JANUS FILMS

FESTIVAL DE CANNES
SPECIAL PRIZE
2025

NYFF63
2025 OFFICIAL SELECTION

RESURRECTION

Directed by Bi Gan

NEW YORK PRESS
Charlie Olsky, Cinetic Media
charlie@cineticmedia.com

LA PRESS:
Josh Haroutunian, Divergent PR
josh@divergentpr.com
Christine Richardson, Divergent PR
christine@divergenpr.com

Film Info: China | 2025 | 156 minutes | Color | Chinese with English subtitles | Various aspect ratios

SYNOPSIS

In a future where humanity has surrendered its ability to dream in exchange for immortality, an outcast (Jackson Yee) finds illusion, nightmarish visions, and beauty in an intoxicating world of his own making. A work of staggering imagination from visionary Chinese director Bi Gan (Long Day's Journey Into Night), *Resurrection* conjures vast and ever-shifting worlds on the brink of collapse in an era-spanning journey through our deepest and most human desires.

INTERVIEW WITH BI GAN

Your last feature film was seven years ago. What was the original inspiration behind RESURRECTION?

Bi Gan: After LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT, something very special happened — the whole world went through the pandemic. Before 2020, I was already working on the script for my next feature film, which was inspired by a real-life news event and explored the psychological state of a murderer. I wanted to change my filmmaking approach, aiming for a narrative rich in detail, and dense with specific, tangible elements. I was inspired by the theme of "human destiny, " which led me to begin writing about the fate of a murderer. I worked on this for a long time, up until early 2020. Then, one day, I realized I needed to rethink my approach to creative work. I decisively set aside what I had written and decided not to pursue it further. I wanted to start a new story, and instinctively felt it should be connected to the entire century.

Being related to the entire century means writing a story that can go through over the past hundred years, condensing the expression about the previous century within the duration of a single film?

Yes. I think, first of all, the language I'm most comfortable with is definitely cinema. Cinema has its own history, and I have a clear understanding of film history. But within that context, I feel that every piece of land, every people has its own fate. Over the past century, a question naturally arises: What philosophical questions does a person with this blood and these genes, living in this place today, face? For example, in the literature of many countries, I think there is always this person, this character, or this symbol—someone who is suffering, longing for something better, yet also, in their own way, engaging in self-destruction. They suddenly find themselves caught in a destiny they cannot control, but that destiny is universal. It's not just specific to one country or one ethnicity. This made me think about creating a "Movie Monster, " because film, as a medium, is the most suited for expressing such a concept. At the same time, when I was creating this film, I wanted to overload the information. I wanted the audience to experience, like the monster itself, a century within a two-and-a-half-hour film. I wanted to revive the beauty that once belonged to cinema.

History, or perhaps the historicity was not something you were interested in before?

In my previous works, there wasn't a sense of history, or rather, the historical coordinates were always removed from my films—because I never considered that aspect. But when I began to reflect on who I

am, I found that I have history, and my history has stories. And this made me want to explore what exactly happened.

So from the very beginning, was the entire project conceived as a dialogue with the history of cinema?

I would say that from the beginning, the idea was there. But after a while, I kept trying to avoid anything related to film, because I wondered whether the subject could be something other than a "Movie Monster." Yet in the end, even right up until we were about to start shooting, I realized that this idea of a movie INTERVIEW WITH BI GANINTERVIEW WITH BI GAN monster was something I couldn't escape. None of the other directions felt right, and I couldn't come up with anything better. Perhaps, in my heart, it had already become a haunting monster. So gradually, I developed this story—about a movie monster drifting through a century of illusion and dreams. As the hundred years pass, its sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch are stripped away one by one, until finally, its consciousness fades completely.

The different stories of this film kept evolving—it was already different before shooting, dur-ing production, and then it changed significantly again in the editing stage. Looking back at the various versions of the story, it seems that what truly interests you is the "storytelling" itself, rather than what we usually assume: the "audiovisual language"?

I think this is indeed a common misunderstanding, even among those who are somewhat familiar with my works. They often assume that I care more about form, more about visual creation. In fact, what interests me most is how to tell a story— it's just that the way I tell it each time might be a little unusual. A core element of filmmaking is undoubtedly its narrative instinct. However, this narrative instinct is not merely about telling a story to the audience; it's about using the story to reflect a certain fate.

