

The last emperor review

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The Last Emperor (1987), directed by Bernardo Bertolucci, is an artistic masterpiece revolving around one of the most prominent and intriguing events in our world's history, the fall of the Manchu Empire. Widely recognized for his colorful screenplay, Bertolucci's elegance and craft was on display throughout the movie. With a \$25 million budget to work with, Bertolucci and his crew went to great lengths to maintain and capture the authenticity of traditional China during the early 1900s. In fact, the Hemdale Film Production house was the first non-Chinese corporation that was granted special permission to access all of the Forbidden City, the palace complex for the Manchu Empire, for filming purposes. The Manchu Empire was China's last great dynastic ruler, and they held this position for almost 250 years. As the movie depicts, the Manchu Empire was on its last legs at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century. Matters only complexified when the dying Empress Dowager appointed her 3-year-old grandson, Piyu, as the next emperor.

Stripped away from his family and living in exile away from anyone in the outside world, the movie did a great job portraying the varied emotions a toddler would experience in such unfavorable conditions. As Piyu got older, the movie focuses on his isolated lifestyle, and the growing frustration of not being able to go out, or spend enough time with his younger brother. This feeling of loneliness only intensifies when Piyu's childhood nanny, and the closest thing he has to a friend, is forced away from him. Soon after, Piyu was forced to give up the title as the emperor of China, as people began revolting to make China a nation state. Even after this declaration, Piyu lived in the forbidden city and was not allowed to step out. During his teen years

however, he finds a mentor in the form of his new tutor, Sir Reginald Johnston, a Scotsman who was hired in an attempt to modernize the young emperor. Under the tutelage and clever guidance of Sir Johnston, Piyu is able to escape his life in exile by becoming a married man. Piyu enjoys his freedom with his wife, and together they begin to indulge in all activities that are considered 'western' or 'modern', and he envisions himself living out west. However, his new-found ambition clouds his decision-making.

During World War II, Japanese warlords befriend, and then double-cross Piyu, forcing him to sign documents that benefit Japan over China. Consequently, he spends the majority of his remaining life as a prisoner of war. It is important to understand that while the storyline of the movie is accurate with the historical timeline, the director gave an artistic recounting of the developments in Piyu's life, and this results in some of the realism being sacrificed. Overall, the movie was a riveting tale of one of the less talked about characters in history, Piyu, The Last Emperor.