

# News and Reviews Vol. 2, No. 2 Fall 1999

# The Japanese Version—A Look Back

>> by Louis Alvarez

t has been over eight years since my co-producer Andrew Kolker and myself completed our one-hour video documentary called The Japanese Version, an amusing and provocative look at how the Japanese interpret Western popular culture.



Our original intention had been to gain a national broadcast on PBS and then test the waters to see if there

was any interest in distributing the program to schools and universities. As we put our plan into action, we were surprised at every turn. It turned out to be virtually impossible to secure a national "same time everywhere" PBS broadcast for a single hour unconnected to a longer series, so we ended up selling The Japanese Version to the Discovery Channel, which aired it at a shorter length with commercial breaks-hardly what a filmmaker dreams of.

In the academic world, however, we were

pleasantly surprised by the interest in using The Japanese

Version as a teaching tool. We prepared a mailing and began promoting the documentary at academic conferences, aided by our redoubtable

advisors David Plath and Ted Bestor. We also undertook a series of screenings sponsored by Japan-America societies in various American cities, which raised the profile of the documentary and enabled us to see how audiences were perceiving it.

The Japanese Version had always been intended as an antidote to what we felt was the prevailing cherry-blossom-Zen-garden- geisha-in-kimono view of Japan among the lay American public.



Our look at Japan started with a tour of a love hotel and ended with an extended look at the fantasies on display in "Ultra Quiz," NTV's long-running travel-to-America quiz show. Here was a hat frequently resorted

brash, kitschy, loud Japan that frequently resorted to crude stereotypes of Americans while remaining  $\underset{\omega}{\overset{\otimes}{\underset{\omega}}}$ fascinated with what went on beyond its borders. We intended it as an affectionate yet clear-eyed portrait of the culture we had come to love in the six months we lived and worked in Tokyo, and we hoped that it would help humanize a country that seemed to be alternatively deified and demonized by Americans.

Our audiences at public screenings of *The Japanese Version* were uniformly enthusiastic, but in the Q&A that followed a certain pattern would

FOR

CENTER



Three 19th-century Chinese American women from California, Wyoming, and Alaska, known only as "China Mary." From the documentary series Ancestors in America. For review, see page 8.

## Contents

Welcome
How to Contact AEMS 2
"The Japanese Version–A Look Back"
by Louis Alvarez 1
Reviews of films and videos:
Eternal Seed
The Women Outside and
Camp Arirang 4
Sprouts of Capitalism in China 5
Japan 20006
Bangkok: Rim Nam, Rim Khlong 7
Trav's Travels China
Ancestors in the Americas,
Parts I and II
Spirits Rising9
Homes Apart
Religion in Indonesia: The Way of
the Ancestors11
Guide to Distributors

#### 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 audiovisual 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 twice a year, 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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# Welcome



#### From the Center Director

T wo years have elapsed since AEMS moved to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. During this period, much has transpired. New media, new people, and new events have helped our program continue to grow and thrive. Our latest news is that Ms. Sarah I. Barbour has been appointed as the new Program Coordinator. With an MA in Film, Television and Radio Studies from Northwestern University and extensive teaching and working experience in Japan, Sarah brings to AEMS not only a knowledge of the region

but also a superb professional background. We are fortunate to have secured the services of Sarah who, we are certain, will continue the outstanding achievements of Ms. Rebecca Payne.

In other news, *Makiko's New World*, a documentary video by the AEMS-affiliated Media Production Group (MPG) has continued to attract favorable notice since its premiere last spring. This fall it was screened at the Hopes and Dreams Festival in New Jersey and at the Japan Association in Singapore. We are delighted that it is reaching a wide audience and hope to have it screened at more festivals soon.

The diverse and varied essays and reports included in this issue of *AEMS News and Reviews* is testimony to a wide range of both topical and geographic interests. From *Eternal Seed* (on Indian agriculture), to *Religion in Indonesia: The Way of the Ancestors* (on Toraja religion and culture) to *Sprouts of Capitalism in China* (an account of one man's rise to wealth in new China), these reviews represent an endeavor on our part to be comprehensive in our coverage of Asia and to introduce and report on the leading videos and films available.

AEMS' new Web site continues to be well received; the number of visitors has increased significantly, reaching nearly 10,000 in the past few months. We appreciate the positive response of the users and welcome your comments and suggestions on still better improving the homepage. We also continue to solicit more reviews in order to improve the educational usefulness of the posted materials. Our goal is to provide you the best possible service in each of our areas—Web site, newsletter, and video production. Thank you for your support.

—George T. Yu

## The Japanese Version

continued from page 1

always assert itself. Usually the first objection raised was that of skewed selectivity: that we had deliberately chosen unflattering aspects of Japanese culture (such as faux-Christian wedding ceremonies) that were out of the mainstream. If the person objecting was Japanese, they sometimes said, "I am Japanese, yet I have never been to a love hotel," implicitly challenging our statement in the film that love hotels were ubiquitous in big cities and quite popular.

We would point out that the film was clearly labeled as our own personal view of Japan, even to the point of being narrated by my partner Andy, and that it was intended to complement the conventional American view of Japanese culture. But we also noted that in our experience much of Japanese society had a strong lower-middle-class taste which manifested itself in the kitschy decorations of wedding palaces and love hotels. We sympathized with the questioners—who wouldn't prefer to see their culture represented by Kyoto temples rather than humiliating TV game shows?—but felt that we had been true to our own experiences, as well as to the Japan of the late 1980s. The second common objection to the show was that *The Japanese Version* invited Americans to make fun of the Japanese, and that we were, in essence, laughing at a culture that was unable to defend itself. Interestingly, this objection came almost exclusively from native Americans who had never actually been to Japan, but whose presence at the film screening suggested a sympathetic interest in its culture. Obviously, *The Japanese Version* clashed with the romantic vision of Japan that many Westerners have, mixed perhaps with a whiff of political correctness.

All during the editing of *The Japanese Version* we had made great pains *not* to take cheap shots it's not our style. We have genuine affection both for Japanese culture and for its occasional lapses in taste. We told our audiences about this, and pointed out that in fact Japan was fully a First World, grown-up nation that needed neither apologies nor protection from well-meaning Westerners; not only that, but Japan was fully capable of condescending to Americans on its own, thank you very much!

