

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'

PRESS

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## SYNOPSIS

China. Mid 90's.

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

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

HONG Tao, oppressed by this heavy inheritance, wants to hide it from the world. But a new wave of unscrupulous antique collectors will 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 about the paintings of Mao on human skins. It made me think of 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 circumstances were complicated and difficult back then. I heard of a person who got arrested and beaten up by the mob. He was accused for having made a not very good-looking portrait of Mao. So I recalled that I lost one of the paintings I made of Mao. Subsequently, I was scared that I have painted a bad image of Mao and that I would be molested and proven guilty of not loving him enough... This irrational feeling, surrounding the paintings with 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 this novel was mainly a triangle love story. I wasn't really interested in that part, so I decided to change most of the elements (characters, situation, structure, locations...). I wanted this story to be about fear, feelings, life and experiences from back then up till today.

### THE CONTEXT

I grew up in a very political environment, where everything 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 up rigidly from the Cultural Revolution to the contemporary reformation. Even today, people can't escape from the invisible specter. The contemporary society and the spirit of the population are influenced by the past political turmoils, but not only by that. To me, it all arrives from our long history. People's craziness for money today is equivalent to the craziness for Mao Zedong during the Cultural Revolution in China, or to other "great leaders" all over Europe during the last century. We have to pay the 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 compared to my previous, very realistic films. It's a thriller. **THE BACK** is not an authentic story, neither are the characters realistic. But they represent my vision of the society and what my generation lived through. **HONG Tao** represents people who had to live through those troubled times of Mao's cult. And the feelings we had and still can recall, are very realistic. I wanted to make a thriller to ensure that more people would understand, experience and feel what I'm trying to say. I believe that the lives of many people are terrified and full of fears. I believe that this film could have been even more terrifying.

## THE STYLE

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

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

I decided not to shoot with a documentary's style camera, like in my previous films. 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 the craziness of the world from a distance. In this way, the audience would not be in the middle, but they can keep a distance with an objective sight. I wanted to put the non-existing relationship between the main character and the world around him in evidence.

We did a great job on the sound effects. The idea was to highlight the emotions and feelings inside the mind of the character, the sound of the city and the differences between the abstract worlds. The sound effects and the minor details helped us to construct the thriller, despite the movie is very soft and light. The wind and the doors are in fact the linkage between HONG Tao today and his childhood. The sounds are still in his head, a great 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 put a lot of effort to change his image to become the new HU Bing. He wanted to play a character that is totally different from what he was used to. I guess that's the reason why he was interested in the project. I'm glad that he committed himself so much and managed to do this great performance. At the beginning, when his name was mentioned to me, I wasn't sure he was the right actor for the role. We met and we had a long and interesting chat. We discussed who the character Hong Tao was, what he was feeling and thinking inside. When we met the second time, he had already adapted himself to the personality and was getting quite close to the character I've imagined. That day he convinced me that he is the perfect candidate for this role.

Now we've found the main character, we have to find the matching female counterpart. HU Bing is tall and good-looking. We didn't know who could match him and stand tall 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 decided to cast at the end.

## LIU Bingjian – director



Liu Bingjian, born in 1963, worked for the television in his early years, after graduating from Beijing Film Academy. His first feature film, *YANCHUANG* (Ink stone, 1996), tells the story of an old lady who takes great care of an ancient ink stone, which portrays an ancestral and traditional China. *YANCHUANG* is the first Chinese film to be bought for US distribution since 1949.

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

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

His fourth film *CHUN HUA KAI* (Plastic Flowers, 2004) was presented to public in Toronto, Berlin and Hong Kong Film Festivals. The film tells the story of the owner of a craft factory who gets involved with her two younger male workers. In their imagination, the world is filled with plastic flowers.



## HU Bing –BIOGRAPHY

Hu Bing was a member of the China national team of Canoe and Kayak from 1987 to 1992 and soon he became a model. He started his career as an actor in 1996 by featuring in different TV series and dramas.

He has been asked to host several TV programs in China, and in 2000 he started to sing. Since then, he has released 6 albums and promoted them with concerts 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

HONG Tao  
HUA Dan  
SU Wenjun  
LI Wenge

HU Bing  
JIA Yuanyuan  
XU Ning  
XU Chengfeng

## CREW

Director  
Script  
Adapted from the novel by  
Director of Photography  
Editing  
Art Director  
Sound  
Sound Design  
Mixing  
Producer

LIU Bingjian  
LIU Bingjian, DENG Ye  
JING Ge  
ZHENG Jiansong  
MAO Hui  
FEI Liu, YAN Pen  
YANG Yuhui, Aymeric DEVOLDERE  
Nicolas BECKER  
Jean-Paul HURIER  
LIU Bingjian, Louise PRINCE,  
Nadia TURINCEV, Julie GAYET  
Jacky YAU Chi Chak, TONG Man Hong

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With the participation of FONDS SUD CINÉMA, Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication -  
CNC, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères et Européennes.

A HONG-KONG - FRANCE production



CINEMA

FESTIVAL  
INTERNAZIONALE  
DEL FILM DI ROMA  
28 OTTOBRE | 5 NOVEMBRE 2010