This two-campus University of Toronto series features ethnographic films by young Tibetans from within China and young Burmese filmmakers, a lecture and film on Buddhism in Burma, and workshops on documentary film and development in Asia. The weekend highlights works of emerging and established Tibetan filmmakers, some never shown outside China, Burmese students in the Yangon Film School, and established Anglo-Burman filmmaker Lindsey Merrison. Films will be followed by discussions with invited documentary filmmakers from Toronto. Discussions will focus on the special value of participatory media projects for young people worldwide and on the potential of open access and open source media products and practices. Also featured, a stunning exhibit of images by Plateau Photographers, a participatory photography project that trains minority students in western China.
The Films

“Stories from Myanmar”
The work of 12 new participants from The Yangon Film School’s Art of Documentary Filmmaking Beginners Workshop in 2007, who were given the opportunity to grapple with the technical, artistic and ethical aspects of the genre by producing their own short documentaries on the topic of children in Myanmar. This series contains their first film exercises. Several documentaries portray people from Kachin State, southern Shan State and the Ayeyarwaddy Delta who describe, in their own emotive and surprisingly humorous words, how development organisations are making a real difference to their lives. The body of work bears witness to a growing nucleus of talented young Burmese filmmakers.

“Friends in High Places”
Whether contending with a deceitful daughter-in-law, forecasting financial prospects for a tea shop, or freeing a husband from government detainment, Friends in High Places reveals the central role of Buddhist nats and spirit mediums in alleviating the day to day burdens of modern Burmese life. “Leprosy isn’t as contagious as people’s problems,” notes one medium, “my clients bring their worries into my home. I don’t need to go out on the street to learn how cruel life can be.” Yet despite their skills in channeling good luck for others, the life stories of the mediums prove to be as poignant as the stories of those who seek their assistance. Just as nats lie somewhere on the spectrum between mortals and the divine, the gay men who serve as primary conduits for the nat spirits are considered to be neither male nor female. Regarded by society with a curious mix of disdain and reverence, the male mediums profiled in this film illustrate the special niche granted to gay men in Burmese society. Deceit and artistry, tragedy and comedy, faith and cynicism – in a country known both as a 2,500 year bastion of Buddhism and more recently for its legacy of political instability, the world of the nat becomes an analogy for the many unusual juxtapositions within Burma itself.

Featured Participants

Leslie Chan
Leslie Chan is Program Supervisor of the International Development Studies program at the University of Toronto Scarborough. He has a long-standing interest in the use of information technology in teaching, learning and research, and a commitment to new modes of scholarly publishing and communications, human capacity-building and international co-operation. Leslie has been invited to participate in numerous international conferences on scholarly communication issues and conferences on ICT and development, and he has conducted workshops on these topics for a wide variety of institutions, many of them in developing parts of the world.

Carmen Celestini
Carmen is a film and television producer and scriptwriter in Toronto. After working in the fringes of the film and TV industries in Canada she decided to jump into the fray and start Artistsheart Productions. As a successful blogger where her political activism, sarcastic humour and penchant for making up stories about people made her blogs a hit, she expanded her horizons and began to apply her organizing and writing skills to produce and write for film.

David Cherniak
David Cherniack’s career spans over 50 documentary films. After an undergraduate degree in Physics he was living in London in the late 60’s when he became interested in film. He studied at the Prague Film Academy (FAMU), studying dramatic direction for four years under Otakar Vavra and Evald Schorm. On returning to Canada he was one of the founders of the Winnipeg Film Group before settling in Toronto. There he made the ground breaking Coming and Going about life on a palliative care ward, and from 1981 he produced and directed documentaries at CBC’s documentary anthology series, Man Alive, over the next 13 years. As an independent he began shooting and editing his own films with Sleepwalking Mongolia in 1998. He completed the innovative 26 part Spiritual Literacy in 1999, and from 2000-03 he made Reservation, a cinema verité feature and mini-series that follows life on a remote BC reserve over the course of a year.

Dondrup Dorje
A Buddhist monk and filmmaker from Tibet, Dondrub Dorje is now a student at Duke University. Dondrup saw his first “Tibetan” film in NYC, when he traveled as a young monk to Beth Israel hospital for treatment of a serious illness. The film inspired him to become a filmmaker. He learned English, and in 2008 he received a grant from the National Geographic Society to make his first film, Stone Scripture. In 2009, he made a short documentary about Climate Change on the Tibetan
The Films

“The Art of Documentary Filmmaking”
In 2005, Lindsey Merrison brought together eight tutors well-versed in documentary from Europe and Australia with twelve young Burmese men and women for a three-week workshop entitled “The Art of Documentary Filmmaking.” The venue was a quiet hotel in Myanmar’s capital, Yangon. The Burmese participants had little or no prior knowledge of filming stories from real life. A task that would have been daunting in any country posed a particular challenge in Myanmar, where documenting reality is a risky undertaking for those on both sides of the camera. All the more remarkable then, that, 21 days later, the participants on this residential course had learned how to handle the equipment, grappled with the artistic and ethical aspects of the genre, and researched, wrote, and filmed four short documentary portraits inspired by the subject of “Women in Myanmar.” The greatest achievement of the event could well have been the impetus and direction it gave to these budding filmmakers, all of whom are already developing new projects. The film features the four final films made by the participants.

