

## AN EXAMINATION OF GENDER ISSUES AT THE 2019 YAMAGATA INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL

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### ABSTRACT

This research shares the title of the researcher's individual project, which was supported by a grant allocated from the budget for the development of faculty members in the Master of Arts Program in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, College of Interdisciplinary Studies, Thammasat University. The 2019 Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival, the 16th edition of this renowned event, took place from October 10-17, 2019, in Yamagata, Japan. This celebrated festival showcases documentaries created by filmmakers from various regions around the globe, including Japan. The researcher focused on examining gender issues at this festival by attending screenings of documentaries from October 11-15, 2019. The research methodology was based on textual analysis, employing critical tools such as theories of representation and semiotics, along with gender theories for data analysis. The researcher viewed 34 documentaries during this period and discovered that the festival presented a diverse range of gender perspectives. The content and characters in these films addressed issues of gender in relation to women, men, and individuals of diverse sexual orientations. Furthermore, the films' gender representations intersected with issues of ethnicity and class. A key finding of the study highlights the significant role of women in documentaries portraying the aftermath of natural disasters affecting a small Japanese community, a circumstance that mirrors contemporary societal challenges Japan was facing at the time of the festival. Additionally, the researcher discovered that the content of several documentaries, particularly those that prominently addressed gender issues, especially those focusing on women and individuals of diverse sexual orientations, directly contributed to the researcher's pedagogical work in the courses he is responsible for in the aforementioned program. Moreover, the researcher reflected on the impact of natural disaster and the COVID-19 crisis on the organization of international cultural activities in Asia, such as this film festival.

**Keywords:** Alternative Film Festival, Cultural Studies, East Asia

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