

A Glimpse at the Development of the Environmental Documentary in Taiwan

Tsung-lung Tsai, Li-ping Yu, and Chin-yuan Ke

Foreword

Of all documentary genres, the environmental documentary stands out as the most distinctive and significant genre in Taiwan. Its distinctiveness and significance lie in its subject matter, its close connection with local concerns, and its determination to claim the basic human right to a clean and healthy environment. Over the past three decades, Taiwan has single-mindedly focused on economic development, aspiring to the status of a developed country through its all-out efforts—unfortunately at the cost of its environment. In response and in resistance to this trend, the local environmental documentary has been carefully documenting the situation and giving us warnings, calling out to our environmental conscience.

The environmental documentary has been playing an indispensable role in recording and witnessing the formative years of Taiwan on its path of capitalist development. It has raised the environmental awareness of the public; it has also attracted some of the best minds of our time to take part in green causes and even in the making of green films. This is not true only for Taiwan's environmental documentaries, but the development of this genre in Taiwan is certainly noteworthy, especially in the context of the country's Asian and African peers. This brief survey will look at the beginnings and the development of environmental documentaries in Taiwan, and briefly introduce some representative works and filmmakers over the past thirty years.

The Beginning: The Lifting of Martial Law

The environmental documentary in Taiwan is to be understood in the framework of its development over the past thirty years, which parallels the history of local political reforms, social movements, and media marketing, as well as the international trend toward environmental awareness.

In the 1970s, a time of martial law and police state, people's claims were silenced more than they were voiced and the media were censored by the government. In the 1980s martial law was ended, freedom of speech was ushered in and many infrastructure projects were undertaken. The latter led to issues of environmental pollution, and people's environmental awareness and concern was soon reflected in their protests and countermeasures. Their claims attracted the media and environmental protection became a major cause and rallying point, second only to politics, of social movements. From 1980 to 1990 there were 413 social movements sparked by the interrelated demands for environmental protection, political reform, and democratic empowerment.

Nevertheless, full-fledged freedom of speech and of the media was not yet in sight. News coverage of major movements and protests were still under tight government control: the government could still decide what was to be seen and what was not. A limited number of film studios and individuals, defying the government, shouldered the responsibility for voicing people's claims and videotaping people's fight against environment-hostile projects.

With the lifting of martial law in 1987, freedom of speech and the media came into view; in 1988, more news agencies were allowed to cover events; in 1991, overseas channels and satellite TV services were introduced; in 1994, more TV-station licenses were issued; in 1998, the Taiwan Public Television Service was established; up till 2006 the average number of TV channels in Taiwan came to 100 or more. Although such freedom means that the local media have entered a new era of intense competition, this only contributes to the flowering of the media industry: breakthroughs in media technology, the expansion of media marketing, and a greater diversity of media production. All these factors promise brighter prospects and possibilities for the environmental documentary.

The Environmental Documentary: Tentative Categories

Environmental documentaries are films focused on environment-related issues. They may include any topics and themes drawn from nature and science or directly related to environmental protection, protests and demonstrations, culture and the humanities, etc. The wide spectrum of this genre defies any convenient categorization of its content. We here suggest four tentative categories, based on what we already have in the archive, in order to serve the needs of academic and informal analyses, discussions, and debates.

Environment and the Preservation of Species

This category aims to encourage the preservation of species by providing knowledge of the biological facts. *The Insects' Story (Kunchong ji)* by Lee Sung-Yang may be the most representative work in this category. Lee single-handedly finished this documentary without any subsidy. The project began in 1968 and in eight years' time gave birth to the first ecological documentary in Taiwan. The story of its making and the research going on behind the scenes was reported by the BBC in 1976 (*BBC: The Insect World of Dr. Lee*, 1976). In 1979, the former Government Information Office produced a follow-up piece, *Lee Sung-Yang's World of Insects (Lee Sung-Yang's kunchong shijie)*, which was honored at home and won awards abroad. Films in this category have continued to be made, most significantly by Liu Yen-ming (劉燕明), Liang Chieh-te (梁皆得), Chen Chin-fa (陳進發), Deng Wen-bin (鄧文斌), Chung Jung-feng (鍾榮峰), and Hsu Hung-lung (許鴻龍).¹

Making documentary films of this type is comparatively challenging and time-consuming; it is therefore often subsidized or commissioned by the government, international media enterprises, or public TV services. There are many works in this genre and they are given ample subsidies and government commissions, but the filmmakers also tend to follow the demands of their financial supports. In its early days, this category focused on recording the behavioral patterns and lifecycles of species; beginning from the 1990s, concerns about changes in the environment and the threats they entailed started to find a voice in this category.

