

The Council on East Asian Studies at Yale University

SPECIAL SCREENING AND Q&A SESSION

MONDAY, MARCH 27, 2006

7:00 PM, Henry R. Luce Hall Auditorium, 34 Hillhouse Avenue

VISUAL DOCUMENTARY PROJECT ON CHINA'S VILLAGE-LEVEL DEMOCRACY

An Introduction

Launched in September 2005 by the EU-China Training Programme on Village Governance, the Visual Documentary Project on China's Village-Level Democracy covers activities in the following five sub-fields:

- 10 Villager DV (Digital Video) Documentary Films Project
- 10 Young Documentary Film-Makers Project
- 100 Villager Photographers Project
- A documentary film on the villagers' DV project
- A documentary film on the history of China's village self-governance

Curator: **Wu Wenguang**, documentary filmmaker, Visual Consultant for the EU-China Training Programme on Village Governance

Coordinator: **Jian Yi**, filmmaker, photographer, Public Communications Expert with the EU-China Training Programme on Village Governance

The following three productions are currently available:

1. Chinese Villagers' DV Documentaries on Village-Level Democracy

Length of the film: 95 minutes

Produced in December 2005

Language: Chinese (with English and Chinese subtitles)

Curator: WU Wenguang

Coordinator: JIAN Yi

FILMMAKERS

NONG Ke (literally meaning “agriculture” “science”), Male, age 59, an ethnic Zhuang farmer from Guangxi province

Film title: ***A Welfare Council***

ZHANG Huancai, Male, age 45, a Shaanxi native, a farmer plus freelance writer

Film title: ***A Futile Election***

ZHOU Cengjia, Male, age 42, a farmer from Hunan

Film title: ***Village Leader Wu Aiguo***

SHAO Yuzhen, Female, age 55, a farmer from Beijing

Film title: ***I Film My Village***

NI Lianghui, Male, age 35, a Hubei native, currently running a barber shop in the coastal province of Guangdong

Film title: ***Returning Home for the Election***

CILI Zhuoma, Female, age 24, an ethnic Tibetan living in Yunnan

Film title: ***The Holy Mountain***

JIA Zhitan, Male, age 55, a farmer from Hunan

Film title: ***Quarry***

FU Jiachong, Male, age 49, a village Communist Party chairman from Henan

Film title: ***Our Village Committee***

WANG Wei, Male, age 28, a farmer from Shandong

Film title: ***Allocation of Land***

YI Chujian, Male, age 26, a villager from Zhejiang, currently making a living by doing camerawork for a wedding video studio in a nearby town

Film title: ***Did You Vote in Our Village's Last Election?***

What is the video about:

For the first time, public and political lives of Chinese villages are captured through the lens of the people who belong there. Villages can never be so real if filmed by an outsider.

This video is a collection of ten short documentary films, each approximately ten minutes in length. They are ten films made by ten amateur villager filmmakers (ranging in age from 24 to 59 at the time of filming) selected from around China. The ten filmmakers were the successful candidates selected among villagers who sent in their

proposals for the competition. Each of them was awarded a DV camera (which “is worth something like at least an equivalent of the costs of raising 15 handsome pigs back home”) by the EU project. They were all eager to discover their home villages through the DV lens and to tell stories and be heard for the first time in their lives.

It is the first time that Chinese villagers have taken up a DV camera to shoot a documentary of their own on the changing rural public lives and the changing countryside dynamics in their home villages within the developing democratic system known as “village self-governance.”

The interaction between the villagers in front of the DV camera and the one who is holding it from behind can never be the same if the film were to be shot by a “professional” from outside the village.

2. *Seen and Heard*

DV documentary film: 55 minutes
Produced in January 2006
Language: Chinese (English and Chinese subtitles)
Curator/Producer: WU Wenguang
Director: JIAN Yi
Cameras: SU Ming, XIONG Jiang, QIU Qian

Voices from China’s 700,000 villages might have always been low, but when a number of those 900 million Chinese villagers start to point their cameras to their home villages and force you to discard your preconceptions and stereotypes with their stories, you cannot fail to recognize the power of documentary films in its most plain and coarse form. This documentary film tells the story of how ten Chinese villagers become DV story tellers of their home villages in this unprecedented DV project.

3. *Photos by 100 Chinese villagers*

Produced in January 2006
Curator: WU Wenguang
Coordinator: JIAN Yi
Trainers: Artists from Caochangdi Workstation

These will be the best photos selected from among a few thousand photos taken by 100 Chinese villagers living in 17 different provinces in China. Most of these villager photographers had never taken a single picture in their lives before they received the amateur camera and four rolls of film as a gift from the Visual Project on China’s Village-Level Democracy. These excellent photos represent a wonderful collective reflection on China’s countryside on its journey to village self-governance and democracy.

Additional background:

Acclaimed as a “quiet revolution,” China’s village self-governance system first introduced in the early 1980s can be considered as a significant step in the political history of China. In this new rural governance mechanism installed and protected by law, the state power withdraws from the rural areas while the villagers are entitled to elect their own village heads and manage and supervise village affairs in an autonomous and democratic manner.

