

FESTIVAL INTERNAZIONALE DEL FILM DI ROMA 2010
In Competition



APSARAS FILM, CS PRODUCTION,
ROUGE INTERNATIONAL,
HRTV PRODUCTION INC. , PRO EAST ENTERTAINMENT LTD

present

THE BACK

A film by **LIU Bingjian**

Hong Kong, France / 1.85 / colors / Dolby SR / 85'

SALES: CHINESE SHADOWS
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SYNOPSIS

Beijing. Middle of the 90's.

HONG Tao, thirty years old, has moved from the countryside to Beijing where he works in a fancy restaurant.

He lives since the Cultural Revolution with a strange secret. Back then, his father was a famous Mao's portrait painter and, obsessed with the leader's representation, started tattooing Mao on human skins.

HONG Tao, oppressed by this heavy inheritance, wants to hide it. But a new wave of unscrupulous antique collectors is ready to do anything to get their hands on them...

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

THE NOVEL

When I read this story for the first time, I was stuck by the idea of the author of the paintings of Mao on human skin. It made me think about my childhood and the feelings I had during the strange time of the Cultural Revolution. At that time the only thing we were drawing over and over was Chairman Mao. Since I was a child, I loved painting. So the only thing I painted was Mao. But times were complicated and difficult back then. I heard of a person who got arrested and bitten up by the mob. He was accused for having made a not good-looking Mao's portrait. So I recalled that I had just lost one of the paintings I had made of Mao and suddenly I was scared to have painted a bad image of Mao and to be molested and proven guilty of not loving him enough... This irrational feeling surrounding paintings and Mao's face came back to me and I felt that I had to do a film about the experience of my generation at that time. The rest of the novel was mainly a triangle love story. I wasn't that interested by that part, so I decided to change most of the other elements (characters, situation, structure, locations...). I wanted this story to be all about the fears, the feelings, the life and experiences from that time up till today.

THE CONTEXT

I grew up in a very political background, where all was about class struggle, social issues, and communism. At present, 20 years later, it's all about business, markets, capitalism.

The film explores the limits of humanity in our contemporary world, which in China has been stepped violently from the Cultural Revolution up to contemporary reform. Even today people can't escape from the invisible specter. Contemporary society and the spirit of the population are influenced by the past political turmoil's, but not only by it. In my eyes, it comes from our common long history. People's craziness for money today is the same as their craziness for Mao Zedong during the Cultural Revolution in China, or for other "great leaders" all over Europe during the last century. We have to pay a high price for what we are doing and what we have done: losing humanity and trampling on human civilizations.

THE GENRE

This film is somehow different from my previous very realistic films. It's a thriller. *THE BACK* is not an authentic story, neither are the characters real, but they represent my vision of the society and what my generation lived through. HONG Tao represents the kind of people who had to live through those troubled time of Mao's cult. And the feeling we had and can still recall, are very real. I wanted to use the genre of the thriller in order to make sure that more people would understand, experience and feel what I'm trying to say. I believe that the lives of many people are scary and full of fears. I think this film could have been even scarier.

THE STYLE

I've been working on this project for 10 years, so during the process of development, financing and pre-production, I had the time to think about the many different ways to shoot this film.

I wanted a strong relationship between my characters and myself. The main character doesn't speak much as well as I can't have any kind of dialogue with people today. There's nothing you can say to make people change. I spend much time at home painting: I can put colors and influence my own world. The characters I paint are people I care for. My characters in this film are the same.

I decided not to shoot with a documentary's style camera, like in my previous films, because I wanted this story to be told in a steady, quiet way to express the feelings of the characters in each shot. The camera had to be like an eye observing with distance the craziness of the world. In this way, the audience is not be in the middle, but keeps a distance and a certain cold sight. I wanted to put in evidence the non-existing relationship between the main character and the world around him.

We did a great work on the sound. The idea was to highlight the emotions and feelings inside the heart of the character, the sound of the city and the differences between the worlds. The sound effects and details helped us to construct the thriller, even if it's still very soft and light. The wind and the doors are in fact link between HONG Tao today and his childhood. The sounds are still in his head, part of his memory, like the water sound.

