

1942

Director: Feng Xiaogang ("Aftershock" "Assembly" "If You Are the One")

Story: Liu Zhengyun (Novel "Remembering 1942)

Cast: Xu Fan 徐帆, Zhang Guoli 张国立, Adrien Brody, Chen Daoming 陈道明, Zhang Mo 张默, Tim Robbin, Zhang Hanyu 张涵予

Synopsis

In 1942, Henan province was devastated by the most tragic famine in modern Chinese history, resulting in the deaths of at least three million men, women and children. Although the primary cause of the famine was a severe drought, it was exacerbated by locusts, windstorms, earthquakes, epidemic disease and the corruption of the ruling Kuomintang government.

At night, hundreds of famished farmers descend with sickles and torches on the household of Landlord Fan (Zhang Guoli) in North Henan province. He holds the final stocks of grain in Laozhuang Village. Afraid of the angry mob, Fan prepares a banquet for them in his own home. But old feuds break out and his property is burnt to the ground in an accidental fire.

Meanwhile, war is about to break out between Japanese troops and Nationalist forces in North Henan. The province's full supply of grain is to be diverted to the Chinese troops. Realising the danger, provincial chairman Li Peiji (Li Xuejian) pays a visit to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek (Chen Daoming) in Chongqing, but doesn't have the courage to speak up.

Homeless and hungry, Landlord Fan is forced to join the millions of refugees who are walking on foot to Shaanxi province, where they have traditionally sought refuge in times of crisis. He is among the most fortunate, with his own donkey and cart to carry his 16-year-old daughter Xing Xing (Fiona Wang), loyal servant Shuang Zhu (Zhang Mo), and his tenant Hua Zhi (Xu Fan).

On the perilous journey south, marching in the opposite direction to the Chinese army, Fan encounters three men facing a crisis: impassioned American journalist Theodore White (Adrian Brody), chef-turned-judge Old Ma (Fan Wei), and Father Simeone (Zhang Hanyu), who is losing his faith in God and turns to the pragmatic Italian priest Thomas Megan (Tim Robbins) for advice.

As the weeks pass, the social difference between Fan and his servant Shuang Zhu steadily evaporate. They dream of a future, after the war, ruling as landlords together. Fan does the unimaginable and sells his own daughter - who begs for the opportunity to eat - to a brothel for a few quarts of millet. Shuang Zhu, who has long cherished Xing Xing, is brokenhearted.

Shuang Zhu finds consolation when the older Hua Zhi offers to marry him. After one night with her new husband - having secured a new father for her starving children - she sells herself to slave traders. The family now have enough food to survive the perilous crossing of the border into Shaanxi. With nobody left to live for, Fan returns north again to die in his hometown.

Theodore White publishes his scathing report on the extent of the famine in Time Magazine, embarrassing Chiang Kai-shek (Chen Daoming). The Generalissimo orders the Chinese troops to retreat, leaving the amassed Japanese army in complete confusion. Then the Japanese make a completely unexpected move... they begin feeding the famished population....