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Secondary school = 中學

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Secondary School Tammy Cheung

Director's Profile

Tammy Cheung is an award winning documentary filmmaker in Hong Kong. She was born in Shanghai in 1958, but grew up in Hong Kong. She studied sociology in Hong Kong and film studies in Montreal, Canada. She has curated film festivals in Canada. She moved back to Hong Kong in 1994. And she became a teacher in her early years. She made her first documentary film *Invisible Women* in 1999, which follows the lives of three Indian women in Hong Kong. Also, she is the founder of Visible Record, which is devoted to producing, distributing, exhibiting and promoting documentary films in Hong Kong. It is a non-profit organization which hosts the annual Chinese Documentary Festival and provides filmmaking training in Hong Kong in order to raise people's interest in documentary films.

Synopsis

This film was filmed in 2002 and exhibited in different cities and countries (e.g. Taipei, Toronto, Munich, Singapore and Seoul etc.) It was shot over three months. It chronicles the daily lives of two prestigious "Band One" secondary schools which are Ying Wa College (boys' school) and St. Catharine's School for Girls (girls' school). The daily activities include morning assemblies, lessons, extra-curricular activities, staff meetings and parent-teacher gatherings. This film observes the Hong Kong education and school system at close-range and explores the teaching objectives and styles, students' common values and the relationship between parents and children.

Production History

Tammy Cheung thinks the theme of the education system is really interesting and that an in-depth look at it is worthwhile. Besides, she regards filming documentary films as a special way to understand key issues, as an alternative to learning through reading books. Cheung was once a teacher and many of her ex-colleagues kept sharing their opinions about the education reforms with her. This became the initial motive for Cheung to make this documentary, for education problems remain serious in Hong Kong. Cheung's view is that while many people have a secondary school education and are familiar with the education system, they may not have thought deeply enough about its problems.

Film Type

Secondary School is a strictly observational documentary. Influenced by American filmmaker Frederick Wiseman, who is considered "the most sophisticated intelligence" in the area of documentary, Cheung employs an observational, non-intrusive approach—that of the Direct Cinema style. The Direct Cinema approach means there is no voice over, background music or even interviews. Cheung adopted this approach in order to remain objective and to provide the viewer with more room to interpret the unfolding realities. Therefore, Cheung used a third person angle in shooting the whole film—the camera does not favor the students' perspective nor that of teachers. Also, Cheung's role in the film is like an invisible bystander and all the scenes are shot straight on, at eye-level. This is how we see things in reality. Thus, viewers will feel like outsiders who are allowed to observe the filmed subject. Like other observational documentary filmmakers opting for Direct Cinema, Tammy Cheung and her camerawoman were described as "flies on the wall."

Specific Features

Although *Secondary School* is filmed in a strictly observational and non-intrusive manner, Cheung still thinks that "No documentary can be absolutely objective." She pointed out that her own stand point is evident in her placement of the camera and how she edits the film. For example, in the first release of the film, there was a scene depicting an overweight girl licking her plate at lunch. However, it was eventually cut by Cheung because she thought this type of student was not common in a Band one school and because she cares about the representativeness of the scene but not the entertaining elements. Thus, we can see that *Secondary School* is an objective film although there may be subjective elements.

Reception

Both positive and negative comments have been made about the film. Those who are positive see *Secondary School* as offering a detailed picture of education in HK, as covering many issues and as offering different perspectives. It is also seen as truly inviting analysis and discussion. The film has attracted different audiences: headmasters, teachers, student organizations from the secondary school and tertiary sectors. It has been even used in connection with the training of teachers. However, some said that Tammy used the teachers' perspective as the main focus but did not provide the students' perspective. They also claimed the arrangement of shots was too choppy. Even worse, some think that *Secondary School* leads to the interpretation of school as a prison.

Background information

Starting from 1994, the government of HK carried out education reform without much planning and very aggressively. The rushed reforms led to lots of problems:

First of all, the EMI system is inflexible. In September 1998, the HKSAR government adopted the language policy of mother-tongue teaching for the public sector schools. Only those secondary schools that have a proven record of successfully using English as the teaching medium are allowed to retain the use of English as the medium of instruction (EMI). A total of 114 secondary Schools are EMI, 22.8% of the total 501 secondary schools in HK. Being an EMI school is equivalent to being an elite school. The EMI system is rigid: schools insist on teaching in English even when it has a negative outcome, especially in practical subjects like Home E (home economics).

