

# Good historic context of yellow earth movie review example

[Politics](#), [Communism](#)



Produced in 1984, *Yellow Earth* was the first film directed by Chen Kaige, a graduate of the Beijing Film Academy. The film is a period piece, taking place against the backdrop of China when World War II broke out. The film focuses on a communist soldier who comes to a village to collect folk songs to serve as morale-raising communist propaganda for the Eighth Route Army. During his visit to the rural village, the young soldier stays with a family, motherless but with a father, a young boy, and two sisters. The elder sister has already been "married off" in an arranged marriage, and the 14-year-old younger sister, who is about to enter into an arranged marriage at the insistence of her stern father, wants to run off and fight the Japanese during the war. The movie, one of the first post-Mao non-propaganda films, depicts a harsh landscape, as well as a rugged, unforgiving rural life. The film is a negative commentary on Chairman Mao's communist cause, as it depicts a family who is unable to carve out lives of their own because of communism's failed promises, a reality that is symbolized by the unforgiving terrain, forced marriages, and the utter lack of "happy" folk songs.

First, the rural area is untouched by communist battles against the Japanese. The land is almost too worthless and barren to fight for. At one point, Cuiqiao (played by Xue Bai), her father's (played by Tan Tuo) younger daughter, makes a pair of shoes that he can use to plow the land with his yoked ox. However, he later laughs about the shoes, implying that the land is so barren and infertile that they are useless. He prefers to wear no shoes at all, plowing the fields barefoot instead. In the film, the fact that the land can barely be cultivated in rural China is a commentary, as well as a criticism of Mao's early communist fight. Without food, the peasants are not only unable

to farm and eat, but they are rendered unable to supply the army with food as well. As Mao once said, "An army marches on its stomach", and the starkness and barrenness of rural China illustrates how Mao's communist party is unable to achieve these basic necessities in order to defeat the Japanese Empire.

Similarly, the life of the family is barren, and their choices are as rigidly planned in the manner of the communist party central committee's policies. The young daughter (Cuiqiao) is miserable with her father's plans for her arranged marriage. Instead, she wants to join the army, the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) Eighth Route Army. Immediately after her marriage, instead of staying with her husband, she is desperate and sorrowful. She attempts to swim across the turbulent Yellow River, and her fate is unknown. Nonetheless, her choice between a spiritual death married to someone she does not love, or her uncertain odds of making it to the other side of a ruthless river, illustrate how communism had a direct effect on rural peasants during World War II.

With subtle irony, the village folk singer interjects sorrowful songs throughout the film. Towards the end, she sings, "With sickle, hammer, and pick, we make a new road for the poor." Not only is this what Chairman Mao asserted during this period, it is an empty promise to the rural peasants who farm in the harsh northern region of China. Like the folk songs sung throughout the film, they are a people without hope, barely surviving in a land that seems as if Chairman Mao and the communist forces forgot.

Yellow Earth is a story about arranged marriages, young women whose fathers make choices for them, and an isolated, rural existence tainted with

hopelessness and desperation. It is also a film that was written and produced to address a much broader context. The failed promises of the CCP and the prospects of endless war touched the lives of even the most rural areas of China, areas that were without warfare yet filled with sadness and despair -- as shown by folk songs that are not even effective communist propaganda, and could never improve the morale of a starving army.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Yellow Earth. dir. by Chen Kaige. Guangxi Film Studio, 1984.