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About AEMS

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Greetings!

Welcome to the new AEMS News and Reviews E- Newsletter. AEMS mission is to promote the understanding of Asian culture and society through media. In each new issue, you will see film reviews, details about upcoming screenings and events, and useful information relating to films about and from Asia. You will find a more detailed description of AEMS programs and services on our website at www.aems.illinois.edu. The AEMS staff - Susan Norris, Jason Finkelman and myself - welcome you to visit our website and live chat with us. We invite your suggestions and questions. Please e-mail us at aems@illinois.edu.

Sincerely,
Nancy Jervis
Program Director
Asian Educational Media service (AEMS)

FILM REVIEW



Journey of a Red Fridge

Directed by Lucian Muntean and Natasa Stankovic.
2007. 52 minutes.
In Nepali with English subtitles
Reviewed by Mary Arends-Keunning

In *Journey of a Red Fridge*, we are introduced to the plight of child porters in Nepal. This type of child laborer is extremely common, yet working as a porter is considered to be one of the worst types of work; the average load weighs over 100 lbs. and carrying such heavy loads over a prolonged period of time often leads to health issues. According to the movie, there are 60,000 child porters in Nepal with only 25 percent in school. The film provides an intimate

view and raises many interesting questions about child labor, but does not offer answers about how to eradicate it.

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FILM REVIEW



To Tell the Truth: The Liu Binyan Story

Directed by Meggie Miao. 2006. 59 minutes. In English and Chinese, with English subtitles and voice over
Reviewed by John A. Rapp

Suffering the pain of exile and the fate of ultimate irrelevance is perhaps a minor tragedy for those brave men and women who dare to challenge those in power. For every Andrei Sakharov and Vaclav Havel who used their international prestige to challenge authoritarian rule directly and who have reaped well-deserved honors and rewards once those regimes were overthrown, there are many other, equally brave if less well-known individuals who labor within the margins of official ideology, trying to open a space for loyal criticism of the regime.

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EVENTS



[AsiaLENS Documentary Film Series](#)

AsiaLENS is a series of free public film screenings and lecture / discussion programs -- organized by AEMS in collaboration with the Spurlock Museum -
- presenting recent documentary films on issues reflecting contemporary life in Asia.

AsiaLENS Fall 2010 Calendar:

Journey of a Red Fridge

Tuesday, September 7, 2010, 7:00 pm

Discussion led by Ritu Saksena (Associate Director, Center for South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, UI)

1428

Tuesday, October 5, 2010, 7:00 pm

Discussion led by Kevin Lee (Vice President of Programming and Education, dGenerate Films)

Unmistaken Child

Tuesday, November 2, 2010, 7:00 pm

Burma VJ

December 7, 2010, 7:00 pm

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SPECIAL EVENT



Asian Film Festival 2010: Visualizing Tibet November 2-7

Documentary and feature films from Chinese, Tibetan and the American directors portray Tibetan history, culture, and a way of life that may be the last frontier of an ever-encroaching global "civilization." The festival starts on November 2 with the AsiaLENS screening of *The Unmistaken Child* followed by Martin Scorsese's *Kundun* at The Art Theater on Thursday, November 4th. All other events take place at the Spurlock Museum on the University of Illinois campus.

Check our website for updates (coming soon).

About AEMS

Media Production Group

In addition to hosting film screenings, AEMS also produces and distributes its own materials under the brand name Media Production Group (MPG) . These are short educational videos and DVDs about an aspect of Asian culture suitable for classroom use and accompanied by curriculum.

Database

AEMS maintains a searchable database of over 6,000 films about Asia, including length, format, distributor and synopsis.

Library

AEMS library, through its connection to the Lincoln Trails library system, circulates videos and DVDs locally from its collection of more than 2,000.



Journey of a Red Fridge

Directed by Lucian Muntean and Natasa Stankovic. 2007. 52 minutes.
In Nepali with English subtitles.

Study areas: Nepal, Child Labor, Human Rights and Tourism.



