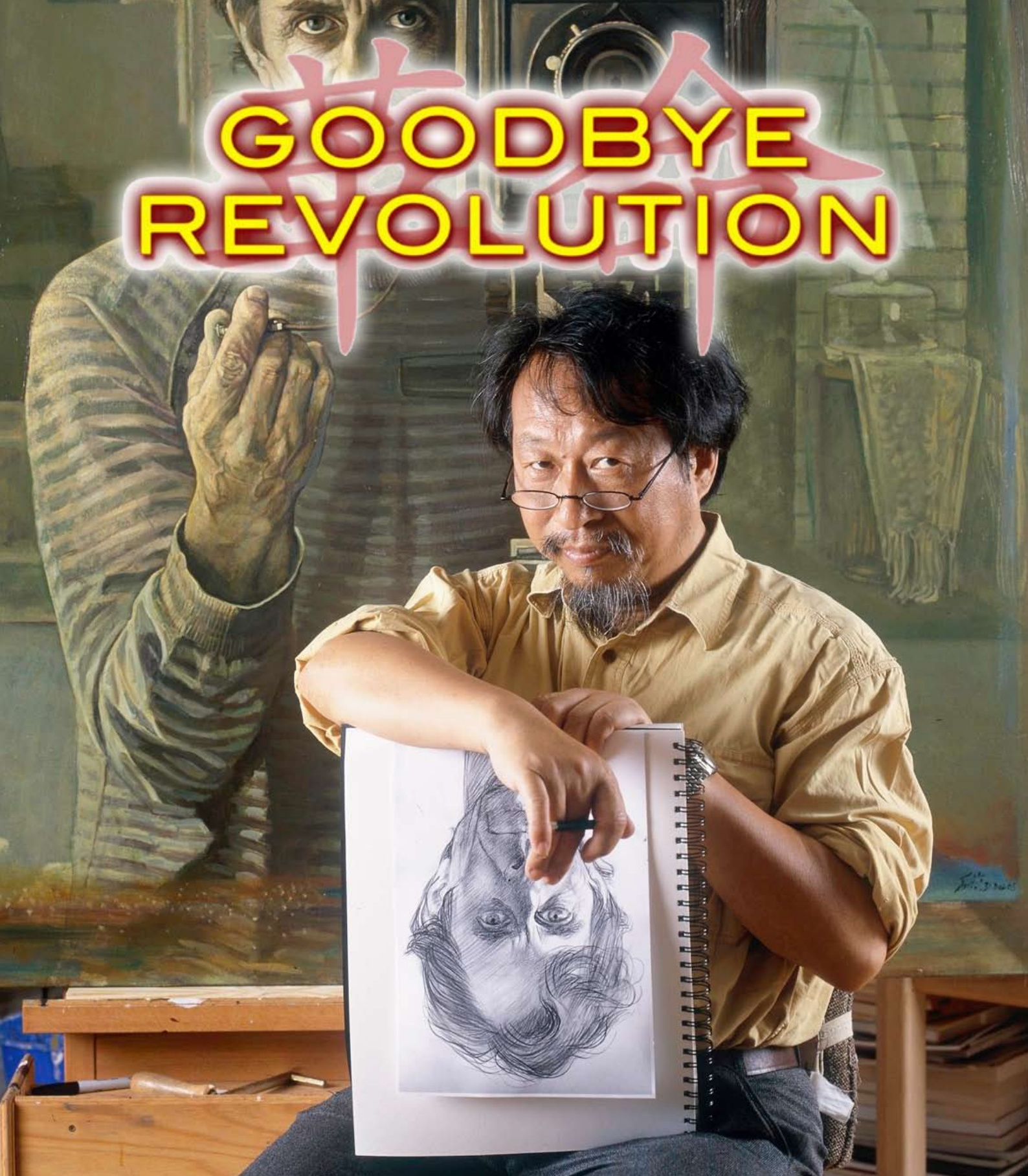


# GOODBYE REVOLUTION



A STUDY GUIDE BY ANDREW RENAUT



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## Goodbye Revolution

Sometimes we see a piece of art and wonder about the artist; just who are they and where did they learn their unique style? When filmmaker Esben Storm, who was born in Denmark, heard that Chinese artist Shen Jiawei had painted an official portrait of Princess Mary to present to the royal family of Denmark his interest was roused. Then, in 2005, Storm read an article by Sydney Morning Herald journalist Nick Galvin that told the story of Shen's long march as a portrait artist from Beijing to Bundeena and he decided to approach Shen to recount his varied life in China and how he had developed his career as an artist in Australia.



