

Discussion Questions about *To Live*

1. What strikes you most?

After watching the movie, I think the most impressive thing is after all the misfortune and death that FuGui has been through, he's not despair of everything, and still keeps living on. Also, the concept that the director wants to share life and death also impressed me. "We live for nothing but life itself." Nowadays, we are seeking money and others to determine a successful life, but we are all ignoring the simplest thing about life, to live.

One of the most successful movies of Zhang Yi Mou, "To Live" is set in a special background in China (from the 40s to 60s) when Civil War and Cultural Revolution happened. As a viewer, we do not see any hero or villain role in the movie but the ordinary people. The movie tracks the transition of Fugui's life in different periods throughout the effect of politics changing and it strikes me the most throughout the narrative of Fugui from a landlord to a lonely elderly. "To Live" is not the anti-communist film, on the other hand, it takes us back to sixty years ago to approach the meaning of "live" in that period when the little town people, citizens trusting the leaders who can bring the positivity of the ideology, the new expectation to their lives.

I saw sarcasm in this film. FuGui survives in the struggle session because he loses his house during the gamble and feels lucky for being poor. His daughter died because of a lack of good experienced doctors due to political reasons. There are many similar tragedies that have happened in these times due to the bad policy and the movement. But just as FuGui said to his grandson, the future will just get better and better.

2. Critics consider *To Live* an epic film. Why do they say so? In other words, what makes this film so representative of modern Chinese history and culture?

I think the most impressive characteristic of this movie is real and close to reality. It restores every aspect of a normal person's life of the 1940s to 1970s. All the detail and background are accurate, it resonates with the audience.

3. The history and culture connection: How do the political changes impact culture and cultural expression?

There is a special period of Chinese modern history, The Culture Revolution. The movie also represents how people are crazy during that period. After WWII and civil war, the

people during that time extremely need spiritual support. Politics creates exclusiveness and perception of affiliation, which is exactly what people need during that chaotic time.

4. How does politics impact ordinary people's lives? What does it say about politics and life/survival? What does the title mean? What do you think of Fugui? Is he a hero?

"To Live" has the political background from the Chinese Civil War to Cultural Revolution and the main characters relate by a family of Fugui for more than three decades. If Fugui represents the ordinary people's lives in the Civil War period, then his next-generation- Feng Xia and Mantou face the struggle during the Cultural Revolution period. In 1966, Communist leader Mao Zedong launched the Cultural Revolution with the purpose to purge the impure elements of Chinese society. In fact, the Communist leaders were taking the party moving too far in a revisionist direction while nation's schools were shutting down, damaged the economy and traditional culture. Students joined "Red Guards" who is known as the support group of the Government and were allowed to inflict bodily harm on people as dissidents. Thousand of ordinary people who were denounced as class enemies and counter-revolutionaries were abused, tortured, and killed. During this period, the rich farmers, landlords classes, intelligent groups such as teachers, educated intellectuals, doctors were considered as the black categories, were separated out for struggle sessions, humiliation, re-education, beating. The impact of politics, through the death of Long er, who cheats Fugui out of his property and is shot for being a counter-revolutionary because he is considered as the landlord group. Also, Feng Xia's death indirectly is affected because of the lack of experience of young student nurses while doctors, the educational group were sent to the village with the purpose of "re-education".

The movie's title- "To Live" represents the greatest joys that come in minimal doses, and it stands for the strong spirit inside the soul of modern Chinese. There is nothing easier than living; also nothing is difficult than living. They found the happiness in life even though struggling in never-ending day today.

Neither the characters in the movie were described into hero categories. Especially in the narrative of Fugui's characteristics, from a rich landlord who lost a fortune through incessant gambling to a poverty class, Fugui's life is tracked down each transition period through the old shadow puppet, from playing it for fun till the end it all is burnt. Fugui represents the lives of many people during the 60s of China society, represents their joy and pain. They had an expectation on the decision of Government such as Wan Erxi (

Fugui's son in law), also common ones such as Fugui and others are clueless about their allegiance to the new ideology.