

Report of the Special Session of Pop Culture in Asia in the 11<sup>th</sup> SCA

“The landscape of Mongolia -- the formation of a steppe image in East Asia.”

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It was in 2008 that the Special Session “Pop Culture in Asia --Comparison of Film Culture” began as part of the SCA, proposed by Professor Shozo Fujii, a member of the Science Council of Japan. This is the fourth time that our workshop has been held at the SCA, and through the experience of the past three workshops we have gained the profound understanding the importance of interexchange with local people.

In the first year in Qingdao, in China, under the title “the Comparison of Film Culture,” three researchers of Asian films from China, Singapore and Japan discussed how other countries’ films were received in their countries. A Korean Chinese film researcher commentated on these three reports.

In the second year, in Singapore, our session was run in conjunction with the School of Humanities and Social Sciences of Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in Singapore, and the session was in two halves. One was the Academic discussion in the morning under the title “Families in the films of Asia.” There, four Asian film researchers from Singapore, China, Korea, and Japan discussed how Asian films depict families and the Chair person commentated on these four reports. The other half was the roundtable discussion “The past, present and future development of Singapore movies,” participants in the discussion included local Singaporean panelists such as screenwriters, film critics, and film researchers. This full day session was held in a room with 80 seats, and was filled to capacity all day long.

The Manila conference was the third and was held under the title “Memories of the Past and the Present in the Films of Asia”. This conference explored Asian documentary films and the historic perspective of memory in a recent film in the chinese language “Lust, Caution” which has been most popular and controversial for the last few years.

Each time the special session was held, we made conscious efforts to

invite local speakers and audiences to join our session. For example, in Singapore, thanks to the great efforts of Dr. Kwan, an assistant professor of Nanyang Technological University (NTU), a big audience attended our session and we were able to exchange opinions enthusiastically.

Therefore, in this fourth session, we focused on local issues under the title “The landscape of Mongolia -- the formation of a steppe image in East Asia.” Thanks to the generous support of Mr. Dawagiv, the director of the international cooperation department of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences, we were able to invite two Mongolian film directors to our session as speakers and could also welcome a local audience to take part in our discussion.

Our session consisted of three parts. Firstly, Dr. Hirokawa’s lecture and the showing of a Japanese documentary about Mongolia followed by commentary by Prof. Chimid and Mr. Khishigt, with discussion. Secondly, the lecture of Prof. Chimid and the showing of recent Mongolian films followed by commentary by Prof. Kim and Dr. Kwan, with discussion. Finally, the round table session was focused on discussing the session and what we had learned as a whole.

To begin with, we might as well ask why we need to discuss film? Is there any significance in examining film?

Actually, in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, film was regarded as the outcome of the most advanced scientific innovation, and also as the most popular entertainment, thus it spread over almost all the world within a few years. Film made it possible for people in different countries to witness places and people that they had never visited or met in reality. In that sense, film has been a window onto other worlds and a tool for understanding different cultures since the age of Lumière and Edison.

I’d like to introduce an article of 28-June- 2011 published in the Mongolian newspaper “the UB POST.” It said that: Even though in the old days Mongolians themselves didn’t have any cameras or writing tools they could use, they attracted the interest of many foreigners. Therefore, today we have descriptions of Mongolians from a foreigner’s point of view.” It

mentioned Marco Polo's diary, and some photographs taken by foreigners. Because of this kind of indigenous situation in Mongolia, film would have been especially eloquent, as it was able to record the Mongolian's habits and rituals in everyday life with moving images.

Our session started with an opening address by Prof. Fujii, a professor of University of Tokyo, one of the most famous Chinese Literature scholars in the world, who is also the person who initially put our session into practice at the SCA and has led it for these four years.

In the first part, we saw a film made by two Japanese men almost 90 years ago, 'Crossing Mongolia' preceded by a lecture by Dr. Hirokawa, a researcher of socio-economic history of Mongolia and Northeastern China, who is an associate professor of Niigata University.

The film "Crossing Mongolia" was discovered by Dr. Hirokawa herself, and restored by Nihon University. And this is the first time it has been screened outside the university since its restoration. It includes various shots of Mongolian society in the 1920's, such as the shots of markets in Barin, Mongolian wrestling, religious ceremonies and hunting by the Mongolian Royalty. Thanks to Dr. Hirokawa's very detailed explanation, we could understand the background of the film and the deep relationship between Japan and Mongolia in the 1920's. The following is a summary of her lecture:

"Crossing Mongolia" was produced by USUKI Masuzou 薄益三 and USUKI Moriji 薄守次, in Inner Mongolia. This film is interesting because it was made in Inner Mongolia in the 1920's, when lots of social and political changes occurred there. It was also interesting because the film was produced by two Japanese, who were well known as Tairiku Ronin (outlaws in Manchuria and China).

