

News and Reviews

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Ethnography in Fast-Forward and Rewind Notes on Making the Video Program *Under Another Sun*

>> by David W. Plath

Sojourners attract the scholarly eye only in particular circumstances. They inhabit an ethnographic limbo somewhere between tourists and emigrants. The academically proper like to sneer at the tourist for not learning anything about a place he visits and to pity the emigrant for being obligated to acculturate. The sojourner lives in a locale long enough to learn some local conventions and to identify with the people without needing to go native.

Under Another Sun, released in September 2001 by the Media Production Group, brings into focus the 30,000 Japanese now living and working in Singapore. It profiles Japanese sojourners from an array of careers and professions, and sketches earlier phases of Japanese sojourning in Asia. It explores tensions between the expatriates' attachments to their native land and their desires to shed

some of the burdens imposed on them when living at home in Japanese society. And it examines the special challenge that Japanese in Singapore must confront: coming to terms with the history of Japanese involvement in Southeast Asia over the last 150 years.

In the notes that follow, I offer examples of how the process of documentary video production and post-production have influenced the film.

Subtitles and Voice-Overs

A broadcast program will probably be viewed by one or two persons sitting at home positioned where they can read subtitles easily. If the program is screened in a classroom, however (not many classrooms being endowed with a projection system), students in the back rows will have trouble seeing. So for practical reasons of readability, I prefer to use subtitles sparingly.

My team makes its videos for English-fluent



audiences, primarily in the United States. So life will be simpler for the audience as well as the production team

if everybody in a program speaks English with ease. Well, what do we do when a person on camera is speaking a language other than English? (Let's call it Japanese, since that has been the second language in most of the programs my team has made.) We can superimpose a spoken translation or "voice-over" in English. This eliminates the readability problem but leaves us instead with a problem of audibility.

First, somebody has to do the translating. Then somebody has to recruit and coach native English speakers to do the voicing. And their voice qualities—age, gender, eloquence, gentleness or stridency and so on—should approximate those of their Japanese counterparts, or at least be similar enough so as to not draw audience attention away from the content of the message being uttered.

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COURTESY OF FIRST RUIN/ICARUS FILMS

From *Swing on Beijing*, a film profiling avant-garde artists in China. See review, page 7.

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Asian Educational Media Service

The Asian Educational Media Service (AEMS) is a program of the Center for East Asian and Pacific Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. AEMS offers information about where to find audio-visual media resources for teaching and learning about Asia, and advice about which ones may best suit your needs. In addition to *AEMS News and Reviews*, published quarterly, services include a free call-in/write-in service and a Web site. To add your name to our mailing list, request additional copies of the newsletter to use in workshops or to share with your colleagues, or ask for help in locating resources, please contact us.

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What's New?

Due to the tragedy that occurred on September 11th and the conflict that has ensued as a result, we have decided to extend our coverage of Afghanistan, a nation that is frequently considered part of South Asia. In addition to continuously updating the database as new media is released, we have also created a separate Web page focusing on educational resources (including numerous Web sites) that deal with Afghanistan and the Islamic World. Published on October 11th, this guide received over 3,000 hits during its first month of existence. You can check it out by visiting <http://www.aems.uiuc.edu/HTML/AfghanistanLinks.htm>.

Under Another Sun, David Plath's production about Japanese expatriates in Singapore, premiered at the Midwest Conference for Asian Affairs in late September and was shown a few weeks later here at UIUC. For the time being, AEMS will be distributing the film; please contact us if you are interested in purchasing it.

AEMS has been very active on the UIUC campus during the past couple of months. With the help of other international studies departments, Sarah Barbour arranged the Documenting Diasporas film series, featuring seven documentaries that focus on migration of peoples. AEMS also sponsored a screening of *The Turandot Project* (will be available from Zeitgeist Films in late 2002), which was introduced by Professor Isabel Wong. For more information about on-campus screenings sponsored by AEMS or other Asian Studies organizations, visit <http://www.aems.uiuc.edu/HTML/calendar.html>.

