

Ang lees eat drink man woman and cultural values of contemporary china

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Eat Drink Man Woman When viewing Ang Lee's *Eat Drink Man Woman* one immediately notices the clashing cultural values of contemporary China, and the world at play. The opening scene of cars rushing along a freeway is cut against an older gentleman slowly preparing a meal while traditional sounding music is played non-diegetically. The scene is disrupted by the sound of a cell phone, and then juxtaposed against a shot of a fast food restaurant frying French fries. The juxtaposition illustrates the contrasting difference between the old world culture and the hustle and bustle of the new world, and makes a comment on the nature of the consumption of food in the contemporary world.

The inclusion of the fast food restaurant demonstrates the film's thematic concern with Western influence in Eastern culture, as fast food has primarily been identified as a Western entity. This theme is also developed with the inclusion of the Christian sermon. The film explores the Eastern/Western dichotomy through the perspectives of two of the sisters. The more liberal sister is more accepting of Western values and perspectives and has a relationship with a man who had lived in the United States. The conservative sister, by contrast, refused to follow her love interest after graduation to the United States and her life has been lived in opposition to this decision since. Food is a central concern of the film and is used for a number of symbolic purposes. Indeed, director Lee himself even indicated that he incorporated food as a central metaphor (Berry 2005). In one scene the father encounters the young girl while jogging and asks her why she is eating breakfast at the bus stop and she tells him she doesn't have time for breakfast. As she enters the bus one sees the distress in the father's eyes as a result of the

conflicting new world values embodied in the time constraints of modern society that eliminate the opportunity to sit and eat breakfast.

Another significant thematic concern is the nature of love and social relations. The film explores an old world vs. new world dichotomy. These contrasting values are embodied in the perspectives of the sisters. One sister who is moving out has embraced a more liberal sensibility that understands relations to be based on a more open, and ever-changing foundation where being with multiple partners is permitted and leaving someone when the relationship has soured is acceptable. The other sister embraces a conservative sensibility and believes that a relationship should be long term. They two differ on the nature of their parents relationship, with their argument indicating the clash of these value systems. These clashing values are also embedded in the nature of their careers. The liberal sister is devoted to her career and considers moving to Amsterdam to assume a vice-presidents position, while it's understood that the conservative sister will remain at home and take care of her father.

The film explores the conservative sister's concept of love in one scene where she throws away a love letter written by one of her students and states such letters shouldn't be written in chemistry class; the scene is symbolic of her detachment from the concept of 'love' so that has come to understand the concept in terms of science, specifically chemistry. This sister's approach to her love interest is also indicative of this sensibility, as rather than engage her interest in conversation she studies him from a distance, like a chemistry equation. Many times the film juxtaposes scenes of one sister with the other to highlight the contrasting, yet interrelated values

they embody. One such instance occurs when the liberal sister is courting the new negotiator; the black film-noir inspired mise-en-scene is cut against the daytime light of the conservative sister's school workplace.

References

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