

News and Reviews

Issue 28
Winter 2008

A PUBLICATION OF THE ASIAN EDUCATIONAL MEDIA SERVICE ■ CENTER FOR EAST ASIAN AND PACIFIC STUDIES ■ UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

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China Blue

■ Directed by Micha X. Peled. 88 minutes. 2005. In English and Chinese with English subtitles.

Filmed under the radar of Chinese authorities, *China Blue* tells the story of young female workers assembling blue jeans in Lifeng Factory,

REVIEW

located in Shaxi in Guangdong Province. Lifeng is owned by Mr. Lam, a former police chief of Shaxi, who provides Micah Peled, the film's producer, with virtually unlimited access to the factory staff and management. The bulk of the film comprises interviews with two workers in particular—Jasmine, a thread-cutter, and Orchid, a zipper-installer—and documents their working experiences in order to reveal the pressures, and at times abuses, endured by rural migrants whose cheap labor has fuelled China's meteoric economic growth of recent years.

There are a couple of ways to interpret *China Blue*. Most Americans viewing this film will likely see it just as the director hopes: as an example of the dark underbelly of globalization. Moreover, the abuses mentioned or depicted in *China Blue* will simply confirm, for many viewers, existing stereotypes of the tragic Chinese sweatshop worker.

An alternative way to interpret this film goes

against, or perhaps more accurately *beyond*, the depiction of passive Chinese peasants suffering under autocratic bosses. For example, a successful strike by disgruntled workers (over ongoing delays in receiving their wages) could, on the one hand, signal to viewers the high level of frustration endured by exploited factory workers. On the other hand, the strike could just as easily be seen as an example of not only individual perseverance in the face of constant surveillance and threats of dismissal, but also the resilience and agency of the stereotypically fragile and docile Asian female factory worker. Similarly, the human bonds and sympathy exhibited in the film between workers also serve to contradict the tragic undertone of the film, as established by the on-screen textual captions, scene sequencing, and background music used by Peled.

China Blue is a useful teaching tool on two levels. First, the film provides a springboard from which students can learn about the nature and implications of the enormous economic and social transformations occurring in contemporary China. Second, for more advanced courses, *China Blue*

raises many issues that go beyond the case study of Chinese factories. This second, deeper level of analysis scrutinizes the filmmaker and asks larger questions related to representation, development, and ethics.

China Blue does an excellent job of illustrating the "human face" of globalization, and specifically the often-concealed linkages between people at different ends of a commodity chain. It is easy, and of course morally convenient, to avoid giving any thought to where one's jeans are made, but *China Blue* forces viewers to come to terms with the condi-

tions under which their clothing is made. Teachers interested in discussing how commodity chains work in practice will make their task much easier, and more relevant to students, by showing *China Blue*. When we search the racks of Wal-Mart or Target for cheap blue jeans, what happens on the

continued on page 2

Contents

From the Editor	2
How to Contact AEMS	2
Reviews:	
<i>China Blue</i>	1
<i>Good for Her</i>	3
<i>Vagina Monologues:</i>	
<i>Stories from China</i>	4
<i>Punam</i>	6
<i>Campaign (Senkyo)</i>	7
Interview: Sufeng Song	5
Distributors in this Issue	8

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 (UIUC). Our mission is to help educators at all levels, from elementary through college, find multimedia resources for learning and teaching about Asia, to promote understanding of Asian peoples and cultures. Our free services include:

- *News and Reviews*, published three times a year;
- An online database of audiovisual materials;
- Reference service;
- Educator workshops on teaching with film;
- Lesson plans, streaming video, film recommendations and other web resources;
- A lending library for local educators

Please contact us to be added to the mailing list, or for back issues and extra copies of this newsletter. AEMS is funded with generous support from the Freeman Foundation.

