



THE DOCUMENTARY FILM BOOK

Edited by
Brian Winston



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In memory of Richard (Ricky) Leacock (1922–2011) and George Stoney (1916–2012)

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3.1 Eastwards

ABÉ MARK NORNES

The western urban social necessity that engendered the cinema in the late nineteenth century was felt everywhere as an integral element of the West's overall cultural presence. It needed to be negotiated and absorbed; and absorbed it quickly was to the point where it cannot be said to have a western 'heartland', however much Europe is imagined as the centre point whence is measured the rest of the world. And this is as true of documentary as it is of all else.

In December 1896, François-Constant Girel journeyed to Asia lugging the newly invented Lumière brothers camera, accompanied by August Lumière's acquaintance Inabata Katsutaro. After a brief visit to South-east Asia, he made his way to Japan. Girel was followed by Lumière cameraman Gabriel Veyre, who backtracked Girel's journey; he spent 1898–99 in Japan, before hopping to French Indo-China. Over in India, Marius Sestier conducted the first Indian screening in a hotel in June 1896. And then, in the Philippines, Spaniard Antonio Ramos showed the first films in Manila before moving to Shanghai when the Americans took power. He was preceded by James Ricalton, who probably showed the first film in China at a teahouse using the Edison projector. By the turn of the century or shortly thereafter, the first Asian film-makers took up the cameras themselves. Such is the dawn of cinema in Asia – first by Europeans, with Asians waiting.

This chapter takes on the impracticable task of representing 'The East' in this hefty *tour d'horizon*, so where else to start but at the horizon with that cinematic sun peeking out from behind the curvature of the Earth? Yet the original positioning of the chapter itself, in the larger context of the book-in-hand, was going to be towards the end of the volume – the editor being seized with a vision of 'documentary's heartlands', which he firmly saw as being Britain and its white colonies, North America and France. Had he not been persuaded otherwise, documentary was going to be represented by a tree – its roots ontological questions leading to a canopy of branches and eventually arriving at the other horizon: 'beyond documentary's heartlands'. This overtly Darwinian structure would have clearly reflected what has been called the ur-text for

enquiries into colonial and neo-colonial representations of non-western cultures,¹ Hegel's *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*. A quote sets us on our way:

World history goes from East to West: as Asia is the beginning of world history, so Europe is simply its end. In world history there is an absolute East, *par excellence* (whereas the geographical term 'east' is in itself entirely relative); for although the earth is a sphere, history makes no circle around that sphere. On the contrary, it has a definite East which is Asia. It is here that the external physical sun comes up, to sink in the West: and for that same reason it is in the West that the inner Sun of self-consciousness rises, shedding a higher brilliance.²

Thus, a similar philosophy was initially shaping this volume's *tour d'horizon*, ranging over an imaginary geography. That passage from Hegel is preceded by the strong image of a blind person that suddenly gains sight, and is dumbfounded at the dawn's brilliant light; he then begins to take up the objects he finds about him to construct a building (perhaps a movie theatre) by the use of his own 'inner sun' – and when he contemplates it in the evening, he values it higher than that first external sun. However, we must reject a vision of Asian spectators being dazzled by the light coming from those first cameras, that product of European genius, and then being inspired to pick up the machine themselves (or sometimes reverse engineer it!) to build their own indigenous film cultures, local cinemas they inevitably compare unfavourably to the shining example of Europe. In such an account they lag behind European progress, technologically and aesthetically, because geographical distance from the heartlands is both spatial and temporal. This yields an historical narrative for the dawn of Asian documentary, repeated in every single country across the region. It is paradigmatic of the situation of Asian documentary film-makers (and their historians): they are always relegated to the waiting room of history, as Dipesh Chakrabarty has so eloquently put it.³

In fact, Chakrabarty's book, entitled *Provincializing Europe*, informs my own (alternative) tour of Asian documentary.

