

SURF NATION

A film by Jessica Q. Chen and Jeremiah M. Bogert, Jr.



[KEY IMAGES](#)

88 minutes // English and Mandarin with English subtitles // 2022

Website: surfnationfilm.com | Social: [@surfnationfilm](https://twitter.com/surfnationfilm)



[Sneak Peek Screenings at the Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival](#)

Saturday May 7, 2022 at 3:00pm PST and 5pm PST

[World Premiere at Mountainfilm](#)

Friday May 27 at 5:30pm MST, Sunday May 29 at 3pm MST

Port Townsend Film Festival

Thursday Sept 22 at 9:30pm PDT, Friday, Sept 23 at 12:15pm PDT

Santa Cruz Film Festival

Saturday, October 8 at 4:45 pm PDT - tickets on sale now, followed by Q&A with the directors

Newport Beach Film Festival

Saturday, October 15 at 1pm, followed by Q&A with the directors

Portland Film Festival

TBD

Hawaii International Film Festival

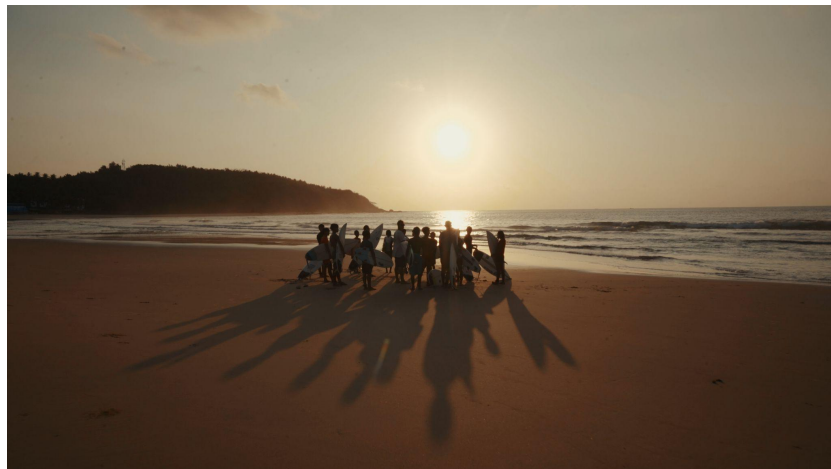
TBD

DOCUTAH

Thursday Nov 3 at 6pm, Saturday Nov 5 at 1pm

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Surf Nation | LOGLINE & SYNOPSIS



LOGLINE -

As China trains its first generation of Olympic surfers, two promising young athletes - Alex and Lolo - navigate adolescence, freedom and their love of the sport.

SYNOPSIS

With unprecedented access, *Surf Nation* is a feature-length observational documentary that tells a story beginning in Hainan, China's southernmost province where hundreds of athletes as young as 9-years-old train as part of the Chinese National Surf team. These young recruits have left their families around the country and are paid to become surfers with Olympic aspirations.

Shot in a tropical paradise with miles of empty beaches, aspiring athletes and their international coaches live in an old hotel that has become the hub of surfing in China. Over a period of two years, we follow two of China's top surfers, Alex, 17, who dreams of competing at the highest levels of pro surfing but has contempt for training, and Lolo, 22, who rejects a traditional life for a Chinese woman and surfs despite her parents' disapproval. We follow them as they train with the team, compete - and most of all, discover what they want their lives to be.

Surf Nation | CHARACTERS



Alex, Chinese National Surf team member, 17
Alex is the best surfer in China and his dream is to compete among the world's top surfers. While he's China's best chance for winning an Olympic medal, his rebellious nature is displayed by his contempt for the strict training program and the leaders who run it. Raised by his single father, Alex dropped out of school at age six and is used to living a life without many rules. His heroes

include Kelly Slater, and his natural talent has caught the attention of Western sponsors who see him as a gateway to sell their products to the world's largest consumer market.

As the pressure of competing mounts, Alex walks away from the team only to have a change of heart. He eventually returns to the team to reclaim his place at the top.



Lolo, Chinese National Surf team member, 22

Lolo doesn't want a traditional life for a Chinese woman and makes some unconventional choices despite her parents' disapproval. Once she learned to surf at age 19, Lolo decided not to attend university or work in an office. She also decides not to marry her controlling fiancé. Instead, she joins the surf team for the housing and monthly

stipend, but the rigorous training soon smothers her joy of surfing. Dreaming of a 'surfing life,' something as yet undefined in China, she eventually leaves the team to pursue this goal.