Around 2000, more encompassing ecological concerns began to be voiced in this documentary genre: reflection on the relations between the environment and human beings, the need for a balance between human society and nature. These films' critique of human behavior that endangers non-human species and their environments have enabled us to see human economic development from a less human-centered point of view and to better understand animals' rights to their own habitats and food sources. Among the most representative post-2000 works are documentaries by Ke Chin-yuan. For example, we have *The Biography of the Formosan Rock Macaque (Mihou liezhuan, 2004)*, one of whose best-known episodes, known in English as *Monkey: War and Peace*, witnesses the struggle

¹ The Chinese names appear in the body of the article in their original sequence, with the family name coming first. The Chinese original of individuals or organizations whose particular works are cited in the article can be found in the Works Cited section.

between two species of primates over a habitat and their attempt to resolve the struggle by sharing the habitat in peace. By this same filmmaker we also have *Remember the Coral Reef* (*Jiyi shanhu*, 2004), a literary narration of ongoing changes in the marine ecology around Taiwan and the possible consequences that may soon follow; *Swing* (*Baidang*, 2010), a series of field-correspondent filmings of wild-life paramedics' various missions and an accusation of the human greed and ignorance that ultimately result in human cruelty to other animals; *The Squid Daddy's Labor Room* (*Chanfang*, 2007), a review of natural environment restoration project after excessive human exploitation, and a plea for the appropriate planning and practice of preservation projects and policies; and *Song of the Forest* (*Sen zhi ge*, 2011), a piece which warns us that the exhaustion of our natural resources will lead to catastrophes for human beings, and which encourages us to think from the standpoint of nature.

Demonstrations and Public Hazards

The earliest and loudest demonstrations in Taiwan that voiced local concerns were those seeking to stop major environment-hostile construction projects and fight for the rights of victims of environmental pollution. These show us very well what the documentary genre can do to make a difference. With assistance from the academic and private sectors, such films draw media attention and win public support.

Anti-Nuclear Demonstrations

Among all the categories of the environmental documentary, this is the most politics-oriented. The anti-nuclear-power demonstration has been a form of political assertion since the 1980s. It is a protest against both nuclear power and autocratic authority. It is the first step in allowing the people's voice to be heard in public affairs. However, not until 1985, when the government began construction on the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant, did the anti-nuclear demonstration gain the attention it deserved.

The first representative anti-nuclear documentary films in Taiwan were *We Want Kids, No Nukes* (*Zhiyao haizi, buyao hezi*, 1987), produced by the Taiwan Green Team, and *Why Against Nuclear Power?* (*Weishenme yao fanhe?*, 1989). The Taiwan Green Team, equipped with handy camcorders, has been working against nuclear power even since the time of martial law. It records related social

movements island-wide, vividly presenting the protesting voices of the people. It disseminates copies of its films on homemade-video and bootleg-style tapes; it shows them in a guerrilla theater context. It has become a significant combatant against the mainstream-media mouthpieces.

In 2004, with financial support provided by the Full Shot Media Foundation, Tsui Su-hsin, a member of the Green Citizens' Action Alliance, finished her film *How Are You, Gongliao?* (*Gongliao nihao ma?*) after six years of work. This documentary focuses on struggle of people in Gongliao, the assigned location for the construction of the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant, for their rights and livelihoods. It shows how political struggles between two major political parties were involved; how people were overwhelmed by the imposition upon their lives of such a huge construction project; and how determined the residents of Gongliao were in preparing themselves for a long-term protest. This film was shown island-wide soon after its production and was widely applauded. It is a fine representative of its genre in its depiction of the history of anti-nuclear movements in Taiwan.