Asian Educational Media Service
805 W. Pennsylvania Avenue
Urbana, Illinois 61801 USA
www.aems.uiuc.edu
aems@uiuc.edu
1-888-828-AEMS (1-888-828-2367)
Fax: 217-265-0641

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FROM THE EDITOR

Women in Asia

We open 2008 with an issue of the newsletter focused on women. Two films concern children in the workforce: Nick Kontogeorgopoulos explores the ambiguities in the lives of teenage girls working in a sweatshop, as depicted in *China Blue*, while Eric Edmonds provides us with detailed background information to place *Punam*—a film about a Nepalese girl—in the context of child labor in Nepal generally. In a very different environment, *Good For Her* also takes a look at challenges women face in the workplace—here, the perceived necessity for cosmetic surgery in South Korea.

We had a special opportunity in May here at the University of Illinois to view *Vagina Monologues: Stories from China*, presented by one of the film's directors, Sufeng Song. We were collectively struck by the film's intelligence and conviction, and so offer you a review, together with an interview with Professor Song, hoping to bring this film to a wider audience.

Finally, Leonard Schoppa reviews one film about a man: *Campaign*, a new Japanese documentary revealing the intricacies and the ironies of the local political process in suburban Japan.

New online reviews and current events pages

In December, we published our second website review (on the AEMS website, under the **Publications** tab): Catherine Benton evaluates "Virtual Village," an in-depth exploration of a North Indian village. In addition, we have added new current events pages (under the **Other Resources** tab), compilations of useful links for teaching about the recent uprising in Burma and about manufacturing issues in China. More online reviews are anticipated mid-winter; subscribe to our RSS feed to read them when they are published.

New DVD release—On Another Playground: Japanese Popular Culture in America

Japan's so-called "Soft Power"—the influence and spread of its popular culture throughout the globe—is the topic of three professionally filmed and richly illustrated public lectures on this new DVD from our own Media Production Group. At a conference hosted by the American Studies program at Doshisha University in Kyoto, Theodore Bestor of Harvard University discusses sushi, William Kelly of Yale University talks about baseball, and Christine Yano of the University of Hawai'i at Manoa explores the Hello Kitty phenomenon. The DVD will be available for purchase through the AEMS website.

Asian Film Festival 2007: Popular Southeast Asian Cinema

The fifth annual Asian Film Festival hosted by the University of Illinois's Center for East Asian and Pacific Studies and AEMS was a great success, with six films screened on November 9 and 10. We offered an educator workshop in conjunction with the festival addressing two topics: women and Islam in Indonesia, and how to teach about Cambodia's Khmer Rouge period. For more information, see our website, under the **Events** tab. Keep an eye out for online film reviews relating to this film festival in the coming months. Our 2008 film festival will focus on Japanese cinema. ■

—Tanya Lee, Editor

***Errata:** Please note that corrections to past issues of *News and Reviews* are now posted on our website under *Publications*.

China Blue

continued from page 1

other side of the world? We get the answer when we see Mr. Lam being squeezed by a British purchaser to lower his price and prepare a large shipment in a short time period. The boss then passes on the pressures he experiences to Jasmine, Orchid, and the other factory workers who must now work almost incessantly until the order is met.

China Blue opens up myriad possibilities to discuss China's economic reforms, rural-urban migration, the pressures facing Chinese peasants in the post-Deng Xiaoping era, the widening cultural gulf between urban and rural China, and the gender dimensions of industrialization. Most

obviously, the labor abuses associated with the early, rapid stages of industrialization are on full display in *China Blue*: workers are constantly fined for infraction of company rules, get only four hours of sleep (if any) on certain days, live twelve to a room, and have their first month's paycheck withheld as a "deposit" to discourage them from leaving. These are just a few of the many hardships depicted in the film.

As mentioned, the deeper level of analysis, and the one that lends itself to rich classroom discussion, involves probing into the film's blind spots. For example, Peled (perhaps deliberately) gives no suggestions of how to improve labor conditions in Chinese factories. International inspections and monitoring of factories are, for

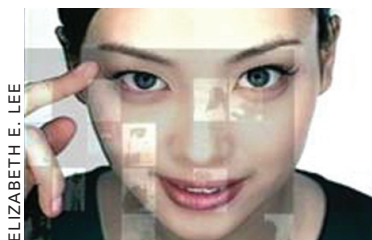
continued on page 3

Good for Her

■ Directed by Elizabeth E. Lee. 48 minutes. 2005. In English and Korean with English subtitles.