It would be around this time in the postviewing discussion that the counter arguments would start. I remember a woman in Seattle raising her hand to say that she had lived in Japan for seven years and *The Japanese Version* was the first film that had exactly captured the way she felt as

## From the Program Coordinator

In October, I replaced Rebecca Payne as Program Coordinator of the Asian Educational Media Service. Having done a remarkable job over the last two years of coordinating all aspects of the service, Rebecca has now decided to pursue a graduate degree in Library Sciences. All of us at AEMS wish her well in her studies.

My own background is varied. After earning an MA in Film, Radio, and Television Studies, I worked at the Museum of Television & Radio for three years then changed courses completely, going to Japan to teach on the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program. I never dreamed I would find a job that so neatly encompassed my interests in Asia and in film. I am delighted to be working here at AEMS and I look forward to the challenge of continuing and expanding the work that Rebecca began.

AEMS will continue to provide useful information about Asia-related media sources through its Web site, publications, telephone helpline, and participation in conferences. We will be regularly updating our



database and adding to our Resource Library collection. I hope that the educators and scholars who utilize our services will help us out by contributing reviews, letting us know about new resources, and offering constructive criticism. I welcome your comments and suggestions. You can contact me by telephone (toll-free: 1-888-828-2367), by fax (217-265-0641), e-mail <aems@ uiuc.edu> or by old-fashioned ground mail (please use the address listed on page 2).

Please don't hesitate to get in touch. —Sarah I. Barbour

an American in Japan. Other Japan hands, with far more knowledge than us, weighed in in the film's favor, and soon we didn't have to say much at all—the audience members said it so much more eloquently.

The back-and-forth was the greatest compliment a filmmaker could receive from an audience, and suggested that *The Japanese Version* would have some success in the college curriculum, which it did. Today it is in the collections of several hundred universities, and an Internet search indicates it is still an active part of the curriculum.

We don't know how *The Japanese Version* has been used over the years, of course. While we always hope that our films are shown uncut and uninterrupted, we realize that the limitations of the class hour and compressed curricula mean that sometimes only short pieces are shown to illustrate a lecturer's point. That's fine with us—we even cut a half-hour version for high school use (and eliminated the love hotel section, which would have undoubtedly shocked the tender psyches of American high schoolers). *The Japanese Version* is in fact structured in modules which lend themselves to excerpting. We also like to imagine the protests that must ensue when a lecturer cuts the tape off and turns the lights back on! Ten years after we returned from Japan, and eight years after finishing it, we're still very proud of *The Japanese Version*. We'd love to have an opportunity to go back to Tokyo and see how things have changed. We suspect that while the surface of things may be different—a more widely traveled younger generation, more tasteful love hotels—underneath, the cultural tensions between looking outward and maintaining a purely "Japanese" culture that dominate *The Japanese Version* are still there, as they have been for hundreds of years. ◆

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Louis Alvarez and his co-producer/director Andrew Kolker, are two-time winners of both the Peabody Award and the duPont-Columbia Journalism Award. Over the past twenty years they have produced critically praised documentaries for their production companies, Kingfish Productions and The Center for New American Media. Their most recently completed project is MOMS (1999).

*The Japanese Version* was produced by Louis Alvarez and Andrew Kolker for the Center for New American Media (1991). Available from Transit Media. Price is \$99 for purchase, \$65 for rental. The High School Edition is 40 minutes, the Standard Edition is 55 minutes.



# Eternal Seed

>> Produced by Meera Dewan. Distributed by Women Make Movies. 1996. 43 minutes.

**E** *ternal Seed* presents the anti-modernist, ecofeminist perspective that is best known in the work of Vandana Shiva. The filmmakers champion local farming tradition and condemn capitalintensive, high-tech agriculture. Indigenous Indian agriculture is presented as respectful of the environment, local culture, and women; modern agribusiness is depicted as a threat to all these things. While this video is a forceful presentation of a point of view, it cannot be recommended as a documentary about the women farmers who appear in it. Nor is it the best articulation of the important critiques of modernization that are being made from feminist, environmentalist, and social justice perspectives.

The video shows women farmers who have organized to protest the loss of livelihood they attribute to capitalist modernization of agriculture. But we hear very little from the women themselves-instead we hear voice-overs reciting poetry, or see silent depictions of staged agricultural rituals. Terms like "goddess," "wisdom," "earth-knowledge," "crusader," "queen," and "magic" feature prominently. For the complexities and tensions of local culture, the filmmakers have substituted their own sentimental imagination of nature-worshipping farmers. We get little sense of women's lives as family members or as members of a larger community, in part because of the film's depiction of an idealized rural community without men. The film provides no historical context or examination of the concrete politics of agriculture in India. The discussion of modernization is also thin, largely limited to couplets mocking factory farms.



# The Women Outside and Camp Arirang

>> *The Women Outside* was produced by J.T. Takagi and Hye Jung Park. 1995. 60 minutes. *Camp Arirang* was produced by Diana S. Lee and Grace Yoon-Kung Lee. 1995. 28 minutes. Both are distributed by Third World Newsreel. 30 minutes.

*amp Arirang* and *The Women Outside* are both path breakers, for they offer the first visual narratives and analysis accessible to an Englishspeaking audience of a long-held taboo reality involving the United States and South Korea: the prostitution of Korean women in the "service" of U.S. military personnel. They both feature the faces and voices-although Camp Arirang employs both voice-over and subtitles-of women who have historically been silenced and made invisible by a Korean society which has condemned their "double immorality"-selling sex and mingling with foreign men. The women's stories-filled with pain, anger, love for their children, and their will to survive-offer powerful and poignant interpretations of the personal costs of war, sexism, militarization, and racism. Facing language difficulties in communicating with American "G.I.s," a woman in Camp Arirang expresses her frustration and anger at being treated like a dummy by the men because she cannot command English well. And in one of the final vignettes in this film, Amerasian children of white and black fathers are asked by their daycare staffer, a former prostitute and madame, Kim Yon Ja, to choose whether they want to live in Korea or go to America. The children raise their right hands, yelling out what they have been told by adults is a better choice: "America!" This scene drives home the point that such children are unwelcome in the homogeneous Korean society and yet cannot claim America because most do not even know who and where their fathers are.

The Women Outside, unlike Camp Arirang, fol-

lows one such Korean woman's journey to the United States as she aspires to become a "normal" wife and mother to her American soldier-husband and soon-to-be-born child. The camera zooms in on her attempts to prepare American dishes to suit her husband's tastes as well as other ways to adapt to American life. Yet, in moments of reflection, she sheds tears for the things she has lost, especially her first child whom she was forced to give up.

