



From the Cannes- and Berlin-honored director of Beijing Bicycle and Shanghai Dreams

Drifters (Er Di)

directed by Wang Xiaoshuai



China, 2004* Chinese, w/English subtitles* 120min* 1.185 * Dolby SRD

A loafer returns to his Chinese birthplace after being thrown out of the US - again - this time for impregnating his boss's daughter. His trips to America give him some status back home in Fujian province, but do not help dispel his family's disillusionment with their slacker "second son." This is a moving and beautifully shot drama that offers a glimpse of the complex consequences of migration, immigration and re-migration.

AWARDS AND FESTIVALS:

Un Certain Regard – Cannes Film Festival

Official Selection: Toronto, Karlovy Vary, Rotterdam, Calgary, Vancouver, Seattle, Nantes, Hawaii Film Festival, AFI Fest

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SYNOPSIS

Would-be immigrant Er Di is back in China, expelled from the United States for working illegally. While in the U.S. he had fathered a child, and when his American-born son comes to China for a visit, Er Di is barred from seeing him. At the same time, Er Di becomes involved with the beautiful member of a touring Shanghai opera company. Caught between his past and his future, his son's culture and his own, Er Di seeks bonds with both.

CAST AND CREW

Cast

Young Brother	LONG DUAN
Little Girl	YAN SHU
Liang	ZHILANG WANG
Big Brother	YIWEI ZHAO
Sister-in-Law	YANG TANG

Crew

Director	XIAOSHUAI WANG
Screenplay	XIAOSHUAI WANG
Executive Producer	ZHIHAO ZHOU
Producer	PEGGY CHIAO
Line – producer	LI PENG, HONGHAO TONG
Director of Photography	DI WU
Editor:	CHING-SONG LIAO
Sound	DU-CHE TU
Music	FENG WANG

AWARDS AND FESTIVALS

Un Certain Regard – Cannes Film Festival
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Hawaii Film Festival, AFI Fest

Bios:

Xiaoshuai Wang - Director

Award-winning director of *Beijing Bicycle* and *Shanghai Dreams*. Graduate of the Beijing Film Academy and one of China's famed Sixth Generation directors. In 1993, he wrote and directed *The Days*, which garnered praise from Western film critics but was blacklisted by the China Film Bureau, along with the director himself. He submitted his next film *Frozen* to various international film festivals under the name "Wu Min" (Anonymous). Other films include *So Close to Paradise* (1998), *The House* (1999) and *Beijing Bicycle* (2001). This last film won the Best Silver Bear and the Best Young Actor Awards at the 2001 Berlin Film Festival.

Zhihao Zhou – Executive Producer

Zhou is already a leader in the entertainment business in Beijing before starting Purple Light Films. He is also a producer of LAN YU.

Long Duan – Young Brother

Duan was born in 1973 and became a student at the National Drama Academy in 1998. He has appeared in many TV drama series and stage plays before making his big-screen debut in *Drifters*.

Yan Shu – Little Girl

Shu was born in 1982 and started studying in the Department of Performance at the Beijing Film Academy. She is also a trained Shanghai opera performer. *Drifters* is her debut screen performance.

Yiwei Zhao – Big Brother

Zhao is a graduate of the Central Drama Academy. He first appeared in Xiaoshuai Wang's *Bicycling Beijing* in 2001. *Drifters* is his second film overall, as well as with the director.

Yang Tang – Sister-in-Law

Tang is a veteran stage actor. *Drifters* is her first big-screen performance.

Production Notes:

Xiaoshuai Wang (Director) on *Drifters*:

The idea for this story came from a friend who went to the U.S. and came back after getting married and having a child there. Family problems began to occur and eventually he couldn't even see his own son. His story affected me greatly. Then recently, a car full of dead Chinese stowaways was found near the border of some country.