It would be easy to move from country to country and chart out the historical sequence starting with the Lumière/Edison arrival scene, followed by the colonial propaganda, then liberation and the subsequent Griersonian documentary of the nation-state (first on celluloid, then on television), ending with the liberatory videos of independent video artists. This, however, would be yet another account tied to the historicism that 'made modernity or capitalism look not simply global but rather as something that became global *over time*, by originating in one place (Europe) and then spreading outside it'.⁴ Nationalist historians in Asia are clearly bothered by the implications of the conventional historiography. This is why, for example, the post-revolutionary histories of Vietnamese documentary ignore the early films Girel and Gabriel Veyre shot for the Lumières (such an perfectly Hegelian name!), or all the imperial propaganda produced by the French, or the USIS documentaries made under the Americans in collaboration with Filipino tutors. Thus, all this history is elided to celebrate 'the birth of documentary' marked by *Resolve to Fight, Resolve to Win: Dien Bien Phu* (Quyet chien, Quyet than Dien Bien Phu, 1954–55). Of course, they fail to mention that the Vietnamese directors Nguyen Tien Loi, Nguyen Hong Nghi and Nguyen Phu Can collaborated with Roman Karmen (and, of course, only the Karmen-produced compilation *Vietnam on the Road to Victory* [1955] made it to the West).

In their revolutionary situation, it was easy for Vietnamese historians to erase the colonial-era documentary simply by ignoring it. However, their conundrum is felt across across the region. The typical strategy of Asia film histories starts with the arrival of cinema (almost invariably in the luggage of European businessmen) and the (subsequent) first film created at the hands of an Asian entrepreneur. This initiates an unforgiving temporality marked by the turn-of-the-century arrival scene, one in which Asian film-makers can only be seen to be perpetually trying to keep up with the West.

Needless to say, such nationalist historiographies must be critiqued and avoided at all costs. These historians have internalised the historicism of progressive history. My goal here is to map out the contours of Asian documentary, tour around its vastness and provide some sense for alternative ways of thinking about the 'now' of Asian documentary (as opposed to its 'not yet'⁵) and perhaps rethink our understanding of documentary itself in the course of things – drawing a new map of the documentary world where Europe has been provincialised.

The first strategy we might try is to disjoint the usual time-line. Looking across the breadth of the globe, the various national documentary histories do seem marked by the same progression: from actualities to newsfilm to Griersonian approaches to Direct Cinema and cinéma vérité, to a baffling heterogeneity of approaches spread

across a variety of formats. This roughly echoes the previous structure of this book and, indeed, we seem to find this sequencing everywhere we look. However, a look at the time-line in Japan roots up some surprises. Auguste Lumière's good friend, the Japanese businessman Inabata Katsutaro actually showed the first film; it's easy enough to see Girel as a collaborator – or perhaps little more than a tourist. Two decades later in February 1927, a group of left-wing activists established the Proletarian Film League of Japan (or Prokino), nearly two years before the renowned Worker's Farm and Photo League.⁶ Furthermore, the subversive found-footage montage we identify with de Antonio was the foundation of Kamei Fumio's remarkable films of the China War (1937–41), as well as the basis for Kamei's imprisonment just before Pearl Harbor.⁷ And the principles of observational cinema were explored by Hani Susumu five years before *Primary* (1960) in his *E o kaku kodomotachi* [*Children Who Draw*] (1955), along with assorted articles and books.⁸

I could go on, but it wouldn't prove much. This kind of 'search for firsts' remains trapped in the logic of historicism. And it is refreshing to see writers like Winston and Musser challenging it in this book. However, inserting the East into the mix highlights the ideological and political stakes of the search. There is the further danger of concluding from such firsts that they indicate some pure indigenous modes of documentary, when, in fact, those Japanese film-makers from Prokino on were all driven by notions of social justice rooted in western philosophy. It is safe to say that no Asian documentarist has been untouched by the Enlightenment. Searching for 'firsts' is, basically, pointless.

At the same time, Chakrabarty argues that these categories of political modernity are braided with 'other ways of worlding' which interrupt the totalising thrusts of historicism. Redrawing the map of documentary, we might look to Asian films that bring these two into a tension

Children Who Draw (1955): the principles of observational cinema were explored by Hani Susumu five years before *Primary*



through innovative aesthetic strategies or experimentation in embodying temporalities that are anything but empty and homogeneous, to use Benjamin's terms. One thinks of the films of Ogawa Productions in Japan (especially *Heta buraku* [*Heta Village*, 1973] and *Sennen kizami no hidokei* [*Sundial Carved with a Thousand Years of Notches*, 1986]), Filipino film-maker Kidlat Tahimik (*Why is Yellow Middle of Rainbow?*, 1981–94), Takamine Go from Okinawa (*Okinawa Chirudai*, 1976) or China's Mao Chenyu (*Shenyan xiang* [*Ximaojia Universe*, 2009]). Rather than the search for untouched Otherness that is clearly the desire driving Sol Worth and John Adair's *Through Navajo Eyes*,⁹ this kind of analysis would concentrate on films that self-consciously embody that braiding of temporalities, that make it their main theme. The problem is that it too easily slips into facile nativisms or orientalisms – on the part of the film-makers or the historians.¹⁰ This avenue must be chosen with great care.

