

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Themes in Bertolucci's Films

Society : Culture

The Sheltering Sky The theme of culture, and especially culture clash, is at the heart of this film, which follows the adventures of two Americans who travel to the Sahara. As outsiders, Port and Kit sample bits of local culture (the Tuareg tribe) but are unable to enter inside. The problem seems to be their cultural 'baggage', especially their reliance on words and writing. Both Port and Kit do eventually merge with local culture, but neither experience is positive

The Last Emperor Another kind of culture clash is depicted in this epic film about the history of China in the twentieth century. As the Middle Kingdom is convulsed with revolution, it also advances along the road of westernisation. Pu Yi is taught by a Scotsman, learns English, wear glasses and, when he takes up residence in Tientsin, adopts the playboy life-style of the Roaring Twenties. The film includes small details, such as Pu Yi's habit of chewing gum, riding a bicycle and playing tennis, as well as major changes, such as the fact that Pu Yi's second wife leaves him because 'western society does not tolerate two wives.'