

WARRIORS OF HEAVEN & EARTH

Written and Directed by He Ping

Starring

Jiang Wen
Nakai Kiichi
Zhao Wei
Wang Xueqi

(China/Hong Kong, 2004, 119 minutes, In Mandarin with English subtitles)

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Warriors of Heaven & Earth

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Introduction

The seventh century AD... Along the Silk Road that crosses spectacular mountain ranges and burning deserts from Central Asia to China, a camel caravan struggles through the searing heat of the Gobi desert. The caravan carries precious cargo – a small Buddhist reliquary, imbued with mystical powers, for delivery to the emperor of China. But the real drama is between the two men – one a soldier turned mercenary, the other a swordsman for the Emperor’s court – who are leading the caravan across the desert. They have sworn to fight each other to the death after the caravan reaches its destination. But first they will have to battle the Turkish bandits and soldiers who desperately want something that the caravan is carrying...

That’s the background of writer and director He Ping’s *Warriors of Heaven & Earth*, a unique adventure epic that mixes the feeling of John Ford Westerns – ultimate showdowns between men and the elements – with the pageantry and power of Asian cinema.

The film brings together a remarkable cast. Jiang Wen (*Red Sorghum*) and Zhao Wei are widely regarded as the most popular male and female actors in Mainland China. Joining them is Japanese actor Nakai Kiiichi, a top-ranked star in his home country, who has collaborated with such famous Japanese directors as Kon Ichikawa and Masahiro Shinoda and starred in many hit Japanese TV series. Rounding out the cast is Wang Xueqi (*Yellow Earth, In the Heat of the Sun*), a favorite among Chinese audiences, and a bevy of intriguing newcomers playing a rowdy band of ex-soldiers who are helping the caravan across the desert.

Writer and director He Ping has established himself as a pioneer of the “Chinese Western” – films which take place in China’s vast and sparsely populated western territories. For centuries in those regions Chinese culture has mixed with the Buddhist and Islamic traditions from central Asia, creating the colorful background of Chinese literary epics such as Journey to the West – epics as central to the Chinese people as Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is to Americans. He Ping’s achievement has been to bring the feeling of this wild territory to the screen, in such previous films as *Swordsman in Double Flag Town* and *Sun Valley*, which have been lauded by the Berlin Film Festival and other top venues. He Ping also directed the international art house and festival hit *Red Firecracker, Green Firecracker*.

Helping to give a spectacular look to *Warriors of Heaven & Earth* is acclaimed cinematographer Zhao Fei, known for his work on such classic Chinese films as Zhang Yimou’s *Raise the Red Lantern* and Chen Kaige’s *The Emperor and the Assassin*. Zhao Fei also added his touch to Woody Allen’s *Sweet and Lowdown* and *Curse of the Jade*

Scorpion. The powerful score is by A. R. Rahman, India's top film composer who is known for his scores for the Oscar-nominated *Lagaan*, Andrew Lloyd Webber's hit musical *Bombay Dreams* and the upcoming musical version of JRR Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, soon to open in London's West End.

The Story

In the tradition of Akira Kurosawa's *The Seven Samurai*, ***Warriors of Heaven & Earth*** weaves a thread of battle, comradeship and honor, as told by Wen Zhu (Zhao Wei), the daughter of a powerful Chinese general.

Set in the ferocious Gobi Desert, the story follows two protagonists, Lieutenant Li (Jiang Wen) and Japanese emissary Lai Xi (Nakai Kiichi) – both first-class warriors and master swordsmen. After decades of service to the Chinese Emperor, Lai Xi longs to return to Japan. Finally, his request seems to be granted, and as battles against the invading Turkish armies intensify, Lai Xi promises to bring Wen Zhu back to the capital city of Changan. Instead, he is sent to the West to chase wanted criminals. His only passport back to Japan is to capture and execute Lieutenant Li, a renegade soldier wanted for leading a violent mutiny when he refused orders to kill female and child prisoners.

