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News and Reviews

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Makiko and *That* Triangle

>> by David W. Plath

essay

In Japanese popular images of life in a multi-generation household, the sources of trouble lurk in the triangle that connects a woman to her mother-in-law, and both women to their son/husband. Japanese ideas about *that* triangle open a window of opportunity for North American students and teachers: an opportunity to examine our ideas about issues of generation and gender in the intimate arenas of living.

On the one hand, *that* triangle contrasts with an American assumption that the most troublesome domestic triad links a man, his wife, and *his* mother-in-law—as portrayed, for example, in the comic strip "The Middletons." On the other hand, *that* triangle seems to bolster American stereotypes about the Asian Woman, especially the Young Asian Woman, subordinate both to her husband and to his mother, and therefore victimized at home as well as elsewhere because of gender and generation.

In our documentary video program *Makiko's New World,* my production team and I portray an example of *that* triangle as three actual Japanese lived it across a whole year. As is so often true, reality proves vastly more varied, and I think more intriguing, than anybody's attempts to embalm it in an image.

The program is based on a journal for the year 1910, written down day after day by Makiko, the young wife in the Nakano household. As of 1910, the Nakano family had been operating a pharmacy and drugstore for 200 years in Japan's old capitol city, Kyoto. Makiko, 20, is the newest member of the household. And though she also is wife to the young man who directs the family enterprise, her most important role is as apprentice to her mother-in-law. In an enterprise household, the young wife must groom herself to become what her mother-in-law is now: the "Chief Woman" (*shufu* in Japanese), the one who manages the entire domestic side of the household. It's a career position—lifetime employment, if you want to think of it in those terms. And since the household may contain several family members, plus two or three maids, plus an array of live-in shop clerks and shop apprentices, the position of *shufu* carries substantial power and requires substantial managerial skills.

To learn all that a *shufu* needs to know takes time and effort. In her journal Makiko now and then reports that mother-in-law scolded her, or instructed her, or told her she could not leave the house because she might be needed later that day. Mother-in-law in fact prodded Makiko to keep a diary because she was having difficulty remembering all that she should about Nakano family

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From *Community*, which was filmed in Bangladesh. For review, see page 5.

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Asian Educational Media Service

The Asian Educational Media Service (AEMS) is a program of the Center for East Asian and Pacific Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. AEMS offers information about where to find 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 quarterly, services include a free call-in/write-in service and a Web site. To add your name to our mailing list, request additional copies of the newsletter to use in workshops or to share with your colleagues, or ask for help in locating resources, please contact us.

AEMS is made possible by generous support from The Freeman Foundation and The Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership.

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What's New?

Our Editorial Board and I thought it might be instructive and interesting to put together an issue of *News and Reviews* that focuses on a particular topic. By doing so, we hope to enable our readers to make comparisons of media on similar subjects and to create a resource that teachers can turn to when they are looking for a range of material on a single issue. I chose the subject of "Women" for this issue partly because there is so much interesting material available from a variety of perspectives, and partly because this material confronts the notion, still so prevalent in the West, that Asian women are largely the helpless victims of tradition and fate.

As the videos reviewed in this issue make clear, poor economies, unequal laws, warfare, and traditions such as the dowry or son-preference adversely affect the lives of millions of women in Asia. What these videos also reveal, however, is that the women of Asia are neither passive nor naïve. Many of them are not only working hard, but working with great creativity and resourcefulness to improve their lives and contribute meaningfully to their communities. From the markets of Bangladesh to the streets of Seoul to the office towers of Tokyo, the women portrayed in these videos are actively shaping their lives and societies. I hope you will find their stories inspiring and these reviews instructive.

In the future, we may print issues that focus on other topics. As always, we welcome your thoughts and suggestions.

—The Editor

Conferences and Workshops

An important part of AEMS' work is participation in workshops and conferences to disseminate information about the service and its resources. Over the past year, AEMS has been represented at the Association for Asian Studies Annual Meeting in March, ASIANetwork in April, and the College of DuPage's Annual Asia Festival in May. Most recently, AEMS presented a session, "Using Educational Videos in the Classroom" at the Mid-West Conference on Asian Affairs Teacher's Day Workshop.

AEMS also sponsors workshops. Last May, we held our first Image Preservation Workshop in which participants learned how to save photographs and 35-mm slides in digital format for dissemination via CD-ROM or Web site. They also learned to select the format and software most appropriate for their intended audience. For information about future Image Preservation Workshops, please contact AEMS.

New K–12 Guide Available

Our Assistant Program Coordinator Liz Cothen has been working hard to update our K–12 Resources List. This list contains videos, Web sites, and CD-ROMs that AEMS' staff, Editorial Board and reviewers have found suitable for K–12 students. The guide is available for free; you can find it on our Web site at http://www.aems.uiuc.edu/HTML/K-12.html, or call us at 888-828-AEMS (2367) and we will be happy to mail you a copy. ✦

Makiko

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recipes, family ways of celebrating holidays, the family's obligations to kinfolk, and the networks connecting it with people in politics, business and art. Her diary is a good read because she records all of this in lush detail: it's almost as if she were an anthropologist come from across the Pacific Ocean and not just a young woman come from across the city.

