



***Wo de fu qin mu qin (The Road Home)* is a March, 2024 LVCA dvd donation to the Hugh Stoupe Library of the Heritage Methodist Church of Ligonier, Pennsylvania in honor of former pastor Hugh Stoupe. Below is Kino Ken's review of that film.**

14 of a possible 20 points = a very good film

Key: *= outstanding technical achievement or performance

China 1999 color & black-and-white 89 minutes live action feature romance in Mandarin with English subtitles Columbia Pictures Film Production Asia / Guangxi Film Studio / Xin Huamian Film Producer: Yu Zhao Guangzhou Beauty Culture Communications Company Ltd. dvd release

Points:

- 1 Direction: Zhang Yimou**
- 1 Editing: Ru Zhai**
- 2 Cinematography: Yong Hou***
- 2 Lighting**
- 1 Screenplay: Bao Shi from his own novel *Remembrance***
- 2 Music: Bao San***
- 2 Art Direction: Juiping Cao***
- Set Dressing: Ying Ma***

Costume Design: Huamiao Tong*

Makeup: Dandan Yang*

1 Sound: Lala Wu

Sound Editing: Qian Lin and Robert Mackenzie

1 Acting

1 Creativity

14 total points

Cast: Zhang Ziyi* (Young Di Zhao), Sun Honglei (Luo Yusheng), Hao Zheng (Luo Changyu), Yulian Zhao (Old Di Zhao), Bin Li (Grandmother), Guifa Chang (Old Mayor), Wencheng Sung (New Mayor), Qi Liu (Old carpenter Xia), Bo Ji (Not-so-old carpenter Xia), Zhongxi Zhang (Crockery Repairman), Ling Bin Zhao (Mei Duo), others

Awards:

2000: Golden Rooster Awards (China's Oscars®) for Best Picture, Best Art Direction (Juiping Cao) and Best Director (Zhang Yimou)

2000: Hundred Flowers Awards (voted by readers of China's most popular film magazine, *Popular Cinema*) for A. Best Film (co-won with *Lover's Grief over the Yellow River* and *National Anthem*) and B. Best Actress (Zhang Ziyi)

2000: Berlin International Film Festival Awards: Silver Bear, Jury Grand Prize and Prize of the Ecumenical Jury

2000: Ljubljana (Slovenia) International Film Festival Audience Award

2001: Sundance Film Festival: Audience World Cinema Award

2001: Crystal Simorgh, Fajr International Film Festival (Iran): Best Film, International Competition

Note: Kino Ken is indebted to review of this film by Dennis Schwartz at <https://dennisschwartzreviews.com/roadhome/> and by Marvin Purvis at www.filmsufi.com/2017/10/the-road-home-zhang-yimou-1999.html. From the latter came information about the name of Di's home village and a literal English translation of the film title. From the former came information about China's Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957-1959, which explains politics behind temporary internal exile of the schoolteacher.

Wo de Fùqin Muqin (My Father and Mother) opens during China's Anti-Rightist Campaign, a period when its Communist bureaucracy undertook to reeducate intellectuals by pushing them into internal exile or extended prison camp suspensions until they "properly" understood what they were supposed to be teaching illiterate Chinese peasants. It focuses primarily on the intertwining of politics and traditions, which frequently clash rather than coordinate with each other.

Young urbanite Luo Yusheng is recalled to his native rural village of Sanhetun in mountainous northern China by the unexpected death of his father in a snowstorm. An atmosphere of bleakness envelops adults there, indicated by a monochromatic cobalt skyscape equating winter with death. Luo cannot find his widowed mother at home. He's informed she has taken up fruitless vigil at his father's rundown schoolhouse. She refuses to budge unless village men accede to a demand for formal transport of her husband's remains by manually carried catafalque from city hospital to burial site beside an old, unused well. This "road home" will bring his spirit back to its most fondly remembered location. Or so she hopes.

However, most working-age men from her community have moved to the nearest city. So who's left to carry the deceased back to familiar surroundings? Luo Yusheng is reluctant to approve his mother's request – or is it more of a demand? He protests, too, her backbreaking toil at an antique loom while weaving a final burial covering for her spouse. Watching her labor, he ponders the remote possibility she may just be opting for something more grounded than mere spectacle.

For she asserts villagers owe Luo Changyu, her late husband, a debt of gratitude in return for about forty years of dedication to teaching them how to read and write.

Not that she herself ever profited that greatly from his instruction. Zhao Di has remained by choice illiterate, more enthusiastic apparently about Luo Changyu's voice than his pedantry. He, in turn, seems to have been mostly captivated by her culinary skill and lovely face.

Surveying items inside their family home, Luo Yusheng's eyes focus on a photograph of his parents taken many years earlier, when both were still quite young and not yet encumbered with a child. This seems to arouse in him

recollections of their initial contacts and subsequent frustrations, separated unwillingly by political intrusions.

The bulk of the film concerns the timid courtship of his elders, who ultimately defy customary arranged marriage procedures and wed instead for sheer love. She's the neighborhood beauty, expert in both cooking and weaving. He's handsome, educated, perhaps scouting for a youthful domestic who will overlook his fairly bland conversation and social blunders. Someone who will blindly dote on the sounds of his words and his good looks.

