



Gerd Seibel, DSK assistant project manager. © 2006 filmproduktion loekenfranke.



Chinese workers on the job site. © 2006 filmproduktion loekenfranke.

ture. Later in the film, he comments that he hopes the next factory that he's sent to dismantle is Airbus, but by that time, he hopes that the Germans are manufacturing spaceships and that the need for coking plants has been left far behind. His view is rosy, with everyone benefiting from the positive trajectory of globalization.

In addition to the differing impacts of globalization on the workers, the culture clash between the two groups is fascinating. The Germans are incredulous at the speed and lack of environmental and safety consciousness of the Chinese workers. The Chinese find the Germans' meticulous observance of regulations, especially safety regulations, and the resultant German disapproval of Chinese methods condescending. But the Chinese managers are confident that only successful results count in the end. China, in their view, is the clear winner here.

*Losers and Winners* has much to offer students of China, Germany, globalization, sociology, and labor. For those who don't want to immerse themselves in the dynamics of this sometimes dry film, the "Culture Clash," "Exemplary Workers," and "End of the Era" sections capture the main themes effectively. Each can easily be used independently in the classroom. ■

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## TEACHING NARRATIVE ANALYSIS WITH A&E'S BIOGRAPHY

### Hồ Chí Minh

AN A&E BIOGRAPHY PRODUCTION  
DISTRIBUTED BY A&E HOME VIDEO  
DVD, 50 MINUTES, COLOR, 2000

### Kim Jong Il

AN A&E BIOGRAPHY PRODUCTION  
DISTRIBUTED BY A&E HOME VIDEO  
DVD, 50 MINUTES, COLOR, 2003

### Dalai Lama: The Soul of Tibet

AN A&E BIOGRAPHY PRODUCTION  
DISTRIBUTED BY A&E HOME VIDEO  
DVD, 50 MINUTES, COLOR, 2005

Reviewed by John Sagers

**A** &E's *Biography* series provides a valuable source for analyzing narrative and representation of Asian subjects on American commercial television. Focusing on programs about the Tibetan Dalai Lama, North Korean dictator Kim Jong Il, and Vietnamese revolutionary Hồ Chí Minh, this essay will outline a method for classroom analysis of historical stories and what these stories mean for their target audiences.

Historical accuracy is a concern when using any documentary in class, and *Biography* programs often raise questions. For example, if Kim Jong Il's personal life is shrouded in secrecy, why indulge in speculation? Does it matter if film footage illustrating Hồ Chí Minh's travels show mistreatment of colonized Africans and Asians that he may not have witnessed himself? How should we evaluate statements of Hollywood actors and Tibet activists about the Dalai Lama's spiritual depth? It is important to raise these questions, and debunking the programs could make interesting term paper assignments.

However, with limited class time and additional research, we can set aside factual issues for the time being and analyze the historical narratives on their own terms. *Biography* programs usually follow a similar structure of dramatic narrative.<sup>1</sup> In the first few minutes, the protagonist confronts a serious problem. Pausing five minutes into the program, we can ask what kind of story we expect given the introductory remarks. "The fourteenth Dalai Lama of Tibet is a monk, politician, diplomat, and Nobel Laureate. He is also the spiritual and secular leader of a nation that only exists in exile. Tibet, the lost kingdom, once known as Shangri-la." This suggests a tale of heroic struggle to preserve a lost culture. Hồ Chí Minh's story is one of persistence against all odds: "He was small even by Vietnamese standards. Only four feet eleven inches tall and barely 100 pounds, he appeared frail. . . . Perhaps no leader in history has resisted the guns of the enemy

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as stubbornly or as long as this little man. . . . He had an unshakable will that helped liberate a country and humble a superpower."

The depiction of the North Korean leader is of a classic villain: "Kim Jong Il rules a country on the edge of starvation with an iron hand. Is his weapons build-up a threat of war or a desperate attempt to be taken more seriously on the world stage?" In these opening statements, we find the stories' central problems and insights as to how the protagonists will solve those problems.

Next, the back story explains how the protagonist arrived at the crisis moment. Anecdotes about birth, early childhood, and family relationships illustrate character development. This is probably where the facts are most controversial, but these early stories tell us what the protagonist symbolized to those recording the events. For example, the Dalai Lama was identified as a young boy who miraculously identified monks by name and objects belonging to his predecessor. If one does not believe the Dalai Lama is reincarnated in each generation, these stories are fanciful legends, but to Tibetan Buddhists and others, they illustrate the Dalai Lama's divine stature.

In Kim Jong Il's case, on the other hand, "There were acts of evil attached to his name soon after his birth. A terrifying story links him to the death of his own brother who drowned at the age of two." The program then shows Kim indulging his every whim, including an obsession with movies that led him to kidnap a South Korean actress and director. Hồ Chí Minh tries to work within the French colonial system, but is frustrated at every turn. Finally, he "determined to become a follower of Lenin, not because he had any understanding of Marxist ideology, but because he loved the strategy that Lenin had set forth as a means of liberating the colonial peoples." After the early stories, we can pause and ask if things are a bit too neat. How do the narratives make certain outcomes seem inevitable? What facts are presented to give us that impression?

The last ten minutes of each program show the protagonist resolving the main issues confronting them. The Dalai Lama focused on the principle of non-violence and raising international awareness for the Tibetan issue. Hồ Chí Minh died six years before the Việt Nam War ended, but his cause eventually prevailed. Kim Jong Il was rational and used his nuclear weapons program to bargain for aid and to make foreign attempts to eliminate him from power prohibitively expensive. At this point, the class can focus on those issues that remain controversial. How sympathetic should we be to the plight of the Dalai Lama's "feudal theocracy" and would he have been such a "fan of Thomas Jefferson" and democracy had he not been courting international aid for his cause? Was Hồ Chí Minh's revolution worth the high cost of war, authoritarian politics, and economic hardship? Is it better to take a hard line with Kim Jong Il, or should other world leaders negotiate to avoid costly confrontations?

The purpose of these *Biography* programs is stated in an ad appearing at the start of the Hồ Chí Minh video, "Slip into the lives of some of the world's most fascinating people. Watch A&E's *Biography* and escape the ordinary." These are stories selected and constructed to entertain a television audience with provocative (sometimes even sensational) coverage of subjects already familiar to viewers. Nevertheless, the *Biography* series, an excellent classroom resource for teaching critical analysis of the *stories* surrounding Asian leaders, will hopefully encourage students to read more about them. ■

**NOTES**

1. For an excellent guide to dramatic non-fiction, see Jon Franklin, *Writing for Story* (New York: Penguin, 1986).

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**ON THE MARGINS OF ASIA:  
DIVERSITY IN ASIAN STATES**

Edited by Charles Keyes



This collection of ten articles from the *Journal of Asian Studies* focuses upon ethnic diversity in Asia. The articles are grouped under five main headings: Premodern Roots of Modern Ethnicity, On Understanding Human Diversity in Asia, Migrant Minorities and Ethnic Pluralism,

States and the Politics of Ethnic Minorities, and Ethnic Conflict and Ethnonationalism. The editor's introduction, "The 'Other' Asian Peoples of Asia," sets the stage for the articles to follow.

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