



» [Home](#) » [Book & Film Reviews](#) » [Documentary Film Reviews](#) » Forthcoming Film Reviews

## Forthcoming Film Reviews

***The following documentary film reviews have been received at Pacific Affairs and will be published in the print edition within the next 12-18 months. Please note that minor textual changes may occur before final publication in our print and official online edition (hosted at [IngentaConnect](#)).***

**Last updated 24 November 2015**

Pacific Affairs accepts documentary films for review from distributors and producers/directors that have been released in the **previous two years only**. Our focus is on current political, economic and social issues affecting Asia and the Pacific Region. We do not review films on art, theatre or music. Please send review copies to the following address marked "For Review Only – No Commercial Value". While we will make every reasonable effort to review all documentary films within our scope that are sent to us, we reserve the right not to review a film.

**We do not accept unsolicited film reviews.**

### NEW

农家乐 PEASANT FAMILY HAPPINESS. *A film directed and produced by Jenny Chio; camera, sound, editing, Jenny Chio. Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Media, 2013. 1 DVD (70 min.) Sale: US\$275.00; Rental: \$95.00. In Chinese with English subtitles. Url: <http://www.berkeleymedia.com>.*

The film title *Peasant Family Happiness* is quite suggestive. We may wonder: What does visiting peasant homes have to do with happiness? Are peasant hosts happy, too? Jenny Chio's film shows that both the visitors and the peasants being visited seem to be quite happy about the benefits tourism has brought or is expected to bring. This is highlighted by the lyrics of the song sung by a woman from Ping'an Village at the start of the film: "today tourism has arrived at every home, every life has become a happy one." However, some peasants are not equally happy, or at least not happy all the time, since tourism has also had a great impact on locals' minds, traditions, and day-to-day living in a way that does not always appear to be rosy or positive.

At its initial stage of development in the early 1990s, the notion "Peasant Family Happiness" had no particular ethnic context. It was the time when the suburbs of big cities started to appeal to urban residents for the imagined rustic and simple life to be found there. Very soon the notion of Peasant Family Happiness spread all over China, including small cities and towns. Ethnic tourism in China incorporated this model. The incorporation reflects great sociopolitical changes in the last two decades that have contributed to intensive negotiations of rural, cultural, ethnic, political, regional and other identities among ethnic minorities. As (ethnic) tourism is both a product and agent of social transformations, many ethnic regions have taken on a new look with an influx of tourists. The locals hope to take advantage of tourism to live a better life but have to deal with its consequences at the same time, such as an exploitative development model that benefits outside investors by sidelining the locals, dilution of traditions or conventional bonds, fierce competition among the locals, sexualized objectification of local women (and men), environmental degradation, and so on. This film doesn't explore all these aspects in the same intensity or detail, but it provides a snapshot of the unprecedented changes the local societies are going through.

Peasant Family Happiness in ethnic areas appears to be even more appealing to city people. With the rapid economic growth and accelerated urbanization, the countryside embodies an "authentic" and "pure" past that the cities are leaving behind. Since most ethnic communities live in mountains, valleys, and grasslands that are supposedly remote from modernity and urban civility, they are conceived as being even more "traditional" and "natural," and thus "primitive." As a result, Peasant Family Happiness is booming in ethnic regions. The two villages in the film, Ping'an in Guangxi, with predominantly ethnic Zhuang people, and Upper Jidao in Guizhou, with primarily ethnic Miao people, are two of the thousands of such ethnic villages engaged in tourism throughout the

country. Ping'an is congested with tourists and more hostels and shops are being constructed to receive them, but Upper Jidao is still finding its way, trying to upgrade its tourism and attract potential investors and more tourists. Through a comparison, the film identifies various differences in the two villages, ranging from the degree of development and commercialization to the locals' attitudes towards undergoing changes.

