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THE CHINESE MAYOR

A FEATURE FILM BY ZHOU HAO



SYNOPSIS

Change is afoot in Datong. Controversial Communist Party Mayor Geng Yanbo is pulling down one of the world's dirtiest cities to recreate its glorious past. The plan is radical and China's ruling elites are watching him closely.

Datong, located on the Loess Plateau, was an ancient capital of China 1,600 years ago. During China's open and reform period, it became a coal mining boomtown. But decades of rampant mining has choked the city in soot, depleted resources and stagnated the economy, earning Datong a reputation as one of the world's most ugly cities. Mayor Geng believes that the future for Datong's population of 3.5 million people lies in culture. His radical reform plan is to recreate Datong's four great ancient walls side by side to restore the ancient city.

To succeed, Geng must raise funds quadruple that of the city's fiscal income and execute mass-scale demolition. The road is paved with risk. Some call him the devil mayor, but Geng is too bent on his utopian vision to care. He has 40,000 of the 140,000 households to relocate before the closure of the great walls and rostrums by September 2013.

Geng works from 5:30 a.m. till midnight. With his office onsite he investigates construction progress everyday and fends off violent protests against forced eviction. He must "invent" money through land sales and calm swarms of grumbling residents and the increasingly perturbed ruling elite.

If Geng's vision can be questioned, the absolute power behind him cannot. Geng is remaking Datong with the speed that only China's party cadres can through an autocratic and secretive web of power. But in a system where officials often do best by doing nothing, why is Geng carrying out such a controversial plan in the spotlight? If he fails, the Party would sack him and Datong's people and the land would be no more than a wasted sacrifice.

In his quiet, private moments, Geng reflects on his own heart and the road ahead. "Some say I've forgotten to be a politician and focused too much on practical deeds. But I'd rather endure criticism today than become a mediocre official." A dedicated student of classical Chinese poetry and Buddhism, Geng believes that our deeds should serve our times and the people's ultimate good would justify his sacrifice.

He admits the government may have damaged individual interests but only so that future generations can enjoy a sustainable Datong. In turn, their secured future in an ancient walled city will be his reward back.

Fireworks fill the dusty night sky in Datong as the new Lunar New Year begins in February 2012. Old and young set off firecrackers in the narrow alleyways of their half-demolished villages. Amidst the festivities, comes the abrupt announcement that Geng Yanbo has been shifted to be the mayor of Taiyuan, the capital of Shanxi Province .

Over the following few months, he would shift out of China's media spotlight, at least for a while. But while Geng may have laid the foundations for Datong's transformation, he has left enormous pressure on municipal finances for his successor and it remains to be seen whether his strategy was viable in the first place. The tragedy of one-man rule may well be that when such charismatic Chinese officials leave their posts, their reform efforts collapse as well. But as Geng himself once said, "History will be my judge." In a rare and intimate encounter, **The Chinese Mayor** looks through the eyes of those ruling in China's greatest era of change, to reflect a giant country with such dilemma and complications that are beyond simple black-and-white image on the news streams.



DIRECTOR STATEMENT

BY ZHOU HAO

I have always been curious to discover the development model of China, and the relation between the Chinese government and her civilians. 3 years ago, when Geng Yanbo, the Mayor of Datong, agrees to let me into his work and life, I know my chance is coming.

What he did for the city is still disputable.

I don't want to put a pre-determined sticker on this Mr Geng or the Chinese government. I hope the film would give a chance for the audience to think what an administration we really need, and what's the balance between development and protection, as we are able observe in the film, that a development model to sacrifice **now** and the **individuals** for **future** and the **collectives**.

In Datong, when seeing the historical relics being protected, I really admire Mr. Geng as a communist official with long visions. However, when seeing individual property being demolished, I have rage to ask, "Isn't the price too high? Is the mission of the State Machine to protect the people? "

No one will doubt this giant country will soon become the largest economy in the globe. You may not like her way of governance, but it does have reasons to exist on earth.

The Chinese title for the film is called "Datong", it is the name of the city, it also refers to an ultimate harmonious world envisioned by the ancient Chinese philosophers over 2000 years ago. Will such a nation be appearing on earth? Or it is only in the dream of the oriental civilization?



ABOUT THE MAYOR

Geng Yanbo, born into a peasant family, became known as “Demolition Geng” (Geng Chaichai, or Geng Smash-Smash) after he took office as the Chinese Communist mayor of Datong city in 2008.

His management philosophy of bolstering the economy by avail the city of local cultural treasures has led him through out his political life. Before taking over the mayorship in Datong, from 1993 to 2000, Geng renovated the old town of Lingshi, a county in the middle of Shanxi Province, and relocated residents in the area. The project generated some hatred from the residents. The day he left the office as the county leader, some residents laid three funeral wreaths to him, to celebrate the leaving of a bane.

Geng is known for his strong leadership, high efficiency and charisma. After taking office in Datong city, his aggressive approaches to demolish the old town brought sweeping changes to the city, while caused a love-and-hate relationship between him and local residents. Over his five-year-term as Datong mayor, he carried out a series of urban redevelopments, including road construction, tree planting and restoring the ancient Datong, as part of the strategy to promote tourism and end the city’s heavy reliance on coal. While the redevelopments were giving the city a facelift, criticism of Geng for forcibly relocating residents and high costs of his projects have put him in the firing line.

