

Sad Films and Tragic Films

A few days ago, I watched a film called *The Last Farewell* (2024) directed by Zhang Zhongchen. I'm not going to be critiquing the film here. But, I'm going to be contrasting the film with another film called *Hero* (2002) directed by none other than Zhang Yimou.

The Last Farewell tells a story of a man in a countryside who is unable to hear and speak. His father is mentally ill, and eventually found dead. When he was a child, his sister died in an accident and the mother left the family as a result. Like many other independent films in China, *The Last Farewell* is a sad film set in a countryside. On the contrary, *Hero* is a tragedy. *Hero* tells a story of a nameless swordsman who schemes to assassinate the ruler of a rivaling kingdom. Through the conversation between the ruler and the swordsman, the swordsman ultimately comes to a conclusion that the ruler must not be killed, as he is the only one capable of uniting various kingdoms into singular China. As the swordsman parts with the ruler, the ruler is pressured by his political assembly to execute the swordsman - the only person in the entire world who understands the purpose, responsibility, and the loneliness of the ruler.

Hero is not a sad film in any way. It is a tragedy. A tragedy is a dilemma. It is a flow of situations that force one or more characters to make unfavorable decisions and face unfavorable outcome. Tragic films, however, don't have to be heavy. A recent film *Perfect Days* (2023) is a good but subtle example of a light tragedy. In *Perfect Days*, the main character chooses to live an unfavorable life despite coming from a wealthy background. In contrast, a sad film relies on one or more characters experiencing a chain of unhappy events. The trick behind sad films is that they are easier for the audience to react emotionally. We've all seen and enjoyed sad films in which a mother sacrifices her life for the sake of her child, or a man gets into an accident and does not remember his fiancée, etc. But let me ask you this: *if you cry watching a film, do you think that film is automatically good? Do you watch a film so you can be emotional?* Sadness, happiness, anger, and fear. There is one or two more.

To be continued.

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