Alternatively, we could try to remap the documentary by highlighting the work of sojourners. True, there are figures like the eminent director Lester James Peries, who consciously helped import Griersonian documentary to Sri Lanka, returning from England in 1952 for a job in the newly established Government Film Unit of Ceylon. (He swiftly quit the documentary for an impressive career in feature film-making because, according to his wife, he felt it had 'more truth, more freedom and more reality'.¹¹) However, there are plenty of film-makers that confound the clean borders between Europe and Asia, their practice ranging across the Earth. Kidlat Tahimik made his contribution to Third Cinema by documenting his travel to far-flung places like Germany and Monument Valley. There are film-makers who enjoyed profound study-abroad experiences and returned home to change the course of documentary in their home countries, such as Kamei Fumio (Leningrad/Japan), Nick Deocampo (New York/Philippines), Apichatpong Weerasethakul (Chicago/Thailand). We must not forget exiled film-makers that live between worlds, such as Rithy Panh, who left the killing fields of Cambodia for Paris (*S-21, la machine de mort Khmère rouge/S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine*, 2003) and Soda Kazuhiro (*Campaign*, 2003), who moved from Japan to New York.

We should also note Asian documentary sojourners who chose routes that avoided Europe altogether. For example, there was a productive circulation between the proletarian film-makers of Tokyo, Shanghai and Seoul in the 1930s. And in the post-war era, Adachi Masao and Wakamatsu Koji produced one of the most extreme guerrilla films ever made in a circuit between Lebanon and Japan; the opening intertitles of their *Sekigun/PFLP: Sekai senso sengen* (*Red Army/PFLP: Declaration of World War*, 1971) loudly declare 'The best form of propaganda is armed struggle.' This was their attempt to bring their home-grown materialist theory of 'landscape' (*fukei*) into practice.¹² More

recently, film-makers like Kidlat Tahimik (Philippines), Fen Yan (China), Wu Wenguang (China), Kim Dong-won (Korea), Byun Youngju (Korea) and Wu Yii-feng (Taiwan) had life-changing, career-making encounters with Japan's Ogawa Shinsuke just before his early death of cancer.

In contrast, there are those Asian film-makers who made prominent contributions to western documentary history. The works of figures like Ono Yoko, Imura Takahiko or Oe Masanori are often claimed for American film history. As for Oe, he was one of the founders of Newsreel and collaborated with Marvin Fishman on films like *No Game* (1968). Historians' default treatment of these film-makers is to identify them with American film, or sometimes simply New York cinema. For example, Wheeler Dixon discusses Imura and Ken Jacobs in the same breath in *Exploding Eye: A Re-visionary History of 1960s American Experimental Cinema*.¹³ We should foreground their presence at the heart of western film culture, avoid folding them into the historicism that erases their sojourn and, rather, highlight this geographic circulation to blur boundaries and redraw the map that emphasises the geographic distance and supposed temporal lag between the West and the rest.

Clearly, a major obstacle to redrawing the map is translation. Achieving a more nuanced history of all the film-makers and films gestured to above is exceedingly difficult absent the translation of both films and writings. Language acts as a bottleneck in the traffic of the film world. The English-language 'heartlands' of documentary are notoriously monoglot, and those who do know foreign languages speak only European tongues. This turns Europe into a linguistic echo chamber, where the historicist narratives of documentary reverberate, replicating themselves ad infinitum and breeding an indifference to other histories that would complicate their world.

How else to explain the missed opportunity of the precious multi-volume *Encyclopedia of the Documentary Film*,¹⁴ which – despite plenty of information in English and multilingual formats – misses nearly all the major pioneers in Asian documentary, including the likes of Kidlat Tahimik (Philippines), Wu Wenguang (China), Byun Young-ju (Korea) and Anand Patwardan (India). This is a book that projects the comprehensiveness of the moniker 'encyclopedia' yet eschews an entry on India, one of the largest producers of documentary in the world, for a single biography of feature film-maker Satyajit Ray (which doesn't even mention Ray's documentaries)! On the other hand, there are several pages of information on Louis Malle's *Phantom India* (1969) and Robert Gardner's *Forest of Bliss* (1986). Disengaged from the issue of translation, *Encyclopedia of Documentary Film* is reminiscent of the brilliant building Hegel's blind man constructs through his 'inner Sun of self-consciousness'. It is a magnificent work on a very flawed foundation.