Also, the elite culture is dominant, for the government has changed the branding system, from band 1-5 to band 1-3. Students in band 2, now at the margin of band 1, find it difficult to catch up. This kind of elite culture specially was shown in the band 1 schools. Students are always told to be conscious of their important identity and image.

And then, the objective of both teachers' teaching and students' learning seems to entirely exam-oriented. Students just aim at success in the public exam and at the opportunity for further study; very few of them enjoy the activity of learning.

And this leads to the spoon-fed education we see in the film, with students falling asleep in class and no response.

Evaluative Statement

The film encourages viewers to question and review the problems of education in Hong Kong. The film offers viewers a new visual experience by reviewing the education system and encouraging diverse interpretations. The use of "Direct Cinema" in the film functions effectively and allows the director to achieve her goals. The film shows the power the camera has to influence society by successfully prompting widespread public discussion in the educational, social and cultural sectors. Documentary film is a mirror of society and an opportunity to communicate about matters of general, public concern. If the purpose of education is to inspire people to think more and to investigate daily life, then this film is definitely an educational film. It invites us to think about the true purpose and nature of education and study. This film is a good medium for further reflection and discussion, and this helps to promote social improvement.

Discussion Questions

For Form 1-3 students

1. Do you think the HK education system is improving or deteriorating these days?
2. According to the film, what are the factors causing the problematic aspects of the education system in HK?
3. If you were one of the students in either Ying Wa or St. Catharine, how would you feel about the school's discipline and rules?

For Form 4-6 students

4. Do you think the film can offer us a new visual experience of the HK education system? To what extent?
5. Do you find that "Secondary School" differs from other documentary films? (Yes/No). What are the differences/ similarities?
6. Do you think that the use of a direct cinema approach leaves you more room for interpretation?

【中學】張虹

導演資料

張虹是香港紀錄片製作人，曾獲香港獨立短片及錄像比賽公開組金獎及大獎。她在1958年出生於上海，但在香港長大。她分別於香港和加拿大滿地可修讀社會學和電影。她亦曾在滿地可籌辦電影節。她於1994年返回香港，早期曾任老師。1999年開始拍攝紀錄片，第一部作品為《看不見的女人》，紀錄三位印度女人在香港的生活。另外，她是采風電影有限公司的創辦人。采風電影是香港非牟利的藝術教育組織，透過製作、發行，教育和展覽的方式，例如每年舉辦華語紀錄片節及定期提供課程和講座，推廣紀錄片在香港的發展，以增加社會大眾對紀錄片的興趣和認識。

故事大綱

《中學》拍攝於2002年，曾參展不同的國家和城市的電影節（如台北、慕尼黑、新加坡、首爾等）。導演用了三個月時間拍攝，紀錄兩間香港知名的中學的日常生活，兩家中學分別是男校英華書院和女校聖傑靈女子中學。被紀錄的日常活動包括早會、上課、課外活動、老師會議、家長工作坊等。這套紀錄片嘗試了解香港的教育和學校制度，探索老師教學目的和方法、學生的價值觀、老師的處境以及家長與子女的關係。

製作過程

張虹認為香港教育制度是一個相當引人入勝，且值得深入研究的題材。她認為拍攝紀錄片是一種了解事情的特別方法，當中的經驗與透過閱讀或詢問別人去學習大不相同。此外，她曾經是老師，她經常與以前的舊同事討論香港的教育改革。她眼看香港教育問題並沒有得到改善，問題更日趨嚴重，促使她拍攝一齣關於教育制度的紀錄片。她希望透過紀錄片，讓人們重新意識到他們從未真正地深入了解香港的教育和學校制度。

電影風格及類別

《中學》是張虹其中一部堅持運用「直接電影」手法所製作的紀錄片。她採用美國紀錄片大師費特力克·懷斯曼平實的「直接電影」拍攝手法，以觀察的角度拍攝中學裡的情況。「直接電影」指影片中並無旁述，配樂或訪問，目的是讓觀眾有更大的空間理解及分析片中所見所聞。因此，張虹以一個「旁觀者」的角度來拍攝，鏡頭不會放在學生的位置去看老師，也不會放在老師的位置去看學生，而是固定地放在一旁，以第三者的角度觀看事情。而且，張虹以人們平常觀看事物的平視角度來拍攝，讓鏡頭所拍的更具真實感，從「局外人」的角度來看《中學》。故張虹及她的拍攝隊伍也如費特力克·懷斯曼一樣，被形容為「伏在牆上的蒼蠅」，意指像蒼蠅一樣貼在牆上，不動聲色地拍攝中學生活。