Finally, I went to the National Council on Social Studies (NCSS) conference in Washington, D.C., right before Thanksgiving in order to promote AEMS and learn more about K-12 educational needs. We look forward to doing more with the Council on Social Studies at both a local and national level. ♦

—Elizabeth Cothen, *Guest Editor*

Ethnography

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Next, somebody has to hire a studio and an audio engineer to record the English voices. And since it is conventional to have Japanese utterances audible in the background while the English voice-overs are heard, utterance and translation need to be trimmed to about the same length, and volume-levels on the two audio tracks have to be balanced carefully during final editing. Recording, editing and mixing thus take longer and cost more than if the voices were English-only.

But what should we do if the person on camera is speaking English with voice qualities that make it difficult for the listener to decipher? In *Under Another Sun* the problem arose with Joe Ide, the entrepreneur. Audio-visual recording blurs or blots out some of the behavioral cues that are present when you are conversing face-to-face. And some people are uncomfortable when coaxed to speak in the presence of a camera, microphone, and camera crew. Much as I dislike doing so, I occasionally have to insert English subtitles even though the utterances are in English. (Superimpose an English voice-over on top of an English utterance and the result is like something out of a Woody Allen movie.)

Each Japanese person who speaks to the camera in *Under Another Sun* has the ability to converse in everyday English. We recorded some participants using English only (e.g., Ms. Abe, the cosmetics executive). Most of the others began in English but after a few minutes we invited them

to switch to Japanese. In English their comments and gestures and phrasings were too stilted, or their hesitation pauses were too long, etc. Viewers might think the person obtuse or juvenile or uneducated. And the program would lack the you-are-there flavor and spontaneity that are video's strong suit.

Why So Many Lower-Thirds?

In the jargon of media production, "lower-thirds" are the titles that identify an individual in view on the image screen at that moment. Editors conventionally place the words in the lowest one-third of the screen. Lower-thirds pop up frequently in *Under Another Sun*. Some viewers find them distracting, and ask if there aren't too many of them. Why do we so often identify people speaking on camera?

It would be enough to identify a speaker once or twice if the program only were to be seen straight through in one sitting. But MPG's policy is to format our videos for two different types of use. One is broadcasting over public and cable channels, the other is narrowcasting in classrooms.

For broadcast use a program must stand alone. A viewer should be able to comprehend its main ideas in a single viewing. Classroom instructors, on the other hand, are more likely to screen just one or two segments in a class period, reserving 30 or 40 minutes of time for lecturing and discussion. With this in mind, *Under Another Sun* has been formatted as a sequence of eight segments plus an introduction and conclusion, each five to seven minutes long. This allows educators to position



Japanese and Korean Pottery

- >> *Mashiko Village Pottery*. Restored by Marty Gross. 1937. 20 minutes.
- >> *Potters at Work*. A film by Marty Gross. 1976. 29 minutes.
- >> *Korean Onggi Potter*. Produced by the Smithsonian Institution Office of Folklife Programs. 1992. 24 minutes.

In Japan around 1918, a movement to promote folk craft and folk art, called “*mingei*,” was initiated by Yanagi Sōetsu, a philosopher of religion, who was influenced by the English Arts and Crafts movement and Zen Buddhism. During a retreat in 1926 at a Buddhist temple on the sacred mountain of Koya-san, Yanagi, along with potters Kawai Kanjiro and Hamada Shōji, came up with the term *mingei* and set out to preserve these traditional skills (Yanagi, 1972). The organizers’ initial focus was on traditional peasant pottery, though they worked assiduously with potters to develop aesthetic and practical adaptations of traditional forms. There was an explicit attempt to define the standards for, and then maintain, traditional styles and technologies of pottery production.

Each of the films reviewed here is based on an enthusiasm for what are perceived as authentic *mingei* artists and traditional *mingei* communities. They are also historical documents in their own right—primary observational data from the working lives of village folkcraft potters in Japan and Korea. All of the images are at least 25 years old and some go back more than a century.