Moreover, as I argued in *Cinema Babel: Translating Global Cinema*,¹⁵ a close look at actual translation practices reveals

a lot about the inequality of languages in translation flows. From the perspective of much of the world, the documentary scenes of Europe and North America appear hermetically sealed – put another way, provincial. While film-makers around the globe are deeply familiar with the history of European and North American documentary, the typically parochial film-makers from those regions are remarkably disinterested in learning about their colleagues. A side-effect of historicism is that an enormous amount of information is translated, films subtitled and then transported to other parts of the world from Europe, but the barest of trickles flows towards that bright inner light illuminating the ‘heartlands’ of documentary.

This would be the perfect time to stop and ask what to do with Grierson. It is probably no exaggeration to say that most documentary in Asia has, historically speaking, been ‘Griersonian’. But it would also be rather wrong to say this – historically inaccurate, if you will. It is true that most documentaries from the 1930s to recent memory have used voiceover narration, incorporated fictional strategies, served governments (foreign or domestic – who else in Asia could afford film-making in the age of celluloid?), concentrated on victims and assumed films could change the world, while – as Brian Winston puts it – fleeing from social meaning. These are, indeed, the hallmarks of the cinema we associate with the British producer, but to subsume all such film-making practices under the sign ‘Grierson’ is a prototypically historicist move. It positions the British documentary movement as a ‘dawn’ whose light enflames the hearts of documentary film-makers across the empire, and then the world. Alternatively, it is a root sending up a sturdy tree trunk from which branches spread across the sky ... or the root of a particularly aggressive weed that swiftly blankets the Earth; take your pick.

True, the Griersonian method was translated to different parts of the world. While most readers might take this in the metaphorical sense, I believe it behooves us to constantly turn to the actual translations of these ideas. Doing so will bring out the full complexity of these interactions. Consider the Japanese case, which I unpack and analyse at great length in an entire chapter of *Cinema Babel*.¹⁶

As in most countries in the world, Japan started with actualities and newsreels, before longer and more complex forms of non-fiction appeared on the scene in the 1920s and 30s. There were early experimental documentaries, shot both by amateurs and famous intellectuals like philosopher Nakai Masakazu. The first feature-length documentaries were hybrid speech films, produced at the coming of sound, called montage films, but these were joined by expedition films, war records, science films and PR films for Japan’s imperial adventures on the continent. Then, as the war in China escalated at the end of the 30s, film-makers turned to a more expository mode with synch sound and a mingling of scripted action, interview and

documentary footage. Kamei Fumio made his city trilogy: the strongly observational *Shanghai* (1938), the city symphony *Peking* (1938) and the subversively edited (and ultimately suppressed) *Tatakau heitai* [*Fighting Soldiers*] (1939). Kamei and other film-makers swiftly elaborated non-fiction cinema into what appears to be Griersonian documentary just as Paul Rotha’s *Documentary Film* took the film scene by storm.¹⁷ Within a short while, four competing translations appear and spawned debates in the pages of journals and on the film studio lots. Before this flurry of translation activity he was, basically, unknown.

On the face of it, the Rotha translation evidences Grierson’s influence. However, the story is far more complicated. First, it is significant that the Japanese film-makers began making their ‘Griersonian’ *before* the British Embassy screened the British movement’s work. When Kamei finally read Rotha (to this day, no one ever talks about Grierson in Japan), he was mainly happy to see that people thought like they did over on the other side of the world.

There might be another reason for this consonance. Looking closely at the Japanese translations, one sees that – thanks to both intense censorship of Rotha’s more political ideas and also to remarkably bad translation – Japanese film-makers were reading a Rotha cut to the measure of their desires. Every sentence had problems, and many of these problems involved projecting local understandings of documentary into Rotha’s text. But these impoverished, competing versions were also remarkably productive, though not exactly the book read in Great Britain. This demonstrates how the translation of words can only imperfectly overcome the barriers that language difference throws up to the supposedly free circulation of ideas and the films they inform. It calls for a renovation in the way we think of western ‘influence’.