Good for Her explores the popular and controversial cosmetic surgery boom in South Korea, particularly the double eyelid procedure that makes eyes look bigger by creating an eyelid fold. Through a series of interviews with women, contemporary newsclips, media images, and personal narratives, filmmaker Elizabeth E. Lee attempts to understand not only why so many Korean women surgically alter their features, but why they seem to mold themselves to a uniform model of beauty.

Rather than fall into the trap of casting cosmetic surgery as an oppression of easily duped women, she does justice to the complexity of the issue by asking how power is involved in this quest for beauty. Cosmetic surgery began in South Korea in the 1950s during the Korean War. Its objective was to alter Korean faces to look more American. One of the first patients to undergo the procedure was a male Korean interpreter who believed that changing his eyes would improve his employment opportunities. More than fifty years later, *Good for Her* finds that the pressure to succeed in the workforce remains



ELIZABETH E. LEE

Lee keeps
the viewers
on their toes
by subverting
our assumptions
about women,
cosmetic surgery,
individual agency,
and power.

one of the most compelling reasons women go under the knife.

This documentary centers the concept of power—internal self-confidence and external economic power—showing that for some women, cosmetic surgery is considered a way to increase power and choice. It ends with a quote by Arundhati Roy, “A feminist is someone who negotiates herself into a place where she has choices,” leaving us with the suggestion that choosing cosmetic surgery can be a feminist act. But Lee complicates this argument throughout the documentary with critiques offered by academics and students about the nature of the social and labor systems within which these women are negotiating their positions. In this way, Lee keeps the viewers on their toes by subverting our assumptions about women, cosmetic surgery, individual agency, and power.

Lee positions herself as an outsider who questions her own Western assumptions. An American

audience might find baffling the near absence of the issue of race, but in Korea, categories such as class, gender, and region are more important for determining social inclusion and exclusion. The elephant in the room may seem obvious to most Americans, but for most Koreans it is a non-issue, or a false reading of cosmetic eyelid surgery. This may provide an opportunity for students to question their own assumptions about, for example, what feminist power and liberation are, or what cosmetic surgery is about, and also about how race is deployed in different ways outside of the USA.

This film is a potentially versatile teaching tool and can lend itself well to a number of college-level classes, including courses in Gender Studies, Asian and Asian-American Studies, Ethnic Studies, Sociology, Anthropology, Media Studies, and Cultural Studies. The documentary can provoke broad questions about agency; women and labor; power and discipline; non-Western feminism; race and body; and more specific questions about Korea, cosmetic surgery, media and body images. ■

Taeyon Kim received her Ph.D. in American Culture Studies from Bowling Green State University. Her research was on cosmetic eyelid surgery among Korean and Korean American women.

HOW TO PURCHASE: *Good for Her* is available on DVD from Center for Asian American Media. Price is \$250 for purchase and \$55 for rental.

continued from page 2



Jasmine (in the blue jacket) works as a thread-cutter at Lifeng Factory in Guandong Province in China. The teenage female workers often get only a few hours sleep at night.

various reasons, effectively dismissed in *China Blue*, but what can American students do? Does watching documentaries like *China Blue* really change one's consumption patterns? Is boycotting Chinese goods really the way to effect positive

change? Such questions emerge from *China Blue*, making the film a great tool for sparking classroom discussion.

Finally, for those with the time to spare, it is recommended that after an initial discussion about the film, students also watch the twenty-minute “Q and A” with Peled, available in the Additional Features section of the DVD menu. After watching this segment, students will learn that Peled lied to Mr. Lam about the film's real purpose, and Peled admits that Lifeng was chosen only because it was the first (and only) factory that permitted access. Clandestine filmmaking has always been important in bringing injustices to light, yet the ethical implications of such strategies cannot be ignored.

China Blue is an important film that works on many levels as a teaching tool. Furthermore, unlike many other documentaries, *China Blue* is suitable for both the university and high school classroom; since the film's central characters are

teenagers, high school students can especially relate to the story and are likely to be captivated by the differences between their own lives and the difficult lives depicted in *China Blue*. Though not everybody will necessarily take away the director's intended message that Western consumers are the principal source of misery for passive, exploited sweatshop workers, the film offers many teaching avenues and students will certainly remember the film for its visual production values, its stories, and especially its characters. ■

Nick Kontogeorgopoulos is associate professor of International Political Economy and Asian Studies at the University of Puget Sound. His research interests include tourism geography, ecotourism, community-based development, and the political economy of Southeast Asia.