In *Journey of a Red Fridge*, we are introduced to the plight of child porters in Nepal. This type of child laborer is extremely common, yet working as a porter is considered to be one of the worst types of work; the average load weighs over 100 lbs. and carrying such heavy loads over a prolonged period of time often leads to health issues. According to the movie, there are 60,000 child porters in Nepal with only 25 percent in school. The film provides an intimate view and raises many interesting questions about child labor, but does not offer answers about how to eradicate it.

The film starts with Hari, a 17-year-old Nepali porter, as he carries a refrigerator on a four-day trip from village to city for repairs. Along the way, Hari interacts with other child porters and talks about his experiences. We also meet his father and grandfather and observe Hari's interactions with them.

It appears that child labor has not harmed Hari, who has a cheerful and optimistic demeanor. He is an ambitious and altruistic protagonist who believes that hard work pays off. His labor allows him to pay for his college expenses. Hari started working as

a porter at age 14, after his mother died when he was 12. For his work, he earns 300 to 500 rupees per day (equivalent to \$4 to \$7 per day).

International tourists travel to Nepal and hire porters to carry their loads up and down the mountains, and the only source of income in the community appears to be tourism. Hari has decided that the best way to reach his goals of being the richest person in his village and bringing a hospital to his village is to study tourism. The movie explores the relationship between the porters and the tourists in an insightful way, and raises an important question: what are the implications when a community is dependent on the whims of international tourists?

Another question raised here is the role that parents play in child labor. We see Hari interacting with his father. Several times, the father requests money from Hari, who loves his father and wants to meet his needs. The father appears to live in a nice house with a tile floor, a color television, and well-dressed family members. We don't know much about the father's economic situation—does he own this nice house? Does he live with Hari's siblings? Is he exploiting his son?

Viewers who want to understand child labor in Nepal and in other developing countries should know that Hari's situation is not typical. Very few child laborers are able to attend high school, let alone college. The majority of child labor is unpaid labor on family farms. We get a brief glimpse of this in the movie when Hari interacts with girls who are carrying loads of hay back to their homes to feed livestock. One of the girls mentions that, unlike Hari, she is not free to run around in the village "and hold some girl's hand."

It is easy to understand why the filmmakers chose to tell Hari's story rather than the stories of the girls who were carrying hay. The shots of the boy carrying a bright red refrigerator with the "Coca Cola" logo across fields with the Himalayas in the background are striking and beautiful, and Hari is an appealing personality. However, the many stories of the children who are harmed by child labor because they cannot attend school remain untold.

This film would be especially appropriate for a high school global studies class. With a proper introduction, students can learn about child labor and discuss the implications for human rights. The pace of the film is slow, and the dialogue is subtitled. Therefore, children younger than juniors or seniors in high school might find it difficult to pay attention.

Young adult viewers will likely be struck by the physical labor that is expended by the porters. They can try to imagine what it would be like to carry a load weighing 200 pounds for several days up and down mountains. The film could be used as a starting point for students to explore such questions as what are the causes of child labor? What steps have policymakers taken to try to eradicate it? Should all child labor be banned, or do children experience some benefits from it? How does the nature of child labor differ for boys and for girls? The International Labour Organization (ILO) has a wealth of information about child labor on its website.

[Click here to learn more about child labor in Nepal at this ILO site.](#)

Mary Arends-Kuenning is associate professor of Agricultural and Consumer Economics at the University of Illinois. Her work on child labor and children's schooling appeared in the top journals in population studies and economic development and is often discussed in United Nations and World Bank publications. She has worked as a consultant for the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the International Food Policy Research Institute, and the Population Council.

Journey of a Red Fridge is available on DVD from **Cinema Guild**. Price is \$295 for purchase and \$95 for rental. www.cinemaguild.com



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To Tell the Truth: The Liu Binyan Story

Directed by Meggie Miao. 2006. 59 minutes. In English and Chinese, with English subtitles and voice over.

Study areas: China, 20th Century Chinese History, Human Rights, Journalism, Dissidents



Suffering the pain of exile and the fate of ultimate irrelevance is perhaps a minor tragedy for those brave men and women who dare to challenge those in power. For every Andrei Sakharov and Vaclav Havel who used their international prestige to challenge authoritarian rule directly and who have reaped well-deserved honors and rewards once those regimes were overthrown, there are many other, equally brave if less well-known individuals who labor *within* the margins of official ideology, trying to open a space for loyal criticism of the regime. Under authoritarian regimes these "reformers from the inside" often suffer no less persecution and exile than do more famous and outspoken dissidents. It would be an historical injustice to forget about these individuals who, rather than seeking to overthrow, have sought to create room for dialogue within the context of dictatorial rule. Perhaps the foremost example of such a person in China was the investigative reporter and writer Liu Binyan (1926-2005).

