

# All about my sisters



**A Film by WANG Qiong**

USA | 2021 | Documentary | Color | 174' | Mandarin, Xiang Dialect



**INTERNATIONAL SALES & FESTIVALS**

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## SYNOPSIS

**A documentary about remembering and forgetting, ending and restarting, forgiving and reconciliation, scarring and healing.**

22-year-old Qiong digs into her family's dramas and traumas, exploring the complexity of politics, gender, sex, birth control and social political power over women's bodies.

At the center is Jin, her younger sister who grew up apart from them. Their parents, because they couldn't consider a family without a son, because they already had two daughters, because China was imposing a one child policy, decided that the mother would abort her third pregnancy. But little Jin survived the medical injection for the abortion. Abandoned as newborn in the street, little Jin survived several days before being saved and finally adopted by her uncle. Today, Jin has a complicated relationship with her two sisters, her little brother, her parents and with her baby boy. She struggles to accept why she was not wanted and abandoned.

The elder sister, Li, is now pregnant with her second child. Wondering if it will be the boy that her husband wants, or needs to get ready to abort if it is a baby girl. At this critical moment, Qiong takes her camera in an effort to heal the family.

# WANG Qiong 王琼

Director, Producer, Cinematographer, Editor

## STATEMENT

Every day on my way to primary school, I would see in a creek newly aborted fetuses: downy, deathly white. Aborting female fetuses, unconstrained by any kind of law, had become almost standard practice. For more than thirty-five years, under China's coercive One-Child Policy, many women repeatedly abort until they get a male-born.

The bodies of aborted girls would be thrown into a river, gutter or dump. The impact, even today, has been the profound disruption of the basis of traditional Chinese culture and society: the family, as shown in mine. Catastrophe notwithstanding, little attention is paid inside China to this part of our recent history. Women like my mother are reluctant to remember or even acknowledge that period of their lives, unwilling to recall the ubiquity of violence and helplessness.

This project started with smaller aspirations: to throw into the questions and tensions built up from my childhood. What actually happened when the doctor gave my sister the lethal injection—how did she survive? How has her past affected her childhood, adulthood and now her own motherhood? How much resentment remains? Is there any possibility of us even talking about it? Why does my elder sister take abortion so lightly?

This history has been a sensitive topic about which nobody has expressed themselves openly. It is a deathly quiet: a tense truce. My family is not alone: in that era there were millions of families like mine: helpless and desensitized parents, abandoned lives. I'd like to document women like my mother and sisters and reflect on our notions of life and existence.

— WANG Qiong

# WANG Qiong 王琼

## BIOGRAPHY

WANG Qiong is a Chinese emerging independent documentary filmmaker and cinematographer based in Philadelphia. Her fascination with images started in a small photo shop, the one her parents run in Ji'an, the city where she was born and grew up in Southeast China.



Qiong is completing her MFA in Filmmaking at Temple University and was nominated by her department for the prestigious Princess Grace Award 2021.

She spent her last seven years on her feature debut documentary, ***ALL ABOUT MY SISTERS*** filming her family to explore complex societal power over women's bodies from the time of China's One-Child Policy and the history of discrimination against women. The film will World Premiere at International Film Festival Rotterdam in June 2021 in Bright Future.

She is currently working on her second and third feature-length documentaries ***ISLAND*** and ***THE LAST NAIL***. She intends to dedicate the coming decade to the production of these films. This series of documentaries will be followed by a fourth one in order to focus on Birth, Death, Illness and the Force of Aging, which in Buddhism are the major four stages of life of all human beings. Through it, she excavates the cultural, political, and sociological context of how people see and deal with these issues. She wants to focus on social injustice and human rights, telling stories of underrepresented individuals and communities who deserve equal attention and care in society.

Following ***ALL ABOUT MY SISTERS***, which is a story of birth, it will come ***THE LAST NAIL***, a film about death. It is a Chinese feature length documentary that investigates the friction within powers, ethics, traditional norms, and how it influences the freedom of death. ***THE LAST NAIL*** will share a story about life and how power can reach beyond the grave.