The Women Outside offers a longer and more detailed journey into the different aspects of these Korean women's lives, but it does not offer the substantive historical context of war, military occupation, and permanent basing of U.S. troops in Korea which are necessary for understanding that these women's lives are intimately related to the larger political and economic structures they do not control. *Camp Arirang* does emphasize the historical and political framework in which the private buying and selling of sex and the creation of offspring takes place.

I would recommend both films for college and university-level courses in Asian Studies, Women's Studies, International Relations, and social science curricula that address Asian history, war and military life, and sexuality. *Olongapo Rose*, a 1988 BBC documentary available in videocassette, would serve as a good comparison for introducing issues related to the U.S. military and women in the Philippines. I would recommend the following published material to serve as textual guides for the viewing and discussion of the films: *Let the Good Times Roll: Prostitution and the U.S. Military in Asia*, Saundra Sturdevant and Brenda Stolzfus,

## The Eternal Seed

continued from page 3

For films which convey a sense of resistance to modernization and present the power of nonmodernist agency, I would recommend the works of Anand Patwardhan, or Jharana Jhaveri and Anurag Singh's Kaise Jeebo Re. For a presentation of the power of collective action and depiction of agency on the part of poor rural women, I would recommend When Women Unite. Sudesha, which documents the agency of one woman participant of the Chipko movement, similarly provides a very rich depiction of women's agency from a critical perspective on modernization, ecology, and social justice. On modernization in agriculture, Seeds of Plenty, Seeds of Sorrow (by Manjira Datta for Media Workshop/BBC) provides a much richer discussion of issues of biodiversity and the social consequences of adding capital to agriculture. 🔶

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S. Charusheela is Assistant Professor of Women's Studies at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. Her research examines the role of different types of grassroots and NGO strategies for feminist social change among informal sector women workers in urban South Asia.

*Eternal Seed* is available from Women Make Movies. Price is \$295 for purchase, \$90 for rental. *Seeds of Plenty, Seeds of Sorrow* is available from Bullfrog Films. Price is \$150 for purchase, \$75 for rental. *Sudesha* is available from Women Make Movies. Price is \$250 for purchase, \$60 for rental. *When Women Unite* is available from TVE (price unknown). *Kaise Jeebo Re* can be borrowed from the South Asia Center, University of Pennsylvania. Please contact Robert Nichols, Outreach Coordinator, at 215-898-7475.

eds. (New York: New Press, 1993); Sex Among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S.-Korea Relations, Katharine H. S. Moon (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Silver Stallion: A Novel of Korea, Junghyo Ahn (New York: Soho Press, 1990); Dangerous Women: Gender and Korean Nationalism, Elaine H. Kim and Chungmoo Choi, eds. (New York: Routledge, 1998).  $\blacklozenge$ 

**Solution Katharine H. S. Moon** is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Wellesley College and focuses her teaching and research on issues related to women and gender in international relations and social movements in Asia. She is currently writing about migrant workers in Japan and South Korea.

Both videos are available from Third World Newsreel. Price for *The Women Outside* is \$225 for purchase and \$85 for rental. Price for *Camp Arirang* is \$225 for purchase and \$65 for rental.

*Olongapo Rose* is currently unavailable for distribution in the USA.

## Sprouts of Capitalism in China

>> Directed and narrated by Wen-jie Qin. Distributed by Documentary Educational Resources. 1997. 30 minutes.

This is a gem of a film. While it deals with a well-worn topic concerning China, "the impact of free enterprise on average Chinese," the treatment within this film is truly special. First of all, there is a family connection between the filmmaker, Wen-Jie Qin, and her uncle, Daquan Yang, the film's focus. Familial affection allows Qin to convey important personal dynamics and ask questions which, from others, would surely be intrusive.

With the family connection established, Qin is able to focus on this case study of one man against the evolving backdrop of Chinese history and culture. The class struggle of the 1950s is made vivid through the news that Yang's mother gave him away (at 2 years old) because the family had lost everything and was being persecuted. The Great Leap Forward of the late 1950s and early 1960s is explained through Yang's personal account of starvation conditions. Yang's illiteracy is treated in tandem with the news that his stepfather would not allow him to attend school since a natal son was consistently favored over Yang, the adopted son.

Another key factor contributing to the special quality of this documentary is Qin's extraordinary filmmaking skill. She juxtaposes her treatment of the Great Leap Forward (photos and Yang's own words) against the entire Yang family eating their noon meal. Yang, his wife, and eight-year-old son are enthusiastically stuffing away dish after dish while the narrator describes near-starvation. In another segment Qin films Yang's wife during a lengthy motorcycle ride throughout the city. She is riding behind her aunt and filming as they go. At only one point do you see Qin; that is when her figure appears as part of a moving shadow of motorcycle and riders. For me, this constitutes a subtle reminder of the filmmaker's presence; she has effectively become an integral part of the family.

While the previously mentioned aspects of the film contribute to its fine quality, one should certainly expect solid factual material explaining the impact of the "sprouts of capitalism." However, Qin provides no conceptual definitions or broad theoretical discussion. Instead she chronicles Yang's climb to prosperity through the following steps: rural peasant to urban construction worker; creation of a construction materials factory using \$4 million dollars worth of machinery bought from Italy and stones quarried in Southwest China; planned shift from popsicle production to an ice cream business; purchase and development of an entire business complex to incorporate the ice cream factory, the Yang family home, housing for the ice cream workers, and rental space.

This films deals fairly subtly with some extremely important contemporary Chinese issues. First is the connection between government and business. We learn that Yang's wife works for the town government. Does her position insure that Yang receives special treatment for his business projects? Qin comments that the connection may bring "many advantages to the family." At the end when asked to what he attributes his success, Yang says, "Having been born in the year of the ox, hard work, of course." Filmmaker Qin delves into the treatment of children through a visual focus on the eight-year-old son. This young boy seems to represent a prototype for the "little emperor," a popular term for China's spoiled

single child. He is chubby, appears to demand a great deal of attention from his parents, and attends an expensive private school (the STARS School) where he boards from Monday through Saturday. The pictures of the school grounds suggest a fantasy theme park, and Qin wryly poses the question, "Will future Chinese leaders come from such places?"

