

The Rise of Digital Platforms and the Emergence of the New Media Documentary Film Industry in China

Name: 中嶋聖雄; Seio Nakajima

Keywords: China, digital, industry, new media documentary film, platform

1 Objective

With the rise of digital platforms such as YouKu, Tencent Video, and Bilibili, a new sub-genre of a documentary film called the “new media documentary” (NMD) (*xinmeiti jilupian*) has emerged in China. According to the *Research Report on the Development of Documentary Film*, the four major video streaming platforms of YouKu, Tencent Video, Bilibili, and iQIYI invested 1.1 billion yuan in documentary film production in 2018—an 83% increase from the previous year. This preliminary presentation attempts to grasp key elements that characterize NMD.

2 Methods

Content and discourse analyses of selected new documentary films. Document analysis of published statistical data.

3 Results

NMD is found to be characterized by 1) content diversification, 2) relatively short lengths, 3) young audience, 4) interactivity, and 5) market-oriented “institutional logic” (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury 2012). In terms of content, documentary films on “food”—one of the most popular—can be diversified into numerous subtopics—for example, those focusing on food in societies around the world, on breakfast in a particular Chinese region, or exclusively on hotpot. As for the length, most NMD is relatively short—30 minutes or even shorter in the case of the so-called “micro documentary film” (*wei jilupian*). The audiences are found to be relatively young—the so-called “post-90s” and “post-00s” generations. In terms of interactivity, due to the interactive nature of digital platforms in general and the function of “barrage subtitling” (*danmu*) in particular, active audience participation is often said to characterize the viewing practices of the NMD. NMD is “new” not only in its content diversification, short length, young audience, and interactivity—which may result from its reliance on digital platforms for distribution and exhibition, but also in its mode of production squarely aiming at economic profit. This “market-oriented institutional logic” differs significantly from the earlier “political logic” of the state-sponsored newsreel tradition and CCTV programs, as well as the more recent “independent logic” of the New Chinese Documentary Film Movement.

4 Conclusion

In conclusion, I attempt to illustrate the utility of the distinction between “the horizontal *intermediary* model” and “the layered *stack* model” of media platforms (Steinberg 2022, p. 1071).

References

- Steinberg, Marc. 2022. “From Automobile Capitalism to Platform Capitalism: Toyotism as a prehistory of digital platforms.” *Organization Studies* 43(7): 1069-1090.
- Thornton, Patricia H., William Ocasio, and Michael Lounsbury. 2012. *The Institutional Logics Perspective: A New Approach to Culture, Structure, and Process*. Oxford University Press.