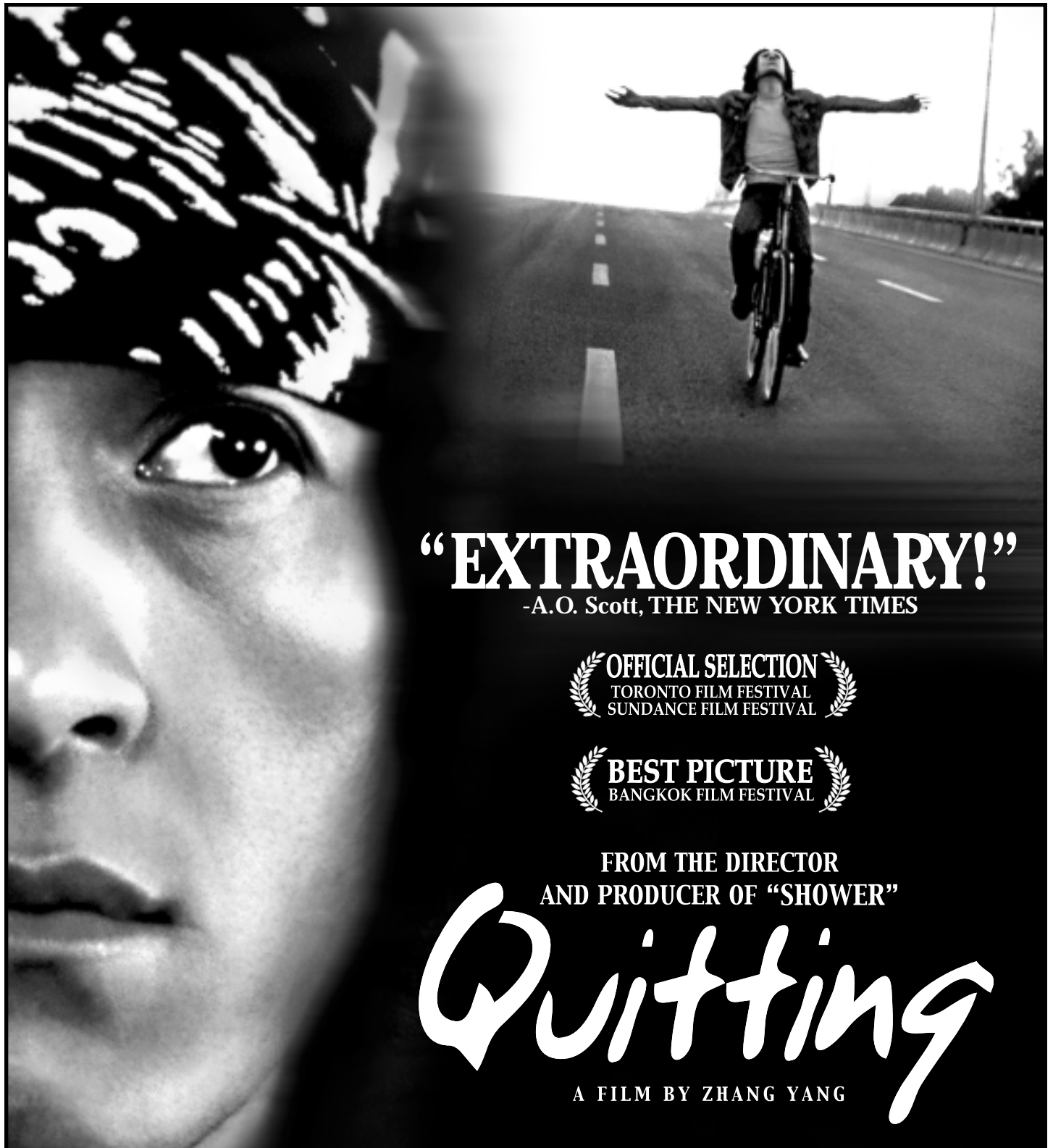


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**“EXTRAORDINARY!”**

-A.O. Scott, **THE NEW YORK TIMES**

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FROM THE DIRECTOR  
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# Quitting

A FILM BY ZHANG YANG

Explores one man's journey, from the cutting edge of China's artistic movement in the early 90's, through a period of conflict with himself and his parents, to a mental institution and finally to the quest to rediscover himself and his family. From the director of *Shower*, this beautifully made, mesmerizing and eye-opening tour of modern Beijing culture is a journey of rebellion, retreat into oblivion and return.