The two producers, Masuzo and Moriji were from Tsugawa 津川, where originally belonged to Fukushima prefecture, the Aizu 会津 domain (Han 藩). It is important to talk about the history of this region, because its background affected these two people's career very much. The Aizu

domain was defeated in Boshin Battle 戊辰戦争 in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Boshin Battle was a war between the new Meiji government and the old Bakufu supporters. The Aizu domain was on the old Bakufu side. After the Boshin Battle, Aizu people were not allowed to have official posts in the new Meiji government. Therefore, the people of this region were tend to get interested in seeking fortune outside Japan in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Japan itself had great interest in Asia and strengthened its influence in these areas. Therefore, many people from the Aizu domein went to Korea ,Manchuria and China. USUKI Masuzo was also a one of them and joined the front Army in the Russo-Japanese War, and went into business in northern Korea. A few years later, he moved to Manchuria, where his nephew Moriji joined Masuzo's activity.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Outer Mongolia and Inner Mongolia were under the rule of Qing dynasty, but in 1911, the Xinhai revolution occurred in China, Outer Mongolia had declared the independence , but Inner Mongolia remained in Republican China . Inner Mongolian people hoped to unify the nation as one Mongolia, but they could not do so because of the international power balance at that time.

As a fact, the Japanese Army planned to separate Inner Mongolia and Northeastern China from Republican China. Masuzo and Moriji co-operated with the Japanese Army, and they joined in the troops of Inner Mongolia. Although Masuzo and Moriji helped their military movements, they were defeated by the Chinese troops. However, through these movements, Masuzo and Moriji had got powerful connections with an influential person in Inner Mongolia and Northeastern China.

On the other hand, after the Xinhai revolution, the Mongolian Princes lost their privileges under the Qing dynasty and they had to be faced with financial difficulties. Therefore the Mongolian princes started to invite the Chinese peasants and allowed them to cultivate the pasture land in Mongolia. In 1914, Masuzo and Moriji loan money to the Mongolian prince Jagar, in return they leased the Mongolian land from Jagar and they built a company in Barin. At that time, they planned to develop the Mongolian natural resources such as wool, meat of sheep.

They aimed to invite Japanese investors to Inner Mongolia.

However, ZHANG Zuolin 張作霖, a famous warlord in Manchuria, tried to eliminate the Japanese power and disturbed their activities in this region. Therefore Masuzo and Moriiji lost their interests in Barin. Although they had selfish idea of earning money in Mongolia, they also love the culture of the Mongolian society. Afterwards, in 1920<sup>th</sup>, Masuzo and Moriiji came back to Barin to advertise Mongolian natural resources. They got the financial aid from the South Manchurian Railway Company. In the 1920's, Moriiji made the film "Crossing Mongolia". But the South Manchurian Railway Company was not interested in the documentary film. So Masuzo and Moriiji showed the film to people in various areas in Japan.

This film includes various shots of changing Inner Mongolia. For example, we can see the transition of Mongolian society from nomadic one to agrarian one. We can also see the traditional Mongolian culture and customs.

(Hirokawa, Saho)

We must admit that the purpose of the film was partly supported by the Imperialistic interests, but nevertheless, the film itself was so fresh and provocative for the audience, the Mongolian speakers showed their surprise in their commentary, and requested to watch it from the beginning to the end. In order to respect the local speakers and audience, we changed our initial time schedule, and screened the whole film in the third part during our round table discussion. Prof. Kim from Korea, a professor of Dong-guk University, pointed out the very interesting fact that "Crossing Mongolia" was shown in Korea during the Japanese colonial era, at Hasegawa Public Hall(長谷川公會堂) in Seoul in December 1926. He found this fact in an article in 'Dong'-A Daily Newspaper. He also commentated on this film in detail. A summary of his commentary follows:

