

***Record and Reflection:
COVID-19 Pandemic Documentary in Japan, China and Korea***

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The Asian Conference on Cultural Studies 2021
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Documentary has always been used to characterize nature, history, and social reality. As a medium text with the spirit of realism and authenticity, it diverts our attention to the world in which we live. During the pandemic, Japan, China, and South Korea each produced documentaries on the theme of the epidemic. This paper focused on these documentaries, including "COVID-19.Fighting.a.Pandemic.2020", and "COVID-19 Pandemic: 132 Critical Days" produced by NHK, Japan, "The Frontline: China's fight against COVID-19" and "The Lockdown: One month in Wuhan" produced by CCTV, China, along with "PANDEMIC" and "Survive the Corona Era" produced by South Korea. The main body of this paper is divided into four chapters. In the beginning, I define the concept of "Epidemic Documentary" involved in this paper. And I made a general introduction to the research objects in this paper. Then I analyzes the common points of the documentaries of the three countries. It is mainly reflected in these documentaries that reflect the timeliness, integration, and information quality of the documentary narrative. Next, I compare the differences between the three countries' pandemic documentaries from multiple perspectives. Specifically, the paper analyzes the characteristics of the pandemic documentary works of different countries in terms of style, perspective, and subject matter, and looks for the patterned discourse expression in the works. Finally, I analyze the role of these documentaries in the countries' fighting against the epidemic.

Keyword: Pandemic, Documentary, East Asia

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Introduction

Documentary has always been used to characterize nature, history, and social reality. As a medium text with the spirit of realism and authenticity, it diverts our attention to the world in which we live. During the pandemic, many countries have made documentaries concerning the epidemic for various kinds of reasons. In the western countries, for example, the "Panorama" column aired "Coronavirus: The Week that Changed Britain" on March 23, 2020, focusing on how the UK responded to the biggest crisis since World War II and asking the British government is there a correct strategy to contain the virus. As scientists studied and understood the virus, the documentary begins to provide a deeper scientific interpretation: Why is the new crown pneumonia so dangerous? What happens when the virus attacks our body? What do all these numbers mean? The second documentary section of the BBC "Horizon" from April 2020 The three-episode documentary "New Corona Virus Special" conducted science popularization on the new corona virus to the audience, investigated the scientific facts and data behind the biggest public health crisis in people's memory, and explored the latest medical and scientific research on the front line. In February 2021, the "Horizon" column aired another issue, "2021: Coronavirus Special-What We Know Now," showing the aspects of genetics, medicine and modeling. This breakthrough gives people hope and confidence to cope with the future pandemic. National Geographic Channel also broadcast the 44-minute documentary "Virus Hunters" in November 2020, epidemiologist Christopher Golden and ABC News foreign correspondent James Longman traveled to Libya, the United States, Thailand, Turkey and other countries to start dialogues with scientists, linking the bits and pieces of culture, disease, and the environment to discover what caused the global health crisis. The virus changed our daily life and the way of interaction overnight, and documentaries began to show the stories of the characters in the epidemic. On August 5, 2020, the first BBC broadcast, "Surviving the Virus: My Brother & Me," recording the work and life of twin brothers Chris and Alexander during the epidemic. Both brothers are doctors and the host of the "New Coronavirus Special" mentioned above. Alexander was infected with the new corona virus. Although he escaped from the dead, he suffered the sequelae caused by the virus. Chris is an infectious doctor in a London hospital. His wife, who is seven months pregnant, is nervous about his return to the battlefield. Through Chris, the audience went to the intensive care unit to learn about the frontline doctors' fight against the epidemic and the moving stories of life and death. As a result, the new crown pneumonia is no longer just a number updated in the BBC's weekly epidemic report, from a collective narrative to an individual narrative (Yu 2020).

In my paper, I focus on the documentaries produced in Japan, China, and South Korea on the theme of the pandemic during the pandemic. This paper focus on these documentaries, including "COVID-19 Fighting a Pandemic 2020", and "COVID-19 Pandemic: 132 Critical Days" produced by NHK, Japan, "The Frontline: China's fight against COVID-19" and "The lockdown: One month in Wuhan" produced by CCTV, China, along with "Pandemic" and "Fight with Virus" produced by South Korea.