That got me thinking: why is that we are in the 21st century, but so many people are still trying to run away to other countries? I felt a touch of tragedy there. Throughout the years, the Chinese had been immigrating to other countries and there must be a lot of similar incidents. Also, I set the story against the backdrop of stowaways. He can't go to the other shore again, and with the loss of family ties, the sense of loneliness is even more profound.

I wish that the protagonist in the film still comes across as an individual case, which is why I set the film in an area where stowing away has become a social problem and the government is concerned. This way, the fate of the protagonist has even more impact.

This film is not just about stowaways. Stowing away is an action, and behind the action are the backgrounds and the consequences it brought on the people and family around. When I was young, seeing people going on train trips, I noticed that the travellers and those sending them off were crying. Thinking about it today, a train trip is nothing, but people at the time considered it like a last goodbye. It was in fact a sign of backwardness.

In the 1980s and 90s, the trend of going overseas was also like that. Going to the other end of the world – a big deal! The entire country would change. We had some film and television dramas that depict the overseas experience, but we seldom had anything that took the story back to China. What I wanted to say is, when something like this happens to a family that is unable to fight against societal forces in terms of both social status and consequence, it's a tragedy of the entire people. This is the case with the son's family, which appears to have the ability to control its life because it has the established roots in the U.S.

This film is more subdued than *Bicycling Beijing*. It can even be considered as pursuit for emptiness, a kind of emptiness that results from a life with no aim and no ideals. The questions are blowing in the wind, with no answers. It's a little like *The Days*.



Best of the Fest

Our guide to more than 100 films at the Toronto International Film Festival

DRIFTERS ★★★

Dir Wang Xiaoshuai w/ Duan Long, Zhao Yiwei. 120 min. CWC. Sep 5, 10pm, Cumberland; Sep 9, 9am, Cumberland.

Wang Xiaoshuai's follow-up to his fest hit *Beijing Bicycle* is another stern, compelling story of modern proletariat life as seen through the eyes of China's Seventh Generation filmmakers. Adrift between two cultures, Er Di (Duan Long) is back in his hometown after being expelled from the US, where he had been working illegally. When his former girlfriend's family brings his American-born infant son over to China

for a visit, Er Di is barred from seeing the child, thereby provoking the ire of Er Di's own family. When not trying to see his kid, he conducts a tender, tentative romance with Xiao Nu (Shu Yan), a member of a touring Shanghai opera troupe. As befits the title, a sense of aimlessness inevitably sets in, though the film's sad, static scenes eventually give way to more dramatic events. **JA**



Film Review: 'Drifters' doesn't stray from the pain of parent-child separation

Posted at 11:19 PM

[Hawaii International Film Festival](#)—On the surface, a story about Chinese stowaways can hardly seem engaging, no matter how serious the content, just because tragedy and politics nearly always seem to head down a bad road. In *Drifters*, however, Long Duan's Er Di is a man without much hope or enthusiasm until he confesses his real desire: To connect with a son he has not seen in years. The twists and turns of Xianshuai Wang's remarkable plot and direction give us a chance to understand, and eventually embrace Er Di and his family in their quest to allow a father to be a father, even if it means breaking a foreign law.

HondaReport.com Movie Review

Title: Drifters

Pupule's Rating: * * * * stars

MPPR Rating:

Date of Viewing: Saturday, November 8, 2003

Location: Dole Cannery/[Hawaii International Film Festival](#)

By Paul Honda

Saturday, November 8, 2003

In *Drifters*, not to be confused with an equally interesting but far less poignant *Grifters*, Wang Xiaoshuai sets his cameras and lets the story tell itself.

No handheld bounciness. No CGI superpowers. Xiahshuai doesn't just direct. He crafts a tale that begins and ends with a constant tension, but like the dozens of cigarettes puffed away in this film, the simmering stays at that level much of the time.

Long Duan, as Er Di, is among the finest character actors of this generation and he shows us not just why, but how. *Drifters*, on the surface, is a story foreign to us as Americans: the desperate strategy of faraway people of risking their lives and fortunes simply to have a chance to come to the United States and make a humble living.

