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NAATA Director Eddie Wong highlights new Asian American film accomplishments at annual AARW banquet

By tracey tsugawa
Executive Director

On Saturday, April 4th, the AARW celebrated another year with a festive evening of good food, great company, and special guest Eddie Wong, the Executive Director of the National Asian American Telecommunications Association (NAATA).

Formerly a filmmaker himself, and one of the founders of Visual Communications (the first Asian American media production organization), Eddie has a long history of community activism and political work. His films include *Wong Sinsaang*, a portrait of his father, a laundry man; *Pieces of a Dream*, about Asian farmworkers and farmers in the Sacramento River Delta; and *Something's Rotten in Little Tokyo*, a documentary about the opposition to the corporate redevelopment of Los Angeles' Little Tokyo. Politically, he was active as the Western Regional Director of the National Rainbow Coalition and served as Executive Assistant to Reverend Jesse Jackson.

In his speech, Eddie highlighted the recent accomplishments of seasoned and new filmmakers, including Renee Tajima-Pena, Chris Chan Lee, Wayne Wang, and 1998 Oscar winner Chris Tashima (all of their works were screened at our recent film



Wong announces a rising new generAsian of filmmakers

festival -- see page 6). In addition to Eddie's presentation, several community members were recognized for their contributions to the APA community at large. Anne Marie Booth, currently of the Asian Community Development Corporation, and Zenobia Lai, staff attorney for the Asian Outreach Program at the Greater Boston Legal Services, both received the Community Leadership Award. Diem Nguyen, former SafetyNet program director, received the Yuri Kochiyama New Activist Award. ■



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NEWS IN BRIEF

SAFETYNET COMING TO A PLACE NEAR YOU

The SafetyNet Hate Violence Prevention Project encourages all members interested in hosting a workshop on anti-Asian violence or recommending potential outreaches to contact us at (617) 542-4800, or aarw@datablast.net. Interns have been executing outreaches at a tremendous pace, so please contact us asap. Outreach locations this year have included Harvard, Boston University, Wellesley, CAPAY, Smith, Hampshire, Boston GLASS' A Slice of Rice, and the Oak Street Youth Center.

GET CONNECTED: ORDER YOUR 1998 DIRECTORY TODAY!

The Workshop will be publishing the 1998 edition of the **Massachusetts Asian Pacific American Directory** in June. The Directory is a great resource for Asian American organizations throughout the state. Order your copy today by contacting the Workshop at (617) 426-5313.

SUPPORT AARW AT THE DRAGON BOAT FESTIVAL

Come cheer for the Workshop's Dragon Boat Team at the 1998 Dragon Boat Festival, Sunday June 7 along the Charles River, near Harvard University. Races start at 9am. Performances will include lion and dragon dances, One World Taiko, Dragon King Opera, Wah Lum Kung Fu, and more. Also, food for sale, arts and crafts demonstrations. Free admission. For more information, call (617) 426-6500 x778.

THE SILENT FAMINE IN NORTH KOREA: A CALL TO ACTION

Contact: Ramsay Liem (617) 552-4108, (617) 552-0523 (fax)

Children are dying at the rate of 10,000 a month due to famine in North Korea according to the Red Cross. In total, as many as two million people may

have died already according to World Vision. Communicable diseases have also spread widely because people are malnourished and too weak to fight off illness. And the long-term impact of hunger on thousands of families will be both physiological and psychological. By March, North Korea had run out of domestic food stocks even with the reduction of rations to 100g of rice/person/day. Many experts note that this famine may rival the famines of China (1959-62) and Ethiopia (1980s). North Korea was hit by two of the worst floods of this century in the summers of 1995 and 1996, followed by a severe drought last summer.

Please support our relief effort by sending donations to the **Boston Campaign for North Korean Famine Relief at PO Box 470556, Brookline, MA 02147**. Checks should be made payable to "American Friends Service Committee" with "Korea Relief Fund" written on the memo line. All donations will go toward purchasing food for distribution by the UN World Food Program.

AARW & NEW ENGLAND JACL JOURNEY TO ELLIS ISLAND

Contact: Stephen Nishino W:(617) 854-1132, H: (781) 647-9293

Join the AARW and New England JACL on a **bus trip to Ellis Island on Saturday, June 13** to tour its special exhibit, "America's Concentration Camps: Remembering the Japanese American Experience." The exhibit was prepared by the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles. After the visit, the group will make a run for Yaohan, the Japanese mega food store in Fort Lee, New Jersey to stock up on Japanese staples.

