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# Afterword: Documentary Filmmaking as Ethical Production of Truth*

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> To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it "the way it really was" (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.
>
> —Walter Benjamin
> "Theses on the Philosophy of History"

## Burgeoning Documentary Filmmaking in Asia

It has been noted that a new mode of documentary practice that can be designated as "cinema from below" began to emerge in many Asian countries such as Taiwan, Korea, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines after the 1980s (Chi; Pok; Nam; Lu; Deocampo; Hanan). "Cinema from below" is a film practice based on a strong penchant for the perspectives of subordinated social groups. If mainstream documentaries often serve the interest of socially dominant groups, documentary making as cinema from below stresses the (self-)representation of the underprivileged groups. Although personal documentaries and commercially oriented documentaries also made their appearance in the recent developments of documentary making in various countries, "cinema from below" maintains a strong momentum.

In the case of Taiwan, a new mode of documentary making emerged in the mid-1980s. It was new in several different ways. First of all, as I have pointed out elsewhere, for the first time in the history of Taiwan, film making was practiced as a

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social intervention, creating a space of countermedia to challenge the state's tight media control (Chiu). This does not mean that all independent documentaries produced at that time were oppositional. However, they were generally designated as "anti-mainstream media," engaged as they were in a media war against the state's monopoly of information dissemination (Dai and Wei 333-40). Many independent documentaries address politically and socially sensitive issues, in tandem with the vibrant social movements in Taiwan during the 1980s. New Taiwan Documentary was self-consciously and conspicuously "grassroots" in character (Chiu). It was characterized by what the Russian activist-writer and photographer Sergei Tret'iakov defines as "operativism"—an interventional representational practice that abandons detached observation for active participation "in the life of the material" (Stark 131).

Strikingly similar practices can be found in other Asian countries. In South Korea, for example, a new type of documentary making often referred to as the "minjung cinema" or "workers' cinema" appeared in the 1980s. It actively participated in the minjung movement to push for South Korea's democracy (N. Lee 17-18; S. Lee 216). Operating as a media activism, the "minjung cinema" sought to represent "the lives and struggles of the minjung" "from the perspective of the minority or from the position of an outsider" (N. Lee 20). As in the case of Taiwan, Korean documentarians were not concerned so much with the accuracy or the so-called "objectivity" of documentary representation as with the potential of documentary making to bring about social changes (Berry 139). The minjung cinema has been defined as "a movement resisting or overcoming the political economy of the Korean film industry . . . from the periphery" (Choi 31). Likewise, in India, a type of documentary filmmaking conceptualized as "the cinema of resistance" appeared in the early 1980s. Many documentarians defined their works as "giving voice to the voiceless people" and "[telling] stories of oppression, corruption, and denials" (Sen and Sen 85).

Turning to China, we find the emergence of New Chinese documentary in the early 1990—to be more specific, between the Tiananmen Democracy Movement in 1989 and Deng Xiaoping's announcement of the "Tour to the South" with its economic reform agenda in 1992, according to Chris Berry and Lisa Rofel (Berry and Rofel 135). The renowned film scholar Lu Xinyu argues that the significance of this new type of Chinese documentary making "lies in its perspective from the bottom up on the status of different social classes under current political, economic, and social transformations in China" (Lu 32). We find here the similar concern with the voice of the voiceless, as in the cases of Taiwan, South Korea, and India.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that, unlike its counterparts in the aforementioned countries, the new Chinese documentary is "disconnected from the idea of the general social movement in China" (Zhang 49). Documentary filmmakers associated with the new documentary movement tend to define their documentary works as works of art (Zhang 49). Also, "the label of 'underground,' which implied opposition to the official media system," was rejected by the documentarians (Lu 30). As Lu Xinyu takes pains to show, there are overlaps and interactions between the New Chinese Documentary Movement and the official television systems, "where the liveliest and most creative documentary making happened alongside experiments within the television system" (Lu 31).

Thus, Berry and Rofel use the term "alternative archive" to designate the corpus of New Chinese documentaries. In their view, "alternative," rather than "oppositional," best captures the spirit of New Chinese documentary, for the term "alternative" implies that "the alternative does not substitute for or exist in competition with the 'main building,' but simply grows alongside as something additional" (Berry and Rofel 137).

