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**WINNER · SILVER BEAR**  
**BERLIN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL**  
**2001**

" WANG HAS UPDATED DE SICA'S  
LYRICAL FABLE 'THE BICYCLE THIEF'...  
A GRACEFUL, ALMOST CLASSICAL  
SENSE OF PERSPECTIVE...  
PRECISE, PAINTERLY  
CONFIGURATIONS OF  
LIGHT AND SHADOW. "

-A.O. SCOTT, THE NEW YORK TIMES

" A MASTERFUL,  
FLAWLESS FILM! "

-KEVIN THOMAS, LOS ANGELES TIMES

" MARVELOUS! "

-JONATHAN FOREMAN, NEW YORK POST

" BEAUTIFULLY SHOT.  
CRISPLY ACTED.  
EMOTIONALLY  
SATISFYING. "

-THELMA ADAMS, INTERVIEW

# BEIJING BICYCLE

A FILM BY WANG XIAOSHUAI



In this compelling, beautifully shot tale of life in a rapidly changing China, two teenage boys - one a poor migrant from a country village who works as a messenger, the other a schoolboy from a family that has struggled into the new middle class - battle for possession of a stolen mountain bike.

CHINA • 2002 • 113 mins • Color • In Mandarin with English subtitles

# Lives Full of Rage in the Brutal 'Beijing Bicycle'

KEVIN THOMAS

Bicycles are as synonymous with Beijing as cabs are with Manhattan, and when the hero of Wang Xiaoshuai's superb and harrowing "Beijing Bicycle" joins the swarm of cyclists who crowd the city's streets, he stands for countless young people who have made the journey from the country to China's capital in search of a better life.

Cui Lin's shy yet stubborn Guei considers himself lucky. He has a place to live—with a friend in an old compound with small quarters for working people. Even better, he has landed a job as a messenger that provides him with a uniform and an impressive silver mountain bike that will become his once he has earned 700 yuan, which is about \$85.

A determined worker, Guei will earn this sum in little over a month, yet by then he will have discovered how mean-spirited city people can be. For instance, he's summoned to the gym in a luxury hotel and is forced to shower before he can enter, only to discover the hotel expects him to pay for it. Then just before the bike is to become his—after which he will split the delivery fees instead of having to give 80% to his employer—it is stolen. His boss will take him back if he finds the bicycle. "Beijing Bicycle's" story now takes off in earnest. The bicycle has fallen into the hands of another young man, Jian (Li Bin), but it is not immediately clear whether he bought or stole it. What is clear is that he wanted it in the worst way, to impress his pals at school and his new girlfriend Qin (Zhou Xun). His father has been promising to get him a bike, but that money now must go toward his younger half-sister's education. Had not chance and poverty placed Guei and Jian in the same neighborhood, Guei probably would never have seen his bicycle again.

What emerges is a portrait of modern urban life at its most brutal. Jian is in such a state of rage toward his father and so eager to be a member of a group more prosperous than his family that he is blinded to the fact that Guei needs his bicycle to earn a living—and that his pals, for all their prep school ties and blazers, are virtually a gang, each one a violent, thuggish brute.

Inevitably, "Beijing Bicycle" brings to mind Vittorio De Sica's neo-realist classic, "The Bicycle Thief," but it also recalls Akira Kurosawa's early masterpiece, "Stray



Dog," in which a young police detective searches for his stolen gun throughout a war-ravaged Tokyo, needing to find his weapon to regain his sense of manhood as intensely as Jian needs the bike for social acceptance. Wang, however, has a bleaker vision than De Sica or Kurosawa, moving beyond the question of whether Jian will ultimately see his so-called friends for what they really are. For Xiaoshuai, modern urban life in China is destructive, the notion of a Communist classless society a cruel joke in which the struggle for survival is ruthless, even more so than in the big cities of the Western world.

From start to finish, "Beijing Bicycle" moves adroitly with the emotional impact of a steamroller. Xiaoshuai comes from the ranks of China's underground cinema and has seen all of his work either heavily censored or banned outright. With this masterful, flawless film, he emerges in the front ranks of China's now numerous, world-renowned filmmakers.

## BEIJING BICYCLE

Director Wang Xiaoshuai. Producers Peggy Chiao, Hsu Hsiao-Ming, Han Sangping. Screenplay Wang Xiaoshuai, Tang Dalian, Peggy Chiao, Hsu Hsiao-Ming. Cinematographer Liu Jie. Editor Liao Ching-Song. Music supervisor Wang Feng. Costumes Peggy Yan. Art directors Tsai Chao-Yi, Cao Anjun. In Mandarin, with English subtitles. Running time: 1 hour, 53 minutes.

Cast: Cui Lin: Guei, Li Bin: Jian, Zhou Xun: Qin

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