Covid-19 Pandemic films in this paper are restricted to those documentaries that record the covid-19 pandemic and its relevant agendas such as the epidemic situation, people's real sufferings, and government's reaction. I incorporate mainly documentaries that concerns the topic during the pandemic, and directly about the pandemic. This criteria excludes some that deals with pandemic but not take it as the theme, such as "Post-Pandemic Era" made in China, and "Post-Pandemic: Find Our Lost Daily Life" made in Korea.

Specifically, I analyze the characteristics of the pandemic documentary works of different countries in terms of style, perspective, and subject matter, and look for the patterned discourse expression in the works. I mainly focus on comparing the differences between the three countries' pandemic documentaries from multiple perspectives. Finally, I discuss the role of these documentaries in the countries' fighting against the epidemic.

Different Strategies

To begin with, the two Japan-made documentaries to be examined in this paper are "COVID-19. Fighting a Pandemic. 2020", and "COVID-19 Pandemic: 132 Critical Days". Japan's pandemic documentaries can be characterized as digitalization and governmentality. The previous document, as case studies into cluster infections in Japan, offers some clues into how the pandemic began. NHK provides reports from the frontlines of the fight against the coronavirus, around the world and in the lab as scientists race to develop effective drug treatments. Interviewers in the documentary talk to experts in the studio about how long this battle will last. By inviting to the studio experts on the government's task force, including a former WHO adviser with experience of the SARS epidemic, the program communicates the steps each one of us can take in order to bring the virus under control (NHK 2020). Digital technology is being widely used in global COVID-19 prevention and control, including crowd monitoring, identification of infected persons, and contact tracing. The rapid response to the pandemic prevention and control utilizes billions of mobile phone resources, large network data sets, networked equipment, relatively low-cost computing resources, and machine learning and natural language processing technologies. In the documentary "COVID-19 Pandemic: 132 Critical Days", data on the pandemic in Japan was consciously shown from a computer in one governor's office. One government officer claimed that Real-time monitoring of the distribution of the epidemic and predicting its changing trend has important reference value for epidemic prevention and control and the adjustment of its strategies. Therefore, it is very necessary to monitor the epidemic situation in real time, intuitively and in all directions, and be able to dynamically predict the changes in the epidemic situation. This abundance in data and scientific discourses in the documentary are without doubt beneficial to send signals to the audiences that the Japan is striving to control the coronavirus spreading through scientific measurements. This gave audiences a sense of security. However, what are the application scope and limitations of digital technology in response to public health emergencies? What are the obstacles to the implementation of these technologies, including legal, ethical, and privacy obstacles, as well as personnel and organizational obstacles? How to supervise, evaluate and use digital technology in the future? The documentary also invites the audience to think about these questions in regard to digital health and public hygiene.

Another distinct characteristic of Japanese pandemic documentary is that they take emphasis on reflecting government's effort. In "COVID-19 Pandemic: 132 Critical Days", in interviews with more than 100 policymakers, scientists and other experts on the front lines, NHK sheds light on a key weakness in the nation's response: a lack of action on warnings issued by experts after another infectious disease outbreak a decade ago. In the first installment of NHK Documentary series, "COVID-19 Pandemic," the documentary goes behind the scenes to examine the challenges Japan faced during those 132 critical days (NHK 2020). To be specific, in the documentary, many government officers are working hard on analyzing the pandemic and its trend. The documentary also includes many interviews with government officers talking about how the Japanese government is dealing with the coronavirus. Also, in the second half, the documentary narrates how other countries and their governments are working

to fight pandemic. This shows a picture of how Japanese government constantly work on solving the problems and save lives. The new pandemic is a public health emergency. The government can achieve predictive control of the pandemic by establishing and perfecting a public governance mechanism. The documentary shows that local governments are the key players in building and operating a public health emergency governance mechanism. Comprehensive coordination and administration are required in response to the pandemic. Also in the documentary, the officers are viewed as taking core responsibility of the government, which is to provide rules for the effective interaction of multiple subjects and promote collective action in the management mechanism of public health emergencies involving multiple subjects.

