



I'M SO SORRY

趙亮導演作品

ZHAOS IMAGE PRODUCTION LIMITED, ARTE FRANCE, LES FILMS DIC! PRESENT

無去來處

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无去来处

I'M SO SORRY

A film by ZHAO LIANG

2021/Hong Kong, France, the Netherlands/Documentary/96 min/Color
Chinese, Japanese, Russian, German with English subtitles

Zhao's Image Production Limited

Arte France

Les Films d'Ici

present

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LOGLINE

In the context of contemporary high-advanced technology and totalitarianism, this film presents the predicament of global warming in terms of humanity's choices about nuclear power.

SYNOPSIS

Anchored by a man whose quest humanizes global changes, this film traces the historical events and present situation of nuclear disaster across human society. Every nuclear site he revisits represents a specific temporality - Fukushima, Japan, as the ongoing present; Semipalatinsk, Kazakhstan, as the concealed past; Chernobyl, Ukraine, as the forever alienated present, and Onkalo, Finland, as the future of the future. The narrative created through deconstruction and reconstruction of histories provides a new space to reflect on nuclear issues. In this space, a panorama of global apocalyptic landscapes after nuclear disaster as well as the daily lives of humans on these land is brought to life. The film, visually futuristic yet close to cyberpunk science fiction, seeks to create a human allegory in the present.

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY



Zhao Liang was born in Liaoning, China in 1971. He graduated from Luxun Academy of Fine Arts in 1992. Based in Beijing since 1993, he has been working as an independent documentary filmmaker as well as an artist in photography and video art. His films **BEHEMOTH** (2015), **PETITION** (2009), **CRIME AND PUNISHMENT** (2007), **TOGETHER** (2011) and **PAPER AIRPLANE** (2001) have been selected and screened in Cannes, Venice, Berlin and other prestigious film festivals worldwide.

DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY

PAPER AIRPLANE (2001)

- 14th Amsterdam International Documentary FF
- 12th Marseille International Documentary Festival
- Merit Prize, 3rd Taiwan International Documentary Festival
- 4th International Independent FF Buenos Aires, Argentina

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT (2007)

- 60th Locarno
- Montgolfière D'or, 29th Nantes' 3 Continents FF
- Silver Lady Harimaguada Award, 9th Las Palmas de Gran Canaria IFF
- 6th International Nuremberg Human Rights Film Award

PETITION (2009)

- Special Screening, 62nd Cannes
- 61st Locarno
- Award for Best Feature Documentary, 7th Doc Lisboa
- Halekulani Golden Orchid Award, 29th Hawaii IFF
- Humanitarian Awards for Documentaries, 34th Hong Kong IFF
- Golden Reel Award, 9th Tiburon IFF

TOGETHER (2011)

- 61st Berlinale
- 35th Hong Kong IFF

BEHEMOTH (2015)

- Competition, 72nd Venice
- Best Documentary, 26th Stockholm IFF Suède
- Special Jury Prize, 16th Tokyo FILMeX
- Firebird Award, 40th Hong Kong IFF
- 29th IDFA Amsterdam

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Nuclear technology is the culmination of human reasoning; symbolizing human advancement at its highest level. And yet, just like Pandora's box, it may be the most severe threat to humanity that science has ever created. Besides the deadly effects of nuclear weapons, the maintenance of nuclear power plants remains a challenge, since upkeep must be immaculate.

Since the 1950s, increasing numbers of nuclear power plants have been built along the world's seashores, bolstered by the promise of huge financial benefits from reduced emissions and increased energy efficiency. As of April 2017, 30 countries worldwide are operating 449 nuclear reactors for electricity generation, and 60 new nuclear plants are under construction in 15 countries.

Nuclear power plants provide approximately 11 percent of the world's electricity production (70% in France). Running in silence and leaving few carbon traces, the plants stand so far from cities and populations that they seem to exist in separate worlds.

But one must shudder upon thinking about how much devastation could result from a nuclear accident. Even today, the most

capable scientists are still debating about how to accomplish the formidable task of safely containing high-level radioactive waste for perpetuity.

Maybe all we can do is to pray. We pray that the workers at the power plants will never make mistakes. We pray that when a disaster befalls, it will be far enough from our own location.

However, as the planet's resources can hardly satisfy our demand for goods and energy, living in an ecology that may collapse under nuclear explosion or fallout at any time has become a written destiny for humankind.