This film is appropriate for high school students as well as for college and adult audiences. Its treatment of Yang's meteoric economic rise along with its effective consideration of the influence/corruption connection between government and business and the results of its one child policy, provide evidence for thoughtful student analysis. Qin is less judgmental than many filmmakers. She draws few conclusions but does allow Yang's story to suggest many worries about the values from which China's capitalistic sprouts are growing. She concludes her film by posing a question: "Since the old rules are gone, there is more prosperity but more insecurity also. Will the rich only get richer, or will the poor also prosper?" This



film will not provide basic information about the ways that free enterprise has become accepted policy in China, but provides memorable footage of one man's rise from grinding poverty to astonishing wealth. While the scenes were filmed in 1995, they are just as appropriate today. Finally, the thirty-minute film length is perfect for high school level and up, and the issues raised would work well in any high school world history or world cultures course. I consider it a "must" for students attempting to understand China today. It would work equally well within college history, anthropology, or economics courses. **♦** 

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Diana Marston Wood is currently the Associate Director of the Asian Studies Program at the University of Pittsburgh. Her particular interests are Modern Chinese history as well as curricular and pedagogical issues, K–16.

Sprouts of Capitalism in China is available from Documentary Educational Resources. Price is \$195 for purchase and \$50 for rental.

## Japan 2000

>> Produced by BBC Television. Distributed by Films for Humanities and Social Sciences. Four videocassettes, approximately 20 minutes each, accompanied by a CD-ROM. 1998.

*apan 2000* is comprised of four programs that take an interdisciplinary look at problems facing Japan at the end of the twentieth century from the perspectives of human and physical geography, economics, and technology. The videos have apparently been distilled for classroom use from a longer BBC series.

The first program in the series, *Against All the Odds*, examines two contemporary responses to Japan's mountainous terrain and paucity of

resources. The first segment discusses Japan's high speed rail system before introducing an ambitious bypass bridge project that would link Japan's Kansai region to Kyûshû via Shikoku. The video next examines a complex of nuclear power stations located in picturesque Wakasa Bay and designed to meet the energy

demands of the Kyoto, Osaka, Kobe megalopolis. While local residents have benefited from increased government investment in the area, one fisherman voices muted reservations about the potential hazards.

Program 2, *The Hi-Tech Road*, is exceptionally useful, tracing the production of electronic consumer goods from the waterfront, where petroleum is imported and processed into plastic, to small workshops, which comprise the vast majority of Japanese companies, to

medium size factories for assembly and further production work, and finally on to the factories of Japan's major electronics corporations. While secondary students and undergraduates are familiar with large corporations like Sony and Panasonic, few may be aware that, although such high profile companies sit atop the production chain, 60% of Japan's manufactured goods come from small manufacturing firms, which must constantly adapt to the changing demands of the global economy. Teachers who use this program may want to provide students with an economic update. Japan's economy, mired in recession when this series was



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filmed in the early to mid 1990s, took a turn for the (even) worse in 1997 with the collapse of a number of major financial institutions.

The third program, *The Future* of the Countryside, examines problems facing farming families, including competition from foreign produce, high capital outlays, the need for an outside income, the vicissitudes of weather, and the abandonment of the farming lifestyle by young people. Hydroponics technology is introduced as a potentially more efficient farming method. The program also briefly examines challenges facing Japan's for-

estry industry.

*Changing Lifestyles*, the final program, introduces a couple living on Rokkô Island, an artificial island in Kobe constructed in response to the demand for urban housing. The wife has been

forced to reenter the

workforce, abandoning the traditional role of housewife. The program also interviews a Japanese high school student who questions the centrality of work in the lives of her parents.

The four programs are informative, reasonably up to date in terms of the issues discussed, and thought provoking. Discussions with politicians and professors have been eschewed in favor of interviews with average Japanese citizens. At twenty minutes each, the programs can be

used with block and traditional scheduling, leaving time for discussions, lectures, or other activities. They can be viewed separately and in some cases can even be divided into shorter segments without loss of coherence. *Japan 2000* would be most suitable for secondary and lower division college students. Instructors should be warned to preview the programs before using them in class, as the introductory blurbs on the video cases can be misleading.

All of the programs focus on the Kansai area. This is a welcome change from the dominant Tokyo-centric view which conflates Tokyo with all of urban Japan. In addition, although a number of dichotomies can be teased out of the programs (for example, traditional versus modern, urban versus rural, old versus young, etc.), the relationships between each pair of opposing categories is appropriately depicted as being complex. Moreover, although an overall theme of the series, as suggested by the first program, is to explain the economic success of modern Japan, some dissenting voices are included, questions are raised about alternative roads, and the technological solutions Japan has taken are not depicted as being unproblematic.

The CD-ROM that accompanies *Japan 2000* contains footage from the videos themselves along with maps and additional film snippets on specific topics such as the 1995 Kansai Earthquake, which are not covered in the videos. The CD-ROM includes sample questions for students to investigate as they peruse the material within, and it also enables students to "splice" together film footage to create their own thematic programs. Although middle school students might find such activities interesting, my own secondary students would not be impressed. This CD-ROM does not make full use of available technology, and I found it to be much less engaging than the video programs themselves. ◆

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Jeffrey Johnson teaches non-Western history and Japanese language to secondary students at Park Tudor School, an independent K–12 institution in Indianapolis. A resident of Japan's Kansai region for six years, Johnson has taught at the collegiate and secondary levels in the U.S. and Japan.

*Japan 2000* is available from Films for Humanities and Sciences. Price is \$129 each for purchase (\$465 for series) and \$75 each for rental. Price for the CD-ROM is \$149.

Notice of Broadcast: In February 2000, PBS will air *Regret to Inform*, a documentary by Barbara Sonneborn and Janet Cole which won the 1999 Sundance Film Festival's Director's Award. *Regret to Inform* portrays the devastation of the Vietnam War as seen through the eyes of women, both American and Vietnamese, who lost their husbands in the conflict. Please contact your local PBS station for exact time and date.

# Bangkok: Rim Nam, Rim Khlong

>> Produced by Window Seat Films, Inc. Distributed by The Media Guild. 1993. 18 minutes.