Taiwan's Public Television Service also made contributions to this category with *Our Island* (*Women de dao*), *Viewpoint* (*Jilu guandian*), *Ten Years of Anti-Nuclear Movements* (*Fanhe fengyun shinian*, 2000), and *Strange Bedfellows: 10 Episodes about Nuclear Power* (*Tongchuang yimeng: guanyu hedian de shige duanpian*, 2002). These films often discuss the issues of nuclear safety and the disposal of nuclear waste, and indeed films in this category also serve as indispensable references or "texts" for discussions of nuclear-power issues. The anti-nuclear documentary is characterized by its outspoken assertions and prominent anti-nuclear advocates.

Prevention of Public Hazards

This category comprises films recording the protests that warn against possible public hazards, in particular the pollution and other forms of environmental damage caused by acts of industrial expansion or large-scale construction. The purpose is to check these government-sponsored acts long before the damage is done; the concern is usually based on previous experiences of suffering from these hazards.

Protests of a preventive nature are the most controversial, for there is no actual damage that can be seen and evaluated for its environmental impact. Accordingly, documentaries of such protests are the most controversial category in the genre of the environmental documentary. On the one hand, they feature the

direct involvement of the people in the cause of environmental protection, which means that they record an event in the ongoing shaping of public opinion. On the other hand, they are the most susceptible genre to conflicts and controversies.

The year of 1987 witnessed a decisive moment in the history of protests against public hazards in Taiwan. Residents in Lukang, after a 400-day struggle against the U.S.-based Dupont Company, made Dupont give up its plan to locate a factory in Lukang. Another significant struggle was staged by residents in Houjin, near Kaohsiung, called the Anti-Fifth Naphtha Cracker Movement. Residents in Houjin spent three years voting and protesting against the construction of a naphtha plant. Then the government's Executive Yuan threatened to prosecute persistent protestors, offered damage compensation subsidies to those who chose to give in, and mobilized the police to disperse protestors. Due to this government intervention, CPC Corporation Taiwan finally had the Fifth Naphtha Cracker plant located in Houjin, but the residents have continued their protests. Such potential consequences as air pollution, water pollution, and other health hazards to residents have continued to loom large, providing headlines for the press and an ongoing focus for documentary filming.

Preventive protests against public hazards inspired the following productions: *Anti-Dupont Movements in Lukang* (*Lukang fan Dubang yundong*, 1987) and *I Love Houjin, Not the Naphtha Cracker* (*Wo ai Houjin, buai Wuqing*), both by the Taiwan Green Team; *Environmental Protection Is Bleeding* (*Huanbao liuxie le*, based on the Houjin movements), *The Kaoping River Issue* (*Gaopingxi shijian*), and *Anti-Nuclear Movements on Orchid Island* (*Lanyu fanhe*), all three by The Third Image; *After the Anti-Dupont Movements in Lukang: Profiles of Some Key Figures in the Movements* (*Lukang fan Dubang zhihou: yixie shehui yundong gongzuozhe de huaxiang*, 1990) and *The People's Voice: Concerning Environmental Protection* (*Renmin de shengyin: huanbao pian*), both by the independent filmmaker Lee Tao-ming. Lee interviewed the key figures in these movements in the former film and traveled to different public hazard sites for the latter, in order to map out his coverage of the new environmental dangers in Taiwan in the 80s. This U.S.-educated director stands apart from his peers in his aloof observational standpoints. Unlike the strategy of direct engagement and accusation often adopted by the Taiwan Green Team and The Third Image, Lee's strategy as a director is to avoid direct involvement. Thus his films are allowed to speak for themselves instead of using a narrator. Whatever the strategy, all these documentary productions do give the people a voice. In so doing, they themselves become precious documents in the ongoing struggle to protect the environment in Taiwan.

The prevention of public hazards is still a common theme in recent Taiwanese documentaries. Whatever the scale, community-based or island-wide, almost all environment-oriented protests are accompanied by filmmakers. The camera has now become a powerful weapon in such social movements, one which can prevent environment-hostile policies from being carried out.

Recordings of Public Hazards

As early as the very beginning of the 1980s, Taiwan saw people taking to protest against the public hazards of pollution. Significant examples include the protest against pollution caused by the Sanhuang Pesticide Factory in Taichung in 1982, and the one against pollution caused by LCY Chemical Corp. The early filming of such protests focused on victims of the pollution and their independent countermeasures, without any help or remedies being offered by the liable parties or the authorities. In their later development, however, documentary recordings of public hazards no longer limited themselves to actual protests but also focused on the public hazards themselves, their possible effects, and the different ways of dealing with them.