Li and Lai Xi battle, but finally agree to delay their final personal fight until the caravan carrying Wen Zhu and a Buddhist monk is brought to safety. The monk, however, is carrying a sacred and powerful pagoda that attracts the attention of the region's ruthless overlord, Master An (Wang Xueqi). Lai Xi and Lt. Li, accompanied by Li's former posse of soldiers, who have forsaken their peaceful new lives to return to his side, must face the cruelty of the desert, the region's barbaric bandits and the brutality of the overlord's men before they can finally face one another.

Warriors of Heaven and Earth – Full Synopsis

The time is 700 AD. In China, the great Tang Dynasty rules Asia from the sea in the east to the far regions of the west where the Chinese encounter Arab and Middle Eastern cultures. In the desolate and beautiful west, the Silk Road is the way of passage, and the Tang army is engaged in vicious battles with Turkish forces for control of the territory.

The story is narrated by Wen Zhu, the daughter of a top Chinese general leading the fight against the Turks. She tells us about...

Lai Xi, a Japanese soldier who was sent to China at an early age to study. For 10 years, he has been an official of the Tang court, hunting criminals and rebels in the west. But he longs to return to his native Japan and has officially requested to do so. Finally it seems his request is granted and Lai Xi writes to his mother, telling her he will return soon.

The battles with the Turks are becoming more intense, and Wen Zhu's father, fearing for her safety, entrusts her to Lai Xi to take her back to the capital city of Changan (modern day Xian, home of the famous terra cotta warriors) as he heads east to return to Japan. But new orders for Lai Xi arrive. He cannot return to Japan until he has hunted down one last criminal in the west.

That criminal is Lieutenant Li, a soldier who had fought heroically under Wen Zhu's father for the Tang forces. But when he refused an order to slaughter local civilians who had been taken prisoner, Li's loyal band of soldiers joined him in a mutiny and Li killed a Tang officer.

Fugitives from the Tang forces, Li and his men take work as guards for the many trade caravans plying the Silk Road route from India and the Arab lands to China. One day, Li decides to split from his men and suggests that they go to Western Lake and settle down and raise families. Li then rides off alone into the desert.

In a dusty town on the Silk Road – Damaying, or “Big Steed Village” – Lai Xi, with Wen Zhu in tow, looks for Lt. Li. There, Lai Xi happens upon another criminal and kills him with his astonishing swordsmanship. This is witnessed by Master An, the evil warlord who rules this area.

Later, a camel caravan on its way from India enters the vast western deserts, headed east for China's capital. The caravan is hit by a terrible sandstorm, burying alive all but three people: a young monk, a guard, and Lt. Li.

Lt. Li enters Damaying, looking to hire new guards for the caravan. But Li is recognized by one of his old soldier compatriots – Bai Tuzi – and warned to get out of town. Li decides the caravan must head north to Western Lake to find guards before

continuing east. Lai Xi learns of Li's plan. He leaves Wen Zhu in the town, and, after a battle with Master An's men, heads out of town, hoping to find Li.

At Western Lake, Li reunites with his soldiers, who have indeed settled amidst the lush green mountains, but he refuses their help with the caravan, saying he will hire soldiers instead.

The army outpost where Li hoped to find soldiers is deserted, but Li does hire the aged "Old Die Hard" and his young charge "Di Hu," who is just a boy. Lai Xi arrives at the outpost and has a sword battle with Li. They fight to a draw. Li tells Lai Xi that because the caravan is carrying goods for the emperor in Changan, Lai Xi should allow Li to help the caravan finish its journey. After that, they can battle to the death in Changan. Out of respect for the emperor, Lai Xi agrees. The caravan sets out again, with Li steadfastly refusing the help of his soldiers – with the exception of the young Zao Zimo, so worshipful of Li he cannot be dissuaded from joining the caravan.

Back in Damaying, a Turkish emissary engages Master An to help in capturing Li's caravan. Master An demands to marry the daughter of the Great Khan – the Turkish leader – in return.

Li returns to Damaying, hoping to finally hire more guards. Master An offers some of his men, hoping to infiltrate the caravan. When Li refuses, An's men attack but Li's soldiers ride in at the last minute to help him battle An's swordsmen and the soldiers escape. The soldiers – "Long haired scorpion" Wu Lao Er, "The Lantern" Ma Gun, "Horseshoe Maker" Bai Tuzi, and "One Eyed Eagle" Cao Jian – will now join the caravan and help Li reach Changan.