In terms of your working method, perhaps "discovering the story" is a more accurate way to describe it—whether during the writing phase, or later in filming, editing, and post-production. In the writing stage, you tend to endlessly expand on each plot point, so that many details in the final film, which might not immediately stand out, could actually have originated from stories that were rich enough to stand on their own.

Take the pen in the second part, Qiu, for example. At first, even its backstory was carefully developed in the narrative—it was a pen that had once been used to sign a secret document, and so on. We even held several script meetings just to discuss this one detail. So while such subtle elements from the underlying story may not seem important to the audience, they are deeply important to me. That's because I can't decide in advance—before the editing stage—which part or layer of the story I would ultimately want to focus on later. There's simply too much information contained within it all. For me, storytelling is something dynamic—it shouldn't be a fixed outcome, but rather a process. So if there's a

predetermined result, I would almost certainly avoid following it. By the time I reach the editing stage, the film will inevitably take on a different shape. That's why my working method involves making extensive adjustments in the editing room—but these adjustments are anticipated. During shooting, I deliberately leave a lot of "air holes" in the material. For instance, I might shoot certain scenes from one or two extra angles, or try out different ways of mise-en-scene, —not always knowing why, just following a sense of intuition, a feeling that something is beautiful or necessary. Then, in editing, I search through that material almost obsessively to weave together the story I'm ultimately trying to tell. So I believe "story" is always something fluid and evolving. That dynamic process of making a story is the core of creation—not the purpose. Its true purpose lies in the "audience": who the story is meant to be told to. For example, if I intend to tell a story about the collapse of the world, that much is certain from the outset. However, how to construct a narrative that allows the audience to experience this collapse is something I haven't fully determined even at this moment of our conversation.

Would you describe the way you work on set as a form of improvisation?

From a common sense perspective, yes—there's definitely an element of improvisation in how I work. It happens every time: the day before shooting, we hold a detailed meeting with the key crew to plan out the next day's shooting details. But once we get on set, things almost always shift completely. What we decided the night before often no longer applies, and this makes everyone quite anxious: why does everything change once we're on set? I don't think it's about my style or habit. It's because being on set brings a very strong emotional response—something tells me there's a better way to ex-press it. And that "better way" is almost never what we discussed the night before, because that version has already become a predetermined process. Maybe there's a kind of obsession in that, but essentially, the moment we arrive on set, the shooting plan transforms. There's also a technical issue here: a fundamental difference between cinema and literature, or written words. Film is inherently different from the notes we write in a meeting, or even the imagination in our minds. This difference doesn't become clear until everything is in place—the lights, the actors—and suddenly the scene comes alive. Only then do I realize that what we previously planned just isn't good enough. And by "not good enough, " I mean it's not moving—it doesn't stir anything. But of course, that sense of being "moved" is extremely subjective. So I stop. Whether it's about stopping the take or starting again the next day, I act based on a very simple criterion: I am not moved.

At this moment, are you someone who relies more on intuition to create?

Actually, my approach to work is highly systematic. I meticulously organize every element in a scene—props, settings, and cause-and-effect in story etc.— with strict logic. But once that framework is in place, I rely entirely on intuition to evaluate the final result. This creates a significant challenge: On a rational level, everything may seem perfectly executed, yet at the final stage, when I say, "This isn't right, " no one can tell why. The team isn't afraid of preparation, but when we reach the critical moment and I reject everything, it's undeniably frustrating for everyone.

Many are quick to analyze your films through the lens of formalism, but what truly matters in them is the sensation and emotion—the very elements that resist dissection.

My approach is precisely this: to address the technical aspects of filmmaking with rigorous logic, rationality, and precision. I've often said that making a film is like constructing a building—but now I realize the crucial difference. In architecture, the work is done when the "house" is complete. But in film, the final creation isn't the "house"—It's the person who enters it. I invest immense effort, resources, and time into building this "house" , yet the true film only exists when an audience inhabits it. People often misunderstand this. They assume the structure I've built is the film, but no—the real film is the guest: someone who spends a night in this house and wakes up saying, "Last night, I dreamed a film." Perhaps this confusion arises because the extremity of the audiovisual language overshadows the humble emotional core at its heart.

