

Signal Fire

A poetic short film about Chinese-Canadians in the city of Markham, Canada

Directed by Alice Il Shin

Produced by Alice Il Shin, Eiko Kawabe Brown



Artist Statement of *Signal Fire* written by Alice Shin

I was inspired to make *Signal Fire* from both a societal and artistic standpoint. I believe it is important to share stories that can also create opportunities for conversations to happen. I am fascinated by moments when characters share an experience, feel commonality, and in turn spark a mutual growth in the relationship with each other. These moments do not often happen through conversation rather it occurs when least expected like sharing a meal, standing side-by-side, or watching the same night sky. Throughout my career, I strive to create films focusing on Asian storytelling where the story often centers unspoken encounters and actions of characters and images instead of dialogue. *Signal Fire* is an extension of this artistic process, exploring the way non-verbal communications and action can largely impact change between people.

Introduction to the Poems

By Ryan Harte, doctoral candidate at the University of California

Following the Army Road by Wang Changling (698–765)

從軍行其一王昌齡

Signal fires flicker in watchtowers west of the city walls,
and autumn wind lifts lonely off the yellow-dusk sea.
Song of moon and valley echoes from a nomad's flute—
—far off, your grief-gloomed golden hall.

烽火城西百尺樓
黃昏獨上海風秋
更吹羌笛關山月
無那金閨萬里愁

Context: Wang Changling is a Tang poet known for his quatrains (also called ‘cut verse poems’ 絕句). His imagery frequently draws on the empire’s frontier, the inner Asian deserts and steppes. This poem is the first in a series called ‘Following the Army Road’ or ‘Trailing along with the Army’. The last line has several possible interpretations: the first two characters (wuna 無那) are probably some sort of textual corruption that most commentators read as a homophone for wunai 無奈 (‘helpless, in any case, grudgingly’). The line as a whole might shift attention from the frontier to the speaker’s beloved far away—a typical thematic shift for the genre.

Recalling a Dream: Day 20, Month 1, 1075 by Su Dongpo (1037–1101)
(set to the tune of *River City*)

乙卯正月二十日夜記夢江城子蘇東坡

Ten years of endless life, ten years of endless death.
Unsought
the heavy thought arrives:
 your solitary grave, a thousand miles away—
 no place to share this cold despair.
Your glance restored would not discern
 my dust-scraped face,
 my frosted hair—
Night hearkens dark with dreams: you're home,
 a little terrace shows
 your combing, your adorning—
 our eyes meet, silent
 but tears streak our faces.
How many years, how many aches—away,
 the moon shines bright
 on your runt graveside pines.

十年生死兩茫茫
不思量
自難忘
千里孤墳
無處話淒涼
縱使相逢應不識
塵滿面
鬢如霜
夜來幽夢忽還鄉
小軒窗
正梳妝
相顧無言
惟有淚千行
料得年年腸斷處
明月夜
短松岡

Context: Su Shi was the literati of the Song Dynasty. He and his wife married young (19 and 16). She was beautiful and kind and died just about ten years later. Su Shi wrote grieving poems about her for a decade after. This is a genre called *cí* 辭 poetry—an original poem will be written to the melody and rhyme scheme of a pre-existing song. Su Shi's poem is titled 'Recalling a Dream from the Night of the Twentieth of the First Lunar Month of Yi-Mao Year [1075]'.

Production Still Images