Meanwhile, Lai Xi sneaks back in to Damaying to grab Wen Zhu. The two of them head out in pursuit of the caravan. Lai Xi wants to make sure Li is not killed by anyone else before Li gets to Changan. If that happens, Lai Xi might not be allowed to return to Japan.

The caravan heads east into Red Rock Gorge. But An's forces have followed and attack as the caravan makes its way through the gorge. Lai Xi joins the battle himself to help Li. The caravan escapes through the narrow gorge but one of Li's soldiers, Bai Tuzi, is killed in the fighting.

Now trapped in the desolate and scorching hot desert, Li leads the caravan to an underground cavern where they can rest and consider their next move. The soldiers realize that An must be after something valuable in the caravan. The monk reveals that he is carrying not only Buddhist texts from India, but also a reliquary containing remnants of the bones of the Buddha himself. The bones seem to have a magical power. The monk explains that whoever has these artifacts can control the believers of the western regions. Li and his men realize An must be working with the Turks to gain control of the bones. They also know An and the Turks will fight terribly hard for this prize.

Li decides their only hope is to head directly east to the Lonesome Fort, where they can defend themselves against the Turks – but that’s ten days away in the burning sun of the desert. Old Die Hard remembers an underground river he once found in this region which made it possible to make the crossing. The caravan sets out for Lonesome Fort. In need of water, Old Die Hard rides ahead to see if he can find the underground river but his search is fruitless.

Master An and his bandits catch up with the caravan and attack. The soldiers hold them off and An retreats. But he taunts the caravan – dropping water bags a few yards outside the caravan’s encampment. When Wu Lao Er walks out to fetch the bags of water, An’s archer kills him with an arrow. An’s men attack again, and it looks like they will massacre the soldiers. Old Die Hard is mortally wounded, but as he falls to the ground dead his own sword plunges into the desert soil – finding the underground river which erupts as a powerful geyser of water. An is astonished by what he takes to be the mystical power of the desert and retreats in fear, allowing the caravan to flee for the Lonesome Fort.

The caravan arrives at the fort but finds it nearly deserted. It is stocked with weapons though, and Li, the soldiers, and Lai Xi prepare for the attack they expect from the Turks. Li asks the monk to pray to Buddha to save them. Wen Zhu tells Li she’s the daughter of a general and joins the battle.

At dusk, the Turks attack in full force with hundreds of troops. An and his men join them. Li and the caravan members battle valiantly and hold off the Turks until dawn, but they are severely outnumbered. Li’s fellow soldiers are killed one by one.

Master An himself enters the fort for the final showdown. He kills Lai Xi – who dies whispering to his imagined mother that he is coming home – and the monk. An slices the reliquary in half with his sword, and the power of the Buddha’s bones is unleashed. An’s sword is melted down magically as he holds it. The monk comes back to life for a moment and kills An. The Turkish leader tries to grab the bones but is killed by flying spikes unleashed by the magical power. The battle is over, and Li and Wen Zhu have survived.

Later, in Changan, Li has given the reliquary to the emperor. He is being sent back to the western frontier. He meets Wen Zhu, who is delivering Lai Xi’s sword to the emperor. She tells Li she will go with him to the west.

The delivery of the reliquary to the emperor has inaugurated a golden age of Chinese rule.

Warriors of Heaven and Earth – Production Notes

He Ping and the Chinese Western

Warriors of Heaven and Earth has been, first and foremost, a labor of love for writer and director He Ping, who first hatched the idea for the film more than 15 years ago and worked on the script on and off throughout this period. In that time he was making an international reputation for himself as the director of *The Swordsman from Double Flag Town*, *Sun Valley*, and *Red Firecracker, Green Firecracker*, but always held this idea close to his heart.

“This film has been on my mind for a very long time,” he says. “I knew it was a very ambitious film – especially for the Chinese film industry – because of the size of the production, the special effects which were required, and the actors that were needed to bring these roles to life. It was a long time before I knew I had all the elements I needed to make the film as I saw it in my imagination. But when I knew I had those things at hand, I plunged forward.”

In addition to giving He Ping a chance to return to directing, the film also marks He Ping’s return to the genre he loves most – and did much to create himself – the Chinese western.

