

VIEWING GUIDE: A LONG WAY HOME

This viewing guide was developed by the Center for East Asian Studies at University of Arizona, East Asian Studies Center at The Ohio State University, and Taiwan Studies Arts & Culture Program at University of Washington, in conjunction with Documentary Educational Resources.

INTRODUCTION

Trailer: [Link](#)

Full Film: <https://vimeo.com/340978129> (password is **longway-der24**)

Note: The link will be available through Feb 3, 2024.

Director: Luc Schaedler, color, 73 min, 2018, in Chinese with English subtitles

A Long Way Home takes us on a fascinating journey into both the grim days of recent Chinese history and the dazzling cultural scene in present-day China. The film centers around five of the most significant representatives of contemporary Chinese counterculture: the visual artists the Gao Brothers, the choreographer and dancer Wen Hui, the animation artist Pi San and the poet Ye Fu. With bravery and subversive wit, they each shed light on the social problems in their country from their unique perspective. Their vision is of a democratic and humane civil society, and, increasingly, their struggle seems as relevant for the world today as it is for China. from *go between films*

NOTE: THIS FILM MAY BE INAPPROPRIATE FOR SOME USERS. PLEASE SEE BELOW ABOUT TRIGGERS AND NUDITY. Every effort has been made to mark the sensitive areas, though some might have been missed:

- Nudity: 2:54 - 3:05, 3:25 - 4:53, 5:16 - 5:39)
- Trigger: language, violence (27:12 - 28:22)
- Nudity (29:59 - 30:06)
- Nudity: (43:30 - 44:01)
- Trigger warning: "Arresting Prostitutes" (44:00 - 46:30)
- Trigger warning: "Blow up the school" (46:31 - 50:49)
- Nudity: (1:11:28 - 1:11:40)

PREPARATION

Before viewing the film, you may find it helpful to review these two documents if you would like more background about the Chinese Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen Square events :

- [Introduction to the Cultural Revolution | FSI](#)
- [Tiananmen Square Demonstrations \(1989\)](#) Asia for Educators

ELEMENTS OF FILM

- [Analyzing Film - Teaching Intro](#) from the ORIAS *World In Film* summer institute for teachers
- [Shot Styles](#) from the ORIAS *World In Film* summer institute for teachers
- [The Kuleshov Effect](#) - short clip from *The Cutting Edge: The Magic of Movie Editing*, directed by Wendy Apple, 2005.

As you view the film, think about both the message of the film and the ways the director uses cinematography to communicate this message. To help you focus on both the media and the message, we've created multiple sets of viewing questions. We recommend you read the questions before viewing the film, then take some notes as you watch.

ANALYZING THE FILM AS TEXT

1. How does the opening scene featuring Gao on the rooftop relate to the overarching story goal in this film? Why does the filmmaker open the film this way?
2. How does the filmmaker set up the connection between the artists and their artistic creations? In what way does this connection contribute to or align with the overall story goal in the film?
3. How does the film connect each artist to shape the overarching story goal? How do the individual contributions of the artists relate to the story goal, both on an individual basis and as a collective force?
4. How does the filmmaker choose the settings for artist interviews, whether in the studio, at home, amidst their communities or families, against cityscapes, or within neighborhoods? What is the reasoning behind these arrangements? Additionally, which interview setting do you find most appealing, and what makes it stand out to you?
5. How does the filmmaker capture and present historical moments and personal memories through audio-visual means? How are these elements preserved, portrayed, or represented cinematically?
6. How does the filmmaker create a distinction and/or highlight conflicts between the government (macro/grand narrative) and its citizens (micro/personal narratives) using the artist interviews and their creative works?
7. Which audio-visual motifs does the filmmaker employ to depict the five artists, showcasing them as individuals while also conveying their role within a broader community?
8. How do the artist interviews and their artworks influence your comprehension of the two historical moments explored in the film—the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen Square incident?
9. How does the filmmaker convey the notion that politics infiltrate every facet of daily life?
10. How does the filmmaker utilize varied footage styles (e.g., black and white, color, static, and motion), as well as diverse genres (e.g., artist interviews, reproduction of artworks, and documentation of their creation, along with historical primary sources) to establish connections between the past, present, and/or future? Additionally, can you identify a particular juxtaposition or transition that, in your view, effectively enhances the impact of the film?
11. Which audio and visual motifs does the filmmaker employ to convey the concept and the importance of remembering (not-forgetting) and eventual reconciliation, as exemplified by the Gao Brothers towards the conclusion of the film?
12. How does the family portrait of the Gao Brothers and their mother, which concludes the film, contribute to the overall story goal in this film? Why does the filmmaker end the film this way?