All those interested can reserve their seat with a \$35 deposit. Send checks payable to **NE JACL to New England JACL, PO Box 592, Lincoln, MA 01773**.

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL WITH

kelly and tony

ON THE EDGE OF ASIAN AMERICA

By Sandra Yoshizuka

National Asian American Telecommunications Association (NAATA)

Kelly Saeturn is a 17-year-old, newly minted high school graduate on her way to college—a first in her family of Iu Mien refugees from a hill tribe in Laos. She is also newly pregnant, on her way to unwed parenthood with her boyfriend, a high school drop-out and ex-con Tony Saelio.

What road will Kelly choose in these first, rocky years of adulthood? Find out.....

On **Saturday, June 20th**, the Asian American Resource Workshop and National Asian American Telecommunications Association (NAATA) will present the New England premiere of **KELLY LOVES TONY**, the remarkable new film by Emmy Award-winning director Spencer Nakasako (A.K.A. DON BONUS). The show will take place at the **Remis Auditorium, Museum of Fine Arts, 465 Huntington Avenue, at 2pm**. The event is free and open to the public.

Kelly Saeturn and Tony Saelio will both be present for the screening, as will David Kakishiba (who is also in the film), Executive Director of the East Bay Asian Youth Center where the Tony works, and Nannette Fok of NAATA. There is also a chance that Spencer Nakasako will be able to attend the screening.

Nakasako gave the young Iu Mien couple a video camera at Kelly's high school graduation to film the last year and a half of their teenage lives. The camera is witness and confidante as Kelly and

Tony juggle the responsibilities of a new baby with school, family conflicts and the complication of Tony's impending deportation hearing.

The result is a searingly intimate portrayal of a new American family on the streets of East Oakland. We watch Kelly and Tony deal with the realities of life in the '90s, a time when Southeast Asian teens are growing up too fast in urban America.

As dictated by Iu Mien tradition, Kelly moves in with Tony's family to assume the role of mother,

"wife," and dutiful daughter-in-law. In addition to caring for her own infant son and attending college, she must help cook, clean and watch over Tony's seven siblings. Meanwhile, Tony works his first job as a van driver for a local youth center, but his past catches up with him when the INS threatens him with deportation for his criminal record.

In **KELLY LOVES TONY**,

we follow the twists and turns of these young lives as the couple struggles to understand each other, and themselves, through the camera's lens. More than a coming-of-age story, **KELLY LOVES TONY** reveals how 2 young people, locked into adult roles, must negotiate their day-to-day lives in the face of adversity, and navigate the competing demands of two cultures and two families.

This event is co-sponsored by the Coalition of Asian Pacific American Youth and the Film Department of the Museum of Fine Arts. ■



The King and I: From Whose Perspective is I?

By Tanya Rakpraja
Brown University '00

The *King and I*, written by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein, first opened on Broadway in 1951. This musical, based on Margaret Landon's 1946 novel, *Anna and the King of Siam*, takes place in the 1860s and focuses on the relationship between King Mongkut (Rama IV) and teacher Anna Loewens. King Rama IV brings Anna over to Thailand from England in an effort to Westernize and modernize Thailand. Upon the suggestion of their wives, Rodgers and Hammerstein translated Landon's book into a musical which first opened at the St. James Theatre on Broadway on March 29, 1951, and continued to be staged there for three years. The musical hit its largest popularity with the release of its film version in 1956 that won six Academy Awards including "Best Scoring for a Musical Film." The movie *The King and I* came to be the authors' favorite film production of any of their stage shows. On April 11, 1996, *The King and I* re-opened on Broadway. Lou Diamond Phillips played the role of King Rama IV, while Faith Prince played the role of Anna Loewens.



When I heard that the musical was being revitalized on Broadway, I was excited to see the performance. My mom and aunt had told me that the show was defaming to the King, and the movie was banned in Thailand, but I have always enjoyed musicals, and the idea of a Broadway show about Thailand especially intrigued me. During my Spring Break, almost one year after the musical had first re-

opened, my friend and I went to New York to finally see *The King and I*.

