



© 2005 angry monk productions.

A monk in Eastern Tibet shows off his shortwave radio. Although Tibet is widely imagined to have been cut off from the world, isolated by high mountains and broad plateaus, its traditions of religious, economic, and cultural exchange extend back to at least the seventh century. Tibetans continue to tune in to world events through broadcasts of the BBC and Voice of America.

The real conundrum of *Angry Monk*, however, may be its title. For most of his life, Gendun Chopel lived not as a celibate monk, but a layman uninhibited by social or religious mores. Although his principal teacher called him “the madman” (referring to his unorthodox philosophical views), he rarely appears angry in the sense of outright hostility. The film’s Tibetan title noted on the DVD menu (*Yid byung ba’i grwa pa*), translates somewhat ironically into English as “The World-Weary Monk”—standard Buddhist language describing someone who has renounced all mundane affairs. Nevertheless, Chopel’s life ended abruptly. Returning to Tibet after his travels abroad, he was imprisoned and possibly tortured on the fabricated charge of counterfeiting currency; rumors also circulated that he was a Fascist or a Communist, and that he served as a spy for the Russian or Kuomintang government. After his release several years later, he was, by some accounts, a man broken down by the conservative forces he had criticized and then devoured by signs of alcoholism. He died shortly thereafter, possibly of liver disease.

The World-Weary Monk may seem an incongruous epithet for Tibet’s first modern intellectual, but it appears to capture the mood late in his career. Indeed, Chopel’s writings often reflect a certain weariness, and perhaps bitterness too, that his progressive views remained under-appreciated or overlooked. Toward the end of the film, renowned Tibetan artist Amdo Jampa recalls once asking Gendun Chopel, “Are you afraid of death?” “No, not of death,” came the reply. “But I have failed in life. All my knowledge will fade into oblivion.” In this case, at least, *Angry Monk* proves him wrong. ■

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## CHINA FROM THE INSIDE

DIRECTED BY JONATHAN LEWIS  
DISTRIBUTED BY PBS HOME VIDEO  
DVD, 240 MINUTES, COLOR, 2006

Reviewed by Jeffrey R. Johnson

**H**ow shall we describe the scope, pace, and consequences of change in contemporary China for students in American classrooms? *China from the Inside*, a four-hour Jonathan Lewis documentary that originally aired on PBS in January 2007, is a valuable resource for teachers who embrace this challenge. Lewis’ goal was to obtain candid perspectives on politics, gender, and the environment.

The four episodes of the documentary, “Power and the People,” “Women of the Country,” “Shifting Nature,” and “Freedom and Justice,” provide faces and voices of those wrestling with the major issues, humanizing the statistics. As the introduction to each episode reminds us, Lewis and his crew had impressive access to both Communist Party officials and dissident intellectuals, along with workers and farmers for whom the rewards of economic development are often at best attenuated.



Voters at polling booths in Liuqian village, Shandong Province, where there was a 96 percent turnout to elect the village head and village committee members. Some believe village elections are China’s first steps to democracy; others that they enable the Communist Party to tighten its hold in the countryside—the candidates were all approved by the Party.

Photo credit: Jonathan Lewis

I tend to use films in segments, to underscore lectured material, or, more often, as prompts for class discussions or role-playing activities. Lewis has introduced key issues through such a variety of individuals that his documentary is very useful for these tasks. There are many instructive moments. Tears well in the eyes of the daughter of an AIDS patient infected due to a combination of government incompetence and corruption. An independent candidate knocks a chunk out of a slate of Party-approved candidates, gaining election to his village council. A gathering of Uyghur women becomes vocal on gender issues, but only after their husbands are shooed away. An environmentalist pro-



The Communist Party of Xiamen City in southeast China honors its "model workers" (right, in red sashes). The party wholeheartedly backs capitalist-style economic growth to create prosperity. Xiamen makes computers for world markets and now produces more than Bahrain.


Photo credit: Jonathan Lewis

fessor spars verbally with a bumbling propaganda official while inspecting anti-erosion work that is part of the Three Gorges Dam project. A priest explains the relationship between the government and the government-regulated Chinese Catholic Church. These and other scenes humanize issues for students.

The visual aspect of the series, from the pea soup smog of Chongqing to the stark highlands of Tibet, is another highlight, sure to provide students with a sense of what it is like to be in China today. True to its title, the series' geographical scope stretches deeply into the country and encompasses both urban and rural areas. Official state news video and surreptitiously shot historical footage of dissident protests and arrests provide valuable content as well as drama.

An accompanying DVD for educators is a compilation of thirteen video clips culled from *China from the Inside* in which the individual programs are represented by segments ranging in length from two to eleven minutes. While these can be useful for classroom purposes, teachers who have viewed the entire series will be best prepared to introduce the scenes in context. The educators' DVD also includes sample lesson plans pegged to California standards, an interactive map, vocabulary, and other materials. This is available separately from KQED. Ancillary materials also abound on the PBS Web site at <http://www.pbs.org/kqed/chinainside/>. ■

**JEFFREY R. JOHNSON** teaches Asian and African history at Park Tudor, an independent college preparatory school in Indianapolis. Johnson has led four NCTA seminars. Last summer, he accompanied a group of his students on a study tour of China.



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