Actually, the audiovisual language reveals your rational side more than your emotional one, doesn't it?

It's not the core of what I pursue. When working with my key crew—like Liu Qiang(Production Designer) or Dong Jinsong(Directors of Photography)—they fully grasp this paradox about me. My philosophy of film is inherently contradictory. They know I demand rigorous foundations, but once all the logic and causal relationships are in place, they always ask that same question: "Does it feel right?" That's the threshold: if it feels right, we shoot; if not, we dismantle everything.

Perhaps cinema itself is a paradox. Take the ending of the fourth story— what moved me most was how the director deployed every trick of the craft, only to chase something utterly simple. Like the old man in the film: all he truly wants is to know what his daughter's letter says.

Despite exhausting every cinematic tool at my disposal, I could never fully reconstruct that letter. Every day on set, among the other difficulties, that was the only thing I thought about. I poured every-thing I had into it—collaborating with the team, pushing our collective limits—yet we still couldn't "resurrect" the letter. To this day, I still have a real letter unfinished in my own hands.

How would you describe the procedure of shooting this film?

This procedure was perhaps more challenging than KAILI BLUES and LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT because I could no longer allow myself to work as a completely amateur director. I had to uphold professional discipline—yet that very discipline felt constraining. The sheer weight of the film industry, coupled with the real situation of shooting in China, created an overwhelming pressure. I'd felt it during LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT, but I chose this path again because a more "lightweight" approach in such an environment would have made my ambitions impossible to realize.

RESURRECTION was shot across three separate production cycles spanning over a year—an experience echoing your previous film's process. Has this approach now become a necessity?

Because after each shooting cycle, I find the intervening period of reflection absolutely crucial. This approach is fundamentally anti-traditional film workflow— where the norm is to concentrate efforts and wrap quickly for maximum cost efficiency. But that would make the film lose its beauty in my creative process. After completing a phase, I need to pause and assess the gap between the footage we've captured and the final result I envision. That's why this project's three shooting cycles involved constant refinement—adjustments that continued right up until the final 60-day stretch, where we filmed four key segments.

Across the various stages of filmmaking, do you feel you've finally discovered a methodology that's distinctly your own?

I've developed a methodology that feels distinctly my own during post- production. But from scriptwriting to shooting, the process remains fluid—even this time, especially with the story being more concrete and detailed than before. I can't yet distill a definitive "working method" for those early stages. The truth is, my entire creative process is intensely intricate, drowning in details that demand exhaustive time and labor. Yet in the end, what emerges is just a "portrait" —one that might seem deceptively simple. I keep adding brushstroke after brushstroke, only to realize all along, I was just trying to complete a bare "spiritual portrait" .

How do you typically direct actors on set—especially in this film, where Jackson Yee plays five distinct roles?

My primary difference lies in my perspective. I was entirely unfamiliar with the established "traditions" of filmmaking, which served as a foundational element. It meant I couldn't conform to the expected "image" of a director. I strongly reject the hierarchical dynamic that often exists between directors and actors. I refuse to let actors feel the weight of authority or pressure from me. With non-professional actors, I frame scenes using their own lived experiences. For professionals, I cut straight to the chase: I clearly outline the logic of mise-en-scene and narrative intent upfront. This saves time and prevents misunderstandings about what I'm asking for. That said, actors in my films often arrive on set gripped by anxiety. The moment they step onto the set, they realize nothing matches what they'd envisioned—not even what we discussed in meetings. After ten takes, I might inform them that their character has evolved into someone else, which initially surprises them, but they eventually adapt. In terms of acting, I think Jackson Yee is truly outstanding. He faces, deep within himself, a filming process full of unknowns with great courage. To me, he portrayed the characters exactly as I had imagined them.

Do you still shoot many takes now?

We shoot many takes—honestly, because every shot is technically demanding. The bar is high, with layers of technical interplay.

With six standalone stories spanning a century, what was the greatest challenge of this ambitious project?