Upon entering the auditorium, I was amazed by the beautiful set design. Large elephant cut outs, ornate with Thai art, framed both ends of the stage. These elephants were a particularly appropriate first impression of Thailand to the audience since elephants have long been a symbol of luck and nationalism in Thai culture. At the top of the stage, stretching between the elephants, there was a string of carved human figures wearing Thai costumes and displaying Thai mannerisms. Although the Thai costumes and art remained beautiful and genuine throughout the play, I was extremely disappointed by every other aspect of the play. The play, with its fatuous plot and shallow imagination, relied too much on the enchantment of the costumes and scenery to allure and captivate the audience. Moreover, I found the rest of the musical quite degrading to King Rama IV, to Thai religion, and to Thai culture.

The writers presented a blatantly Euro-centric portrayal of Thailand and completely left out all the amazing qualities of King Rama IV that Thai people recognize, respect, and love about him. King Rama IV was an extremely intelligent man who spoke fluent English and kept wide connections with the Western world through letters he wrote himself. Furthermore, King Mongkut made much progress for Thai politics towards democracy made evident by his generous treatment of slaves which was far more progressive than England's practices. During his reign, King Rama IV showed much concern and compassion for all aspects of his people's lives. Only the antithesis was portrayed in the play.

In *The King and I*, little effort was made by the writers, director, or actors to portray more than a narrow-minded Westerner's viewpoint. From the beginning, the King is characterized as stubborn, crude, sexist, and tyrannical. The play opens with Anna accusing the King of not keeping the terms he stated when he first hired her. She talks about the West where one's word means something: where people can be trusted. As the play progresses, Anna continues to impress upon the King how things are done in the West, implying that the English way is the only right way. She is shocked at the exaggerated number of wives the play depicts the King as

having. She attacks what she interprets as the lowly status of women in Thailand, portraying King Mongkut as a womanizer. Ironically, at the time this story takes place, women in England would not gain the right to vote for another 50 years.

Throughout the play, Anna continues to become upset and offended because she feels that the King is always acting as if he were superior. Displaying her lack of understanding of Thai values, Anna cannot believe that everybody in all of Thailand bows down to the King, and she even states how barbaric it is for the King to expect that everyone else's head in the room should always be lower than his. This theme of the King's uncompromising character runs through the entire musical. The only time the King's compassion comes through is when the writers ridiculously have King Mongkut fall in love Anna, a Western woman. The play's entire representation of the King's character is fundamentally insulting to the Thai people.

Moreover, this musical makes a mockery of Buddhism. A little boy, to whom the people turn to to ask for trivial things, is used to represent the Buddha. When the people pray, they sit and chant in vacant, monotone voices between "Oommmyyyy"s, which only serves to perpetuate Asian stereotypes of docility and foreignness. Through thoughtless actions and words, the show displays little respect for Buddha and no understanding of the Buddhist religion. At one point in the script, the actors even imply that the King and the Buddha are of the same social status, showing that the director and writers of this play have no grasp on the values or principles of Thai Buddhism. The scenes portraying Buddhism and the

Buddha's followers are intended for comedy more than anything else.

Furthermore, Thai culture is portrayed as being unrefined and inferior compared to Western culture. In the few spots in which the Thai language was supposedly being used, the actors did not even take the time to learn Thai; instead they spoke a made-up language. Moreover, the play's main plot, concerned with King Mongkut trying to impress an English diplomat, only served to further ridicule Thai culture. The King does not want to be thought of as the ruler of a barbaric country, so with Anna's



planning, he proceeds with a scheme to fool the diplomat by putting on the pretense that Thailand is Westernized, thereby civilized. Anna and the King execute this plan by stripping all the women of their Thai dresses, and replacing them with large, frilly, yellow and orange ballroom dresses. Then, to further impress the English convoy, characters from the *Ramakien*, a cherished classical Thai folktale, begin to ridiculously run around the stage playing out the story of Uncle Tom's

Cabin. Thai dance is slaughtered by integrating Western moves. The result is an embarrassing, foolish progression of movements that only serve to deride Thai culture. This performance is supposed to prove to the Englishman that the King holds progressive ideas. This sequence of events debases Thai society.

When I got back to school, I read literature on Anna Loewens and her time in Thailand. I found out that she never even learned to speak Thai. This handicap prevented her from truly learning and understanding Thai culture. Often she was left to her imagination to piece together and make sense of this entirely new and diametrically different world surrounding her. Furthermore,

Landon, who wrote about Anna's experience, assumed that all of Anna's observations and conclusions were correct, and admitted that her novel was only 75% based on Anna's questionable interpretations.

