

# 长春

# ETERNAL SPRING

Animated Documentary 86 min | Canada | 2022

## PRESS KIT

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## LOGLINE

Confronted with government denunciations and human rights violations against their spiritual practice, a group of Chinese activists executes a bold and perilous plan to hack into state television.

## SYNOPSIS

In March 2002, a state TV station in China was hijacked by members of outlawed spiritual group Falun Gong. Their goal was to counter the government narrative about their practice. In the aftermath, police raids sweep Changchun City, and comic book illustrator Daxiong (*Justice League*, *Star Wars*), a Falun Gong practitioner, is forced to flee.

He arrives in North America, blaming the hijacking for worsening a violent repression. But his views are challenged when he meets the lone surviving participant to have escaped China, now living in Seoul, South Korea. Combining present-day footage with 3D animation inspired by Daxiong's art, *Eternal Spring* retraces the event on its 20th anniversary, and brings to life an unprecedented story of defiance, harrowing eyewitness accounts of persecution, and an exhilarating tale of determination to speak up for political and religious freedoms, no matter the cost.



## DIRECTORS' STATEMENT

### **JASON LOFTUS**

I first worked with artist Daxiong on a video game I produced called *Shuyan Saga* (2018 Canadian Screen Award nominee, Best Original Interactive Production). I had known Daxiong's work on *Justice League* and *Star Wars* comic franchises, and was struck by his talent in bringing characters to life in his illustrations. Through our collaboration, I learned why Daxiong left his hometown of Changchun and the connection this had to an unprecedented hijacking of the Chinese state television in 2002 by members of the outlawed Falun Gong spiritual group.

I came to know Falun Gong myself in 1998 through an interest in meditation and Eastern philosophy. At that time, Falun Gong's slow-moving exercises were still freely practiced in Chinese parks, and its adherents numbered in the tens of millions. When authorities banned Falun Gong a year later in 1999, they began an extensive state media campaign to vilify it. Those who persisted in practicing were subjected to detention, torture or abuse.

The state media characterizations were a sharp contrast to my own experience with Falun Gong and the community of Chinese expatriates I'd encountered who practiced it. I was sympathetic to the samizdat efforts by adherents to counter the Chinese state narrative on Falun Gong, underpinning what would become a 20-year-long campaign of well-documented human rights abuses. But I wondered how this conflict escalated to a state TV hijacking, especially given Falun Gong's pacifist roots. I wanted to understand what led those involved to carry out this bold act, which ultimately cost several participants their lives.

Pursuing this story would have consequences, however. While simultaneously in production on this film and its predecessor, the investigative documentary and 2020 Slamdance Grand Jury Finalist *Ask No Questions*, Chinese authorities approached my business partners at Tencent, a large Chinese media company that was publishing our *Shuyan Saga* video game. Tencent was forced to cut ties with my company in the midst of our launch. A mobile publishing deal was also axed with another Chinese distributor. Furthermore, Chinese public security officers contacted the family in China of my wife and filmmaking partner, Masha Yujiao Loftus, and warned them that the regime knew what we were up to overseas.

Despite the threats and interference, which I detailed in an op-ed I wrote for the *Wall Street Journal* in late 2020, I felt it was crucial to continue with my filmmaking on these subjects. Firstly, the crimes against Falun Gong adherents in China are abhorrent and they are continuing today. Outside China, the plight of Falun Gong, if known at all, is often regarded as an issue of the past as it has proceeded for years and is not often regarded as news. Inside China, the story is highly censored. My wife, Masha, shares a hometown with the protagonists in the film (Changchun City), but having had no contact with the Falun Gong community there, she was completely unaware of the atrocities taking place out of sight in her own city.

Secondly, regardless of one's interest in Falun Gong's repression, we see the same tactics and issues rising to the surface with other groups in China, and this story serves to shed light on broader issues.

*Eternal Spring* explores religious persecution at a time when similar abuses continue against millions of Uighur Muslims in northwest China. It is also a story about media censorship, misinformation, the need for transparency, and freedom of speech. These themes are crucial in the wake of controversies around transparency in the reporting of important public health information at the onset of what's now a global pandemic.

After the rise of anti-Asian hate related to the spread of Covid-19, this film also presents a needed narrative featuring courageous Chinese protagonists. It demonstrates that the Chinese regime does not by default represent Chinese people, and reminds us there are remarkable Chinese individuals struggling for human rights, transparency, freedom, and justice.

Creatively, *Eternal Spring* presented an opportunity to use animation in documentary filmmaking not only as a device for recreation, but as a means to explore the inner journey of an artist who endured torture and for whom the process of creating these images offered catharsis.

*Eternal Spring* offered a unique combination of dramatic heist story, an ongoing and important human rights concern, and an artist's personal journey in bringing these stories to life and facing his own recollections of loss and suffering in the process.