PEOPLE

[Introduction of artists featured in *A Long Way Home*](#) from go between films

The connecting element and main theme of the artistic works of Wen Hui, Pi San, Ye Fu and the Gao Brothers is a demand for the reconstruction of humanity throughout Chinese society. Looking back at their personal family histories, and thus recent Chinese history, takes on greater significance within the backdrop of their unease toward present-day Chinese society. Actively remembering is an important part of their work as they try to fathom the roots of present-day problems. Like researchers, they explore the possibilities of collective healing in their work.



WEN HUI (choreographer | dancer) In China, Wen Hui is considered the mother of modern dance. For years she has explored the topic of memory. In her current piece «Red», based on the propagandist ballet of the same name from the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), she processes the physical impact of this traumatic era.

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PI SAN (animation artist) Pi San is known to millions in China for his subversive animated film series, which have caused a sensation on the Internet. Through his mischievous cartoon character «Kuang Kuang» he exposes the injustices and absurdities of everyday life in China. In doing so he must constantly gauge how far he can go with his criticism.



YE FU (writer | poet) The former police officer, who resigned in 1989 in protest against the suppression of the Democracy Movement, has made a name for himself in recent years with his autobiographical essays and blog articles which loudly demand political change.



GAO BROTHERS (visual artists | painters) Gao Zhen and Gao Qiang, known internationally as the Gao Brothers, have been around since the birth of the modern Chinese art scene in 1985. They belong to the group of critical avant-garde artists



whose work reflects the complexity of recent Chinese history and the «human condition» in a globalized world.

In order of appearance

1. **Gao brothers** (Gao Zhen & Gao Qiang) - artists
 - a. **Nudity:** (2:54 - 3:05, 3:25 - 4:53, 5:16 - 5:39)
 - b. U.S. Museum exhibit (2010) [Link](#)
 - c. Check for nudity and list for teachers/trigger warnings
 - d. Black list in China
2. **Wen Hui** - choreographer (6:23)
 - a. “In everyone’s body there are a lot of personal things stored ... marks left by the society. In order to reflect you need to know what happened in the past. Then you will know what to do in the future.” (8:37)
3. **Pi San**, animation artist (10:10)
 - a. 10:55 Kuang, Kuang animation (set in mining area of Northern China)
 - b. 108 Heroes from Shuihu (13:03)
 - c. Discusses creating animation and characters
4. **Ye Fu**, writer/poet (14:52)
 - a. Wang Yin memories (hometown)
 - b. Grandmother recited poems every day
 - c. Poetry’s tradition (17:00) - Be kind hearted, express one’s values, criticize the darkness
5. **Gao brothers** (17:24)
 - a. Tianjin, 2015 Warehouse explosion, killing 165 (“political backdrop” “political system is never isolated” (17:45)
 - b. “... the communist party wants people to forget, but I think such tragedies should not be forgotten.” (20:05)
6. **Wen Hui** (20:48)
 - a. “I believe everyone’s body ... it’s the place where you store your life experiences, your memories and the past.” (21:17)

- b. Bridge for young people to understand the past (23:00)
7. **Ye Fu** (23:32)
 - a. Talks about a young child's destructive choices but reflects on cruelty in life. "It dawned on me that in China I had received an education in cruelty." (24:32)
8. **Pi San** (25:02)
 - a. Shows family, son, father, mother, eating together,
 - b. Animation (27:00) school scene (using inappropriate word by mistake)
 - c. **Trigger: language, violence (27:12 - 28:22)**
 - d. Compare the idea of a "bad" child to the relation between people and government (28:31), i.e. the government thinks the worst of the people for example when they are complaining.
9. **Gao Brothers** (28:47)
 - a. Outdoor photograph with cooks
 - b. **Nudity (29:59-30:07)**
10. **Tiananmen Square, April, 1989 Ye Fu talking about being a policeman** (30:08) **(be careful of nudity just before)**
 - a. Student protest because movement for democracy
 - b. June 3, 1989 crack down
 - c. Train (38:06)
 - d. Six years in Changjian Prison
11. **Gao brothers** (39:58),
 - a. Tank man from Tiananmen Square
12. **Wen Hui** (41:07)
 - a. Time after Tiananmen Square, link between body and memory, past, family and society
13. **Gao brothers** (42:53)
 - a. Discusses time after Tiananmen, black list
 - b. **Nudity: (43:32 - 44:01)**
 - c. **Trigger: "Arresting Prostitutes," 2007 (44:01 - 46:30)**
14. **Pi San** (46:31 - 50:49)
 - a. **Trigger warning "Blow up the school" (46:31-)"It's about telling the truth. Even a simple truth like farting"**
 - b. **"Blow up the School" trigger warning. "Hurt the public order"**
 - c. Creator sensors themselves.
15. **Gao Brothers** (figures in history) (50:50)
 - a. Hitler (Nazi Totalitarianism), Stalin (Russian Totalitarianism), Mao Zedong (Chinese Communist Party)
 - b. Close view versus distance
16. **Wen Hui** (52:53, 56:18)
 - a. Model operas, cultural revolution
17. **Ye Fu** (55:20)
 - a. "Ever since we came into this world we were taught by the country that each person has his own class and that the struggle between classes must never stop."
 - b. Teacher asks "family status"
18. **Cultural Revolution - History** (52:53)
 - a. Model operas, cultural revolution (52:53)
 - b. 1960's: Marching, rallies (56:48)
 - c. Communist party
 - d. Beijing 1966 (58:53) at Tiananmen Square, Mao Zedong "To build the new on the rubbles of the old."
 - e. Ye Fu: Experiences from artists' perspective (tall hat of shame in parade (59.53)
 - f. Gao brother: "Isolated", father committed suicide/died (1:02:00)
 - g. Wen Hui - talks about dancing all night and looking back now (1:04:06)
 - h. Gao brother: Dark time in China "Education in cruelty" (1:06:26)

