

## 10th Aurora Asian Film Festival

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## 'Lost Children' is a peaceful delight

Ashton Do, staff writer  
May 23, 2007

When a tough Muay-Thai boxer becomes a loving abbot, good things happen.

"Buddha's Lost Children" is a refreshing and vivid heartwarming documentary set in the outskirts of Thailand. Its focus is about monastery children, called novices in the film, who learn hard lessons about tough love. Many documentaries push an agenda or message, but director Mark Verkerk takes a backseat to reveal a truthful, uninhibited and vibrant account of young life at a monastery.

The film follows Phra Khru Bah, a Muay-Thai boxer turned Buddhist abbot, and his life raising impoverished and homeless boys at the Golden Horse Monastery. Under his care, the boys train and meditate rigorously. Some are stubborn, but as the documentary progresses, they learn to conform because friendship and brotherhood underlie their growing sense of identity.

Verkerk occasionally lists facts to set a context for what's going on, but there are otherwise no narrators in the movie. Remarkably, the novices don't seem to acknowledge the presence of a camera. The film unfolds on its own, relying on the subtle and honest personalities of the children to carry it along.

But things aren't always subtle in the monastery life. Conflict erupts in one scene where villagers gather to rebuild a local temple under Khru Bah's guidance. In the midst of their efforts, some of the younger villagers grow angry at each other and nearly break out into a fight. Khru Bah intervenes, using some of his Muay Thai boxing skills, and challenges the villagers to consider the moral costs of fighting.

Force is used quite frequently in the film – particularly on the children. Throughout the movie, novices

### **Buddha's Lost Children**

**Not rated**

**Directed by**

Mark Verkerk

**Featuring**

Phra Khru Bah

**Time**

97 minutes

**Language**

Thai with English subtitles

are reprimanded with a smack over the head. It's unnerving to watch such innocent looking children – even when bratty – get punished.

“If a horse is stubborn, the child will have to hit it,” Khru Bah says in the film, elaborating on tough love as part of the nurturing process. “If the child is stubborn, I'll have to hit him.”

Outside of child-rearing methodologies, Khru Bah's mission is actually quite in line with American values. Set in the Golden Triangle of Thailand, an area notorious for drug trafficking and abuse, “Buddha's Lost Children” unveils Khru Bah as a savior figure. His humor, his tough love, and his compassion are evident in his positive influence on the region.

It's worth mentioning how beautiful this documentary is from an audio and visual level. The cinematography is smooth, directly in the action of things, and practically unnoticeable. Without it, the film would never achieve such a heightened sense of authenticity and reality. Accompanying sounds also enhance the experience in their richness – sounds of crackling fire, snapping branches, and splashing water bring an organic touch to the screen.

“Buddha's Lost Children” portrays a different kind of monastery than the one most people are accustomed to. A sense of peace permeates through the film, but it also reveals feelings that are authentic, touching and very much alive. Meditation has never been so enjoyable. Above all, this documentary is a warm reminder that compassion is not lost in this world.

Ashton gives "Buddha's Lost Children":



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Ashton Do is a staff writer for AsiaXpress.com. Ashton can be contacted via e-mail at [Ashton.Do@asiapress.com](mailto:Ashton.Do@asiapress.com).

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