其他特點

雖然《中學》一片嚴守「直接電影」和純以觀察的角度拍攝，但張虹坦言「電影都是主觀的，不可能做到絕對客觀。同樣的片段給十個不同的導演去剪輯，會出現十個不同的版本。」她指出個人意見和立場可在攝錄機擺放的位置和剪輯過程中反映出來。但張虹只想在主觀上用比較客觀的方法表達，例如在《中學》試片時，本來有一段片段記錄一個體形肥胖的同學在午膳時把碟子舔得一乾二淨，當時大家都看得哈哈大笑，但由於張虹認為在學校內，這樣的學生不多，故最終把這鏡頭刪去。這可見張虹重視的是片段有沒有代表性，而非是否精采。由此可見，《中學》是一部在主觀環境中盡量達致客觀的紀錄片。

回響

張虹的《中學》放映後，人們作出了正反兩方面的意見。欣賞《中學》的觀眾認為它是香港教育詳細寫實的表述，為眾多的教育問題提供了多元的探討角度。它亦成功地引起了社會各界的討論和分析，吸引了多個層面的觀眾：包括來自中學和大專教育的校長、教師、學生組織等，它甚至被用作教師培訓時的模型。然而，亦有人以為張虹在《中學》中以教師的角度為重心，缺乏以學生的角度展現事件，認為電影片段被剪輯得太零碎，對於事件的描繪不夠完整。更甚者認為中學校園被闡釋作為監獄一樣。

背景資料

自1994年起，香港特區政府對教育制度展開了一連串的改革，然而改革過於急進而且規劃有欠完善。倉促的改革出現大量的問題：

首先，英語教學系統(EMI)過於僵化。1998年9月，香港特區政府對公營中學採取了母語教學的語言政策，只有具紀錄證明成功地使用英語作為教學語言的中學才允許保留使用英語作為教學語言。共114所中學允許保留使用英語作為教學語言，佔香港501所中學的22.8%，由是，作為一所EMI相當於作為一所精英學校。但由於EMI制度失缺彈性，學校教授知識時，甚至是在實用科目，例如家政科等，當效果不如理想仍盲目堅持英語教學，扼殺了學生的潛能和興趣。

此外，精英文化佔主導地位，因為政府已改變了學校的評級制度，由五級制縮減簡化為二級制，原來第一等級邊緣的學生現在被納入第二等級的邊緣，他們難以趕上進度。這種精英文化的情況特別表現在英語教學的第一等級的學校，師長總是告訴學生要意識到自己的身份和形象的重要，過份強調成就。然後，教師的教學和學生的學習目標似乎是完全的考試為本。學生只著眼於取得公開考試的成功及升學的機會，很少享受他們的學習活動。正如影片中，學生在課堂上睡著，對老師的提問甚少作出回應，這種多年來被受批評的填鴨式教育就是在考試為本的教和學的風氣下產生的。

評價

《中學》一片自放映以來，成功引起社會各界人士的輿論，尤其是教育界和文化界對香港教育制度問題的反思和關注。這部紀錄片帶給觀眾關於香港教育問題的另一個視覺體驗，讓觀眾可從另一渠道得知中學教育的模式。張虹所採用的「直接電影」拍攝手法更能給觀眾從一個較客觀中肯的角度去看待事情。假若紀錄片是社會的縮影，藉此予人機會去反思社會問題，那麼《中學》一片便無疑是一部甚具教育意義的紀錄片了。毫無疑問，《中學》是一幅如實反映香港中學校教育的寫照，同時能夠引起各界人士對香港教育的反思。

討論問題

中一到中三級

1. 你認為現時香港的教育制度是在改善途中，還是退步中？
2. 根據《中學》一片，你認為香港教育制度存在甚麼問題？
3. 假如你是英華書院或聖傑靈女子中學內的其中一位學生，你對這兩所中學的校規有何感覺？

中四到中五級

4. 你認為《中學》一片能夠帶出關於香港教育制度的一個新的視覺經驗嗎？
5. 你認為《中學》與其他紀錄片有差別嗎？試述有甚麼相似或相異之處？
6. 你認為張虹所採用的「直接電影」拍攝手法，能讓你有更大的空間去思考片中所見所聞嗎？