But the significance of this new type of documentary making in Asian countries should not be understood simply in terms of its departure from the perspectives or content of state-produced documentaries. The breakthroughs in film production and screening venues also deserve attention. Film making used to be out of the reach of common people because it was expensive and required complicated skills. Understandably, in many Asian countries with their various histories of authoritarian rule, documentary making was usually monopolized by the state or commercial corporates before the appearance of lightweight, portable, less expensive, and user-friendly types of recording equipment opened up the possibility of independent filmmaking. With the *prosthesis*, as it were, of the newly invented filming gadgets, documentarians, even with limited resources, become mobile bodies capable of capturing a world kept out of sight in mainstream media representation. The advancement of technology opens up a new vista of democratized media culture, which was unimaginable in days past. The new type of documentary making bears witness to the revolutionary potential of mass production that Walter Benjamin so optimistically prophesied in the 1930s (Benjamin 106).

Precisely because this new type of documentary making is often oppositional or alternative in character, it can hardly depend on the conventional, institutionalized film distribution network for screening. In the 1980s Taiwan, South Korea, and India, social documentaries with a strong interventional agenda had to

find their own ways to reach the general public. Anand Patwardhan went to small Indian towns and villages to screen his films (Sen and Sen 86). Taiwanese documentaries made by the activist group called "The Green Group" were circulated through vendors at the sites of street protests. In contemporary China and Malaysia where government still exercises strict censorship, the circulation of independent documentaries is often restricted. In a word, conventional screening network usually does not work for these documentaries. New screening venues need to be found, or invented. Many documentarians resort to screening tours, community-oriented venues, schools, and film festivals to increase the visibility of their works.

Recently, new media has been exploited in ingenious ways to boost the visibility of oppositional documentaries from below throughout Asia. Websites, Facebook page, blogs, YouTube, and web shops are particularly helpful in creating alternative screening opportunities (Baumgärtel 28-29). Indeed, in some recent environmental movements and protests in Taiwan—such as the 2010 protest against the forced expropriation of farmland in Miaoli and the 2006-2012 environmental movement against a controversial petrochemical investment project in central Taiwan, documentarians uploaded their digitized works to YouTube[1] with the aim to create what Jane M. Gaines calls "political mimesis"—the production of affect that aligns the viewers with the body on screen (Gaines 90-91). In South Korea, some activist-documentarians also make their films available online for free. In the words of Lee Seung-min (referring to the online distribution of the film *Jam Docu Kangjing*), "Such free online distribution was carried out in order to fulfill the production goal which was to serve as visual activism that can draw more attention to the current situation at Kangjung Village" (S. Lee 219).

This does not mean that there are no commercially released independent documentaries. Online companies such as dGenerate Films and CreateSpace help open up a space for the commercial circulation of some of the independently made documentaries. It is also noteworthy that in some Asian countries, more and more documentarians are aiming at a theatrical release of their works, and some have enjoyed remarkable success as a result. The documentary film *Repatriation* (2003) by the celebrated Korean documentarian Kim Dong-Won (sometimes considered the pioneer of new Korean documentary) and *Gift of Life* (2004) by the Taiwanese

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[1] See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3o6VhSXHNtw>;
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dKBVUmuQpqU>;
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HRq3YSs0IT0>;
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7H_PIJAhG7A>.

documentarian Wu Yi-feng are illustrative examples. Even so, I would like to contend that although documentarians may try to build a rapport with conventional distribution channels, it is the ingenious use of unconventional distribution networks that marks the great vitality of the documentary practices under discussion here.

That having been said, we should point out that the picture of independent documentary production and screening is far from rosy. Amir Muhammad, a young Malaysian filmmaker with the reputation of being the pioneer of Malaysian independent filmmaking, quit filmmaking for a writing career because of the lack of local investors, screening platforms, and any widespread public interest in documentary films (Arif 183-84). It is worthy of note that Jane H. C. Yu's introductory essay in the edited volume *Asian Documentary Today* is poignantly entitled "The Invisible Asia and Asian Documentaries." She estimates that there must be "over a thousand documentaries produced in Asia every year" (Yu 12). However, in spite of the vibrancy of documentary filmmaking in Asia, Yu points out that "most of the Asian documentary filmmakers all [sic] face the same difficulty: a lack of distribution channels and a stable production environment for long-term support" (15). She remarks that "despite the diversity found in Asia, its documentaries usually are difficult to approach, thus, invisible, not appreciated and rarely discussed" (16).