Starting with the so-called "Age of Discovery" at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Europeans began to make their own "travelogues" in earnest. They traveled around Asia and Africa continents, devalued the non-Europeans, and depicted Asians and Africans as "others" comparing

to “superior” Europeans. “Otherness” is the concept of exclusion from European ego, so to speak. Europeans established and completed their own subjectivity through writing those “travelogues” of exploring “others,” whom they wanted to subordinate. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there got to come out the works of “ethnography” in European society. The “ethnography” can be defined as follows: “a scientific research and description in economy, social system, and cultural tradition of undeveloped people.” “Crossing Mongolia” is also can be read as a work of ethnography. The two Japanese filmed the beautiful natural scenery of Mongolia, and showed it to the public. It was nothing different with the act of European colonialists, who wanted to introduce “the uncivilized world” to “the civilized world.” On this point of view, my first question starts: If “otherness” created by Westerners had been begun with “the perfection of European ego,” how could we explain “otherness” created by Japanese?

We can assume that “Crossing Mongolia” was tremendously popular at that time. This film was even showed at the Japanese imperial palace. The modern society was regarded as the age of visuals, and also as the age of “representation.” In the representation system, there is always a power structure between an “observer” and an “observed.” Once the representation was showed, people would have a fixed idea of the object. In that sense, dose “Crossing Mongolia” only focus on describing the Mongolia’s primitiveness, ignoring “a distance between representation and reality”? How truthfully dose this film depict the real Mongolian society at that time?

(Kim, Yongsu)

In the second part, Prof. Chimid, a professor at the Mongolian University of Radio and Television, delivered a lecture on the development of Mongolian documentary films, showing the documentary films that he had directed, one about Mongolian history and another about the great nature of Western Mongolia. The former film utilized various archival film clips, produced, for example by the French company PATHE in the 1910’s and by

Russian filmmakers in the 1920's. The second film beautifully depicted the mountainous landscape in western Mongolia that challenges our preconception of the steppe image of Mongolia. Also, a well-known Mongolian director Mr. Khishigt spoke about his experience as a director of environmental film and emphasized the importance of protecting the wild landscape of Mongolia. The following is the summary of Prof. Chimid's lecture:

In the end of nineteenth century in 1895, the cinema was originated in the world. After 33 years, the Mongolian national cinema was originated in 1938.

"Mongol Kino", the hearth of Mongolian cinema, was governed by the state and its first creation was a documentary film, due to undeveloped communication, transportation, radio and media in Mongolian great broad, the government considered that cinema is the main media to communicate all new actions in society life of the country to herders who lived in further countryside. So cinema, documentary films were greatly attended, the communicative documentary films which shows changes of nation mentality and creation of society life, were dominantly made in order to exterminate upcoming actions in Mongolian society and country's anachronism. Especially, the government designated the slogan "Nation should know their motherland" in order to introduce natural scene of mother land, its resources and its historical scene to people and cognitive documentary films were greatly produced.

Indeed, Mongolian landscape wasn't harmed then, deserts, steppe, forests were abundant for series of quarries, lakes and rivers were abundant for series of fish and waterfowl.

Until the end of twentieth century or in last generation, because of little changes of Mongolian landscape, patterns of people's life, the government attended greatly to protect landscape and buffeted conflicts and its emergence. Therefore, the main topic of Mongolian documentary films in the end of twentieth century was motherland, its beautiful nature, its natural recourses and also the movies shows patterns of life, tradition of nation, was considerably popular.

Since the late 80s, because of the beginning of the changes in Mongolian landscape and climate, documentary films with the topic of protect landscape such as “Taastiin Tsagaan Nuur”, “Har Mur Uldeh Yosgui” were created.

In 21<sup>st</sup> century, industrialization and the mining sector are developing rapidly in Mongolia and the changes in landscape and patterns of life are arising therefore, the topic of protecting landscape and Mongolian life is arranged censorious.

(T. Chimid)

Regarding their talks and films, Prof. Kim raised the question of the indigenous viewpoints of Mongolian directors. Then, Dr. Kwan from Singapore, an assistant professor of the Nanyang Technological University, pointed out the problems of decoding moving images, arguing that landscapes in moving images are also value loaded. Owing to their thought-provoking commentary, we were able to deepen our discussion. The summary of Prof. Kwan’s commentary is as follows:

Before we analyze the documentary ‘The natural landscape of Mongolia’ filmed by Director Chimid, perhaps it is beneficial for us to delve into some rudimentary concepts that may help us to understand the perspective of his documentary. These critical concepts probe the very nature of typology, documentary and historiography.

In the past, typology is always seen as an ideologically free concept.