# WANG Qiong 王琼

## FILMOGRAPHY

as Producer/Director/Cinematographer/Editor

**ALL ABOUT MY SISTERS** (USA, 2021, DOCUMENTARY, 174')

**ASH** (2019, FICTION/NON-FICTION HYBRID, 7')

as Producer/Director/Cinematographer

**SO NEAR, SO FAR** (2020, EXPERIMENTAL DOCUMENTARY, 9')

as Director/Cinematographer/Editor

**A CHAIR LAWSUIT** (USA, 2016, DOCUMENTARY, 60', IN-PROGRESS)

**SEARCHING FOR TSANGYANG GYATSO** (China, 2015, DOCUMENTARY, 60')

**THE LOST LAKE** (China, 2014, DOCUMENTARY, 13')

**SAND REQUEST** (China, 2013, DOCUMENTARY, 60')

as Cinematographer/Editor

**SEEDS TO STORE** (China, 2017, DOCUMENTARY, 8')

as Cinematographer

**ZERO LIFE** (USA, NARRATIVE, 120', IN-PRODUCTION)



## In CONVERSATION with the DIRECTOR



### ***HOW IT STARTED***

#### **What made you decide to take your camera and film your family?**

In 2014, for a different project, I interviewed my mother about my birth story. She told me a lot about what she has experienced during her pregnancies and the processes of giving birth to me, my elder sister Li, and my younger sister, Jin. Soon after, I went back to school – I was an undergraduate student back then.

One day, I received a message from my elder sister Li, saying that she was pregnant and would abort the baby if it was a girl. I was shocked, noticing that she has to experience what my mother had suffered 25 year ago – pregnancy, abortion, and the “obligation” of bearing sons for their husbands. And the unborn infant – if it’s a girl, has to go through what my younger sister Jin has gone through – being aborted. As these things connected as far as I understand, I was shocked.

It was also an immediate realization that after living as a family for more than 20 years, I still don’t understand my family, especially the women in my family. I felt that there’s something wrong, but I didn’t really know what it really was. The only thing that I was clear about was that we, as a family, didn’t talk about it even once. There’s not a long distance between Jin and my parents, but a wide gap between me and all of them. Then I decided to return home. I took my camera with me as I needed a reason to start the conversations, and making a film was a decent reason.

**Did your film start because you wanted to record this family conflict? Or because you were filming your family, the family relationship became the center of your film?**

I started filming my family because I wanted to ask questions, and mediate Jin's relationship with my parents. But I was clear in the beginning that relationship would be the center of my film as there are many connections and breakages among all in my family, and this is what I care a lot apart from the questions about family history.



**How long was the shooting?**

The filming started in May 2014 and ended in 2019. The first three years I spent most of my time shooting, almost full time – I stayed at home and lived with my parents and shot the family's daily life. I left home and moved to different places to do the editing in the next few years, still shot something from time to time when I visited my family.

**How did you structure the film and worked on the editing?**

Editing the film was very challenging, because there are many characters, issues, relationships and contents, as well as dealing with the timeline. I collected 300 hours of footage in total, which took me an entire year to finish the transcription before I started to edit. At the beginning I felt that Jin's birth story and her relationship with my parents should be the center of the film. And as her story goes on, Li's story waves into the string that started by Jin. The first few cuts were confusing to the audience as it's easily gets people lost in understanding the relationships amongst many characters.

Then I decided to construct the film with three parts: The first 60 minutes focus on Jin's birth story, and the conflicts between her and my parents; the next 20 – 30 minutes introduces Li's story of being pregnant with and giving birth to her third child, that bridges her story with Jin's, and the rest of the film returns back to Jin's relationship with my parents, with my elder sister Li and my younger brother Sifan joining the scenario. This structure makes things less confusing and provides coherence in developing each character with details.

## ***THE SHOOTING***

### **What was the process of the shooting?**

I enjoyed the whole process of shooting a lot. I felt very comfortable with my camera – I felt that I and my camera became as one and we never separate since I started filming. I shot whatever I was able to see with my eyes. There was no decision of filming or stop filming. I only stopped filming when my physical body doesn't allow – when I got tired, or sick. And I never thought about the audience. There was no audience behind me. During the shooting, I never asked what the audience want to see. It was a pure freedom that I have never had before.