Peter 'PT' Townend

To Alex he is "grandpa," to the surfing world he is the first world champion, winning the ASP title as a 23-year-old in 1976. PT grew up in Australia and was among the best surfers in the world throughout the 1970s and 1980s. He has since then established a presence in the sport and has appeared in films such as 'Big Wednesday' and 'Step Into Liquid.' PT has known Kelly Slater since Slater was a teenager and can be considered one of the sport's elder statesmen.

He became the first coach of China's national team in 2016.



The Chinese National Surf Team

Shortly after surfing became an official Olympic sport in 2016, the Chinese Olympic Committee established an official training program in a country with no widespread surfing culture. Most of the best kids were recruited from Hainan, a tropical island in the South China Sea. Other provinces recruited kids from swimming and gymnastics programs. After a year, a couple

hundred athletes from around the country had arrived to train at the academy. In their first appearance at the International Surfing Association world championships the Chinese team finished last. The next year they finished in the middle of nearly 50 other teams. The emphasis is on consistent progress and close monitoring of individual development. The stakes for the

surfers are high, and those who do not show consistent progress lose their salaries and are sent home.

Hainan

The surf capital of China, Hainan is an island province of ten million people in the South China Sea. Over the past two decades Hainan has become a place for people seeking to escape large mainland cities. The city of Sanya attracts tourists and second home owners but the small towns along the coast draw young people looking for an alternative to urban office jobs. The first generation of surfers established communities in and around Riyue Bay, where winter swell hits tropical beaches and hidden point breaks, the cost of living is cheap and the water is warm all year long.

Surf Nation | DIRECTORS' STATEMENTS



When I first heard China was forming a national surf team, I saw an opportunity to express something deeper than the news headlines we read about China. On the surface, this story appears to be about China's quest for an Olympic gold medal in surfing. But as it unfolds, it becomes a story about young people finding the courage to push against the expectations of family and society, and explore what matters most to them.

While we closely follow the Chinese national surf academy in Hainan, this story reflects something inside each person. China is a place that less than a decade ago had only a hundred or so surfers, despite its 9,000 miles of coastline and a population of 1.4 billion. It's undergone unprecedented economic development and the young people are more connected than ever before on social media, giving them a window to the entire world. Their values and lifestyles are being shaped outside of China. So while for some youth, living up to society's measures of success is enough, for others like Alex and Lolo, they are interested in much more.

My personal connection to this story is as a Chinese American video journalist and filmmaker. The line of work I chose is something my family encouraged but never quite understood. I don't see mainstream media covering these stories and the pursuit of a path that seems even a little crazy to some until you've proven yourself on the other side is something that resonates deeply with me. Something about the existence of Chinese surfing — a culture that values collectivism with a sport that is individualistic — felt triumphant to me. I hope Surf Nation inspires audiences with ideas that resonate with young people anywhere and connects with

their desire to go against the grain for a life that is true to them.

- *Jessica Q. Chen,*

Director

When I learned that China had created an official sports academy to teach surfing and to eventually compete for Olympic medals, I wondered how the rebelliousness inherent in the sport's culture would be preserved inside a structured environment. I knew that surfing was relatively unknown in China. Would young people inside this academy see surfing as a way to establish themselves as individuals? How would these young athletes cope with the pressure to win an Olympic medal? I thought about what surfing meant to me, about my own teenage children and how they manage expectations and pressure to perform.

My version of surfing has a lot to do with facing fear and exercising a choice different from what was expected of me. In the two years I spent filming this story I met many people who were drawn to surfing or at least drawn to a version of surfing that was in conflict with what was expected of them.

Lolo, a young woman, decides against a university education and an office job in favor of a surfing life. Alex, the best surfer in China, recognizes that his future lies outside of the national team structure and pushes against the team's collective goal of the Olympics. I am beyond grateful for Alex and Lolo's willingness to share their lives at a critical time and place with me and Jessica.

Everyone remembers breaking away at some point in their lives - maybe as a teenager or maybe later. Those choices are filled with risk and doubt, especially when parents and coaches might have other ideas about what constitutes success. The path can seem harder yet impossible not to take.