“Summer Pasture”
Summer Pasture is a feature-length documentary that chronicles one summer with a young family amidst this period of great uncertainty. Locho, his wife Yama, and their infant daughter, nicknamed Jiatomah (“pale chubby girl”), spend the summer months in eastern Tibet’s Zachukha grasslands, an area known as Wu-Zui or “5-Most,” the highest, coldest, poorest, largest, and most remote county in Sichuan Province, China. Summer Pasture takes place at a critical time in Locho and Yama’s lives, as they question their future as nomads. With their pastoral traditions confronting rapid modernization, Locho and Yama must reconcile the challenges that threaten to drastically reshape their existence.

Plateau for the World Wildlife Fund. In 2010 he came to the U.S. to study cultural anthropology and documentary filmmaking. Dondrub grew up in a small village listening to stories of elders, helping his family herd yaks and harvest barley. Now seeing children watching TV and herders moving to town, he feels an obligation to remember tradition with his camera.

Dorje Tsering Chenaktsang
Dorje Tsering Chenaktsang (aka Jangbu) is considered by many Tibet’s greatest living poet. Born in Qinghai, China, he worked for many years as editor of the Tibetan language literary journal Bod kyi rtsom rig sgyu rtsal [Tibetan art and literature] in Lhasa. In recent years he has been a Visiting Professor of Tibetan Language at the National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilizations in Paris. He has directed the documentaries Tantric Yogi, Kokonor and Ani Lacham: A Tibetan Nun. He is currently working on a series of documentaries that reflect on social and cultural issues in modern Tibet. The first English translation of his poems and short stories, an anthology of his works titled The Nine-Eyed Agathe, was just published.

Eh Mwee
A member of the Karen ethnic group, Eh Mwee is a director, cinematographer and editor who joined Yangon Film School in 2005, after which she married, returned to Bangkok to finish her masters degree in gender studies, returned to Myanmar to have her child, joined Oxfam, and later worked as an evaluator for NGOs. She came back to YFS in 2009 to repeat a beginners course, where she rediscovered her passion for filmmaking and discovered her talent, initially for camera, and subsequently during the course of 2010, her skill for editing and directing too.

Frances Garrett
Frances Garrett is Associate Professor of Tibetan and Buddhist Studies in the University of Toronto’s Department for the Study of Religion, where she has taught since 2003. Her research focuses on Tibetan religious history and other forms of Tibetan culture, especially medicine. She has lived for a number of years in various parts of India and China, including most recently a 14-month stay in Amdo (a Tibetan region of Western China) in 2009-10, where she became involved in participatory media work with young Tibetans there.

Mark Johnston
Mark is one of the most in-demand documentary filmmakers in Canada and is now President of Nomad Films, www.nomadfilms.ca. He began his television work with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and was series anthropological consultant and director for the BBC series The Human Animal. Mark has spent considerable time with more than a dozen tribal peoples.
around the world, researching, filming, creating aid projects and writing. He has made numerous documentary films and has a global perspective that reaches into hard business and fundraising. Mark has lectured extensively in Europe, Australia, Japan and Hong Kong.

Lindsey Merrison

In 2005, Anglo-Burman Director and Producer Lindsey Merrison and seven other experienced filmmakers mounted the first Art of Documentary Filmmaking workshop in Myanmar, during which they trained young Burmese men and women to develop their own skills as documentarians. Lindsey has since mounted a second workshop and founded the non-profit organization, Yangon Film School – Association for the Promotion of Young Burmese Film and Video Artists, with the aim of setting up a permanent school in Yangon with a regular curriculum.

Patrick Pranke

Pat Pranke holds a Ph.D. in Buddhist Studies from the University of Michigan and is an Assistant Professor of Humanities at the University of Louisville. His specialization is Burmese Buddhism and Burmese popular cults, on which he has conducted extensive research over several years in the Sagaing Hills in Upper Burma. In addition to his experience in Burma, Pat has been a teacher and administrator on the University of Wisconsin’s College Year in India Program and Antioch College’s Buddhist Studies Program in north India.