HOW TO PURCHASE: *China Blue* is available on DVD and VHS from Bullfrog Films. Price is \$295 for purchase and \$95 for rental.



The Vagina Monologues: Stories from China

■ Directed by Ai Xiaoming, Hu Jie, and Sufeng Song. 63 minutes. 2004.
In Chinese with English subtitles.

The *Vagina Monologues: Stories from China* is a documentary about the first-ever production of Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues* in mainland China, in Mandarin Chinese. Ai Xiaoming and Sufeng Song, faculty in the Women's Studies Program at Sun Yat-sen (Zhongshan) University in Guangzhou, together with a group of their undergraduate and graduate students, organized and co-directed the play and, subsequently and to some extent simultaneously, co-directed the film with filmmaker Hu Jie. Scenes from the original stage performances, footage of rehearsals, interviews with the directors and performers, and discussions among a wide variety of audiences who viewed either the live performance or an early version of the DVD are smoothly interwoven.

Ai reveals in the film what motivated her to bring the play to China: she hoped that it could change Chinese people's conventional perception of women's sexuality and the cultural repression of their physical desires. According to her, the Chinese staging of the play represents Chinese women's commitment to reverse the discourse, to bestow positive cultural connotations to the expression of women's sexuality, and overwrite the cultural stigma towards female genitalia. It is an invitation for women to assertively explore sexual pleasures and re-imagine their own bodies, demands, and fantasies.

The Chinese version of *The Vagina Monologues* not only draws people's attention to gender issues in Chinese society but, by its international reception, shows us the growing influence and global interaction of Chinese feminism on the international stage. At international screenings, Song reports that many feminist activists from other parts of the world were amazed, remarking that it opened up a new window to reexamining gender



issues on both local and global levels. Rather than passively applying first-world theories to local experiences, third-world feminist practices and innovations like this project can significantly expand the scope of the global feminist activism and reverse the flow of knowledge, normally from the first world to the third world.

To achieve this paradigmatic change of knowledge production, Ai, Song, and their students not only gracefully translated the original American play into Chinese, but also adapted it, illuminating the rampant gender issues in contemporary Chinese society. For example, in the play's episode "Groaning," women performers talk about how they groan aloud when reaching orgasm during sexual intercourse. As it is almost impossible for Chinese girls to discuss this topic in public, the Chinese team borrowed the performance format of a traditional local opera. One woman in rural clothing sings her right to sexual pleasures out loud to the tune of a well-known local opera, originally a famous solo of Mulan, the legendary Chinese woman warrior, proclaiming women's equality with men. She then groans in an exaggerated and hilarious way along with the other two more modern-looking women performers on stage, and the audience joins in. This creative adaptation challenges the taboo on women's sexuality in Chinese culture and conveys a powerful message of self-affirmation, while also making the public expression of sexual pleasures more acceptable to Chinese audiences.

For another episode, a group dance was added to reflect the problem of female infanticide still rampant in some rural areas in China, as the traditional preference for boys endures. Shocked by a local news report of the tragic deaths of several baby girls smothered in a pile of sacks in March 2003, the students created the dance to represent the suffering of those baby girls and a traumatized mother figure's great sadness and pain. Although the choreographer and all the dancers are amateurs, the emotional power in this scene moves the audience to tears.

