

YUNNAN ETHNIC FILM INITIATIVE

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Overview

This pilot program of the RURAL YOUTH FILM INITIATIVE (RYFI) is a three-phase community project that invites ethnic minority youth to explore their lives, community and culture through creative methods focussed on the art of narrative filmic storytelling.

In the course of the programme the participants will be encouraged to actively investigate their surroundings and history. They will be trained in the basics of film-making and will be asked to collaborate with their peers and community with the goal of producing a 15-minute short film to be shared within and beyond their own community.

This project seeks to combine the expertise of seasoned film professionals with the experience and resources of organisations already established and trusted within the participant communities in order to facilitate the production of **one high-quality film** over which the participants feel a sense of ownership. This film will actively be distributed by the facilitators in order to reach as wide an audience as possible.

In providing an opportunity for a currently underrepresented community to actively participate and contribute to a hugely influential modern media platform, (web, T.V., film festivals) this project seeks not only to encourage cultural exchange but also to revitalize an interest in that target groups own culture.

Three Phases

EXPLORE (1 week)

The first phase of this project is a creative-methods workshop focused on storytelling. Participants join activities aimed at connecting them with the stories of their own lives. Stories of who they are as young members of a changing society; stories of their ethnic history and mythology; stories of their daily lives.

Facilitators will conduct an instructive introduction to audio-visual recording basics which will focus on the recording of usable images and sound. Basics in lighting, framing, camera usage and microphone placement. Then, using small camera's

participants will be encouraged to investigate and record their surroundings, interviewing family and community members in order to build a picture of where they are, where they have come from, of the changes that have taken place and of what the future may hold.

These findings will then be viewed and used as material to be workshopped through different expressive forms; drama, written/spoken word, painting, sculpture, song and dance in order to explore different methods of storytelling. Technical feedback will also be given on the audio-visual recordings and how to ensure high production values.

CREATE (2 weeks)

The second phase of this project is the production of one short-film (10-15min.) inspired by stories discovered in the phase-one workshops. In phase-two workshops the group will select story elements they feel as meaningful and would like to work into a short film.

Participants will work with professional filmmakers to learn the creative and technical process whereby a story becomes a movie. An introduction will be given to the different disciplines (“departments”) which contribute to film production. Acting, directing, camera, sound, lighting, costume, makeup, set design, locations and production, accounting... The participants will then be asked to dedicate themselves to a specific “department” as per their interest and the needs of the film. Where possible local expertise may also be involved, i.e. the local electrician working with the lighting team. The local tailor working with the costume team.

The facilitators will provide further specific instructions to each team and coordinate the efforts of the different teams in working towards the production of a film of broadcast quality production values. Once the film has been shot the facilitators will work with the participants to edit, sound mix and colour grade, assemble and export the film into a finished form. As the technical knowledge of both hardware and computer software is key in this process facilitators will take on the bulk of the hands on manipulations while participants will offer direction.

COMMUNICATE

The final phase of this program is to distribute and screen the finished piece. The ultimate goal is the broadcast of the film on a TV channel available in their village homes. These young people thus gain an opportunity to see the content they have created alongside the mainstream content they view daily. Screening tours, film fes-

tivals (both regional and international) and internet releases will also be used to distribute the finished piece.

Background

The concept of this project stemmed from David's exposure to many rural communities while producing the documentary "Small Path Music" in Yunnan and remote Northern Laos in 2009. While searching for artisans still versed in traditional musical forms he witnessed the changing circumstances which have disrupted the traditional transmission of this cultural knowledge and in its place saw the rise of modern media consumption (T.V. / radio / internet) but witnessed little active participation on these platforms. Recognising that there are obstacles / gaps (technical / educational / monetary...) in being able to actively create and participate on these platforms this project was conceived to address and bridge those gaps.

