

## Film Review: ‘The Farewell’ Greets with Cultural, Emotional Exploration

Submitted by [JonHC](#) [1] on July 22, 2019 - 5:39am

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CHICAGO – We all have those family stories that seem just so uniquely ours that it is hard to believe anyone could actually relate to them. Stories that, at the time, don’t seem like anyone else would even understand. Lulu Wang proves in “The Farewell” that all it takes is a little empathy, a skilled storyteller, and a group of talented people to bring any story to life.



Rating: **5.0/5.0**

Based on a true story that is all “based on an actual lie,” Wang creates something that’s much less of an explanation and much more of an exploration. It all begins when Billi (Awkwafina)—meant to represent Wang herself—discovers that her grandmother, AKA Nai Nai (Shuzhen Zhao), has a terminal illness. As if that information weren’t distressing enough, Billi also finds out that her family plans to hide the diagnosis from Nai Nai, and let her live the rest of her days in what they assume will be blissful ignorance. Devastated by both the news and her family’s decision, she plans to go along with it when she decides to visit her family in China for a rushed wedding that they’re putting together as a front for getting the entire family to spend one last great moment with Nai Nai.

I couldn’t possibly do justice in explaining the amount of beauty that radiates from this film. It exists in the framing of every scene, in the interactions between characters, in the copious amounts of comfort food, in the meaningful silences, and even within the mournful sadness throughout. Wang doesn’t tell her story as much as she forces us to experience it. Her character, Billi, is the emotional vehicle through which we explore this foreign-to-many world of duty and tradition, with her reactions perfectly mirroring our own. Her genuine and relatable reaction to everything she experiences transcends any sort of limitation you might think exists because of the specificity of location and culture. Although we may (hopefully) go our entire lives never having experienced something like what Wang and Billi went through, we are all the better for having witnessed them unfold.

Regardless of our own family life, “The Farewell” offers a story that provides everything necessary to understand and empathize with it. The bittersweet emotions are tempered with poignant moments that aren’t afraid to just sit there in silence. The humor is organically sprinkled in even some of tensest moments, providing a momentary respite from the unbearable sadness while never betraying the thoughtfully crafted tone and pacing. Not only does the film earn our laughter and tears, but more importantly, it gains our respect and understanding. The emotional complexity in “The Farewell” is one of the layers available to all viewers, but there is a deeper dive for other Americans that also belong to two cultures.

*“The Farewell” opened in Chicago on July 19th. Featuring Awkwafina, Tzi Ma, Diana Lin, Shuzhen Zhao, Han Chen, Jim Liu, and Hong Lu. Directed by Lulu Wang. Written by Lulu Wang. Rated “PG”*



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