Particularly noteworthy is the fact that the team behind this project has not limited its influence to the ivory tower. In addition to showing excerpts of the original stage production itself, the documentary also follows the reception of an early edit of the film by different audiences throughout China. When a DVD of the play is screened at a migrant workers cultural center, female migrant workers respond actively by talking about their own life experience. They describe indignantly how a fellow woman migrant worker had been raped and then ruthlessly murdered by a manager. This tragic incident clearly illustrates that in the power structure of post-Mao Chinese society, what

continued on page 5

Sufeng Song

Interviewed by Tanya Lee,
May 31, 2007

One of the co-directors of *The Vagina Monologues: Stories from China*, Sufeng Song is a professor of gender studies at Sun Yat-sen (Zhongshan) University in Guangzhou,

YACHUNG CHANG



China. Born and raised in Taiwan, Song earned her Ph.D. from Shandong

INTERVIEW

University in China, taught in South Korea, and held a post-doc at the University of California, Berkeley. In 2006–07, she spent the year at the University of Illinois as a Freeman Fellow, and in May 2007, screened her film on campus. Soon afterwards, I had the opportunity to interview her about the project. What follows is a brief excerpt; the full interview can be found on the AEMS website under Publications.

LEE: It's clear from the film that your students felt some discomfort saying the word "vagina" 120 times during the course of an evening. Could you put this in context? How much of a taboo is there around that word in China today?

SONG: You know this word ["*yindao*," or "vagina"] is not common in our daily life. One of my students said when she first heard the title of the play, she was thinking it was some kind of story that happens in a dark, hidden alley [*laughs*]. You know, "*yin*" means "dark," and "*dao*" could be "alley!" She couldn't recall any use of that word for a female part at all. So that tells you something, right? For some Chinese students, it's an unthinkable body part. This word has so little exposure in

the language, in proper language, especially for young ladies. Our students, at first they were a little embarrassed to talk about their parts because they are like any other students. But after a while they got so involved in the preparation and the rehearsals and action and so on, that they would talk about the word and the play in the taxi loudly and just forget the context.

LEE: Do you have a sense of what kind of impact this experience had on students afterwards, in their lives?

SONG: For some students, there was a change in their personality. Some students were kind of shy or not so outspoken, or maybe they were not thinking about gender equality or not thinking that they were entitled to develop themselves before. But the stage production was a kind of a process of self-education. They become more independent, more outspoken, and more firm about their stance advocating for women's rights. Before, they might know that things weren't right, but because of their personalities, because of their education as young ladies, and because of the expected resistance and hostility of the people around them, they tended not to want to voice out their stances.

LEE: Why did you feel it was urgent to do this project?

SONG: If you live in Chinese society you see in your daily life some kind of injustice. It's not just from the news. Most students come from privilege at home so they have no problem at all—they have a future and a home and so on—but if they

look outside of their context, look outside of their class, [they can see injustice]. Also in this experience of teaching feminism you feel some kind of resistance, too, from the students and also from other faculty. At best they were indifferent to what we were doing, and sometimes they would make jokes behind us. You will sense that there is a lot of male chauvinistic culture there.... It's everywhere. One day you find out that your students—still very good students, very smart, very sweet—they just didn't have an awareness and you kind of have to start from ABC [*laughs*]. So that's one of the things that make me feel a sense of urgency.

LEE: How has this experience, putting on the play and then making the film and taking the film all over the world, your total experience of with *The Vagina Monologues*, how has this changed you?

SONG: Me? It's kind of a reconfirmation of my fight for women's rights and gender equality and it's just part of my vision of a better life, very liberal, based on equality of all human beings. It's kind of a general concern, but still feminism and gender issues and the women's movement are one approach to get to that goal. It's a reconfirmation that what I'm doing, it's worthwhile, it's valuable. It's not just for myself—it's for my students, for all the people in the world or in China.

LEE: Well, I think that how connected you are is exactly what comes through as a big strength in the film.

SONG: And also remember the students there at the screening [at Illinois], they were talking about their experiences too. So it's really a very good thing to find people who are working for the same cause in different corners of the world. ■

continued from page 4

victimizes women is not simply the man's physical organ (the penis), but the formidable alliance of patriarchal ideology and transnational capital.

Against this alliance, the documentary provides the possibility of arousing women's gender consciousness to form a transnational network of feminist activism. From a series of illuminating interviews cleverly interwoven into the film's narrative flow, we can see that feminists from different locations all over the world express their concerns with and reflections upon the question of women in contemporary China. Ai and Song send free copies of the DVD to various women's studies programs and NGOs on International Women's Day and for women's rights campaigns. Seminars and workshops have been organized to discuss the play and possible solutions to the gender problems represented in it. Numerous articles have been published in newspapers, journals, and the *Sex/Gender*

HUANG HAITAO



Education Forum at Sun Yat-sen University (<http://genders.zsu.edu.cn>, in Chinese only). This engagement in social movements propels the creation of regional networks, makes the feminist alliance more powerful on a transnational level and adds a new dimension to globalization.

