

Sample Introductions:

Pro:

When a citizen decides to protest injustice in a dictatorship, often the price such an individual pays is torture, imprisonment or death. Historically, many artists have decided to frame their message in a medium which is less direct than a public demonstration, or critical writing. A theater performance, play, or film allows an artist to protest against a certain regime's acts of injustice with the possibility of plausible deniability. A survivor of the Cultural Revolution, Zhang Yimou, has a history of deftly maneuvering around a Chinese dictatorship that has moved from trying to stamp out knowledge of China's traditional past to actively celebrating it in a time of increasing public criticism of the present regime's corruption. Recently Zhang Yimou has become quite adept at challenging the Chinese regime in symbolic terms. Hero celebrates China's distant past while urging a Chinese citizen to rebel because it itemizes in allegorical terms in what ways the Chinese government has failed the average citizen, glorifies the role of the individual in the formation of society, and places the duty to rebel in the context of Chinese values.

Con

In a time of increasing public criticism of a corrupt Chinese regime, Zhang Yimou has become quite a propagandist for civic unity at all costs. In a dramatic turnaround in recent years, the Chinese regime as gone from celebrating the death of a decadent past in the Cultural Revolution, to trying to revive public faith in a common heroic past in recent, more pluralistic capitalist times. Zhang Yimou has changed his colors accordingly; deftly becoming a sort of David, for the modern Chinese state, emphasizing a grand epic Chinese past that has no room for the individual who might disagree with the Chinese government's

nationalist, unified program. Zhang Yimou put this message on display during the Beijing Olympics where he orchestrated an epic opening ceremony. Zhang Yimou follows his Olympic theme in Hero, where he argues that Chinese citizens should not rebel openly against the Chinese government because such a rebellion is not consistent with Confucian values, unity should be preserved at all costs, and such a rebellion would open the door to civil war and private vendettas which would plunge the Chinese state back into anarchy.