

## Sherman ONG



Genre: Drama  
Format: HD  
Estimated Running Time: 90 min.

Budget:  
US\$ 578,001 (HK\$ 4,508,408)  
Funds Secured:  
US\$ 75,000 (HK\$ 585,000)

Producer:  
TAN Bee-thiam

Writing Credit:  
Sherman ONG

Production Company:  
13 Little Pictures

HAF Goals:  
Funds, Co-producers,  
Sales agents, Pre-sales

Contact:  
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## INTRODUCTION

A romance between a non-Muslim Chinese man and a Muslim Chinese woman set in Malaysia, *Betok* plots the tensions between the different ethnic, religious and political groups that share this nation.

## SYNOPSIS

Ah Ping is a Chinese worker who slaughters pigs for a living at an abattoir in a small town in Malaysia. Every day he goes for lunch at his favourite chicken rice stall, which also allows him to see his sweetheart, Suhalia Mei MA, a Muslim Chinese. The stall is owned by her father, Sufian Shah MA, and Suhalia and her older sister, Subaidah, take turns helping their dad serve the customers. Their youngest brother, Sazali, is developmentally disabled but even he helps out by serving the drinks.

Ah Ping and Suhalia have been courting for three years, but unbeknownst to them, Subaidah is secretly carrying a torch for Ping. Finally, one day, after much procrastination, Ah Ping plucks up his courage and asks Suhalia's dad for his daughter's hand in marriage. Her dad takes to the idea instantly, eager to have another pair of hands to help around the family business. Ah Ping's next step is to break the news of his marriage, and subsequent conversion to Islam, to his own family. On his last day at the slaughterhouse, his workmates throw him a bachelor party at a local karaoke bar.

Ah Ping gets roaring drunk one last time, and his workmates decide to dump him in Suhalia's room. But in a strange twist of fate, Ah Ping wakes up in bed the next morning next to Subaidah. What follows is a loveless marriage to Subaidah in order to save Suhalia's family from embarrassment. He is trapped, and so is she, and when they finally rebel against their circumstances all that awaits them is a tragic fate.

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I have always been interested in the migration and movements of people, which inevitably creates minorities, imbalances and flux that forces a struggle to achieve equilibrium with the majority. As a seventh generation Peranakan (Straits Chinese), the broad swathe of the Chinese diaspora also brings a physical, mental and spiritual change to the emotional geography of a place and this is something which I am very eager to explore. These issues have become the genesis for my film, which is set within the Chinese Muslim community and their interactions with the non-Muslim Chinese community of Malaysia. My hope as a person and as a director is to offer a glimpse of an alternative path towards understanding the human condition where, ultimately, the problems that isolate and separate us are also the things that bind us together.

## DIRECTOR

Sherman ONG is a filmmaker, photographer, visual artist and educator. Straddling fiction and documentary, his films have won awards in Singapore, Hong Kong, Greece, Italy, Indonesia and Malaysia. He is an alumnus of the 1<sup>st</sup> Berlinale Talent Campus and has presented works at the Centre Pompidou Paris, Mori Art Museum Tokyo, as well as the Biennales of Venice, Singapore and Jakarta. Most recently, he premiered 3 works at the International Film Festival Rotterdam: *Memories of a Burning Tree*, a feature film in Swahili; *Flooding in the Time of Drought* (feature film) and *Ticket* (short film). He is currently developing his fourth feature film, *Betok*.

## PRODUCER

TAN Bee-thiam is founder of the 13 Little Pictures that completed 7 feature films in 2009 and is developing 7 new feature films for 2010. Films that he produced have been presented at the International Film Festivals in Hong Kong, Singapore, Seoul, New Delhi and Rotterdam. He leads the Asian Film Archive as its founding director and was elected secretary-general of the Southeast Asia-Pacific Audiovisual Archive Association. He is also the producer and curator of the well-received *Asian Film Archive Collection: Singapore Shorts* and *Royston's Shorts*, a series of DVD anthologies featuring emerging filmmakers.

## PRODUCTION COMPANY

13 Little Pictures produces and presents innovative feature films by filmmakers who love cinema. Since debuting three feature films (*Flooding in the Time of Drought* by Sherman ONG, *White Days* by LEI Yuan Bin and *In the House of Straw* by YEO Siew Hua) in 2009, the collective has been hailed by critics as the "real New Wave" from Singapore. New completed works (*Memories of a Burning Tree* by Sherman ONG and *Red Dragonflies* by LIAO Jiekai) are set to premiere at the film festival in Rotterdam and Hong Kong in 2010. Other upcoming projects include *Night Lights* by Daniel HUI, *For I've Loved* by LAI Weijie, *In The Absence of the Sun* by Lucky KUSWANDI, *Matahari* by Azharr RUDIN and *Redhill Close* by LEI Yuan Bin.