HONG TAO BY HU BING

HU Bing is well known in China for being a model and playing either the playboy or the lover boy. For this film he worked a lot to change his image and became this new HU Bing. I guess that's the reason why he was interested in the project. He wanted to play a character totally different from what he was used to. I'm glad that he worked that much and managed to do this great performance. At the beginning, when his name was mentioned to me, I wasn't so sure he was the good actor for the role. We met and we had a very long and interesting talk. We discussed who Hong Tao was, what he was feeling inside. When we met the second time he had already changed and was getting quite close to the character I imagined. That day he convinced me that he could do it.

One of our problems then, was to find a matching girl. HU Bing is so tall and so good looking, that we didn't know who could play next to him. I asked him to help us to find the actress. So he introduced me to an actress, JIA Yuanyuan, who had been studying in Japan and worked with him before. And that's the actress I finally decided to cast.

LIU Bingjian – director

Liu Bingjian, born in 1963, initially worked in television after graduating from Beijing Film Academy.

His first feature film, *YANCHUANG* (Inkstone, 1996), the story of an old lady who takes great care of a highly convertible ancient inkstone, portrays an ancestral and traditional China. *YANCHUANG* is the first Chinese film to be bought for a US distribution since 1949.

Liu Bingjian's second feature is radically different. Produced independently, *NANNAN NUNU* (Men & Women, 1999) is a realistic and humorous look at homosexuality in Chinese society. The film participated in many film festivals, and was awarded the Fipresci award at the 52nd Locarno Film Festival. It received high comments from international film critics.

His third film *KU QI DE NU REN* (Cry Woman, 2002) was selected by the Cannes Film Festival official selection « Un certain regard » where the leading actress received a Special Mention. The story of an ordinary woman who is laid off and becomes a professional mourner tells the real life of contemporary China. She cries for the dead and cries for herself at last. The film participated in many festivals.

His fourth film *CHUN HUA KAI* (Plastic Flowers, 2004) was presented among others in Toronto, Berlin and Hong Kong Film Festival. The film tells the story of an owner of a craft factory who gets into involvement with her two young male workers. In there the world is filled with plastic flowers, like the whole country.

HU Bing -BIOGRAPHY

Member of the China national team of Canoe and Kayak from 1987 to 1992, HU Bing soon become a model. He starts his career as an actor in 1996 by acting in different TV series and drama. He soon is asked to host several TV program in China, and in 2000 starts singing. Since then he has released 6 Albums, and promoted them with Concert in China and Japan.

FILMOGRAPHY

| | |
|------|---|
| 2010 | THE BACK (LIU Bingjian) |
| 2009 | LOVE STINK (Michael Gleissner) |
| 2005 | HONAY IN SUPPORT (LU Hongxuan, LI Minwen) BILLABONG STORY (Masahiro Kobayashi) |
| 2001 | HORRID JOURNEY (Ford CLARENCE) |
| 1998 | TRUE LOVE (HUANG Yushan) |
| 1997 | WEDDING ON THE HANDOVER DAY (CHAO Zheng) |

CAST

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|-----------|--------------|
| HONG Tao | HU Bing |
| HUA Dan | JIA Yuanyuan |
| SU Wenjun | XU Ning |
| LI Wenge | XU Chengfeng |

CREW

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|---------------------------|--|
| Director | LIU Bingjian |
| Script | LIU Bingjian, DENG Ye |
| Adapted from the novel by | JING Ge |
| Director of Photography | ZHENG Jiansong |
| Editing | MAO Hui |
| Art Director | FEI Liu, YAN Pen |
| Sound | YANG Yuhui, Aymeric DEVOLDERE |
| Sound Design | Nicolas BECKER |
| Mixing | Jean-Paul HURIER |
| Producer | LIU Bingjian, Louise PRINCE, Nadia TURINCEV, Julie GAYET Jacky YAU Chi Chak, TONG Man Hong |

A APSARAS FILM, CS PRODUCTION, ROUGE INTERNATIONAL, HRTV
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A HONG-KONG - FRANCE production