

The Hero

Chinese mainland

NING Hao



Genre: Black Comedy
Format: 35mm
Estimated Running Time: 100 min.

Budget:
US\$6,000,000
(HK\$46,500,000)

Funds Secured:
US \$2,000,000
(HK \$15,500,000)

Producers:
NING Hao
Daniel YU

Writing Credits:
NING Hao

Production Company:
Injo Film

Partner attached:
Fantasy Pictures

HAF Goals:
Funds

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INTRODUCTION

The first stories about heroes sprung from the oral tradition thousands of years ago. The hero story is the origin of stories, and in China, the fetishization of the hero lasts down through the generations: national heroes, revolutionary heroes, cultural heroes, entertainment heroes, folk heroes. They are imaginary totems created by group consensus, and their stories inspire and civilize people, teaching the importance of moral behavior. *The Hero* is an ironic take on the way these heroic stories are used as socialization tools. This film doesn't attempt to attack the hero stories themselves, but rather to criticize people who worship heroes and society's need to keep creating them.

SYNOPSIS

Jianwen Period, early Ming Dynasty, Yangshuo county near Guilin.

Erdou Zhao is descended from Mongolians and he has always loved the story of Genghis Khan, feeling that his Mongolian blood should make him a brilliant hero and a peerless warrior. He even changes his name to Si Han Zhao, which means "King Zhao" despite the fact that his mother completely disapproves. But while Si Han Zhao can change his name all he wants, nothing can change the fact that he was born in the wrong time: the country is at peace and people are, generally, pretty happy.

One day, news comes that the King of Yan has rebelled against the Emperor and his army is heading for the capital of Nanjing. Thrilled, Si Han Zhao races home and tells his wife, "Finally, we're at war! We're going to win! It's time to gain honor for our descendants!" He insists that his wife tear up their one red bedspread and he gets someone to write on it, "Suppress Rebellion!" and he sets out to ride to Nanjing.

There are no freeways in the Ming Dynasty and, riding his little donkey, it takes Si Han Zhao three months to arrive in Nanjing. He yells over the city walls that the generals should come out and welcome his reinforcements. They take one look at his "Suppress Rebellion!" banner and instantly throw him in prison. It turns out that the rebels have won. Charged as an insurgent, Si Han Zhao is condemned to death.

But the King of Yan grants amnesty to all the prisoners sentenced to death and so Si Han Zhao is taken to Beijing where the prisoners will be used as shock troops in a battle with the Mongolians of the Central Plains. It's the first time Si Han Zhao has faced battle and it is terrifying. So he runs, leaving behind nothing but his boots.

The officers decide that his desertion will reflect badly on their camp so they send his shoes to Nanjing with a letter stating that he died heroically in battle. The officials are deeply touched by the letter and they send it to his hometown of Yangshuo where his wife and elderly mother sob as they read the account of his heroic death. The man who wrote the characters "Suppress Rebellion!" on Si Han Zhao's bedspread uses this as his opportunity to promote himself

and he spreads the legend of Si Han Zhao and gets appointed county clerk.

And then Si Han Zhao turns up. His wife and mother think he's a ghost but they finally realize what has happened and his mother begins to weep because they got a pension thanks to his "heroic" death, and room to start a small business and security. Now he's ruined it all by coming home. And so, they decide to hide him in the basement.

Carefully tended by his wife, his mother and himself, the legend of Si Han Zhao spreads across the land. Children play at being Si Han Zhao and it seems he will live in the hearts of future generations. An old Genghis Khan statue is even repurposed into a statue of Si Han Zhao to be used in a temple bearing his name.

But when a general asks his wife to become his concubine, Si Han Zhao faces a stark choice. His wife cannot refuse, but how can he grant permission? And so he runs out into the streets to show everyone he is still alive. But they all point to his statue: he looks nothing like Si Han Zhao. Life goes on peacefully, except now in the streets of Yangshuo there is a madman who walks around all day asking everyone he meets, "Who am I?"

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Storytellers have always added a civilized veneer to the heroes of their stories, adjusting the facts so that they better fit the idea of a hero. In *The Hero*, Si Han Zhao faces a hero's choice: live in degradation or die a hero? He chose to die bravely as a hero, but when he realizes how terrifying death is he instantly changed his mind and decided to live in degradation. By the time he finally takes responsibility for his actions it's too late and he no longer even has the right to choose his own death. *The Hero* is a linear story set in the Ming Dynasty and the subversive message at the heart of this film will generate the comedy.

DIRECTOR

Ning HAO was born in Shanxi, China in 1977. His debut feature film, *Incense* (2003), premiered at the Locarno Film Festival and won Grand Prize at Tokyo Filmex, going on to win the Gold Prize in the Asian DV Competition at Hong Kong IFF. The film was also shown in official selection at seven other international festivals. His next film, *Mongolian Pingpong* (2004) was selected for the Berlin International Forum and won the Audience Choice Award in the Shanghai International

Film Festival as well as receiving an American theatrical release. His third film, *Crazy Stone* (2006), was produced by Andy LAU's Focus Features and was a huge hit in China, earning US\$3 million at the box office. He has just released his fourth film, *Silver Medalist* (2005 HAF project, originally titled *Red Bicycle*) produced by Warner Films China.

PRODUCER

Ning HAO (see above)

Daniel YU is a maverick producer who founded Team Work Company with superstar Andy Lau. Their debut film together, *Saviour of the Soul* was a huge hit across Asia, winning the Best Art Direction and Best Cinematography awards at the Hong Kong Film Awards in 1991. In 1997, Yu teamed up with Fruit Chan to create *Made in Hong Kong*, which won critical acclaim and multiple awards at numerous film festivals. The two men later made *The Longest Summer*, which was also widely heralded by critics around the world. Yu was the action producer for the Korean film *Resurrection of the Little Match Girl* (2002) and he associate-produced the Malaysian period epic *The Princess of Mount Ledang* (2003).

In 2005, Yu co-wrote, directed and produced *All About Love* and that same year he also produced the "Focus: First Cuts" films, a series of HD movies from young directors in Hong Kong, Taiwan, the Chinese mainland, Singapore and Malaysia. One of them was *Crazy Stone* (2006) directed by Ning Hao which became a breakout hit in the Chinese mainland.

PRODUCTION COMPANY

Injo Film was founded in 2006 as a video production company with director NING Hao as its creative core. It produced the hit film *Crazy Stone* (2006) and NING Hao's follow-up feature, *Silver Medalist* (2009). It also produces movies, short videos, commercials, music videos and also handles literary and theatrical projects.