For most of the human population who are striving to make ends meet, the potential fate is especially bleak. When a catastrophe hits, it would be doubtful whether they would know the severity of the situation; it is far less certain whether they could deal with it.

The intractable state of being entangled in the uncertainty brought by the employment of nuclear technology reveals an existential conundrum facing humanity today: that it is ever more difficult for an individual to live a

life in the way he or she hopes. Individuals have few options to protect themselves from the negative effect of decisions made by the ruling class.

According to the Law of Concentrated Benefit Over Diffuse Injury, a small, determined group, working energetically for its own narrow interests, can almost always impose an injustice upon a vastly larger group, provided that the larger group believes that the injury is “hypothetical, ” or distant-in-the-future, or real-but-small relative to the real-and-large cost of preventing it.

Political philosopher Hannah Arendt also wrote about the fragility of individual will in our society. She pointed out that, because of the pre-existing “web of human relationships, with its innumerable, conflicting wills and intentions”, an action may never achieve its purpose. Nobody is the author or producer of his own life story. Instead, one can only be an actor or a sufferer of actions.

As the lies told by the Soviet and Japanese regimes, as well as the suffering of local residents in the aftermath of nuclear fallouts at Semipalatinsk, Chernobyl, and Fukushima reveal to us, when individual wellbeing is at odds with the state’s interest, powerlessness comes to define the individual’s fate. And the misery of small groups of people may be

conveniently excluded from official records. How are the victims of past nuclear disasters continuing with their lives? Who is in charge of writing human destiny?

“At first, the question was, who’s to blame? But then, when we learned more, we started thinking, what should we do?” *Voices from Chernobyl* by Svetlana Alexevitch. Therefore, hoping to raise social awareness and contribute to the worldwide debate, I try to create a panorama that shows the predicament of humans nuclear technology, by tracing sites to nuclear production, disaster, or deposit in different parts of the world, as well as the men and women who live and work in such places. Constructing an image narrative with the tone of an essay-poem, I want to portray the workers employed in the various nuclear facilities, everyday images of isolated people still living in exclusion zones, of sick people, especially born disabled children in institutions or families.

Collaging scenes that reveal how nuclear power shapes human destiny in the past, present, and future, and following two characters haunting disaster-struck locations, this contemporary parable may help us imagine, and highlight, what kinds of enormous consequences may result from our careless decisions today.



DIRECTOR'S INTERVIEW

1. Would you please talk about where your interest in the nuclear issue originates from?

In 2017, I was doing research for a new film in my hometown Dandong, Liaoning Province, as I was resting at home, the chandelier and the fan started trembling, and the whole building was shaking, we thought it was an earthquake. My niece dragged my mother down the stairs. We found out from foreign press the next day that it was an atomic bomb launched by North Korea. The distance between the explosion site and Dandong is more than 1,000 kilometers. That's an unmeasurable power if we could feel the shock even in Dandong. There's a trembling chandelier in the film which comes from my personal experience.

2. Where did the Chinese and English titles come from?

"WU QU LAI CHU" is written by Emperor Qianlong on a plaque of Dajue Temple, it's an allusion to Zen. The next line is "DONG JING DENG GUAN" (Motion and motionlessness are interchangeable and relative). I'm not really taking the religious implications of the quote, just referring to the literal meaning in modern Chinese.

"WU QU LAI CHU" means "No whence, No

whither", it sums up the human conditions of our time, with no place to go and no homeland to

return to. Perhaps it's just my personal feeling. Even before the concept for this film came about, I asked Li Xianting (Art critic and curator) to calligraph the phrase for me, and it ended up being the title of this film, it's fate.

The English name "I'M SO SORRY" is what I sincerely want to say to the world, to nature and to future generations. Because the current environmental and energy dilemma is the original sin that everyone who produces carbon emissions must carry on their backs. Everyone should apologize and introspect.

3. The film uses sufficient subjective narration, could you talk about the creative process behind it?

During the shooting process, I recorded my firsthand feelings with the memo on my phone. Later, I sorted them through and selected some for refinement and extension. At the same time during the pandemic, I read up on philosophical works about topics related to the climate and the environment as additional replenishment.

