

“The Farewell” starring Shuzhen Zhao, Awkwafina, Tzi Ma, 2019, PG, 100 minutes

Major themes:

- Family
- Diagnosis
- Lying
- Truth
- Honesty
- Compassion
- Healing
- Emotions
- Relationships

Major characters:

- Billi Wang
- Grandmother Nai Nai
- Father Haiyan Wang
- Mother Lu Jian
- Great Aunt Little Nai Nai
- Uncle Haibin
- Aunt Ling
- Cousin Hao Hao
- Aiko (Hao Hao’s fiancée)
- 2nd Cousin Yuping

Movie Nights for Thinkers and Seekers

Background info:

- This film is based in part on the writer's own family experiences and bears the tagline, *"Based on an Actual Lie."*
- Writer and director Lulu Wang also played piano on the film's soundtrack.
- The actor playing Billie, Awkwafina, won a Golden Globe Award for Best Actress – Musical or Comedy in January 2020. Awkwafina is the professional name used by Nora Lum.
- Guggenheim Fellowships are grants that have been awarded annually since 1925 by the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation intended for individuals who have already demonstrated exceptional capacity for productive scholarship or exceptional creative ability in the arts. There are approximately 3000 applicants each year for the approximately 175 fellowships granted.
- A hongbao is a red envelope used in Chinese culture containing a monetary gift which is given during holidays or special occasions.
- The US National Institutes of Health says this about various approaches used to tell cancer patients about their diagnosis: *"How to tell cancer patients about their diagnosis is approached in different ways across various countries and cultures. For example, in European and North American societies, physicians prefer direct truth telling, while in Asian countries, indirect truth telling is more culturally accepted. Families usually have major influence over clinicians' disclosure of diagnosis to patients."*
- Mainland China does not currently have a law protecting patient autonomy. In China, the interdependence of family and community define the greater morals and social meanings in society, which overrides the concept of autonomy. Confucianism encourages people to judge "right and wrong" based on their common sense. Thus, unlike Western societies, it is difficult to find statutory moral codes in China.

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Scriptures:

Proverbs 2:1-12 (The Message) – *“Good friend, take to heart what I’m telling you; collect my counsels and guard them with your life. Tune your ears to the world of Wisdom; set your heart on a life of Understanding. That’s right—if you make Insight your priority, and won’t take no for an answer, searching for it like a prospector panning for gold, like an adventurer on a treasure hunt, believe me, before you know it Fear-of-God will be yours; you’ll have come upon the Knowledge of God. And here’s why: God gives out Wisdom free, is plainspoken in Knowledge and Understanding. He’s a rich mine of Common Sense for those who live well, a personal bodyguard to the candid and sincere. He keeps his eye on all who live honestly, and pays special attention to his loyally committed ones. So now you can pick out what’s true and fair, find all the good trails! Lady Wisdom will be your close friend, and Brother Knowledge your pleasant companion. Good Sense will scout ahead for danger, Insight will keep an eye out for you. They’ll keep you from making wrong turns, or following the bad directions of those who are lost themselves”*

Luke 6:36 (NLT) – *“You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate.”*

Ephesians 4:32 (NIV) – *“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”*

1 Peter 3:8-9 (NASB) – *“To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, [e]loving, compassionate, and humble; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you would inherit a blessing.”*

Proverbs 14:30 (The Message) – *“A sound mind makes for a robust body, but runaway emotions corrode the bones.”*

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Discussion points:

1. What's the hardest thing about saying goodbye for you?
2. What's the difference between truth and honesty?
3. Relationships tend to be complicated. What would you have done if this happened in your family?
4. What was most endearing to you about this film?
5. What was most challenging to you?
6. What cultural differences stood out to you?
7. What helped everyone to pull together more during this particular family crisis?
8. What advice would you give to someone who embarks on what they might consider a "good lie" in order to prevent it from snowballing into an elaborate deception?