



KITE 风筝

A FILM BY YUMENG HE



KITE

Running Time: **30 minutes 46 seconds**

Directed and Edited By: **Yumeng He**

Produced at the Center of Visual Anthropology,
University of Southern California

Composer: **Nicoletta Nomicou**

Sound Editor: **Bin Lin**

Colorist: **Keyhan Bayegan**



LOGLINE

While haunted by the collective cultural trauma and their personal pain, four determined Chinese women, young and old, set out to reconcile with their emotional health and to break free from the weight of the past.

SYNOPSIS

Kite is the moving portrait of four Chinese women across generations. The three young Chinese women—Patrice, Viola and Yuni—allude to the intersection of mental health and one's experience as a member of the diaspora of Chinese youth. The filmmaker's grandmother, Suqin, speaks about the Great Chinese Famine sixty years ago and foreshadows the continuation of a collective memory of trauma in a younger generation. The film explores the relationship between time and memory, the shifting definition of health, feminine embodiment, and the question of labels. Kite is an illustration of the weight of time and responsibility, a testament to the never-ending nostalgia and regret, yet it is also a hopeful portrayal of the possibilities of changing and becoming. While witnessing how four Chinese women in different generations have responded to pain, the film also spotlights their resilience when facing overwhelming social and bodily constraints.





Patrice was diagnosed with bipolar 2 with the most recent depressive episode. Growing up, she experienced tense family relationship, especially with her mother, who has attempted to kill Patrice multiple times. Instead of reporting this to others, Patrice held it within herself. In the film. She describes herself as “always trying to be the perfect daughter” for her mom, because she is afraid of losing attention and affection from others. Patrice stories delineate a picture of children’s obligation, which is prevalent in many Chinese families. Her narrations shed light on how China’s one-child policy had affected her identity, as well as her perception of her mental conditions.

Yuni was diagnosed with clinical depression and anxiety from a Chinese traditional hospital. After her grandmother's passing in 2014, she decided to study abroad in the US. In college, she experienced eating disorder, bodily pains associated with her mental conditions, and have struggled to manage relationships with her distant parents. When we meet Yuni, she is still battling with these difficulties, while facing uncertainty about the future. The memories with her grandmother and the unsolvable myths around her grandmother’s death keeps returning as a ghost in the present, haunting her to rethink the relationship between life and death. She describes herself as “an untethered kite”, losing her string that was originally attached to her grandmother before her death, freely floating in the world while being exposed to the dark contingency and bewilderment of the future.



Viola diagnosed herself with anxiety. She speaks about Chinese older generation’s perceptions of mental illness, where she characterizes that Chinese parents have a strong belief in “agency”. Viola understands her emotional illness more as a result of the combination of environmental and social factors. Viola suffered from self-hatred to her body since a young age. After being treated from cancer, the skinny body type became a norm for her, forcing her to constantly criticize her body. Viola’s story illustrates the relentless loneliness that many Chinese international students faced when studying abroad, and the never-ending internal conflicts, also shared by other young women in this film. Viola discovered swing dancing in 2016 and after that, dancing has become her way of coping with anxiety and of coming to terms with her body.

Filmmaker’s grandmother represents the point of view from an older generation of Chinese women. Now in her 80s, grandmother had endured extensive physical suffering and bodily control during the Great Famine (1959-1961) and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). In the film, she recalls the harsh living conditions during the famine and depicted the political control over women’s bodies in the 1970s. She explains the reason why young people nowadays often experience emotional illness as the lack of self-control. For grandmother, the younger generation “think too much” and “talk too much”.





DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Kite will always be special to me because it witnesses my personal journey of searching for an identity while feeling like an in-betweeners betwixt two cultures, two places and two times.

I started this ethnographic film project after a casual chat with one of the film's participants, Yuni, in late January 2019, with a sudden realization that I could relate to many experiences of a mental health patient to my own unexplainable sadness and emotional disturbance. The film's style and its focused contemplation on time and memory were inspired by the works of Andrei Tarkovsky and Chris Marker. Kite is about the embodied sickness. The individual body should be regarded as the most immediate space where social truths and cultural contradictions are being performed, as well as a site of personal and collective resistance and creativity. Kite is not an exploitative representation of the sufferings, but a narrative that highlights individual agency when facing overwhelming social constraints. I envisage my audience to understand how personal history and China's cultural past are intertwined and are affecting young Chinese women's emotional health after watching this film. I want my audience to see the emotional weight and bodily pains that these young women are carrying, but also to recognize that they are carrying these hardships with grace and imagination.

DIRECTOR, YUMENG HE

Yumeng (Shirley) He is a visual ethnographer and a documentary director, producer, cinematographer, and editor based in Los Angeles, California. Yumeng grew up in Beijing, China, studied Visual Anthropology at the University of Southern California. Her background as an anthropologist gives her a unique understanding of how one's story and its cultural and social ambiance are closely intertwined. Her mission is to share deeply personal and resonating stories that recognize the uniqueness of our cultural experiences but also hope to bridge such differences. Her works explore the ample forms of storytelling — poetry, oral history, animation and self-reflexive essay film, blurring the line between fiction and documentary. Yumeng intends to create a "cinema of affection" that does not exploit but speaks nearby, embraces and receives the film participants' perspectives.





PRAISE

"Yumeng He's Kite is like having access to someone's visual diary; it is personal and it is raw. In the smart choices made with its use of footages and photographs, what it does is subtly enhance the viewer's experience by very gently highlighting the scene's message."

Indie Shorts Mag:

https://www.indieshortsmag.com/reviews/2021/01/kite-a-story-that-spans-across-generations/?utm_campaign=Filmmaker%20Notification&utm_medium=email

"(Kite) makes exceptional use of numerous sources, even altering the format of the frame, in a courageous and interesting cross-media tale."

The Rome Prisma Independent Film Awards:

<https://www.romeprismafilmawards.com/2020/10/29/an-interview-with-yumeng-he-director-of-kite/>

AWARDS

Silver Award for Best Documentary Short - Spotlight Documentary Film Awards 2021

Best Documentary Short - Festigious Los Angeles 2020

Best Documentary Short - Los Angeles Film Awards 2020

Best Documentary Short - Kosice International Monthly Film Festival 2020

Official Selection - Rome Independent Prisma Awards 2020

Official Selection - NewFilmmakersLA "Asian Cinema" 2021

Official Selection - Asian Film Festival 2020



CREDITS

Directed by: Yumeng He

Written by: Yumeng He

Produced by: Yumeng He and the Center of Visual
Anthropology at the University of Southern California

Director of Photography: Yumeng He

Editor: Yumeng He

Music by: Nicoletta Nomicou

Sound Mixer: Bin Lin

Colorist: Keyhan Bayegan

