

MOUNTAINS MAY DEPART

China (2015) 126 minutes

Director: Jia Zhangke

Cast: Zhao Tao (Shen Tao)
Zhang Yi (Zhang Jinsheng)
Liang Jingdong (Liangzi)
Dong Zijian (Daole / Dollar)



Screening 13 February 2019 at Swindon Arts Centre

Synopsis

The film comprises three separate vignettes showing the changing lives of a group of childhood friends living through the tumultuous transformation of China over nearly three decades. It opens in 1999 when the country is poised at the beginning of its transformation into a capitalist superpower. A young woman, Shen Tao, has two suitors – Zhang, a brash aspiring entrepreneur, and his best friend Liangzi, who works as a coal miner. She chooses to marry Zhang, whom she sees as a man with a future. The film then leaps forward to the lives of the same characters in the present day (2014), and finally in an imagined near future (2025), chronicling how their youthful aspirations have weathered the storms of China's capitalist experiment and their journeys through the twists and turns of modern life.

Reviews



The cinema's consummate chronicler of a China evolving so rapidly that its own citizens can scarcely keep apace, Jia Zhangke strikes a particularly melancholic chord in ***Mountains May Depart***.

Following a single family as it is tossed about by time, tide and the onward march of progress over the span of a quarter-century, Jia's latest feature addresses a host of pet themes through a less quirky, stylized lens than 2013's gruesomely violent *A Touch Of Sin* or 2006's *Still Life* (with its condemned buildings blasting off like rocket ships).

If *Mountains* feels a touch schematic at times, and awkward in its third-act English-language scenes, the cumulative impact is still enormously touching, highlighted by Jia's rapturous image-making and a luminous central performance by the director's regular muse (and wife), Zhao Tao.

Scott Foundas, Variety

Writer-director Jia Zhangke emerged from China's underground cinema to become one of the most prominent filmmakers from the People's Republic of China's "sixth generation". Since winning the Golden Lion at Venice in 2006 with *Still Life*, he has gained considerable international standing: to date, five of his films have been selected for competition at Cannes and John Powers, the senior critic at *Vogue*, has called him "the most important filmmaker working in the world today."

It is impossible not to marvel at the scale and scope of Jia Zhangke's eighth feature film, a huge multigenerational drama that might easily be called "China". A triptych with chapters set in 1999, 2014 and in 2025, ***Mountains May Depart*** simultaneously presents as an Oedipal drama, a national allegory, and futuristic science fiction, roughly in that order.

This is an extraordinarily beautiful film with lush, occasionally radical cinematography from Yu Lik-wai; profound things to say about the immigrant experience; and a commanding performance from Zhao Tao, a turn that ought to have won every single award going, including the Nobel Prize for chemistry, if that were at all possible.

Tara Brady, Irish Times

Film Facts

- Jia has said in an interview that he was attempting to evoke "a collective history for that generation."
- The film's "marching tune" is the Pet Shop Boys' cover of *Go West*, a song Jia calls the "password" to his youth. Jia decided to incorporate actual footage from his archive into the film, featuring a man emphatically dancing at a disco that Jia used to frequent.
- As the film moves from 1999 to 2014 and finally to 2025, the aspect ratio it uses gets wider each time.

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