It was upon these extremely ambiguous foundations that Rodgers and Hammerstein created their play, exacerbating the cultural distortions even more by molding the story into a theatrical performance intended primarily for Western audiences.

There are innumerable misconceptions about Thailand and Asia that stem from *The King and I*. The Western world is presented as civilized and right while Thailand is painted as barbaric and wrong. This musical shows how quick Westerners can be to exploit, judge, and disregard other cultures that are not like their own. If a culture is going to be exposed, it deserves to be correctly portrayed for it is often by a person's culture that one defines herself. Behind every culture there is a deep and complex history of the people that cannot be understood from a quick glance. ■

MOVING THE IMAGE

the 1998 Boston Asian American Film Festival



FROM "YELLOW" (1996) BY CHRIS CHAN LEE

By Michael King Thomas Tan



FROM "COWGIRL" (1996) BY SUNNY LEE

Today, Asian Pacific American filmmakers are boldly exploring issues of community, artistic expression, identity, and daily life through a broad range of creative filmmaking. This year's Boston Asian American Film Festival, presented March 13-21 at the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA) by both the Workshop and the Museum, featured narrative films and documentaries that demonstrate both the diversity and commonalities of the Asian-American experience. Included were films about the difficulties of being "out" as a gay or lesbian Asian Pacific American, women's struggles, the challenges of growing up and finding a sense of identity in modern "America", and our connections to ancient and contemporary Asia. Filmmakers such as Chris Chan Lee and Anita Chang were present as well as local Asian Pacific American artists, community agency staff, and authors, such as Sonia Shah, to discuss their work and community issues.

This festival was part of the national tour of the 20th Asian American International Film Festival, organized and programmed by Asian CineVision. Also included were films produced and distributed by the National Asian American Telecommunications Association and the Asian Pacific Islander Wellness Center in San Francisco.

"Yellow" by Chris Chan Lee (1996), preceded by "Better Late" by Jessica Yu (1996)

"Yellow" is a feature length comedy-drama that vibrantly captures today's conflicts between first generation parents and their teenage children. Eight Asian American high-school kids roam Los Angeles on their last night before graduation. One of the teens tells his friends that he lost \$1,500 of his dad's money when he was held up at gun-point in his father's Korean grocery. Due to his already strained relationship with his father, he fears that when the money is discovered missing, he will be forced to work at the grocery instead of going off to college. Thus sets in motion a frenzied scavenger hunt among the friends to cover the loss. The program opened with "Better Late," the audience-pleasing short by Jessica Yu, the Oscar-winning director of "Breathing Lessons."

"My America - or Honk If You Love Buddha" by Renee Tajima-Pena and Guynh Thai (1997)

Directors Renee Tajima-Pena and Guynh Thai cross America in to take stock of its changing and growing Asian presence. Included in the many stops are interviews with San Franciscan Victor Wong, a photographer who captured the civil rights movement on film after traveling with Jack Kerouac, and later appeared in such films as Dim Sum and The Last Emperor; a pair of Filipina sisters living in New Orleans who recall growing up as "honorary whites" during the Jim Crow years; a pair of Korean-American rappers in Seattle (the Seoul Brothers); and activist Yuri Kochiyama, who recalls her years of incarceration at a World War II internment camp.

"There Is No Name for This" by Ming-Yuen S. Ma and Cianna (1997) and "Coming Out, Coming Home" by Hima B. (1997)

"There Is No Name for This" looks at the difficulties of being simultaneously Chinese or Chinese American and gay, lesbian, or bisexual in the United States. Since the Chinese language lacks words to describe this state of being, Chinese American gays and lesbians struggle to find ways to name themselves, talk with their families, and shape their identities in a bicultural, bilingual context. "Coming Out, Coming Home" profiles five proud and confident API families as they speak about their children's sexual orientation.

Co-sponsored by the Massachusetts Asian AIDS Prevention Project, members of MAAPP facilitated a discussion following the film.

Short films by and about Asian women include "One Hundred Eggs a Minute" (1997) and "Mommy, What's Wrong?" (1997), both by Anita Chang; "Cowgirl" by Sunny Lee (1996); and "Beyond Asiaphilia" by Valerie So (1997)

In "One Hundred Eggs a Minute," a young woman recalls the time she spent in her childhood working at her parent's fortune-cookie factory. "Mommy, What's Wrong?" is a personal essay about the distance between mothers and daughters, and the filmmaker's own search for strength from her immigrant mother.