In 2002, Tsai Tsung-lung drew public attention to the RCA “event”² with his *Behind the Miracle (Qiji beihou)*. Tsai in this documentary tells the entire history, traced back to 1970, of how transnational enterprises polluted the local environment to the point of irreversible contamination and of how the populace fell victim to this. The work touches upon the rights and livelihood of the affected laborers, the pollution caused by transnational industries, the development of high technology, and public hazard compensation. It is more like the record of an in-depth investigation than a disaster film. With its many surveys and interviews, this documentary profiled the whole event and all the parties involved, including those

² Translator’s note: This is one of the most serious cases of irreversible environmental harm causing imminent casualties, yet surprisingly shunted into suppression and oblivion, leaving no entry online or in print for years. The Radio Corporation of American (RCA) in 1970 set up its production lines in Taoyuan. During its production process, chemical wastes were buried on site instead of receiving standard disposal procedures. The site of its production lines was later taken over respectively by the General Electric Company, the France-based Thomson-CSF, and lastly the local Hongyi Construction Company, which planned to transform the site into a residential area. Charges against the land contamination came as late as 1994. Reports of cancer cases and projects of countermeasures soon followed. In 1998, after years of remediation efforts, the Environmental Protection Administration confirmed that off-site release of various chlorides led to permanent environmental damage to this area and banned further utilization of the site. For the Administration report, see <http://sgw.epa.gov.tw/public/0602_RCA.asp>.

who suffered. The revelation of an environmental catastrophe, a tragedy involving numerous families, the stories of victims suffering from cancer, the impotence of state policies, and so forth, the film prompts us to stop and think again about the cost of economic development.

Time leads all things into oblivion. Documentaries like this remind us that even top-level public hazards make media headlines for only a day or two, while immanent and insidious sufferings are inflicted on the victims and their families for the rest of their lives. It is documentaries like this that speak of their pain, catching the public's attention and evoking its concern.

In 1979, central Taiwan witnessed one of the worst cases of food contamination in the island's history. The consumption of cooking bran oil contaminated with PCB (polychlorinated biphenyls) caused an outbreak of several very serious health problems. In the thirty years since then, over 2000 victims have been found, some already deceased and others still suffering from various terrible symptoms, and even passing some of these to ensuing generations. These symptoms, which lead to serious structural and functional changes, are known as *yushuo* (*youzheng* in Mandarin Chinese, literally oil-related disease), a name supplied by Japan, the first country to have experienced a similar large-scale outbreak. Tsai has found and interviewed some of the victims and covered their stories. The compilation of these stories gave us the 2008 documentary *Surviving Evil* (*Youzheng: yu du gongcun*). This work is both an account of the scientific aspects of *yusho* and a narration of the stories of the victims. In 2009, the Taiwan Yushuo Victims' Association was founded in order to seek sustainable medical treatment for the survivors.

Another grave public hazard shocked Taiwan in 1992. Cases of indoor radioactive pollution were discovered in buildings contaminated with radioactive pollutants in their construction materials. Up until now, over 300 buildings, 1,661 households, and more than 10,000 people have been affected, yet most of the affected buildings still stand without any plans for their demolition. The TV program *Our Island* on the Public Television Service channel brought us, years after Taiwan first suffered the effects of radioactive buildings, two compilations of reports and stories (ten and twenty years after the fact respectively). Residents of the affected areas, who fought for their rights and compensation as we could see on TV years ago, were afterward found to be victims of leukemia, thyroid cancer, breast cancer, etc. This PTS series shows us the health alert in effect in the hot zones of radioactive pollution, and continuing concerns about the existing radioactive buildings.

In recent years, environmental awareness has come to the petrochemical industry, which has clearly played its part in damaging the environment. Protests held by residents of areas near refinery complexes have become ever more intensified. The tug-of-war between the people and the industry, between the environment and development, inspired the work *Formosa vs. Formosa* (*Fu'ermosha dui Fu'ermosha*, 2010) by Ke Chin-yuan. A work of clear analysis and critique, *Formosa vs. Formosa* estimates the damage done by the industry to labor, to society, and to nature, raising the questions: "What is the total cost of economic development?" and "What price did Taiwan pay for its prosperity?" In the documentary, we see the Formosa Plastics Group being confronted by historical records along with various kinds of evidence of environmental pollution. The company accordingly falls from grace as its inglorious past carefully examined. *Formosa vs. Formosa* exposes the mainstream values of lionizing enterprises, which blandly profit from people's loss and harm nature. It calls for a new social and environmental conscience on the part of such enterprises and asks them to make their due contribution to society.

