

# *A Matter of Time*

A Film by Liu Yang

2020 / 15mins 37 secs/ Drama/ Color/ Chinese with English  
Subtitles/ Aspect Ratio: 1.85:1 / ARRI ALEXA MINI 4K

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# A Matter of Time

## Logline:

During the large-scale demolition and construction going on in a small town in China, an independent and empty-nest grandma YING(70s) who is in the early stage of Alzheimer's confronts the pressure of moving into a local public nursing home persuaded by her daughter XIAO YU(30s).

## About the film:

*A Matter of Time* is a 15-minute short film written, directed, and edited by Liu Yang as her MFA thesis project at Emerson College. The story describes an independent grandma YING(70s) who is in the early stage of Alzheimer's living in a small town in China by herself. She insists on working, making a modest living by owning a small tailor shop, while her daughter XIAO YU(late 30s) is married to a laborer working and living in a big city. Xiao Yu travels back to Ying's hometown with her son WEI WEI(7) in order to persuade Ying to move to a public nursing home.

The film applies a realistic style with stationary camera movements and an objective audio environment to portray citizens at the bottom of society in China. The project focuses on observing and reflecting ordinary people's struggles and conflicts in daily lives. In addition, *A Matter of Time* intends to connect the rapid developments of cities in China and the changes of Ying's inner state to establish a sense of helplessness and loneliness.





# Synopsis

Ying(70s) is an owner of a small tailor shop in a small town in China. The town is undergoing a large-scale demolition and construction to be developed as a new modern city. She lives alone in an old apartment thinking about her daughter, Xiao Yu, who is living in a big city as a construction worker. Ying enjoys working everyday and chatting with her old friend Wang(60s), an owner of a small fruit store in town.

Ying is in the early stage of Alzheimer's, so her memory gets worse day by day, and it makes Xiao Yu worries about her health conditions. Xiao Yu and her son Wei Wei(7) come back to visit Ying this time persuading her to move to a local public nursing home. However, Ying believes that Xiao Yu has other reasons to make her leave the apartment, which makes their conflict and tension reach a boiling point.





## Director's Goal



As an artist, I have a strong responsibility to reveal the unexposed side of China's society. This project discusses the conflict and friction between the two generations caused by different values and beliefs. I would like to focus on the lives of lower-class people since they are about 60% of the population in China.

However, the public doesn't really know the details of their real situation because the lower-class don't have much power or channels to express their real conditions. All they can do is to work and earn a living, paycheck to paycheck, repeatedly to survive in this competitive country.



## Director's Note

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The reason why I chose the theme of the nursing room is because of the rapid development of China and its aging population. To control the situation, China canceled the only-child policy and applied the two-child policy in 2011. More and more families have been faced or are going through the situation of caring for elders, including myself. I was born in 1995 under the only-child policy. Most of people in my generation are on the same boat as me. When we grow older and have our own families, we will need to take the responsibility for four elders and kids, while working in the competitive industries in cities. We can not deny that our generations have heavy external and internal pressures from our family and work. Facing the pressure inspires me to discuss this topic for my thesis film.

Furthermore, During the period of China's rapid urbanization, young people from the middle and west part of China moved to coastal cities to seek better job opportunities. In China, we have the specific term for those migrant workers — “off-farm workers”. In the script, Xiao Yu, Ying's daughter, is one of the off-farm workers. They bring their dreams and swarm into already overburdened big cities. However, most of them don't have higher educations and connections, so they have no choice but to take the jobs that require manual labor with low salaries. In addition, daunting housing prices in big cities prevent young workers from dreaming about their own dwelling places. For example, in my hometown, Shenzhen, which is also Xiao Yu's work location in the script, the housing price is in the top five of the world's most expensive cities to buy a home. For lower-class workers, they would never be able to afford an apartment in the big city, even if they worked hard for their whole life.

A house represents an emotional attachment for Chinese from the historical background. A house does not only just provide a living space for individuals, but also offers a sense of belonging to them. However, migrant workers cannot afford any house in the cities. They might never own an apartment for their whole life. They are marginalized people in cities. They wish they could belong to the city one day, but they would never be part of the city. In the meanwhile, house demolition is an issue everywhere; people lose their own houses because of government policies and strategies. Some residents have been given huge amounts for compensation; some residents have lost their lives while protecting their homes. Demolition sites play an important role in my film. It not only reveals the realistic situation for most of the places in China but is also a symbol to hint at the main character Ying's fear of disappearing and dying.