In "Cowgirl," a young Asian woman wants to be a buckaroo while her friend wonders if her motive is really to snare the perfect cowboy. "Beyond Asiaphilia" explores the filmmaker's fascination with Hong Kong action heroes Jet Li and Chow Yun Fat.

"Strawberry Fields" by Rea Tajiri (1997)

Experimental film artist Rea Tajiri makes her feature debut with this striking personal film about Japanese-American teenagers. In a household that never discusses her parents' internment during the war, she is drawn toward destructive behavior, especially pyromania. Her rebellious fury sends her on a soul-searching journey with her boyfriend, guided by the ghost of a sister whose recent death is another source of stress in their family.

"Isamu Noguchi: Stones and Paper" by Hiro Narita, preceded by "Visas and Virtues" by Chris Tashima (1997)

"Isamu Noguchi" surveys the distinguished career of one of the world's great sculptors. Noguchi, who died in 1988 at the age of 84, was born to a Japanese father and an American mother, spent much of his childhood in both the US and Japan, and considered himself in later years a true citizen of the world. The film explores Noguchi's art and its cultural influences.

Based on a true story, Oscar-winning "Visas and Virtues" explores the moral and professional dilemmas of a Japanese diplomat stationed in Lithuania during World War II as he sees what is happening to hundreds of Jewish refugees outside his consulate.

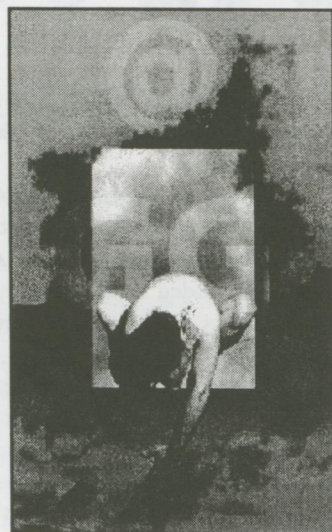
"When East Meets East" by Kalli Paakspuu (1997), preceded by a performance by Odaiko New England and a panel on art and community development

In "When East Meets East" a Canadian filmmaker and a student activist from China interview a series of international filmmakers, all of whom identify as Chinese. Their discussion focuses on constructions of identity in their films, and about why it is important to produce Asian American, Asian Canadian film.

A panel discussion about the role of art in community development, with Anita Chang, Elaine Fong, Arawana Hayashi, and Wen-ti Tsen, followed the film.

An Interview with Chi-Ho Lee

This year's Boston Asian American Film Festival opened with Chris Chan Lee's smash comedy-drama "Yellow." Chris is one of a new generation of Asian Pacific American filmmakers on the rise, and is further expanding the meaning, depth and quality of APA film production. Fortunately for us, Chris was present for a well-attended opening night as well as for the showing of Renee Tajima-Pena's new film, "My America -- or Honk if You Love Buddha." He spent time with the audience on both days answering questions about his work and the current state of and trends in Asian American film production.



Recently, we had a chance to interview Chi-Ho Lee, another young, new Asian American filmmaker in Boston whom we met at our film festival in March. A recent graduate of Boston University, Lee's new film "Sweet and Sour" is being produced by GenerAsian Films, a new production company located in Boston. If you would like more information or are interested in supporting Lee's work, please contact GenerAsian Films at 617-244-4856.

AARW: Tell us a little bit about your background, where you grew up, about your family, about your sense of being Asian American as a child/teen.

Lee: I was born in Hong Kong in 1974. I moved to Florida in '83 when I was eight years old. I lived in Florida until I graduated high school in 1993, and then I moved up here to Boston to attend Boston University. My parents were both born in China, but they moved/escaped/fled to Hong Kong when they were young. They essentially grew up in Hong Kong and then they moved to Bermuda for a short while, and then finally settled in Florida. My dad worked for the Marriott Hotel corporation, so that's why they were able to move from place to place.

Florida wasn't the best place to be an Asian American. I was the only Chinese kid in elementary and middle school. When I got to high school there were a few others, but only one in my year. And he was third generation; his sense of his heritage wasn't that great. I had a tough time with coping as an Asian American growing up, still do at times now. When you're growing up, you want to be like your friends. Acceptance is very important when you're going through your teen years. 99% of my friends were white, which meant that I tried to be white to get a sense of belonging. Although I enjoyed Chinese things with my parents, I would never share this part of me with my friends. I tried to hide everything that was Chinese about me from my friends and the outside world.