*Goodbye Revolution* is the result. A fifty-two minute documentary film telling the story of Shen's journey through life in China and his move to Australia in 1989. Shen is a well respected artist whose paintings were used as propaganda by the Communist Party in China, have been selected as a finalist eleven times in the Archibald Prize, won the coveted Sulman Prize, and have become part of the Guggenheim Collection.

Shen was born in Shanghai in far-eastern China in 1948, just months before Mao Zedong completed his Long March revolution which brought China under control of the Communist Party. Shen's early life with his parents and sister was conventional, but his final year of high school was cut short by the Cultural Revolution which pitted young people – gathered into an organization known as the Red Guards – against old ways of thinking and an older generation unsympathetic to Mao's leadership.

Like many young Chinese people at the time, Shen became a member of the Red Guard, before the movement was replaced by the Down to the Country Movement of 1968. Shen was sent to the north to work on a farm in 1970. Shen was recognized as a skilled artist not long after and worked for various government and army departments as an artist until the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 when the universities were reopened.

Once the art schools were re-opened Shen gained formal tertiary qualifications in art and became a teacher. It was as an art student that Shen met his future wife Wang Lan, who because of the political leanings of her parents was doomed to work as a farm or factory labourer. Wang Lan is now a successful artist in her own right. In 1989, Shen accepted an offer to visit Australia, leaving his wife and soon-to-be-born child shortly before some of the biggest political protests China had experienced since the Communist Party

gained power in 1949.

In April 1989, Shen arrived in Australia with \$45, yet the next day earned \$50 working on the foreshore of Sydney Harbour painting portraits of tourists. He worked in this role for three years, learning English and making contacts in art circles, before his wife and child arrived in Australia to join him.

Today, Shen opens his garage studio on the first Sunday of each month for the regular artists trail in the small town of Bundeena south of Sydney where he and his artist wife live. Commissions for Shen's paintings cost upwards of \$30,000. He has been a finalist in the famous Archibald Prize, won the Sulman Prize and painted an official portrait of Princess Mary of Denmark. He has works in the National Portrait Gallery in Canberra and the Guggenheim Collection in New York.



### Curriculum links

Curriculum links include: Senior English, Studio Arts and History (especially VCE History - Revolutions).

### Before viewing

Prior to viewing students may need to be filled in on four important events that are referred to in the text that have taken place in China over the past 200 years: the Boxer Rebellion of the late 1800s, Mao Zedong's Long March Communist Revolution of 1948-49, the Cultural Revolution of 1966 and the events of 1989 in that centred on Tiananmen Square in Beijing.

### Boxer Rebellion.

Substantial trade began between European countries and the Far East in the 1700s. While the Japanese readily accepted this type of trade, the Chinese resisted the threat to their feudal-style agricultural society. The Europeans were keen to buy the tea, silk and porcelain that China was so good at producing. To entice the Chinese into selling the Europeans were initially

forced to pay for these goods in silver and other luxury items. In the long term, however, this proved expensive for the Europeans and between the 1790s and the 1830s the Europeans began to pay in the drug opium. By the late 1820s the amount of silver leaving China far exceeded the amount flowing in. The British traders began to see the sale of opium as more lucrative than the trade in tea and the British demanded even more silver for the opium. The problem became so widespread that the Chinese wrote to Queen Victoria asking her to order her subjects to stop the opium trade. This appeal failed. In 1839 British and American traders were forced to surrender over 20,000 chests of opium and it was publicly burnt on the beaches near Canton in Southern China. The British and Americans were outraged and declared war leading to a resounding defeat of the Chinese.

For the remainder of the nineteenth century the Chinese, who had always considered themselves vastly superior to the barbaric European traders, were forced to sign a series of ever more humiliating treaties with the British and

Americans. Slowly, the traders and foreign armies began to breakdown the long tradition of 'tributes', gifts to given to officials to allow trade, and for the next century China became a 'semi-colony' of the Europeans. A further opium war occurred between 1856 and 1860. In 1895 the Japanese invaded, which was perhaps the most humiliating defeat of all for the Chinese.

