

Haoran Jiangda (PhD) Faculty of Design & Creative Technologies

Since COVID-19, Chinese digital platforms have seen a surge in the creation and consumption of Chinese new media documentaries (CNMDs) across the user-generated content (UGC) and professional user-generated content (PUGC) models. This PhD study maps the evolving documentary production ecosystem that emerged in post-pandemic China and examines interactions among its key factors. As part of the study, the presentation focuses on the dynamic relationship between the Chinese government and Chinese digital platforms, demonstrating how China's platforms promote CNMDs while responding to the government's content-regulation requirements.

The PhD project adopts a qualitative research design comprising several methods. It conducts document analysis of selected state and platform initiatives that emerged after 2020, including the China Jilin DOC FEST (China Daily, 2025) and the 7th West Lake International Documentary Festival (China Academy of Art, 2024). It also uses semi-structured interviews with CNMD creators across UGC and PUGC models – including UGC creators (ordinary people who make documentary-style videos on China's digital platforms) and platform-based PUGC creators. Through thematic analysis, data from these sources are examined to identify negotiations over narrative choices, platform requirements, and regulatory expectations. Thematic analysis is combined with textual analysis of selected CNMDs made by UGC and PUGC.

For this presentation, I will focus on the dynamic relationships among state policies, digital platforms, and CNMD creators. Preliminary findings suggest that Chinese digital platforms operate as both gatekeepers and coordinators, mediating between state content-regulation requirements and their own commercial and visibility priorities. This points to a dynamic yet constrained environment in which creators' autonomy over documentary themes and narrative choices is continually negotiated. By demonstrating the initiatives and negotiating processes between the state and the platforms, the study contributes to a broader understanding of how state regulation, platform governance, and creative labour intersect in post-pandemic Chinese documentary production.

Keywords

Chinese new media documentaries, UGC, PUGC, digital platforms, the Chinese government, Creative Labors

References

- China Academy of Art. (2024, October 25). *The 7th West Lake International Documentary Festival*. <https://en.caa.edu.cn/info/1611/3067.htm>
- China Daily. (2025, January 10). *First China Jilin DOC FEST promotes development of documentary industry*. <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202501/10/WS6780fb65a310f1265a1da302.html>