Beneath the surface, however, *Drifters* is about far more. As Er Di returns to his home province of Fujian, he doesn't tell us his story of being a new father, of stowing away to the states before being deported back to mainland China. Instead, secondary characters—and they turn in strong, sustaining performances thanks to a balanced script by Wang—feed us key bits of information about Er Di and the circumstances surrounding his return.

His older brother, known simply as Big Brother, cues us in not so much with information, but with the passion that has seemed to dissipate from Er Di, a.k.a. Young Brother. When one of their brothers is discovered among the victims in a stowaway tragedy, Big Brother is full of questions—and as we learn, explosive anger.

The simmer comes to an early boil when Big Brother sits at the table, and nobody is eating though there is food aplenty. When Er Di arrives, Big Brother questions and questions him. Er Di has no answers, and after a few minutes, Big Brother finally erupts with doubt about Er Di's participation in the death of their brother.

Before long, however, Big Brother is on Er Di's side again. We learn, as does the old neighborhood, that Young Brother fathered a son in the states, and that the boy is now in Fujian. Problem is, because the mother's family refuses to allow Er Di near the child, he has no choice but to stay away lest he break American law.

That triggers a heated feud between the two families, and in the mix are younger brother Liang and an traveling opera performer, Xiao Nu.

The two play larger roles than most movies allow for secondary parts. Liang's spark helps the depressed, sometimes volatile Er Di to summon the courage to seek out his son, even with failed results. And when Big Brother quietly brings the boy, now 5, into Er Di's hands, the genuine moments of discomfort and silence are mesmerizing.

It is Xiao Nu who breaks the tension between the boy and his father (and uncle) on a typically gray afternoon at the harbor, which is not exactly a pretty beach. With those same boats and tugs chugging away nearby, Xiao Nu is the one who gets the boy to play, reminding the men about what kids love to do best, and before long, all four have forged a simple, pure bond. It's the kind of scene that every adult and child can relish, not because of the temporary triumph over politics, international law and family disputes. The smile on little Fusheng's face is all that Er Di has dreamt of, ever since they spent time together in the states.

Of course, it doesn't end here, and to spill more would be overkill. The ensuing scene is probably the most powerful moment in Asian cinema in this HIFF, and any father or

mother who has been separated from a child can feel the torment in Er Di's heart for long, brutally, but beautifully painful minutes.

Drifters begins with a sense of hope, despair and ambition, and it ends on that theme, as well. It is a masterpiece of our human condition regardless of culture and status. Xiaoshuai Wang understands the threads that weave through all souls, and thankfully, he spares no burden in telling this amazing story.

For good measure, it's worth noting that Ziahshuai covered all his bases. In the first five scenes, someone—usually Er Di—is calmly toking a cigarette. It continues for the entire film but for a few moments, including scene 6, when Er Di visits his child for the first time in Fujian.

The Hype: Coming off *Beijing Bicycle*, there certainly is an exceedingly high level of expectation for any work done by Wang.

Strengths: Wang allows lighter moments to mature bit by bit, and with confrontational situations, he doesn't necessarily let characters drift outside their scope of emotion. He is attentive to momentum, and that allows the actors to work each scene accordingly and without time constraints. Long Duan's chemistry with his brothers changes between Big Brother and the younger Liang with tremendous finesse. He also pairs very well with Shu Yan (as Xiao Nu), and though she is a glamorous-looking woman, I buy their compatibility and passion.

Weaknesses: This film could have been trimmed just a bit, especially in the scene where Liang returns home with Er Di before moving to Guanzhong. There were two instances where the subtitles flitted by too quickly. There was also a single grammatical error. I'm really digging here because it is a nearly flawless work.