The Chinese variety bears some similarity to its more famous American kin: wide open spaces and beautiful vistas, long arduous journeys, tales of perennial virtues like honor and heroism put to the test. But He Ping sees some key differences which define the Chinese western as its own species.

“Most American westerns are about bringing order to the wild frontier, imposing discipline on chaos,” he says. “But the Chinese western is about cultures meeting and

interacting on the Silk Road. Often in the American western, the hero opens up the west. The Chinese western takes place on the Silk Road, and that route runs both ways.”

Historical and cultural background

Warriors of Heaven & Earth is an adventure tale with deep roots in Chinese culture. The historical background of *Warriors of Heaven & Earth* is as important and powerful for Chinese viewers as the history of the 20th century is for western viewers of say, David Lean epics such as *Lawrence of Arabia* or *The Bridge on the River Kwai*. In creating the story of *Warriors* He Ping reached back for inspiration to one of the most well-known figures of Chinese history, the monk Xuanzang, a fabled figure who left China at the age of 27 in 629 AD to study Buddhism in India.

Xuanzang, after a four-year journey to India along the Silk Road, spent 10 years in India learning Sanskrit and immersing himself in Buddhist texts. By the time he returned to China in 645 AD, after 16 years away, his legend as a scholar had grown to such an extent that he was already a famous figure even before his arrival in Changan (modern day Xian – home of the famous terra cotta warriors), then the capital of Tang Dynasty China. The Tang emperor even offered Xuanzang a ministerial post, but the monk demurred, preferring to spend the rest of his life translating Buddhist scriptures into Chinese. Xuanzang is still regarded as one of the most important figures in the spread of Buddhism to China – and also to Japan, through his famous pupil Dosho, a Japanese monk who later became an important Buddhist philosopher in his native country. The peripatetic Xuanzang’s story is even told – fancifully – in one of the greatest Chinese

literary works, the 17th century epic *Journey to the West*, which also introduced the Monkey King to the Chinese imagination.

The story of Xuanzang, the interactions with Indian culture and with Japanese citizens who have come to China to study – were direct inspirations to the historically-minded He Ping, and have clear echoes in *Warriors* in the story of Juewei, the monk who is bringing texts (and more) from India to China, and as well in the story of Lai Xi (played by Nakai Kiichi), the native Japanese who now works in the service of the Tang court.. The story of the special artifacts which Juewei is bringing back from India – and their extra-special powers – is part of the web of legendary folk tales which grew up around Xuanzang, although historians discount this as a fable.

“This movie captures one of the great periods of Chinese history,” says Jiang Wen (who plays Lt Li), whose own directorial efforts, *In the Heat of the Sun* and the Cannes-award-winner *Devils on the Doorstep*, attest that Jiang is also a Chinese history buff. “This is the period when China began to define its sometimes complicated relationship with the other cultures on its borders.”

For Nakai Kiichi (who plays Lai Xi) there was a special reason to appear in *Warriors*, given the painful history between Japan and China in the past century.

“I have very complex feelings toward China,” Nakai says. “I grew up after WWII but I’ve seen many Chinese TV shows and I realize that the image of Japanese here is either they are devils or bandits. I want to tell people around me through my own behavior that modern day Japanese people are not like that.”

About the shooting

With major battle scenes, hundreds of extras and animals, and an entire 7th century town that had to be constructed, preparation on *Warriors of Heaven & Earth* began several months before actual filming started. After the lead actors trained in horseback riding for two weeks in Beijing, production began in Xinjiang province, in far western China. Many of the locations for the film were on the actual route of the ancient Silk Road. The town of Damaying (“Big Steed Village”), where much of the early action of the film takes place, was built from scratch next to a small oasis in the desert. The collapsing brick ruins of centuries-old Silk Road guard posts lay only a few yards away from where the construction crew built a 60-foot high temple and more than 50 actual clay-and-straw houses to create Damaying.

The film shows off the tremendous range of landscape that exists in this magical region of China. The vast desert with sand dunes rolling for miles in the distance; the bucolic green hills reaching down to rivers with whitewater rapids; the deep gorge flanked by towering layers of rock so red it well earns its Chinese name of “fire mountains” – all of these fantastically different settings for *Warriors* were shot in Xinjiang.