Additionally, we all remember facing pressure from above and from within. Alex, Lolo and Daisy feel pressure and do their very best to meet it. I have great sympathy and respect for them, and I have seen it in my own children. So much of what I needed to know to make this film came from my experiences as a parent of three teenagers.

Alex and Lolo exist in a context in which they are outliers, and they do have doubts just as we all do. But because China has changed so rapidly, Alex and Lolo are nearly unrecognizable to their families, and they don't have ready examples to follow. So surfing's culture, like that of many other sports, helps create the space for Alex and Lolo to figure out what they want in life. In many ways surfing has done that for me and for countless others. - *Jeremiah M. Bogert, Jr.,*
Director

Surf Nation | DIRECTORS' Q&A



How did the idea for this film come about?

We were colleagues at the L.A. Times for years, working together in the photo and video department. One day we stumbled across a story in Surfer Magazine about a new surf team being formed in China as a result of surfing becoming an official Olympic sport for Tokyo 2020. We're both amateur surfers ourselves and understood the inherent rebelliousness of surf culture and were curious how that would be accepted in a country like China. We had a hunch that there was more to uncover in this story, and that it would probably require a feature length telling - beyond the scope of the newspaper.

So, on our own, we spent a month trying to directly reach the coaches, but our efforts were in vain. Finally, after contacting the writer of the article, we got an email address for PT Townend, Alex's Australian mentor and former Surfing World Champion. To our surprise, PT got back to us almost immediately and from there, the process really sped up.

We were eventually introduced to Moyu Huang, the top Chinese coach, who invited us to Hainan to spend a few weeks meeting with the coaches, leaders from Beijing and, of course, the kids.

When in this process did you know you had a film?

Early on, Alex and Lolo's conflicts felt relatable to our own personal experiences. We believed that seeing Alex and Lolo go through their journey would result in an universal story worth telling and an experience that so many young people can relate to whether you live in China or the U.S.

How did you negotiate access to this story?

We were fortunate that Moyu Huang and other leaders in the sports administration wanted the story of the new surfing program to be told. Moyu's idea was to blend coaching techniques from China's gymnastics program, which emphasized rigorous physical preparation, with his personal ideas on sports psychology, which de-emphasized winning in favor of enjoyment. The leaders of this program saw it as a departure from other Chinese Olympic training programs. Jessica speaks Mandarin and was able to establish strong relationships with the kids. Our

requirement of the team leaders was that our access be free from any interference and that was happily agreed to. Finally, we just kept showing up, which showed we were committed to their story.

Will the film be shown in China?

We are hoping to finalize distribution soon and want to make the film available around the world. We would love to return to the surf academy to screen the film for all the coaches and athletes someday. We've shared the film with Alex and Lolo and they both loved it!

How did you pick your main characters?

Alex stood out right away because in addition to being the best surfer he was unafraid to challenge team leaders and coaches. He embodied a rebelliousness along with a drive to succeed that characterizes many top surfers. But, he was a kid living apart from his family and most of the other kids wanted to beat him. He was under great pressure and was facing it with courage. Most of the other kids had less pressure and were much more willing to go along with what was asked of them.

Lolo told us right away she had thoughts about leaving the team to escape the competitive pressure and that her family disapproved of her for not going to university, having an office job or raising a family. She was pushing back against both the team and her family and facing those challenges with grace and determination. As characters, Alex and Lolo were open about their challenges and doubts which made them appealing subjects. They each had a version of conflict in their lives and were open to sharing them with us.

Where are Alex and Lolo now?

Alex is currently in Australia, surfing a lot and trying to figure out how to compete in additional WSL events. As is the case with so many high level athletes, the pandemic complicated his training and his ability to travel. Lolo remains in Bali and is building her presence on social media as a representative of a soul surfing lifestyle. She has been there throughout the pandemic and probably surfs everyday. Daisy is in school and living with her family in Hainan Province. Dong continues to train with the team.

Surf Nation | ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS



JESSICA Q. CHEN (DIRECTOR/PRODUCER) is an Emmy award-winning Chinese American filmmaker and video producer at the Los Angeles Times. Her work includes the *WOMEN OF APOLLO* series, which was nominated for an Emmy in 2020; and a short documentary on Caroline Marks, the youngest surfer to qualify for the World Surf League's championship tour, which won an L.A. Press Award. She was an associate producer for National Geographic's *HELL ON EARTH: THE FALL OF SYRIA AND THE RISE OF ISIS*, which premiered at the 2017 Tribeca Film Festival. She has lived in

New Zealand and Jordan, has a master's from Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism and a bachelor's in biology from the University of California, Irvine. She speaks Mandarin and basic Arabic.



