

Link to the film: <https://youtu.be/vDPfpgMSXL0>

*with... before 8 am* (2024-2025)

7: 32

Ning Zhou

*With... before 8 am* is a short film shot with a DV camera throughout the summer of 2024, as part of a one-year chronicle project with my peach-farmer grandparents in their village in southeastern coastal China. The film begins before dawn, when I arrive at their home only to find it empty because they have already disappeared into the peach grove. Observing and joining them in their agricultural activities, I began to realize how distant I had become from their world, one shaped by the rhythms of soil, sun, water, wind, and season.

Through documenting their daily routines, from digging, pruning, watering, to harvesting, I started to recognize these gestures as forms of old ecological intelligence quietly passed through generations. Their knowledge of weather patterns, soil textures, and the life cycle of the peach trees embodies a kind of resilience that adapts to change without abandoning its roots. They are, in a way, like two peach seeds deeply rooted in the soil: absorbing, growing, and devoting themselves fully.

In recent years, the “socialist new countryside” movement has transformed many villages into tourist sites, turning lived landscapes into curated attractions. As homes and lives become commercialized and exoticized, some traditions that villagers have followed for generations fall into an existential uncertainty. For more than a century, people in this village have been connected with one another and with the land through the peaches. My grandparents remain deeply bound to their soil, not as caretakers of a commodity but as participants in a living ecosystem.

*With... before 8 am* reflects on this intergenerational dialogue between tradition and transformation. In their gestures, I find a quiet form of resistance and adaptation, an embodied knowledge that continues to grow among the peach groves.