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| Documentary has been rigorously explored and exploited in Japan as a political, social and aesthetic mode of filmmaking since the 1920s. By the interwar era, both ends of the political spectrum had fully utilized documentary as a vital participatory apparatus to mobilize the masses. Abé Mark Nornes argues that the style and conventions of the leftist Proletarian Film League of Japan (Prokino for short) in the 1930s would soon become ‘hardened’ and appropriated within the rhetoric of national propagandistic cinema. This wartime instrumentalisation of the medium in favour of larger categories (such as 'nation' and 'people') led to increased efforts to theorize documentary both before and after the war. |
| Documentary has been rigorously explored and exploited in Japan as a political, social and aesthetic mode of filmmaking since the 1920s. By the interwar era, both ends of the political spectrum had fully utilized documentary as a vital participatory apparatus to mobilize the masses. Abé Mark Nornes argues that the style and conventions of the leftist Proletarian Film League of Japan (Prokino for short) in the 1930s would soon become ‘hardened’ and appropriated within the rhetoric of national propagandistic cinema. This wartime instrumentalisation of the medium in favour of larger categories (such as 'nation' and 'people') led to increased efforts to theorize documentary both before and after the war. A number of filmmakers, including Kamei Fumio and Matsumoto Toshio as well as so-called New Wave directors like Hani Susumu, attempted to incorporate the issue of their own subjectivities (*shutaisei*) into the attitude toward the subjects (*taisho*) of their films. These explorations in documentary culminated in the emergence of radical documentarists like Ogawa Shinsuke, Tsuchimoto Noriaki and Hara Kazuo in the 1970s and 1980s. Whether it was Ogawa's and Tsuchimoto's method of standing with the oppressed or Hara's extreme individuality that unsettled the public and authority, their socially-committed documentary stood in stark contrast with the following generation, represented by Kawase Naomi, whose early works in the 1990s primarily revolved around intimate and personal themes, often called 'private' documentaries. |
| Further reading:  (Nornes)  (Nornes, Forest of Pressure: Ogawa Shinsuke and Postwar Japanese Documentary)  (Nornes, The Postwar Documentary Trace: Groping in the Dark)  (Kazuo Hara, Noonan and Yasuda) |