That Japanese film-makers produced Griersonian documentary without knowing Grierson suggests some provocative implications for anyone interested in the non-fiction form and its histories, whether in Asia or beyond. ‘Griersonian documentary’ should be dropped for neutral terms like ‘expository’ for much of the world. Should we do so, we will stop seeing an idea take root in Europe and branch across the world through direct influence, and see figures like Kamei and Grierson as contemporaries living in very different temporalities. The decisive difference is that Grierson had (and has) the British Empire at his back, so his blinding sun rose and never set, at least in the West. And as for Kamei, he’s left in the waiting room of history. It is stunning, through unsurprising, that so few western experts of documentary know this incredible film-maker.

This brings me to the issue of ‘The East’ as a region – which, as Hegel reminds us, is a direction and not a territory. In asking for a chapter that accounts for Asia, the editor of this volume admitted that, ‘putting these areas

together only makes sense geographically'. Indeed, geographically speaking this chapter purports to 'cover' three-fifths of the world's land mass where half the human race resides. As Prasanjit Duara writes in his recent essay 'Asia Redux',¹⁸ this means that any idea of Asia must be marked by 'flexibility and pluralism'. So let us loosen 'Asia' from its cartographic moorings and consider what Asian documentary is, and has been, and what it is now becoming.

Duara's essay argues for a new emerging conception of Asia in this post-Cold War moment. He quotes Henri Lefebvre to set a basic premise: that 'powerful systems such as capitalism create the space they require'.¹⁹ Capitalism itself drives energies across national borders and it easily traverses regions. It is a de-territorialising force, particularly in its present neo-liberal incarnation. Documentary tends to have an ambivalent relationship to capital, as it clearly does not lend itself to capitalism's hunger for profit, while proving to be a ubiquitous tool of centripetal nationalist aspirations. Wherever one looks across the Asian region, from the 1910s on, documentary has served as a key mechanism to solicit identification and integration, whether it is with an empire, a nation, or a supra-national body like the 'proletariat'.

Documentary cinema was left untouched by these intellectual currents. Quite the contrary, it served colonial masters almost exclusively and there probably was no conception of 'Asian documentary' per se. However, as Japan's ambitions grew and its territories expanded, so too did an intensifying rhetoric around the idea of Asian cinema. In the early to mid-1930s, the map was directional: Japanese critics and bureaucrats spoke of '*nanpo*' (southward) and '*hokuho*' (northward) films. The former conceived of cinema sweeping across Taiwan, then a colony, and to its protectorates in the South Pacific; the latter projected across Korea and Sakhalin, deep into the continent. As Japan barrelled towards world war, the rhetoric transformed into a broadly inclusive vision of Asia – most of which would belong to Japan. At this point, and I can only speak to the Japanese context, the first significant conceptualisation of an 'Asian cinema' appeared in a book called *Ajia Eiga no Sozo oyobi Kensetsu* (*The Creation and Construction of Asian Cinema*, 1940), which was published months before Pearl Harbor. A book like Ichikawa's was inevitable at this point in time, precisely because it had become possible to imagine such a thing as 'Asian cinema'. The proof was in the films which, aside from their host of pleasures, documented the emergence of a heady Asian modernity of bustling urban spaces filled with cafés, smoky cabarets, smart fashion, crime and money. Movie theatres were a key part of this newly built environment, significant for the buildings themselves as well as the celebratory documents they featured inside. These documents – both fictive and documentary – were projected across the Asian region in every which direction. Naturally, this has an ugly edge as

well, as Japan actively took up the task of creating and constructing Asian cinema as it colonised most of the region.

Under Japanese imperialism's modernisation of institutions, cinema benefited greatly. Documentary film achieved uncommon prestige in Japan and its territories throughout the 1930s and early 40s, precisely because it served imperial projects in such a spectacular fashion. Wherever the Japanese military or settlers went, standing studios were appropriated and new ones built. The industry was infused with capital and, when the war dragged on, the industrial structures were nationalised and rationalised, but the flow of film stock and finished prints was relatively protected until the very end. The prestige of documentary even infected the feature film. If a global characteristic of documentary in this era was fictionalisation and re-enactment, a local variation was the widespread incorporation of documentary convention by feature film-makers. And because of this prestige, the Japanese-language writings on documentary from this era are incomparably richer than the English-language archive in both size and depth. There are many specialised journals and books, but the topic was also broached in the popular press and by major writers and philosophers. This was all brought to a close shortly before the atomic bomb laid waste to Nagasaki.