This video is part of the *Pen Pal Series* designed to provide an insider's view of life in their country. In this case, it is from the viewpoint of a

young Thai boy in Canada and his nineyear-old cousin, whose nickname is Oat, in Bangkok. The brief presentation is refreshing in that it is an appealing youngster telling the story of his cousin's daily life along "The Edge of the River,

The Edge of the Canals," to translate the title. The life of the Thai cousin and family along the city's waterways is, in many ways, enviable, and seemingly carefree. For the most part it is a buoyant and breezy visual presentation, with catchy "oriental"-sounding background music. The "voice" of the boy is read by someone who is a bit older than the boy in the video, and he is unfortunately not familiar with the correct pronunciation of some of the key Thai words used in the script. That aside, the narrative is generally informative.

The role that Buddhism plays in daily life permeates the tableau; young monks are seen carrying building materials for the temple grounds and making the rounds to receive food offerings from the laity in the early morning. An elderly monk, glowing and serene in his saffron-colored robe, is seen paddling in his diminutive canoe collecting food offerings as well. The quality and professionalism of the film is outstanding. Among

Despite the smiling faces and well-groomed children, the narration does not hesitate to mention the prevalence of poverty and prostitution...

presented for increased cultural awareness is the importance of water in the lives of Thais and the problems of water and air pollution. Despite

other points

the prevalence of smiling faces and well-groomed children, the narration does not hesitate to mention the prevalence of poverty and prostitution including sexual exploitation of children—in Thailand and the inability of most Thais to afford a high school education. A significant portion of the story takes place inside Oat's school. A history teacher is shown telling her—in Thai—the importance of Thai history; likewise a geography teacher points out places on the globe and com-

Trav's Travels China

>> Distributed by IVN Entertainment. 1998. 23 minutes.

A very basic, accurate, engaging 20-minute video with some animation features. The video is geared to elementary school audiences and would best be suited to third and fourth grade students. The print matter on the box states "all programs in this series exemplify the five themes of geography as set by the Geography Standards" and this is true.



The video makes a useful teaching device. If one looks beyond the main character, Trav, the video makes a good travelogue of distinctive natural and historical Chinese features in each region.

The video begins by situating China in its international setting (continents) and regional setting (Pacific Rim). From there we view the following:

- the Yangze River (fishing, swimming, no discussion of the Three Gorges Dam)
- Beijing (the Forbidden City, kite flying, a touch of communist ideology and the onechild policy, and the hobby of song birds and crickets)
- Shanghai (a port city, an elementary school, and bicycles as a main means of transportation)
- Suzhou (excellent brief footage of silk from cocoons to cloth and Chinese medicine and pharmacies)
- Xian (Qin dynasty terracotta warriors)
- Yellow River (fact of floods on society)
- Sichuan (tea cultivation, the great Buddha at Leshan, home of the pandas, cradle of farming, and different types of Chinese food)
- Kunming (the stone forest and the Torch Festival of the Bai Chinese minority nationality)
- Dali (three Indian Buddhist-style pagodas)
- The Great Wall
- Tibet, Nepal, the Himalayan Mountains and Mt. Everest (yaks, barley, Buddhism,

ments on how far away North America is. It is good to hear some ordinary Thais speaking in their native tongue rather than obscuring the beauty of the Thai spoken language with an English voice-over. Considerable thought and creativity went into the making of this vignette.

The intended audience is elementary- and junior-high school students. However, a general audience of older listeners would take great pleasure in this attractive slice of Thai life in one of the world's most fascinating cities. The video is an appreciation of everyday life that is seldom captured—and with a total lack of pretension and unneeded ponderousness.

Included is a useful guide to the contents, objectives, description, and six discussion questions to engage young people viewing the video.  $\blacklozenge$ 

John Hartmann is Professor of Thai languages and linguistics in the Department of Foreign Languages at Northern Illinois University. He does research on historical-comparative Tai, focusing in particular on Tai Dam (Black Tai of Vietnam) and Tai Lue (Tai of Sipsongpanna region of Yunnan, China). He received a three-year grant (1999-2001) from the Luce Foundation to do fieldwork on "The Origins and Spread of Tai Irrigated Rice Engineering Culture in Southern China."

*Bangkok: Rim Nam, Rim Khlong* is available from The Media Guild. Price is \$210.

the Potala and the complicated relationship Tibet has with China–as a result of China's occupation of Tibet, the Tibetan way of life is changing).

*Trav's Travels China* is made very appealing through excellent photography, both overviews and close-ups, of China. The narrator's pronunciation of Chinese place names is acceptable to decent, and the video content is accurate. The video provides some thematic continuity in the areas of food, animals, lifestyle, land, ancient relics, and minority nationalities, as it presents highlights of representative places in regions of China. Elementary school students will enjoy this interesting introduction to China tailored for their level.  $\blacklozenge$ 

Marleen Kassel is Project Director of Discover China in Our Schools, a professional development program for K–12 teachers, at the China Institute in New York City. She received her Ph.D. from Columbia University's East Asian Languages and Cultures Department.

*Trav's Travels China* is available from IVN Entertainment. Price is \$29.99.



## Ancestors in the Americas Series, Parts I and II

>> Produced and directed by Loni Ding. Distributed by the Center for Educational Telecommunications (CET), 1997. 60 minutes each.

oolies, Sailors & Settlers: Voyage to the New World, the first film in the Ancestors in the Americas series by Loni Ding, one the foremost filmmakers documenting the Asian American experience, sets the stage for a global understanding of the Asian diaspora. Focusing mainly on the Chinese, and to a lesser extent South Asians and Filipinos, this film documents how the immigration of Asians to the Americas was linked to the transnational movement of capital, goods, and people during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The film makes it very clear that Asian work-

ers were brought to labor in the New World as the African slave trade was in demise. Needed for labor that Europeans and various South Americans were unwilling to perform, Chinese, South Asians, and Filipinos were taken, often against their will or unaware of the conditions they would encounter, to the United States, Cuba, Peru, and

Throughout the film, Asian immigrants are portrayed as active agents, attempting to shape their own destinies.

Africa. They were brought to work the sugar cane fields of Cuba and Hawaii, the guano pits of Peru, and later, the various developing industries in the American West.

