

孔子梦

Confucian Dream

Directed by Mijie Li
2019 | Color | 82 minutes



With Chinese society rapidly changing around her, one young mother turns to ancient teachings to repair her estranged family.

WINNER: Special Jury Prize - Documentary Competition
Karlovy Vary International Film Festival, 2019

Contacts

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Synopsis

Chaoyan is a young wife and mother with a steady job living in a giant city. Her life is comfortable, but she increasingly finds emptiness at home with her young son Chen, her husband Mei, and his mother. Chaoyan met Mei when he was a young man with big dreams. But now, with a utilitarian focus on money, he isn't that way anymore.

But Chaoyan discovers ancient teachings that her generation has forgotten: Confucianism. Daily, she reads and recites mantras on themes of morality and harmony, and in them, she sees hope for her estranged family. She insists that Chen join her studies, so he can absorb these values from an early age.

Mei finds their studies excessive, but reluctantly allows Chen to attend a classics summer camp. Chaoyan pushes him to allow their son to attend a year-round school traditional school, but he firmly refuses. Split across different values, the family's conflicts intensify, and their ties weaken. In this zealous pursuit of harmony, Chaoyan and her family instead find themselves approaching a breaking point from which they might never recover.

Festival Screenings & Awards

2019

Hot Docs Canadian International Film Festival

Karlovy Vary International Film Festival

WINNER: Special Jury Award - Documentary Competition

Antenna Documentary Film Festival

About the Filmmakers

Mijie Li | Director/Producer

Originally from Hunan, China, Mijie studied film in both Shanghai and New York. She has produced television series with BBC-2 and Discovery Channels as well as working on feature-length documentaries with award-winning filmmakers such as Jessica Yu, Mila Aung-Thwin, and Julia Reichert. She co-produced Steven Bognar and Julia Reichert's *American Factory* (Sundance 2019). As a director and editor, Mijie primarily makes observational documentaries. Her first feature film, *Confucian Dream*, won the Best Asian Pitch at 2015 Docs Port Incheon, and was then selected for the 2016 IDFAcademy Summer School and 2018 IFP Film Week. In 2017, her short film "Walking Into Tradition" aired on NHK World Channel "Inside Lens." In 2018, she was selected to present a Chinese story for the opening night of the 2018 BRICS Film Festival. Her web series, "Miles To Go Before She Sleeps" was selected by the 2019 Tribeca N.O.W. Creators Market.

Jeff Reichert | Producer

Jeff is an award-winning filmmaker, critic and distributor who lives in Brooklyn, NY. His award-winning films include *Gerrymandering* (Tribeca 2010), *Remote Area Medical* (Full Frame 2013), *This Time Next Year* (Tribeca 2014) and the short "Kombit" (Sundance 2014). He recently produced on Steven Bognar and Julia Reichert's *American Factory* (Sundance 2019). He is the co-founder and co-editor-in-chief of the NEA-sponsored online film journal Reverse Shot, which is the in-house publication of Museum of the Moving Image, and has written for numerous publications including Film Comment, Filmmaker Magazine, and Indiewire.

Betsy Tsai | Producer

Betsy Tsai is a director and producer based in Los Angeles. She most recently produced *Confucian Dream* (Hot Docs 2019) and was an associate producer for *Our Time Machine* (Tribeca 2019). From 2015-2018, she was a staff member of the Documentary Film Program at Sundance Institute, where she provided critical operational and curatorial support for the Sundance Documentary Fund. She is a directing alumna from the UCLA School of Theater, Film, & Television, where she also studied English Literature and International Conflict Resolution. Prior to Sundance Institute, she worked for a conflict analysis nonprofit, The Olive Tree Initiative.

Violet Feng | Producer

Violet Feng is an Emmy Award winning documentary film producer. Feng produced *Maine-Land* (2017), which received the Special Jury Award of SXSW and a theatrical release in the U.S.; *Please Remember Me* (2015), which premiered at 2015 IDFA Film Festival and received three awards at China's biggest documentary film festival GZDoc in 2016. She executive produced *24th Street* (2017), nominated for Best Documentary at IDFA. She is the co-producer of *Nanking* (2007), winner of Peabody Award and a Sundance Grand Jury Award.

Director's Statement

Living in China, I spent 16 years going through an education system of which our primary focus was to get a good job and have a comfortable life. Most children growing up in China live under the expectant eyes of their teachers, and parents. I began to feel distant from my parents, weary of their focus on my achievements. I wanted to believe that there was something more to me than what they seemed to see.

I became interested in families who have sought out spiritual practices to supplement their modern lifestyles. This includes alternative education, focused on Chinese classics and Confucianism. Confucianism is primarily about harmony, which is shaped by critical self-reflection and nurturing relationships, with oneself and with others. I reached out to 14 private schools and over 500 families, and interviewed 124 families. These parents are eager to find schools that will shape their children into moral people, before shaping them into successful people. It feels relevant now, given the rapid development of China. While we remain proud of our country's economic growth and material prosperity, it seems like we expect our individual lives to reflect that narrative too. The resulting mentality prioritizes achievements, even at the expense of one's ethics and relationships.

In spite of having achieved a Master's degree, Chaoyan feels that her technical knowledge has only left her feeling empty. So she, among thousands of others have joined a growing Confucian revival movement. She hopes that by studying Confucianism, she can help reunite her family and strengthen their bonds.

However many parents, including Chaoyan, don't fully understand the literature and its learning methods. Confucianism, along with other ancient philosophies, has not been widely observed in Chinese society for over a hundred years. It was criticized as feudalistic, conservative, and counter-revolutionary. The revivalist movement faces an uphill battle in trying to integrate Confucian practices and traditions into communities let alone their households.

I saw eye-to-eye with these parents when it came to their overarching objectives and these core values. Yet, I was not completely convinced that these groups had found the right answer. While the story may at first glance seem like a black-and-white clash between past and present, I found that a number of these traditionalist parents embodied this clash within themselves, and became their own roadblocks in their journeys. Chaoyan is stubbornly determined to preach Confucianism to her family and friends, but her resulting behavior and actions stand in ironic opposition to those same values, and push her family to the point of breaking. How can we truly connect to wisdom of the past when we try to apply it to the present? How do we find happiness, harmony, and find fulfillment? Is balance something to be arrived at, or continually negotiated throughout one's life? These are questions that all of us continually ask ourselves. In *Confucian Dream* I wanted to show one young mother struggling with them all.

Credits

Directed by	Mijie Li
Produced by	Mijie Li, Betsy Tsai, Jeff Reichert, Violet Feng
Co-produced by	Edmond Yang
Associate Producers	Evita YuePu Zhou, Nathan Duddles
Executive Producers	Mila Aung-Thwin
Written and Edited by	Mijie Li, Evita YuePu Zhou
Cinematography by	Mijie Li
Additional Camera	Feng Zhou, Nathan Duddles, An Guo, Kaidi Wu
Sound Recording by	Nathan Duddles
Additional Sound Recording	GuangZheng Qian, Yanhuan Shi, Songzhuang Chen
Consulting Editors	Ching-Song Liao, Douglas Blush, Ollie Huddleston
Original Music by	Nima Fakhrara
Re-recording Mixer & Sound Design	Ron Bochar
Colorist	Chase Whiteside
With support from	Docs Port Incheon DocEdge Kolkata IDFAcademy IFP Week 2018 “IDF Workshop” of the 2nd West Lake International Documentary Festival