This special issue is an effort to draw attention to this significant documentary making phenomenon.

## Stakes of Documentary Making

The sheer amount of documentaries independently produced in many Asian countries since the 1980s does not in itself make the subject truly worthy of serious attention. The significance of this documentary making phenomenon does not lie simply in the large quantity of its products. In the view of Jane Yu, these independently made documentaries warrant attention because "[t]o understand Asia, we need to go deeper than the exotic appearances and into the lives of different groups of people in different regions" (Yu 13-14). Documentaries made by insiders from Asia are taken to help us gain in-depth understanding of this area. It goes without saying that this belief implies a notion of documentary filmmaking as a film practice that engages the notion of "truth." If imagination is key to the shaping of a feature film, truth is key to the production of a documentary film. Documentarians may transgress the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction and make all kinds

of bold experiments that problematize documentary's tie with the historical world; it nevertheless remains the case that the stakes involved in documentary making and viewing are quite different from those for feature films. If commercial interests and artistry are pivotal issues for feature films, documentary films are concerned most of all with the production of "truth," no matter how this intriguing concept is defined, problematized, and even dramatized in documentary works.

This does not mean that imagination and artistry are not important. Every documentary has a voice of its own, which is, as Bill Nichols remarks in *Introduction to Documentary*, the film's "specific way of expressing its way of seeing the world" (68). The construction of a distinctive documentary voice depends greatly on the creativity of the documentarian. Dziga Vertov's and Jean Rouch's radical experiments with documentary styles are the most illustrative examples. Nevertheless, while we are stunned by the two great documentarians' admirable, bold stylistic adventures, we should not gloss over the fact that creativity was the means rather than the ends for them. There was a close link between their formal experiment and their conception of "truth." Vertov's "kino-eye" practice was closely associated with his notion of *kino-pravda* (film truth). "Kino-eye" was meant "to reveal and show the truth," producing a new visual reality so as to herald a new social reality (Nichols, *Introduction* 217). Likewise, Jean Rouch's *cinéma vérité* places the concept of "truth" at its very heart. It was practiced in search of a deeper level of truth, something that, so argued Jean Rouch, conventional documentary forms were incapable of (Barnouw 254-55). For both experimental documentary masters, documentaries are *more than* cinematic art.

In the history of documentary, many important formal innovations have been advanced as part of the documentarian's search for "truth." From the observational mode, *cinéma vérité*, to the "reflexive" mode, the history of documentary in its evolution and revolution witnesses documentarians' vigorous engagement with the problematic of "truth." Even *Song of Ceylon* (1935), greatly admired for its poetry and evocation of the beauty of the Ceylonese landscape and people, was not simply a virtuosic performance in celebration of the creativity of the filmmaker Basil Wright. Instead, it had an important role to play in the imperial production of "truth" (Barnouw 91-92).

The question of *how* a documentary makes critical claims to truth should be carefully kept in sight when we do documentary studies. In Peter Hughes's view, "what may make a particular documentary distinctive and important is the specific cultural point of view it brings to an issue, along with a sense of debate" (Hughes). To engage in a debate is inevitably to participate in what Michel Foucault calls "the

political economy of truth" (Foucault 131). What is particularly worth noting is that not all documentaries overtly address the question of truth. But, as *Song of Ceylon* illustrates, it is often when the documentary is silent about its role in the production of truth that the whole issue tends to be most intriguing. I will come back to this later, when I address the issue in more detail with a critical analysis of a contemporary Taiwanese environmental documentary.