Transportation for the actors and crew to get to those locations was difficult. Xinjiang’s capital, Urumqi, is itself a four-hour plane flight from Beijing, and many of the locations then required a seven or eight-hour car ride, followed by another hour over bumpy dirt roads to the actual shooting locations.

And as with ancient travel on the Silk Road itself, the forces of nature did not always cooperate with human plans. Snow came unseasonably early in October, adding to the complicated shooting of many scenes in the film – which takes place in the scorching heat of summer. In fact, much of the film’s climactic battle scene at the Lonesome Fort – including the night action – were shot in frigid temperatures sometimes plunging below zero degree Fahrenheit in late December. The actors and crew were very thankful when the production moved back to Beijing where the cave scene was filmed in an abandoned factory, for a final two weeks of shooting.

But despite the difficulties, the experience in Xinjiang gave a glimpse of the mix of cultures which still exists in this crossroads of cultures. Most of the truly acrobatic horsemanship in the film is courtesy of 30 ethnic Kazakh horsemen from the People’s Liberation Army Battalion 77 based in Xinjiang’s Ili district. These young horsemen, few of them older than 20, grew up riding horses with their families, who raise livestock on the high Asian plains. Another 100 Kazakh horsemen joined the production for the Lonesome Fort battle scene. In addition, 30 camels came from central China, where they normally earn their feed taking tourists on day trips; The production turned to the these animals because camels are actually fierce and independent creatures and trained ones are quite rare anywhere in the world.

But for He Ping, a lover of the outdoors and an excellent horseman himself who gave riding tips to the actors throughout the production, the difficulties and hardships of recreating 7th century China are only minor annoyances. For him, the chance to shoot in such wild environs was a welcome respite from the hustle and bustle of Beijing, where he spends most of his time trying to shepherd movies into, and through, production. In a

break from filming one day, looking over the vastness of the Xinjiang desert, He Ping said, “See how nice it is here, there’s sand like a beach, sunshine, people riding and enjoying nature, beautiful white clouds in the sky. It’s hard living here, but there’s a comfort for the soul in the beauty of this.” In *Warriors of Heaven & Earth* He Ping has captured much of that special feeling of China’s own wild west.

About the Filmmakers

HE PING *Director and Writer*

He Ping has with only a handful of films established himself not only as one of the leading directors in mainland China but also as a pioneer of an exciting new genre, the “Chinese Western.” With his award-winning films *Swordsman in Double Flag Town* and *Sun Valley*, He Ping has put his very recognizable stamp on the remarkable world of recent Chinese film.

Variety said of *Swordsman in Double Flag Town*: “There's never been a film quite like China's first western, where ‘The Long Riders’ meets ‘Chariots Of Fire’ ...The ‘Swordsman In Double-Flag Town’ is a terrific action/romance western...” Of *Sun Valley*, the publication noted, “Aficionados of the American Western should get a kick out of ‘Sun Valley,’ a psychological noodle oater that makes the wilds of China's Gansu province look as familiar as Wyoming.”

He Ping is best known in the Chinese film world for these films which take place in China’s vast and sparsely populated western provinces – regions where for centuries the cultures of China and central Asia have met and mingled. But he also showed his range by garnering worldwide acclaim for the 1994 period domestic drama *Red Firecracker, Green Firecracker*.

The world’s top film festivals have honored He Ping and his films. The Berlin Film Festival awarded him the Young Director’s Prize (for *Swordsman in Double Flag Town*) and a special mention (for *Sun Valley*). The San Sebastian International Film Festival also awarded him a special mention for *Red Firecracker, Green Firecracker*.

When not directing films himself, He Ping is also an important figure working behind the scenes as a producer and supervisor with some of China's top directors.

Born in 1957, He Ping came up in the film industry step-by-step, working for several years as continuity person and assistant director before becoming a director.

ZHAO FEI *Cinematographer*

Zhao Fei is one of the key cinematographers of the Chinese film renaissance of the past 15 years. His spectacular work on such films as director Zhang Yimou's *Raise the Red Lantern* and Tian Zhuangzhuang's *The Horse Thief* have put him in demand worldwide. Zhao was also the director of photography on three Woody Allen films, *Curse of the Jade Scorpion*, *Small Time Crooks*, and *Sweet and Lowdown*.