Nowhere during that entire year do we glimpse the ogre mother-in-law of popular legend. On the contrary, husband and mother-in-law often show affection for Makiko and concern for her needs as an individual. It's patent that they want her to grow into the role of *shufu* and be ready to take it on when the time comes. (They couldn't know that it would come five years later.) Both women understand that they have to get along with one another if they want to insure the long-term prosperity of the household they share.

Perhaps Makiko's husband and mother-in-law were kinder and gentler than some presumed typical example of *that* triangle. But they are not an aberrant case. Most Japanese who have viewed *Makiko's New World* comment to me along the following lines: truly victimized women exist in Japan as elsewhere, and so do ogre mothers-in-law. But in most actual Japanese multi-generation households *that* triangle operates more like the one in Makiko's record than like those of legendary cruelty.

Makiko's New World evokes home life in the

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The Story of Noriko

>> Part of the *Faces of Japan* Series. 1986. 14 minutes.

For some years now, I have found this 30-minute video an engaging way to teach about gender issues in post-war Japan. Originally produced for PBS in 1986, and narrated by Dick Cavett, the video tells of a young female junior college graduate who is quietly but firmly defying her family's hopes that she will give up her dreams of a career in Tokyo for a comfortable married life looking after babies and aging parents in her hometown. Part of a larger series of videos on different Japanese "faces," it confronts issues still facing Japanese women more than 15 years later, and hence (like most of this well received series) has clearly stood the test of time.

I have found this 30-minute video an engaging way to teach about gender issues in post-war Japan.

Anyone using the film will want to be sure that their students are aware of at least three key issues. First off, why does Noriko have trouble finding satisfying work? Cavett tells us that this is because Noriko quit her first job at the fashion firm Miyake Issei, and therefore is considered unreliable. It is less clear from Cavett's narration that Noriko is a junior (vs. four-year) college graduate, and hence not from one of the elite schools that Japanese businesses have traditionally favored. Most crucially—and here the video only hints at the problem—many Japanese businesses, despite 1986 equal employment legislation and rapidly changing worker preferences, still prefer to divide their work force into permanent and temporary positions. Rather than make these distinctions by ability, the tradition has been to balance a potentially expensive male workforce in permanent positions with "OL" (office ladies) who, by taking time out for children and/or working less than full time, provide a more flexible and less expensive complement to *sarari-man* (salary man). This sexual division is reinforced, again in ways that the film only hints at, by after-work customer entertaining and/or bonding sessions that for the (male) permanent work force has traditionally revolved around lots of drinking and rather childishly sexual jokes in glitzy hostess bars. If (but only if) properly prepared, viewers can see how Noriko's desire to have a meaningful career faces a sexual discrimination that has deep economic as well as cultural roots.

A second key moment that requires some preparation comes when Noriko's parents take advantage of her visit home at the traditional O-Bon (Ancestors) Festival to follow up the ritual cleansing of her grandfather's grave with a formal attempt (in Mom's kimono) at an arranged marriage. Students will laugh incredulously at this scene, but should see that for both sets of parents the stakes are high: given Japan's relatively undeveloped old age facilities, having a child nearby is more than just an emotional blessing. Viewers should note here, by the way, that Noriko's grandmother now lives with the family, that Noriko is the eldest child in a family with three daughters but no sons, and that the father owns a family lumber business that could be passed on to a suitable heir. Unlikely though it is, then, both sets of parents seem to think that mutual obligations and the slight chance of success make a formal attempt to get two young people together at least worth a try.

Is Noriko better off turning down this offer? While Americans will surely answer "yes," they can be asked to recognize how Noriko's cramped and expensive apartment, noisy surroundings, guilt over the hurt she causes her family, and less than fully liberated boyfriend make it understandable why her schoolmate has chosen married life in her hometown. Nor does her projected career with an all-women firm called "Flash" exactly shatter, at least in my mind, the *tatami* (straw mat) ceiling.

Noriko's smoking is perhaps the perfect metaphor for the tensions and concerns facing a young woman seeking equal treatment in Japan; as the Virginia Slims ad put it some years ago, "You've come a long way, baby"—but at a cost. Whether this cost is unique to a Japan "still bound," in Cavett's words, "to ancient customs" or common enough in our own country as well is a third issue that can surely be discussed with this engagingly short, funny, and quite poignant documentary. ✦

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The Story of Noriko is available from ITS, Inc. Price is $89 for purchase.

Makiko

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Japan of 1910 by blending together a rich array of materials—photos from the Nakano family's albums and photos (many of them hand-tinted) from historical archives, expert comments by Japanese and American scholars, old black-and-white film footage and present-day video footage of the photogenic city of Kyoto, and above all an array of dramatized re-enactments of selected events as Makiko recorded them in her diary.

The video program is organized into segments that are a few minutes long, set apart by subtitles that name the segment focus (e.g. "The Tricky Triangle," or "Western Food"). A time-pressured instructor can use only a few minutes of a classroom hour to have students view a segment. The remainder of the session can be devoted to discussing that segment or related issues of the instructor's choice.