To Tell the Truth: The Liu Binyan Story traces the life and career of the foremost practitioner and perhaps even the founder of the so-called "reportage" school of

modern Chinese literature. As far back as the Hundred Flowers Movement of 1956, Liu challenged the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) from within for not living up to its stated ideals. For his troubles, along with hundreds of thousands of other students and intellectuals, he was imprisoned for many years at the start of the CCP's Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957. Released from jail and rehabilitated at the start of the reform era in China in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Liu wasted no time getting back to his self-assigned task of investigating the abuses of power and grievances of urban and rural dwellers throughout China as a reporter for the CCP newspaper, *People's Daily*. Liu published collections of his articles and essays in the West and signed petitions and wrote articles in support of student demonstrations in the 1980s which culminated in the Tiananmen protests of 1989. As a result, China sent Liu into exile in the United States, where he finished his days editing a dissident newsletter at Princeton University, trying in effect to lead a loyal social democratic opposition from abroad, until he died of colon cancer on December 5, 2005.

The film uses archival footage and interviews with China scholars including Perry Link and key participants in China's democratic movement, and of course Liu himself and his wife, Zhu Hong. The director and narrator, Meggie Miao, was granted complete access to Liu and his wife and indeed appears by the end of the film to be treated as a member of the family. The best parts of this film include poignant scenes of Liu and his wife trying to make a life for themselves in America in the years after the Tiananmen protests, when memories of the movement had started to fade in both China and the West. In one scene, Liu marvels at the easy availability of all kinds of inexpensive books at a flea market in New Jersey, demonstrating his continuing appreciation for the availability of uncensored writing—this scene may stand out to American students who take such access for granted.

This film will be ideal for classes on modern Chinese history, contemporary Chinese society, political advocacy and human rights. In China-related courses, it might be shown in conjunction with a selection of other documentaries such as the *China Rising Series* produced for BBC and A&E networks, or the PBS series *China: A Century of Revolution*, both of which include interviews with Liu and other Chinese "critics from within," including the late philosopher Wang Ruoshui of *People's Daily*. Other primary source materials include Liu's easily accessible and highly readable essays, such as the collection of his reportage literature, *People or Monsters?* or his memoir, *A Higher Kind of Loyalty*.

In sum, this is a very moving film that takes a very personal approach to the issues of individual liberty. Above all, *To Tell the Truth* shows by example the need to keep alive the memory of courage of many individual Chinese, such as Liu Binyan, who not only dared to stand alone but who gave the lie by their own example to the claim that Chinese people do not care about democracy and freedom.

John A. Rapp teaches comparative politics at Beloit College and carries out research into the political ideology of Chinese dissent from ancient to modern times.

How to Purchase: *To Tell the Truth: The Liu Binyan Story* is available on DVD from [The Cinema Guild](#). Prices are: for universities, colleges and institutions, \$295 for purchase and \$85 for rental; for K-12, public libraries and select groups, \$99.95 for purchase. Prices include institutional public performance rights.

Recommended Resources:

China Rising: The Epic History of 20th-Century China. 1996. Directed by Gwyneth Hughs. 150 minutes (in 3 parts of 50 minutes each).

China: A Century of Revolution Series. Directed by Sue Williams:

Part One: China in Revolution, 1911-1949. 1989. 120 minutes.


Part Two: The Mao Years, 1949-1976. 1994. 120 minutes.

Part Three: Born Under the Red Flag, 1976-1997. 1997. 120 minutes.

Liu, Binyan and Perry Link. 1983. *People or Monsters? And Other Stories and Reportage from China After Mao.* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Liu, Binyan. 1990. *A Higher Kind of Loyalty: A Memoir by China's Foremost Journalist.* Translated by Zhu Hong. New York: Pantheon.

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