



**SIGHT AND SOUND GREATEST FILMS OF ALL TIME 2022: 78=**

# **A Brighter Summer Day**

Measured, elliptical and understated, Yang's riveting account of growing up in Taiwan in the early 1960s focuses on a boy's on-off involvement in gang rivalry and violence and his experience of young love. Very much about a society in transition, forever aware of its isolation from mainland China and prey to Americanisation, the film builds steadily towards scenes of considerable power.

**Geoff Andrew, [bfi.org.uk](http://bfi.org.uk)**

I can still vividly recall skipping the last two classes of the day one afternoon in 11th Grade, going off to a nearby library and stumbling on a stream of this movie long before it had been restored. So I sat for four hours, watching a heavily compressed stream of an already low-resolution LaserDisc rip, and was totally mesmerised. The characters were Taiwanese yet I related so heavily to that search for identity and sense of alienation. In the years since, it's only become more meaningful for me – it's a profound study of a social ecosystem, our daily lives and its relation to a political situation, the hopes and dreams of youth we have despite it, and the mistakes we make when we believe the world is incomprehensible.

**Neil Bahadur, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 2022-23**

## **Edward Yang on 'A Brighter Summer Day'**

Our reaction to the real life murder back in 1960 was that it wasn't a big deal. There were fights all the time; the massacre of the 217 Gang in the film is based on an actual event. This murder seemed only a little more serious, though it did surprise everyone in the school maybe because it wasn't very acceptable to go dating at the time, especially for younger kids. But I found that the incident stayed with me and when I began researching it found that most of my contemporaries remembered it clearly too, whereas older people had forgotten it. And I began to realise that this was because all of us had sympathy with the kids involved. It could have happened to any one of us.

I happened to know a number of people closely associated with the boy, and so I was able to research the facts of the case in some detail. But only for a very short period did I feel any need to be faithful to the facts; it soon became clear that it wasn't simply a question of what had happened to this specific boy and girl. Once I realised that, I was free to construct a fictional family for him, and to create the other characters as well. In fact, the other writers and I built up detailed psychological profiles and personal histories for virtually every character in the film. If someone asked me to make a 300-episode TV series about these people, I'd have the material to do it.

In actuality, the boy was a member of the gang. But my philosophy of storytelling is that it's not interesting when a bad guy kills someone or when a good guy does something good; it gets interesting only when a good guy does bad things or vice versa. If Xiao Si'r belonged to a gang and killed someone, the entire focus would be blurred. The real-life girl had a background very similar to the one I gave Ming; that's why I had such sympathy for her. Just about all the native Taiwanese at the time still had

close family ties, whereas the Mainlanders arrived detached from their old family structures. Ming's is an extreme case in point. For a girl that age to have no security, no obvious future...

Gangs have always existed in Chinese society, as they do today. They exist because they fulfil a need; the Chinese have never been able to structure justice or law enforcement very well, and so there are always lots of holes in the system that need to be filled at local level. Sometimes I think that's a positive thing, but maybe I'm just romanticising it. China's history is full of strong central governments that failed to understand the immediate needs of local people, and communities always found ways to fill that vacuum. And so I think that secret societies and gangs are very characteristic of Chinese culture.

American influence meant a lot to any generation, particularly to kids from Mainland families (like me), who found themselves detached from their roots. Learning to stand on our own feet, we found plenty to identify with in American individualism. At the time, of course, America had the world's dominant popular culture. Everywhere else was still in the process of rebuilding after the war. Also, you have to remember that no one in China ever thought that we'd win the war. The Chinese government never really had a plan to win. And when it was all suddenly over, thanks to the US, the American forces in Taiwan inevitably represented a kind of stability. The image of America as a model modern country grew strong. And America was always fresh. If you tuned into a rock 'n' roll show on US Forces Radio, there'd be a new Number One every week. Whereas if you tuned to a Chinese music station, you'd hear the same thing over and over again.