Mashiko Village Pottery is reproduced from a silent black and white movie made in 1937. There is neither narration nor captioning beyond a brief description of Mashiko as a pottery town at the beginning. It shows the workshop of one local man, Sakuma Totaro, currently remembered as the one who made it possible for Hamada Shōji to be accepted into Mashiko society when he chose to move in and establish his workshop there. The film shows all the stages of production from digging the clay out of a local hillside to firing the finished pots in a large multi-chambered climbing

kiln (*noborigama*). Storage jars, kitchenware (grater bowls), and teapots are all shown being thrown on the wheel and decorated with slips and glazes.

One woman, Minagawa Masu, is shown deftly drawing landscape decorations on the teapots. She was famous in the village for her ability to decorate the pots quickly and simply. She had no workshop of her own, but went into local workshops when summoned. The items she created were not produced for ceremonial or high society use; they were farmers’ utensils that could be taken to work in the fields. When asked what attracted him to Mashiko, Hamada used to credit the example of Minagawa’s work. She inspired his understanding of *mingei* with her repetitive, simple, and artful designs reproduced without pretension.

Two generations later, Sakuma’s grandson has inherited the workshop and continues to produce functional work. A small collection of his grandfather’s work is displayed in a special gallery. But Minagawa’s descendants no longer go out to decorate other people’s pots. They have their own shop and gallery where they turn out reproductions of the teapots seen in this film—favorite souvenirs for current visitors familiar with the history of Mashiko.

Potters at Work features two workshops in the Kyushu villages of Onda and Koishiwara—communities much favored by the early *mingei* organizers. The families are descendants of Korean potters kidnapped in the late 1500s during Hideyoshi’s invasions of that country. Yanagi and his friends were especially taken with Onda, a small village at the top of a mountain pass with room for only 14 families. It represented for them their *mingei* ideal of a cooperative community

with three communal kilns and a consistent pottery style. Traditional pottery technology was assiduously and self-consciously maintained. Pots are still often signed with the name of the town rather than the potter or household. Because of the attention drawn to both communities by the *mingei* movement, they were able to abandon their farm work and become fulltime potters by the time this film was made in 1976. The film, taken in color, has no narration and only brief captions to introduce the major sections. The only sound is the ambient sound from the scenes filmed and a few short conversational phrases in Japanese. It is expertly edited to convey its story.

The film opens with the mudding up of chamber doors and the firing of a kiln at Ohta Kumao’s shop in Koishiwara. Then the film switches to Onda, with an extended series of shots about the preparation of clay. Dug from the hillside, the town has particularly hard rock clay that has to be pulverized before it can be used. The trademark image of Onda is its heavy log clay pounders that are operated by waterpower from the town stream. Good pictures of this procedure gradually reveal the nature of the technology. Then the camera moves into the workshop of Sakamoto Shigeki where he is throwing pots alongside his teenage son Takumi. A caption says, “Teaching the craft.” The son is shown in initial attempts at throwing small plates from a lump of clay. The fatherly concern for his son’s progress is shown by the way he looks at him and gives occasional pointers, even while he continues to make his own pots. Not mentioned in the film is the older custom of severe apprenticeship outside of the immediate household for a son who will become the heir to a shop. Shigeki, for instance, worked with an uncle for a couple of years before coming home to work with his father. Takumi, on the other hand, undertook to learn the craft in earnest after two years of college in Tokyo. While there, he spent time exploring Yanagi Sōetsu’s *mingei* museum and gaining a larger national view of *mingei*. Twenty-five years after the film was made, Takumi and Shigeki still make pots together. As shown in the film, Shigeki’s wife continues doing many jobs around the shop. This is a family enterprise; they use their own kiln, rather than the communal one.

In the film, the camera travels back to Koishiwara to show Kumao and two other potters working at wheels placed on a common deck. There are more workers here, beyond the immediate family. Many different pots are being made and are carried out from the wheels to sun dry in the yard. Suddenly one of the women workers cries out, “Ame da!” (It’s raining!) With some consternation, everybody jumps up from their work to run into the yard and rescue the pots from a

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Sadako's Legacy

>> *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*. A film by Informed Democracy. 1990. 30 minutes.

