



Explorations in transcultural documentary: a study of the *Looking China* Youth Film Project

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The *Looking China* Youth Film Project, organized annually by Beijing Normal University's Academy for International Communication of Chinese Culture, is a unique platform for young filmmakers from around the world to showcase their work and exchange ideas in transcultural documentary filmmaking. Over the past decade, the project has gathered over 804 young filmmakers from 91 countries and regions and has produced over 779 short documentaries that spotlight Chinese people and culture. The project is not only a platform for young filmmakers to showcase their work, but also offers a unique opportunity to explore the intersections of film and culture in a transcultural context. By breaking the monotony of daily life and rediscovering the hidden beauty and meaning behind familiar things, the filmmakers bring new energy and vitality to the documentary genre. Through their gaze, they bridge the gap between the Self and the Other, and foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of Chinese culture. The subjective position of the filmmakers turns into persuasive power that captivates the audience and leads them on a journey of discovery. By using the camera lens as a tool for self-expression and cultural exploration, the *Looking China* project showcases the power of the subjective gaze in filmmaking and highlights the importance of cultural exchange in our rapidly globalizing world.

One of the significant explorations of the *Looking China* Youth Film Project is its approach to transcultural documentary, which explores the interactions and

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relationships between different cultures in contrast to traditional documentary filmmaking which often focuses on a single culture or viewpoint. This approach offers young filmmakers the opportunity to examine Chinese culture from a foreign perspective and to explore the intersections between different cultural experiences. This provides a fresh and nuanced view of Chinese culture and a unique window into the cultural exchange between China and the rest of the world.

Another essential exploration is the emphasis on collaboration and cross-cultural exchange. The project brings together young filmmakers from different countries and cultural backgrounds, allowing them to exchange ideas and perspectives, and gain a deeper understanding of different cultural experiences. This collaborative approach not only produces high-quality documentaries, but also helps build bridges between different cultures and foster greater understanding and respect.

The *Looking China* Youth Film Project also offers a unique opportunity for young filmmakers to experiment with different styles and techniques of documentary filmmaking. By encouraging filmmakers to push the boundaries of traditional documentary filmmaking, the project provides a platform for them to develop their unique voices and create engaging and thought-provoking documentaries.

The project also provides a platform for young filmmakers to engage with audiences and share their documentaries with the broader public. Through screenings and exhibitions of documentaries, young filmmakers have the opportunity to reach a wider audience and engage with others who share their passion for film and culture. This engagement with audiences is not only an important aspect of documentary filmmaking, but also provides a valuable opportunity for young filmmakers to connect with others.

The collaboration between universities is another crucial exploration of the *Looking China* Youth Film Project. By bringing together 87 international teachers from over 78 universities from five continents to work with 110 Chinese teachers, the project provides professional instruction to young filmmakers and a unique opportunity for cross-cultural exchange. This collaboration not only provides young filmmakers with the opportunity to learn from a wide range of perspectives, but also fosters cultural exchange and mutual understanding between participating universities and countries.

The collaboration between universities has the potential to lead to further explorations in the field of documentary filmmaking. By exchanging ideas and perspectives, young filmmakers can create truly unique and innovative documentaries. In addition, the collaboration between teachers from different universities and countries can also lead to the development of new teaching methods and the creation of innovative film projects.

After a decade of growth, *Looking China* has established a comprehensive education model for talent training and organizational management. This model consists of three core stages: preliminary preparation, time-limited creation, and follow-up promotion.

During the preliminary preparation stage, the annual theme is determined, cooperative colleges are organized both domestically and abroad, and international

students and domestic student volunteers are recruited. International supervisors and domestic team leaders are also determined, and topic selection research and preliminary training are carried out. Teachers and students communicate remotely to guarantee quality and quantity.

The time-limited creation stage utilizes 17 days to complete the teaching-and-shooting process. This includes the launch ceremony, cultural lectures, cultural inspections, interviews and filming, editing and production, local premieres, the release of results, and expert feedback. The focus is on cross-cultural communication management, cultivating young Chinese and foreign talents and promoting an understanding of Chinese culture.

The follow-up promotion stage focuses on promoting the network of young people who know China and promoting Chinese culture through digital means, such as website feeding, global tours, publicity, book publishing, awards, academic seminars, and so on.

The project has also developed detailed operation manuals, such as the Project Schedule, International Youth Operation Manual, Chinese Volunteer Operation Manual, Chinese Team Leading Teacher Operation Manual, and Operation Manual for International Supervisors. These ensure that Chinese and foreign youths can get the most out of their limited time and have a positive, active, and innovative presentation of Chinese stories. The combination of local team teachers, Chinese volunteers, interviewees, and local governments and communities form a comprehensive story support for foreign youths, deepening their understanding of their destinations in China.

The *Looking China* Youth Film Project is an innovative and exciting platform for young filmmakers to explore the intersections of film and culture in a transcultural context. With its focus on collaboration, experimentation, and engagement with audiences, the project offers a unique opportunity for young filmmakers to develop their skills, exchange ideas, and make a meaningful impact worldwide. Furthermore, the collaboration between universities is a crucial exploration of the project, playing an essential role in promoting cultural exchange, fostering creative collaboration, and advancing the field of documentary filmmaking.

The authors contributing to this publication are all experts with a close connection to the *Looking China* Youth Film Project. The guest editor-in-chief, Dr. Yang Zhuofan, is the project manager of *Looking China*. Other contributing authors, including Professor Cecília Mello from Brazil, Professor Predrag Velinovic from Serbia, Professor Jocelyn Ford from the United States, Associate Professor Jiang Shen, Associate Professor Yu Ming, and Ms. Huang Xinya from Beijing Normal University, have each played a role as a supervisor or team leader in multiple iterations of the project. In addition, Mr. Luscious Dosi from South Africa participated as a young filmmaker and later as a supervisor in the project. Their collective contributions are sure to provide insightful and inspiring perspectives for readers.

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