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Getting Home (2007) Movie Review

[Asian Movie Reviews](#), [Chinese Movie Reviews](#), [Reviews](#) — By [James Mudge](#) on July 21, 2007 [✉](#) [f](#) [t](#) [g+](#)



Simply put, "Getting Home" is one of the best Chinese films of the year. The latest effort from Zhang Yang, who previously delighted viewers with the likes of "Shower", it sees the Sixth Generation director continuing his rich vein of form with another honest tale of ordinary people. Apparently inspired by a real life incident, the film stars Zhao Benshan in the lead role, an actor best known for his work as a stage [comedian](#), who also starred in a number of films including Zhang Yimou's "Happy Times". It features cameo appearances by a variety of Chinese stars, including Hu Jun (seen in Stanley Kwan's "Everlasting Regret"), Xia Yu ("Electric Shadows", for which he won the Best [Actor](#) prize at the 1994 Venice Film Festival), Guo Tao (recently in Ning Hao's excellent "Crazy Stone"), Song Dandan (a famous stage comedienne who frequently worked with Zhao) and the immortal Wu Ma (from "A Chinese Ghost Story" and other classic [films](#)).

The plot follows Zhao as a construction worker whose best friend Liu dies, leaving him to fulfil a promise that he will return his body to his distant hometown. Short on money, the determined Zhao decides to carry his friend's corpse on his back, relying on help from the people he meets on his travels.

"Getting Home" is a road film in the purest sense, progressing in anecdotal fashion through Zhao's encounters with a variety of quirky characters, some of whom help and some of whom hinder him in his journey. The plot revolves around a number of small, personal stories and is frequently unpredictable, as the viewer never knows what lies around the corner, or who he will run into next. Through this, the film works well as a series of clever observations on the lives of everyday people in modern rural China, and is both believable and fascinating. Despite the subject matter, it makes for upbeat and life affirming viewing, helped by the fact that the honest and loyal Zhao makes for a great, sympathetic protagonist who the viewer really comes to care for. His efforts to fulfil his promise are very touching, as are many of the tales of the people he meets, and Zhang shows his usual skill in avoiding cheap sentiment, keeping things heartfelt and unforced throughout.

Although the premise might seem to suggest some kind of bad taste or dark corpse comedy, the film is actually light-hearted with a gentle, grounded sense of humour. Most of the jokes come through the odd behaviour of the supporting cast, and the film is both funny and imaginative, featuring some great scenes including a metal detector using robber and an elaborate funeral being held for a man who does not appear to be dead. As well as providing a generous number of laughs, these work well to give the film a lively spring in its step, and paint a playful, colourful picture of the common people, though one which is never less than convincing. To be fair, there are a number of gags involving the dead body, mainly relating to Zhao's ingenious methods of disguising and transporting it, though even these are strangely respectful, and never undermine the moving fact that the man was his best friend. Indeed, the corpse is treated almost as a character in its own right, and is used for far more than as a simple symbol of Zhao's righteous promise.



As might be expected the film features some strikingly beautiful scenery, made all the more so thanks to Zhang's naturalistic, discreet approach which showcases the locations without resorting to obvious panoramic shots or detracting from the proceedings' down to earth feel. Similarly, although there are inevitably some images of change and modernisation in rural China, such as the flooding of valleys, these sit quite comfortably in the background and are never allowed to get in the way of the genuine, human story at the film's heart.

Ultimately, as with Zhang's previous works, it is this emotional core which drives the film and which really pulls the viewer into the story. Few other directors working in modern Chinese cinema or indeed from anywhere else in the world are his equal in this respect, and "Getting Home" is another tribute to his great talent as a teller of compassionate tales. Funny and poignant in equal measures, it makes for great [entertainment](#) and again goes to show that the best films to come from China in recent times have been the small, personal ones rather than the big budget [blockbusters](#).

Yang Zhang (director) / Yao Wang, Yang Zhang ([screenplay](#))

CAST: Degang Guo, Tao Guo, Jun Hu, Fan Liu, Jinshan Liu, Dandan [Song](#), Haiying Sun

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








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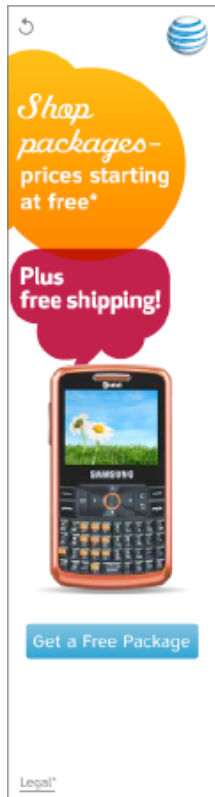
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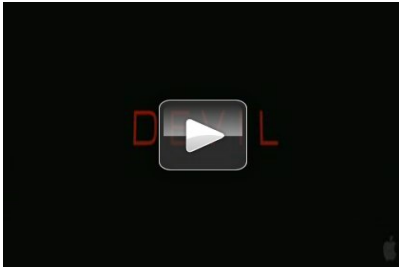


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