Best Scene: Hands down, at the shop where Er Di—formal name Hong Yuenshang—returns with his son, brother and girlfriend only to find the two opposing clans at battle's edge. For anyone who has experienced separation in a parent/guardian-child relationship from either side, this is strong content. It is the first time I've shed a tear at an Asian film with a male lead, and that's saying a little something. The last time I felt this emotional at an Asian film was during Gong Li's string of triumphant work in the '90s.

Worst Scene: None. Wang is an artist when it comes to having purpose behind every scene, and he occasionally uses some scenes to set up later circumstances.

Summary: It is rare to find a drama featuring a man's family, a child and a feud so compelling, especially without rampant sex and violence. *Drifters* is one of my top films of the year not because of this achievement, though. It's one of the best because it is wonderfully crafted on every level. You will find few actors globally who are capable of carrying a heavy storyline the way Long Duan does here.

Discretionary notes: Mature theme, and one intimate scene (no nudity) between Er Di and Xiao Nu.



DRIFTERS - MOVIE REVIEW, PREMIERE AT AFI FILM FESTIVAL

Posted: [11/15/2003] by Harish Rao [\[View/Add comments\]](#)

THE DRIFTERS "REVIEW

The world premiere of writer director Wang Xiaoshuai`s film happened at the 2003 AFI FILM FESTIVAL.

In this year`s AFI film festival I tried to target the Chinese films since Indian films were absent from the festival, I know we will be indulged however, next Spring at the 2nd Annual Indian Film Festival from Christina Marouda and her wonderful team of organizers...

Why should you see this film?

There are a number of Chinese / Taiwanese filmmakers who are absolutely fascinating filmmakers and you will never see their films because on the major studios isn`t distributing their films. This filmmaker is one, Takeshi Kitano is another, and Won Kar Wai is yet another, but I digress...

More importantly if this review and other ones I am planning on "little known" forces in Asian filmmaking (Indian, Pakistani, Middle Eastern, East Asian and all other points Asia) can help reach that audience in some small way then it is worth it, its all about knowledge innit? (as the British would say)

The Drifters is a powerful gripping drama about life in modern China. A stowaway who lived in the US for several years is suddenly deported, having left behind a son, he returns to his seaside village and drifts aimlessly until he learns that the boy has been brought to China. He must struggle with his own emotions and insecurities to regain purpose in life and become a father to his son.

I saw this director`s previous film, BEIJING BICYCLE, actually admittedly I bought the DVD without ever having seen the film before! I am very glad I did. Xiaoshuai`s approach to storytelling is nothing short of amazing! In the DRIFTERS he continuous the unique and uncanny knack of pulling you along the story only revealing short bits and pieces of the plot, when he drops a major plot point on , I really felt the impact of it.

The other very admirable trait of this film is that nothing is sold short to the audience, you really feel the plight of the main protagonist played by Long Duan. If the beginning of the film feels distant, by the midpoint, I was completely engrossed

with the intertwined lives of the families.

Xiaoshuai never tries to influence your opinion one way or the other, which is a pitfall unfortunately of many American films that are categorized in the same genre, at some point, some American filmmakers consciously sway your opinion by skewing your emotions toward specific characters, that doesn't happen here. The movie has an open ended ending which again proves the resiliency of this great director to tell a "realistic" story which mirrors life, there are never true answers that conveniently wrap up a story by the of the film.

I strongly recommend this film, and be on the lookout for future movies from this director.

1/2 out of ** (3 1/2 stars out of 5 stars)

PROS:

Wonderfully simple storytelling. Compelling realistic drama of what people have to go through and choices that they make

CONS

Some of the scenes are a bit long, after the point is made in a scene there is a tendency by the director to hand on it for a bit longer than needed. This may be the intention of the director, but after 4 or 5 times it starts becoming redundant.

OVERALL

Director Wang Xiaoshuai is definitely a tour de force of Chinese cinema. Check out BEIJING BICYCLE and this film for sure! Certainly a director who is embarking on a major career of a historic body of work!

Harish Rao

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