With its superb cinematography and skilled editing, the documentary excels in capturing the subtle emotions of the performers and audiences. The film is as enjoyable as it is educational. Used in a class either about general conditions and

social changes of contemporary China or gender and women studies, this documentary can serve as a valuable resource to study gender issues in Chinese society, and provide a great opportunity for college students to discuss and engage in the transnational alliance of feminist activism. Due to the explicit subject matter, high school educators may wish to prescreen this film for suitability for their students. ■

Hui Xiao is a doctoral candidate in East Asian Languages and Cultures at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her dissertation is on literary and cultural representations of divorce in post-Mao China.

HOW TO PURCHASE: *The Vagina Monologues: Stories from China* is available on DVD from the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Price is US\$150 for institutions and US\$8 for individuals.

Punam

■ Directed by Lucian Muntean. 27 minutes. 2006.
In Nepali and Tamang with English subtitles.

Punam, a simple, clear and coherent documentary short, is an excellent portrayal of the life of a young girl in Nepal, one of the world's poorest countries. Narrated in her own voice, the film shows us how she cares for her younger siblings and attends school. We learn of her hopes for herself and siblings, and meet friends who spend their days at work rather than school. While it is a setting that could easily turn to melodrama, Director Lucian Muntean's film is largely free from judgment and hyperbole. I provide here some demographic information to contextualize the film.

Punam is a 9-year-old girl living in Bhaktapur, a small city in the eastern part of the Kathmandu Valley in central Nepal. Surrounded to the east and north by agricultural areas, 40 percent of employment in Bhaktapur is in agriculture, but manufacturing and trade are also prevalent. Punam's father, whom we never see, works in a rice processing plant. According to Punam, he works multiple shifts in the factory to support the family, leaving for work at 4:00 AM and returning home at 8:00 PM.

A central theme in the film concerns the causes and nature of "child labor." Motherless, Punam rises early, preparing breakfast for her siblings, dressing and washing them, and making sure they get to school. At the end of the school day, she shops for the next day's meal in the local market. Without refrigeration, she needs to shop frequently. Indeed, roughly 30 percent of 9-year-old Nepali girls report spending substantive time doing domestic chores. These activities do not bring in wage income and are typically not considered child labor. However, they are critical to the family's well-being; Punam's father would not be able to work without her contribution to the household. Watching Punam's day can easily spark a discussion about what "child labor" is and whether we should view Punam's work as fundamentally different from the work of those who help in the local market or in a tea stall.

We also see two sets of Punam's friends who would unquestionably be labeled "child laborers." Shyam and Purnya Shakya, ages 12 and 5 respectively, are brothers who work from 9 to 5 in a stone quarry, breaking rocks into gravel to be used in cement manufacturing, in construction, or most likely in the building of roads. An estimated 32,000 children under the age of 15 work in stone quarries in Nepal. We see mostly children and women working in the stone quarry, and it is not unusual for children to accompany their mothers to work.

Punam also has friends who live in the brick



factory where they work; we see the five Shrestha sisters, ages 5 to 15, packing clay into brick molds. There are an estimated 60,000 children working in brick kilns in Nepal. Punam is decidedly upbeat when talking about the lives of these working children. Purnya is not bothered anymore by hammering rocks all day and we see the sisters playing at the brick kiln. However, one cannot help but worry about their future.

Why are these children working? Anti-child labor policy focuses on eliminating employment opportunities for children. Student activists protest products with child labor content in the hopes of eliminating child employment. Punam does not argue that her friends work in stone quarries and brick kilns because those are lucrative jobs, or because her friends do not value education. Rather, Punam emphasizes schooling fees as the reason why children do not attend school. The average Nepali family with a child in school devotes 18 percent of their family budget to education related expenditures. Punam emphasizes that paying for schooling for herself and two siblings is why her father works multiple shifts, and she worries that she would not be able to attend school if her fees were higher. This naturally frames a discussion of whether or not restricting children's ability to work with their mothers in the stone quarry or brick kiln would actually improve their lives and somehow enable these children to afford schooling.