I refuse to let these be seen as standalone vignettes or a shorts compilation. I want it to feel unmoored—like the Fantasmer drifting through an entire century. That's why the sense of realism in each story should feel diluted. Some viewers might perceive this film as a spiritual portrait of the Chinese people. Not a concrete figure, but something abstract—an essence of Chineseness. At two and a half hours, this isn't about any single era. The century itself must be the protagonist.

The silent film segment clearly bears the imprint of German Expressionism, and the design of the "Movie Monster" is equally impressive.

During post-production, while designing the Monster's appearance, I was deeply moved. He's a figure with a hunched back—one that evokes profound sympathy, almost like a literary archetype, such as Quasimodo: grotesque in form, physically twisted, yet pure in heart. I envisioned the film's protagonist exactly this way—a being who drifts through different eras, transforming into different incarnations, until finally, he loses all physical form entirely. By the end, he's no longer a single entity but a collective of luminous figures, or perhaps, people set aflame.

The second segment on "hearing" drips with noir texture, while the next story, a claustrophobic huis clos (behind closed doors) thriller, explores "taste" . Did you intentionally design each part to reflect film history?

Yes. To ensure each segment transcended superficial homage, we conducted exhaustive re-search—hundreds of pages dissecting the grammar and aesthetics of each era's cinema. The third part, set in the temple, was originally placed in outer space; it might have been striking but lacked the devastating empathy that now deeply moves me. What moved me was restoring an era's visceral experi- ence and texture—crafting something so true to its spirit that I, myself, would weep.

How do you view the use of historical or cinematic references—even intertextuality—in your creative process?

Take the Movie Monster as an example—I couldn't place it within a real historical framework. Even if I could, people might as well watch *The Last Emperor,* which is more entertaining and perhaps even better made. But that wouldn't be an artistic outcome born from my own mind. All the research, all the films I study—they're not about mining for ideas or inspiration. They're about understanding why certain genres and narratives could move others, move me. What is it about noir, for instance, that resonates? I'm chasing that ineffable result—the core of why it stirs emotion—then using my own

methods to arrive there. Without dissecting these elements, I'd be lost in subjectivity, and that terrifies me.

Have you noticed that, after searching, the ultimate reason for being moved is often very simple; it's never something complex?

Every moving story is like this. But this is a point I now strongly agree with in creation. What we call simple, in fact, cannot be found without going through these processes.

Without going through these processes, it's called simplification.

In essence, it is a conclusion with a very high density.

The fourth part is about "smell, " which actually corresponds to the most classic form of melodrama.

I am actually very familiar with that era because I was born in Guizhou, a relatively economically underdeveloped province. Therefore, my formative years coincided with those depicted in the film, aligning with my own life experiences, allowing for a more accurate grasp of that period.

The penultimate part is a fin-de-siècle story of elopement concerning "touch."

Developing this story took two to three years, with many iterations. I still felt unmoved until two days before filming. On that day, I suddenly didn't go to the set, causing concern and panic among everyone, including the actors, who were anxious because the director's absence was announced at the last minute. In fact, it was because I had an "epiphany" that day, suddenly understanding how to write the story. By the next day, when I was back to set, I had already finalized the story.

Everyone was already quite familiar with the long-take shooting method used there (laughs).

Regarding the filming style, I've become quite adept at it, I must admit (laughs). We established this approach early on, primarily for its efficiency. It streamlined the process, making it easier for everyone to prepare, as they knew exactly what to expect. At the very least, I could inform the team that we wouldn't need to scout for locations, as everything would be contained within this specific geographical area. Consequently, this segment of the film was surprisingly the least challenging to shoot.

What was your most significant discovery while making this film?

The imagination originated from cinema can break through many difficulties and obstacles so easily. Before this project, I wasn't entirely convinced that cinema, or art in general, could achieve this. I had

considerable concerns beforehand, anticipating significant hurdles. However, upon completion, I realized that the character “Fantasmer” reaches the final destination with such profound emotion, is something I hadn't foreseen. While archival or realistic reconstruction certainly possesses historical authenticity and power, true abstraction can offer a scope and grandeur that direct replication cannot. This potent capacity for generalization is a key attribute of cinematic art.

RESURRECTION made me feel something very strongly: the feeling of carefreeness, even of childlike innocence, that emanated from LONG DAY’S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT now seems to be a thing of the past, which evokes a certain sadness.

