



STRANGER

局外人 JU WAI REN

a film by Zhengfan Yang

113 mins | Color | 1.85:1 | Mandarin, Cantonese, English | USA, China, Netherlands, Norway, France

Synopsis

The hotel room as a place where everyone is a stranger. A place that is yours for just a moment. A temporarily intimate space entered by a maid in order to clean it while, if possible, not leaving a trace of her visit. Each episode of *Stranger* is set in such a place, and each is captured in one long take. Weaving together a series of episodic stories – some humorous and absurd, some poignant and mysterious – that all unfold within a seemingly confined space, *Stranger* explores the idea of home while being away from it, and sheds light on the distinctive yet universal experiences of isolation and loneliness.

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Director's Statement

Broadbent: *I find the world quite good enough for me - rather a jolly place, in fact.*

Keegan (looking at him with quiet wonder): *You are satisfied?*

Broadbent: *As a reasonable man, yes. I see no evils in the world - except of course, natural evils – that cannot be remedied by freedom, self-government and English institutions. I think so, not because I am an Englishman, but as a matter of common sense.*

Keegan: *You feel at home in the world then?*

Broadbent: *Of course. Don't you?*

Keegan (from the very depths of his nature): *No.*

*Georges Bernard Shaw
John Bull's Other Island, Act IV.*

Once I stayed at a modest hotel in Hong Kong, surrounded by bustling malls, crowded streets, and clamorous vendors. One morning, as I passed the hotel lobby, I came upon a scene of police, journalists, and cameras. Later, I read in the news that the previous night, in one of the hotel rooms, a middle-aged, unemployed, homeless man had taken the life of a distressed teenage girl – a school drop-out who worked as a prostitute – before taking his own. During my remaining stay there, I couldn't stop thinking about them. Who were they? Where were they from? How did they meet? What happened in that room? Did they long for a place to call home? Did they ever feel a connection to this world?

A hotel room implies comings and goings; people reside in a hotel for a period of time – a fragment of their lives – while the rest of their stories are left untold. Hotel rooms provide those away from home a private space to nestle temporarily in a strange place, allowing them to release emotions they have held back during their journeys. A hotel room is generic and idiosyncratic at the same time – all the hotel rooms in the world are distinct in kind, yet similar in nature. In a broader sense, they are a miniature representation of the rootlessness of urban life. Every time I wake up in a hotel room, I am gripped by a fleeting confusion – a momentary disorientation about the surroundings, the time, and occasionally, my sense of belonging.

In China, the hotel industry emerged as a result of the economic reforms initiated by Premier Deng Xiaoping in 1978. Throughout the past four decades, it has witnessed China's economic boom, political reform, and societal modernization. In *Stranger*, the characters are isolated in their rooms, distanced from the outside world, each grappling with their own predicaments; the state of being confined in a space resembles the feeling of being trapped and estranged in society. Hotel rooms, therefore, become the place where we examine our existential relationship with the larger world.

Born and raised in China, I have been living and working between China and the U.S. since 2015. While I'm an outsider in America in terms of language, culture, and identity, each time I return to China, I feel an equivalent sense of estrangement as I would in a foreign land. Interestingly, in recent years, more and more Chinese have begun to yearn for a life abroad. Some believe they would find a sense of belonging after they leave their homeland. Yet for me, no matter where I am, there is no place that feels like home. I am stuck in this feeling of belonging nowhere.

Marguerite Duras once wrote: "It is in a house that one is alone. Not outside of it, but inside. In the park there are birds, cats. Maybe even a squirrel, a ferret. But in the house, we are so alone that we are sometimes lost". With *Stranger*, I intend to examine the country I am from as a stranger, and I want to share my experience and feelings as an outsider – not from the "outside", but from the "inside".



Director's Bio

Zhengfan Yang is a writer, director, producer, and visual artist. After graduating from law school, he started making films with Shengze Zhu, and together they established Burn The Film. Yang has made four feature-length films and several shorts, encompassing narrative, documentary, and experimental films. His work includes DISTANT (2013, Locarno), WHERE ARE YOU GOING (2016, Rotterdam), DOWN THERE (2018, Venice), and FOOTNOTE (2022, Rotterdam). STRANGER is his latest narrative feature.

Filmography

DISTANT (2013, narrative)
WHERE ARE YOU GOING (2016, documentary)
LIQUID IMAGE (2017, experimental short)
DOWN THERE (2018, narrative short)
FOOTNOTE (2022, documentary)
STRANGER (2024, narrative)

Credits

writer and director: Zhengfan Yang
producer: Shengze Zhu
co-producers: Frank Hoeve, Hilde Berg, François d'Artemare
featuring: Jin Jing, Yuan Ligu, Xue Baohe
director of photography: Zhengfan Yang
image advisor: Sabine Lancelin
cinematographer: Xin Hongke
assistant director: Gu Xue
set design: Chen Nuanqi
location sound: Du Chunfeng
re-recording mixer: Jos van Galen

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