JEREMIAH M. BOGERT JR. (DIRECTOR/PRODUCER) is currently a photo editor at The New York Times and has more than 25 years of experience producing award-winning visual stories. He was the photo assignments editor at The New York Times during the 9/11 terrorist attacks for which the paper won two Pulitzer Prizes in photography. While at the Los Angeles Times, he edited a story on victims of gang violence which won a Pulitzer Prize in 2011 and was part of the team awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 2016 for coverage of the terrorist attacks in San Bernardino. Additionally, at the

Los Angeles Times, he produced several short documentaries, including *CHASING THE SWELL*, a 2012 film about big wave surfing. He received his BA in philosophy from Yale University and his MA in journalism from the University of Missouri.



DIANE QUON (PRODUCER) is an Academy Award nominated producer who worked as a marketing executive at NBC and at Paramount Pictures in LA before moving back to her hometown of Chicago. Diane produced the feature documentaries: Oscar-nominated *MINDING THE GAP* (Hulu, POV); *THE DILEMMA OF DESIRE* (Showtime); Emmy-nominated *FINDING YINGYING* (MTVDocs); *FOR THE LEFT HAND* (PBS), *WUHAN WUHAN* (POV) and *BAD AXE* (IFC Films, SXSW 2022 Audience Award). Upcoming documentaries include: *UNTITLED SAM AND OMAR*

PROJECT, THE UNTITLED 19TH* NEWS FILM, and THE FUTURISTS. In addition, she is developing a fiction film based on a New York Times best-selling book, and Bing Liu's original screenplay. Diane is an Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences and PGA member, a Sundance Creative Producing Fellow, and is a recipient of the Cinereach Producer Award.



NEVO SHINAAR (PRODUCER) is an Israeli-born creative producer based in Chicago. His award-winning films played at film festivals including Sundance, SXSW, AFI Docs and Palm Springs, acquired by Disney+, The Criterion Channel, POV/PBS, and The New York Times, and supported by Tribeca Film Institute, Sundance Institute and Kartemquin Films. Nevo produced STAY CLOSE, a short documentary which was a Cinema Eye Honors 2020 Nominee and shortlisted for the 92nd Academy Awards. He is a founding member of SITE collective, and of Wolf + Me Films. Nevo holds an MFA from Northwestern University in Documentary Media.



CARYN CAPOTOSTO (EXECUTIVE PRODUCER) is a 3-time Emmy-winning documentary producer known for WON'T YOU BE MY NEIGHBOR?, which also received a 2019 Independent Spirit Award, a Producers Guild Award and Critics' Choice Award for Best Documentary. She received a 2016 News and Documentary Emmy Award for her role as co-producer on BEST OF ENEMIES and she was associate producer on the Academy Award and Grammy Award-winning documentary, 20 FEET FROM STARDOM (2013). Other projects include FEELS GOOD MAN, which won a Special Jury Award at Sundance 2020 (Producer), SHANGRI-LA, a music doc series for Showtime (Co-Executive Producer 2019) and the Emmy-nominated Netflix series UGLY DELICIOUS and BREAKFAST, LUNCH, DINNER (Executive Producer 2019-2020).



BONNI COHEN (Executive Producer) has produced and directed an array of award-winning films since co-founding Actual Films over 20 years ago with her film partner, Jon Shenk. Most recently, she produced Oscar-nominated LEAD ME HOME, which premiered at the 2021 Telluride Film Festival and is a Netflix Original. She also recently co-directed ATHLETE A, which won an Emmy for Outstanding Investigative Documentary and received four nominations from the Critics' Choice Awards. Bonni directed AUDRIE & DAISY in 2016, premiering at Sundance and becoming a Netflix Original. Her film, AN INCONVENIENT SEQUEL was the opening night film at the 2017

Sundance Film Festival, earning her a BAFTA nomination. In 2010, Bonni co-founded the Catapult Film Fund, which gives development grants to documentary films.