Child labor is not the only issue that arises in the film. Like roughly 600,000 other Nepali children, Punam has lost her mother. We know that her mother died shortly after her youngest sister was born, but we do not know the cause. As the oldest girl, Punam is filling her mother's role, caring for her younger brother Krishna, age 7, and sister Rabina, age 4. Punam's life could be used to frame a discussion of the consequences of maternal mortality.

The film also illustrates the potential consequences of poor quality health care. Punam's younger sister Rabina is disabled. She has broken her leg twice, and by her gait we can infer that it



7TH ART RELEASING

was never set properly. In a 2003 household survey, 32 percent of sick or injured girls under 10 (and 27 percent of boys) who had been sick or injured did not consult a medical professional. There are many reasons why a medical professional might not have been consulted: Health insurance is rare, user fees are high, clinics have long lines

continued on page 7

continued from page 6

with high degrees of absenteeism. Punam worries about the ways in which Rabina's disability will affect Rabina's future, and hopes that through education Rabina will be able to find office work where her gait will not be a disadvantage.

Rural to urban migration is also increasing throughout most of the developing world, and *Punam* can also open discussion on why families migrate. Punam's family recently migrated from Sindhupalchok district, an area north-east of Bhaktapur where 84 percent of employment is in agriculture. In Bhaktapur, their livelihood is less dependent on land and weather and Punam's father can make more money. Schooling opportunities for his family are also better. While Sindhupalchok has 41 primary school students for every teacher, in Bhaktapur there are 15 primary school students per teacher. Like 17 percent of primary students in Nepal, Punam attends a private school, and much of the difference in pupil-teacher ratios between these districts reflects the prevalence of private schools in relatively well off urban areas like Bhaktapur. Overall, 17 percent of primary school students go to private schools in Nepal. Perhaps in part because of higher quality schools and better availability, school attendance is also much higher in Bhaktapur: 72 percent of 9-year-old girls attend school in Sindhupalchok, compared to 97 percent in Bhaktapur.

Overall, Lucian Muntean's film provides a realistic description of the life of a young urban girl in Nepal that is useful to frame a discussion of child labor, addressing the central questions of why children work and why they attend school, as well as a host of related issues that are more subtly portrayed in the film such as schooling, maternal mortality, health care, and migration in low income countries. All of the issues other than child labor are subtle enough within the film that educators need not feel compelled to discuss them along with the central question of why children work and why children attend school. ■

Eric Edmonds is an associate professor of economics at Dartmouth College and he is director of the Child Labor Network at the Institute for the Study of Labor (IZA). His research focuses on improving our empirical understanding of the reasons for the prevalence and persistence of child labor, illiteracy, and low levels of schooling attainment in low income countries.

HOW TO PURCHASE: *Punam* is available on DVD from 7th Art Releasing. Price is \$175.



Campaign (Senkyo)

■ Directed by Kazuhiro Soda. 120 minutes. 2007. In Japanese with English subtitles.

Yamauchi Kazuhiko, the protagonist in this documentary about a local election campaign in Japan, is a novice candidate chosen by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to run in a special election for the Kawasaki City Council. With the Council deadlocked 18-18 after the resignation of an LDP heavyweight to run for higher office, it is up to Yamauchi to run a successful campaign so that his party will be able to hold onto the seat and preserve its hold on power in the city.

Viewers may have trouble getting too excited over the political stakes in the election. Kawasaki, after all, is a medium-sized suburban city adjoining Tokyo, not a world-famous place like Tokyo or Osaka, and the election is very local, not national. When the candidates talk about policy issues (not often), they mainly touch on "budget reform" and "childcare services." At one point, even candidate Yamauchi has trouble remembering what the election is about, stumbling in his attempt to recall the term "waiting lists" during an interview with the local paper, even though these are central to local public concerns about shortages of childcare.