China's documentaries can be characterized as Collectivism and Heroism. The lockdown: One month in Wuhan is an English-language news documentary released by CGTN (China International Television Station). It is the first English-language documentary showing the "anti-pandemic" process in Wuhan after the outbreak of the new pandemic. It took 33 minutes to review how the pandemic went from a rapid outbreak to a gradual containment in Wuhan, a city with a population of tens of millions. It fully demonstrates the major measures taken by the Chinese government to prevent and control the pandemic under the personal leadership of president Xi. It records the great sacrifice and dedication of frontline medical staff, and also tells stories about community workers, volunteers, couriers, etc. CGTN reporters have been in Wuhan since the beginning of the outbreak and continue to report the real and first-hand local situation for overseas audiences. The concepts of working together to fight the epidemic are reflected in people's behavior and emotional expression in front of the camera. These documentaries contain discourses of home and country thus elevating individual experience to the grand theme of global affair, highlighting the consciousness of one community with a shared future for mankind.

The Frontline: China's fight against COVID-19 changes its title from "Wuhan" to China. After "The lockdown: One month in Wuhan", CGTN polished for half a year and released the English-language anti-pandemic documentary. Many first-hand material, disclosed for the first time, recorded 1.4 billion ordinary people united in self-rescue under the raging virus, how to survive the pandemic, restore the touching details behind. The fighting against illness is not just a story about a certain person and a certain city, everyone in the documentary is the protagonists. The documentary features heroizing people who are struggling with corona in the frontline including doctors and nurses, medical technicians who are working on the corona medicines and vaccines, workers in the mask factories who have not slept for many days. By heroism and even deifying these normal people, the documentary seems to have a eulogy tone after the big war, even though the pandemic was not totally eradicated.

Korea's documentaries can be characterized as Ecologism and Poetic Life. Korean Pandemic documentaries use another approach to introduce the pandemic and corona virus. In Fight with Virus, which was broadcast on consecutively two days, examines the future of the virus and humanity through science, history, and the present. First of all, in Part 1 [Virus X], we look into the fundamental reason why new viruses appear more frequently as civilization develops, and predict the virus X that may come soon through virus experts and futurists. Part 2 [The Great Blockade: The World Made by Viruses] focuses on the changes in the world that the virus will bring, highlighting the economic situation that has worsened due to COVID-19 and the rapidly changing international situation. The documentary starts with a macroscopic view of nature, human being and the universe. The director tries to avoid a mundane narrative of current pandemic, but instead, use a bigger standpoint to retrospect

human ourselves. The effect is direct, leading people to think of the relationship between human and nature. This ecologism perspective attributes this pandemic to human's fault, that is human overrides the balanced relationship with nature, thus cause disasters. In the documentary, we were able to re-understand the existence of viruses in modern society: viruses, a quasi-species that broke the boundary between living and non-biological, are renewing the ontology of modern society. The virus itself is a non-living organism and does not constitute an organism system, but when it invades the host, it begins to undergo metabolism, gene replication, and energy flow as if it has life. The virus spread between animals and humans, blurring the boundaries of species, and connecting with these organisms to generate new life forms. In specific social practice, viruses, as a kind of non-human actors, continue to grow outward like tubers in time and space where human science is not easy to demonstrate. It becomes visible under a microscope in the laboratory. It is empirical and visible, but when it infects other animals unknowingly, its invisible sporadic process always threatens human life.

Second, in the Korean pandemic documentaries, directors capture individual's experiences and emotions by poeticizing normal life. The protagonist includes medical staff on the front line of fighting the pandemic as well as teachers and students working hard at home. The series uses a short and succinct genre to describe everyone who is fighting against the new epidemic, and uses storytelling and ordinary people's perspective to narrate people's mentality in response to the pandemic. The crisis structure presents the difficulty of individuals fighting the epidemic in Wuhan. It also praised the general public for their optimistic and strong survival attitude in the face of the pandemic. In the film, people use their mobile phones to record the real experience of users. People show their confidence and desire for new life with sincere words, which can move people's hearts even more.

