

Chinese film 'Yellow Earth' lands at Sheldon

By Mick Dyer
Senior Reporter

"Yellow Earth," also translated as "Yellow Land," a recent film from the People's Republic of China, dramatizes the contrasting values of feudal and modern China, and represents a spirit of hope for the nation's future.

Set along the Yellow River in rural northwestern China in 1939, poor environmental conditions are a metaphor for the poor social conditions in the country at that time.

movie REVIEW

The Yellow River, the heart of much of ancient Chinese culture, represents the spirit of China. The vast, dry barren land surrounding the river represents the dying feudal culture, as China enters the 20th century.

The film focuses on the lives of four people: Gu Qing, a young cadre who is collecting folk songs to be used by the communist party; Cui Qiao, a free-spirited 12-year-old peasant girl; her younger brother and her old father.

In the movie, Gu Qing is the epitome of the Chinese revolutionary with his eyes on the future. He is young, gallant, intelligent, a member of the army and he even sews his own clothes when they need mending. He's a true comrade.

Cui Qiao's father symbolizes the rigid acceptance of out-dated cultural attitudes that are causing the culture to stagnate. Cui Qiao and her younger brother represent the young people—

caught in the middle — who symbolize hope for the future.

There is a lot of singing in the film. It seems that singing is one of the few pleasures the people living in such a harsh environment have.

Ironically, Cui Qiao sings beautiful songs about her unfortunate lot in life in a very sexist culture:

"I've been beaten/ because I don't want to get married/ I only miss my mother/ I've been beaten/ poor girls.

"If I don't have to get married/ I'll be happy though I live a miserable life/ who will sympathize with me when I go through hardships/ who will sympathize with me/ poor girls."

It's a powerful moment in the film. Cui Qiao is painfully aware of the social problems existing in China at the time. As she spends time with Gu Qing (he's staying with the family in their primitive home), she is inspired by the ideas that he brings from the world outside of her backward, isolated community.

She is enlightened and realizes the possibilities of a better life with communism.

Later on in the movie, after Gu Qing has left, and on her wedding night, Cui Qiao steals away to a raft on the river and escapes her fate in the remote community to join the communists. She explains why this is necessary to her younger brother before she leaves.

As she floats down the river, Cui Qiao sings one last song — a song about "only the communists can save us."

Gu Qing returns to the community to find the land parched, and the local

men praying to the "Grandfather Dragon" for rain. The last moment of the film focuses on Cui Qiao's younger brother struggling against the crowd to make contact with his communist friend who can save them.

At any rate, besides the patriotic theme, which often seemed to fall more into the category of propaganda than art or literature, the cinematography dominated the film.

Carefully composed camera shots throughout the movie gave breathtaking panoramic views that seem more like alien landscapes than agricultural land that people cling to for their very existence. Abstract shots of the river running past, featuring motion but not form, also added meaning and continuity to the movie.

Through the careful use of the camera, Chen Kaige, the director of the film, effectively captured the desolation of the region and the difficulty of life there. It seems almost ironic that Kaige would choose to create such powerful and beautiful images of such a desperate land. Perhaps that is to symbolize the pride and resiliency of the people who occupy it.

"Yellow Earth" is appearing at the Sheldon Film Theater on Wednesday at 1 p.m., Friday at 7:30 p.m., Saturday at 3 p.m. and Sunday at 7 p.m. as a part of the new Chinese Cinema Series. The Series features eight modern Chinese movies running now through Nov. 12 at Sheldon.

"Yellow Earth" is Kaige's directorial debut. He will be interviewed on stage by Professor June Levine following the screening Friday night.



Andy Manhart/Daily Nebraskan

Sheldon to show 10 Chinese films

The New Chinese Cinema Series, running now through Nov. 12 at The Sheldon Film Theater, features 10 modern Chinese films.

• "Yellow Earth": Wednesday at 1 p.m., Friday at 7:30 p.m., Saturday at 3 p.m. and Sunday at 7 p.m.

• "Horse Thief": Thursday at 7 p.m., Saturday at 9 p.m., and Sunday at 2:45 p.m.

• "A Good Woman": Thursday at 9 p.m., Friday at 1 p.m. and Saturday at 7 p.m.

• "The Black Cannon Incident": Friday at 3 p.m., Saturday at 1 p.m., and Sunday at 9 p.m.

• "Sacrificed Youth": Oct. 25 at 3:15 p.m., Oct. 26 at 1 p.m., Oct. 27 at 7 p.m. and Oct. 28 at 3 and 9 p.m.

• "In The Wild Mountains": Oct. 27. at 3 and 9 p.m. and Oct. 28. at 7 p.m.

• "Taipei Story": Nov. 1 at 3 p.m., Nov. 2 at 1 p.m., Nov. 3 at 7 p.m., Nov. 5 at 3 and 7 p.m. and

Nov. 6 at 7 p.m.

• "A Time To Live And A Time To Die": Nov. 3 at 9:15 p.m., Nov. 5 at 12:15 and 9:15 p.m. and Nov. 6 at 3 and 9:15 p.m.

• "A Chinese Ghost Story": Nov. 8 at 3:15 p.m., Nov. 9 at 1 p.m., Nov. 10 at 9 p.m., Nov. 11 at 3 and 9 p.m. and Nov. 12 at 1 and 7 p.m.

• "Peking Opera Blues": Nov. 10 at 7 p.m., Nov. 11 at 1 and 7 p.m. and Nov. 12 at 3 and 9 p.m.

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