For instance, while many a migrant worker from Ping'an has chosen to return to his or her native village thanks to the increasing tourism-driven profits at home, men (and women) at Upper Jidao continue to go to cities to search for odd jobs. While charging tourists for taking photos with local women is largely accepted as a normal practice at Ping'an, doing so is not yet counted as reasonable at Upper Jidao. While some people at Ping'an complain about the unfair development model in which a corporation manages and leads tourism, Upper Jidao villagers are looking for the opportunity to have the first company come and invest. While the profit-oriented focus is starting to disconcert some locals at Ping'an, a critical local concern at Upper Jidao is how to leave behind poverty. However, both villages are conscious of the fact that their ethnicity is a major tourist attraction that they can promote through colourful costumes, "exotic" songs and dances, traditional buildings, and so on. At least, we can ask why it was normally male tourists that were "invited" by the girls with ethnic costumes (who could be Han, too) for photos. What is the implication of this? In a way, it is a reflection of unequal power relationship between tourists and tourees (host population) as much as that of between the Han and ethnic minorities (this aspect is thoroughly discussed in my book: *In the Land of the Eastern Queendom: The Politics of Gender and Ethnicity*, University of Washington Press, 2014).

I am personally interested in the role of Jenny Chio in it. She arranged a learning trip to Ping'an for villagers from Upper Jidao. The latter is now catching up in developing ethnic tourism or Peasant Family Happiness, and Ping'an appears to be an excellent model for it. Will her intervention be successful? In what way? One possibility is that Upper Jidao villagers will become more skilled at attracting tourists and making money. In the last two decades I have witnessed so many changes in Sichuan's Tibetan area, where I am originally from, partly as a result of tourism development, and one notable change is that many locals are learning "smart" tricks, including cheating and coercive dealing, for the sake of more tourism income. Would Upper Jidao's tomorrow be different? Surely, with tourism or without tourism, with or without Jenny's intervention, Upper Jidao will change. Can we say with certainty that learning to play tricks or becoming profit-oriented is a bad thing? There are always different ways to interpret the locals' or the marginal population's strategies and concerns, as well as the role of an ethnographer in the field.

In a nutshell, the film opens a whole range of important questions to be further discussed, debated, and reflected upon. Therefore, I strongly recommend it to an audience and students who are interested in indigenous responses to and consequences of tourism development, as well as in ethnicity and rural development in China. I also suggest that you read her newly published book *A Landscape of Travel: The Work of Tourism in Rural Ethnic China* (University of Washington Press, 2014) for more contextualization and deeper analyses.

Tenzin Jinba, Lanzhou University, Lanzhou, China

[Back to top](#)

---

**DON'T THINK I'VE FORGOTTEN: Cambodia's Lost Rock and Roll. A film directed and photographed by John Pirozzi, produced by John Pirozzi and Andrew Pope; film editing, Daniel Littlewood, Matt Prinzing and Greg Wright; original music score, Scot Stafford; executive director, Youk Chhang. New York; Argot Pictures; presented by Harmony Productions/Primitive Nerd/Pearl City, 2014. One online resource (106 mins.) In English, French, and Khmer with English subtitles. Url: <http://www.dtifcambodia.com/>.**

At first blush, Cambodian rock music might seem like an unlikely topic of fascination for North American listeners. Until fairly recently, few outside of the Khmer diaspora knew that a full-blown rock-and-roll culture had developed in 1960s Phnom Penh, or that this music was still widely remembered in contemporary Khmer communities, and painstakingly maintained as a cherished archive representing a golden era of prewar Cambodian popular culture. *Don't Think I've Forgotten: Cambodia's Lost Rock and Roll* (2014; director John Pirozzi) reveals a hidden history of musical innovation, bringing viewers into the rapid efflorescence of a shimmering creative and social world just as abruptly torn apart by war and genocide.

In the course of exposing viewers to this little-known musical scene, the film presents an engaging and informative history of modern Cambodia. Norodom Sihanouk, crowned king of Cambodia in 1941 at the age of 18, represents a poignant and recurring through-line in the film's development, which traces his tragic path against the country's sickening disintegration into violence. In the 1950s, immediately after having successfully negotiated a peaceful transition from French colony