Documenting the Memory of China’s Great Famine: 
Wu Wenguang and the Folk Memory Project

A programme of screenings and discussion

Presented by:
The Chinese Visual Festival
The Lau China Institute and the Departments of Film Studies and Comparative Literature King’s College London

In the Folk Memory Project, China’s first independent documentary maker Wu Wenguang encouraged his young colleagues from Caochangdi Work Station in Beijing to go back to the villages to talk to their grandparents and the other villagers about an event they knew little about -- the famine that killed tens of millions of people in China in 1960-61. Largely the result of the disastrous “Great Leap Forward” project, the famine is rarely spoken about today. This significant oral history project raises questions about the reliability of memory, the tension between cultural memory and official history, and the value of remembering.

In this very special programme, we are delighted to be able to present films from the project with their directors, Zou Xueping and Zhang Mengqi, as well as a panel discussion on the project and the famine, and also Wu Wenguang’s own personal memory project film and tribute to his mother, Treatment.

Schedule (NB All events take place at King’s College London, Strand campus).

Satiated Village 《吃饱的村子》 (Zou Xueping, 邹雪平, 2011, 88 min) & Q&A with director

Monday 1 December 2014
Venue: S-1.04
Time: 16:00 – 18:30

Director’s Statement:

After completing my previous documentary The Starving Village, I returned to my hometown to give the first screening of the film to my family. The film was unanimously and fiercely opposed by my family members, including my parents who were born in the 1950s, my elder brother born in the 1970s, and my younger brother born in the 1990s. They were worried that investigating the history of the famine in the village from fifty years ago was dangerous; they also thought that after I had graduated I should find a more stable job instead of interviewing the elderly and making documentaries. I was very much frustrated with my family’s strong objections, and had...
some doubts and wavered over the path I have chosen; at the same time, I had to re-examine myself and do some soul-searching. It was the first time I had confronted my parents and my family in the 25 years since I was born, and was also the beginning of my rebellion. Fortunately, against the “high wall” of family opposition, I had a steadfast supporter standing with me—my 9-year old niece. She became my little angel. There were also the old folks I had interviewed; they still unswervingly backed me, even though after watching the film, some of them were afraid that a documentary intent on “exposing the history of the famine” would make China a laughingstock if shown to foreign audiences, and then an old man named Xiling spoke out and persuaded them to support me. It is the second documentary of “my village” series since I got involved with the “Folk Memory Project” and returned to my hometown to shoot footage, recording the realities I encountered in my search for memories. My biggest question is: after experiencing the disaster of the tragic famine fifty years ago, the villagers now are not short of food, and are living a better life than before, but is the spirit of this village still starving?

Bio:
Zou Xueping was born in 1985. In 2009 she graduated from the China Fine Arts Academy. Since 2008, she has been a resident artist at CCD Workstation. She has documentaries Mom (2008), The Starving Village (2010), Satiated Village (2011) and Children’s Village (2012). Her films have been selected by Taiwan International Film Festival, 2010, Tampere International Film Festival, 2011, Beijing Independent Film Festival and won "Excellent Award", 2012

Children’s Village 《孩子的村子》 (Zou Xueping, 邹雪平, 2012, 85 min) & Q&A with director

Monday 1 December 2014
Venue: K-1.56
Time: 18:30 -21:30

Director's Statement:

This film is the third one I have made for the Folk Memory Project, returning again to the same village. In the beginning of 2012, in winter, while continuing my interviewing there, I began investigating and gathering statistics on deaths during The Three Year Famine. I also began soliciting donations for a memorial for those who had died then. Kids from 10-15 years old voluntarily joined these activities, taking the video camera I gave them, visiting old folks, interviewing, and getting statistics, donations. This project gave them a first opportunity to learn about and appreciate their village's history. With these "Little Angels" help, I suddenly no longer felt alone in the village. I could see the future and its hopes. This film completes my three-film Zou Village Series.