By the late nineteenth century discontented Chinese were demanding reform, and in the summer of 1898 the 'Hundred Days Reform' allowed the building of a university in Peking, the building of schools across the countryside, the promotion of trade and the beginning of a banking system. Nonetheless, the reformers were soon betrayed and Chinese Christians and foreigners were killed for their non-traditional views. The Boxers from northern China formed an army and marched south, reaching Peking in May 1900. This rebellion was put down by the European colonists and the once again defeated Chinese were forced to build monuments to the killed Europeans and Chinese Christians. The treaty that was subsequently signed by the Chinese and Europeans is depicted in Shen's painting *The Beijing Peace Treaty*.

Dissatisfaction with the Manchu Dynasty's handling of the Europeans continued to simmer during the first decades of the twentieth century and a series of further revolutions occurred in 1911 (Republican) and 1926-1927 (Nationalists). Chiang Kai-shek finally led the Nationalists to victory and ruled from 1928 to 1949.

### Long March Communist Revolution.

In 1927, the Nationalists led by Chiang Kai-shek slaughtered thousands of peasants who supported the popular Communists. Mao Zedong, one of the Communist leaders, wrote of the Nationalists: 'Countless thousands of the enslaved – the peasants – are striking down the enemies who battered on their flesh. What the peasants are doing is absolutely right; what they are doing is

fine!' In retaliation of Chiang's methods, Mao and his fellow leaders formed the Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army. They formed their own state in the south-east town of Juchin. Fearing the rise of the Communists, now led by Mao, the Nationalists fought four campaigns against the so-called bandits and forced the Communists on a 9,500km trek to the north in 1934 where another stronghold was formed in the cave city of Yanan.

The Nationalists found the war against Japan between 1940 and 1945 exhausting and the weakened Nationalist areas of the divided Chinese country were now led by a corrupt army. A long-running civil war ensued and the larger Nationalist army was defeated by the Communists led by Mao Zedong who proclaimed the People's Republic of China on 1 October 1949.

### The Cultural Revolution of 1966 and the Down to the Countryside Movement of 1968.

The Cultural Revolution was an attempt by Mao to right some of the problems resulting from the 'Great Leap Forward' policies of 1958 to 1960 and the subsequent three years of famine. Students were increasingly dissatisfied with an education system that:

put into practice ... the principal that 'educational training comes first' and 'marks come first'. This meant 'recognising marks only not persons, still less the social classes people belong to'. Many pupils were forced to be 'preoccupied with marks while looking at their books'. In school, they strove simply for marks, and when working in the brigade (Red Guards) the strove for 'marks, marks, marks'...<sup>1</sup>

It was claimed that this system betrayed the general population as it gave those children from professional positions an advantage over those who worked in the factories and on farms. In an attempt to quell the mounting criticism and further reduce the power of those against reform, Mao formed a student movement named the Red Guards. Students were encouraged to become members of



the Red Guard, and fought their battles through 'the media of character posters and great debates'. Using the thoughts of Mao, they argued against the 'hidden representatives of the bourgeoisie.' This revolution may have resulted in a revised education system, but it was also a clever way for Mao to put down a series of threats within the party and further remove references to history, including many historical buildings.

Over the next two years the Red Guards increased their power with the organization expanding to workers as well as students. However, the 'success' of the Red Guards quickly became too great. They were used to overthrow members of the People's Revolutionary Army and were given greater powers than the army itself. In 1968 Mao purged members of his party sending them to labour camps in the country, and in an effort to disperse the influence of the Red Guards, formed the Down to the Countryside Movement.

This is perhaps the defining moment in Shen's life as he was in his final year of school and the Down to the Countryside Movement initially closed all schools and universities. All intellectuals and many teachers were sent to farms to work on

the land. The universities were to remain closed until the death of Mao in 1976.

### Tiananmen Square - 1989

Although the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests are perhaps the most well known in Western society, they were not the first major incidents to occur in Tiananmen Square. Therefore, in China the protests of 1989 are referred to as the June Fourth Incident. The square covers over forty hectares and is the largest public square in the world. Tiananmen refers to the gates at the northern end of the square which date back to the early 1400s, although there are suggestions that the current gates are not the originals. The square has great significance to the Chinese Communist Party, as it was the place where Mao Zedong proclaimed the formation of the People's Republic of China on 1 October 1949.

Following Mao's death in 1976, there was a slow but steady opening of China with an emphasis on building a free market economy under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping. However, there remained a strong Communist political ideology. When Mikhail Gorbachev gained power in the Soviet Union in 1985 he began the process of turning the Soviet Union in a



more open and democratic society. The term glasnost was used to describe the policy of openness and transparency. Similar reforms were begun in China under Deng Xiaoping and many Chinese – especially university students – began to feel that some freedoms, such as the ability of the news to report freely, may occur. Many even began to see the coming of a Western-style democracy. While reforms were slowly occurring, many students did not believe that the reforms were happening quickly enough, or that they were going far enough.

