CULTURE MATTERS

Comrades: The Chinese LGBT Film Festival

When Beijing University students tried to launch a gay film festival on campus in 2001, representatives of the Ministry of Public Security showed up in plain clothes and shut down the event. The organizers tried again in 2005, but despite careful efforts to limit publicity for the event, the film festival was exposed and banned from the campus. This summer, several Chinese Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) films were successfully screened with no hassles—this time in New York City. Asia Catalyst, an NGO that supports grassroots human rights advocacy throughout the region, hosted "Comrades: The Chinese LGBT Film Festival" in solidarity with these intrepid festival organizers.

September 5–7, 2008
The LGBT Community Center
208 West 13th Street
New York City

For copies or more information on hosting your own showing, please contact Yang Yang at oignon@163.com.

The weekend-long showcase featured four films from the festivals banned in Beijing. These compelling stories reveal glimpses of the lesbian, gay, and transgender experience in contemporary China. *East Palace, West Palace* (《东宫西宫》, 1996) may be the first Chinese film to explicitly explore homosexuality in China. *Tangtang* (《唐唐》, 2004) uses documentary and fictional filmmaking techniques to tell the story of a transvestite performer's cross-gender love affair. In *Butterfly* (《蝴蝶》, 2004), a schoolteacher's chance encounter with a seductive singer reawakens memories of an adolescent lesbian fling and sparks a journey of rediscovery. Blending realism and fantasy, *Welcome to Destination Shanghai* (《目的地上海》, 2003) features a collection of vignettes that examine the underground sex trade and those living on the fringe in glittery Shanghai.

Letters written to Asia Catalyst by one of the organizers of the original Chinese LGBT film festivals describe the poignant—and often vexing—story of their repeated attempts to screen these films in Beijing. The organizers used a variety of strategies, including cell phone text messaging and underground publicity, but were blocked at every turn. True to its title, "Banned in Beijing, Out in New York," the film festival was finally brought to fruition on September 5–7, 2008, at the LGBT Community Center in New York City.

For the full text of the aforementioned letters, see: http://www.asiacatalyst.org/comrades/history.

(In)Human Scale

BY CLAIRE KELLS

Up the Yangtze opens with the otherworldly noise of a luxury cruise ship scraping through a lock in the massive Three Gorges Dam, setting the mood for this documentary's elegiac look at a handful of the two million people to be displaced by the imminent and inexorable rise of the Yangtze's waters.

***Up the Yangtze* (2007)**
Directed by Yung Chang
Running Time: 93 minutes
Mandarin with English subtitles

Canadian director Yung Chang focuses mainly on the lives of two young people as they go to work on a "farewell cruise" catering to Western tourists taking in the spectral Yangtze River landscape before it is immersed under a colossal man-made lake. Yu Shui, nicknamed Cindy by the ship's managers, comes from a family of illiterate

subsistence farmers and is sent to work despite her desire to continue schooling. Her parents' struggle against their grim economic situation and their desire to give their studious children a chance to make it in the new China touchingly illustrates the challenges facing multitudes of poor families.

In contrast, Chen Boy, nicknamed Jerry, is a brash "little emperor" who, because he speaks some English, is put to work where he can interact with the tourists, all the while chasing eagerly after their generous tips. Yung Chang makes an excellent choice in following both of these engrossing young people, and viewers are rewarded with the pair's openness as they deal with the frustrations and shocks of adolescence and first jobs.

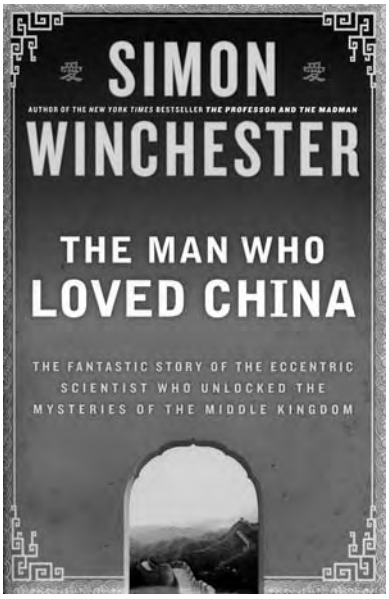
The film interweaves shots of luxuriating tourists with those of workers toiling to support that leisure, and pits the spin spouted by tour guides against the cruel realities that displaced residents face. Together, these juxtapositions neatly illustrate the ironies and contradictions caused by the enormous environmental and economic changes in the Yangtze River basin. Thankfully, Yung Chang never dwells too ponderously on the metaphors his film creates; rather, he employs only minimal narration and allows the landscape and people he films to evoke the human and environmental costs of China's unbridled development.

Although the Three Gorges Dam is a monumental project, the human scale of this well-crafted and moving film—echoing recent offerings like *Manufactured Landscapes* and *Still Life* (reviewed in *China Rights Forum* No. 1, 2008)—challenges the inhuman scale of the dam itself.

China's Rich Scientific Past

BY ROGER GARSIDE

The Man Who Loved China: The Fantastic Story of the Eccentric Scientist Who Unlocked the Mysteries of the Middle Kingdom
By Simon Winchester
HarperCollins, 2008
316 pages, $27.95



The book's title refers to Joseph Needham (1900–1995), whose multi-volume *magnum opus, Science and Civilization in China*, continued beyond his death under the direction of the Needham Research Institute at the University of Cambridge. After 60 years the work now stretches across 24 books, organized into seven volumes, presenting the history of Chinese science and civilization to non-Chinese readers.
For decades, Needham, whose Cambridge academic career began in biochemistry, was the intellectual and administrative driving force behind this vast undertaking. He conceived the idea for the project, wrote most of the early volumes, and edited later ones.

In 1984, Lynn White Jr., Professor Emeritus of History at UCLA and a past president of the American History of Science Society, called Needham "the world's greatest scholar in the comparative study of civilizations . . . unique in the grandeur of his vision, and his epic ambitions." According to White, Needham was prolific in his publications while driven by one clear vision.

Needham was inspired to undertake his ground-breaking work during World War II while he was in China directing the British government's program of assistance to Chinese scientists. He discovered that, contrary to the view almost universally held in the West at that time, China had been the world's most technologically-advanced society from about 500 BC to 1500 CE. He set out to research the history of this phenomenon and make it known to the Western world. In addition, he questioned why "modern science" did not continue to develop in China after the sixteenth century?

According to scholars like White, while