

Kim's subsequent struggles as a defector and a penniless Asian immigrant in capitalist Canada.

Having established that in war there are no winners and losers, only victims, the film examines Kim's emergence as an angel of peace and a healer of hearts and minds shattered not only by her war, but all wars. The film concludes dramatically with her visit to the national Vietnam Veteran's Memorial in Washington, D.C. and her reunion with an American soldier who worked with the Republic of Vietnam's Air Force, who told her that he personally called down the fire and resultant pain from which Kim still suffers.

This advisor, Jim Plummer, explained to Kim that he had sought and received multiple confirmations from local Vietnamese officials that Kim's village was abandoned. The village was not even the target, which was a bunker to its front. Yet, he was consumed by guilt from the moment he saw Kim's photograph (in the Army's newspaper, *Stars and Stripes*) the day after the air strike he believed he ordered.

Plummer maintains that this incident may have played a role in his subsequent plunge into that vortex of alcoholism and social isolation that is not universal, but also not uncommon, among veterans of all sides in that war. Like Kim, Plummer was able to channel his pain into a devotion to a higher calling, in this case literally; he became a minister of God. Yet, his relief upon receiving Kim's gestures of forgiveness and comradeship at their first meeting is palpable.

As a piece of documentary filmmaking, *Kim's Story* is inferior in many respects to an American Broadcasting Company's special report distributed nationally to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of Nick Ut's photograph. The ABC program has a



Phan Thi Kim Phuc  
Photo courtesy of First Run/Icarus Films.

fuller historical frame, a clearer narrative line, superior production values, and a more fulsome treatment of Kim's reunion with Plummer. However, *Kim's Story* is a more personal account, and its human touch may render it a superior selection for classroom use.

In one scene, Kim is shown addressing students who are visibly shaken by her testimony as a witness to war. This is sure to strike a chord among students viewing the film, particularly those cynics among them that might be unmoved by the ABC report's didacticism. The challenge to instructors is to turn the film's personal and emotional material into discussions not merely of the cost of war, but of the complexity of its causes and impact. *Kim's Story* possesses enough nuances of its own to ensure that this task will be an easy one. ■

Marc Gilbert

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## Confucianism— The Wisdom of Faith Series

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Huston Smith has said, "Trying to understand the human story without religion would be like trying to explain smoke without fire." Smith is interviewed in the film, *Confucianism*, by Bill Moyers for the series, *The Wisdom of Faith* which was first shown on public television in 1996. Smith's look at the Chinese view of the universe is not only concerned with Confucianism but also Taoism and Buddhism. Since philo-

sophical discussions can be at times amorphous, the film also touches on Smith's practice of Hatha Yoga and the viewpoints of the people in South Asia.

This documentary interview is not a good introductory survey about the religions of Asia but rather an excellent supplement to be used after a preliminary understanding of the Asian belief structures is in place.

Huston Smith first came to wide notoriety in 1958 after writ-

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**FILM REVIEWS**

ing an outstanding textbook on comparative religion, *The World's Religions*. It is still in print, translated into twelve languages, and used in many university classrooms. He has since written other books and taught in a variety of locations around the country. The documentary is partially biographical and mixes the author's belief structure with photos and films of his life.

Born in 1919 in a town seventy-five miles from Shanghai to Methodist missionary parents, Smith remembers the steam rising from tai chi practitioners working out on cold winter mornings on the hill behind his house. When he was ready for college, he left China and attended university in St. Louis. He then became a Methodist pastor and the president of the Vedanta Society. He has gained the spirituality he needs from the eastern religions while his cultural grounding has been in his own church which has, according to Smith, been "diluted by modernism."

It is balance that signifies the theme of much of what Smith

discusses with Moyers. Unlike the dualistic Europeans, the Chinese believe in the sense of yin/yang, and since one component flows into another, the Chinese don't have any problem believing in Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism depending on the needs of the moment. Smith explains that Confucian rituals are followed on state occasions, the Taoist sages and healers when illness prevails, and when death comes the Buddhist priests give the Chinese comfort partially because of Buddhist belief in reincarnation.

Yin/yang makes nothing absolute. Smith tells the story that he remembers from his youth illustrating yin/yang. A man's horse runs away, and his neighbor tries to console him. The man says, "Who knows." The next day, the horse brings back a herd of wild horses, and the neighbor congratulates the man, but he says, "Who knows." The following day, the man's son tries to ride one of the wild horses and breaks a leg. The neighbor says, "How dreadful," and once again the man says, "Who knows." The

following day, the army comes by to conscript all young men, and the son doesn't have to go because he has broken his leg.

The explanation of yin/yang would be the most useful part of the film in high school world history, cultures, and humanities classes because the yin/yang icon is a fad in teen jewelry, surfboards, and clothing. When asked what they think it means, teens usually answer that it means peace.

In the last part of the film, the dialogue moves to Smith's views of yoga. He doesn't explain in depth the meaning of the practice, so if you want to teach your students about yoga, this isn't the film.

In addition, Smith mentions the eight steps of yoga but does not discuss what they are except for Hatha Yoga, and this he practices daily (in addition to praying to Allah five times a day in Arabic) as a way to unite the human spirit to the ultimate spirit. He states that the emphasis is on the breath, which is the doorway between the body and the mind; furthermore, he goes on to say that the

breath is the most useful thing to concentrate on because air is invisible, so it's a natural link between the body and the mind.

For younger teens, the whole film is not advisable unless they have a strong interest in Asian religion. For high school students in general, only show clips of the film because of its nonlinear quality. Showing excerpts and then leading a discussion about the differences in the European world view vs. the Chinese world view would be a powerful use for this film. Huston Smith is an engaging and positive individual and therefore will captivate audiences on the college level where the film in its entirety would be most appropriate. ■

Pam Vaughan

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