The visual riches of the video program also can be combined pedagogically with the verbal wealth of detail in the record that Makiko herself left. An award-winning English translation of her journal was published in 1995 under the title *Makiko's Diary: A Merchant Wife in 1910 Kyoto,* available from Stanford University Press. ✦

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Makiko's New World is available from Documentary Educational Resources. Price is $195 for purchase, $50 for rental.

A study guide for primary and secondary classrooms is available for free downloading from the AEMS Web site or by mail on request.

COURTESY OF FILMAKERS LIBRARY

The Modern Moso

>> *The Ladies of the Lake: A Matriarchal Society.* Produced by Journeyman Pictures. 1999. 20 minutes.
>> *Visitors of the Night.* Directed by An van Dienderen. 1998. 34 minutes.

Taking complementary approaches, these two short videos introduce the Moso (or Mosuo) people of Southwest China. *Ladies of the Lake* focuses on the distinctive Moso gender system and their family traditions (formerly misrepresented by some as "living fossils"). *Visitors of the Night* deals mainly with cultural transformations and presentations of the Moso in the 1990s.

Ladies of the Lake presents the ways in which Moso women are situated at the center of their culture. Both the descendent identity and property are passed down through matrilineal lines and the headship of extended families is usually transmitted from an elderly woman to one of her most talented and able daughters. The Moso also have a unique practice called "visiting marriage" or "walking marriage," in which couples live and work in their own natal families while the males may visit their partners houses at night. Not only do women have the freedom to choose their sexual partners, they are also the ones who take the initiative in ending the relationships. While focusing on the extremely high status of Moso women in their society, the narrator states that female supremacy comes at the cost of women's exclusive roles in childcare, as well as dominant ones in domestic and subsistence work. The video ends with the uncertainty of the future of Moso culture, which has been challenged by increasing encounters with other ethnic groups.

> …a high degree of coherence is achieved between the narration, the voices of Moso men and women, the astounding beauty of the natural environment…

Considering the limited length of the program, *Ladies of the Lake* has successfully documented some major features of Moso culture, providing classrooms at both university and high school levels a much-needed visual document to enhance students' understanding of cultural diversity within China. Throughout the video, a high degree of coherence is achieved between the narration, the voices of Moso men and women, the astounding beauty of the natural environment, as well as the images of Moso daily life and dramatic courtship performances. In addition, most Moso individuals in the video appeared relaxed and confident in expressing their opinions both at their homes and in public, suggesting a rapport between the video makers and the Moso villagers who tend to be defensive to external gazes into their culture. Nevertheless, female supremacy in Moso society seems to be overemphasized or even romanticized, as manifested by the uncritical usage of the problematic term "matriarchy" and the ignorance of the authority of the mother's brother.

To counterbalance *Ladies of the Lake's* focus on traditions, *Visitors of the Night* contributes to the students' understanding of the commercialization of Moso culture in recent years from the perspective of ethnic tourists. Through the journey of the filmmakers, the audience can observe the newly erected hotels, the interactions between hotel managers, paid ethnic dancers (whose authenticity is questionable), and tourists, as well as some scenes of villager lives. In contrast to *Ladies of the Lake*, most of the interviewees in the video were nervous, and often defensive in answering questions. Additionally, the subtitles were extremely difficult to read. ✦

Shanshan Du is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Tulane University. She has conducted ethnographic fieldwork and published many articles about the Lahu of Southwest China and Northern Thailand. She is completing her book, *Chopsticks Only Work in Pairs: Gender Unity and Gender Equality in a Lahu Village Cluster of Southwest China*, scheduled for publication in 2001.

Ladies of the Lake is available from Filmaker's Library. Price is $225 for purchase, $55 for rental. *Visitors of the Night* is available from Women Make Movies. Price is $250 for purchase, $60 for rental.

Community

>> An OXFAM America Production. Directed by Michael Sheridan, narrated by Susan Stamberg. 1996. 23 minutes.

Community is about an organization called Uttoron, which means "uplifting." Uttoron is a non-profit NGO (non-government organization) that provides training, employment opportunities, and loans to thousands of villagers of Bangladesh and promotes small businesses that alter men's and women's roles in this society. *Community* demonstrates how this NGO serves as a catalyst in the overall socio-economic growth of the country and helps people who do not have a handful of food to eat, who labor everyday from dawn to dusk in utter destitution.

With their new power, female villagers challenge the dominant male interpretation of Islamic laws.

Filmed in Southwestern Bangladesh, the documentary penetrates deeply into the lives of poor women who have often been treated as the property of men. We hear men and women describing how social customs, poverty, and the illiteracy of women are often exploited by men who seek to protect their privileges in this patriarchal society. Villagers explain a host of challenges they confront as they try to improve their situation by getting involved in Uttoron and speak out on what they believe should be the role of women in a society where people experience the constant threat of hunger. They explain why equal rights for men and women are not only fair, but also economically smart.