MARK MITTEN (EXECUTIVE PRODUCER) is an Academy Award-nominated and Emmy award winning producer who has created a variety of media and entertainment projects including originating and producing the Steve James directed documentary ABACUS: SMALL ENOUGH TO JAIL as well as a feature film adaptation with Participant Media. He was a producer on the Roger Ebert documentary, LIFE ITSELF, which was named best documentary by The National Board of Review and The Producers Guild of America. Other documentaries Mark has produced include RINGSIDE, FINDING YINGYING and the recently released

THE LOST LEONARDO and the upcoming JOAN AND TED. Mark is making his directorial debut this year with MIRACLE ON 19TH STREET.



JUSTINE NAGAN (EXECUTIVE PRODUCER) is an Emmy and Peabody Award-winning documentary producer and creative media executive. She recently relocated to California and joined Actual Films as their Head of Production. Prior to this role, Justine was the Executive Director of American Documentary, Inc., and an Executive Producer on its two signature series, POV (PBS) and America Reframed (World Channel). During her tenure, she launched POV Shorts, and oversaw AmDocs programming that included several Oscar nominations, and Emmy, Peabody and DuPont wins. Films showcased during her time at AmDoc include THROUGH THE NIGHT , THE MOLE AGENT, SOFTIE,

MINDING THE GAP, LAST MEN IN ALEPPO, DARK MONEY, HOOLIGAN SPARROW and 93 QUEEN. Before AmDoc, Justine led Kartemquin Films as Executive Director for seven years. She is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences, the PGA and the Television Academy.

JOHN FARBROTHER (EDITOR) was the editor of the Emmy-nominated film, FINDING YINGYING, winner of the China Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Documentary. He co-edited Steve James' Emmy-winning and Academy Award-nominated documentary, ABACUS: SMALL ENOUGH TO JAIL. John's first feature documentary, Siskel/Jacobs' LOUDER THAN A BOMB, won the Humanitas Prize for Documentary and was one of Roger Ebert's top 10 docs of 2011. Other recent credits include THE ROAD UP, Audience Choice Award-winner for Best Documentary at the 2020 Chicago International Film Festival, and HIDDEN LETTERS, a film centered around a centuries-old secret Chinese text shared only among women.

HARRISON SCHAAF (DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY) is a Los Angeles born-and-based Director/DOP, specializing in telling immersive visual stories around the globe. To date,

Harrison has shot for clients in Shanghai, Beijing, Chile, Argentina, Taiwan, Mexico, Thailand, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Singapore, Macau, Los Angeles, and New York. Harrison is fluent in Mandarin and maintains a presence across Asia, particularly in Shanghai and Beijing, where he lived for three years working as a director/cinematographer. Harrison's passions include surfing, skiing, aviation, and traveling to the far corners of the globe to find unique images. Harrison has found that living these pursuits on a personal level greatly impacts the choices Harrison makes behind the lens.

CHAD CANNON (COMPOSER) is a composer and multi-instrumentalist whose recent credits include the Oscar-winning Netflix documentary AMERICAN FACTORY, the D.I.C.E Award-winning Sony PlayStation video game GHOST OF TSUSHIMA (Iki Island Expansion), and the WGA Award-winning EXPOSING MUYBRIDGE (with Gary Oldman). Fluent in Japanese and conversational in Mandarin, Chad works frequently in Asia, most notably as an arranger for Joe Hisaishi. He is an alumnus of Harvard, Juilliard, and the Sundance Composer Labs.

Surf Nation | CREDITS



directed and produced by
JESSICA Q. CHEN AND JEREMIAH M. BOGERT JR.

produced by
DIANE QUON
NEVO SHINAAR

executive producers
CARYN CAPOTOSTO
BONNI COHEN
MARK MITTEN
JUSTINE NAGAN

edited by
JOHN FARBROTHER
KRISTIN BYE
LUTHER CLEMENT-LAM

cinematography by
HARRISON SCHAAF

music by
CHAD CANNON

post-production supervisor
RYAN GLEESON

motion graphics
TITLES BY SAROFSKY

post-production audio services
ANOTHER COUNTRY
supervising sound designer & re-recording mixer
DREW WEIR
SFX editor
CATHRYN STARK
SFX editor
BRETT ROSSITER
SFX editor
GABBY HENDERSON
producer
LOUISE RIDER
associate producer
JOSH HUNNICUTT
managing director
TIM KONN

color grading studio
NOLO DIGITAL FILM
lead colorist
MICHAEL MATUSEK
colorist
ELLIOT RUDMANN
online editor
KATHLEEN YOUNG