Françoise Robin

Françoise Robin is a scholar of Tibetan contemporary literature and film. In 2003, she completed a doctoral thesis on Tibetan literature at the National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilizations in Paris, entitled “La littérature de fiction d’expression tibétaine au Tibet (RPC) depuis 1950: sources textuelles anciennes, courants principaux et fonctions dans la société contemporaine tibétaine.” Françoise is a maître de conférence at INALCO. She publishes widely on Tibetan literature and is currently doing research on Tibetan film.

Shelley Saywell

Shelley Saywell is a Canadian documentary filmmaker whose films focus on social/political and human rights issues. As a child, her father’s career as a Professor of modern Chinese history meant extensive travel through Southeast Asia and Central Asia. Exposure to other cultures imbued her with a life long interest and passion in promoting global awareness. Over the past 20 years, Shelley has written, directed and produced 20 independent documentaries for Bishari Films, many about women and children caught in conflict. In 2010 Shelley was honoured by Women in Film and Television with the Creative Excellence Award. She has received numerous awards, including an

The Films

“Tantric Yogi”
In Tibetan with English subtitles, Tantric Yogi follows a Yogi and his fellow villagers as they travel through challenging territory to reach a rare gathering of thousands of lay tantric practitioners in Eastern Tibet. Narrated by Jim Broadbent.

“Stone Scripture”
Stone Scripture documents a stone carving tradition in an Eastern Tibetan village. Each year tens of thousands of pilgrims visit the massive heap of carved stones in the village. The film tells the story of three families who are connected through the village’s heap of carved stones. The result is a reflection on local religious beliefs, economic concerns, education, and minority life in China.

“Seeds in the Wind”
This film documents traditional food collection, production and consumption practices in a remote Eastern Tibetan region in Western China.

“Lacham, A Tibetan Nun”
When she was a child, Lhacham was eager to learn how to read and write. For economic reasons, her parents thought otherwise. She decided to run away to a nunery in order to receive the education she was dreaming of. Dorje Tsering Chenaktsang follows her during a trip to the nearby town to get her tape recorder fixed. This recorder is her knowledge tool which she uses to learn Tibetan. The film is a tender and poetic portrait of Lhacham’s first journey into town.

A student with the Yangon Film School.
Two monks from Eastern Tibet watch and comment on ethnographic video footage of a traditional wedding in Western Tibet.

Emmy for Outstanding Investigative Journalism, 2 Hot Docs Best Canadian Feature Awards, 3 Canadian Cinema and Television Gemini Awards, and UNESCO’s Gandhi Medal for Promoting the Culture of Peace. Shelley is an alumni of the University of Toronto.

Tsering Perlo

Tsering Perlo is the founder of Rabsal, an association of young Tibetans from the Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan Province who are committed to the continuation and adaptation of Tibetan culture and the fostering of this commitment in a younger generation of Tibetans. Tsering is a graduate of the Sichuan Province Tibetan School and has six years of work experience with a variety of international development organizations, including overseas training.

Mona Schrempf

Mona Schrempf is an anthropologist from Humboldt University in Berlin who focuses on the anthropology of religion, medical anthropology, oral history in Tibetan societies, Tibetan medicine, Chinese public health and minority medicine, and the globalisation of traditional Asian medicine. Her current research projects focus on family planning among Tibetans in China; medicine, religion and healing in Tibetan and Tibetanized communities in China and the Himalaya; and ritual masked dances and the revival of Tibetan Bon religion.

Cyrus Sundar Singh

Cyrus is a Gemini Award-winning filmmaker, composer, singer and producer. His documentary Film Club was the 2000 winner of the National Film Board of Canada’s Reel Diversity Competition, and received The Canada Award (for programming that reflects the country’s racial and cultural diversity) at the 2002 Gemini Awards. Singh has composed music scores for a number of films, including documentaries Moving Day and Salaam Shalom: The Jews of India.

Daniel Thomson

Daniel is a documentary filmmaker with years of industry experience as Producer, Production Manager, Researcher, and Director. He has recently completed Visual Research for The Return of the Prairie Bandit, which aired on CBC’s The Nature of Things, and he is Directing and Producing the short documentary and multi-media project, Reclaimed, which profiles Toronto artist Matt Durant.

Wendekar

Wendekar is from a nomadic family of the Eastern Tibetan region of Amdo. He was born in 1989 and started school when he was nine years old. He studied Tibetan in local schools and then moved to Xining to study English at Qinghai Normal University. He started to work with a video camera in 2009 but has never received any formal training in filmmaking. This is his first trip outside China, and Seeds in the Wind is his first film.