In this video, viewers are introduced to the role Muslim women play in economic growth, a role which is seen by many Muslim fundamentalists in Bangladesh as a violation of religious tenets. The video addresses the effort to empower these women, emphasizing the threat that women's freedom and self-determination posed to a Muslim community, and explicating the successful strategy, providing women the greater visibility and participation in public life, used to overcome this threat. With their new power, female villagers challenge the dominant male interpretation of Islamic laws. This video itself challenges the stereotypical view that women in Muslim societies are passive and do not take any initiative to change their situation, while also acknowledging the very real obstacles to women's progress.

In *Community*, we meet a couple, Bahanur Begum and Habibur Rahman, who are involved in Uttoron. They stand in front of their tidy packed-mud home in their village and describe their realistic dreams to transform their home into a house made of brick and cement and to educate their children. We also meet a widow, Shukjan. Like many women of South Asian societies where the identity of wives depends on the identity of their husbands, Shukjan did not have an identity after the death of her husband. She made her living by begging, was sexually harassed, and even raped. After she became involved in Uttoron, she was able to support herself financially and gained enough courage to bring her rapist into justice. *Community* demonstrates how millions of people in the developing world, like Bahanur, Habibur, and Shukjan, are helping answer the question that is crucial to the effort to achieve universal human rights: How successful will be the civil society sector be in solving the problems of the developing world in the 21st century?

Community elucidates some of the learning experiences of Uttoron's staff about mistakes they have made in achieving their goals and the development of alternative strategies to achieve socioeconomic growth. For example, staff explain how they have eased male resistance to their efforts by including men in their projects.

There are similar types of the developmental ventures that have not produced the expected result; however, *Community* does not look at those cases. Nor does *Community* mention the famous case of the Grameen Bank, the first NGO to give out micro-credit, which now has millions of borrowers all over Bangladesh and has become an example all over the world.

Overall, I think that this video is an excellent educational tool for college students who are taking courses offered on women's studies, sociology, economics, social work, public policy, courses on South Asia, human service, and cultural studies. It is a particularly rich text for any course that addresses social, as well as global, inequality. ✦

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Afroza Anwary is Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology and Correction at Minnesota State University, Mankato. She specializes in Social Movements, South Asian Societies and Politics, Social Inequalities, and Gender.

Community is available from Bullfrog Films. Price is $195 for purchase, $40 for rental.

COURTESY OF BULLFROG FILMS

Made in Thailand

>> A videotape by Eve-Laure Moros and Linzy Emery. 1999. 33 minutes.

This video uses a semi-documentary style to explore employment issues confronting factory workers in Thailand, particularly women. The only dialogue in the video consists of excerpts from interviews with several women who have worked in light manufacturing in Bangkok (an industrial sector that relies heavily on women workers). The dialogue plays against scenes of factory work (mostly from stock footage supplied to the filmmakers) and street life of working people in Bangkok. Thailand's great economic growth since the mid-1980s has been driven largely by the investment of multinational corporations. The filmmakers' main argument seems to be that employees are frequently exploited by these companies, which, they assert, underpay workers and often cut corners on health and safety standards.

Thailand's great economic growth since the mid 1980s has been driven largely by the investment of multinational corporations.

Unfortunately, this video is undiscriminating in its treatment of companies operating in Thailand, implying that just about all multinationals are exploitative and unconcerned about worker welfare. The video is really a polemic that is little more than an emotion-laden tirade against multinational corporations. One can imagine its greatest use will be by NGO (non-governmental organization) activists endeavoring to mobilize those who might participate in Seattle-style protests at future meetings of the World Trade Organization or World Bank.

Especially distasteful is the video's use of a genuinely tragic event—the Kader Toy Company fire of 1993—to enflame the viewers' passions. Kader, a Hong Kong-based manufacturer, operated a toy plant in Bangkok. The fire that occurred at the plant in May, 1993, claimed the lives of 188 employees, most of whom were women and who were trapped inside as the management had locked many fire escapes, apparently to reduce theft and prevent employees taking unauthorized breaks. The Kader fire stands as the single worst industrial accident ever recorded, at least in terms of the number of employees killed. Several of the women featured in the film were survivors of the Kader fire and they discuss their experiences there.

If *Made in Thailand* focused specifically on the Kader fire, the irresponsibility of Kader management, and the fact that almost no one was subsequently punished by the Thai judicial system for the deaths (except for the workman whose carelessly discarded cigarette caused the fire), then the approach used in this video would perhaps be appropriate. The flaw here is that images and discussion of the Kader situation are presented as representative of general industrial conditions in Thailand and of the widespread insensitivity of multinationals. In fact, multinationals, particularly American, Japanese, and European-based companies, have reputations as being particularly good employers that typically offer pay, benefits, and working conditions that significantly exceed those of local employers. Many of these companies now utilize codes of conduct that regulate employment policies in their subsidiaries in developing economies and also are often extended to major supplies and subcontractors for these subsidiaries.

The video is also filled with flaws in logic. At one point, we are told that the minimum wage in Bangkok is 157 baht per day (about $3.00 per day), which was correct at the time the video was made. We are then told that the dolls produced at one plant cost about $25 in the United States. and left to conclude that this is clear evidence of exploitation. Issues of productivity are never addressed. Nor do we know what the daily wage of these workers would be absent the multinationals. In yet another scene, the perfidy of Kader management is described by one of the workers interviewed against factory scenes depicting the manufacture of various Disney-related products. But the Disney Corporation, which indeed subcontracts production of its trademark products to many Thai firms, had no connection to the Kader incident, yet such a linkage is unfairly fostered in the mind of the viewer.