Usually, when one describes natural environment, natural resource or natural landscape, we would expect these landscapes are free of human influence. But are they really so? If we can still recall the impact of the cultural turn in geography studies more than 3 decades ago, the works of David Harvey, Manuel Castells, and not to mention Michel Foucault have already alarmed us that no geography studies are apolitical. Natural landscape may only mean an area which is deliberately crafted and designed for the preservation of certain unique landscape. Natural, after all, is a relative concept.

Likewise, if compared to featured film, documentary film is also once



deemed as a transparent tool to record historical or social event by means of moving images. In the process of producing the documentary, the narrative will try to present an unobstructed view which is without any primordial and preoccupied stand point. But as we know, documentary is no less than any other cultural production. How would a cultural product not to convey any prescribed messages to its audience?

Chimid's documentary shows a great deal of unparalleled picturesque scenery which are taken in Khovd province, Uys province and in Mountain of kharkhiraatugen. All those splendid moving images are presented in a lucid way. It is perhaps too lucid that one would lose oneself into the images. Indeed, Chimid's film is actually demonstrating the desert, mountain, landscape all are the discursive production of Mongolia nationality. And by preserving the natural landscape by this technique free documentary, the director is trying to reinforce and re-present an artifact (i.e. documentary) that contains something which its author wished to be remembered for some duration. And if seen in this light, I would say the documentary has already served a larger purpose, it is the medium selected by the Mongolian director who would like to use the iconic images of Mongolia to formulate a collective memory of Mongolia.

(Uganda Sze-pui Kwan)

In the third part of the special session, we held our round table discussion and screened the film "Crossing Mongolia" in its entirety so that we could exchange our opinions on specific shots freely, and could also clarify the similarities and differences between the past and the present, as well as the foreigner's viewpoint and the Mongolian's viewpoint, not only as regards the landscape of Mongolia, but also as regards broader aspects of Mongolian society.

At the end of our session, Prof. Fujii gave us a closing remark, referring to the novel "Blue Wolf" written in the 1960's by the Japanese novelist INOUE YSUSHI. And he gave a beautiful conclusion to our full day

session. His comments are as follows :

The documentary film, “Crossing Mongolia,” shot by two Japanese gentlemen in 1920's surprised us because it depicts the various lives of Mongolians in those days so vividly. But we should remember that this film was supported by the imperialistic interest of Japanese before the war. And after the dissolution of the Japanese empire in 1945 and the construction of Democratic Japan after 1945, Japanese lost the imperialistic but intimate interest in Mongolia.

But in 1960 one of the most famous Japanese authors INOUE Yasushi, who was the principle of the Japan Pen Club, published a novel “Blue Wolf” and it gave Japanese totally new image of Mongolia. This INOUE 's novel depicts the great life of Chinggis Haahn full of wisdom, courage and love in the green steppe. Mongolia and Japan did not have diplomatic relations until 1972 and the Japanese dreamed the most romantic dream about Mongol because of the novel.

The Mongolian people are as courageous as their ancestors and accomplished democratization in the end of the 1980's. As the 21st century arrived, Mongolia has been more and more globalized and has been developing very quickly. This kind of new free and rich situation enables talented filmmakers to produce great documentary films on Mongolian beautiful steppes and mountains.

Under this globalized situation, now we Asian people are right in the time to create new Mongolian image cooperating with the Mongolian people. I hope today's discussion on the landscape of Mongolia can be one of the important milestones in terms of the creation of new Mongolian image.

(Fuji, Shozo)

At the general assembly meeting of the SCA, regarding my report on our session, a member of the SCA from Bangladesh, kindly suggested that not only the historical viewpoint but also other viewpoints, such as, “knowledge of rich and poor,” might be interesting to discuss when we deal with films. During the coffee break of the meeting, another member of the

SCA from India asked me to send the references of our session to him, since he felt that this kind of workshop is quite important especially for his country, India, whose population consists of many ethnic groups with different languages and cultures. It is truly encouraging for us to hear that natural scientists were also interested in our session, and showed their sincere interest in discussing film.

Furthermore, during the next day of our session, an article in the Mongolian newspaper “the UB POST,” introducing the 11<sup>th</sup> SCA, made special mention of our session and stated that the film we presented had “opened a new chapter in Mongolian history.” Unfortunately there are several factual errors in the article, but we are still very pleased to witness the significance of film highlighted by the attention paid to our Special Session locally in Mongolia.