

Chinese Society and Film

OLLI Spring 2025

Golden Bear Center 202-204

10:00-12:00

Prof Thomas Gold

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In December 1978, the Chinese Communist Party shifted the focus of its work away from revolution in the name of socialism, to reforming the economy and opening the economy and society to the outside world. This was a revolutionary act coming after 10 years of violent internal upheaval in the name of a Cultural Revolution. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), culture of all types was subjected to strict political control to make sure that all works adhered to a rigid formula supporting the Party and its revolutionary agenda of remaking Chinese society in the name of the workers and peasants. Intellectuals, including artists, suffered greatly, and most of what was produced had little artistic value.

In the film world, it was not until the mid-1980s that a new generation of filmmakers began producing films that interrogated many of the myths of the communist revolution. These films and their artists attracted global attention. This global acclaim irritated the communist leaders because of their independent spirit and questioning of the party's line. Many works were forbidden to be shown domestically. The crackdown under the leadership of Xi Jinping, 2012-present, has cast a new pall over the artistic world.

In this class, we will watch and discuss six of the best known and highly acclaimed films from the reform era. Each film is available on streaming services. For each class, the instructor will introduce some of the social and political background of the following week's film, and class time will be devoted to probing deeper into the issues raised in the film as well as its

artistic merit. For the first week, this background information will be circulated to students in advance.

Suggested reading:

Mao Zedong, “Talks at the Yanan Forum on Literature and Art”,
Introduction

Peter Hessler, *River Town*

Odd Arne Westad and Chen Jian, *The Great Transformation: China’s
Road from Revolution to Reform*

Week 1: April 1

Red Sorghum (originally planned to show “Yellow Earth” but no English subtitled version was available)

Week 2: April 8

To Live

Week 3: April 15

In The Heat of the Sun

Week 4: April 22

Not One Less

Week 5: April 29

Beijing Bicycle

Week 6: May 6

Still Life