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- i. Pi San - talks about violence against self and others - violence through his character to stand up for himself (1:08:00)
- j. Gao brothers: Hugging performance at bridge, Yellow River, ruins of 9/11 requested but Gao brothers are state prisoners (1:09:57 - 1:11:25)
- k. **Nudity: (1:11:28 - 1:11:40)**
- l. Ye Fu - Policeman talking about grandmother
- m. Gao brother: confronted one of the men who killed his father

PLACES/IDEAS

1. Shuihu 108 heroes (from *Shuihu Zhuan*, also known as the *Water Margin*. It's one of the Four Great Classical Novels of Chinese literature)
2. Wang Yin (town)
3. Tianjin, 2015 warehouse explosion
4. Beijing
5. Communist party
6. Fine art digital print studio - Beijing
7. Environmental issues/Smog

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

[Historical background of *A Long Way Home*](#) from go between films

The historical background for *A LONG WAY HOME* is made up of two defining phases in recent Chinese history: the Democracy Movement of 1989 and the Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976. Beginning with present-day China, *A LONG WAY HOME* moves deeper into the «heart of darkness» of Chinese history. The focus is on how people handle historical and biographical ruptures and how they process traumatic experiences.

During the **Cultural Revolution** (1966-76), systematic violence was employed to eliminate everything private and to destroy social relationships. Mao Zedong and the Party relied on betrayal, public humiliation, self-incrimination, and re-education in everyday life. Mistrust and deep insecurity continue to shape relationships among people in China today. In the film, the **Democracy Movement of 1989** stands in direct opposition to the Cultural Revolution. What began as a student protest in Beijing soon grew into a sweeping movement uniting people of diverse social backgrounds. The first spontaneous mass movement outside party structures, it showed initial signs of a possible civil society that would not be able to germinate until after Mao's death.

The violent suppression by the People's Army was a clear sign from the regime that this was not welcome and that public criticism of the Party would not be tolerated - a condition that continues to this day. Links to background information follows:

Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)

- [Cultural Revolution](#)
 - [Primary Source Document with Questions \(DBQs\) THE SIXTEEN POINTS : GUIDELINES FOR THE GREAT PROLETARIAN CULTURAL REVOLUTION \(196](#)
 - [Introduction to the Cultural Revolution | FSI](#)
 - [China's Cultural Revolution | Stanford History Education Group](#)
 - [The Chinese Cultural Revolution: Dynamic Times, Dramatic Lessons for Today's Kids - Association for Asian Studies](#)

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- [Morning Sun](#)
- [China's Cultural Revolution \(ExEAS\) pdf](#)
- [China Under Mao | FSJ](#)
 - [China Under Mao: Discussion Guide](#)
- [Chinese Cultural Revolution | East Asian Studies Center](#)
- [Interview with Red Guard](#)

Democracy Movement of 1989 (Tiananmen Square)

- [Tiananmen Square Demonstrations \(1989\)](#) Asia for Educators
- [Tiananmen Square in the Newspapers | Asia for Educators](#)
- [Sunrise Over Tiananmen Square - Association for Asian Studies](#) (film)

Three Figures in History

- Adolph Hitler
- Joseph Stalin
 - [Joseph Stalin \(Wilson Center\)](#)
- Mao Zedong
 - [Mao Zedong \(Wilson Center\)](#), Primary Source documents, including “[Bombard the Headquarters](#) (Big-Character Posters)” and other documents and data visualization.

