



铁道

THE IRON MINISTRY

A FILM BY J.P. SNIADOCKI

**“THE BEST FILM
ABOUT CHINA
IN THE TWENTY-FIRST
CENTURY”**
Travis Jeppesen, Artforum

SOUND DESIGN & MIX by Ernst Karel
CO-PRODUCED by Joshua Neves and J.P. Sniadecki



THE IRON MINISTRY

directed by **J. P. Sniadecki**



THE IRON MINISTRY

Documentary

production

2014, USA, J. P. Sniadecki

83 min., Colour, Chinese

screenplay & cinematographer

J. P. Sniadecki

producers

Joshua Neves, J. P. Sniadecki

synopsis

Filmed over three years on China's railways, *The Iron Ministry* traces the vast interiors of a country on the move: flesh and metal, clangs and squeals, light and dark, language and gesture. Scores of rail journeys come together into one, capturing the thrills and anxieties of social and technological transformation.

The Iron Ministry immerses audiences in fleeting relationships and uneasy encounters between humans and machines on what will soon be the world's largest railway network.

tags

road-movie, visual anthropology, social ethnography, China — modern Babylon



THE DIRECTOR'S COMMENTS But, within THE IRON MINISTRY itself, there are also countless relationships to Chinese politics — and geopolitics as well — that ripple out from the lives of the passengers, impacting and shaping the film itself. I was trying to bring together my affinity for trains — especially Chinese trains, where I first learned the Chinese language back in 2000 — with a portrait of a smoldering unease and uncertainty that ramifies out towards questions of society, economy, sovereignty, and technology, among many other things. This unease and uncertainty often expresses itself as a prevailing anxiety over the future of the self, ethnicity, and the nation.

My hope was actually to depict a cross-section of the different trains operating within the Ministry of Railways, and the different carriage spaces of each class on the train. In focusing on the infrastructure and environment, on the trains themselves, though, I inevitably filmed with individuals from different geographies, social classes, ages, ethnicities, and personalities.

The title has a fairly wide range of meanings. "Iron" refers, on one level, to the railways, the railroad, trains, etc. On another level it refers to notions of development, progress, and modernity. On yet another, more indirect level, it refers to the governmentality of the Chinese Community Party: the "iron bowl" of collectivism (which supposedly provided food for everyone) and the continued "iron fist" of social control, despite its efforts to develop soft power.

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