Zhao was born in the city of Xian in 1961. He graduated from the department of cinematography of the Beijing Film Academy in 1982 where he studied alongside Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige. Evidence of his unique stylistic achievements can also be found in such Chinese films as *Li Lianying: The Imperial Eunuch* (1990, directed by Huang Jianxin and starring Jiang Wen), and Chen Kaige's *The Emperor and the Assassin* (1999). In 1992, the National Society of Film Critics (U.S.), the New York Film Critics Circle and the Los Angeles Film Critics Association all honored Zhao with awards for best cinematography for *Raise the Red Lantern*.

A. R. RAHMAN *(Composer)*

A. R. Rahman is one of the leading musical figures in India and is rapidly becoming one of India's most important musical ambassadors to the world. Among his most recent notable accomplishments are the score for the worldwide hit (and Oscar

nominee for Best Foreign Language Film) *Lagaan*, and the musical *Bombay Dreams*, produced by Andrew Lloyd Webber. Rahman's utterly distinct combination of contemporary sounds and traditional Eastern rhythms and melodies has brought him to the attention of a significant audience in the West.

Rahman holds a degree in Western classical music from Oxford University and comes from a musical family – his father, R.K. Shekar, was also a film composer. Though now only in his mid-30s, Rahman has composed the music for more than 50 films, and has won every major award in the Indian film industry, as well as receiving India's highest civilian honor, the Padma Shree, from the president of India. Rahman's music has sold in excess of 100 million albums worldwide.

QU LIXIN (Sound)

Qu Lixin was born in 1967 in Urumqi, Xinjiang province. He studied sound recording at the Beijing Film Academy and graduated in 1989. He has recorded sound on a number of Chinese films which were released outside of China to critical acclaim, including 1991's *Beijing Bastards* and the 1999 *Suzhou River*. One of his specialties is doing sound for Chinese versions of foreign films. Among other projects, he worked with Disney on the Chinese version of *Bambi*.

YAO XIAOHONG (Costumes)

Yao Xiaohong was born in 1957 and began working for the Xian film studio in 1975. From 1984 to 1986 she attended the Northwest Textile Institute's costume design

department. She's worked on such films as *The Price of Crazyness*, *Stand Up, Don't Grovel* and *Lie Low*.

CHENG YIN (Makeup)

Cheng Yin is affiliated with the Xian Film Studio, where she began working in 1979. She has worked on more than 30 films and TV series, including *Li Qingzhao*, *Stand Up, Don't Grovel* and He Ping's *Sun Valley*.

About the Performers

JIANG WEN (*Lieutenant Li*)

Jiang Wen is one of the most exciting and important figures in Chinese film today, both as an actor – he is the dominant male performer of his generation on the mainland – and as a director. His second directorial effort, *Devils on the Doorstep*, in which he also stars, took the Grand Prix at the 2000 Cannes Film Festival.

As an actor, Jiang Wen is perhaps best known to international audiences for his starring role opposite Gong Li in director Zhang Yimou's breakthrough film *Red Sorghum* (1987).

Born into an army family in Tangshan, Hebei province on Jan. 5, 1963, Jiang Wen moved to Beijing at age 6 and showed an interest in acting at an early age. He entered China's foremost acting school, the Central Academy of Drama, in 1980. After graduating in 1984 he was assigned to the China Youth Theater, and gave many stage performances with the troupe. He began acting in films the following year.

His performances have won him numerous awards at home and abroad, but for Chinese audiences it was his starring role in the 1992 Chinese TV series "A Beijinger in New York" which made him one of the best-loved actors of his generation. He also starred in such other well-known Chinese films as *Hibiscus Town*, from director Xie Jin, *Black Snow*, from director Xie Fei, and *The Emperor's Shadow*, directed by Zhou Xiaowen. His second collaboration with Zhang Yimou came on that director's 1997 film *Keep Cool*.

