Despair and Hope in the Midst of the Industrial Ruin: Zhang Meng’s *The Piano in a Factory*

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**Abstract**

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Critics generally regard Chinese director Zhang Meng’s award winning film *The Piano in a Factory* (2010, *Piano* hereafter) as a rare daring work in Chinese cinema today, despite languishing in relative obscurity domestically. The film places Chinese laid-off factory workers, an important and yet long neglected subject, at its center, revealing the financial and emotional loss of the workers, as well as the disintegration of community, family, and values brought by the drastic economic and social changes in the 1990s. *Piano*’s attraction also comes from its narrative style. The film won the Artistic Exploration Award at the 18th Beijing College Student Film Festival for a highly controlled style and distinctive visual language. As an independently produced low budget work, *Piano* achieved remarkable success, claiming several domestic and international awards and nominations. Focusing on the cinematic landscape—predominating image of the industrial ruin, this talk will analyze its visual language and style in relation with the subject matter and discuss the director’s contribution in constructing the landscape of historical memory.