When I was making **BEHEMOTH**, I drew a lot of inspirations and passages from

Dante's *Divine Comedy*, an 800-year-old foreign text that provided a particularly interesting counterpoint. During this investigation, I first tried to make a short film, and I continued with the pattern of grafting and collage. The narration is partially interviews of characters from Alexievich's work *Voices from Chernobyl*, juxtaposed with the lives of people now in the same disaster: he becomes them. They do not know each other, but they bear the same pain. The film has two narrations, one is the ghost who is the stand-in of the leading man "I", and the other is the inner monologue of the character.

4. How did you come up with the image of a spirit with Noh mask wandering through the debris?

In my film, the spirit refers to the artifact of nuclear radiation, which aligns with French philosopher Latour's belief. I call it the ghost. Nogaku is a form of art that shows the communication between human and spirits. The mask presents itself as a face with both woeful and smiling expressions, and can travel between Yin and Yang. The surface of the mask has this flexibility and ghostly presence of being everywhere, which fits my need for a crossover scene.

One of my best friends is a renowned Noh

professor. He attends weekly anti-nuclear rallies in front of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry in Japan. I thought it would be surreal and mysterious to try to bring this unique Japanese culture into the film and into the ruins. When I make films, I always want to add a touch of subjectiveness.

I had hoped that the ghost could travel to more places, but failed to do so due to the pandemic, but I still kept the character to reflect the connections between Yin and Yang.

5. There's a certain oriental compassion and sorrow in the representation. Please talk about the visual style that evokes such emotions.

The audience may have different feelings. This time I did not deliberately create any specific tone, but just tried to restore my impressions. Therefore there's the brand new ruins (Fukushima) and the rotten ruins (Chernobyl). We didn't even have to desaturate in color-grading, it already had a sense of time. The span of time and space in between is very interesting to me. Where does the future hold?

6. Maria from Chernobyl is the most memorable character in the film, and she is also the main subject of your last short

film. Could you elaborate on the process of filming her?

When I met her, I could sense a profound loneliness. She was the only one left in the village. She always kept track of the time with an old Nokia and had several small clocks at home. She was waiting, and her only company was time. In the film I was trying to capture the passage of time in the air.

I asked the interpreter and the crew to leave, and I was left by myself. Sometimes with the camera all set up, I would leave as well. The time was very limited, I hoped to let her return to the natural state of being as soon as possible.

7. Do you think the film is firmly anti-nuclear?

I'm not against technology, but I'm against the way technology is taken advantage of by capitalism. I'm not against capitalism in general either, it has many aspects, but I'm against the excessive consumerism, the unlimited expansion of capital and profit, blind consumption, waste and destruction fueled by capitalism.

What I mean is that we probably don't need that much stuff, therefore we don't need to consume as much electricity either. We have to examine our lifestyles. I'm actually

pointing to a deeper structural defect behind the nuclear issue, which is the problem of consumerism.

8. This is your first international project. Are there any differences comparing to Chinese projects?

Documentary filmmaking on international projects has different difficulties from that in China. Costs have increased, transportation has to be arranged, language issues have to be resolved, and filming schedules are tighter. This shoot involved Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union and the Commonwealth of Independent States, and had to face many geopolitical situations and differences.



CAST

Maria Shovkuta

Ivan Semenyuk

Chaliadzinskaya Ina

Chaliadzinskaya Lizaveta

Yoshimichi Matsumoto

Yoshiko Matsumoto

Mizue Mori (Noh)

CREW

Director

Zhao Liang

Narration Script

Zhao Liang, Sylvie Blum

Cinematographers

Zhao Liang, Sun Shaoguang

Editors

Fabrice Rouaud, Zhao Liang

Music

Mikael Plunian

Sound Design

Jeroen Goeijers

Closing Music

Benoit Guerroué

Producers

Zhao Liang, Serge Lalou, Valérie Guérin

Co-Producers

Ruby Chen, Jia Zhao

FILM SPECIFICATION

Original title: Wu Qu Lai Chu (无去来处)

English title: I'M SO SORRY

Year: 2021

Country: Hong Kong, France, the Netherlands

Language: Chinese, Japanese, Russian, German

Runtime: 96 min

Camera: RED EPIC-W 8K

Format: Digital, Color

Screening format: DCP

Aspect Ratio: 1.896:1

Frame rate: 24 fps (Theater) and 25 fps (TV)

Sound: 5.1

Resolution: 4K (4096 x 2160) and 8K (8192 x 4320)

PRODUCTION

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Les Films d'Ici

Arte France

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