It is not without reason that I insist on the tie between documentary and the production of truth. Theorization is no abstract reasoning. It is usually conducted in response to a problem—or a "crux," to borrow Abé Mark Nornes's term. The same social phenomenon can be understood and interpreted in different lights when it is perceived from different angles with different concerns. The difference in interpretation and focus often reveals the baggage we carry with us. As a prominent scholar of Asian film studies and veteran programmer of the high-profile Yamagata Documentary Film Festival, Nornes urges for a more creative exploration of fiction in Asian documentary making. He identifies creativity and subjectivity as essential to documentary making; as he suggests in his response, "To keep documentary open to all the possibilities of screen art is to ensure a rich and vibrant scene that points us to novel and exciting ways of seeing the world and thinking about history, truth, and all that matters." He ends his discussion with a most moving, visionary statement: "I wish to highlight the path marked by poetry and delirium and joy. That is the crux."

I totally agree with Nornes on his call for more critical and imaginative reflections on documentary styles. And it is certainly true that there is ample room for artistic improvement as more and more amateurs join the Asian documentary filmmaking scene, empowered by new technology. I personally favor documentaries imbued with poetry and delirium and joy over those with a dull, conventional documentary style, even though my research on indigenous documentary often requires that I be wary of this aesthetic penchant shaped by my Western academic training. However, the crux I want to engage is notably different from the one identified by Nornes, and this to a great extent reflects my background as someone with a long-term interest in postcolonial issues in Taiwan. First of all, I want to call attention to the problem with the recent trend of documentary making as being subjective, creative expression without much critical reflection on the filmmaker's (implicit or explicit) role in the battle for truth. In addition, I would like to address the impact of film festival competition on this trend and discuss what it means when filmmakers vie for (international) recognition in an environment where the curators and jury members' aesthetic taste is more often than not the most

critical factor in the evaluation process. How the jury members and curators define "good documentaries" has far-reaching implications.

I will make my point by way of a brief discussion of the award-winning documentary *Nimbus* (2010) by Huang Hsin-yao. This documentary garnered several important awards in film festivals in Taiwan and has been selected for screening at several international film festivals. Commissioned by a county government with a mission to promote local tourism, the documentary takes a small coastal town as its subject. Eschewing talking-heads and interviews, the young documentarian renders in his work an artistic vision of the rural place with music and poetry. For film festival juries, this work exemplifies a promising path for documentary making in Taiwan. Instead of bombarding the viewers with tedious interviews, voice-over, testimonials, and detached narrative, it allows the images to speak for themselves. The comment of a film critic captures very well the refreshing impression the viewers receive from this documentary: "Every shot in this piece of work is so beautiful. *Nimbus* reminds me of Werner Herzog's *Fata Morgana* with its astonishingly innovative treatment of time and space; it also reminds me of *The Wild Blue Yonder*" (Cheng). A cinema and communication studies scholar also remarked in a private conversation that her students were so impressed by the documentary's lyrical representation of the coastal town that many of them expressed the interest in going there for a visit.

What is intriguing is that this town is located in one of the most severe land subsidence areas in Taiwan. It has been plagued by environmental problems caused by injudicious policies and controversial development plans. In fact, the Ministry of Domestic Affairs at one point admitted that the High Speed Rail, which gains admiration of almost every visitor to Taiwan, probably would have to cease operation because of the severity of land subsidence in that area. In reality, the beautiful water scenes that we see in the documentary actually reflect what Rob Nixon calls "slow violence": "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (Nixon 2).

This biting reality is mentioned in the documentary, but the documentarian's focus is apparently elsewhere. As Huang says in an interview, he sees himself as an artist who expresses himself through the medium of documentary. He refuses to use documentary as a "tool" for social movement; for him, documentary making should be taken as artistic creation (Hu). The result is that he transforms an environmental problem into a work of art for aesthetic enjoyment. As for the idea of promoting tourism, I think it will remain a remote dream for the indefinite future to come after

I took a fieldtrip to the place filmed. The current condition of the infrastructure makes it practically impossible to turn this coastal town in its harsh reality into an appealing tourist spot.

A documentarian is entitled to self-expression through the documentary form. Nevertheless, the question of the documentarian's role in the battle for truth—the war waged between environmental activists and the state in this case—should not be dismissed outright. To represent the coastal town in the way Huang does is to choose to ignore what has brought about the land damage there, and to justify what the environmental activists perceive as wrong. This does not mean that the documentary viewers should side with the activists. The point is to *not* overlook the tie between documentary making and the political economy of truth, for documentary production often entails actual impacts on the material world and the people inhabiting it.

