



**thirteen**  
WNET NEW YORK

450 West 33rd Street  
New York NY 10001-2605  
www.thirteen.org

## press information

FROM NEIGHBORHOOD DISPUTES TO LIFE-AND-DEATH CASES, *WIDE ANGLE* FOLLOWS JUDGES, LAWYERS AND ORDINARY CITIZENS SEEKING JUSTICE AS CHINA BUILDS A LEGAL FRAMEWORK FROM SCRATCH FOR ITS NEW MARKET ECONOMY, IN *THE PEOPLE'S COURT*

*WIDE ANGLE* Launches Its Sixth Season Tuesday, July 3 at 9 p.m. on PBS

When a state judge brings her mobile court to a hillside village to resolve its first lawsuit, the entire community shows up for the public spectacle. When a crusading lawyer risks government retribution to defend farmers rioting against a massive dam project, a teenager is tried and executed in secret.

It may be the court of “the people,” but it’s a long, long way from Judge Wapner’s California courtroom.

As *WIDE ANGLE* returns for its sixth season of in-depth documentaries about issues that are shaping the world today, *The People’s Court* takes viewers inside the courtrooms and law schools of China to provide an unprecedented and unexpected portrait of its rapidly growing legal system. *The People’s Court* premieres Tuesday, July 3 at 9 p.m. (ET) on PBS (check local listings).

Poised to surpass the United States as the largest economy in the world, yet facing mounting domestic and international pressure for a fair and transparent framework of laws, China is racing to reshape the rules of society. With Chinese from all walks of life taking to the streets in record numbers (official figures count an average of 200 incidents of unrest a day) to protest



land seizures, corruption, pollution, or unpaid wages, China is under duress to provide a release valve for mounting social discontents. “Rule of law,” originally a Western concept, was recently adopted in China’s Constitution for the first time ever, and legal reform is high on the state agenda, despite the Communist Party’s continuing monopoly on power. Above all, a market economy requires a reliable framework of property rights, without which international investors cannot do business with China.

In the past quarter century, the country has opened nearly 400 law schools, trained hundreds of thousands of judges and lawyers, and launched education campaigns to encourage people to bring their grievances to court rather than taking to the streets. Few nations have ever attempted to create a new legal system so quickly.

Yet the transformation is incomplete and the judiciary far from independent. Senior judges are appointed by, take orders from, and receive their paychecks from the Communist Party. Hundreds of Chinese lawyers have been jailed in recent years for challenging state leadership or taking on overly sensitive cases. More than 99 percent of criminal cases end in convictions. And China executes more prisoners every year than the rest of the world combined. *The People’s Court* reports the shocking story of the recent secret trial and execution of one of the 100,000 peasants who protested the loss of their land to a huge hydroelectric dam project on the Dadu River.

*WIDE ANGLE* was given exclusive access to film in Chinese courts – a first for a Western documentary. Profiling itinerant judges, law students, a human rights lawyer, and ordinary citizens, *The People’s Court* examines China in flux, revealing the lengths to which Chinese people must go to obtain justice and raising crucial questions about their present system of law: Is it possible to get a fair trial in China today? Will the “rule of law” transform Chinese society into one that protects the legal rights of all citizens?

**WIDE ANGLE** anchor Daljit Dhaliwal is scheduled to conduct a post-film interview with Alice Young, Chair of the Asia Pacific Practice Group at the international law firm Kaye Scholer LLP, to discuss the global implications of China's experiment to introduce the "rule of law."

For additional information and photography, visit [thirteen.org/pressroom/wideangle](http://thirteen.org/pressroom/wideangle) or [pbs.org/pressroom](http://pbs.org/pressroom).

Major funding for **WIDE ANGLE** is provided by PBS, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Bernard and Irene Schwartz, Mutual of America Life Insurance Company, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Foundation, The Jacob Burns Foundation, Ford Foundation, Josh and Judy Weston, Rosalind P. Walter, and The Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation.

**WIDE ANGLE** is a production of Thirteen/WNET New York for PBS. Stephen Segaller is executive producer. Pamela Hogan is series producer. Andy Halper is senior producer. **The People's Court** was directed by Bruno Sorrentino and produced by Maggie Still of Xanadu Productions.

.....

Thirteen/WNET New York is one of the key program providers for public television, bringing such acclaimed series as *Nature*, *Great Performances*, *American Masters*, *Charlie Rose*, *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly*, *Wide Angle*, *Secrets of the Dead*, *NOW With David Brancaccio*, and *Cyberchase* - as well as the work of Bill Moyers - to audiences nationwide. As the flagship public broadcaster in the New York, New Jersey and Connecticut metro area, Thirteen reaches millions of viewers each week, airing the best of American public television along with its own local productions such as The Ethnic Heritage Specials, The Thirteen Walking Tours, *New York Voices*, and *Reel New York*. Thirteen extends the impact of its television productions through educational and community outreach projects - including the Celebration of Teaching and Learning - as well as Web sites and other digital media platforms. More information can be found at: [www.thirteen.org](http://www.thirteen.org).

.....

Press Contact:

**Deirdre Branley**

Thirteen

212.560.3130

branley@thirteen.org

**Ellen Levene**

212.255.7997

ellenl2@nyc.rr.com

**Gloria Park**

Thirteen

212-560-2063

parkg@thirteen.org