### **How difficult was it to film your family?**

They allowed me to film everything. I think it's because that none of us had thought anything about the future of the film – how it will be shown, who will be watching it. We never thought about this. I didn't expect any audience for this film because I never thought that this film would be able to get into the market.

So, when I told them that it's a school assignment to make this video, they accepted me and my camera right away. I can't tell what it meant for them to have me film them – maybe they can give a better answer. But for me, the three years of staying at home and filming them is a period of time for us to company each other. It's a time when I stayed with them, more as a daughter and a sister.

## **YOUR FAMILY**

### **When did you first learn about your younger sister's story?**

I can't remember the exact time when I first learned about Jin's story – I guess it's from when I started to remember things. Jin's story was told by my parents and other adult family members very fragmentarily every year. My elder sister and I grew up with those fragments, until when we got mature enough to understand the real relationship between Jin and us. I hated my parents for what they have done to my younger sister, and the feudal idea of *重男轻女 Zhong Nan Qing Nu* (preferring boys to girls). Though I never spoke this out to them, deep in my mind, I constantly accused them for being fooled by the feudal ideologies and being heartless.



### **Do you recall your first meeting with Jin?**

I can't remember my first meeting with her because we grew up together. We lived in the same region, though in different villages. We didn't see each other every day. But time to time her parents would send her to us, or my parents would send me to her, so that we could have some fun together. What I can remember is that when we were very little, we were very close to each other. Every time we separated, we missed each other very much. This kind of closeness only happens between Jin and I - I was not that close to my elder sister Li even we grew up in one family. Jin was not that close to Li too. This is something we still don't quite understand.

### **When did you start living with her?**

Jin moved from the village to the town and live with us when she started her first year of junior high school, at the age of 12 or 14.



**How would you describe the differences and resemblance between you and your two sisters?**

I look alike Jin more than Li. Jin and Li are stronger than me, psychologically. I'm more obedient than them. Jin is dependent on me. Li is more independent.

**How do you feel about your brother, the little prince that your parents wanted so much?**

He's innocent. We were all wanted or not wanted because of the gender, and Sifan is not an exception. None of us were blessed because of who we are. It's a very pragmatic mindset. So, I'm sympathetic to Jin as well as to Sifan. I love him. I feel bad about the way he was spoiled and educated improperly. I feel sorry about how he was expected to get married early and have sons to carry the family name. He bears this "obligation" from the day he was born, and it's hard to change it. I don't see a clue of him trying to challenge this, so far.

**Since the end of the shooting of the film, could you give us some updates on your sisters, and your family? How are they doing? Any changes in their relationship or their life? Any new daughters in the family?**

It's a right decision for Jin to leave the town and keep a distance with my family. Distance may not solve any problem, but it can help to heal wounds. Since Jin left, she didn't speak to my parents and my sister Li for two or three years. This became a good opportunity for me to mediate with less conflicts. I seized every possible chance to say something good about Jin in front of my parents and Li, and vice versa. Now they are getting along very well. Now, Jin is willing to come back home and visit my parents during vacations. Everyone is much happier than before. Jin is working in a factory in a city that is 800km from our hometown. She would come back and visit her family once a year. She's still struggling with her debt. Life is still hard for her but she's tough as always. There's no new family member joined.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **What would you say is your film about?**

My film is about memory, love, pain and humanity.

### **Can you tell us more about the legend mentioned at the beginning of the film?**

The legend is a trop of the birth of all of my parents' children. In the legend, there are the Seven Fairies, which is a trop of the seven daughters whom my mother was pregnant with, including those aborted and Lv Immortal is a trop of my younger brother's birth, the only son in my family.



The first part of the legend about my parents wanting a son and my father crying in front of the status of *Guanyin* is a fact that my father once told me. The second part of the Seven Fairies and Lv Immortal is made up by my family – I forgot when but it was told by my parents and relatives when I was a little kid. They used to tell me and my elder sister that we were reincarnations of the Seven Fairies, which I actually believed as a child. So, it gradually became an unforgotten childhood memory that today I still think is satiric but sweet.