Unfortunately, this important question is often ignored at film festivals. It is unrealistic to expect each jury and curator to be well-informed of the historical reality behind every documentary film, particularly those from geopolitically marginalized places. Without adequate knowledge of the complex local realities represented in the documentaries submitted for competition, juries and curators tend to give awards to works that stand out as cinematic *art*.[2] Given that film festivals provide an important platform for documentarians to enhance the visibility of their works, the criteria adopted by the juries and curators carry tremendous weight. Award-winning documentaries are received as "good documentaries." They are often taken to be the models to emulate. With the increasing currency of "personal documentaries" characterized by individuality and depoliticization in the new era of Asian documentary making, especially in Taiwan, China, and South Korea (Kuo 193-95; Lu 35-36; N. Lee 24; Choi 42), the question of "what counts as a good documentary" is more pressing than ever. Can a documentary celebrate the documentarian's imagination or creativity without proper critical attention to its role in the production of truth? I think not.

Instead of casting the question in terms of the "reportage or art" dichotomy or the "evidentially vs. fiction" opposition—a debate that dates back to John

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[2] I recently conducted a study on Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival (YIDFF). My findings show that the Taiwanese documentaries awarded at YIDFF share the same stylistic traits. Most of them, social documentaries and personal documentaries alike, unfold as a psychological drama with a great emotional intensity. These documentaries are expressive, characterized by an interest in individual subjectivities rather than in-depth engagement with social problems. Given the long-standing tradition of interventional social documentaries in Taiwan, this phenomenon demands our attention.

Grierson's famed definition of documentary as "creative treatment of actuality"—it may be more productive to identify the relation between documentary making and the production of "truth" as a "crux" in thinking about "what counts as a good documentary." Documentary making often involves a "battle for truth," a battle that is "about the status of truth and the economic and political role it plays" (Foucault 132). *How* does a documentary address the question of truth? *How* does it participate in the production of truth? These questions are not just central concerns for social documentaries, but also for the so-called "personal documentaries." The making of a personal documentary is always tied up with ethical questions about the legitimacy of the knowledge that gradually comes into shape as the filmmaker interacts with the filmed subjects in the filmmaking process. Are the filmed subject's interests properly protected in the process of documentary making? Or are they subject to exploitation and abuse? In other words, is the documentary project conducted at the expense of the filmed subjects? Does the documentarian violate the contract of good faith with the audience and cheat the audience with faked stuff? Arguably, the way that a documentary makes claim to truth defines the stakes of the documentary making and viewing.

It cannot be stressed too much that the participation of documentary making in the production of truth is always regulated by ethical rules. It cannot be stressed too much that a documentary made without ethical concerns is seldom recognized as a good documentary, regardless of the artistic excellence it manages to achieve (Ruby 144). On the one hand, it is a tacit understanding that the relationship between the documentary maker and the viewer is built on good faith (Aufderheide 25). Does a documentary maker responsibly represent reality or fake it without open acknowledgement? This is a question that all documentarians are obliged to answer. No documentary making would be considered legitimate if the documentary maker abjures this ethical responsibility toward the viewer. On the other hand, ethics also governs the documentary maker's relationship with the filmed subject. It is expected that the quest for truth in documentary making should not be conducted in violation of these ethical rules. The documentary maker's ethical responsibility to the filmed subjects is of paramount importance in the assessment of a documentary.

Thus, Bill Nichols defines the documentary space as a space of "axiographics," which "address[es] the question of how values, particularly an ethics of representation, comes to be known and experienced in relation to space" (Nichols, *Representing Reality* 77). Axiographics engages issues of ethical debate, such as "the nature of consent; proprietary rights to recorded images; the right to know versus the right to privacy; the responsibilities of the filmmaker to his or her

subject as well as audience, or employer; codes of conduct and the complexities of legal recourse," and "the ethical implications conveyed by the representation of time and space itself" (77). In the words of Nichols, "Developing a sense of ethical regard becomes a vital part of the documentary filmmaker's professionalism" (Nichols, *Introduction* 59).