Natural Disasters

To be the first witnesses of those in need and to help them reach out for support, filmmakers, following earthquakes, typhoons, and floods, find their way to natural disaster zones to record disasters and those who suffer from them, and to urge rescue operations and remediation. While the mainstream media quickly put up their headlines and then lose interest, independent filmmakers stay in disaster zones for long-term projects. They record events, not news; their efforts parallel those of the affected people, for they witness and experience the entire process from destruction to reconstruction.

One of the most noteworthy examples was the series of reports on the 9/21 earthquake by Full Shot Image Company (FSIC). Beginning in 1999, the year when the September 21 earthquake pounded Taiwan, FSIC began its customary fieldwork and long-term recording, gleaning all the shreds and shards of the natural disaster and encouraging every effort to reconstruct the affected areas. In 2004, the company put the documentary genre back in the spotlight, inspiring heated discussions and winning recognition of the general public. FSIC's representative works on the 9/21 earthquake include *Gift of Life* (*Shengming*), *Radio Mihu* (*Buluo zhi yin*), *A Taste of Plum* (*Meizi de ziwei*), *The House Matters* (*Tianxia diyijia*), and *Three-Fork Village* (*Sanchakeng*).

In August 2009, Typhoon Morakot struck Taiwan. Ranked among the worst natural disasters in Taiwan in twenty years, second only to the 9/21 earthquake, it too summoned local documentary filmmakers. Lo Hsing-chieh, the director of *A Gift for Father's Day: The Tragedy of Hsiaolin Village, Part 1* (*Babajie de liwu: Xiaolincun miecun shijian shoubuqu*, 2011), one of the most representative works to witness and record the tragic aftermath of the storm in typhoon-stricken regions, followed the life of the sufferers by living among them (in prefab or container houses) and working with them as they tried to bring relief and reconstruction to a village in ruins.

Similar works were produced through similar if not even more arduous and admirable efforts by, again, the Taiwan Green Team, in particular the *Ka'aluwan* (*Jialan baogao*) series, an enormous ongoing body of documentary clips made from September 2009 up until now. With its filming personnel and machinery located among the severely-affected *Ka'aluwan* tribe in the Tatung mountains, the Taiwan Green Team resumed its usual intensive and sustained fieldwork. During the years of filming, the documentary clips reached innumerable viewers through internet postings and *PeoPo* broadcasting. In 2012, the first compilation of clips was made into a documentary film—*Ka'aluwan's Reconstruction from Moratok* (*Jialan baba chongjian*). The *Ka'aluwan* project has documented more than a natural disaster. It marks the beginning of a new epoch in the development of its genre in Taiwan by demonstrating the resourcefulness of modern documentary production and broadcasting, rendering the genre a process of historico-cultural recording and archiving, as well as a venue of information transmission, of multidirectional communication and social participation.

Given the public recognition of their contribution, documentaries of natural disasters and reconstruction projects often attract subsidies from both government and media enterprises which want to encourage sustainable efforts for various reasons. This generous financial support has made documentation of the aftermath of natural disasters a routine phenomenon, and this may be something of concern. Filmmakers should be cautious about their relation with the filmed subjects, make efforts to avoid exploiting or imposing further harm to the sufferers of the disasters, and also to avoid sentimentalist treatment of their subject matter. What should be kept in view is the ethics of documentation.

Local Features

The fourth category or genre of documentary films is somewhat more open and diverse in scope. In its earlier years, these films were intended primarily to offer a general introduction of Taiwan's local culture and natural scenery, oftentimes presenting their subject matter in a poetic and panoramic style. However, this ever-evolving documentary genre has now also entered the sociopolitical arena. The once-idyllic introduction of local features now asks for environmental justice and supports the rights of generations to come, drawing attention to the consequences of overexploiting natural resources and proposing solutions.