Geng is a mayor with iron fist, also a man of people. Before he could accomplish his great project to revitalize Datong, he was forced to leave the office. When news of Geng’s demotion was announced in February of 2013, thousands of Datong residents marched in the streets to protest his departure, holding up signs that read, “Datong needs you.” His departure, meanwhile, has left the city in debt of over 3 billion dollars and 125 construction projects being halted.



ABOUT DATONG

Datong, the northernmost city of Shanxi Province, is located in a basin surrounded by mountains on the fringes of ancient china. It was a strategic town guarding the (mountain) passage to Inner Mongolia and bordering Hebei to the east. During it's hey-day 1,600 years ago, Datong served as the capital of Northern Wei Dynasty, but it continued to thrive all through the Liao and Jin dynasties, and later regained prominence as a major strategic center in the Ming dynasty (1368 - 1644).

Though falling into decline thereafter, Datong gained the label “China’s capital of coal” with a booming coal mining industry after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China. The history and development of the city is very much linked to the commodity. Even though Datong still sits on significant reserves of coal after 60 years, consequently it has developed a reputation as one of China's most polluted cities. With a population of 3.4 million, Datong ranks as the second largest city in Shanxi Province. However, the city’s GDP only ranked the sixth in the province in 2007 and then dropped to the 9th in 2012. The city has been seeking to loosen its dependence on coal.

Six years ago, Datong’s then appointed mayor, Geng Yanbo, set out to restore its glorious history – an ambitious plan to level off the old city and replace it with a new “ancient” city, surrounding it with newly city walls. The plan is to resettle tens of thousands of residents, and transform the city into a tourist site – a replica of the historic Datong but with no actual people living in it.

As of February of 2013, the city is overwhelmingly under construction, and shows no sign of completion any soon, when the mayor left to take up mayorship in Taiyuan, the capital of Shanxi province, leaving behind a city covered under rubble and debris.

THE BIOS

DIRECTOR

The Chinese Mayor / Director

2015 Sundance Film Festival-World Documentary Competition

Cotton / Director

2014 Taiwan Golden Horse Award - Best Documentary

Emergency Room China / Director

2013 Chinese Documentary Festival, Hong Kong - Best Feature

The Transition Period / Director

2009 Chinese Documentary Festival , Hong Kong - Best Feature

Using / Director

2008 Hong Kong International Film Festival - Best Documentary

2008 Taiwan International Documentary Festival - Asian Vision Award First Prize

Senior Year / Director

2006 Hong Kong International Film Festival - Humanitarian Award for Best Documentary



ZHOU HAO,

born in 1968, started his career as a photographer for China's national news group Xinhua News Agency and Southern Weekly, the country's most influential weekly newspaper. His debut documentary "Hou Jie Township" (2001) won the Black Pottery Award (Best New Professional Reward) at the Yunnan Multi-Culture Visual Festival. He went on to direct "Senior Year" which won the Humanitarian Award for Best Documentary at the Hong Kong International Festival in 2006, followed by "Using", which clinched the Asia Award the Taiwan International Documentary Festival 2008. Zhou Hao was invited as jury of the Chicago International Festival 2007 and the following year, jury of the Taiwan International Documentary Festival and Guangzhou International Documentary Film Festival in 2009.

THE BIOS

PRODUCER



The Chinese Mayor / Producer

2015 Sundance Film Festival-World Documentary Competition

Fallen City / Director, Producer

2013 Sundance Film Festival-World Documentary Competition

Play with Shadow / Producer

2013 Mid-Length Documentary Competition, IDFA

China Heavy Weight / Producer

2013 Taiwan Golden Horse Award

2012 Sundance Film Festival-World Documentary Competition

Last Train Home / Producer

2012 Emmy Award

2009 Best Documentary Feature IDFA,

2010 Sundance Film Festival-World Documentary Competition

ZHAO QI

is a documentary filmmaker in Beijing. He worked as producer for the feature documentary "Last Train Home", which won 2 Emmy awards, and "China Heavy Weight", which won the Gold Horse Prize in Taiwan. His directorial debut "Fallen City" follow the aftermath struggle of 3 surviving families of the Sichuan Earthquake for 4 years and was nominated by 2013 Sundance Festivals World Documentary Competition. His most recent film is The Chinese Mayor, in which he serves as producer and scriptwriter, chosen by 2015 Sundance Festival.



Directed by **Zhou Hao**
Produced by **Zhao Qi**
Written by **Zhou Hao Zhao Qi**
Executive Producers **Zhao Qi Michelle Ho**
Honorary Executive Producer **Peter Wintonick**
Featuring **Geng Yanbo Zheng Hui Ma Suying**
Song Yuhua Li Fu Zhang Xinpin
Feng Lixiang
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Edited by **Yu Xiaochuan Tom Lin**
Sound Recordist **Zhou Hao**
Raw Footage Editors **Wen Zhikang Li Bin**
Sound Designer and Mixer **Xiao Jing**
Sound Editors **Zheng Yu Zheng Yue**
Digital Colorists **Hong Wenkai Su Peiting**
Still Photographers **Liu Yujun Liu Hai**
Graphics and Poster **Helen Zhai Shi Rongfeng**
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