Jiang wrote and directed his own first film in 1994. *In the Heat of the Sun*, adapted from a novel by Wang Shuo, which won the Best Actor prize at the Venice Film

Festival for its young lead Xia Yu and numerous other prizes, including Best Feature at the Singapore Film Festival and six Golden Horse awards in Taiwan. It was cited by Richard Corliss in *Time* as the best film of 1995.

Since 1996, Jiang Wen has been a professor and researcher at his own alma mater, the Central Academy of Drama. In 2003, he was also seen on the screen in director Zhang Yuan's *Green Tea*.

NAKAI KIICHI (*Lai Xi*)

Nakai Kiichi is one of Japan's top stars, known for his roles in a wide range of films, from period dramas to modern day comedies. His screen presence – marked by his tall and agile figure, with a personality that mixes equal parts playfulness and a gracious sense of honor – have led some film world observers to dub him the “Chow Yun-Fat of Japan.”

He has collaborated with some of the legendary directors of the Japanese cinema. He has worked several times with director Kon Ichikawa (*Tokyo Olympiad*, *The Makioka Sisters*, *Dodesukaden*), in the films *47 Ronin*, *Film Actress*, and also *The Burmese Harp*, the director's 1985 remake of his own 1956 classic. He also appeared in the 1999 film *Owl's Castle*, from director Masahiro Shinoda (*Double Suicide*, *MacArthur's Children*).

Shortly before joining the cast of *Warriors of Heaven & Earth*, Nakai co-starred with Chinese singing and acting superstar Faye Wong (*Chungking Express*) in the Japanese TV series, *Love Lies*.

His recent films include *Tales of the Unusual*, *Begging for Love*, and *Falling Into The Evening*. Nakai, scion of a famous thespian family, lives in Tokyo.

ZHAO WEI (Wen Zhu)

Zhao Wei is now widely regarded as one of the top female stars in mainland China – (she is ranked third on Forbes’ China Celebrity List after basketball superstar Yao Ming and actress Zhang Ziyi) and her success has begun reaching across the rest of Asia with her performance in the recent smash hit comedy from Hong Kong director and actor Steven Chow, *Shaolin Soccer*. Her big-eyed look of mischievous innocence has made her a much sought-after star. In Time Magazine, Richard Corliss wrote, “When Zhao shares a scene with anyone -- with Jiang Wen, China’s De Niro, or Hong Kong heartthrob Ekin Cheng, or bad boy Nicholas Tse -- she’s the one to watch..”

Just before going to Xinjiang in northwest China to shoot *Warriors of Heaven & Earth*, Zhao Wei shot, *So Close*, for director Cory Yuen. After finishing *Warriors*, she filmed *Chinese Odyssey* for director and writer Jeff Lau (also the writer of *So Close*). And, she is a cop conflicted by love and honor in Ann Hui’s new film, *Jade Goddess of Mercy*.

Zhao Wei rose to fame in the 1998 Chinese TV series *Princess Pearl*. A 1999 sequel to the series was equally popular and firmly established Zhao as one of the very top actresses in China. The series brought her China’s top TV award, the Golden Eagle, for best actress, and also gave her the nickname by which she is known to her millions of fans, “Little Swallow,” the name of the character she portrayed.

In China, she has appeared in the films *Valley of Girls* and *A Fate Too Beautiful for Words*. In 2003, she appeared opposite Jiang Wen in another film, director Zhang Yuan’s *Green Tea*.

An accomplished singer and musician, Zhao Wei has released several pop CDs, including “Spirit Across the Sky,” “The Charm of Love,” and “Last Parting.”

Zhao Wei was born in Wuhu, Anhui province, China. She attended the Beijing Film Academy, where she studied acting. Zhao Wei lives in Beijing.

WANG XUEQI (*Master An*)

Wang Xueqi is one of the most well-known and beloved character actors in China. International audiences saw his work as the soldier collecting folk songs in rural China in director Chen Kaige’s breakthrough 1984 film *Yellow Earth*. He collaborated with Chen Kaige again on *The Big Parade*.

Wang’s other well-known films include *In the Heat of the Sun*, directed by Jiang Wen, and *Sun Valley*, his previous collaboration with He Ping.

Wang Xueqi is an officer in the performing arts branch of the Chinese Air Force.

