

WHISPERS

春日幻游

TINN

MAY
MAY

十日
幻游



A FILM BY
DONGNAN CHEN

TAIL BITE TAIL FILMS & MUJI FILM PRESENT

Tail Bite Tail Films & Muiyi Film present

In co-production with HER Film & Seesaw Pictures

WHISPERS IN MAY

Hong Kong / Netherlands /
South Korea / Sweden, 2026, 95 min.

A film by
Dongnan Chen

World premiere



PRESS NOTES

Press materials can be downloaded [HERE](#)

Contacts

Production

Tail Bite Tail Films
Dongnan Chen
nanchen1895@gmail.com
tailbitetail.com

Production

Muyi Film
Jia Zhao
+31653488758
jia@muyifilm.com
muyifilm.com

World Sales

Muyi Film
Tail Bite Tail Films
nanchen1895@gmail.com
jia@muyifilm.com

Festival Agent

INDOX Films
Luke Brawley
luke@indoxfilms.com
indoxfilms.com

Publicist CPH:DOX

NOISE Film & TV
Mirjam Wiekenkamp
+31 6 28652249
mirjam@noisefilmpr.com
noisefilmpr.com



Logline

In the remote Liangshan Mountains, 14-year-old Qihuo and her friends set out to find a skirt for her rite of passage. What begins as a small quest drifts into a suspended space of childhood, where time slows and the world is vast.



Synopsis

Qihuo has a secret: she's just had her first menstruation. This marks the arrival of the 'Changing Skirt' ceremony, a traditional coming-of-age ritual, which signifies she is no longer a child, but a woman bound to the communal demands of marriage and labor.

With her parents away as migrant workers and grandfather recently passed, Qihuo and her two best friends set out on a road trip to buy a skirt for her rite of passage. Blending raw documentary with an improvised fictional voyage, the film crafts a world inhabited by the girls that exists beyond social norms. Here, as the days go by and landscapes shift, the trio traverse the rugged mountains, chase shadows, and cherish fleeting moments. A time capsule, *Whispers in May* clings to the last moments of childhood, just before reality takes hold.

Director's statement

When I first traveled to Liangshan, I wasn't planning to make a film, until a local teacher showed some of her students' writings. One line in particular stayed with me: "I've made many wishes, but none has ever come true." Later that day, I met its author, Qihuo.

Bright-eyed, Qihuo loved trees and sparkling stones in a river, and squealed with joy at the sight of neon lights. However, as with many children in the area, her life was shaped by absences and loss: her parents were away as migrant laborers and her grandfather had recently passed. At 14, she was at a point where childhood was starting to slip away. The world was ready to define her — as a woman, wife, and migrant worker — before she could choose her own path.

I didn't want to document her coming of age within a predetermined narrative. Instead, I wanted us to use the film to create an alternative narrative, a dream that ran parallel to her real life, exploring what she might not have done otherwise. Together, we embarked on the journey. Set against the rugged terrains of Liangshan, the film grew from close collaboration and improvisation with the girls, imagining a space where they could simply be in all their unfiltered joys and sorrows, free from judgment, definition, or expectation. They were just kids, navigating life's complexities, straddling between reality and a tale.

Whispers in May is a reluctant coming-of-age story. It's not about becoming, but about being allowed to linger in childhood and remain in that fragile space as life moves forward with all its cruelty and beauty.





Producer's note

Spring comes even to the most remote places — quietly, almost unnoticed — yet it carries a promise of change.

What moved me in the film is the director's devotion to capturing that quiet transformation, a delicate space between girlhood and womanhood. The filmmaker weaves in fleeting, almost ungraspable moments of youth after a girl experiences her first menstruation, a transition that is deeply personal and universal.

This is not a mere coming-of-age documentary. Structured as a road movie, it expands an intimate rite of passage into a poetic journey. Landscapes become an extension of the girls' inner worlds, granting them a suspended moment of freedom before reality begins to define them. Their ambivalence, curiosity, and vulnerability are portrayed with tenderness and clarity.