FILM EXCERPTS

1. Tiananmen Square, 1989 Protests (30:08 - 43:00) (be careful about starting point, scene before has nudity)

- Ye Fu talking about being a policeman(30:08)
- Student protest because movement for democracy
- June 3, 1989 crack down
- Train (38:06)
- Six years in Changjian Prison
- Gao brothers (39:58), (42:00 -)
- Tank man from Tiananmen Square
- Discusses time after Tiananmen, black list
- Time after Tiananmen, link between body and memory, past, family and society

2. Cultural Revolution (53:03 - 1:11:25) (be careful to end, nudity starts at 1:11:28)

- Wen Hui (53:03, 56:55) Model operas, cultural revolution
- Ye Fu (55:16) “Ever since we came into this world we were taught by the country that each person has his own class and that the struggle between classes must never stop.”
- Teacher asks “family status”
- 1960’s: Marching, rallies
- Communist party
- Beijing 1966 (58:53) at Tiananmen Square, Mao Tse Tung “To build the new on the rubbles of the old.”
- Experiences from artists’ perspective (tall hat of shame in parade (59.53)
- Gao: “Isolated” (1:02:00), father committed suicide
- Wen Hui - talks about dancing all night and looking back now
- Gao brother Dark time in China “Education in cruelty” (1:06:26)
- Pi San - talks about violence against self and others - violence through his character to stand up for himself (1:08:00)

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- I. Hugging performance at bridge, Yellow River, ruins of 9/11 requested but Gao brothers are state prisoners (1:09:57 - 1:11:25)

3. Three Figures in History (50:50-53:00)

- a. Gao Brothers: Hitler (Nazi Totalitarianism), Stalin (Russian Totalitarianism), Mao Tse Tung (Chinese Communist Party)
- b. Close view versus distance

VIEWING FOR HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

1. How are the two historical events—Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and Democracy Movement of 1989 (Tiananmen Square)—depicted audio-visually in the film?
2. Based on the film, what do you know about what happened to the artists and their families during these historical events?
3. How did the experience of participating in these two historical events at a young age affect the artists and their art?
4. Did parts of the film challenge your assumption or preconceived ideas about the Cultural Revolution and/or the Democracy Movement of 1989?
5. Based on the film, how do the two historical events continue to affect China and its citizens?
6. How does the filmmaker use photographic records to introduce the two historical events—Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and Democracy Movement of 1989 (Tiananmen Square)?
7. How does the filmmaker use sound (e.g., artist voiceover, music score) to support and/or disturb the narratives revealed, visually, by the historical photographs?
8. How and why does the filmmaker choose to juxtapose historical evidence and oral history to introduce the two historical events?
9. What techniques does the filmmaker use to convey the generational similarities and/or differences vis-à-vis the two historical events and their impact on contemporary Chinese society?
10. Why is the act of remembering and/or not forgetting so important to the artists?
11. Based on the film, how do the artists approach historical writing through photography, choreography, poetry, and animation similarly and/or differently?
12. Moving beyond the context discussed in the film, how do artists around the world respond to historical trauma in different contexts?

POST-DISCUSSION REFLECTION

1. What did you miss, misunderstand, or not fully understand when you first watched the film? What did you learn that expanded your understanding or challenged your preconceived ideas?
2. What scene from this film was most transformative for you? *This could be because you gained emotional understanding of a situation, cultural or historical knowledge, or a new understanding about film itself.*

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[INTERVIEW with Luc Schaedler](#) (04:30) from the Dharamshala International Film Festival

[MULTIMEDIAREVIEWCOLUMN](#)

[“Multimedia Review Column: *A Long Way Home*”](#) from The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology

[Statement from Director Luc Schaedler](#) from go between films

[Introduction of artists featured in *A Long Way Home*](#) from go between films

[Historical background of *A Long Way Home*](#) from go between films

Image credits: <https://gobetweenfilms.com/en/materials/downloads-alwh/>

This project is a collaboration between federally-funded National Resource Centers and Documentary Educational Resources (DER). This program, focused on *A Long Way Home*, was organized and supported by: Center for East Asian Studies at University of Arizona, East Asian Studies Center at The Ohio State University, and Taiwan Studies Arts & Culture Program at University of Washington through U.S. Department of Education Title VI grants to each of the centers, in conjunction with DER.