From 1970 onward, local features documentaries were already available in mainstream TV programs in Taiwan. Examples include *Fragrant Formosa* (*Fenfang baodao*, 1974) by Huang Chun-ming with Guohe Media, and two series commissioned by the former Government Information Office and produced jointly by Lei Hsiang, Chang Chao-tang, and Christopher Doyle in the early 1980s, *Impressions* (*Yingxiang zhi lu*) and *Ode to Earth* (*Dadi zhi song*). They were mostly shot in the style of documentary photography with a dubbed-in literary-style narration.

However, in more recent years the camera has been attracted to more dynamic local features, and no features are more dynamic than polluted, endangered, and disappearing ones. How the environment changed and how people's way of life was forced to change along with it have now become central themes of the local-features documentary. Representative works are *Fishermen in the City* (*Hekou ren*, 2006) and *Farmers in the City* (*Chengshi nongminli*, 2005), both by Hung Chun-hsiu. These two films tell of the lives of fishermen and farmers who inhabit the margins of the prosperous city of Taipei, its forgotten corners, polluted riverbanks, and meager acres of rice paddies. Those intending to pursue the once-promising careers of fishing and farming have seen the rivers turn murky and the paddies dwindle, and the fishermen and farmers speak directly to the viewer on behalf of nature and themselves. Hung intentionally employs the narrations of those who have experienced this transformation of the marginal cityscape.

In 2009, this category boasted its first work of black humor—*Nimbus* (*Daishuiyun*) by Huang Hsin-yao, which features the problem of land subsidence facing Hukou Township of Yunlin County. Huang shot people's anxiety and grief with a picturesque presentation of the suffering region and humorous asides to avoid the conventional didactic undertones. The weight of sorrow is somewhat lessened by the filmmaker's light-hearted tone.

In 2011, Ke Chin-yuan made a further contribution to the documentary genre with *Ebb and Flow* (Tuichao, 2011). Here residents' narrations were again heavily relied upon to address both viewers and the whole society. This production features the interdependence of the wetland and its residents on the west coast of Taiwan, and expresses the fear that this balance, or even the entire wetland, may be lost due to the impact of petrochemical projects. In *Ebb and Flow*, asides and sound effects are purposely avoided; post-production editing is likewise minimized. The only sounds the film brings to the viewer are on-site recordings of hymns, of a harmonica, and of wind and waves; the only voice that speaks to the viewer is that of the camera. Thus the viewer is presented with a sense of reality in the rough as the distance between nature and human beings is narrowed. The *Ebb and Flow* production team also edited and shared twenty-two documentary clips via internet posting, opening up a new venue for the distribution of documentary films.

In the area of TV-program-style documentary, *Our Island* produced by the Public Television Service deserves much credit for its quality as well as its persistent devotion. *Our Island* is the first of its kind in terms of environmental and ecological awareness and scope. In its first season, beginning from September 1998, the series has given us exemplary productions like *Farewell, Ocean!* (*Zaijian haiyang*), *The Catastrophe* (*Zaibian*), *Animal Preservation* (*Dongwu baoyu*), and *Public Hazards* (*Gonghai*). Already in these films we see how excellent documentary reportage is done through a combination of fieldwork, meticulous investigation, and resourcefulness that bring to life the vigor of the people and the vitality of the island. Beginning in 2000 *Our Island* initiated a new form of environmental journalism which combined thematic coverage and documentary clips, and featured environmental damage, the practice of environmental protection policies, and the real-time updating of environmental news. The program continues to advocate the harmonious relationship between nature and human society.

Viewpoint, also on the Public Television Service channel, with its comprehensive compilation of films and exhaustive methods of production, serves as the friendliest and the most effective platform for environmental documentaries. This program makes use of self-production, commissioned production, co-production, and copyright purchasing for its documentary programs, thus providing a great number of independent directors and public TV filmmakers with a venue to show their works. From its first show in 1999, *Viewpoint* has proved itself indispensable to the cause of environmental protection.

Retrospect: The Green Chronicle

The increase of environmental awareness and knowledge in Taiwan is transforming the environmental documentary: its subject matter is no longer confined to the sorrow of the victims or the rage of protestors; this genre can also be about the humankind's reflections on what has contributed to the here-and-now we inhabit, and on prospects for the future. Indeed, documentary film has undergone vital transformations everywhere in the world: either in its presentation, length, or method of transmission. What is taking place in the environmental documentary in Taiwan is reflecting these transformations.

