

# Hu Jie: the Story of a Chinese Patriot: A Film by Bertrand Renaudineau and Gérard da Silva

By René Viénet<sup>1</sup>

Hu Jie is a prolific independent Chinese filmmaker who has, all by himself, produced and directed 30 documentaries about starvation during the Great Leap Forward and massacres during the Cultural Revolution. But he is also an original and powerful engraver. Bertrand Renaudineau and Gérard da Silva have devoted a film to him. It will be screened on Monday, 16 December in Paris.<sup>2</sup>

Hu lives and works in Nankin, China. During a brief stopover in France in 2019, Bertrand Renaudineau asked him to comment on his prints, his development as an artist and the context in which he works.

From the second murder of the so-called Cultural Revolution,<sup>3</sup> in August 1966, of the director of the most celebrated school for girls in Peking,<sup>4</sup> by her own students (including the one who would be compensated by being given the armband of the Red Guard to wear while standing at the side of Mao Zedong on the grandstand of the Gate of Heavenly Peace, Tiananmen), to the martyrdom of Lin Zhao, after years of torture, killed in the Shanghai prison (for celebrating the first of May, 1968), where she wrote thousands of lines with her own blood and a hairpin, on scraps of tissue, to denounce the great famine that killed 35 million people,<sup>5</sup> Hu Jie has been the sober and patriotic chronicler of innumerable crimes

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<sup>1</sup> René Viénet, “*Hu Jie, histoire d’un patriote chinois: Un film de Bertrand Renaudineau et Gérard da Silva*,” published 13 December 2019 by *Causeur*: <https://www.causeur.fr/Hu-jie-histoire-dun-patriote-chinois-170164>. Translated from the French by NOT BORED! 7 March 2020. All footnotes by the translator.

<sup>2</sup> Introductory text presumably by *Causeur*. The screening was held at the Club de l’Étoile, 14 rue Troyon, 75017 Paris.

<sup>3</sup> The French used here, *la révo. cul.*, is both an abbreviation and a denigration of the so-called Cultural Revolution (*cul* means ass).

<sup>4</sup> Her name was Bian Zhongyun. Hu Jie’s film about her is titled *Though I Am Gone* (2006). An entry in Wikipedia (accessed 7 March 2020) says that this film is banned in China. It is available on Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eBfGc3-InrA>.

<sup>5</sup> Hu Jie, *Searching for Lin Zhao’s Soul* (2004). It is available on Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O6y2x1Zo3tQ>.

and mass massacres, now condemned in China, but which the West has forgotten too quickly after having first praised them.

And yet, the little Madame-Maoist killers, 40 years after her killing, have performed a self-critique by bowing down before the bust of the assassinated headmistress. And Lin Zhao was rehabilitated in 1980 by the tribunal of Shanghai. The Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution [*la révo.cul.*] have been criticized and condemned in China, but, in the West, there remain traces<sup>6</sup> of the praise sung by French intellectuals and newspapers.<sup>7</sup>

The film by Bertrand Renaudineau and Gérard da Silva<sup>8</sup> gives Hu Jie his first opportunity to explain that he was an engraver well before becoming a filmmaker and that, in 2004, he freed the soul of the young martyr, Lin Zhao, thus inspiring, through his prints and films, [several] recently published biographies that are available across the world.

In the 52 minutes of *La Chine rouge, en noir & blanc*, under Hu Jie's gouge, under the press rolls, in black and white on engraving paper, it is waves of the red blood (which quickly becomes black) of the Chinese and their recent history that flows out and dries up.

Hu is a master of wood engraving in the renewed expressionist line of Käthe Kollwitz, whose work LuXun made known in China.<sup>9</sup>

Hu is also a master of the creation of images, which depict in engravings, including one made in Paris for this film, and in preparatory designs for the print run, some of the most terrifying crimes committed against the Chinese people, which must be taken out of the trashcan of history in order to be understood.

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<sup>6</sup> The French word used here, *relents*, also can mean “bad smells.”

<sup>7</sup> Roland Barthes, Philippe Sollers, Julia Kristeva, Alain Badiou, Judith Miller, et al.

<sup>8</sup> *La Chine rouge, en noir & blanc* (“Red China in Black and White”).

<sup>9</sup> Käthe Kollwitz (1867-1945) was a German printmaker, painter and sculptor. “LuXun” was the penname of Zhou Shuren (1881-1936), a Chinese author and critic.