>> *How to Fold a Paper Crane*. A film by Informed Democracy. 1994. 30 minutes.

The video, *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*, is based on a children's literature classic written by Eleanor Coerr twenty-four years ago. It is the true story of Sadako Sasaki and takes place in Japan in 1955. Ten years after the atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, 12-year-old Sadako begins to experience dizziness and finally collapses. At the hospital, she is diagnosed with leukemia. This disease is not unknown to young Sadako since many children and adults have died from leukemia during her short lifetime. Throughout the book, she never loses hope that she may be one of the few who survive. When a friend reminds her of an old Japanese legend that says if you fold a thousand paper cranes your wish may come true, Sadako starts folding. This story is a testimony to her courage. Her hope is kept alive by her diligent effort to complete the thousand cranes, her attentive parents, and friends who bring her scraps of colored paper. Sadako herself shares her message of hope with another hospitalized child who has acquired leukemia from his mother. Sadako never finishes her thousand paper cranes, but her friends construct the remaining cranes so that she can be buried with them.

Though sad, the story allows people to share Sadako's hope for her own life and the lives of all the children who

have been or will be affected by wars. In 1958, children in Japan gave money to erect a memorial statue in her honor, and every year since, many thousands of paper cranes continue to appear at its base, renewing Sadako's wish for peace and bringing attention to the suffering caused by war.

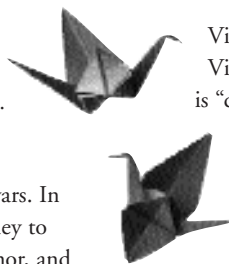
The video, which was made in 1991, remains true to the book. Liv Ullmann's narration could not be any better in voice and expression. Ed Young's soft pastel drawings, the sole images featured in this film, perfectly embrace the sentiment of the story. (Young, an award-winning illustrator, has also written and illustrated a picture book, entitled *Sadako*, for younger children.) The music, performed by guitarist George Winston, enhances the story and provides a lilting background, though at times it makes the narration difficult to understand.

This video has already won many awards, including the Gold Award by Parents' Choice Magazine, the Blue Ribbon for the American Film and Video Festival, The Gold Apple from the National Education Film and Video Festival, and the Notable Film and Video Award by the American Library Association. It has been reviewed and given five stars from the Video Rating Guide, a "Highest" rating from Children's

Video Report, and is highly recommended by Video Librarian. School Library Journal states it is "deserving of the honors and awards it has received and delivers a powerful message that is especially appropriate in today's world" (April, 1991).

Teachers and educators will find many useful resources to accompany this video. The video of *How to Fold a Paper Crane* (1994), produced by the same company as *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*, begins with a brief reprise of the Sadako story and includes information about the Sadako statue (known as the Children's Monument), which stands in the center of Hiroshima's Peace Park surrounded by millions of paper cranes. After the introduction, it very clearly describes the procedures for constructing the origami paper cranes. A narrator presents the 26 steps in a clear voice while a pair of gloved hands demonstrates the folds. Teachers will find the video particularly suited for a class project since the steps are divided into individual segments that can be paused to allow students to complete each of the steps. The accompanying guide provides visual instructions for folding a paper crane, a brief history of origami and information about cranes. The Sadako Film Project's Web site (<http://www.sadako.com>) provides free posters, additional directions for folding paper cranes, and factual information about many endangered species of cranes who themselves have become victims of habitat loss. This site also has links to

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Bargain Buys—Vietnam: Then and Now

Few countries have had a greater affect on the American psyche than Vietnam. The war we fought on that soil remains with us today in the form of countless books, movies, songs, and memories.

Bargain Buys!

But despite decades of political and military involvement, Americans still know very little about the place itself. This month's Bargain Buys column focuses on affordable media that makes some attempt to talk about Vietnamese, not just Americans, who were touched by that terrible conflict. In addition, I will discuss what is available on Vietnam today, especially since it reopened for development during the 1990s. Everything mentioned is appropriate for high school through college classes unless stated otherwise.