Here is a brief review of the past twenty years of environmental documentaries in Taiwan.

1980-1990

This decade saw heated debates over nativist culture and the emergence of reportage literature and reportage photography. This was also the time when the authoritarian governance was gradually collapsing and various social movements were rising. This was a burgeoning time for the environmental documentary, and the development of the genre started with two strands, documentation of people's protests and that of nature.

1990-2000

The lifting of martial law, alongside increasing international trade and contact with Western societies, expedited the local development of environmental restoration and species preservation. In such a social and political climate, the authorities stipulated and passed environmental protection laws for the future and amended rules and regulations from the past. Martial-law control over the media was removed; the Public Television Service, the major platform for the environmental documentary, was established. The latter's lasting success keeps attracting public funds, and environment-related education as well as documentation accordingly thrive in Taiwan. The environmental documentary functions efficiently in circulating environmental knowledge and news of environmental movements, and in helping to create an environmental social conscience.

2000-2012

Other than efforts dedicated to the prevention of public hazards and the documentation of people's struggles against pollutions, the trend of the environmental documentary is now turning toward reflecting on the interdependent and interactive relationships between humans and nature: "the environment first" and "life first" are becoming the mainstream views of the genre. However, due to the short-sighted media policies of the government, the mainstream media are all forced into the game of ratings competition. And inasmuch as the once-subversive documentary has entered the world of mainstream media, more and more films have chosen to appeal to accessibility with a clear storyline and tailor-made entertainment; some even willingly succumb to the values and points of view of the sponsors. This genre now risks becoming shallow, reactionary or twisted in its values.

Finally, we can hardly fail to acknowledge the importance of the influence from abroad. Both the production and the expectations of the documentary genre in Taiwan are changing in response to the frequent exchange of domestic and foreign experiences, and to the rising visibility of international environmental documentaries on local TV channels. Moreover, the Public Television Service has been keen on cooperating with international directors, with the hope of winning more awards at international festivals and gaining a wider local audience. Yet here we also wonder whether the prospect of increasing international influence may mean that the local environmental documentary will begin to lose its local flavor or a specific Taiwanese perspective. What is equally noteworthy is how the environmental documentary is to work with the online media in the future and how this may change the production of the environmental documentary.

—Translated from the Chinese by Alvin Dahn

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About the Authors

After obtaining a B.A. in Law from National Chengchi University and an M.A. in Mass Communication from Fu Jen Catholic University in Taiwan, Tsung-lung Tsai went to UK to study in Film Studies at the University of East Anglia. He is currently an independent documentary filmmaker and assistant professor in the Department of Communication of National Chung Cheng University in Taiwan. His works include *Killing in Formosa*, which won Best Documentary at the 2001 Golden Harvest Awards; *Taipei Licensed Prostitutes*, which received special mention by the jury at the Asian Television Awards in 2002; *Behind the Miracle*, which won Excellent Journalism Award (卓越新聞獎) for Best Feature Story; and *My Imported Wife*, which was invited to the International Public Television Screening Conferences and was archived in the Museum of Television and Radio in New York. His latest film, *Surviving Evil*, won the Top Prize at the 2008 South Taiwan Film Festival.

Li-ping Yu began making environmental films after graduating from the Institute of Marine Environment and Engineering of National Sun Yat-sen University, Kaohsiung, Taiwan. He is currently a producer of *Our Island* at the Public Television Service of Taiwan. His works have been nominated and won awards at numerous international film festivals, including the Earth Vision Festival in Tokyo, the Green Film Festival in Seoul, Germany's GREEN SCREEN Festival, Asian Television Awards, New York Festivals: International Television & Film Awards, and the U.S. International Wildlife Film Festival.

Chin-yuan Ke is currently a producer in the Department of News of Public Television Service, Taiwan. He has been nominated for more than one hundred important awards home and abroad and has won several of them, including Taiwan's Golden Bell Award for Best Photography and Best Director of a Non-drama Program, Taipei Film Festival's Top Prize for Documentary, U.S. Montana CINE International Festival's Golden Eagle Award, the U.S. International Wildlife Film Festival's awards for Best Television Program and Best Point of View, the Silver Award at New York Festivals: International Television & Film Awards, and the Platinum Award at the WorldFest Houston Film Festival.