineage of Asian cinema devoted to exploring the themes and structures of family.

The family is the original lens through which we all learn to see the world. It is our first and most intimate ecosystem—where we first understand love, conflict, duty, and sacrifice. As a subject, it fascinates me precisely because it is both universal and intensely specific.

In Singapore, the family unit becomes a potent, often pressurized vessel for our nation's larger narratives. It is here, within the four walls of a flat, that the abstract forces of national progress, economic pressure, and social expectation become deeply personal. What compels me is how the Singaporean family often functions as both a fortress and a cage. It is an unwavering emotional and economic support system—a vital refuge in a fast-paced, competitive society. Yet, that same closeness can create a weight of expectation and a stifling sense of obligation that is hard to breathe under. My characters often navigate this delicate, painful line: seeking to belong to their family while also struggling to become their own individual selves within, or sometimes against, its structure.

Ultimately, I am drawn to the family because it is where our most profound human dramas—of loyalty, disappointment, resilience, and silent love—are lived in everyday gestures. But I am also very much questioning the definition of family across my films. In a way, all of my films have dealt with the idea of a constructed family - in *ILO ILO*, between a Filipino domestic worker and the young Singaporean boy she cares for; in *WET SEASON*, where a female teacher and her student form a fragile family with her half-paralysed father-in-law; and now, in *WE ARE ALL STRANGERS*, where two couples—one younger, one older—are compelled to become family.

The family, in all its flawed and fervent complexity, remains our most enduring story.



You also are an astute observer of class and social stratification in an almost neo-realist vein. Would you say this has changed in the three decades you have documented in your films?

While my lens is intimate rather than sociological, what I have observed over these decades is a deepening of the same anxieties, just within a far more polished and expensive landscape.

Singapore's physical transformation is undeniable. It's a city-state changing at a pace too rapid for even most of us to keep up with; some locations which I shot in 2012 for my film *ILO ILO* have since been demolished and disappeared.

Yet, even as material comforts have increased for many, but the emotional architecture, the quiet struggles around dignity, belonging, and the pressure to keep pace, have not only remained, they have become more internalized and complex.

In the past, stratification was more visibly tied to basic provisions and physical space. Today, it manifests in more subtle, psychological layers—the weight of educational expectations, the silent judgment in a luxury mall, the profound isolation one can feel in a hyper-connected, prosperous society. The heart of the struggle is less about survival now, and more about meaning and emotional sustenance within a rigid structure.

The human need for connection, understanding, and a sense of worth continues to bump against invisible walls. That is the constant thread my films have traced—not the change in the system itself, but the persistent, personal cost of navigating it.

*WE ARE ALL STRANGERS* is perhaps the most working class of all my films, but I wasn't interested in just capturing grit or poverty. The challenge I presented to my creative team right from the start was, "How do we make the ordinary beautiful?" That was the thinking behind all the creative decisions.





Born in 1984, **Anthony Chen** is an award-winning writer, director and producer and a pivotal figure in Singapore cinema. His work is recognized for its humanistic storytelling and emotional depth.

In 2007, he became the first Singaporean filmmaker to win an award at the Cannes Film Festival for his short film *AH MA*. In 2013, he gained international attention with his debut feature, *ILO ILO*, which was awarded the prestigious Camera d'Or at Cannes and four Golden Horse Awards, among over 40 accolades. His sophomore feature, *WET SEASON* (2019), premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival. Both films were selected as Singapore's official submissions for the Academy Awards.

Chen's recent work demonstrates a dynamic international reach. His English-language debut, *DRIFT* (2023), starring Cynthia Erivo, premiered at Sundance. That same year, *THE BREAKING ICE*, his first Chinese-language film produced in China, premiered in Un Certain Regard at Cannes and was again Singapore's Oscar submission.

His latest film, *WE ARE ALL STRANGERS*, completes his Singapore 'Growing Up' trilogy, reuniting him with actors Yeo Yann Yann and Koh Jia Ler, making history as the first Singaporean film to compete for the Golden Bear award at the Berlin International Film Festival.

Beyond directing, Chen is a prolific producer through his company, Giraffe Pictures, championing distinctive voices in Asian cinema. Notable productions include Kirsten Tan's Sundance winner *POPAYE* (2017), He Shuming's Golden Horse-nominated *AJOOMMA* (2022), and festival highlights such as Neo Sora's *HAPPYEND* (Venice 2024), Tumpal Tampubolon's *CROCODILE TEARS* (Toronto 2024) and Edwin's *SLEEP NO MORE* (Berlinale 2026).



## FILMOGRAPHY 2026

**We Are All Strangers** - Writer, Director & Producer  
Berlinale (Competition)

2023 **The Breaking Ice** - Writer, Director & Producer  
Cannes (Un Certain Regard)

2023 **Drift** - Director & Producer  
Sundance (Premieres)

2021 **The Year of The Everlasting Storm (The Break Away)** - Writer, Director & Producer  
Cannes (Special Screenings)

2019 **Wet Season** - Writer, Director & Producer  
TIFF (Platform Competition) | Singapore's Official Entry for the Academy Awards |  
Pingyao Film Festival (Best Film, Best Actress and Cinephilia Critics' Award) |  
London East Asia FF (Best Film) | Nominated for 6 Golden Horse Awards

2013 **Ilo Ilo** - Writer, Director & Producer  
Camera d'Or at Cannes | Sutherland Award at BFI London FF | Singapore's Official Entry for the Academy Awards |  
Golden Horse Awards (Best Feature, Best Screenplay, Best New Director and Best Supporting Actress)

# ANTHONY CHEN

陳哲藝

DIRECTOR  
SCREENWRITER  
PRODUCER



**YEO Yann Yann** is a central voice in contemporary Asian cinema, renowned for performances of quiet intensity and profound psychological depth. A two-time Golden Horse Award winner, she was awarded Best Actress for *WET SEASON* (2019) and Best Supporting Actress for *ILO ILO* (2013). Her work has garnered additional accolades at the Asian Film Awards, Asian Academy Creative Awards, and Best Actress honours at international festivals spanning India, Vladivostok, and Dubai.