The film moves between documentary immediacy and poetic abstraction, allowing space for nuance and emotional complexity. At its core, it is a daring hybrid and artistic attempt to capture the girls' dreams as they hold onto the final moments of childhood.

The project embodies the courageous vision of a woman director in China, where making independent documentary films is a precarious endeavor. As a European-Chinese producer, I am strongly committed to amplifying such bold, artistically-driven stories across borders.



About the director

Dongnan Chen

Dongnan Chen crafts films that turn lived experience into cinematic fables, exploring transitional identities and the in-between spaces of reality and the imagined.

Her works include *14 Paintings* (Sundance, IDFA, MOMA Doc Fortnight), *Singing in the Wilderness* (IFFR, New Directors/New Films), *Sound of Vision* (Emmy-nominated), and *The Trail from Xinjiang*.

Whispers in May, her second feature, premieres in CPH:DOX's DOX:AWARD 2026.



Filmography (selected)

Whispers in May (2026) – hybrid documentary feature, 95 min.
Selected for the DOX:AWARD Competition at CPH:DOX

14 Paintings (2023) – documentary short, 24 min.
IDFA, Sundance Film Festival, MoMA Doc Fortnight
Nominated for the Best Documentary Innovation Award at China Academy Awards of Documentary Film

Singing in the Wilderness (2021) – documentary feature, 98 min.
IFFR, New Directors/New Films (MoMA & Lincoln Center)
Won the ETNOMATOGRAPH Award at the Millennium Docs Against Gravity Festival (MDAG)

The Trail from Xinjiang (2013) – documentary short, 36 min.
Won Best Documentary Short at the Asian American International Film Festival (NY)

Sound of Vision (2012, co-directed with Loretta van der Horst, Julia Doran, Joseph Vele, Konstantin Syomin) – documentary short, 8 min.
Nominated for the News and Documentary Emmy Award

About the producers

Jia Zhao is a Chinese-Dutch film producer based in Amsterdam, dedicated to authentic Asian storytelling and cross-cultural cinema. She founded MUYI FILM in 2012 and co-founded SILK ROAD FILM SALON with Afghan-Dutch director Aboozar Amini, focusing on stories from regions along the ancient Silk Road.

Her recent works include *Whispers in May* (2026), CPH:DOX International Competition; *Kabul, Between Prayers* (2025), Venice International Film Festival; *Flower Chasers* (Sheffield DocFest 2023); *A Marble Travelogue* (IDFA 2021); and *I'm So Sorry* (Cannes 2021), which she co-produced. Between 2015 and 2019, five of her films were selected for the IDFA Competition, including *Kabul, City in the Wind*, which opened IDFA 2018 and received the First Appearance Jury Award. In 2025, Jia Zhao became a member of the Academy, in recognition of her contribution to internationally collaborative, author-driven documentary filmmaking.



Kay Xu is a Chinese documentary producer and founder of the WOMEN DOCU community, supporting women professionals in the domestic film industry. Her recent producing works *Chinatown Cha-Cha* and *Being Mortal* have achieved nationwide theatrical release in China.

She has also participated in the production and distribution of multiple documentaries, including *Plastic China*, *Singing in the Wilderness*, and *Hard Love*, selected for Sundance, IDFA, and IFFR.





Credits

STARRING & CO-CREATED BY

Jjippupmop Qihuo, Mathxiemop Atnyop
Lhithxamop Itgop, Lhithxamop Itsi

CREW

Director	Dongnan Chen
Director of Photography	Ming Xue
Cinematographer	Xiao Xiao
Sound Recording	Kelan Li
Editors	Sisi Chen Tao Gu
Composer	Chad Cannon
Illustration & Animation	Chenxi Zhang Lopvup·Ma·Axmuyiggu
Sound Design	Mark Glynn Olmo van Straalen
Grading	Albin Abrahamsson
Production Company	Tail Bite Tail Films Muyi Film
Producers	Jia Zhao Kay Xu
Co-production companies	HER Film Seesaw Pictures
Co-producers	Malin Hüber Heejung Oh

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Awards: DMZ Industry, H!-Docs Pitch, FreshPitch, TokyoDocs, CNEX CCDF, and Women's Film Fund of China Film Foundation





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