Underlying this project's design is a conviction that audio-visual media and storytelling holds great potential for fostering, rejuvenating and transmitting cultural knowledge across boundaries geographic and socio-economic. By participating in modern-media creation of a high-quality product, the participants will not only learn a host of new skills, but also have an opportunity to have their voices heard alongside those of other cultures, thus actively enriching the modern cultural landscape we all live in.

In 2015 David and Yunqing travelled to Dehong Province, Yunnan, to meet with Anton and Liyang, the founders of Prop Roots, an education centre already well established in a Jingpo village near Xishan. Meeting the local youth and witnessing how they are benefitting from their work it was plain to see that Prop Roots is a well organised centre with true heart.

The aims of this project are a natural fit with the aims of Prop Roots and we are excited at the prospect of working together

"When country folk or tribal peoples hear or view their own traditions in the big media, projected with the authority generally reserved for the output of large urban centers, and when they hear their traditions taught to their own children, something magical occurs." - Ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax

Participants

Prop Roots have been working in their local community with local youth for five years now. The strong ties, experience and trust that have been built up by their good work provide a very strong platform on which to run this project with the local youth (ages 12 - 16yrs.)

Facilitating Partners

David Harris - Project Manager

Since 2000 David has lived and worked in China. For the last decade he has worked in film and T.V. and artistic audio-visual production as in many different capacities garnering a broad knowledge of production workflow from conception through to final delivery and distribution. Storytelling is David's focus and the folk arts of China have been focus of some of his works, living for a year in Yunnan with Yunqing in 2009-10.

Most recently he produced / directed the filmic-musical piece Sever 《斬斷》 (Shanghai 2015, New York 2016) featuring Peking Opera performers. Various he has worked as producer, director, camera, writing, editing, post-supervising, and acting. He has worked on large-scale Hollywood feature films to small, independent productions, and has produced and directed documentaries, short-films, music-videos and PSA campaigns.

David now seeks to apply the professional skills he has honed into facilitating underrepresented communities in self-spoken media creation on modern media platforms. David currently lives in Shanghai, China.

[Prop Roots](#) - Project Host

Prop Roots is a non-profit organisation in Yunnan, China, founded by former lawyer and Communications director Li Yang, and her husband, Dutch linguist and artist Dr. Anton Lustig, main specialist on Zaiwa language, as spoken in the ethnic Jingpo mountain village where the couple is permanently based - at their multifunctional Prop Roots Education Center. The Prop Roots team provides local village children with free after-class education, through art and language classes, and cultural exchange activities with people from all over the world.

Prop Roots' goal is to empower all Jingpo children with their own culture and their own creativity. All educational activities and projects focus on building up confidence and individuality, which help Jingpo children stand strong against drugs and other threats that are severely affecting their native area.

Yunqing - Project coordinator / facilitator

Yunqing has many years of film and media production experience. She has worked on international feature films specialising in costume and production management and on smaller independent productions in costume, art department and makeup.

She has a great rapport with children and youth and has lived for sometime in Yun-nan with David in 2009-10, visiting Prop Roots in 2015.

Edward A. Burger (commonfolkfilms.com)

Edward has been involved in the project development and conception and will also join to facilitate in future RYFI projects. Edward Burger is a documentary filmmaker. He studied religion at The College of Wooster, where he discovered his interest in Buddhism, leading him to a semester in India and finally to nearly 15 years living in China. He has produced documentaries on Buddhist life in China (Amongst White Clouds / One Mind). He has also worked with many public-sector organisations in China and Vietnam (Save the Children / WWF / UNICEF and others).

Recently Edward, David and Yunqing worked together with Save the Children (China), consulting with child psychology and development experts to produce a series of video's with local Beijing youth which spoke to parenting issues in China as seen from the children perspective.

Current Status

In August 2017 David will travel to Prop Roots to run the first pilot program. Our vision is for this project to be ongoing, and one which may serve as a template to be run in other communities.

For questions and additional information please contact David Harris

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