Awakening Voices from Immigrants: Study of Asian CineVision in 1970s-80s New York Chinatown

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1. Historical Background
   • 1960s – Immigration Reform Act (lead to drastic increase of immigrants from China), Civil Rights Movements.
   • Asian students joined forces in civil right movements and raised Asian identity awareness.
   • Asian students also realized the importance of mobilizing community power.
   • 1970s – the rising trend of video arts with the popularity of SONY EIAJ video tape recorder system.

2. Birth of Asian CineVision (ACV) and Chinese Cable TV (CCTV)
   • In 1970, a group of youngsters rented a dingy basement at 22 Catherine Street in New York City and started the first grass-root art group in the East Coast – the Basement Workshop.
   • In 1975, some Basement members founded Asian CineVision – an organization that dedicated to bringing out voices of Asian American through media works.
   • The first media project of ACV is Chinese Cable Television – the first community television station in America.
   • On August 15, 1976, CCTV had debut on Manhattan public access Cable Television Channel D.
   • CCTV was operated from 1976 to 1983.

3. CCTV as cultural and political space
   CCTV helped Asian immigrants adapt to American culture and even mobilized Asian immigrants’ political engagement in the mainstream politics. (e.g. CCTV recorded Mrs. Rosalyn Carter’s visit to New York Chinatown, the first time in American history that representative of presidential election candidate visiting Chinatown)

   CCTV brought to audience street interviews, social service programs providing useful information to new immigrants, entertaining shows, and most notably, social movements among Asian American communities.

4. Archiving and Preserving CCTV
   • CCTV video tapes are part of the ACV records. ACV records are now under custody of Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives at NYU Special Collections.
   • ACV records were donated by John C. Woo, executive director of ACV to NYU Libraries in 2007.
   • CCTV tapes numbered approx. 380, in either half inch open reel tapes or U-matic tapes. Around 100 tapes have been digitized by NYU’s Barbara Goldsmith Preservation and Conservation Department.
   • Archival descriptions (according to DACS) were added to the digitized CCTV videos by me thanks to my language competence.
   • Archival issues arise:
     • Lack of description due to language barrier – spoken language of most of the broadcast tapes is Cantonese (a regional language spoken by people from South China, a totally different linguistic system to the Chinese official language)
     • Lack of research and public awareness despite of its significant research value due to its thin description.

View clips of CCTV programs: https://youtu.be/4lYLvuqwTdcQ (Remember to turn on the subtitle!)