This Ruritanian wooing allows Yimou to proceed into color filmmaking, making past episodes much more polychromatic than scenes of contemporary life. Which could be a veiled commentary about life before Communism and survival under it.

What keeps audiences unflaggingly involved is the acting of Zhang Ziyi as naïve and star-struck young Zhao Di. Through her eyes, audiences witness transformation of Luo Changyu from urbane honored visitor to idealized admirer. When Changyu responds to her mushroom concoctions with evident voraciousness and even gifts her with a lucky red hairpin, Zhao Di becomes hopelessly infatuated and pursues him relentlessly, neglecting prudence, health, safety, even her blind grandmother.

Obstacles arise when the object of her obsession is compelled to journey back to a less charitable locale by command of authorities concerned about what Confucian maxims he might be imparting to impressionable peasant minds. Chasing belatedly after her most prized exotic, Di manages to both lose her hairpin talisman and break a treasured family crockpot.

After protracted combings covering the full length of an earlier race through meadows and forest, she finds one lost treasure just outside her own doorway. But that is poor recompense for a damaged heirloom and despairing heart.

Attempting to fix what can be repaired, Grandmother hires a passing tinker to reseal shards of fragmented ceramic into an intact, serviceable container. Yet the pain of her granddaughter at separation from a beloved outsider cannot be mitigated so easily. How will the two enamored youths ever reunite and find happiness together?

Actually, that process is left only partly explained. When Di braves a blizzard in order to provide another welcoming meal for what she anticipates will be Luo Changyu's returning, she is left disappointed, frostbitten and alone on the road

leading to her hometown. A passing native discovers her and takes the miserable girl back to Grandmother, where no amount of medicines or loving care can restore Di's zest for living.

Hearing about this potentially fatal depression and illness, Luo Changyu absconds from the city and makes his way mysteriously back to Grandmother's house. There he watches over her afflicted granddaughter until once again summoned back by some authority to reeducation class. Probably quite forcibly, too.

As penalty for what amounted to intentional jailbreak, the young man is forced to endure another two years of vocational deprivation and absence from his loved one.

Meanwhile, Di recovers customary optimism when informed about the secret visit from Luo Changyu. Surely only a genuine lover would do such a thing just for her.

Once the erstwhile teacher is allowed restoration to his former position, he makes haste to formally marry Di. She eventually gives birth to Luo Yusheng. Despite urgings by both progenitors to select Luo Changyu's profession and carry on his elder's pedagogical work, their only child prefers to become an engineer. A rebellious spirit like his mother's lurks within him, it seems.

Being ridden with guilt over that defection, Luo Yusheng ultimately consents to a plan involving bribing menfolk in nearby settlements to carry his father to a hillside grave overlooking the school where the older man had served for so many years. To the son's surprise, former students of his dad volunteer to serve as bearers, refusing payment. Even hired strangers respond similarly, opening Luo Yusheng's eyes to the full impact his sire made on people of that region.

After seeing their willingness to serve under most unaccommodating weather conditions, the somewhat prodigal son finds it extremely difficult to withstand maternal urgings to, if only for a single day, fulfill paternal duty in the same schoolhouse he himself had once long ago attended. Deeply moved at finding himself in his dad's shoes, even to the extent of teaching from a primer of maxims Luo Changyu had created, he decides to delve into savings and offers the mayor a hefty donation for construction of what would be a new and better school. Thus becoming a patron of education in the approved manner of a Communist progressive.

The MPAA rating for this film is G, which translates to a mild PG in reality. Preteens are not going to immerse themselves in what is overtly a love-at-first-sight romance.

Bao San's simple, nostalgic theme music, with a couple variations, serves as underscoring throughout the picture. It is highly effective, as can also be said of Juiping Cao's art direction, Ying Ma's set furnishings, Huamiao Tong's costume designs, and Yong Hou's cinematography.

Most of the cast being comprised of first-time amateurs, performances are competent without being exceptional. Making her screen debut, Zhang Ziyi's Di proves otherwise, encapsulating every nuance of an untutored rustic farm girl hopelessly fixated on a stranger brought purely by chance into her primitive, if scenic, backwater. She would next appear onscreen as the enigmatic nemesis of Wudang master Li Mu Bai in Ang Lee's masterpiece, *Wu Hu Zang Long* (*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*).

Lighting and sound are adequate, though less intriguing than transitional edits of superimposed images that slowly dissolve into others like water ripples in a stream.

While the screenplay adapted by Bao Shi from his own novel *Remembrance* is slight in content, its central character is so fetchingly realized absence of development in the rest can be accepted without complaint.

A Sony Pictures Classics release here offered in a subtitled version along with its Chinese original by Guangzhou Beauty Culture Communication Company Ltd. on dvd, *The Road Home* is a charmingly attractive throwback to the hoary boy-meets-girl Hollywood formula. Redefined within a Chinese milieu with full, loving detail by a master of cinematic expressiveness and décor, it's both sweet and simple, a true bonanza for Romantics.