

STUDENT: PK

ASSIGNMENT: FILM RESPONSE

Still Life is a film by director Jia Zhangke that examines, through art film sensibilities, the effect modernity is having on China's citizens as China embraces modern attachments. Communism isn't overtly on display in this film but the shadow of the CCP still hovers around the film's settings as Jia Zhangke allows his camera to examine another period of rapid societal change.

An interesting theme running through some of the films lately seems to me to be a longing look back at traditional Chinese values/way of life and its conflict with China's rapidly modernizing society and the economic needs that arise because of the modernization. Fuel, rice, cooking oil, and salt, as you told us in class, are traditional gifts in China and items of historical significance, key items of survival. In *Still Life* these have been replaced with liquor, cigarettes, tea and candy. The first list is all things necessary for survival, fuel for heating, rice as a staple of Asian cuisine, cooking oil for food prep and salt a dietary necessity. It is interesting to note that the modern items as listed in Jia Zhangke's film are all things that have nothing to do with survival but are all either addictive or in the case of tea and candy, empty calories, devoid of any nutritional value.

Another theme evident in this film and has been touched on in films like *Meishi Street*, is the displacement of Chinese citizens as the country is not only radically reshaping the people, but it is also literally reshaping the land. In *Meishi Street* it was the widening of Meishi Street in preparation for the Summer Olympics. In *Still Life* the displacement and reshaping is on display. Both of the protagonists have been separated

by because of modernization and economic pressures. The guy left his home and family to work in the mines in southern China. When he returns to his hometown in the Three Gorge (?) areas, because of the dam and demolition of the region, he finds his former home's location at the bottom of a new lake. The female protagonist is also separated from her husband due to modernization. Her husband, who initially traveled to the region to oversee a bridge construction, has stayed in the area to continue to work and more importantly, make money while living a decidedly modern lifestyle.

I checked out the dGeneration website and was blown away by the number of films they had available on their site. I've got two questions, first where do you suggest I begin?, and does everybody in China make films now?

<http://munibrezale.com>