

幸福城市

CITIES OF LAST THINGS



SYNOPSIS

CITIES OF LAST THINGS highlights three extraordinary nights in the life of an ordinary man, told in reverse chronology. Each story examines his relationships with women, which result in life-changing events.

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STORY

In a futuristic world rife with discrimination, advanced micro-technology is racing forward while society is aging and going backward irreversibly. The interaction between humans is as cold as the bitter winter.

Zhang Dong Ling (60s), a retired construction security guard, fueled by the anger he has repressed over the years, takes revenge on a high-ranking officer who made his life a torment one particular night thirty years ago...

PART 1 – FUTURE

Age of Disenchantment

Taipei – Winter 2049 – 5:00pm-12:00am

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PART 2 – PRESENT

Age of Desire

Taipei – Summer 2016 – 10:00pm-5:00am

Zhang Dong Ling, an young innocent cop accidentally witnesses his wife having sex with his senior police officer. After a confrontation, he chooses to repress his anger to keep his family together for the sake of their baby daughter. Roaming the streets at night, he bumps into a foreign teenager, Ara, whom he arrested earlier. Ara doesn't want to go home either. Two lonely individuals spend the long night together. The unspoken desire between the cop and the ingénue shapes an unforgettable night in Zhang's life ...

PART 3 - PAST
Age of Innocence

Taipei – Spring 2000 – 11:00pm-6:00am

Big Sister Wang is ambushed by police at a night market. Taken to the police station, she is handcuffed on a bench beside the 18-year-old Zhang Dong Ling, who is also in handcuffs. As they talk, Wang and Zhang come to realize that they share a past in ways they could never have imagined...



Can you explain the meaning of the title?

The title “Cities of Last Things” is in fact inspired by “In the Country of Last Things”, written by Paul Auster, one of my favorite writers. In my title, Cities is plural because, even if it’s the same city, it becomes more than one: a city can change into different characters over the course of a long time, just like a person.

The birth of “Cities of Last Things” was a long process. Can you tell us more about it? You must be relieved to be opening in a major festival like Toronto after all the hard work?

It was a labour of love, for sure – a Herculean task lasting eight years, with much support along the way. As a lead producer, writer, director and even co-editor, this is the first time I have felt like I am making a film the way I want to make it. I took as much time as I could. The images that had been singing in my head have been transferred more or less into reality. I first had the idea and wrote the first draft seven years ago. I started shopping it around in 2015, in Berlin and Paris, looking for potential co-production opportunities, actors, a VFX team and a director of photography. The seeds of possibilities were planted. Then I went off to do some ‘director-for-hire’ jobs before returning to this film in 2016. I started casting the character of Ara, interviewing cinematographers and locking in the VFX team in Paris.

With the support of Taiwanese government money and investment from my company, we filmed the present and past segments in the summer and fall of 2016. Because the future segment needed to be shot in winter, we waited until the oncoming winter of that year while raising money for the rest of the shoot. Winter came and went; the money never arrived. Then 2017 went by quickly with two thirds of the film finished and still no financing in sight. While waiting for the financing, we finished editing the present and past segments and showed the rough-cut in order to raise finishing funds. It was a tough year until the fall, when we were lucky enough to meet various investors who helped us to finish the film.

The process was both physically and mentally exhausting - like mountain climbing. But maybe you have to go through that so you can view the world in a better light. Toronto has always been a blessed place for me. When I left home at 18 for the first time, Toronto was my first city abroad. It was the very first experience of international flight in the first winter of my adult life. Attending TIFF was my first experience of immersion in a film festival: I saw fifty-one films in ten days. Many years later, I world-premiered my debut feature “Pinoy Sunday” in Toronto; eight years after that I premiered another film in Platform.

After “Pinoy Sunday” and shorts, you directed a number of commercial films and TV movies in China. “Cities of Last Things” seems like a return to your indie roots, to taking bold risks again...

After the success of “Pinoy Sunday”, a light comedy, I regarded myself officially as a director. I did a lot of director-for-hire jobs. In the process, I learnt a lot about making commercial films, working with corporations and big casts, and dealing with big budgets. But I also felt creatively lazy and limited; I felt safe, complacent. Slowly I began to miss the time of making my first feature: the energy, the drive and the uncertainty. So I took the most daring script out of my drawer and made it. Directing “Cities of Last Things” allowed me to escape my comfort zone: to take risks, with limited resources. My company cash-flowed the film so I could start shooting two segments without knowing whether we would manage to obtain the rest of the money we needed.