The War

From the Vietnamese perspective the war lasted 30 years, from right after the end of WWII when negotiations with the French broke down to when the North Vietnamese army marched into Saigon in 1975. The man who led them through most of that period was the revered Ho-Chi Minh. Although most documentaries on the war barely mention him, A&E Biography has produced a respectable 50-minute account of his life, focusing mostly on his time in Europe and as a young revolutionary. This video portrays Minh in a generally favorable light, but shies away from discussing the larger events.

Vietnam: Chronicle of War, on the other hand, deals heavily with the politics surrounding the war. It features, according to host Walter Cronkite, some of the most important and interesting stories filmed by CBS. More than half the clips in this 1981 documentary focus on U.S. soldiers, but there are several powerful scenes featuring Vietnamese. These include, among others, one of sobbing villagers watching Americans burn their homes and another of dead Vietcong soldiers being unceremoniously piled up and airlifted away. In between the footage, several reporters that covered the war, including Dan Rather and Mike Wallace, give their analysis of various events.

The War in Vietnam, a Windows/Mac compatible CD-ROM, nicely accompanies this video. Co-produced by CBS and The New York Times, it contains a lot of relatively accessible information about different

periods of the war. Both of these resources are fairly comprehensive; they give teachers plenty of material to work with, but also require extra time to sort through all of the information.

There are also resources available to educators interested in teaching about particular events during the war. During the 1990s, CBS's "60 Minutes" traveled back to the village My Lai to confront an incident many Americans would like to forget—the cold-blooded murder of hundreds of civilians by U.S. soldiers. Accompanied by two airmen who helped stopped the atrocity, Mike Wallace talks with several of the town's former residents (no one actually lives in My Lai anymore, though some still work there), including one woman who had been personally saved by one of the airmen. Although the program, titled *Back to My Lai*, is very critical of the men who instigated the massacre, especially the officers, it stops short of arguing that the entire war effort was wrong.

The Discovery Channel feature, *The Fall of Saigon*, on the other hand, views the U.S. involvement more negatively. Twenty years after the fact, key players in Washington (including President Ford and Henry Kissinger), the military, and the former U.S. embassy recount the chaotic situation that evolved over that last week before the North Vietnamese took over the city. Also featured are Vietnamese people who aided the Americans throughout the war effort and were then left behind. This program reveals what an utter failure this conflict was and how it ultimately hurt most the people it was designed to protect.

Beyond the War

No one, American or Vietnamese, forgets a conflict like the Vietnam War quickly. While anger persists on both sides, many people just want to make peace with this terrible chapter in their lives. War widow Barbara Sonneborn traveled to

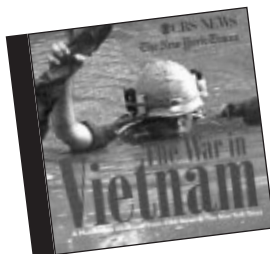
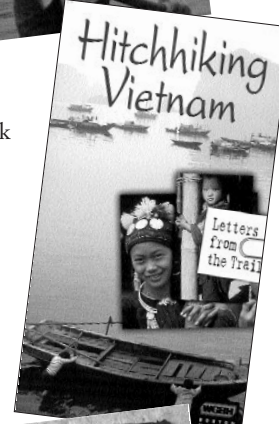
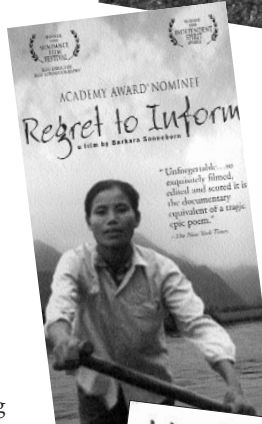
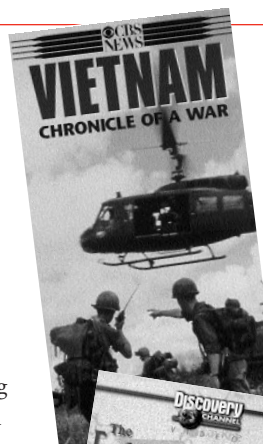
Vietnam on just such a mission, a journey documented in the acclaimed documentary *Regret to Inform*. Accompanied by her Vietnamese-American friend, who is also a widow, Sonneborn visits the village where her husband was killed and talks

with the former Vietcong women still living there. *Regret* is unique in that it chronicles the heartache and recovery of three groups of women—American, South Vietnamese, and North Vietnamese—focusing on their common humanity and strength. This film could be used in Women's Studies classes as well as units on Vietnam.