Mikhail Gorbachev's swift reforms were seen as a model for China and some of China's reformist political leaders began to press for political as well as economic change. One such reformer was Secretary General Hu Yaobang. He had supported the student protests that occurred in 1986 and despite the reorganization of some aspects of the economy and education his support for the students led to his swift removal. When Hu Yaobang died on 15 April 1989, the lack of recognition of his achievements in the Communist Party and the failure to grant a state funeral triggered further student protests.

Initially the protests were small, but over the three days following Hu Yaobang's death the protesters in Tiananmen Square numbered over 10,000. By 21 April 1989, the day before his funeral, over 100,000 students had marched to Tiananmen Square. Despite the eventual granting of recognition and a state funeral the student protesters demanded a meeting with Li Peng, China's Premier, to press for greater political reforms. The request was refused and, being aware of a similar protest in Tiananmen Square in 1976, the government issued a statement saying the protests were small and only a few dissidents were involved.

Nonetheless, the student protests continued and spread to universities across China. Urban workers, who appear to have originally been against further reform, began to support the actions of the students, as the students began to concentrate on corruption within the Communist Party<sup>2</sup>. The

protests continued into May and coincided with a visit to China by Soviet Leader Mikhail Gorbachev and a large contingent of Western media. Further demands were put to the government by the students, who began a hunger strike. According to Craig Calhoun, this was a defining moment in the protests as it demonstrated to the wider Chinese community that the protesters were serious, and were acting for the good of the Republic not simply themselves.<sup>3</sup> Although there appears to have been some successful negotiations with the government, the protests continued to grow until, after much internal Communist Party debate, a crackdown was ordered. Martial law was declared on 20 May 1989.

Two army divisions were ordered in to remove the protesters from Beijing, the 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> Armies. It was reported by Western media that the armies took up defensive military positions as opposed to how a civilian police force might be expected to handle the situation. It is this positioning of the army, which had to force its way through large numbers of ordinary citizens protesting and barricading the entrances to Beijing, that may have led to greater-than-expected casualties. The armies moved into Tiananmen Square at 10.30pm on 3 June 1989 and the square was reported to have been cleared by 5.30am the following morning.

Western media who were yet to leave following Gorbachev's visit showed bloodied protesters being taken from the square by sympathetic locals using rickshaws and wheelbarrows. However, the lasting image is of a lone, unarmed man standing in front of a line of tanks proceeding along the Avenue of Eternal Peace as the armies left Beijing after clearing Tiananmen Square. Although his identity has not been confirmed, he was reported as saying 'Why are you here? You have caused nothing but misery.'<sup>4</sup> In footage of the stand-off, which can be downloaded from a number of Internet sites, he is seen moving in front of the tanks as they try to manoeuvre around him. At one point he climbs on the front

tank, before being taken away by his friends.

The uprising was finally suppressed. However, the incident damaged China's relations with Western nations and led to Australia granting Chinese students in the country at the time Temporary Protection Visas.

## Activities

### All subject areas.

Check the National Library website for the oral history done by Shen Jiawei for the Post-war Chinese Australians oral history project. Details of Shen's interview are available at: <http://protocat.nla.gov.au/Record/46802>.

Who are some of the other people interviewed and why is it important to record the history of ordinary people?

Use a tape recorder or digital recorder (microphones are available for some iPod models.) and see if you can organize a visit to a local artist. Prepare a list of questions before your visit.

Use the Picture Australia website - <http://www.pictureaustralia.org> - to search for pictures of events described above. For example, a search on 'China Boxer Rebellion' will reveal pictures of the weapons used by the Chinese and the rebellion in progress.

What do the descriptions of the photographs tell you about how the Europeans saw the Chinese people?

Do you think the Chinese were right to describe the Europeans as barbarians?

Do you think that the Chinese may have been justified in trying to keep their society closed?

Find out about artist trail openings in your area.

## Studio Art.

Major works by Shen shown and explained in the documentary.

*Standing on Guard for our Motherland* – propaganda portrait, 1974.

*Climbing Over the Great Snow Mountain* – propaganda portrait, 1977.

*War Suffering* – portrait, 1984.