### **How is your family story related to the situation in China?**

My family is affected by the policies, like how political powers affect every family in every country in this world.

### **Your film isn't just about your sisters, it is also about your mother, and other little girls and mothers. How do you see the position of women in China today?**

Women's condition in China is overall better than the old days, but it's true that China is still a male-dominated society. A lot of efforts are expected to achieve any improvements.



**Why do you think couples, and mostly men, still desire to have sons and not daughters?**

China is still a patricentric society, it's been a long tradition. In recent 20 years, feminism was introduced and has been developing in China, though slowly. Families in the city are more open-minded to new ideas and less persistent to the value of keeping the family names nowadays. But most people from the village, like folks in my hometown, are still holding the old values. There are many reasons why this still exists in China: it's a very long process to challenge a millennial-long tradition/social norms.

New ideas and ideologies have been introduced to this country since the *Reform and Opening Up*. China opens its door to the world, but it's not open enough inside of this big country. Most of the people, especially those from the countryside still have very little access to new resources and information. They still live in a world with their own old rules. They know little about the outside world. They are exposed to new medias of course, like domestic Tik Tok, but the information they get from there is still limited. Another reason is that: having sons taking care of their parents when they get old is still a practical pattern in Chinese family system, in particular for those who are not from the main cities and have less support from the system. Like what my mother said in the film, daughters will join another family and take care of her husband's parents, while sons are around all the time when there's a need.

**The ONE CHILD POLICY program disappeared in China a few years ago. Could you tell us more about it?**

The one child policy was initiated in the late '70s and early '80s. The '90s is the period when this policy was executed seriously the most. In 2015, it was replaced by two children policy, responding to the aging population. Now childbirth is widely encouraged by the authorities more than ever.

## **CINEMA**

### **You are studying cinema in the USA now. How is it to finish your first film while still learning?**

I feel lucky to be able to finish this film when I'm here. Actually, the reason why I decided to study abroad is to complete this film – this is the only purpose. It was impossible for me to finish the editing in China with the huge financial burden. I applied for fellowship to study in the USA, which reduced a lot of pressure from the financial incapability and from my family, so that I could continue the editing.



### **You have been producing this film alone, filming it, editing it. Was it by choice?**

The reason why I produced this film alone is simple, it's because I had no one to help and I had no money to hire someone. Though it's very hard and it brought me a lot of pain, I believe that it's better to make it all alone as this is a very intimate family story.

### **This is your first film, do you intend to continue doing documentary or would you consider doing fiction?**

I will continue making documentaries, and only documentaries. I like fiction too, but making a fiction film has more restrictions – it requires a crew and many more funds. Making a documentary is easier. I can still make a doc when I'm alone or there's very little funding. But you can't make a fiction alone.