Nevertheless, the documentary does an excellent job of drawing viewers into the story and the experience of campaigning in Japan by inviting them to relate to the campaign from Yamauchi's own perspective. He looks young (I guessed he was in his 20s or 30s before learning that his actual age is 40), and he is obviously new at politics: He has to be taught how to look a voter in the eyes when handing out pamphlets and how to talk on the phone to supporters.

The early scenes of the documentary gradually reveal the precariousness of his situation. He is a "businessman" who sells stamps and coins to collectors, and his home was actually in Tokyo. He tells friends that he had hoped to build a political career there and maybe become prime minister one day, but before he had a chance to run for office

there, a friend in the LDP came to him suggesting that he move to Kawasaki to become the standard-bearer for the LDP in this special election.

The LDP is fully behind him for this election, sending senior politicians to aid and advise him. But it turns out that many LDP heavyweights in Kawasaki don't want him to get too comfortable in office. They need him to win this special election so that the LDP will stay on top locally, but at the next regular election—which, at the local level, pits LDP members against each other in multi-member districts—they don't want him to get in their way.

In one scene later in the documentary, Yamauchi is invited by a local politician to join him for a meeting of his host's support group. But rather than extolling his virtues, the host merely instructs his supporters to vote for Yamauchi *this time* and come back to him at the next regular election. Watching Yamauchi endure this meeting, we feel his sense of humiliation and alienation.

This episode is just one of many that give viewers a sense of the frustrations and limitations of campaigning Japanese-style (to borrow a phrase from Gerald Curtis). Yamauchi spends most of his time standing in front of stations and other locations where people gather or live, repeating his name endlessly and talking about how he is for "reform." Discussion of issues is extremely superficial. Posters, which are plastered everywhere, show his name and face but give no idea of what he stands for.

When he is not giving speeches, Yamauchi is forced to endure the indignities of cozying up to party bigwigs who can deliver votes for him. We see him bow and accept rude instruction many times. Even his wife is criticized for refusing to play the role of subservient wife. She has a career and has taken a paid vacation from work to assist

continued on page 8

Campaign

continued from page 7

her husband, but it is clear that her refusal to sacrifice more for her husband's election does not fit well with the expectations of conservative party members in local LDP support organizations.

The documentary is full of scenes that will help students in classes on Japanese politics, Japanese culture and society, or broader comparative politics classes that include a section on Japan, gain a better understanding of what politics there is really like. I have described sound trucks many times in class and even used slides and photos, but students will develop much more of a feel for what these are once they see Yamauchi go out in one with a bevy of "warblers," professional young women with cultivated feminine voices who repeat Yamauchi's name many times as the truck moves through neighborhoods.

The film raises many points that can be discussed with students once they have viewed it, but the central one is raised by Yamauchi himself halfway through the film (scenes 16 to 17) when he visits with several old friends from college and talks to them about what the campaign has been like. He sometimes wonders, he says, about the quality of democracy in Japan. The politics that he's experienced seem to him to be like politics in a developing country where "tribal chiefs control election results."

Does democracy elsewhere work better? After

watching this film, students will be inspired to reflect not only on the quality of democracy in Japan, but also on the limits of democratic systems in their own societies. ■

Leonard Schoppa is professor of politics at the University of Virginia. He is the author of *Race for the Exits: The Unraveling of Japan's System of Social Protection* (Cornell University Press, 2006), *Education Reform in Japan* (Routledge, 1991), and *Bargaining with Japan: What American Pressure Can and Cannot Do* (Columbia University Press, 1997). He has served as a visiting researcher at Keio University and University of Tokyo.

HOW TO PURCHASE: *Campaign* will be officially released on DVD in the U.S. in the summer of 2008. It will also be broadcast in the U.S. on

PBS's P.O.V. series in 2008. Please see the film website at www.laboratoryx.us/campaign for up-to-date information.

Related Reading

Curtis, Gerald. 1971. *Election Campaigning Japanese Style*. New York: Columbia University Press. This book covers an election campaign several decades ago in a much more rural area, but it remains the classic work that gives a feel for campaigning in Japan and could be used with the film to get students to identify continuities and change.

Scheiner, Ethan. 2006. *Democracy Without Competition: Opposition Failure in a One-Party Dominant State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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