CHINA • 2002 • 112 mins • Color • In Mandarin with English subtitles

# A Father and Son Reaching Across the Generations

A.O. SCOTT

"Quitting," a new film by Zhang Yang, tells the story of Jia Hongsheng, a rising Chinese movie star of the early 1990s whose career was derailed by drug problems and mental illness. In outline, Mr. Jia's story might have, for American audiences, a wearying familiarity: addiction and recovery, especially when it involves celebrities, is so ubiquitous a theme as to seem like a touchstone of our culture. And at least superficially, "Quitting" suggests that Beijing, where the movie takes place, is not so different from New York or Los Angeles. It is a big, impersonal city that draws ambitious young people from the provinces and subjects them to temptation, loneliness and danger.

But if Mr. Zhang's subject matter is, to some degree at least, quintessentially American, his approach to storytelling might be called Iranian. In "Quitting," which opens today in Manhattan, the role of Jia Hongsheng is played by the actor himself, and nearly all of the other characters in the film, from his parents (who are, like their son, professional actors) to his fellow inmates at a psychiatric hospital, likewise play themselves. This technique has been used, to extraordinary effect, by Iranian filmmakers like Abbas Kiarostami (most famously in "Close Up") and Samira Makhmalbaf (in "The Apple"). It sounds exploitive — a step away from the hyperventilating prurience of reality television — but it is really the opposite. Somehow, inviting people to recreate moments of vulnerability and confusion affirms their dignity rather than stripping it away.

Like its Iranian counterparts (and like "Sons," a grim, terrifying peek at family dysfunction shown last year in the Film Society of Lincoln Center's series on recent Chinese cinema), "Quitting" is not a documentary. Instead it is a fragmented re-enactment, long after the fact, of Mr. Jia's life from roughly 1992 to 1995, presented sometimes with raw cinematic naturalism and at other times with the distancing apparatus of theater, as the characters speak under spotlights or move across a stage set in an empty playhouse. The story starts in 1995, when Hongsheng's mother and father go to Beijing from their rural village to join their daughter in caring for her increasingly erratic and antisocial brother.

As the narrative moves back and forth, we track Hongsheng's withdrawal from the world, and what emerges is not only a portrait of individual depression but also a



study in generational division and social malaise. The father-son relationship is sketched with a special poignancy. A cultural gulf separates the young man from his father, who, for example, has never heard of the Beatles, whose music is the soundtrack to his son's inner life (though not to the movie, perhaps because permission to reproduce the songs was too expensive). His efforts to bridge the divide are touching, and their inadequacy is heartbreaking. He buys a cassette of "Let It Be" and drinks beer with Hongsheng on a patch of grass near a highway overpass. After a while we begin to perceive the deep, almost subliminal similarities between the solid man from the country, who has trouble controlling his drinking, and his willowy, citified son, whose taste runs to heroin.

Generational confusion in a country that has changed drastically in a very short time was also the subject of Mr. Zhang's first feature, the warm, popular "Shower." With "Quitting," he has removed sentimentality from the theme and presented it with unflinching honesty, a quality he shares with his fearless cast.

## QUITTING

Directed by Zhang Yang; written (in Mandarin, with English subtitles) by Mr. Yang and Huo Xin; produced by Peter Loehr; directors of photography, Wang Yu and Cheng Shouqi; edited by Yang Hong Yu; music by Zhang Yadong; art director, An Bin. Running time: 112 minutes. This film is rated R.

WITH: Jia Hongsheng; Jia Fengsen, Hongsheng's father; Chai Xiurong, Hongsheng's mother; Wang Tong, Hongsheng's sister; and Zhang Yang, film director (all playing themselves).

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