Creatively speaking, I told a story in reverse over a span of forty years. We used three actors to play one person at different stages; we went to Seoul to match Taipei as a futuristic Asian city in bitter cold winter; we shot on 35mm using a load of expired Fuji film stock. All these risky decisions came from ambition, and a desire for audacity and boldness. I made this film as if it could have fallen apart at any time: two shoots with 13 months in between, shooting chronologically for one segment, facing several typhoons during the production, two editing periods in two years... I made this film to feel alive. It’s the first time I’ve felt I’m a capable storyteller and filmmaker. Finally, I’m a professional.

“Cities of Last Things” deals with time and regret. Is it for you some kind of self-portrait? A film you made so you could avoid becoming like your main character in the future: bitter and regretful about the films you didn't make?

All my films reflect who I am, in either an obvious or a repressed, hidden way. Of course this isn't my story, but telling it reveals how I think about the world. I regret more and more as I get older; I constantly ask myself “what if”? Then I realize I cannot change my past and I should be smarter about my life in the present in order to have fewer regrets in the future. But one thing you have to take for granted from the moment you are born: things will get worse and regret is part of the game. I wrote this character and made this film in order to avoid becoming like him – I'm a bit scared of my future self so I need to work hard, to be alert and clear now so that I can have a better future.

Your lead character has quite complex relationships with women. Overall, they are not seen in a positive light through their interaction with him. Can you tell us more about your desire to paint the portrait of such an antihero?

The female characters in this film represent the archetypes of wife, lover, mother and daughter. A man will face these four characters in his life. I am confident they are true to life. These four female characters shape a man; he must surrender to them throughout his existence.

Behind his bitterness, you show this man trying to make his family work, despite his difficult background. This theme, the subject of how generations deal with each other, seems to be a recurring personal motif throughout your films...

I come from a big traditional family; I grew up with three generations living under one roof, with more than one hundred members. I grew up watching a live family drama, watching the generational conflicts unfold in front of me. I was taught to know the importance of family values, which I think are now underrated. Humans exist because of their relation to others. The most primitive and foremost relationship is blood. A healthy or a fragile family shapes the success or failure of a man.

Can you tell us about your vision of the future in “Cities of Last Things” – which remains grounded in reality – and how you designed it?

Within the limited budget, I flexed my creative muscles. I was looking for a tangible future. A future in the present tense, if you will, not in the future tense. I researched futuristic technology, all the technologies currently being developed. All the references for my future stem from contemporary reality: clones, sex dolls, the obsession with plastic surgery, a cashless bitcoin world. I just put them all together. I felt the aesthetics of my future had to go against the current trend of futuristic films, so it could feel true to life, somehow second-hand and antique-looking. I believe we are heading towards a ridiculous future, with all the technological problems and man-made disasters - how can one not view it as something sinister, pessimistic, dark and ridiculous?

Portmanteau films always represent a challenge. Can you tell us how you connected all the segments, and also the three actors through the various periods of the character life?

I try not to think of “Cities of Last Things” as three films, but as a single film happening over three nights. Sure, it’s a challenge to find three people to play one character. I don’t just look for the similarities in appearances, I also look for the personality and the feeling. Once we have established the consistency of the ‘three-in-one’ protagonist, his function is to lead the audience through the wonderland: from sunset to sunrise, from winter to spring, from future to past. I would like the audience to observe the life of a man through a believable character.

This isn’t the first time you’ve worked with an international crew. Can you tell us more about your background working with foreign partners, and how it has helped your filmmaking process?

I have been a foreigner since I was 18. I left home and never went back or settled down. Wherever I go, I’m seen as a foreigner, and as a foreigner I feel rootless. Even when I’m back in my hometown, I have lost the feeling of belonging. I have compensated for this loss with the inspirational, creative and intellectual sparks I find living within various kinds of people and different cultures. After a while, you forget about language barriers and cultural borders, and cherish the fruitful, exciting and unpredictable accomplishment of working with a wide variety of good people all over the world. Making films, I long for this kind of spark to drive me forward.

Shooting an indie film in 35 mm is another big challenge. You also pushed the grading with Didier Le Fouest and the score with Rob, evincing a real desire to create a powerfully cinematic experience. Are you like your character, fighting the passage of time?

