

2014电影《归来》笔记 Coming Home

- To me, this film ought to fall under the category of “scar literature” 伤痕文学, like Lu Xinhua’s *The Scar* and Gu Hua’s *Hibiscus Town* that are historical novels and works of psychological realism about China’s past. As such, it is a belated work coming over 30 years after it had become possible and even fashionable to remember the atrocities of the Cultural Revolution ending in 1976. But a sense of poignancy is still keenly felt when people scratch an old scar or reopen an old wound. In fact, no amount of reflection and introspection is adequate about this painful episode and highly sensitive political topic!
- It can be argued that director Zhang Yimou was fighting a collective amnesia over tragic events too painful to remember. Feng Wanyu’s amnesia functions to block out bad experiences in the past, which directly results in her not being able to recognize her husband, Lu Yanshi, coming home from a labor camp to join her. In this sense, the story is a national allegory; the blockage in her recollection is analogous to a man-made collective amnesia when people become oblivious to a time in which man’s evil side came to the fore.
- It was a dark decade (1966-76) in which the political obligation that everybody stood under was “when you see something, say something” to the party and the state. People reported on one another to save their own skin and carry to the end the life-and-death “class struggle” 阶级斗争 of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. We know how “class consciousness” 阶级意识 works in *The Scar* when Xiao Hua would not want anything to do with her mother suspected of being a traitor. In this film, Shanshan hopes to become a ballerina in *Red Brigade of Women*, so much so that she won’t think twice of informing on her father, a Rightist and fugitive wanted by the state. Because her future is being jeopardized due to her guilt by association, she intimates to the police the rendezvous place of her parents.
- To magnify this family tragedy a hundred-fold, you begin to see this modern dystopia of Maoism. What is painful to the Chinese psyche is the total loss of intimacy and love in the family where people are taught to expect loyalty and trust. Lu Yanshi escapes from his labor camp to see his wife and daughter, only to complicate and jeopardize their lives. Feng Wanyu must go incognito to meet her husband, knowing full well she would be punished for aiding and abetting a class enemy if recognized. For Shanshan wishing to be respected as a dancer for Mao, her success is at stake if she chose her father over her duties to the state.
- It was also a time in which “political background” 政治背景 such as “Rightist” and “Traitor” or “the proletariat” and “workers-peasants-soldiers” 工农兵 was directly associated with the amount of political rights 政治权利 that a citizen enjoyed. As the wife and daughter of a Rightist, Feng Wanyu and Shanshan are treated with suspicion and distrust. Feng is socially vulnerable and nearly raped by the chairman of her school’s

Cultural Revolution Committee who came to “see” her during Lu Yanshi’s absence. This is why she confuses her husband with Fang trying to make a pass in her bedroom. Human remembrance is selective for mental health. We’d rather project out own sinister side onto others to protect ourselves or suppress what is hurtful to stay normal.

- In 1953, American playwright Arthur Miller wrote *The Crucible* about Salem witch-hunt (1690), to critique the period of American history known as McCarthy Era in which many Leftist writers lost their livelihood and hunted down as communist sympathizers. Mass psychology drives people to do irrational things. People’s propensity for self-preservation does not end with the Cultural Revolution and resurfaces in other forms of madness.
- In psychoanalysis, there is something called hypnosis to induce dreams or lost memories from a patient in the hope to identify what is buried in his subconscious mind that is responsible for his abnormal behavior. Post-Mao China cannot move forward unless people are able to undo or uncover the pains, shame, scars and wounds that linger. These sediments in the human subconscious must be brought to light to prevent another Cultural Revolution from happening again.