When people ask me what the murder has to do with the political climate, I always say: 'Go back and watch it again!' Actually, if you follow the main characters through the story, it's clear enough that the film's 'hidden' meaning has to do with conformity and non-conformity. Xiao Si'r and his father are both loners, and it was inevitable at the time that anyone with a conscience, anyone with honour, would become a loner. In Chinese history, or at least recent history, it has always been the educated class that suffered worst. It happened in Taiwan in the late 40s, when most of the Taiwanese elite was eliminated; it happened during the political purges of the martial law period; it happened in Tiananmen Square in 1989. In the film, Zhang gets into trouble because he relies on his supposed friendship with the official Wang, but if it hadn't been that it would have been something else. That's the tragic thing about being educated, decent and conscientious in times like those.

In structuring the film, we looked for ironies and tried to set up connecting chains of action and reaction. For example, would-be usurper Sly might start something, and the consequences would have to relate to what happens to Ming. We tried to anchor it by tying characters to particular events, but each strand was designed to contribute to the scope of what we were building up. It took us some time to work it all out. Even though the full version runs four hours, I think it's very lean. My rough-cut was 20 minutes longer, and if I hadn't cut those 20 minutes out it would have been flabby.

**Edward Yang interviewed by Tony Rayns, *Sight and Sound*, March 1993**

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## **A BRIGHTER SUMMER DAY (GULING JIE SHAONIAN SHAREN SHIJIAN)**

*Director:* Edward Yang

*Production Company:* Yang and His Gang Filmmakers

*Executive Producer:* Zhan Hongzhi

*Producer:* Yu Weiyen

*Assistant Producer:* Yang Liping

*Production Manager:* Wu Zhuang

*Project Co-ordinator:* Vincent Chin

*Assistant Directors:* Cai Guohui, Yang Shunqing

*Continuity:* Chen Rofei, Lin Yuehui, Chen Xiangqi

*Screenplay:* Edward Yang, Yan Hongya, Yang Shunqing, Lai Mingtang

*Cinematography:* Zhang Huigong

*Lighting:* Li Longyu

*1st Camera Assistant:* Hong Wuxiu

*Gaffers:* Yang Zhiguo, Bao Junhong

*Grips:* Qu Dehai, Xu Xianliang, Chen Taisong

*Still Photography:* Wang Geng-Yü, Yang Shunqing

*Editor:* Chen Bowen

*Production Designers:* Yu Weiyen, Edward Yang

*Set Decorator:* Yang Shunqing

*Art Work:* Zheng Kangnian

*Props:* Tan Zhihua

*Costumes:* Chen Rofei, Wu Leqing, Zhu Meiyu

*Make-up:* Wu Shuhui

*Music Supervisor:* Zhan Hongda

*Sound:* Du Duzhi

*Boom Operator:* Yang Jing'an

*Public Relations:* Yan Hongya, Jiang Weihua

### **Cast**

Zhang Zhen (*Xiao Si'r, Zhang Zhen*)

Lisa Yang (*Ming (Liu Zhiming)*)

Zhang Guozhu (*Zhang Ju, the father*)

Elaine Jin (*Mrs Zhang, the mother*)

Wang Juan (*Juan, the eldest sister*)

Zhang Han (*Lao Er, the elder brother*)

Jiang Xiuqiong (*Qiong, the middle sister*)

Lai Fanyun (*Yun, the youngest sister*)

*friends and classmates of Xiao Si'r:*

Wang Qizan (*Cat, Wang Mao*)

Ke Yulun (*Airplane, Ji Fei*)

Tan Zhigang (*Ma*)

Zhang Mingxin (*Underpants, Mingxin*)

Rong Junlong (*Sex Bomb, Zhang Bowen*)

Zhou Huiguo (*Tiger, Xiao Hu*)

Liu Quingoi (*Hefty, Da Ge*)

He Qingxiang (*Animal, Mao Shou*)

Cai Changda, Li Zhongming (*Tiger's buddies*)

Tang Xiaocui (*Jade, Xiao Cui*)

Jiang Mingying (*Jade's girlfriend*)

*Xiaogongyuan gang:*

Lin Hongming (*Honey*)

Wang Zongzheng (*Deuce, Honey's brother*)