I find myself fighting against a lot of beliefs these days, not just the passage of time, as I tend to disagree with the world around me more and more. I miss the raw cinematic viewing experience, the simple filmmaking experience and the nostalgic feeling of all things. 35mm is only one kind of tool to revisit this nostalgic world. It's psychology. You also need a strong desire and courage to tell people that there is more than just streaming platforms and digital out there. Craftsmanship still exists.

“Cities of Last Things” mixes English, French and Chinese. What is the next step? An English-speaking feature?

I'm currently developing a Chinese story, shooting in Taiwan next year. And yes, I'd love to do a feature in English. I lived in Toronto, Los Angeles and New York for twelve years. I spent my 20s in western society. Those formative years really shaped me into an artist I am today. I miss that part of the world, and now that I'm capable of telling good story, I would love to tell one that takes place in the US or Canada.



CAST

Jack Kao as LAO ZHANG

This taciturn, tough guy actor from Taiwan has appeared in Tsui Hark's *Time and Tide* and *Dragon Gate*, and Derek Yee's *Shinjuku Incident*. He has also worked frequently with Taiwanese director Hou Hsiao-hsien: credits include *City of Sadness* (1989), *Millennium Mambo* (2001) and *Flowers of Shanghai* (1998).

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CAST

Hong-Chi Lee as XIAO ZHANG

His breakthrough debut performance in *Thanatos Drunk* (Berlin Panorama 2015) garnered him Best Actor at the Taipei International Film Festival 2015 and Best Newcomer at the 2015 Golden Horse Award, where he was also nominated for Best Actor. His most recent film is *Long Day's Journey Into Night* by Bi Gan (selected in Un Certain Regard, Cannes 2018).

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A close-up portrait of actress Louise Grinberg. She has long, wavy, light brown hair and is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. She is wearing a dark, possibly black, lace-trimmed top. The background is a solid, deep blue.

CAST

Louise Grinberg

as ARA

Louise Grinberg made her film debut in 2008 in Palme d'Or-winning French drama *The Class*. In 2011, she played the lead role in *17 Girls*. The following year she played Denis Ménochet's daughter in the romantic comedy *Je me suis fait tout petit*. Her most recent film is *The Prayer* by Cédric Kahn (Berlin Golden Bear Nominee)

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CAST

Huang Lu

as YU-FANG

Huang Lu has appeared regularly in films by leading Chinese auteurs: her credits include *Blind Mountain* (2007), *She, a Chinese* (2009), *How to Describe a Cloud* (2013) and *Blind Massage* by Lou Ye (2014). More recently she appeared in *Yellow Bird* (selected in Critics' Week, Cannes 2016). Her most recent film, *Suburban Bird* (2018), was selected In Competition at Locarno International Film Festival.

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CAST

Ning Ding as WANG JIE

Ning Ding is a Taiwanese actress best known for her roles in *What on Earth Have I Done Wrong?!* (2007), *Taipei 24H* (2009) and *Girlfriend Boyfriend* (2012).

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CAST

Stone

as SHI ZHI WEI

Stone is a key member of the band Mayday which won the Golden Melody Award for Best Musical Group in 2001, 2004, 2009 and 2012. Dubbed “the Chinese Beatles” by CNN, Mayday is one of the most influential bands of the 2000s.



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CAST

Shin Yin

as ZHANG'S DAUGHTER

Shin Yin's credits include *The Island That All Flow By* (2016) for which she won the Taipei International Film Festival Best Actress Award, and was nominated for the Taiwan Golden Horse Best Actress Award. Her most recent film was Tsai Ming-Liang's *The Deserted* (VR).



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Wi Ding Ho is a Malaysia-born and Taiwan-based filmmaker. His feature debut *Pinoy Sunday* won a Best New Director Award from the prestigious Golden Horse Award in Taiwan and showcased in major film festivals including Busan and Toronto.

His short film *Respire*, won two awards at the International Critics' Week of the Cannes Film Festival, and the Best Fantasy Short Film Award at Sitges International Fantasy Film Festival. His film *Summer Afternoon* premiered in Directors' Fortnight at the Cannes Film Festival.