*Red Star Over China* - 1987.

*Tolerance* – 1988.

*John Clark* – portrait, 1992.

*Mary McKillop of Australia* – portrait, 1994.

*Self-portrait: Suddenly Back to 1900* – self-portrait, 2000.

Look at Shen's painting *This is not a photograph* (2006), a portrait of the





photographer Greg Weight with his Sinar large format camera and compare it with works from the Dada and Surrealist movements. In particular look at the painting *The Treachery of Images* (René Magritte, 1928 - 29). The painting carries the inscription 'This is not a pipe', which is a paradox, for indeed the painting is in fact a painting *not* an actual pipe. What objects are 'out of place' in Shen's painting? Look through the back of a camera lens and note that the image is upside down and back-to-front. Compare this to the upper-left image of Shen's painting.

What style does Shen currently paint in?

How has his style changed over the past thirty-five years?

How has his art been influenced by the paintings he did for the Communist Party?

What artists influence him now?

What media does he use for his paintings?

What preparation goes into the creation of his artworks?

## Activities

Look at various forms of poster art from the 1930s to the 1970s. Include a range of forms such as political, advertising and public service such as workplace safety.

List some of the common techniques used by the artists.

Include: angles used, colours – what are some of the messages contained the colours.

What do the 'camera-angles' reflect in the posters?

How do the artists depict the following?

- modernity
- speed
- luxury
- safety.



## History

Shen arrived in Australia with only \$45, now his commissions to paint portraits command payments of \$30,000. Look at how the Chinese in particular, but also other immigrant groups, have contributed to Australian society. Look especially at the White Australia Policy that originated during the gold rush era of the 1850s and was given nationwide force in *Commonwealth Immigration Restrictions Act* of 1901 and not fully revoked until 1973 under the Whitlam Labor government. See <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/08abolition.htm>

Are there any links between the Eureka Stockade rebellion of late 1854 and the rebellions occurring in China at the time?

How were the Chinese immigrants to Australia treated in the 1850s to 1890s?

How have multicultural policies since the 1970s changed Australia?

## Documentary and narrative

*Goodbye Revolution* is a documentary film that follows the life of one main 'character', Shen Jiawei. The documentary uses a number of techniques to tell Shen's story. These include the use of archival material, music, interviews, fly-on-the-wall observation, on-camera interviews and





voice-overs by the narrator (who is also the filmmaker).

Take notes during the viewing of the film that cover the following points:

Who is telling the 'story'? Justify the conclusion you have reached.

Is the story being told in a linear or non-linear manner? Explain the reasons behind your decision.

Why does the filmmaker narrate the film himself and not use a voice-over professional? How might the use of a voice-over professional have changed the film? Give an example of a similar documentary that uses a professional voice-over.

Could the filmmaker have made the film without a voice-over? Give an explanation for your decision and give an example of a similar documentary without voice-over narration.

How many cameras were used in various sections of the documentary? Who is holding the camera? What camera techniques are used in the documentary? What does this tell you about the way the documentary was made and perhaps its budget?

What editing techniques have been used?

Apart from the voice-over, what do we hear on the soundtrack?

List techniques that are used in other documentaries, such as recreations and dramatizations, that are absent from this production. Would they have improved the narrative? Justify your decision and include reasons why they were not used in this production.

Imagine that one of your classmates has come from another country and has become a famous artist. Write a short synopsis of their life, then write a short film treatment that you could present to a funding body to get money to make your documentary. List some of the expenses that would be involved in the production process, such as airfares, tapes/SD cards, editing time, copyright fees for music, etc.

If you have time prepare a script and storyboard for a three minute documentary. Video tape the script/storyboard and edit the resulting footage. Try different styles of voice-over and music. Write about your experiences and how the change in voice/music changed the way in which audiences understand your production.

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### (Endnotes)

- 1 Wes H. Blackmore, *Impact: tradition, change and problems in Asia*, Macmillan, Victoria, 1972, pp.75.
- 2 <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiananmen\\_Square\\_protests\\_of\\_1989](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiananmen_Square_protests_of_1989)>
- 3 Craig Calhoun, 'Science, Democracy, and the Politics of Identity' in *Popular Protest and Political Culture in Modern China*. Edited by Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom and Elizabeth J. Perry, Westview Press, Boulder, 1994, pp.113.
- 4 <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiananmen\\_Square\\_protests\\_of\\_1989](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiananmen_Square_protests_of_1989)>



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