Skillfully combining reenactments, archival footage, stills, oral histories, and interviews with leading Asian American historians, this film follows a line of historical inquiry that has gained prominence in recent years: The Asian presence in America should not begin with the immigration of Chinese to the gold fields of California, but instead, should be viewed as a larger process, one involving Chinese, Indians, and Filipinos (and later Japanese, Korean, and Southeast Asians) venturing to parts of the Americas well before the Gold Rush in California. The film notes that the Philippines was a region where East met West. Colonized by the Spanish in the 16th century, Chinese emigrants had long settled there as well. Once the Spanish established a trade network between the Philippines and Mexico, Filipino and Chinese sailors began appearing in Mexico.

Filipinos, in fact, settled in Louisiana as early as the 1760s. The trade between the British colonies in North America and China and India brought Chinese sailors to New York, Philadelphia, and Boston years before the America Revolution and the tea thrown overboard in the Boston Tea Party was certainly of Asian origin. Thus, Asia has long been a part of American history.

(Lest we forget, the New World was "discovered" by Europeans looking for Asia.) Some Chinese sailors jumped ship in these American harbors and some eventually married working-class Irish women, forming some of America's first Asian-Caucasian families.

Others, however, were not as lucky. Tricked by unscrupulous labor agents and local crimps, Chinese and Indian laborers were taken to Africa, Cuba, and other parts of Latin America as part of

the infamous coolie trade. Ding includes fascinating footage of coolies digging guano on the islands off the coast of Peru, remarking that many died in less than a year. The film also points out that some of the Chinese escaped from the brutalities of the guano islands or the sugar cane plantations of the Caribbean to come to the United States, bringing with them a "Chino-Latino" culture.

Throughout the film, Asian immigrants are portrayed as active agents, attempting to shape their own destinies. Although they faced many hardships and obstacles, they are seen to exercise their rights and wills in seeking to claim their place in America. This first installment ends with a moving reenactment of a young Chinese woman braiding her husband's queue as he prepares to leave for America, the Gold Mountain. The anxiety of separation is palpable as he thinks to himself, "I need not fear slavery, I will not be whipped or herded like so many pigs," and she wonders when and if he will return, and if he dies, who will tend his grave or carry on the family name.

This scene serves as a segue to Chinese in the Frontier West, the second installment in the series, which focuses on the Chinese in the history of the development of the American West, especially in California. Acknowledging that there is a marked lack of a Chinese presence in much of the recorded history of the region, the narrator ponders, "What is history when the recorder does not record and the camera does not see? Find our history and tell it." Thus Loni Ding sets out to restore Chinese to the history of the American West.

Through pictures and interviews with historians, the American West is seen as multiracial and multicultural, with many people and their attendant cultures coming into contact with each other, many for the first time. The Chinese were vital players in the history of California, and throughout the film they are depicted as strong, intelligent, and determined to build lives in America. They were among the early miners during the Gold Rush, and later went on to become pioneers in the agricultural and fishing industries. By 1870, three-quarters of the laborers in California's agricultural fields were Chinese; and it was the Chinese who first fished for abalone, sea urchins, and other sea life, helping to establish one of the West's most lucrative industries. In addition, Chinese were instrumental in manning the fish canneries on the West Coast and they were also engaged in light industry, manufacturing cigars, shoes, and other items.

However, the Chinese arrival in the United States coincided with the national debate over slavery. Perceived as a racial Other, akin to enslaved Africans, Chinese were seen as competition to free White labor and racially inferior. Therefore, they

## Ancestors in the Americas

continued from previous page

suffered extreme discrimination and oppression at the hands of White Americans and European immigrants. The targets of physical violence, Chinese were at a distinct disadvantage because they were not allowed to testify for or against a White man in a court of law, nor were they eligible for American citizenship. Chinese women, suspected of being likely to become prostitutes, were discouraged from immigrating through the Page Law of 1875. This created a situation where most Chinese men were without the means to raise a family, since Chinese were not allowed to marry Whites in most Western states. Thus there developed a "bachelor society" of single Chinese men (many with wives and families in China) separated from their families for years, sometimes forever.

Despite these restrictions, Chinese immigrants and their offspring sought ways to resist this oppression. Often accused of being docile and unassimilable, Chinese proved they understood the American judicial system very well. According to one scholar interviewed in the film, it would be hard to find a discriminatory law aimed at the Chinese that they did not challenge. From the 1850s on, the Chinese sought justice in the courts, bringing over 170 cases to the United States Supreme Court. Although they often lost, when they won, they established precedents in American civil rights law, rights that would benefit all Americans.

Herein lies one of the important messages of this film series. The Asian presence in America has been long, complex, and vital to the development of modern American society. These films are insightful, informative, and at times, very moving. They are to be recommended to anyone interested in Asian American history and how that history fits into the larger global history of migration and settlement.  $\blacklozenge$ 

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K. Scott Wong is an Associate Professor of History at Williams College where he teaches courses on Asian American history, comparative immigration history, history of the American West, American Studies, and theories of race and ethnicity. His articles have appeared in a variety of academic journals and anthologies, and he is the co-editor of *Claiming America: Constructing Chinese American Identities during the Exclusion Era.* He is currently writing a book on the impact of the Second World War on Chinese Americans.

Coolies, Sailors, & Settlers: Voyage to the New World and Chinese in the Frontier West are available from the Center for Educational Telecommunications (CET). Price is \$265 for each.



## Spirits Rising

>> Directed by Ramona S. Diaz. Distributed by NAATA. 1995. 56 minutes.

**S***pirits Rising* is a dramatic film about women in the Philippines. In a stunning introduction,

President Corazon Aquino dispassionately talks about the death of her husband as he returned to the Philippines from exile. The film then interweaves the history of the Filipina with contemporary interviews with influential women. The result is a splendid film, of great interest to men and women who want to understand the Philippines and the role of women in the modern world.

The film is appropriate for high school and college classrooms that are focused on the Philippines, "Third World Societies," or women in the world. The speakers are clear, concise, straightforward and insightful. The speakers state that traditionally politics in the Philippines has been the domain of men. The feminist movement did not catch on until contemporary times. The symbol of the Filipina was "Maria Clara," the epitome of all feminine virtues. The rise of women participants in organizations and in political parties was an astonishing event that eventuated in the election of Corazon Aquino as the nation's president and made the notion of Maria Clara passe.

Slightly less than an hour long, the film is captivating from beginning to end. Viewers will learn about Philippines history and culture. They will learn about dictatorship, corruption, and the fan-

Spirits Rising is about People's Power as much as it is about Philippines women. The film deserves a huge audience. tastic strength of ordinary people who demanded justice against the oppressive Marcos regime. Viewers will see women as leaders of the People's Power movement. *Spirits Rising* brilliantly portrays one of the most remarkable events of modern history.

