

# BRICS gets big-screen treatment

Filmmakers team up for an anthology that gives a unique cultural insight into each of the bloc's five nations

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If you know anything about BRICS and its activities, you may be under the impression that the bloc is all about dry economics and politics. Prepare then for a fascinating cultural insight into the five-nation grouping with a film that opens in select Chinese cinemas next month.

*Where Has Time Gone?* is the first feature film coproduced by the five BRICS countries — Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. After its test screening, the movie will open across China later this year, said producer and co-director Jia Zhangke.

The 110-minute anthology comprises five short tales, directed by Jia, Alexey Fedorchenko of Russia, Madhur Bhandarkar of India, Walter Moreira Salles, Jr of Brazil and Jahmil XT Qubeka of South Africa.

"The world has undergone rapid social and economic change, and most people now lead incredibly fast-paced lives," Jia said. "Time flies, and it is the theme of time that resonates with the five filmmakers from different countries."

Jia, 47, said that acclaimed anthology movies such as *Ten Minutes Older: The Trumpet* (2002) and *New York, I Love You* (2008) inspired him.

The acclaimed art-house director Jia has garnered a lot of attention in the West since his directorial debut *Xiao Wu*, also known as *The Pick-pocket*, which won several international awards in the late 1990s.

Most of his movies, such as *Still Life* (2006) and *A Touch of Sin* (2013), set emotional stories against a backdrop of the changes that are changing the face of China.

In *Revive*, the Chinese short story in *Where Has Time Gone?*, Jia again shows his stylish bent for depicting modern Chinese and the confused lives they lead.

The story, set in Pingyao, a town in the northern Shanxi province, centers on a middle-aged couple who wrestle with the question of whether they should have a second child.

The story begins with a comedy scene in which a man brandishing a sword jumps off an ancient section of wall to fight a group of "hunters" who want to capture him. Soon, several tourists show up and use their smartphones to take photos. The couple and their neighbors are all live-action performers working and living in the town.

"I've always wanted to shoot a modern story that is set in an ancient town," Jia said. "Pingyao has a history that goes back more than 3,000 years. It has been flooded by youngsters since it became a tour-



From left: Film director, Jahmil XT Qubeka of South Africa, Jia Zhangke of China, Alexey Fedorchenko of Russia and Brazilian scriptwriter Gabriela Amaral Almeida, at the second BRICS Film Festival in Chengdu, Southwest China's Sichuan province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



*Where Has Time Gone?* is a coproduction consisting of five short stories that portray the unique cultures of each of the BRICS countries. The film gives an insight into the five-nation grouping.

ist attraction. To some extent, the newcomers have breathed life into the old town."

In addition, Jia has long been fascinated by the topic of couples having a second child and going through mid-life crises.

"Since the country adopted the policy that allows families to have a second child, many couples have expressed the wish to do so. But they also encounter many problems, such as economic stress and gaining approval for their decision from the first child.

"I also wanted to shoot a story about a couple reigniting their

enthusiasm for one another and for their own lives after being married for many years."

Apart from serving as director, Jia talked with the other four directors about their scripts, bringing consistency in the way they filmed and helping bring all the material together.

Most of the team spoke English or Chinese, but Jia said language and differences in time zones presented the biggest challenges.

"At one point we translated the dialogue of the Brazilian and Russian stories from English, but linguists told us that handling things

that way resulted in the original flavor being lost, so we retranslated both versions from Portuguese and Russian."

The Brazilian story, titled *When the Earth Trembles*, focuses on the lives of survivors after a massive mudflow — caused by the bursting of a mine dam struck Minas Gerais state in southeastern Brazil, on Nov 5, 2015, killing at least 17 people.

Some of the scenes use news photos to give a real touch, said the Brazilian producers during the 2017 Chengdu BRICS Film Festival held in the southwestern Sichuan province, from June 23 to 27.

In the Russian section of the film, titled *Breathing*, a man suspicious about his wife's loyalty is accidentally injured as they quarrel. To save her husband's life the woman has to turn a broken accordion into an oxygen pump.

Fedorchenko, the director, said in Chengdu that he got the inspiration from a Chinese news report about such an unlikely use of the musical instrument.

Jia said that the South African story surprised him most. *Stillborn* is a sci-fi tale about a janitor who fights against her destiny, which is pre-programmed in a futuristic world.

"It explores the recycling of life with a rich imagination," Jia said.

For Chinese viewers the Indian story, *Mumbai Mist*, may strike the most resonant chord. In a sprawling city a retired man drives away loneliness by befriending a street boy.

All five stories end in an old saying or a famous line about time, which acts as a link.

"Before *Where Has Time Gone?* I took part in similar projects (that brought filmmakers from multiple countries together) initiated by South Korea and Switzerland. I feel so proud that now I can join a Chinese-led project," Jia said.

"The coproduction is making history by transforming BRICS from a political and economic concept into a cultural one."