## FILMMAKERS



### **JASON LOFTUS** DIRECTOR/PRODUCER

A Peabody Award-winning filmmaker and four-time Canadian Screen Award nominee, Jason's work spans documentary, docuseries, virtual reality, narrative games, and animation.

Jason produced the docuseries on Chinese cuisine, *Confucius Was a Foodie*, which was named Best Food Series on TV at the 2021 Taste Awards. It has aired in over 100 territories worldwide, including on PBS stations across the US and NatGeo People Asia.

Jason's directorial debut in a documentary feature, together with Eric Pedicelli, was called *Ask No Questions* and premiered in competition at Slamdance in 2020. It won the Copper Wing (Best World Cinema) at the Phoenix Film Festival, was endorsed by artist Ai Weiwei, and was nominated by Film Threat as 2021's Best Socially Relevant Documentary, among other honours.

*Eternal Spring* is Jason's follow-up to *Ask No Questions* and his second documentary feature as director.



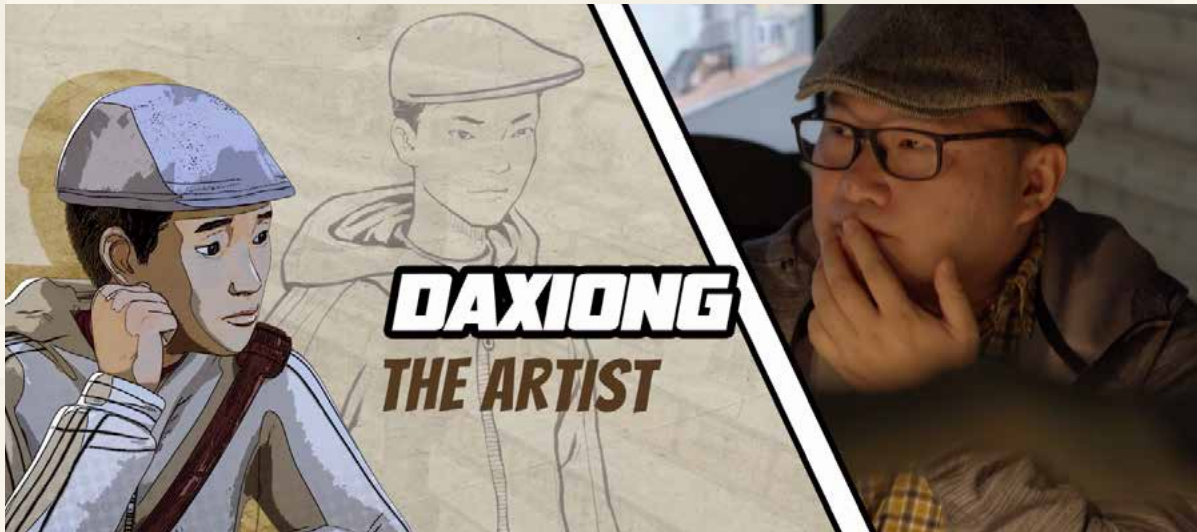
### **DAVID SCHMIDT** EDITOR

David Schmidt has edited documentary films for a decade. His work has appeared at the AGO, Toronto International Film Festival, TVO, CBC, and CTV. He worked on *Anthropocene: The Human Epoch*, winner of the Canadian Screen Award for Best Documentary.

Previously he worked on *Long Time Running*, First Runner Up for TIFF's People's Choice Awards for Documentaries. David holds a BFA in Film Production and Screenwriting from York University.



## SUBJECT



**Daxiong** is an internationally recognized illustrator and comic artist, having worked in China, Europe, and North America. In 1999, he created Qicartoon Studios in Jilin province where he served as the chief illustrator. In 2000, he was the winner of the Shanghai Animation & Comic Competition with his work *Chinese Ghost Stories* which received publication soon after the competition. In 2002, Qicartoon Studios earned third place in the Shanghai Animation Competition for its work *Zhuzi Baijia*. In Europe, he received top honors at the 33rd annual Angoulême International Comics Festival for his work in *Demi Gods and Semi Devils* written by Chinese novelist Jin Yong.

Since 1999, through his studio, Daxiong has published more than 100 titles which are being distributed in China, Japan, and Taiwan. In 2008, Daxiong was arrested in China because his art offended the Chinese Communist Party.

After relocating to New York City, Daxiong founded Flag Art Studios. He was the artist on the *Top 10 Special #1* with Wildstorm Productions and subsequently was announced as the artist for the graphic novella, *Star Wars: Adventures: Luke Skywalker and the Treasure of the Dragonsnakes* with writer Tom Taylor through Dark Horse Comics. Daxiong was also the artist for a 10-page story titled "Superman and Doctor Light in Samurai" in DC's 80 Page Giant, *Justice League of America*, written by Amanda Mcmurry.

## **AWARDS & FESTIVALS**

News of each festival selection is embargoed until the festival has announced its lineup. Please confirm with [judithc@loftysky.com](mailto:judithc@loftysky.com) if you're unsure and would like to report on an upcoming festival appearance.