The project:

Village self-governance is China’s important step forward towards decentralization and democratization. It has changed the dynamics and public lives of China’s rural communities, with an estimated total population of some 900 million people. This process, however, is rarely documented for various reasons. Even less so are the changes been viewed *from* the villages themselves. This project tries to address this need and, as an unprecedented act in the nation, has largely been a success by opening a new visual channel to and from the villages. It aims at bringing together young filmmakers and villagers, and seeing the changing realities from the perspective of the young generation and the people whose lives are dependent on the villages, for better or worse.

The process:

A call for documentary film proposals was advertised in September 2005. Some 90 proposals entered for competitions in the villager DV-makers and young directors (below the age of 30) categories, among whom 10 from each category excelled.

In the first week of November 2005, the 10 successful villager candidates and the 10 young directors/production teams were invited on a paid trip to Wu Wenguang’s Caochangdi Studio in Beijing, where they participated in a training workshop designed to prepare them for the production of their proposed documentary films.

● The villagers’ DV project and *Seen and Heard*

The successful candidates were very diverse in their background, with ages ranging from 59 to 24, two women, and two ethnic minorities. Eight of them were farmers living in their home village, while two were making a living in towns. They came from nine different provinces, ranging from the impoverished Northwestern province of Shaanxi and the prosperous coastal province of Zhejiang.

Only two of the ten villages had even touched a DV camera in their lifetime before they received the awarded DV cameras from the project. One of the two who did have some previous experience was a 45-year-old farmer who spent more time doing freelance writing for literature magazines and filming time-honored wall-slogans in his villages than doing farm work. The other was a 26-year-old who left his home village a few years ago to earn a living doing camerawork for a wedding company in a nearby town.

The exciting comments written in the proposals entered in by the villagers serve as testimonies of how valuable this unprecedented project is -- out there in the countryside, the villagers, who previously had only been the object of curious cameras, have always had a yearning for expressions of their own. Given this, most of the villagers and their relatives did not really believe that they would receive a DV camera – a luxury most of them could never afford to buy themselves. Even at the moment when they stepped into Caochangdi Art Studio, they were suspicious of how true this offer could be.

The training workshop was a major success, with a lot of interactions and exchanges of ideas between the trainers and the trainees. The villagers learned all the basic technical skills needed for shooting a DV and helped each other analyze their proposed topics.

For the trainers, including both Wu Wenguang and Jian Yi, the workshop was a learning experience too, as they learned to speak in plain and simple language and to see village issues from perspectives which had been foreign to them.

The villagers spent the month of November shooting their individual films. Three coaching teams, led by Wu Wenguang, paid visits to nine of the ten villagers on their shooting spots to help them solve technical problems. The teams filmed the DV-makers at work as well, as part of the efforts to produce a separate documentary film, named *Seen and Heard*.

Some additional facts:

The project was launched in September 2005, as part of the public communication activities of the EU—China Training Programme on Village Governance, a joint project between the European Union and the Chinese Government and so far the largest international cooperation project on China's village-level democracy. Headed by China's premier documentary filmmaker Mr. Wu Wenguang and Mr. Jian Yi, communications expert of the EU-China program, a group of enthusiastic people mainly from Wu Wenguang's art studio Caochangdi (the "Land of Grass") are the main organizers of all the activities.

吴文光任总策划，中国村民自治影像传播计划启动

DV镜头对准村民自治进程

文：周文翰

一项特别的纪录片拍摄计划“中国村民自治影像传播计划”开始征选作者了——不同的是，这次不仅是受过专业教育的职业摄影师拥有控制镜头的权力，普通的村民也可以参与这个计划，用小型DV摄像机、照相机拍摄乡村和乡村发生的变革。

这一项目的总策划著名纪录片导演吴文光介绍说，“中国村民自治影像传播计划”是中国民政部与欧盟合作开展的“中国—欧盟村务管理培训项目”下的公共宣传计划，目的是让更多公众了解并关注农民和农村，特别是影响深远的村民自治进程，同时让具有“草根背景”的村民以及更多年轻有才华的影像工作者通过影视媒体来传播村民自治的建设进程。

吴文光介绍，项目方原来只建议他做个纪录片就行，其他计划都是他后来提出的，“毕竟，多10个人拍纪录片比一个人做更好些，何况像村民自治这样的题材太少有人接触了。”这一计划拍摄的题材已经限定为如民主选举、民主决策、民主管理和民主监督等农村现实生活和村民自治话题，具体有四部分内容，第一部分是征选十名青年影像制作人（也包括联合制作或制作小组）各自独立制作十部20分钟长度的纪录短片；第二部分是征选十名村民分别拍摄制作的十部10分钟长度纪录短片，第三部分是让一百个村民拍摄自己的图片作品，第四部分是摄制一部纪录中国村民自治历史发展与现实进程的纪录长片。

吴文光说，所有的征选都是公开的，第二、三部分的应征者不论是在乡村还是在城市打工，只要是村民身份就可以报名征选，“不一定要具备影像拍摄能力，只要你对这个计划具有热情和一定想法，就可以在中国—欧盟村务管理培训项目网站（<http://www.chinarural.org/euchinaprogram/euweb/>）或中国村民自治影像计划网站（<http://www.chinavillagefilm.com>）

了解详细的情况，向项目组提交自己的拍摄计划书”。影像计划的最后截止日期是2005年10月15日，然后将于10天以后公布入选名单，对于入选的青年影像作者和村民影像作者，组织方将为他们在北京举办培训，同时提供DV摄像机、照相机或者一定拍摄经费。此外，作品完成后，将由评选顾问团评选出优秀作品给予奖励。