I find it very sad. The film’s ending caption highlights the heart of the entire work—those two “Farewells.” That world of cinema has collapsed, and everyone ultimately comes to acknowledge it in the theatre. It’s not a profound expression, but it’s certainly a very emotional one. Art then becomes the most useful thing: it doesn’t just record that moment, it sings it—this very sad thing, something resigned, which is not even despair, nor hope. If I had to describe it emotionally, it would be a deep melancholy, an intense regret. ■ Interview by Wang Muyan In memory of Pierre Rissient.

ABOUT BI GAN

Born in June 1989 in Kaili, China, Bi Gan studied at the Shanxi Institute of Communication in Taiyuan. With a passion for poetry and cinema, he made his first film tests in Kaili, set up a video workshop, and directed the short film Diamond Sutra, which received a special mention from the jury in the Asian New Force category during the 19th edition of the IFVA Festival (Asia's audiovisual film and media incubator in Hong Kong). Between 2014 and 2015, he directed his first feature film, *Kaili Blues*. Selected in 70 festivals, and welcomed by rave international reviews, the film received the Best Emerging Filmmaker Award in the “Cinéaste du présent” section at the Locarno Festival in 2015, as well as the “Montgolfière d'or” at the Festival des trois continents in Nantes and the prestigious “Best New Director Award” at the Golden Horse Awards. 2018 saw the release of his second feature film, *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, a monumental fresco in 3D. The film was presented in the “Un Certain Regard” section at the 2018 Cannes Film Festival to rave critical and public acclaim. Bi Gan directed an ambitious short film in 2022 called A Short Story, told through the eyes of a cat. Resurrection will be his third feature film, and his second co-produced with France. ■

ABOUT JACKSON YEE

Born in 2000 in Huaihua, China, Jackson Yee began his career as a singer at the age of 13 in the Chinese boy band TFBoys. He launched his solo career in 2017 and became a superstar in his homeland. At the same time, Jackson Yee pursues an acting career, starring mainly in Chinese blockbusters such as *The Battle of Changjin Lake*, directed by Tsui Hark, Chen Kaige and Dante Lam, as well as Zhang Yimou's *Full River Red*. In China, he embodies the Emporio Armani brand and works for Tiffany & Co. Resurrection is his first collaboration with Bi Gan. ■

ABOUT SHU QI

Shu Qi was born in 1976 in Taiwan, where she lived until she was 17. She then moved to Hong Kong, where she gradually became one of the most prominent actresses in Hong Kong cinema, working with the likes of Andrew Lau and Mabel Chaung. In 2001, she came to international attention in *Millennium Mambo* by Taiwanese director Hou Hsiao- Hsien. She collaborated twice with the director, notably for *Three Times* in 2005 and for *The Assassin* in 2015, a contemplative action film set in the Tang dynasty, in which Shu Qi plays a ruthless killer. *The Assassin* was awarded the Prix de la mise en scène at the 2015 Cannes Film Festival. Today, she alternates between international blockbusters and Taiwanese auteur films. ■

CAST

Fantasmer	Jackson Yee
The Big Other	Shu Qi
Commander	Mark Chao
Tai Zhaomei	Li Gengxi
Mr. Luo	Huang Jue
Spirit of bitterness	Chen Yongzhong
Girl	Guo Mucheng
Old Man	Zhang Zhijian
Serving girl	Chloe Maayan
Deceased man	Yan Nan

Crew

Story and Directed by	Bi Gan
Screenplay	Bi Gan, Zhai Xiaohui
Executive Producers	Bi Gan, Wan Juan
Produced by	Shan Zuolong
Producers	Charles Gillibert, Yang Lele
Director of Photography	Dong Jingsong
Production Designer	Liu Qiang, Tu Nan
Costume Designer	Hwarng Wern-Ying
Sound Director	Li Dafeng
Lighting Director	Wong Chi-Ming
Chief Lighting Technician	Mao Weiliang, Chen Xiaoyong
Music	M83
Edited by	Bi Gan, Bai Xue
Visual Effects Supervisors	Liu Song, Chen Zhijie, Lise Fisher
Practical Effects Supervisor	Wu Songyi
International Sales	Les Films Du Losange