### **Thessaloniki Documentary Festival, March 2022**

Official Selection

World Premiere

Newcomers Competition

### **London Human Rights Watch Film Festival, March 2022**

Official Selection

UK Premiere

### **Movies That Matter, April 2022**

Official Selection

Competition Programme: Activist

Netherlands Premiere

### **Krakow Film Festival, May/June 2022**

Official Selection

International Documentary Competition

Polish Premiere

**More to come.**

## POSTER & PRODUCTION STILLS

High-resolution stills and film poster can be downloaded [here](#).



Still 1: Daxiong illustrates memories of Changchun. Photo Credit: Lofty Sky Pictures.



Still 2: Night of the TV hijacking. Photo Credit: Lofty Sky Pictures



Still 3: Director Jason Loftus (L) with artist Daxiong (R). Photo Credit: Lofty Sky Pictures





Still 4: Memories of Changchun. The birch trees have eyes. Credit: Lofty Sky Pictures



Still 5: Haunted by memories of persecution. Credit: Lofty Sky Pictures



Still 6: Lei Ming on the run. Credit: Lofty Sky Pictures



Still 7: Violent arrest. Credit: Lofty Sky Pictures



Still 8: "Mr. White" recalls his labour camp experience. Credit: Lofty Sky Pictures



Still 9: Liang in captivity. Credit: Lofty Sky Pictures

# CREDITS

**Directed by** Jason Loftus

**Written by** Jason Loftus

## **Additional Writing**

Masha Loftus

The Pearman Brothers

**Produced by** Jason Loftus

## **Producers**

Yvan Pinard

Kevin Koo

**Executive Producer** Masha Loftus

**Director of Photography** John Tran, csc

**Animation Director** David St-Amant

**Edited By** David Schmidt

**Lead Concept, Storyboard, and 2D Artist** Daxiong

**Music By** Tom Hill

**Casting & Voice Director for Animation** Masha Loftus

## **FEATURING**

Daxiong

Jin Xuezhe (“Mr. White”)

Lan Lihua (“Xiao Lan”)

Wang Jianmin

Zhang Zhongyu

Wang Liansu

Wang Huilian

## **ANIMATION CAST**

**Daxiong** Himself

**Jin Xuezhe “Mr. White”** Henry Guo

**Liang Shi Jian**

**Big Truck** Ben Li

**Little Wei** Yu Feng



**Zhang Wen** Tan Junfeng  
**Lei Ming** Yu Zhicheng  
**Liu Weiming** Tony Bai  
**Aunt Zhou** Zhang Yuhuan  
**Sister Chen** Xiao Yanrong

#### **SUPPORTING ANIMATION CAST**

**Liang's mother-in-Law** Zhang Yuhuan  
**Liang's wife** Masha Loftus  
**Liang's daughter** Evelyn Guo  
**Young Daxiong** Tan Dabao  
**Boy at the winter festival** Tan Erbao  
**Girl at the winter festival** Masha Loftus  
**Train attendant** Shi Jian  
**Daughter of train attendant** Masha Loftus  
**Police in orange jacket** Zheng Zhi  
**Chief of police** Tony Bai  
**Sister of Big Truck** Xiao Yanrong  
**Relative of Little Wei** Henry Guo  
**Roommate of Mr. White** Shi Jian  
**Waiter** Tony Bai  
**Jianmin Wang** Henry Guo  
**Taxi Driver** Ben Li

#### **Unit Production Managers**

Kevin Koo  
Yvan Pinard

**Production Coordinator** Masha Loftus

#### **SECOND UNIT**

##### **Flying Cloud Productions**

Leon Lee, Second Unit Director  
Jacey Shi, Second Unit Coordinator

**Set Decorator** Vivien Csere

#### **Camera Operators**

Chris Goll  
Scott Burton  
Eric Pedicelli  
Kevin Koo

#### **Still Photographer**

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Kevin Koo

#### **Sound Recordist**

Brian Cushin  
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Eric Lork

**CG Supervisor** Kevin Zimny

#### **Post Production Supervisor**

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Kevin Koo

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**Leica Reel Editor** Rhodanim Belo Jr

#### **2D & 3D Concepts**

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Ben Li  
Leinweber Cansino

#### **2D Matte Painting**

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Chun-yi Lin  
Fuyu Yang  
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David Prentice

**3D Matte Painting**

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Jong Ho Kim  
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Yoo Hoon Kim  
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**Character & Prop Modeling/Texturing**

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Yoo Hoon Kim  
Vipin A Jacob

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Yvan Pinard

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**Project Coordinator**

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Big Picture Research (Laura Lucas)  
Masha Loftus

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Washington Post  
Amnesty International  
BBC  
The Associated Press (AP)  
Minghui.org  
Christopher Huppertz

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