## Director's Note

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A large number of seniors are found in rural areas because of the family planning and urbanization in China. The main character Ying is one of the "remained elders" in the rural area. Especially in remote and poverty-stricken villages, many seniors basically live alone once their children leave their hometown. The problem of loneliness and boredom is very common. Their children may just come home to visit once a year. The lack of emotional support for elders is a serious topic that I need to address.

Creating a sense of reality for my film was very important to me. In order to achieve that, I used stationary shots, long takes, and deep depth of fields as the cinematographic style for most of the footage. I also wanted to restore the realistic background sound from the nature of life. John Fiske firmly believes that realism is "realistic not because it reproduces reality, which it clearly does not, but because it reproduces the dominant sense of reality" (20). In other words, he mentions that realism presents itself as "an unmediated picture of external reality" (20).

I do believe that realism has the power to extract and concentrate on important points from personal experience to create artwork with aesthetics. A realistic film is not like most commercial Hollywood movies with lots of artificiality, artistic conventions, implausible, exotic, and supernatural elements. Realism attempts to represent matter truthfully. It usually depicts ordinary people, especially the lower and middle class's living situations. It also describes the changes in their delicate and subtle inner emotions by using an objective way of displaying them. As a result, when spectators observe realism, they find a similar experience as the plot in order to get emotional resonance.



## About Director

### Bio:

Yang Liu (Lizzy) born and raised in China. She works and lives in Los Angeles now to pursue her dream as a director and writer. Lizzy graduated at the Fine Art Department of Beijing Film Academy with a bachelor degree in 2017. Then, she received her master degree majoring in Film and Media Art at Emerson College, Boston in 2020. She has written and directed several short films, such as *World Without End*, *A Matter of Time*, and *Nude Loan*. Previously, she interned at Voltage Pictures in Los Angeles and China Film Group in Beijing.

In 2017, her short film *World Without End* was an official selection for “the best short film” award at Beijing International University Student Film Festival. In 2020, her short LGBTQ+ film *Tessellation* was officially selected into New York International Film Awards.

### Artist Statement:

The reason I fell in love with filmmaking is that it naturally triggers all of my senses and passions. When I make films, I show my most sincere kindness and sensitive feelings to reflect and express my perspectives of viewing the world and the society around me. My artwork always includes the elements of critical analysis and radical opinions towards society and politics, but I apply a moderate form of expression in my work to deliver the ideas. My film itself creates a strong contrast and irony between the content and format.

I believe that everything that happens in our daily life is a representation, which has a deeper meaning. I enjoy observing, thinking, reflecting, and communicating my ideas to the public by using sound and image. My attitude to my work is humble and modest, but it's pure, determined, and respectful. I'm not an articulate speaker, so let my films be my voice.





# Credits

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## Crew:

Writer/ Director/ Editor: Yang Liu  
Producer: Yudong Guan  
Line Producer: Shufan Lv  
Location Manager: Yilong Li  
Production Assistant: Siqi Lan  
1st Assistant Director: Yi-chi Chen  
Script Supervisor/ DIT: Biwei Cong  
Director of Photography: Qingzi Wang  
1st AC: Ang Zhang  
2nd AC: Lao Wang  
Gaffer: Guoping Sun  
Production Designer: Le Yu  
Art Director: Zhongbo Ren  
Set Dresser: Bin Zhang  
Production Assistant: Chao Chen/ Le Zhang/  
Chuanhui Liu/ Maodao Li  
Sound Engineer: Yunhao Zhu  
Sound Assistant: Mingcai Liu  
Costume Design: Mingzhu Ji  
Wardrobe Assistant: Yuhong Xing  
Makeup Artist: Dashan Zhang  
Colorist: Haobo Wang  
Sound Designer: Zhenyu Zhang  
Music Composer: Benny Char  
Post Production Supervisor: Kyung Sok Kim

## Cast:

Ying Huang: Yang Cao  
Xiao Yu: Chengcheng Fang  
Wei Wei: Gongyu Yang  
Owner Wang: Shuqin Zhang  
Nursing Home Manager: Wang A-yi  
Policeman: Lao Wang  
Construction worker: Chao Chen/  
Maodao Li/ Le Zhang

## Special Thanks:

Committee Members:  
Jan Roberts-Breslin  
L Marc Fields

Wu Jia  
Hui Liu  
Ying Huang  
Fulan Jia  
Yu Jia  
Wei Huang  
Zijun Yao  
ChangYing Sun  
Yunlu Zhang  
Ruoyu Li  
Wendy Luhong  
Zhilin Chen  
Guai Guai  
Xueyi Yang

Space Support:  
Beijing Jiu Hua Xi Xiu Nursing Home