Is life tough for unskilled workers in Thailand? Of course. Is poverty a problem? Definitely. Are there companies, both Thai and foreign-owned, that act in an exploitive and irresponsible manner toward their employees? Without question. The problem here is that the producers of this video present a snapshot—and a distorted one at that—of conditions that can and do exist, without placing these in a broader context. Most companies do not act in this way, though a naïve viewer could not help by draw such a conclusion. The film's objective seems to be to promote support for Thai unionism. In fact, based on our research, unionism in Thailand's private sector is weak, not because of government repression (hinted at by shots of police monitoring picketers), but because of disinterest on the part of most Thai workers. Thailand has one of the weakest labor movements in eastern Asia, but the legal system supports the establishment of private sector unions and little overt repression takes place in what has become among the most open and democratic countries in the region. Moreover, despite the current difficulties of industrial life, few would deny that economic development over the last fifteen years, largely promoted by the presence of foreign-owned

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COURTESY OF WOMEN MAKE MOVIES

Women in China

>> Produced for SVT. 1998. 100 minutes.

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Women in China chronicles the changes that have occurred in the status of Chinese women. The story opens high up in a building in Beijing where Kang Rui writes the word *pingdeng* (equality) in bold brushstrokes. The word has a special significance for this eighty-two year old woman; when she was young this word held little meaning for women, but that has changed. Indeed, Kang, as a member of the Red Army of the Yanan Era, was an agent in as well as a witness to women's quest for equality in China over the better part of the past century. The balance of the film features vignettes that examine how close women have come to this goal.

According to a number of the women interviewed, they have achieved parity with men. This chorus is made up of women who have successful careers: an official in the Chinese Women's Federation, the director of an upscale department store, a textile factory manager, and the head of fishing village collective. Other voices add, with relief, that women nowadays are not that oppressed by traditional mores and have more freedom of action. An office secretary recalls how in the 1960s she resisted her mother-in-law's insistence that she have another child after her first two were girls. Members of an all-woman rock band enjoy their freedom to live the lives they have chosen. They are approaching thirty and—with the exception of the bass player—are still single. This sort of thing would not have been acceptable up through the mid-1980s. Simply put, women in China have become more and more the arbiters of their own lives.

The above conclusion works best in the big cities, particularly those around the economically developed coastal areas. China's transition to a market economy has exacted social costs, however, a number of which have worked to the disadvantage of women. Chen Yiyun, a sociologist in a Beijing women's crisis center, tells how the vagaries of wheeling and dealing in the new economy cause a number of men to take comfort in alcohol and find release in beating their wives. The business of marriage and divorce has also become more free-wheeling now that the state has distanced itself from people's private lives. In the big cities this translates into an increasing number of divorced women with children, but with dim prospects for another marriage. Some traditions still remain.

> The business of marriage and divorce has also become more free-wheeling now that the state has distanced itself from people's private lives.

In the hinterlands—Ansai, a dusty village a couple of hours north of Yanan—the market has also exacted a social cost on the old agricultural and socialist system. Just as it has exited the private lives of its citizens, the Chinese government has by and large taken leave of the onerous fiscal responsibilities of subsidizing the barren and poorer areas in China. Now it is up to local farmers to make a go of it on their own. In families which find paying school tuition beyond their means, children—particularly girls—do not go to school. Moreover, many of the village men seek their fortunes elsewhere and as a consequence now seventy percent of the rural labor force is made up of women. This in turn leads to the rising number of separated rural marriages: the women and children stay in the country while the men move to the big and distant coastal cities.

In the coastal provinces, young women—with the minimum of a middle school education—have also moved to the wealth-producing areas. Yantai is a burgeoning coastal city and one of the select Special Economic Zones (sites for foreign investment and multinational factories). In Yantai, the export textile industry has employed and housed large numbers of young women from the countryside. The wages they make in one month equal what their parents can eke out of the land in a year. These young people's lives, while hardly glamorous, satisfy most of them. At Dayudao, a nearby fishing village, the growth of the fishing industry has also become a magnet for young women from the countryside with a modern touch. Some of incoming women seek to secure permanent residency status by marrying local men and then dumping them later when brighter prospects come along. While hardly a revolutionary strategy, the fact that this practice is employed by the archetypal Chinese ingenues aptly illustrates the dry rationality with which an increasing number of women in China now write *pingdeng*. ✦

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Women in China is available from Filmakers Library. Price is $495 for purchase and $95 for rental.

COURTESY OF FILMAKERS LIBRARY

PHOTO BY MICHAEL CAMERINI, COURTESY OF PBS

Dadi's Family

>> A film in the Odyssey Series produced by Public Broadcasting Associates. 1988. 58 minutes.