HASI BAGEN (*Cao Jian*)

Hasi Bagen was born in 1958 in Inner Mongolia. He spent several years in army performing troupes and in 1981 entered the Beijing Film Academy acting department. He graduated in 1985. He has appeared in more than 15 Chinese films and many TV series, and also wrote and directed three TV series.

HE TAO (*Ma Gun*)

He Tao was born in 1968 in Qinghai province, Xining city and trained as an actor in a Qinghai theater group. In 1992 he entered the Beijing Central Academy of Drama’s

directing program, from which he graduated in 1995. Film roles include appearances in the recent Hong Kong hit *Roots and Branches*. He also appeared in *Chrysanthemum Tea* and *Love in the Age of the Internet*. He Tao has appeared in many TV series and continues to perform on the stage as well.

HOU CHUANGAO (*Guard*)

Hou Chuan Guo was born in 1965 in Fushun, Liaoning province. In 1991 he graduated from the Shanghai Academy of Drama, where he majored in performance. After graduating he joined a theater group in the city of Hangzhou. He has appeared in such mainland films as *Fire and Steel*, *Four Heavenly Kings* and the TV series *Red Carnation*.

LI HAIBIN (*Zao Zimo*)

Li Haibin was born in 1968 in Beijing and is making his debut in a major role in *Warriors of Heaven & Earth*. He has worked for several years as an assistant director in the Chinese film industry including Jiang Wen's *Devils on the Doorstep*.

LI WEI (*Di Hu*)

Li Wei was born in 1989 in the Shangluo district of Shaanxi Province. In 2000 he began attending the Xiao Shang Yu art school, where he studies the local form of Chinese opera, martial arts and dance.

HARRISON LIU (*Wu Lao Er*)

Harrison Liu (whose Chinese name is Liu Linian) was born in 1956 in Heilongjiang province, Jiamusi City. He became a performer at a young age, joining an Army performing group as an opera singer in 1972. In 1982 he transferred to Beijing's famous August 1st Military Movie Studio as an actor. In 1989 he moved to Toronto, and has worked as a producer, screenwriter, actor and director, and has collaborated on projects related to China with Steven Spielberg and Oliver Stone.

Harrison has appeared in such films as the 1986 *Hibiscus Town*, which starred Jiang Wen, and the 1988 international co-production *Bethune*, with Donald Sutherland.

WANG DESHUN (*Old Diehard*)

Wang Deshun is one of the most well-known performance artists in China, and is making his film debut in *Warriors of Heaven & Earth*. He was born on August 20, 1936 in Shenyang city, Heilongjiang province and for 30 years was an actor in an army theatrical performing troupe.

In 1985 he first performed his "moving statues" – which he describes as a mix of dance, theater and mime. His performances quickly became a sensation in Beijing's artistic circles. Deshun has frequently been invited to perform internationally; including appearances in Germany, France, Austria and Korea. In 1993, a performance at which Deshun's clothing was rather scanty caused a bit of a *scandale*, and he has continued to push the envelope of performance art in China since then.

YANG HAIQUAN (*Baldy*)

Yang Haiquan works in the Chinese film industry as a producer, director and actor. He was born in 1968 in Xinjiang – the region where *Warriors of Heaven & Earth* was filmed. She studied opera of Tianjin Academy of Music and acting at Beijing's Central Academy of Drama. Haiquan has also worked as an assistant director on Chen Kaige's *The Emperor and the Assassin* and *Temptress Moon*.

YEERJIANG MAHEPUSHEN (*Turkish Emissary*)

Ye-er Jiang is an ethnic Kazakh. He was born 1963 in Urumqi, Xinjiang province. He attended the Central Academy of Drama in Beijing, studying in the performing and directing departments. He has appeared in TV series, movies and also worked as an assistant director. On *Warriors of Heaven & Earth*, in addition to acting, he organized the scores of Kazakh horsemen who appear in the battle scenes.

ZHOU YUN (*Juewei the Monk*)

Zhou Yun is a rising star in the Chinese film world. She was born in 1978 and grew up in Wenzhou, Zhejiang province. During the filming of *Warriors of Heaven & Earth* she was a student at Beijing's Central Drama Academy, which she entered in 2000.