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SURFING THE WAVES OF POPULAR CULTURE
BY MICHAEL GILTZ & FRIENDS

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"Summer Palace" -- The Popsurfing Review

** 1/2

This Chinese film came to Cannes without the official approval of the Chinese censors. That's hardly a surprise. What is a surprise is the fact that they signed off on the script in the first place. This sexually explicit film features students protesting at Tiananmen Square in 1989, frontal nudity of both men and women, a great big dose of Western ennui and after the massacre by the government it shows one disconsolate student shouting out "Fucking bastards!" before collapsing into tears. The story focuses on one girl's journey from a small-ish town to Beijing university. She has sex with her cute local boyfriend before leaving him behind. And University quickly transforms her into a relatively worldly girl. Im always amazed by the small details of life in countries like China -- the students read by candlelight and have no indoor plumbing. (At one point, our heroine pulls out a small bowl and squats in the corner to go to the bathrom while her roommate continues to practice her music a few feet away.) She falls for another student who we're told is her soulmate, though it's hard to know why since we rarely see them do much at first except have sex. One very erotic scene shows them climaxing. He stays on top of her as they giggle over a silly moment, they playfully laugh and then suddenly get very serious again and he starts making love until they climax again -- all in one take and very believable. her metamorphosis is very convincing and magnetic. Politics appear, but meetings and rallies are just an excuse for the girl to make her boyfriend jealous. he cheats on her; she sleeps with a teacher. They break up; they get back together. Tiananmen Square is quite moving -- not just because of what happens but because of the exciting sense of the Chinese themselves actually depicting it onscreen. The tanks and the gunshots are offscreen. To this point -- maybe half way through -- the movie has been focused and involving. Suddenly, in walks melodrama. This friend moves to Germany. That friend moves to another province. The Berlin Wall falls. Gorbachev. None of this reverberates as politics are ignored for sexual politics. Our heroine

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