This film is a useful introduction to women's traditional roles in a north Indian rural joint family and of the impact of modernization on the family and its members. It is suitable for high school and college students and provides good material for classroom discussion. Dadi, (meaning "grandmother") and her husband are the heads of an agricultural family belonging to the well-off Jat community in the state of Haryana, India. The film focuses on the women of the family and their roles—mother, mother-in-law, daughter, daughter-in-law, and wife. The family consists of three sons, their wives and children, and three married daughters who live in their husbands' villages. Two of the sons and their families work with Dadi and her husband on the family's 30-acre family farm while the younger son has just completed his university degree and plans to remain in the city with his new wife. He is expected to send part of his earnings home to the joint family which will support him until he finds a job. His wedding draws the family closer together, but also becomes the occasion for playing out the tensions and problems of joint family life.

Much of the film consists of conversations and arguments among the women, discussions of their roles, and of the advantages and disadvantages of joint family life, all in Hindi translated in a voice overlay by the narrator. Dadi is desperate to keep the family together and bemoans the pressures that modern life puts on the survival of the joint family—the self-assertion of her daughters-in-law and the consequent weakening of her power over them, and the threat of sons setting up their own households. While Dadi continually points out the advantages of pooling earnings, sharing the farm work and, especially, supporting the education of both male and female children, her daughters-in-laws, particularly the older one who will some day be the Dadi herself, complain of the hardships and inequities of life in the joint family.

Because Dadi happens to be a strong personality, the film might give the impression that women have more power than they typically do in an Indian family.

Their discussions are supplemented by scenes of women working with men in the fields, portrayals of the camaraderie of the village women at the well helping each other draw and carry water, and scenes of the women laughing, singing, and celebrating together in anticipation of the arrival of the younger son's new bride.

The dilemma of the daughter-in-law is the most successfully drawn picture in the film and points to an underlying poignancy in north Indian peasant life. After an arranged marriage a child is sent away to live among strangers while the family must accommodate someone else's daughter, usually homesick, into its own life. In one scene, Dadi is shown affectionately saying good-bye to her own daughter who is visiting home for the wedding, and assuring her she will send for her again soon. In another, the middle son, who already has two sons of his own, urges his wife to have a daughter because only then will she be sympathetic to the plight of her own future daughters-in-law, separated from their natal families and living a lonely life among strangers.

Although there are some heated discussions, the family itself seems somewhat idealized; there are no references to such problems as physical abuse of wives, female infanticide, or dowry. Because Dadi happens to be a strong personality, the film might give the impression that women have more power than they typically do in an

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Dadi's Family

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Indian family. Dadi's family might also be exceptional among north Indian village families in its encouragement of female education. Though the film has its value as a teaching device, it suffers from an air of unreality. The conversations and discussions seem staged and scripted to bring out the pros and cons of joint family life. Aside from some good photography, the director and producer have shown no attempt to strive for artistic merit and have lost an opportunity to make *Dadi's Family* more than a textbook on film. ✦

Blair B. Kling is Professor Emeritus of South Asian history at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He has published numerous books and articles on nineteenth- and twentieth-century Indian history and is currently working on a study of Jamshedpur, a center of steel and automobile manufacturing in eastern India.

Dadi's Family is available from Documentary Educational Resources. Price is $145 for purchase, $40 for rental.

Made in Thailand

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plants and factories, has dramatically improved the lives of large numbers of Thai workers. *Made in Thailand* would seem best suited to those interested in promoting a distorted view of the industrial conditions in Thailand or, perhaps, those seeking examples of emotionally based, factually barren propaganda. ✦

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Vinita Atmiyanandana currently works in the bilingual education program in the Urbana School District. She received her Ph.D. in Mass Communications from Florida State University and was formerly a faculty member at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. She has written several articles on the impact of cultural factors on employment practices in Thailand.

Made in Thailand is available from Women Make Movies. Price is $195 for purchase, $50 for rental.

COURTESY OF BULLRROG FILMS

Rising Above: Women of Vietnam

>> Produced by Heiny Srour. 1995. 50 minutes.

In 1965 Kim Lai, a teenage girl who recently had volunteered for a local defense unit trained by the North Vietnamese Army, was the first to find an American pilot who had parachuted from his disabled plane over rural North Vietnam. The image of diminutive Kim Lai leading the hefty, captive American—"Robinson," as he is called in the film—back to the village was irresistible grist for the North's public relations efforts in support of the national defense effort.

Robinson's return visit to Kim Lai's village and home some 30 years after his capture is shown as well, and it sets the stage for Kim Lai's reflections on the course of her life during this period. She is shown pursuing her nursing vocation and caring for her family, ordinary enough activities for an obviously competent and mature woman. But the message is not that Kim Lai is just a typical or average Vietnamese woman. A brief account of her husband's mental illness culminates with her startling statement that, "I think that capturing a pilot was not heroic. But marrying my husband was." By marrying and thus saving the life of a suffering man whom she did not love (points made explicit in the video) Kim Lai quietly augmented her exceptional contribution to her country and society.

Kim Lai's sacrifice may stimulate some worthwhile discussion in classes at the secondary school level and above; the stories of other women in this film also are suitable for relatively mature students. Compared with Kim Lai, the five other women featured in the film all were and are more prominent figures during the war and in post-war Vietnamese government and society. Their stories thus inevitably provide further insight into the nature of the war and some aspects of Vietnamese society. It is not easy, however, to distill a single "thesis." The title, *Rising Above*, certainly should not be understood to mean that Vietnamese women have succeeded in defeating all forms of discrimination. Many of these women have attained elite status of one sort or another, but some also complain that the disadvantages of being female are substantial.