AARW: How did you become interested in filmmaking? Did anyone or anything in particular inspire you? Are there filmmakers that you look up to — if so, who and why?

Lee: I originally came to B.U. to be a history major in Medieval European History. After my freshman year, I decided that I loved history, but I don't want to make a career out of it (as if that was possible anyway). Across the hall in my dorm was a friend that just decided to change his major from French Horn (he was in the music school) to Film. We were talking one night and he pretty much convinced me to go into film.

Filmmakers that I look up to. There are the ones that are tremendous artists like Kieslowski, Coppola, Scorsese, Kurosawa, John Woo, and many others. And then there are the ones that are more personal to me like Ang Lee, Wayne Wang, and Spike Lee. Ang and Wayne are personal to

me because they make films that I can relate to. They ask the same questions that I've been asking myself. It's nice and comforting to see that other people have these same concerns and issues as yourself. Plus, they're the two main established AA filmmakers in the business. They're able to make the films that concern their people and their issues.

With Spike Lee, he knows what kind of films he wants to make and he goes out there and does it. He makes films for the black community. His films focus on black issues and concerns. He attacks issues that are controversial, that other non-black filmmakers won't touch. And in return, he has built an audience that supports him. I think he has changed American cinema. His audience is mostly made up of the black community and their power at the box office has shown Hollywood that they can't show the same old negative images of black people. That's what the AA community has to do. Hollywood won't support Asian American films because they think that there's no audience for it. We have to show them otherwise.

AARW: Why have you decided to make Asian American films? What brought you to this decision? Are you also interested in making "non-Asian" films? If so, what kinds would you like to do?

Lee: I chose to make Asian American films because when I was a little kid, I barely saw any Asian Americans in the movies. And when I did, they were usually negative images. We are so invisible in the media, still, after almost two hundred years of making this country our home. Making Asian American films will open doorways, between the younger generation and the older generations, between the recent immigrants and the one that are already established, between Asian Americans and the rest of the country. And hopefully, we will develop a sense of understanding and acceptance, both internal and external.

Also, for myself, writing the script for "Sweet & Sour" was the best thing that I could've done to understand

myself, to come to terms with who I am. And by making more films concerning the Asian American experience, I will learn even more about myself and obtain a greater sense of self-awareness and self-understanding. It's also important to me that accurate images of AAs are being shown out there. And that's one of the goals of my film - to depict the life of a young AA living in today's world.

I love movies. I grew up watching movies. In a way, cinema brought me up. So yeah, I want to make all kinds of movies. I want to make a western, a documentary, a big action film, a musical, a fairy tale. I want to make all these films, but for now, I think that Asian American films is the first priority. And when this new wave has been established, then I



would like to move into other territories.

AARW: What kinds of issues/topics do you want to explore through film? Why are these important to you?

Lee: My films are about being a young AA in this country. My films are about the teens and the twenty-somethings. No other films or filmmakers has dedicated themselves to this group. I'm 23, so I know the issues of being a young AA. That's what my film talks about - dating & relationships (same race and inter-racial), identity, racism, stereotypes, parents and all the fun stuff of being a young AA.

I wish I had films like this when I was

growing up in Florida. I think seeing positive AA images, images you can relate to, on screen or on TV would have certainly benefited me as a kid. And I'm sure that there are tons of kids out there growing up like I did, being the only Asian in town. And these are the ones that I would want my films to hit the most.

AARW: Why is it important to produce specifically Asian American film? What does this film do that other films don't?

Lee: It's important for Asian Americans to make films concerning the AA experience. Because if we don't, who will? And we have all seen what happens when Hollywood try to do it without AA artists in the helm. Remember Kung-Fu, Charlie Chan, and The World of Suzie Wong? It's time to change these stereotypes, and it's our responsibility as artists to put forth an effort to make these changes for our people. By making these films, we will instill a greater understanding of ourselves and each other. And understanding and self-awareness is the first step in making real changes.