About this event

This event is a product of the U of T research project, Representing Tibet. Funded by a SSHRC Image, Text, Sound and Technology Grant, Principal Investigator Frances Garrett and several students have been thinking about cross-cultural collaborative models for the understanding of visual media. Undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Toronto have worked with Tibetans in regions of China and in Toronto throughout the project. In the creation of much ethnographic footage, the videographer’s perspective is held dominant, with little or no input given by cultural agents themselves on issues of content, framing, artistry, or other representational concerns. This project began to consider this imbalance by soliciting multiple Tibetan perspectives on existing footage of Tibetan cultural practices. The team wanted to create space for a collaborative and cross-cultural interpretation of ethnographic knowledge using visual media, and to reconsider ethical issues involved in the representation of others. In becoming involved with a number of young Tibetan filmmakers and photographers in China over 2010, the team has turned to look at how diverse groups may use digital media to converse critically about how images are made and how aspects of culture are represented visually.

Plateau Culture

The Representing Tibet project has sponsored the development of PlateauCulture.org, a platform for sharing digital resources about the Tibetan plateau, by mapping geocoded images, articles, place summaries and bibliographic sources to illustrate culture, life and history of the area. Plateau Culture is a partnership between U of T faculty and students, Eastern Tibetan photographers, writers, musicians and ethnographers, and independent scholars living in Qinghai Province. The site features work by several U of T Buddhist Studies students, sponsored by Project Open Access | Open Source.
Plateau Photographers is a participatory photography project that trains minority students in western China. So far the project has trained more than 75 young image makers (half female and half male). Members come from rural communities in five provinces (Qinghai, Yunnan, Sichuan, T.A.R. and Gansu) and although primarily Tibetan, they also include other ethnicities. Each six months, new members train in basic photography and camera use. At the same time, returned members collate and archive their images before displaying them online and in their communities. Their members have made and disseminated more than 21,000 images. Plateau Photographers began in 2007 when cameras donated in Australia were provided to students in Xining City, Qinghai Province. Trained by photographer Elena McKinlay, the first workshop of 12 members made more than 3000 images that summer, using five digital cameras and seven film SLR cameras. Since 2008 local volunteer Chiyang Dorji and staff Nyang-chukja, Libu Lakhi, Tsemdo and Pohua Dondrup have trained members. Now most aspects of the project are overseen by local managers. The project expanded when Andrew Grant joined as co-trainer and web designer from 2007 – 2008. In the spring of 2010, the site was transformed into its current form by Drupal developer, Travis McCauley, with the support of a Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada grant to Frances Garrett at the University of Toronto.
Map from The Tibetans, by Matthew T. Kapstein (Blackwell Publishing 2006).
**Friday**

**Buddhism, Development and Filmmaking in Myanmar**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12-1</td>
<td>Welcome by Drs. Frances Garrett and Leslie Chan, followed by a lecture presentation by Lindsey Merrison and Eh Mwee.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1-2:50</td>
<td>Watch film “Stories from Myanmar,” followed by a discussion with Lindsey Merrison, Eh Mwee and Mark Johnston.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:50-3</td>
<td>Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>Workshop on participatory media for international development, with Toronto filmmakers Mark Johnston, Daniel Thomson and Carmen Celestini Our conversation will consider the theory and practice of “participatory development,” whether participatory media makes development more open and inclusive, and how new modes of access to and participation in media-making may alter the practice and conceptualization of development.</td>
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| 7-9 | Lecture by Dr. Patrick Pranke, University of Louisville, on “Spirits, Ghosts, Goblins and Other Fauna of the Burmese Buddhist Landscape.”
Film, “Friends in High Places,” Directed by Lindsey Merrison. |

**Saturday**

**New Documentary Filmmaking in Tibet**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12-12:45</td>
<td>Introduction by Frances Garrett, following by a lecture on new film in Tibet by Dr. Françoise Robin.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:50-3</td>
<td>Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>3-4:10</td>
<td>Film, “Tantric Yogi,” directed by Dorje Tsering Chenaktsang, followed by discussion led by Shelley Saywell, David Cherniak and Carmen Celestini.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4:10-6</td>
<td>Film, “Summer Pasture,” directed by Tsering Perlo, Lynn True and Nelson Walker, followed by discussion led by Shelley Saywell, David Cherniak and Carmen Celestini.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7-9</td>
<td>Film, “Lacham, a Tibetan Nun,” directed by Dorje Tsering Chenaktsang, and “The Art of Documentary Editing: Women in Myanmar,” by Lindsey Merrison and the Yangon Film School. A discussion with the filmmakers will follow.</td>
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**Friday Venues**

12-5, at the University of Toronto Scarborough, LL Browne Theatre
7-9, at the University of Toronto Scarborough, Building AA-112

**Saturday Venues**

12-6 at the University of Toronto’s Jackman Humanities Building, Room 100, at 170 St. George Street
7-9, at the University of Toronto’s Innis Town Hall, 2 Sussex Avenue