

Transnational Documentary Liaison: YIDFF and Taiwanese Documentary Making

Kuei-fen Chiu 邱貴芬

Graduate Institute of Taiwan Literature and Transnational Cultural Studies,
National Chung-hsing University
國立中興大學台灣文學與跨國文化研究所

The purpose of the essay is to investigate issues pertaining to international exhibitions of Taiwanese documentaries. It takes the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival (YIDFF) as a case study. For the past decade, YIDFF has been a source of inspiration for Taiwanese documentary makers and film curators. Founded in 1989 by the late Ogawa Shinsuke, the highly regarded documentary filmmaker in post-war Japan, the festival is perhaps the most high-profile event in Asia that is devoted exclusively to documentary films. For Taiwanese documentary makers, YIDFF is an important venue for gaining international recognition of their works.

This paper discusses the rapport between the Taiwanese documentary circle and YIDFF and speculates on the common traits found in many of the award-winning Taiwanese documentary films at YIDFF. The first part of the paper is informational in nature, delineating the impact of YIDFF on the development of documentaries in Taiwan. Using *Swimming on the Highway* (directed by Yao-tung Wu, recipient of Shinsuke Ogawa Award in 1999) as an illustrative example, the second part of the paper discusses the implications of the prevalent penchant for the personal in award-winning documentaries from Taiwan. It is the contention of this paper that this peculiar characteristic of award-winning documentaries from Taiwan is more than a reflection of the increasing currency of individualism in contemporary Taiwan. Nor can it be simply seen as a global phenomenon of the displacement of the politics of social movements by the politics of identity. Arguably, it may in fact point to a tough challenge for documentarists from countries with limited internationally recognized cultural and political capital. Social documentaries tend to be place-based because of their strong interventional character. How to make their place-based documentary practices transcend place-boundness remains a demanding task for Taiwanese documentarists.