Bio:

Zou Xueping was born in 1985. In 2009 she graduated from the China Fine Arts Academy. Since 2008, she has been a resident artist at CCD Workstation. She has produced the documentaries Mom (2008), The Starving Village (2010), The Satiated Village (2011) and Children’s Village (2012). Her films have been selected by Taiwan International Film Festival, 2010, Tampere International Film Festival, 2011, and the 2012 Beijing Independent Film Festival, where she won and “Excellent Award.”
**Self-Portrait: At 47 KM 《自画像：47 公里》 (Zhang Mengqi, 章梦奇, 2011, 77 min) & Q&A with director**

Tuesday 2 December 2014  
Venue: S-1.06  
Time: 16:00 – 18:00

**Director’s Statement:**

After my first documentary *Self-portrait with Three Women*, my second "self-portrait" was painted in a village named "47 KM". This village is located 47 KM from Suizhou, Hubei Province, where my father was born. He left the village when he was 20, but his father, my grandfather, still lives there. In the summer and winter of 2010, through my participation in the "Folk Memory Project", I went back to the village, which seems disconnected from my current life, and re-discovered and came to better understand my grandfather, the old villagers who underwent the disaster of the famine fifty years ago, as well as the village, which always perplexed and embarrassed me. What does "47 KM" really mean to me? It seems to be like a mirror, I see myself in front of it.

**Bio:**

Zhang Mengqi was born in 1987. She graduated from the Dance Academy of China Minorities University in 2008. She is now a freelance dancer in Beijing. She has created two dance pieces: Self-portrait and Dialogue with My Mother, and Self-portrait and Sexual Self-education. Her first documentary film is entitled *Self-portrait with Three Women*. *Self-Portrait: At 47 KM* is her second film.

**Panel Discussion on the Folk Memory Project and the Famine**

Tuesday 2 December 2014  
Venue: S-2.23  
Time: 18:30 – 21:30

Participants: Wu Wenguang, Zou Xueping, Zhang Mengqi, Professor Harriet Evans (University of Westminster)

Our panel discussion will focus on the significance of the Folk Memory Project and the issues it raises as part of the recent effort to recover the history of the Mao era in China, and in particular the Great Famine. Important recent works by historians shedding new light on this tragic event include Yang Jisheng’s book *Tombstone* and Frank Dikötter’s *Mao’s Great Famine*. What new dimensions do the Folk Memory Project films add to our understanding of this event and the complexities of oral history? University of Westminster Professor and distinguished historian Harriet Evans joins the filmmakers for a conversation.
**Treatment 《治疗》 (Wu Wenguang, 吴文光, 2010, 80 min) & Q&A with director**

Wednesday 3 December 2014  
Venue: Safra  
Time: 18:30 - 21:30

**Director’s Statement:**

This film started with me wanting to make a film to memorialize and explore my deep emotions toward my mother, who passed away in 2007. As I was making the film, my thoughts toward it kept getting broken and shifted, especially as I sorted through the 12 years of footage I had collected, seeing subtleties I had previously overlooked, or reliving experiences that had long since gone by. Even more impacting was facing the moving images of my mother, seeing someone dear to me who has already left this world captured with such lifelike movements, utterances, expressions, like it all just happened yesterday. Then I realized this film is not just about remembering her—it’s also an experiment to bring her back to life. Especially at a time when I’m in a process of trying to heal myself, my mother is a crucial element. And so, though my mother/ remembrance/ the present/ healing and self-healing, this film’s structure and way of recounting began to naturally materialize.

**Bio:**

Wu Wenguang was born in 1956 in Yunnan Province in southwest China. After graduating from high school in 1974, Wu was sent to the countryside where he worked as a farmer for a year and as an elementary school teacher for three years. From 1978 to 1982 he studied Chinese literature in Yunnan University. After receiving his Bachelor’s degree, Wu taught at a junior high school for three years. He was then a journalist for a TV station for another three years. In 1988 Wu left television and moved to Beijing to be an independent documentary filmmaker, freelance writer and creator and producer of Living Dance Studio, a dance performance group. In 2005 Wu co-founded the independent art space Caochangdi Workstation (CCD Workstation) with his partner Wen Hui. He is the curator of the annual film and dance festivals Crossing Festival and May Festival. He is the curator of the China Village Documentary Project and Folk Memory Documentary Project. His other films include: *Bumming in Beijing* (1990), *1966, My Time in the Red Guards* (1993), *At Home in The World* (1995), *Jiang Hu: Life on the Road* (1999), *Dance with Farm Workers* (2001), and *Fuck Cinema* (2005).

**Interview with Wu on the Folk Memory Project:**