Sonneborn's friend represents another legacy of the war—the migration of millions of Indochinese people to the United States and other Western countries. *The Vietnamese: A Refugee Journey*, produced by Penn State, discusses this phenomenon in a short, but informative 9-minute video that can be shown to younger classes.

Now that Vietnam is open to Americans again, many young people are traveling there as tourists. One somewhat eccentric but brave woman, Karin Muller, trekked through Vietnam alone with only a Hi-8 camera to record her adventures. The resulting documentary, *Hitchhiking Vietnam*, focuses on Muller more than it should, but does offer a view of rural Vietnam that most tourists never see. Even better, there is an online teacher's guide available from PBS that accompanies it (see "Vietnam Web Sites," page 9, for URL).

Vietnamese filmmakers have become quite popular in the United States during the last five years. Of the new releases, *Three Seasons* by Tony Bui is perhaps the most teachable, because it focuses on so many aspects of Vietnamese life, including traditional rural practices, war memories, poverty and the underworld, gender roles,



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Artefakt Productions, Neubruckstrasse 80, CH 3012, Bern, Switzerland. Tel: 0041-31-3025073. E-mail: znoj@ethno.unibe.ch.

Asian Educational Media Service, 805 W. Pennsylvania Ave., Urbana, IL 61801. Tel: 888-828-AEMS (2367). Fax: 217-265-0641. E-mail: aems@uiuc.edu. Web site: <http://www.aems.uiuc.edu>.

DiscoveryStore.com, Customer Service, P.O. Box 6448, Florence, KY 41022-6448. Tel: 800-889-9950. E-mail: customer_care@discovery.com. Web site: <http://shopping.discovery.com>.

Documentary Educational Resources, 101 Morse Street, Watertown, MA 02172. Tel: 800-569-6621. Fax: 617-926-9519. E-mail: douced@der.org. Web site: <http://der.org>.

Facets Video, 1517 W. Fullerton Ave., Chicago, IL 60614. Tel: 800-331-6197. Fax: 773-929-5437. E-mail: sales@facets.org. Web site: <http://www.facets.org>.

First Run/Icarus Films, 32 Court Street, 21st Floor, Brooklyn, NY 11201. Tel: 718-488-8900. Fax: 718-488-8642. E-mail: info@frif.com. Web site: <http://www.frif.com>.

Informed Democracy, P.O. Box 67, Santa Cruz, CA 95063. Tel: 800-827-0949. Fax: 831-426-2312. Web site: <http://www.sadako.com>.

Marty Gross Film Productions Inc., 637 Davenport Road, Toronto, Canada M5R 1L3. Tel: 416-536-3355. Fax: 416-535-0583. E-mail: marty@martygrossfilms.com.

Pariyatti Book Service/Vipassana Publications, P.O. Box 15926, Seattle, WA 98115. Tel: 206-522-8175. Fax: 206-522-8295. E-mail: sales@vrpa.com. Web site: <http://www.vrpa.com>.

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Television Trust for the Environment, Prince Albert Road, London NW1 4RZ, United Kingdom. Tel: 44-20-7586-5526. Fax: 44-20-7586-4866. Email: tve-uk@tve.org.uk. Web site: <http://www.tve.org>.

Zeitgeist Films, 247 Centre Street, 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10013. Tel: 212-274-1989. Fax: 212-274-1644. E-mail: web@zeitgeistfilm.com. Web site: <http://www.zeitgeistfilm.com>.