Chen Hongyu (*Sly (Huatou)*)

Yang Tianxiang (*Worm, Qiuying*)

Liao Xiaowei, Lin Zhengoing, Li Mingxun,

Chen Taisong (*gang members*)

Cao Yiwen (*guitarist*)

Liu Mingzheng (*bass player*)

Zhang Yiquin (*drummer*)

Yuan Ling (*keyboards*)

*217 gang:*

Yang Shunqing (*Shandong*)

Ni Shujun (*Crazy, Shenjing*)

Wang Weiming (*Ka Wu*)

Zheng Jianxiong (*Wu Ba*)

Wang Yeming (*Baldie, Guangtou*)

Qu Dehai (*Cowboy, Xibu*)

Shi Peiming (*Kid Brother, Xiao Di*)

Liu Liangzou (*Mouth*)

Li Mingzhi, Lin Yuchen, Zhong Yicheng,

He Jiaxian (*gang members*)

*Nannat Road gang:*

Shen Hang (*Threads (Yezi)*)

Fu Yangye (*Cushion (Kexing)*)

*Wanhua Market gang:*

Li Qingfu (*Headmaster, Shiye*)

Chen Yiwen (*Horsecart, Mache*)

Lin Renjie (*Grapefruit, Wendan*)

Zheng Yuancheng (*Morphine, Mafei*)

Cai Yiqing (*Headlights, Liangguang*)

Feng Guoqiang (*Piggy*)

Ying Yulong (*Diaper*)

Zheng Kangnian, Xu Xianliang, Tang Zhijian,

Zeng Zihong (*gang members*)

*others:*

Xu Ming (*Wang, Zhang's old friend*)

Cai Qin (*Wang's wife*)

Zhuo Ming (*Uncle Fat, grocer*)

Zhang Wenyan (*Uncle Fat's wife*)

Xiao Lianlian (*Uncle Fat's daughter*)

Zhang Yingzheng (*Ming's mother*)

Jin Shijie (*Ming's seventh uncle*)

Lin Liqing (*seventh uncle's wife*)

Tang Ruyun (*Mrs Xia*)

Lu Qiuyun (*Mrs Fang*)

Duan Zhongqi (*Mr Chen*)

Cao Jinling (*Mrs Chen*)

Xiao Zhiwen (*Ma's mother*)

Chen Liangyue (*chauffeur*)

Chen Lihua (*Reverend Chen*)

Zhang Kezhong (*Juan's boyfriend*)

Lu Deming (*Airplane's father*)

Xiao Ai (*icecream parlour lady*)

Chen Xishen (*blind fighter pilot*)

Huang Shujuan (*girl vendor*)

Shen Hongshen (*dean of conduct*)

Meng Qiliang (*assistant dean of conduct*)

Yan Hongya (*Chinese Studies teacher*)

Ma Tingni (*mathematics teacher*)

Hu Xiangping (*military adviser*)

Sun Baogui, Jiang Weihua (*librarians*)

Shi Mingyang (*doctor*)

Chen Limei (*clinic nurse*)

Chen Xiangqi (*doctor's fiancée*)

Lai Denan (*doctor's father*)

Lin Ruping (*hospital nurse*)

Danny Dunn (*film director*)

Shi Mingyu (*temperamental star*)

Lin Hengzheng (*male lead*)

Shi Yuhua (*assistant director*)

Shu Guozhi (*cameraman*)

Guo Changru (*key grip*)

Gao Miaohui (*producer*)

Liu Changhao (*juvenile division officer*)

Xie Hongjun, Duan Zhongzhang (*juvenile division cops*)

Hou Dejian (*detective*)

Lang Zuyun (*policewoman*)

Tang Xiangju, Chen Laifu (*policemen*)

Li Minnan (*workman*)

Yu Weiyan (*senior interrogator*)

Wang Daonan (*junior interrogator*)

Wu Zhuang, Wu Leqing (*officers*)

Li Ziqiang (*prisoner*)

Yang Li-Ping, Zhou Huiling (*lovers in park*)

Taiwan 1991

237 mins

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