Consequently, documentary analysis demands a whole set of protocols not exactly like those for feature films. The emphasis on documentary making as ethical production of truth, rather than the documentarian's artistic rendering of a reality constructed in and through film, impacts greatly on the paradigm and analytical protocols for a proper critical engagement with documentaries. Documentary conceptualized essentially as cinematic art tends to be evaluated in terms of the artistic creativity of the documentary maker. Documentary making seen as an ethical agent in the political economy of truth, in contrast, evokes questions about documentary making as an ethical practice with consequences for the real world. This is why Amir Muhammad cautions against the lure of film festival accolades. He suggests that the criteria set by the judges for documentary competition in film festivals may compromise documentary filmmaking by setting a specific direction for documentary making (Arif 183). Peter Hughes, an Australia-based film and media scholar, similarly calls attention to the detrimental consequences of "seeking after international audiences" which, in his view, often "dull[s] the edge which a specific perspective is able to bring" (Hughes). He makes the good point that "[d]ocumentary is not about 'content' alone, but about debate and contestation. The question of audience is always central to documentary as the purpose of documentary is to produce changes in attitudes, values, and behaviour" (Hughes). For him, political and ethical issues are vital to the understanding of a documentary. Although Muhammad is addressing the problem of assessing the merits of documentaries with the artistic criteria of film festival juries while Hughes is more concerned with the risks of co-option as documentaries try to enter the commercial market, both urge for a more critical reflection on the paradigms and protocols we use in understanding documentary making as a specific form of cinematic practice. For them, it is important that documentaries be understood as ethical agents in the political economy of truth before they are considered works of cinematic art. I hope I have helped flesh out this point with my analysis of *Nimbus*.

## Documentary Filmmaking as "Archivization"

Ultimately, to insist on the status of documentary as an ethical agent in the production of truth is to recuperate the notion of documentary as "archive." This immediately calls to mind Chris Berry and Lisa Rofel's coinage of the term "alternative archive" to designate New Chinese documentaries. In their view, the term best captures the spirit of New Chinese documentary which tends to avoid "anchoring the meaning" or "directing the viewer to any critical interpretation" (Berry and Rofel 144, 145). They remark that Chinese New documentaries often "pursue formal qualities that maximize ambivalence and reticence in regard to judgment" when addressing sensitive issues (Berry and Rofel 143). With a strong focus on the "perspective from the bottom up on the status of different social classes under current political, economic, and social transformations in China" (Lu 32), these documentaries constitute an alternative archive which "does not substitute for or exist in competition with the 'main building,' but simply grows alongside as something additional" (Berry and Rofel 137). The concept of "archive," as defined by Berry and Rofel, stresses the function of documentary making as recording and compilation, supplementary to the archive created by political authorities.

But the notion of documentary as archive could be understood in a sense not exactly like the one proposed by Berry and Rofel. This designation of documentary making as archivization defines "archive" in the Derridean sense. As expounded by Jacques Derrida, the notion of "archive" initially denotes a house, the residence of the *archons* who are the documents' guardians (Derrida 9-10). What is particularly noteworthy is that the *archons* "do not only ensure the physical security of what is deposited and of the substrate. They are also accorded the hermeneutic right and competence. They have the power to interpret the archives" (10). Key to the meaning of archivization in the Derridean sense is, therefore, the hermeneutic exercise conducted by the archon. Documentary making involves numerous choices, as Erik Barnouw says (Barnouw 344). Each choice inevitably implies a perspective, a position that the documentarian takes up in relation to the historical world s/he is recording. If documentary making is essentially a battle for truth, documentary makers are archons who not only keep records but also exercise the hermeneutic right over the records.