Imelda Marcos, former First Lady, gives a surreal account of the downfall of Marcos ("I gave Ferdinand a woman's heart, so he was defeated").

*Spirits Rising* is about People's Power as much as it is about Philippines women. The film deserves a huge audience. This film was directed, produced, and edited by Philippines women. **♦** 

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**Clark Neher** is Professor of Political Science and Director of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at Northern Illinois University. He has written extensively on the politics of Southeast Asia. His most recent book, with Ross Marlay, is *Patriots and Tyrants: Ten Asian Leaders*.

*Spirits Rising* is available from NAATA. Price is \$265 for purchase and \$75 for rental.



## Homes Apart

>> Produced and narrated by Christine Choy. Directed by J.T. Takagi. Distributed by Third World Newsreel. 1991. 56 minutes.

This video, produced by a Korean-American filmmaker, Christine Choy, and a Japanese-American director, J.T. Takagi, may contain nearly every cliche image or state-

ment about the relationship between South and North Korea, and yet it is a moving account of the ongoing tragedy of families separated since Korean national division. A South Korean antigovernment protestor screams to the camera, "Yankee Go Home," a U.S. military officer tells the camera crew, "We are just here to protect South Korea from North Korean aggression," and a middle-

aged Korean-American man, separated from his sister for more than thirty-seven years, sits in a cafe in Beijing and reflects that "North Korea is just a few hours drive from here, and yet it is so far away." Scenes from South Korea show bustling traffic, and the scenes from the North show a mass rally at Kim II Sung stadium. There is little in this film that has not been seen or heard before, but middle or high school students, as well as some undergraduates, will enjoy the footage from North Korea, and anyone who sees the film will go away with an empathetic understanding of the losses

...anyone who sees the film will go away with an empathetic understanding of the losses Koreans continue to suffer...

Koreans continue to suffer. The filmmakers follow

Moo-Jae Pak, a successful Korean-American man living in Columbus, Ohio, in the late 1980s, as he contemplates his trip to North Korea. After trying for years to visit his sister, from whom he has been separated for thirty-seven years, North Korea has finally given him permission to enter the country. The filmmakers dub in

country music and show Mr. Pak gardening outside his house. The film then shifts focus to the broader historical and political background that separated families like Mr. Pak's. A considerable amount of time is spent describing the military context, with footage of soldiers in South Korea and in the North, and interviews with American servicemen stationed in South Korea and a retired American Rear Admiral. There is only one enlightening interview in the background section, a discussion about North Korea with two Korean-American girls, Jessica and Jennifer Liem, ages 8 and 10, who visited North Korea and speak as eloquently about the need for peace as any military figure.

With the exception of a touching maternity ward scene in North Korea, and some interesting footage of North Korean schoolchildren denouncing South Korea, the background scenes are far less educational than those involving Mr. Pak and his family. Mr. Pak's wife looks away from the camera and says that she is afraid her husband will never come back; Mr. Pak is more concerned that South Korea will never let him in the country again. He loves South Korea, and has family there, but also tells us that North Korea is his country, too.

When Mr. Pak finally meets his sister at the airport in P'yongyang, neither can control their tears. Onlookers share in their exhilaration, in the vision of what, for everyone present, is a symbol of national reunification. Viewers of the video will remember the sight of the reunion much better than Choy's conventional narration, and for that the filmmakers should be applauded. The conflict between North and South Korea is far too often taught as a political and military problem without enough attention to the tragedy of divided families. If we want our students to understand national divisions not only from the perspective of political leaders but of the ordinary citizens they claim to represent, films like Homes Apart should be shown more often.

When discussing the scenes of economic life in North and South Korea, teachers will have to make their students aware that the film was shot in the late eighties and produced in 1991, well before North Korea's famine and South Korea's economic crisis, and before the death of Kim Il Sung in the North and the rise of democratization in the South. But if Korean economics and politics are fast moving targets, national and family division remains the same. That part of the film seems, sadly, to be timeless. As the producer acknowledges, the film is, like Korea itself, incomplete. **♦** 

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Roy Richard Grinker is Associate Professor of Anthropology and International Affairs at George Washington University. His books include *Korea and Its Futures: Unification and the Unfinished War* (1998), and the forthcoming *Pygmalion: The Life of Colin M. Turnbull*, both published by St. Martin's Press.

*Homes Apart* is available from Third World Newsreel. Price is \$225 for purchase and \$75 for rental.

# Religion in Indonesia: The Way of the Ancestors

>> Produced by Peter Montagnon. Directed by Malcolm Feuerstein. Part of *The Long Search* film series. Distributed by Ambrose Video Publishing, Inc. 1978. 52 minutes.

This film offers a compelling glimpse of religious life in the Sa'dan Toraja highlands of South Sulawesi (Indonesia) in the late 1970s. Despite the rampant economic, political, and cultural changes that have swept Indonesia over the past two decades, this cinematically beautiful film has enduring classroom value. Assuming care is taken to contextualize the film, *Religion in Indonesia: The Way of the Ancestors* provides

thought provoking images of a religion in transition and ultimately dispels some myths about socalled "primal religions."

The opening scene, of a young Toraja girl gazing out the window of a traditional Toraja house as melancholic bamboo flute music quivers in the air, sets the tone for the series narrator's confessions of his expectations for this in-

stallment of The Long Search: "If the human race had a childhood and it was anything like a human childhood it would have been spent very near its mother and its mother would have been mother earth, whose lap we all lay in...this was to be the search back to simplicity, back to childhood, back to something primal." As the film progresses, however, we discover that a number of his preconceptions surrounding indigenous religions are challenged by this expedition to the Toraja highlands. Early on in the film we are introduced to Eric Crystal, one of the first American anthropologists to conduct extensive research on Sa'dan Toraja religion and politics, who plays the role of guide and translator in this film. His deep respect for Toraja culture and his appreciation of the complexity of *aluk to dolo* ("the way of the ancestors") religion have clearly left their mark on this film. As the narrator concludes, "'Primal' isn't very easy to nail down...it doesn't mean simple: Toraja ceremonies are very complicated. It doesn't mean stage one in a two stage operation. In other words, it is not a beginner's class. The nearest meaning for "primal" I can find is 'not available for export." Eric Crystal's enthusiastic observations and translations during the course of the film do much to enliven the film. Moreover, his long-standing relationships with the two aluk to dolo ceremonial specialists (to minaa) featured in the film may also account for the candor with which they relate their experiences.