This paper, as a comparative analysis, does not seek a perfect answer to the causes of these seemingly different narrative style. Some may argue that the difference may origin from the cultural difference, taking a Marxist standing. These discourses fail to construe the culture by essentializing culture and reifying it in the cultural product. But one possible practical explanation could be the difference in documentary making tradition. The "documentary land" composed by filmmakers, directors, and the local audience represents an alternative cultural space, where the different social actors interact and negotiate with each other. This specific documentary culture could contribute to a unique cultural product with the seemingly characteristic narrative style.

Conclusion

In this paper, I examine six different pandemic documentaries in three East Asian countries. Through a deep analysis of the narrative style and the lines, I elaborate the features in the countries respectively. Japan's documentaries expose a picture of governmental works that actively utilize digital data to grasp the pandemic situation and make decisions. China's documentaries have a homogeneous narrative mode, that is based on stories of normal people, they depict a real picture of how pandemic influence everyone. Furthermore, these normal people, especially those who fight with the viruses are applauded through the narrative strategy of "herotization". Last, Korea's documentaries take a different starting point. They reflect on human beings as part of nature, rethinking the relationship between human and the nature by introducing the origin of the pandemic. Also, they take emphasis on normal people's normal life, coined with a nostalgia tone.

Despite all the differences, these pandemic documentaries share some common values. First, they can comfort the audiences, and provide channels for talking and record memories. The pandemic documentary provides a channel for ordinary people to talk with other survivals. The ordinary people here include both the people in the film and the audience. "Long Time No See, Wuhan" included one interviewee who tells the story of his family's death due to the new corona virus. Among the more than one hundred applicants, few are willing to mention their family members' experience of the death of the Covid-19 virus. He said, "Although I have experienced entanglement and hesitation, he is still brave and willing to show the wound in my heart, in order not to forget it." Thus this process of telling, recalling, and recording can comfort the mind of the interviewee to some extent, help them vent their pain and preserve their memories. If an excellent film handles the emotion of pain properly, it is easy for the audience to empathize, empathize, and even help the audience to obtain positive energy from the pain.

Second, they provide opportunity for cross-cultural communication. The director of "Long Time No See, Wuhan" uses two languages, Japanese and Chinese, and aims to tell audiences in Japan or around the world that this is a film shot by a Japanese director from an outsider perspective. The narration and other parts are in Japanese, and the director uses Chinese in interviews or speaking to the camera. The use of Japanese is to show identity, and the use of Chinese is to facilitate communication and to narrow the psychological distance with the interviewee. Japanese documentary director Takeuchi Ryo, who lives in Nanjing with his Chinese wife, filmed the documentary film in March this year that recorded Nanjing citizens' fight against the epidemic. The documentary expresses hope that countries around the world, including Japan, will pay more attention to it. To prevent and control the epidemic, learn from China's useful experience to take more comprehensive and thorough measures. This documentary was on the headline area of Yahoo Japan website at that time, and was broadcast by Japan Broadcasting Association TV, Asahi TV and many other mainstream Japanese TV stations. On June 26, he brought another new work, telling the stories of 10 Wuhan people during the epidemic period and introducing the "cured" Wuhan to the public. Ten families, ten stories, one city, simple and mundane but extremely true accounts, showing the appearance of Wuhan people or groups struggling to stand up and live under the epidemic.

Third, information and social effects. Most of the programs about the pandemic were produced by the news and current affairs departments in the initial stage, and the degree of completion may not be so high, and the main purpose is to transmit information quickly and accurately. In Japan, the Japan Broadcasting Association, a public media, responded quickly by making this documentary. On February 9th, it produced the "Emergency Report: New Coronavirus Pneumonia, How Will Infection expand" to introduce this new virus and its development trend.

The epidemic has changed people's views on the earth, the world, and life. Hopefully, this pandemic will also be a test. It will teach us how to unite and cope with a universal, global problems, inspire us to take action, give us optimism and hope.

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