Six lives, each exemplary in one way or another and interesting in its own right, afford good insight into many historical and contemporary social issues. But in fact, six may be too many for a 50-minute presentation. One comes away with the feeling that the featured women, with the possible exception of Kim Lai, are presented as, if not uni-dimensional, less complex than we know they must be. Transitions between segments dealing with the six are not particularly graceful or even, in some cases, clear. Some of the historical footage of wartime and post-war Vietnam, interesting as it is, adds to a sense of ambivalence about the extent to which Vietnam's unique and embattled circumstances have created unique challenges for Vietnamese women. ✦

Stephen A. Douglas is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He specializes in Southeast Asia politics with particular emphasis on state ideologies and regional (dis)integration.

Rising Above: Women of Vietnam is available from Bullfrog Films. Price is $195 for purchase, $40 for rental.

From the Editorial Board

"From the Editorial Board" is a column in which members of our on-campus editorial board comment on their experience with media about Asia and suggest exemplary materials in their areas of expertise. This third column is written by Nancy Abelmann, Associate Professor of Anthropology and East Asian Languages and Cultures.

>> **Silence Broken: Korean Comfort Women**. A film by Dai Sil Kim-Gibson. 1999. A 55-minute and an 80-minute version are available.

>> **Habitual Sadness: Korean Comfort Women Today**. Directed by Byun Young-Joo. 1999. 70 minutes.

Silence Broken: Korean Comfort Women is an important documentary that centers on the personal testimonies of former Korean "comfort women." The term "comfort women," from the Japanese *jugun ianfu*, refers to the up to 200,000 military sex slaves forcibly recruited by the Japanese to serve the imperial troops across Asia. It is widely accepted that most comfort women were young Koreans, and that they were falsely recruited for "factory work." From nearly ten women we learn the stories of their recruitment, heinous details of their years as comfort women, and the trials of their return to Korea, and of the course of their lives thereafter. Many of the women featured in the film are among the earliest former comfort women to have spoken out publicly in the early 1990s. Remarkable is their biting political acumen; these are not women simply bartering a sad story—rather, they emerge as women wanting to bare the bones of social inequality, of militarism, and of the global distribution of power and resources. This is not to say that their testimonies are not tragic—they are; and in places the film is wrenching. Nor is it to say that the film spares us gory details (e.g., the cold-blooded murder of a pregnant comfort woman, the drugging these women were subjected to, and their permanent physical scars). The film, though, manages to capture these women's focus: as one of them puts it, "I want to shake the world." Another woman will be satisfied with nothing short of the Japanese emperor's apology: reparations without that, she argues, would be prostitution. Filmmaker Dai Sil Kim-Gibson, true to her title "Silence Broken," documents just that: the remarkable human spirit of the women who broke silence.

But the film doesn't stop there: with courageous women speaking out. The film takes us to a broad range of people and places to explore the history and reach of the silence on the comfort women that prevailed for so very long. We are, for example, introduced to former Japanese soldiers, a former Japanese military doctor, and a former Japanese schoolteacher who fulfilled orders to recruit young women for "factory work."

Nancy Abelmann

Here we meet historical denial mirroring the official Japanese position: the refusal of formal apology. We listen to a young Japanese scholar dismiss the claims of military slavery through his assertion of the historical ubiquity of prostitution. The range of these voices document, eloquently, the regime of silence. Director Kim-Gibson travels far and wide to tell this story, taking us, for example, to a United States military historian who can speak to the systematic destruction of incriminating documents. The viewer also comes to appreciate the diversity of global interests (among them the United States) willing to share in the silence—for example, in the name of economic prosperity for Japan. Also important and heartening are the voices of Japanese truth-tellers, a former soldier attesting to the cruelty of his compatriots, and a young female law student insisting that this history must be taught to Japanese high school students.

For teaching purposes, it is fortunate that the film presents, at least in skeletal form, the basic coordinates of the history implicated in the story of comfort women, from colonialism to the Pacific War. The War comes to life in the narrative of one former comfort woman who documents her boat travel to the near and far nodes of the Japanese military exploits. The historical stage is set with real footage among the women's voices. This is augmented by staged reenactments that have the look of contemporary feature films. In a book by the same title (Mid-Prairie Books, 1999) that parallels the film, Kim-Gibson explains that she dramatized scenes, in some cases of composite characters, to make historically accurate "fictional" accounts stitched together from stories told by more than one woman (p. 10). Fortunately, the look of the dramatized scenes is different enough that the viewer will generally know when it is not historical footage on display. The book offers extensive first person narratives interspersed by Kim-Gibson's own italicized reflections. The book also includes a chapter on history and a helpful bibliography.

The women we meet here know many deprivations: of happy childhood, youth, marriage, and childbearing among them. Here we learn of the remarkable ways in which they have been able to live on. Living on in bodies so violated, in times so deafening in their silence, has made sages of these women. Although the film is more than voices, and bears the mark of a first-rate filmmaker, its voices alone deserve a large audience.