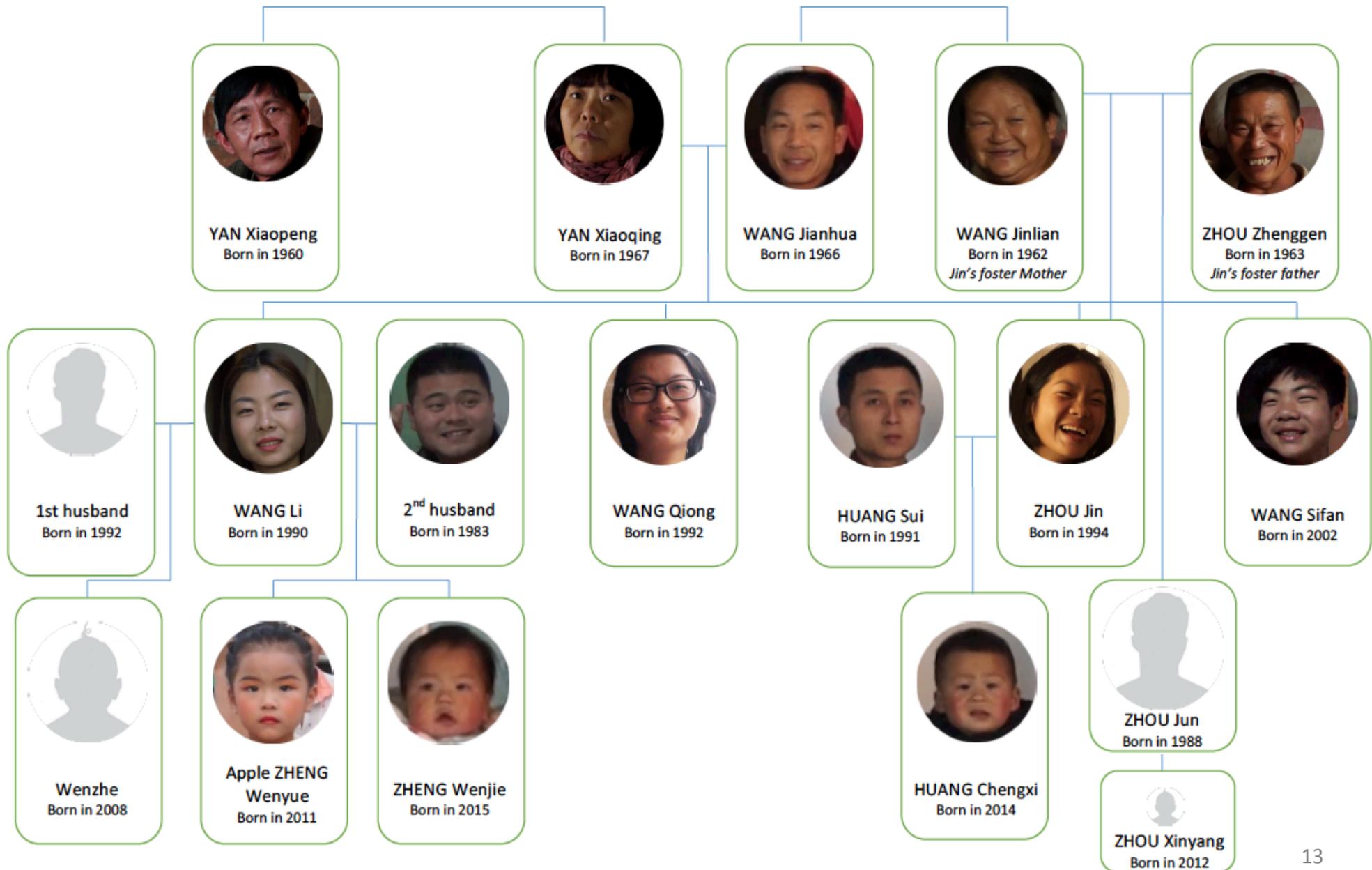
### **You have been already working on other projects, could you tell us more about them?**

I'm currently working on two feature length films. One is called *Island*, a personal story about friendship and farewell. It's a film within a film. Another one is temporally called *The Last Nail*. *The Last Nail* is a story about death.

*Interview done in Philadelphia in May 2021*

# FAMILY TREE

# -ALL ABOUT MY SISTERS



# All about my sisters

A WANG QIONG STUDIO Production

## *The Family*

My Younger Sister	ZHOU Jin
My Elder Sister	WANG Li
My Mother	YAN Xiaoqing
My Father	WANG Jianhua
My Younger Brother	WANG Sifan
My Third Uncle	YAN Xiaopeng
My uncle & Jin's foster father	ZHOU Zhenggen
My auntie & Jin's foster mother	WANG Jinlian
My nephew & Jin's son	HUANG Chengxi
My brother-in-law & Jin's husband	HUANG Sui
My niece & Li's daughter	ZHENG Wenyue
My nephew & Li's son	ZHENG Wenjie

## *The Crew*

Image, Sound & Editing	WANG QIONG
Directed & Produced by	WANG QIONG
Co-Produced by	JIAN YI
Produced with the support of International Sales	IFCHINA ORIGINAL STUDIO ASIAN SHADOWS