**2010 TAIPEI GOLDEN HORSE
FILM FESTIVAL**

— Best New Director Award

**2010 Taipei International
Film Festival**

— Special Jury Award

**2011 Comedy Clui Film
(Romania)**

— Best Feature Film

*“This is a magic realistic film in
which the yearnings for the
hometown of the immigrant
workers are expressed in a
fantastic and imaginative way. A
film with vivid performances by
the two actors.”*

***Jury Statement of Jury Special
Mention Award, Taipei
International Film Festival***



**TAIPEI GOLDEN HORSE
FILM FESTIVAL**

CANNES FILM FESTIVAL 2008 DIRECTORS' FORTNIGHT

Showcased in twenty film festivals,
including: **Pusan, Vancouver,
Rotterdam, Montreal, Hong Kong**

*"...with only five long shots, the near
perfection of amazing mise-en-scene
demonstrates Wi Ding Ho's acute visual
sense and his audacious cinema aesthetic."*

Steven Tu, Taiwan Cinema Note

*"Wi Ding Ho's most effective sleight-of-
hand is in making the long, single takes
completely unnoticeable. But when you do
notice them later, you also realise how
many "How the hell did they do it?"
moments there are in the film."*

TwitchFilm.net

*"Wi Ding Ho's miniature road movie is a
technical tour de force of fantasy, rage,
and suspense."*

Vancouver International Film Festival



CANNES 2008
40^e
Quinzaine
des Réalistes
DIRECTORS' FORTNIGHT

CANNES FILM FESTIVAL 2005

International Critics' Week

- Kodak Discovery Award
- TV5 (very) Young Critics Award

SITGES International Fantasy Film Festival 2005

- Best Fantasy Short Film Award

Taipei International Film Festival 2006

- Special Jury Award

Showcased in thirty film festivals, including:
Busan, Stockholm, Rotterdam, Clermont-Ferrand.

"Very daring work, with almost all extreme close-ups, the film portrays a fantasy sci-fi world...the perfect combination of passionate energy and detached grimness."

Ann Hui, Jury of 2006 Taipei Film Festival

"As in Chungking Express or Battle Royale, the amazing look of the film helps achieve a sense of dislocation. It's bleached out, dreamy... is this now, or in some apocalyptic future?"

Cath Le Couteur, Founder of Shooting People UK

CHANGHE FILMS LTD.

Founded in 2006 by producer Sunny Chih Hsin Hu and award-winning writer-director-producer Wi Ding Ho, Changhe Films has been collaborating with creative artists from around the world and is committed to nurturing local filmmakers. Changhe Films produces feature films, short films, TV movies, documentaries, TV commercials and industrials.

Changhe Films produced Wi Ding Ho's first feature film *Pinoy Sunday*, a Taiwan-Philippines-Japan-France co-production. In Taiwan, the film had a successful run at the local box office.

Changhe Films also produced Wi Ding Ho's two commissioned short films. *100* is a segment of *10+10*, a joint film project comprised of work by twenty celebrated directors initiated by the Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival. The project had its international premiere at the Berlin International Film Festival.

The other short *I Wake Up in a Strange Bed* is a segment of the short film compilation *When Yesterday Comes*, commissioned by the Catholic Foundation of Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementia. *When Yesterday Comes* world-premiered at the Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival and won a Best Short Film award at the Taipei International Film Festival.



JEAN-LOUIS VIALARD

Jean-Louis Vialard is a French cinematographer. Major credits include *17 Girls* (2011) by Delphine and Muriel Coulin, *In Paris* (2006) by Christophe Honoré, *Tropical Malady* (2004) by Apichatpong Weerasethakul, and *The Sea* (2002) by Baltasar Kormakur.



ROBIN COUBERT (ROB)

Robin Coudert, aka Rob, is a French musician and composer born in 1978. He composed the original soundtracks of *Belle Epine* by Rebecca Zlotowski (2010), *Jimmy Rivière* by Teddy Lussi-Modeste (2011), *Populaire* by Régis Roinsard (2012, nominated for Best Original Soundtrack at the Césars), *Maniac* by Franck Khalfoun (2012) and *Horns* by Alexandre Aja (2014). Rob is also a touring member of the band Phoenix.



KEY INFORMATION

International Sales

WILD BUNCH

Eva Diederix

ediederix@wildbunch.eu

Silvia Simonutti

ssimonutti@wildbunch.eu

Olpha Ben Salah

obensalah@wildbunch.eu

In our Paris offices: Fanny Beauville

fbeauville@wildbunch.eu

International Press

PRODIGY

Jason Kasperski

jk@prodigypublicrelations.com

Erik Bright

eb@prodigypublicrelations.com

Download press kit and stills:

<https://www.wildbunch.biz/movie/cities-of-last-things/>



English Title Cities of Last Things

Director Wi Ding HO

Countries of Productions Taiwan - China
USA - France

Year of Production 2018

Length 107 minutes

Shooting Format 35 mm

Genre Drama

Languages Mandarin - English

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FILM STILL



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