What GenerAsian Films' "Sweet & Sour" does is break the hackneyed stereotypes of Asian Americans. The main character, Chen is a 20-something ABC, American-Born Chinese, that is caught between two girlfriends. This already breaks the stereotype of the asexual Asian man. The two women, Alex and Maggie, are both strong and

independent. Maggie, is a young Chinese woman from Hong Kong, and she is not an Asian flower as most American films portrays them to be. And Chen's other girlfriend, Alex, is white. This is breaking the biggest stereotype of them all. An Asian male/white female is such a taboo in the media, why is that? Films and TV will only show a white man with an Asian female, but never vice versa.

Well, I was tired of seeing these stereotypes - so I decided to make a film with subjects that I could relate to. And here we are. The community of AA filmmakers are still very grassroots. And I want to be a part of the new generation of Asian American filmmakers. ■

A Call to Action: We Need Labor Standards

By the Chinese Progressive
Association Workers Center

The Grand China Restaurant, formerly located on Washington Street, opened with much fanfare, heralded as the largest Chinese restaurant in the city. It quickly became host to community association banquets and big celebrations like the thousand-strong Hong Kong reunification banquet. But little more than a year later, the doors of the Grand China closed, leaving dozens of employees in the cold.

Most of the Grand China's employees, from the kitchen help to the waiters, found themselves jobless as well as missing their last two months' pay. Many of the workers have filed a complaint with the Division of Fair Labor and Business Standards of the Attorney General's office and are awaiting pre-trial procedures. In the meantime, the restaurant reopened for the Chinese New Year season under different ownership although at least one partner and building owner remains involved in the business.

The Chinese Progressive Association (CPA) Workers Center has seen more and more cases within our community in which workers go fully or partially unpaid for months at a time. In a few cases, people have gone for years without full compensation!

While mainstream political leaders debate proposals to raise the minimum wage on both the federal and state level, here in Chinatown many workers lack even the most basic human rights: the right to minimum wage, the right to be paid full and on time, the right to unemployment insurance when laid off or to workers' compensation when injured.

Where does the responsibility lie for changing this situation? It is the government's role to create and properly enforce labor laws. Workers need to know their own rights and stand up to claim them. Owners need to learn that there are benefits to bringing their business into the mainstream.

And all sectors of the Chinese community need to take a stronger, more proactive stand to uphold some basic standards of decency for working people in our community. This is obviously important to the immigrant workers who suffer from substandard employment conditions. Exploitation at the bottom also creates downward pressures on wages and working conditions for everyone. Such practices harm the community's image as a whole, reinforcing



American stereotypes that Chinatown is a den of illegal activity and that Chinese people are sneaky and not to be trusted.

Decent labor standards are important for professionals, students, community leaders, and forward-looking business owners who all have a stake in our community's collective progress. Contact the Chinese Progressive Association Workers Center at (617) 357-4499 for more information.

CPA is a grassroots organization that works for full equality and empowerment of the Chinese Community in Greater Boston, focusing on living and working conditions and the involvement of community members in decision-making.

AARW SPECIAL THANKS

GRANTS:

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TAKE BACK THE TUBE

ASIAN PACIFIC HERITAGE MONTH
ON WGBH CHANNEL 44

Pins and Noodles - May 3 at 8pm

In this quirky documentary, Paul Kwan journeys from San Francisco's Chinatown to Saigon, Taiwan, and Hong Kong to cure his food allergies.

Heart Mountain: Three Years in a Relocation Center - May 3, 10pm

This special documents the World War II Wyoming incarceration of more than 10,000 Pacific Coast Japanese and Japanese Americans.

Then They Were None - May 3 at 10:30pm

This award-winning documentary chronicles the swift and devastating decline of Hawaii's native people.

My America, or Honk If You Love Buddha - May 6 at 8pm

Renee Tajima-Pena takes an irreverent cross-country journey in search of what it means to be Asian American (Sundance Film Festival Winner)

American Sons - May 6 at 9:30pm

A look at how racism shapes the lives of Asian American men.

Chinatown - May 17 at 8pm

A history of San Francisco Chinatown.

Tanforan: Racetrack to Assembly Center - May 17 at 10:00pm

Tells the compelling story of Tanforan Racetrack, a center for thousands of Japanese Americans awaiting more permanent internment camps.

Maya Lin: A Strong Clear Vision - May 24 at 10pm

Frieda Lee Mock's Oscar-winning chronicle of Maya Lin, designer of the Vietnam War Memorial.

Miss India Georgia - May 27 at 9:30pm

Asian American Resource Workshop
160 Kneeland Street
Boston, MA 02111-2715
tel: (617) 426-5313, fax: (617) 542-4900
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