
Film as a Document and the Flow of Life

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Abstract

This paper examines the ways in which the film as a document has the potential to speak for the subjects of the footage in a different period after the long lapse of time. When the U.S. Army Signal Corps' footage documenting the Korean victims of wartime sex slavery in the Imperial Japanese Army in China was discovered and released to the public in the summer of 2017, some South Korean academics questioned its admissibility as new evidence since some of the subjects of the moving image had already been located in several photographs that had been discovered in the 1990s. This looked a directly opposite understanding of the footage to the agitated reports circulated in the mainstream media and the social media that praised the discovery of the brand-new evidential document depicting those 'moving' women.

However, as the researcher who first encountered the footage in America's government archives, I have continuously found both attitudes indiscreet and imprudent in that they just limit the footage as a storage that contains a photographic-mechanical evidence to prove someone's existence in a scientific manner.

Alternatively, this paper seeks to explore the film as a medium that embodies the reality of the subalterns and, if circumstances allow, speaks on behalf of them. Invoking Kracauer's concept of the 'flow of life', an affinity films have but photographs do not have, the paper will examine the footage by locating it in the contexts of both the time of production in 1944 and that of reception in 2017.

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