From haunting shots of Toraja effigies of the dead (*tau-tau*) and an overview of the landscape surrounding the Regency capital of Makale, the camera takes us to the Makale market. From there we are whisked to the celebrated funeral of the last wife of the last King (*puang*) of Sangallo. This is no everyday Toraja funeral, but rather a momentous local event that is still recalled two decades later. We are introduced to the Toraja practice of

A compelling glimpse of religious life in the Sa'dan Toraja highlands of South Sulawesi (Indonesia) in the late 1970s. he l'oraja practice of sacrificing water buffalo as a gesture of respect for the deceased (as well as for staking claims to inheritance rights), we witness the funeral processions, and we see the concomitant funeral activities of *ma badong* dancing, palm wine drinking, and water buffalo fights.

As the film's narrator notes, the funeral we witness is momentous for another unexpected reason: it is the first Toraja ceremony to be advertised abroad as a tourist attraction. As we watch a group of sarong-clad foreign tourists solemnly walking in procession into the funeral arena, Eric Crystal speculates that these foreign tourists come seeking a genuine religious experience and expresses his interest in talking with them as anthropological subjects. For anthropologists of tourism, this film has an added significance, then, as it captures in celluloid Toraja tourism in an embryonic stage. Some observers of the Toraja world have even speculated that this film played an inadvertent role in promoting Tana Toraja Regency as a touristic destination.

Disappointment is a theme that emerges in the film, as well. The narrator observes that Christianity has made its mark in Tana Toraja Regency and laments that he has come too late. At the time of the filming 60% of the residents of Tana Toraja Regency were Christian (today this figure is close to 90%). However, he notes that the adherents of *aluk to dolo* are fighting back. In 1969 their religion was recognized by the Indonesian government as an official religion, on a par with Islam and Christianity. We are taken to meet *to minaa* Badu, the elderly *aluk to dolo* ceremonial specialist who was Eric Crystal's teacher. We learn of how his dreams led him to become a *to minaa* and we are given a glimpse of his day-to-day life. We also learn that *to minaa* were planning to record their ritual practices and beliefs in a book.

The film introduces us to a much younger to minaa, as well. We find this to minaa, Tato'na'dena, in the midst of preparing for the funeral ritual of his father who had been a legendary to minaa. Tato'na'dena candidly relates his sadness about the loss of his father and his fears about stepping into his father's role as a premier to minaa in a world where aluk to dolo is on the decline. As he movingly confides, "When my father was alive there were still lots of people alive to help him, now I am like a chick whose mother has been caught by an eagle, the rope I held onto has broken, the ground has collapsed. Where can I look?" (Little did Tato'na'dena realize then that anthropologists, foreign film crews, and government officials from the Office of Tourism would take the place of the *aluk to dolo* adherents his father had relied upon for assistance. He is now the Head of Aluk to Dolo religion in the Regency's Office of Religion. In addition to his traditional responsibilities, Tato'na'dena now lectures reporters, anthropologists, and occasional tourists on the way of the ancestors and officiates at government functions: he is no longer that "lost chick" to which he likens himself in this film.)

The film concludes with the observation that what seems to worry outside observers is the very thing many Toraja would see as progress. As the narrator notes, "but who are we to be telling anyone that their strength is their booklessness, their strength is their churchlessness, their strength is their lack of a bureaucracy, when they can see for themselves that Islam prospers with a book, Christianity prospers with a church, and government prospers with a block of offices." Although it was filmed almost two decades ago, *Religion in Indonesia: The Way of the Ancestors* continues to be a useful resource for high school and college courses on religion, Southeast Asian Studies, and anthropology. ◆

Kathleen M. Adams is Associate Professor of Anthropology at Loyola University Chicago and an Adjunct Curator at the Field Museum of Natural History. She is co-editor (with Sara Dickey) of *Home and Hegemony: Domestic Work and Identity Politics in South and Southeast Asia* (in press, University of Michigan Press) and is completing a book on Toraja art and identity in the age of tourism.

*Religion in Indonesia: The Way of the Ancestors* is available from Ambrose Video Publishing, Inc. Price is \$99.95.

#### Asian Educational Media Service Center for East Asian and Pacific Studies University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign 230 International Studies Building, MC-483 910 South Fifth Street Champaign, IL 61820

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# Guide to Distributors

>> A list of distributors mentioned in this issue of AEMS News and Reviews

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**Bullfrog Films**, P.O. Box 149, Oley, PA 19547. Tel: 800-543-3764. Fax: 610-370-1978. E-mail: bullfrog@igc.org. Web site: http://www.bullfrogfilms.com.

**Center for Educational Telecommunications**, 1940 Hearst Avenue, Berkley, CA 94709. Tel: 510-848-1656. Fax: 510-841-1263. Web site: http://www.cetel.org.

#### **Documentary Educational Resources**,

101 Morse Street, Watertown, MA 02172. Tel: 800-569-6621. Fax: 617-926-9519. E-mail: docued@der.org. Web site: http://der.org/docued. Films for the Humanities and Sciences, P.O. Box 2053, Princeton, NJ 08543-2053. Tel: 800-257-5126 or 609-275-1400. Fax: 609-275-3767. E-mail: custserv@films.com. Web site: http://www.films.com.

IVN Entertainment, Inc., 1390 Willow Pass Road, Suite 900, Concord, CA 94520. Tel: 800-767-4486. Fax: 925-688-0848. Web site: http:// www.ivn.com.

**The Media Guild**, 11722 Sorrento Valley Road, Suite E, San Diego, CA 92121. Tel: 800-886-9191 or 619-755-9191. Fax: 619-755-4931. Web site: http://www.mediaguild.com.

NAATA Distribution (National Asian American Telecommunications Association), 346 Ninth Street, Second Floor, San Francisco, CA 94103. Tel: 415-552-9550. Fax: 415-863-7428. E-mail: Distribution@naatanet.org. Web site: http://www. naatanet.org. Third World Newsreel, 545 8th Avenue, 10th Floor, New York, NY 10018. Tel: 212-947-9277. Fax: 212-594-6417. E-mail: twn@twn.org. Web site: http://www.twn/org.

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