The film is best suited to students in the final years of high school and college.

A nice complement to *Silence Broken* is *Habitual Sadness: Korean Comfort Women Today*, a skillful documentary about "Sharing House," a countryside home in which a group of former Korean comfort women in their 60s and 70s are living out their final years together. While *Silence Broken* focuses on historical memory and comfort women activism, *Habitual Sadness* turns to the daily lives of such women—beyond their activism, beyond the public eye. It becomes clear, as the scholarship affirms, that most of these women have been deprived of the normative Korean woman's life course of marriage and family. This film is as much a portrayal of gender norms and

COURTESY OF DAI SIL KIN GIBSON PRODUCTIONS

conventions (and the costs of their transgression) as it is an introduction to a community of women who have experienced the cruelties of the exploits of colonialism, war, and patriarchy. Finally, the film offers more generally a portrait of the shared, agricultural life (they farm together) of a group of older Korean women; in this sense their ways and dialogue need not be read only as the workings of historical evils or gender discrimination, but as a tribute to older women's struggles with old age and death. Indeed, most remarkable about this film is its eschewal of an exclusive focus on these women's comfort women years or memories. Rather, these histories—and these women's inherent activism as women who have spoken out against longstanding taboos—appear only as they surface quite naturally in the fabric of their daily lives together. As such, the film is not a historical documentary, but an ethnographic portrayal of the fabric of these women's lives and memories. The film thus effectively augments portrayals such as that we find in *Silence Broken* or in the published translations of women's testimonies.

The film features a handful of women and we get to know several of them well. In particular, we see the artist Kang (whose drawings tell her story as a comfort woman) who is dying of lung cancer and repeatedly asks (in the film) to be filmed, to have her life—to its end—documented, so that the younger generations will know! The film incorporates Kang's and others' sense of what it means to be filmed or represented in a very effective manner. One women hardly pauses for the camera, saying that she wants to be seen as "someone who has worked like a cow her whole life." Viewers will perhaps be surprised at—and certainly enjoy—the film's considerable, and sometimes ribald, humor. One woman chuckles cleaning out the chicken coop that she smells so bad that there will certainly be "no man tonight"; another, inebriated, sings in traditional ballad form a humorous story about a woman giving her dog left-overs so that the dog won't bark when her lover arrives in the night. It is these moments that place these women's deprivations—and they are nonetheless very real—in narrative and cultural relief; these are enormously creative, uplifting, and tragic glimpses. And very funny. I commend the filmmakers for allowing such humor to play in a film devoted to a topic that can be so easily—if ironically—dehumanized. In a lovely scene, the music and camera eye shift abruptly as they feature and accompany the mirthful "dance" of these elderly women delighting at the garden produce they are carrying on their heads.

None of these human details divert from the film's engagement with the heinous historical chapter that brings these brave women together. For a number of them we learn the stories of their recruitment (including one woman's stark accusations of the complicity of her own village leaders for having led the Japanese to houses with daughters). And we come to understand how the comfort women years are inscribed in these women's life courses as, for example, in the case of one woman who reflects that her earlier material greed can be best understood as her attempt to "forget my own suffering." Another woman thinks to be reborn a man and a soldier—a woman standing by chides, "so that you can sleep with women" ("No," she retorts)—so that she can "defend her country." Hearing this, another woman muses that she would be reborn to wear a wedding dress, and, humming the wedding march, wonders aloud what it would be like to be able to bear sons and daughters.

The film would serve advanced high school and college students who have been able to read first on the history and contemporary activism of comfort women. For students so prepared, this film has much to offer about this history and about women generally. ✦

While *Silence Broken* focuses on historical memory and comfort women activism, *Habitual Sadness* turns to the daily lives of such women—beyond their activism, beyond the public eye.

COURTESY OF FILMAKERS LIBRARY

Videography

Silence Broken: Korean Comfort Women is available from Dai Sil Productions. Price is $265 for purchase. To purchase the book of the same name, please call 888-328-2665, or look for it on http://www.Amazon.com.

Habitual Sadness: Korean Comfort Women Today is available from Filmaker's Library. Price is $250 for purchase, $75 for rental.

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Chip Taylor Communications, 15 Spollett Drive, Derry, NH 03038. Tel: 800-876-2447 or 603-434-962. Fax: 603-432-2723. E-mail: sales@chiptaylor.com. Web site: http://www.chiptaylor.com.

Dai Sil Productions, 22-D Hollywood Avenue, Ho-Ho-Kus, NJ 07423. Tel: 800-343-5540. Fax: 201-652-1973. Web site: http://www.twotigers.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.

Filmakers Library, 124 East 40th Street, New York, NY 10016. Tel: 212-808-4980. Fax: 212-808-4983. E-Mail: info@filmakers.com. Web site: http://www.filmakers.com.

First Run/Icarus Films, 153 Waverly Place, Sixth Floor, New York, NY 10014. Tel: 800-876-1710 or 212-727-1711. Fax: 212-989-7649. E-mail: mail@frif.com. Web site: http://www.echonyc.com/~frif.

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