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VIỆT LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

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# THE QUEEN FROM VIRGINIA

## AND THE OTHER SUBJECT



JACKIE BONG WRIGHT introduces members of her family in the opening scene—a tradition very reflective of Asian values when one gets introduced to new acquaintances. Right from the start, David Ngo's "The Queen from Virginia: Jackie Bong Wright Story" creates a casual, laid-back

relationship between the film and the viewers; as if watching this documentary is just like chatting with the filmmaker over a cup of coffee. The jazz music on the background, of course, adds a classy yet comfy feel to the ambiance. Surely, watching Ngo's documentary on the first Asian American woman to win the Miss Senior America pageant is quite a soothing experience.

But casual chit-chats sometimes start great only to dwindle down a bit as it loses focus. While I was absolutely absorbed by the film, I got a bit impatient when it starts to feel like the "chat" between me and the director got a bit too spread out. I was thinking to myself: "Is this film really about Jackie Bong Wright or is this about the Miss Senior America Pageant? Or both?"



FROM LEFT, TOP TO BOTTOM: PINKY, JACKIE BONG WRIGHT, CONTESTANT FROM CALIFORNIA, JACKIE BONG WRIGHT (IN TRADITIONAL AO DAI), MS. ARKANSAS, JACKIE BONG WRIGHT, VERNA DAY.

Was David Ngo sure about what he wanted to do?" I can't really tell. Although interestingly, the film postcard that came with the DVD copy that I received says: "The Queen from Virginia: Jackie Bong Wright and the Ms. Senior America Pageant" while in the DVD itself the title only says "The Queen from Virginia: Jackie Bong Wright Story".

David Ngo's documentary is powerful in that it tackles a very important achievement of an Asian American woman. His choice of music is also plausible as it creates a mood that entices the viewers to watch the film. Most importantly, Ngo obviously made a great effort in researching his subject.

The creative use of inter-titles (putting them on trays, writing them on plates), a practice common in documentary films, makes sophisticated audience familiar with documentary films smile and say: "Yeah, this guy did not just make a film for the sake of making one. It seems that for a first-time filmmaker, he is conscientious enough to do research not only on the subject, but also a bit on

the practical aspects of the genre in which he is executing his project." However, I think the film would have been more powerful if it focused more on Jackie Bong Wright instead of segueing to the pageant itself. Not that I don't think the pageant is irrelevant. On the contrary, I think the pageant in itself should be a film subject on its own.

One other thing that is a bit distracting in the film is the random manner in which people were introduced. For instance, why is it that the founder of Mss Senior America, Dr. Mott, was not formally introduced to us until the latter part of the movie when he has already appeared many times and was given a privileged narrative voice all throughout the film?

In any case, without dwelling much on the minor flaws in the film, I am still enthusiastic about the merits of the movie. As in many other films, there are definitely parts that could be redone. But nonetheless, Ngo's documentary is definitely worth watching and Jackie Bong Wright's story is undoubtedly inspiring. **BN**