In the rubble of the various film industries, the old colonial powers reinserted themselves and busied themselves with the resurrection of film units and bureaus in places like Saigon, Manila, Seoul, Taipei and Jakarta (although the only episode in this important story known in the West is the last one, and then only because Joris Ivens's name is attached to it). This all sorted out, with varying degrees of violence, as the post-war, post-colonial flux gave way to the certainties of Cold War nationalisms. With few exceptions (mainly rabble-rousing communists and avant-garde artists in Japan), the documentary served the nation-state, capitalist industrial expansion, or, typically, both. In fact, one of the largest producers across the region became the USIS, the propaganda wing of the United States State Department.

A renewed idea of 'Asian cinema' emerged in the mid-1950s, when studio heads Nagata (from Daiei in Japan) and the Shaw brothers (Hong Kong) spearheaded the Motion Picture Producers Association of South-east Asia and its yearly event, the South-east Asian Film Festival (which was shortly thereafter changed to Asia Film Festival).²⁰ This was a self-consciously Cold War initiative, as countries like the newly formed North Korea and the People's Republic of China were excluded. Their goal was to promote distribution and exchange of personnel within 'free Asia'.

Ironically, the supra-regional interchange between the West and its Cold War allies hardly helped Asian film-makers, as only a handful of auteurs like Kurosawa and Ray managed any success at cracking those markets. In the

era of Bandung and ASEAN, this indifference enabled film-makers in Asia to think and act regionally. However, if we may speak of an emergent 'Asian cinema', the idea of 'Asian documentary' is another problem. The Asia Film Festival was all about the fiction film, which rode capitalism's de-territorialising energies wherever it could. Non-fiction film, tied as it was to national projects, never enjoyed this intra-regional circulation. It was a cinema, after all, for captive audiences. Thus, there was no 'Asian documentary' during the second half of the twentieth century.

Thankfully, the situation changed drastically with the end of the Cold War and we are seeing Asian documentary coalesce before our very eyes. In the post-Cold War situation, writes Duara, 'Regionalism has clearly strengthened, emerging as an intermediate zone between the deterritorializing impulses of capitalism and the territorial limits of nationalism.'²¹ While neo-liberalism is inventing novel forms of exploitation across Asia (which documentarists are dutifully documenting), it is no doubt an exciting era that leaves absorption or rejection for 'interconnection and encounter'.²²

I want to conclude by looking closely at one such encounter, or rather series of encounters, that vastly influenced the current situation while providing a barometer of its steady development. It took place in the northern mountains of Japan in 1989: the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival, the first of its kind in Asia.

As organisers planned the festival, they watched the Berlin Wall fall and the massacre in Tiananmen Square take place. Huge changes were afoot, and the implications for documentary were tantalising but obscure. The festival was organised by the local city with the help of Ogawa Shinsuke, whose collective had been living and filming in a nearby village for over fifteen years. This was the most unlikely of locations for a documentary film festival, but with a healthy budget they were able to invite Jon Jost

(USA), Robert Kramer (France/USA), Marceline Loridan (France), Nestor Almendros (Cuba/USA), Johan van der Keuken (The Netherlands), Monica Flaherty (USA), and many others. Joris Ivens was to come, but he passed away several months before the festival.

Most of those film-makers were represented in the international competition, but not a single Asian film-maker made the cut. This was distressing to the organisers, so they held a panel discussion to enquire into the state of documentary in Asia. The panelists included Tsuchimoto Noriaki (Japan), Stephen Teo (Malaysia), Nick Deocampo (Philippines), Teddie Co (Philippines), Zarul Albakri (Malaysia), (Peggy) Chiao Hsiung-ping (Taiwan), Kong Su-Chang (South Korea), Manop Udomdej (Thailand) and Kidlat Tahimik (Philippines), with Hong Ki-Seong (South Korea) and Tian Zhuangzhuang (mainland China) unable to attend for political reasons. Posing the question, 'Why are there no Asian films in the competition?' Ogawa asked all the representatives to talk about the situation in their respective countries. It lasted more than a day, with story after story about the political and economic obstacles confronting documentary film-makers. At the end of a long day, people boiled with both frustration and the determination to work together somehow and do something about their situation. At the same time, the historical nature of their gathering became clear and, near the end, Kidlat Tahimik invoked the Oberhausen Manifesto and proposed a declaration of their own. At the end of the festival, they had a press conference where they signed it. Here is an excerpt of the Yamagata Manifesto:

We, the Asian Film-makers present here, at the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival '89, call attention to the sad absence of any Asia film in the competition ... We ask then in earnest ... why are the documentaries 'of quality and of interest' that enter the international exchange of information mainly in the hands of those countries who have the material resources to realize these films? We note, with regret, that there exist many obstacles to the opportunities for our film visions to be produced and disseminated in the real world dominated by political and market motivations. We acknowledge, with sadness, that these institutional roadblocks originate from a complex mix of third-world realities as well as international imbalances. We accept, with concern, that these cannot be eradicated overnight. But we believe that these obstacles can be overcome only with concerted efforts by ourselves, the Asian filmmakers, for a start ... with support from the energies generated at international gatherings like YIDFF, committed to the belief that independent social and personal documentaries are invaluable to present and future generations. Therefore, we the Asian filmmakers present here, declare our commitment to maintain a network of

Yamagata International Documentary Festival: ... not a single Asian film-maker made the cut. This was distressing to the organisers, so they held a panel discussion to inquire into the state of documentary in Asia



Asian Filmmakers sharing of our visions, as well as our problems and solutions. We dramatize here, our desire to plant the seeds for the renaissance of independent documentary filmmaking in our region. We affirm here with optimism, our determination to seek, develop and implement approaches to deal with the obstacles, so that future international events like YIDFF will not be short of good Asian films. We declare here, the SPIRIT of the independent Asian documentary filmmakers is alive! And will one day, soar with the wind!²³

The following year, Yamagata established its Asia Programme, now called New Asian Currents. The consonant Japanese name is actually far more evocative: *Ajia Senpa Banpa*, or, literally, 'The Countless Onrushing Waves of Asia'. The biennial event quickly became the hub of documentary film-making across the region. Every year, it became larger and larger. The films became more powerful and finely produced. Within years they were not only in the international competition, but winning the grand prize. The festival became a site where waves of Asian filmmakers arrived every other year. They showed their new works, and saw the variety of documentary being shot around Asia and the world. Furthermore, Yamagata's large retrospectives provided Asian film-makers the rare opportunity to view the canonical documentaries of Europe they had been reading about (this was still before documentaries were readily available on video or the internet). In no time, the far-flung network the manifesto signers envisioned became a palpable reality. Some of these encounters were fateful; for example, Chinese documentary would look completely different today had not Wu Wenguang and Duan Jinchuan encountered Ogawa Shinsuke in 1991 and Fredrick Wiseman in 1993. New documentary film festivals, from low-key queer events to major government-sponsored festivals, appeared in steady succession; they explicitly modelled themselves on Yamagata and its regional focus. Thus, the 'countless onrushing waves' bounced off Japanese shores, spread across Asia only to bounce once again in every direction. Here's the evidence: twelve years after the Yamagata Manifesto, the 2011 New Asian Currents programme was crafted from 705 entries from sixty-three countries.

This statistic is impressive. It indicates vast changes in the conditions for documentary. These include the invention of digital video (DV), which brought images captured on camcorders in competition with 16mm (which was almost exclusively the medium of industry and government). Editing became increasingly easier with its migration to PCs. These personal computers came into the reach of a rising middle class of artists across Asia, just as dictatorships fell and censorship loosened. Whereas most Asian video documentary in the 1980s and 90s was being shot by political collectives (for example, Green Team in

Taiwan and PURN in Korea), by the turn of the century there were independent documentaries of every variety being produced in nearly every country, while government documentary migrated to national television networks or simply stopped altogether. In other words, government and capital lost its totalising grip on the form just as a vast network of independent artists, schools and events emerged. A century after François-Constant Girel stepped off a boat in Singapore, we can finally say that there is, beyond a doubt, something called 'Asian documentary' and it calls for a remapping of the roads to that province called 'Europe'.

