

THE EQUATION OF LOVE AND DEATH

李米的猜想

Lǐ Mǐ de cāi xiǎng (Li Mi's supposition)

Director Cao Baoping 曹保平, 2008. 96 min.

Stars: Zhou Xun 周迅; Wáng Bǎoqiáng 王宝强;

Dèng Chāo 邓超, Zhāng Hányú 张涵予

Cinematography: Yang Shu 杨述



Best Actress (Abuja IFF; Shanghai Film Critics; Asian Film Awards; Chinese Film Media Awards; Beijing Student FF; Golden Rooster Awards; Huading Awards). **Best Director** (Golden Rooster Awards). **Best New Director** (San Sebastian IFF). **Best Original Film Score** (Golden Horse Awards). **Film of Merit** (Shanghai Film Critics); **Society Award** (Golden Phoenix).

In this non-stop dramatic thriller the entangled fates of the main characters remain unconnected puzzle pieces until the full picture is assembled in the end. A feisty chain-smoking taxi-driver in the city of Kunming is obsessed with finding her boyfriend who disappeared four years earlier. She paper-clips snapshots of him to the magazines she keeps in the back seat of her taxi, and routinely questions all of her fares as to whether they've seen him. From the moment she picks up two roughnecks from the countryside as fares, we know she's in trouble—they have their own obsessions with money and a disappeared girlfriend. Sure enough: violence and harrowing escapes ensue and our heroine ends up a reluctant participant in a police investigation whose purpose is opaque. Despite the presence of wildly unbelievable coincidences, the plot surges forward to a not fully predictable but satisfying conclusion.

The award-winning performance of Zhou Xun, normally a glamorous and refined persona, reveals the extraordinary depths of her acting talents. This entertaining genre film is the second work of an emerging director who scripts well-made plots set on the dark side of contemporary Chinese social conditions and aspirations.

Setting: 2007, Kunming 昆明市, Yunnan 云南 Province.

Main Characters

Li Mi 李米, a taxi driver in the city of Kunming 昆明 (Yunnan 云南 Province) who is obsessed with finding her boyfriend, **Fang Wen** 方文, who disappeared four years earlier. However, almost daily she receives in her mail a letter from him, each of which she has numbered and memorized the words of. She has paper-clipped snapshots of him to pages in the magazines she keeps in the seat-pocket of the back seat of her taxi for *passengers to read, and she routinely queries all of her fares as to whether they have seen him.*

Qiu Huogui 裘火贵 and **Qiu Shuitian** 裘水天, two rough-hewn brothers from the countryside in desperate need of money to buy an airline ticket to Guangzhou, who become fares of Li Mi's. **Huogui** is the dominant one, issuing orders, possessed of a violent temper, armed with a concealed mean-looking dagger, and suffering from some abdominal distress. **Shuitian** is a simpler sort; he follows Huogui's orders but is consumed by a single goal of his own: to locate his girlfriend, Xiao Xiang, who left their village to find work in Kunming. When the two flee the taxi, they innocently take Li Mi's magazine with them.

Ma Bing 马冰, driver of the car onto which a mysterious man falls to his death from a highway overpass. He picks up Li Mi's magazine, which has been dropped on the street by the Qiu brothers in their escape, and therein finds himself a dead ringer for Fang Wen.

Ai Feifei 艾非非, the woman riding in the car with Ma Bing, who suffers her own troubles: custody of her child(ren) has been given to her husband while she was fighting a drug addiction.

Ye Qingcheng 叶倾城, a police officer investigating the death of the man who fell from the bridge. He uses his resources to eventually and compassionately untangle the convoluted mystery that intertwines the fates of the other characters.

Director: Cao Baoping 曹保平 (b. Shaanxi 陕西 Province)

Cao Baoping is a 1989 graduate of the Beijing Film Academy 北京电影学院 (BFA) where he also taught screenwriting during the '90s. He began his directing career in television, and made his first film debut in 2006 (*Trouble Makers*). *The Equation of Love and Death* is his second film. Cao is drawn to dark, violent, and complex story-lines, sometimes verging on comedy and satire, which are produced in the mid-range “entertainment” stream of the Chinese film industry. Generationally, he is sandwiched between the well-known Fifth Generation ground-breaking ‘art film’ directors (1982 graduates of BFA) and the ‘indie’ filmmakers of the Sixth Generation (late ‘90s grads). His latest film is *Cock and Bull* (2016).

Star: Zhōu Xùn 周迅 (b. 1974; Quzhou 衢州, Zhejiang 浙江 Province)

Ranked China’s favorite star in 2014, Zhou Xun has received many awards, both domestically and internationally. A graduate of the Zhejiang Vocational Fine Arts Academy 浙江艺术职业学院, Zhou gradually gained fame and recognition as she progressed from minor to leading roles, and is best known in the Eurowest for her performances in *Suzhou River* (2000), *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* (2002), and *Painted Skin* (2008). Like Gong Li in the role of an unsophisticated pregnant peasant woman (*Story of Qiu Ju*, 1991), the role of the taxi driver Li Mi in *Equation* challenges viewers accustomed to her glamorous and refined persona and reveals the extraordinary depths of her acting talents. Beyond the screen, Zhou was named a United Nations Goodwill Ambassador for environmental sustainability, and honored as a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum.

YouTube search: “李米的猜想 | The Equation of Love and Death”
at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GblMeTTXfpE>