With a background in theatre, Yeo has developed a body of work spanning film and television, marked by emotional realism and moral complexity. Her television performance in *INVISIBLE STORIES* earned her a Best Actress nomination at the International Emmy Awards. In 2023, she won Best Actress for her Hindi-language role in *MODERN LOVE, MUMBAI*, and received an acting nomination for Disney+'s *AMERICAN BORN CHINESE* from the Hollywood Critics Choice Association. She most recently appeared in Gareth Evans' Netflix action-thriller *HAVOC*.

*WE ARE ALL STRANGERS*, marks her fourth collaboration with director Anthony Chen, beginning with Cannes-awarded short *AH MA*, then *Caméra d'Or* winning *ILO ILO* and *WET SEASON*, the first and second films of Chen's 'Growing Up' trilogy.

YEO YANN YANN

楊雁雁 as LEE Bee Hwa

**KOH Jia Ler** is a Singaporean actor known for his decade-long collaboration with director Anthony Chen's in his 'Growing Up' trilogy.

Scouted from over 8000 children at the age of 11, Koh made his screen debut in Chen's Cannes Caméra d'Or winning *ILO ILO* (2013), earning a Golden Horse Award nomination for Best New Performer for his natural and emotionally grounded performance. He reunited with Chen for *WET SEASON* (2019), delivering a nuanced portrayal that secured his second Golden Horse nomination, for Best Supporting Actor.

Coming full circle 13 years later, Koh anchors the lead role in *WE ARE ALL STRANGERS*, completing Anthony Chen's 'Growing Up' trilogy with new levels of growth and artistic maturity. A seasoned Wushu practitioner, he is currently honing his skills in stunts and fight performance, as he pursues new ambitions in the action genre.



**KOH JIA LER**

許家樂 as LIM Junyang



**Regene LIM** is a Singaporean actor who began her career as a child performer in television dramas, first appearing on screen in 2006 at the age of 7. As a child performer, she made her mark for her roles in local TV hits *LIVE AGAIN*, *KINSHIP 2*, and *BREAKOUT*, achieving the rare distinction of winning the Young Talent Award for three consecutive years.

She then appeared in dramas such as *ALL AROUND YOU*, *MY GUARDIAN ANGELS*, and *DARK ANGEL*. After graduating from university with a degree in Communications, she continued to establish herself as a regular presence in Singapore television.

*WE ARE ALL STRANGERS* marks a career-defining milestone for Lim, in her first significant feature film role, and also her most challenging role yet.

REGENE LIM

林詠誼 as Lydia

Born in Kota Tinggi, a small town in Malaysia, **Andi LIM** first found his calling on the waves as a surfer before discovering his passion for acting. He entered the industry through the prominent Singapore talent show *Star Search*, and spent over 25 years playing supporting roles on television.

*WE ARE ALL STRANGERS* represents a defining turning point as it marks his first feature film role and is also his most substantial work to date. Working intimately with director Anthony Chen and a dedicated ensemble cast, the collaboration challenged him to access new layers of vulnerability and authenticity, fundamentally reshaping his relationship with acting.



ANDI LIM

林偉文 as LIM Boon Kiat

## CREW

Director / Screenplay	Anthony Chen
Producer	Anthony Chen
Co-Producers	Teoh Yi Peng, Huang Wenhong
Executive Producers	Joe Tsai, Arthur Wang, KH Kuok
Co-Executive Producer	Julia Song
Director of Photography	Teoh Gay Hian
Production Designer	Huang Mei-Ching
Editor	Hoping Chen
Supervising Sound Editor	Lim Ting Li
Original Music	Kin Leonn, Thomas Foguence
1 <sup>st</sup> Assistant Director	Charlotte Lim
Line Producer	Gina Tan



## FILM SPECS

Original Title	我們不是陌生人 (Wa Men Bu Shi Mo Sheng Ren)
English Title	We Are All Strangers
Year	2026
Runtime	157 min
Country	Singapore
Language	Mandarin, English
Format	Digital, Color
Screening Format	DCP
Camera	Sony Venice 2
Aspect Ratio	1.85
Frame Rate	24 fps
Sound	7.1
Resolution	4k

## INTERNATIONAL SALES

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[sales@paradisecity-films.com](mailto:sales@paradisecity-films.com)

[festival@paradisecity-films.com](mailto:festival@paradisecity-films.com)



## PRESS

INTERNATIONAL

CLAUDIA TOMASSINI AND ASSOCIATES

Claudia Tomassini

Carsten Siebert

[berlinale@claudiatomassini.com](mailto:berlinale@claudiatomassini.com)

US

CINETIC MARKETING

Courtney Ott

Emilie Spiegel

[strangers@cineticmedia.com](mailto:strangers@cineticmedia.com)

