

CHINA BLUE FILM SYNOPSIS

By Micha X. Peled, Director

China Blue takes us inside a blue-jeans factory, where Jasmine and her friends Orchid and Li Ping, are trying to survive the harsh working environment. Their lives intersect that of the film's other protagonist and factory owner, Mr. Lam. Providing perspectives from both the top and bottom levels of the factory's hierarchy, this film brings complex issues of globalization to the human level.

Like millions before her, Jasmine leaves her Sichuan village to help her family with a job in a far-away factory. There she meets 14-years-old Li Ping, who is already an experienced seamstress. During brief lunch breaks Jasmine watches another co-worker Orchid, who turns their 12-bed dorm room into a disco. These friendships would provide her only solace as Jasmine's initial excitement soon melts away. The long work hours seven days a week, the merciless fine system and the delays in pay are overwhelming.

Orchid, who specializes in zippers, is the only one with an easier schedule. Later, Orchid uses the New Year holiday to go home after two years away and introduce her boyfriend to her parents, hoping for their approval. Chinese New Year is the only time off the workers get in the entire year, but Jasmine cannot afford yet the expensive two-day trip back.

To get a new order from a promising British buyer, Mr. Lam must agree to extremely low prices and a very tight delivery schedule. For the deal to work, he cuts his workers' pay and requires them to work around the clock.

While the film shows how our global economic system leaves the Chinese factory owner with few choices, it also explores in detail what that means for the workers. Anxious to avoid getting fined for falling asleep on the job, Jasmine and Li Ping sneak out of the factory to buy energy tea, but they get caught and are fined anyway. Other workers resort to keeping their eyes open by clipping clothespins on their eyelids. When the workers' endurance reaches a breaking point, their only recourse may be a strike, which is illegal in China.

China Blue paints a nuanced, tender and ultimately moving portrait of the daily lives of the young workers who make our clothes. It also brings an updated and alarming report on the economic pressures applied by Western companies and their human consequences. The Boston Phoenix called it "heartbreaking, truly unforgettable" and Variety commented that "the Pic's degree of access and intimacy is surprising. Indeed, after you get to know Jasmine and Li Ping, shopping will never be the same.

The film was made without permission from the Chinese authorities. During production the crew was stopped by the police numerous times. On one occasion the crew was arrested and interrogated. Tapes were confiscated and never returned, despite inquiries by the American consulate.

China Blue was an official selection at the Toronto International Film Festival and won the Amnesty Human Rights Award at the International Documentary Festival in Amsterdam.

This 87-minute feature documentary was produced and directed by Micha X. Peled. Peled's last film for PBS was Store Wars: When Wal-Mart Comes to Town. Explored the consumer end of the same issue of the impact of global retail on individual lives. China Blue is a co-production of Teddy Bear Films in San Francisco and the Independent Television Service (ITVS) in association with the Center for Asian American Media (CAAM). It was funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the Sundance Documentary Fund.

China Blue

Awards and festivals so far:

- IDFA (Amsterdam) - Winner: Amnesty Human Rights award
- IDFA (Amsterdam) – Nominated: Joris Ivens award
- Vancouver film festival - Honorable Mention
- Toronto International Film Festival - Official Selection
- Zagrebdox (Croatia) International Documentary Film Festival
- One World (Prague) International Film Festival
- Thessaloniki (Greece) International Film Festival
- San Francisco International Asian American Film Festival

UPCOMING (Apr.-May)

- Bermuda International Film Festival
- It's all True International Documentary Film Festival, São Paulo, Brazil
- Full Frame (U.S.) Documentary Film Festival
- Hong Kong International Film Festival

CONFIRMED FOR LATER IN THE YEAR

- 2006 Green Film Festival in Seoul, South Korea
- International Documentary Film Festival Flahertiana, Russia
- Jerusalem International Film Festival
- Mill Valley (U.S.) Film Festival
- CPH:dox (Copenhagen documentary film festival)

The Int'l Documentary Festival of Amsterdam (IDFA) jury president had this to say about CHINA BLUE:

A crucially important documentary for our times. Told from the inside, this is an account of modern slavery in a global market. It shames us all. Blue jeans are the iconic style item of the departed century and perhaps the next one too. The Jury wish to applaud the integrity, resourcefulness and courage of the film makers who took us on a shocking journey – one that confronts us with the real human costs of our easy choices and our bargain hunting.

Press Quotes

- The tacit fury of China Blue Richard Corliss, TIME magazine
- Pic's degree of access and intimacy is surprising, even more so when closing intertitles reveal Chinese authorities did try to shut down the filmmakers several times.... engaging in character and narrative terms... much of "China Blue" is charming, because its subjects are... Micha Peled's docu "China Blue" makes a stronger case against worker exploitation than any news item could...
Variety
- The Best Documentary of Toronto 2005? Micha Peled's China Blue, a heartbreaking, truly unforgettable cinéma-vérité
The Boston Phoenix
- Shines a light on the inhumane working conditions... will stay with you
The Toronto EYE
- Must-see film for anyone interested in global issues... A compelling story...
The Toronto Globe and Mail (Canada's national newspaper) – reader's review
- One of the hottest titles at IDFA this year... Go, see and feel guilty about being a rich European. You know you want to.
IDFA (Amsterdam), Europe's premier doc film festival