NOTES

1. Arvind-Pal Mandair, *Religion and the Spectre of the West* (Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 394.
2. G. W. F. Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, trans. Leo Rauch (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1988), p. 92.
3. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 8.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
6. What's more, the WFPL itself was inspired by a Japanese Worker's Camera Club in New York City according to Fred Sweet, Eugene Roscow and Allan Francovich, 'Pioneers: An Interview with Tom Brandon', *Film Quarterly* vol. 26 no. 5, February 1931, pp. 26–7. Significantly, German left-wing film-makers found inspiration in Prokino through an article by playwright Senda Koreya, who was living in Europe at the time: Senda Koreya, 'Proletarische Film-Bewegung in Japan', *Arbeiterbuehne und Film* vol. 18 no. 2, February 1931, pp. 26–7. Prokino's efforts were far more ambitious than its western counterparts, having established seven branches across Japan, forty-eight films and more than six books and five film journals. These and more are reprinted, along with several films, in the historiography of the proletarian film movements (English): Makino Makino Mamoru, 'Rethinking the Emergence of the Proletarian Film League of Japan', in Abé Mark Nornes and Aaron Gerow (eds), *In Praise of Film Studies: Essays in Honor to Makino Mamoru* (Victoria: Trafford/Kinema Club, 2001), <https://www.cjpubs.lsa.umich.edu/electronic/facultyseries/list/series/prewar/journals.php>. Accessed 5 October 2012.
7. For more information, see my *Japanese Documentary Film: The Meiji Era to Hiroshima* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).
8. Analysis of these films may be found in my *Forest of Pressure: Ogawa Shinsuke and Postwar Japanese Film* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
9. Sol Worth and John Adair, *Through Navajo Eyes* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1972). Worth and Adair distributed 8mm film cameras to Navajo collaborators. Adair explained: 'We wanted to fulfil Malinowski, the famous anthropologist of the twenties,

- who said that the first duty of the ethnographer is to see the culture through the eyes of the natives themselves, to see their world through their own eyes' (Peter D'Agostino, 'Visual Anthropology: An Interview with John Adair', *Wide Angle* vol. 4 no. 3, 1980, p. 61). Worth and Adair believed that the films showed they had achieved this ambition (Larry Gross, 'Sol Worth and the Study of Visual Communications', *Studies in Visual Communications* vol. 6 no. 3, Autumn 1980, pp. 3ff.). However, this can be disputed (Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real II* [London: BFI, pp. 179–80]).
10. I explore this problem at length in *Forest of Pressure*, see especially pp. 113–27, 197–216, 228–30.
 11. Ken Erikawa, Stephen Teo and Yano Kazuyuki (eds), *Asia Symposium 1989* (Tokyo: YIDFF, 2007), p. 38.
 12. See Yuriko Furuhashi, 'Returning to Actuality: Fukeiron and the Landscape Film', *Screen* vol. 48 no. 3, Autumn 2007. Adachi eventually spent nearly two decades in exile in Lebanon. Jasper Sharp, 'Interview: Adachi Masao', *Midnight Eye* 21 August 2007, http://www.midnighteye.com/interviews/masao_adachi.shtml. Accessed 5 October 2012.
 13. Wheeler W. Dixon, *Exploding Eye: A Re-visionary History of 1960s American Experimental Cinema* (New York: SUNY Press, 1997), p. 84.
 14. Ian Aitken, *Encyclopedia of the Documentay Film* (New York: Routledge, 2006).
 15. See my *Cinema Babel: Translating Global Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
 16. An earlier, but more readily accessible version of this chapter may be found online in *Screening the Past 7* (July 1999): <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/screeningthepast/firstrelease/fr0799/MNfr7c.htm>. Accessed 5 October 2012. It originally appeared as 'Pôru Rûta and the Politics of Translation', *Cinema Journal* vol. 38 no. 3 Spring 1999, but was reprinted in John Izod and Richard Kilborn with Matthew Hibberd (eds), *Breaking Boundaries: From Grierson to Docu-Soap* (Luton: University of Luton Press, 1999); Mona Baker (ed.), *Critical Readings in Translation Studies* (London: Routledge, 2009); and Mona Baker (ed.), *Translation Studies: Critical Concepts in Linguistics*, Vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 2009).
 17. Paul Rotha, *Documentary Film* (London: Faber, 1935).
 18. Prasanjit Duara, 'Asia Redux', *The Journal of Asian Studies* vol. 69 no. 4, November 2010.
 19. *Ibid.*, p. 963.
 20. A forthcoming book by SangJoon Lee explores the role of the Asian Film Festival in rich detail.
 21. Duara, 'Asia Redux', p. 974.
 22. *Ibid.*, p. 978.
 23. The Asian Filmmakers at Yamagata YIDFF, 'The Yamagata Manifesto', in Erikawa, Teo and Kazuyuki, *Asia Symposium 1989*, p. 63.