To engage in documentary making is inevitably to practice a hermeneutic exercise, to enter a debate, to contest over the rights over archivization and over the access to archives. Derrida reminds us that "[t]here is no political power without

control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitutions, and its interpretation" (Derrida 11). Documentary making matters because it may wrest the control of the archive from the hands of the privileged groups, encourage popular and democratic participation in archivization through image-making, and open up the possibilities of interpretation of the archive. The semi-musical documentary made by Amir Muhammad as analyzed in Fiona Lee's "Spectral History" and the Cambodian documentaries Annette Hamilton discusses in "Witness and Recuperation" demonstrate par excellence how documentary filmmaking is a battle over the rights of archivization. Approaching the question from another angle, "Can the Subaltern Sing, and in a Power Ballad?" by Celine Parreñas Shimizu tackles the problem of the subaltern's access to archivization in an age of global media. Insofar as documentary making raises critical questions about archivization and its role in the political economy of truth, documentaries as archives are not really about the past or the world as it is. Documentary making as archivization should be understood as an attempt to "*call into question* the coming of the future" (Derrida 26; emphasis in original). It is in this sense that documentary making as archivization heralds what Yu-lin Lee calls "new history," although for Lee, as he tries to argue in "The Digital Emergence of a New History," digitization is essential to the emergence of the new history.

While we find in independent documentary making a great potential to precipitate the emergence of new history, it certainly would be naïve to assume that the new mode of documentary making is free from the co-option by mainstream power. As Gaik Cheng Khoo shows in her insightful analysis of Singapore's memory project in the article "Of *Diminishing Memories* and *Old Places*," popular participation in archivization may also fall prey to the state's knowledge-control. Chialan Sharon Wang's "Confronting the Real, Construing Reality" also raises very interesting questions about the ambivalent identity of documentary making as practiced by an internationally acclaimed Chinese filmmaker, Jia Zhangke. In Wang's view, Jia's documentaries run the risk of "turning his chronicles of China into a global spectacle for arthouse consumption on the one hand, and reinvoking an idealized image of the working class that has always been glorified and reified in the nationalistic ideology of Chinese communism on the other." In one way or another, all the six essays included in this special issue engage the question of the violence of archivization.

## Why Asia Pacific?

Finally, a few words about the choice of the term "Documenting Asia Pacific" for this special issue. One of the aims of this special issue is to paint a broader picture of how documentary making acted out the violence of archivization in various parts of Asia Pacific. As John A. Lent remarks, such a project always raises the question of delineating the region. Indeed, why Asia Pacific? This term itself certainly is controversial and subject to critique. But it is important to note that the meaning of "Asia Pacific" is not fixed; it can be re-defined and re-imagined to generate another set of meanings in a different context. In her discussion of the Asia Pacific imagination of Asian America, Hsiu-chuan Lee remarks that the substitution of "Asia Pacific" for "Asian America" suggests an understanding of Asian Americans that is based on critical attention given to the socio-political trajectories of Asian Americans across the Pacific in a way that takes emphasis away from the notion of grounded minority community (H. Lee). Likewise, we opted for the phrase "Documenting Asia Pacific" in order to draw attention to the trans-national dimension of Asian documentary making. While some documentaries maintain a strong tie with a specific locality, many are brought into being through translocal connection. Celine Parreñas Shimizu's analysis of *Don't Stop Believin': Everyman's Journey*, a documentary by a US-based Filipino-American filmmaker about the journey of a Filipino singer's journey toward global stardom, illustrates how the production and resonance of Asian documentaries need not be restricted by national territories. Anita Wen-Shin Chang's discussion of her own work *Joyful Life* also addresses the translocal dimension of documentary making. In an earlier version that she wrote for this issue, Chang posed very interesting questions about the significance of trans-Pacific collaboration and life experience as they impact upon her documentary making: "What is the nature of working among such differences that seem at once distancing and yet intimate? How can the positionality of being Taiwanese American facilitate or thwart collaboration abroad and in Taiwan? What does it mean for a Taiwanese American to feel connected, get involved, and engage in communitarian, solidarity-building activities? How can collaborative filmmaking praxis in Asia contribute to like collaborative praxis in the U. S.?"

This special issue, likewise, is the fruit of the joint labor of scholars, filmmakers, and curators in Asia Pacific. Just like the documentaries that try to herald a "future-to-come" in the Derridean sense, this issue is not only an attempt to promote the visibility of invisible Asian documentaries, but also a modest endeavor of archivization. The critical exchange between Professor Nornes and I can also be

understood in this light—an attempt to envision "the future-to-come" of Asian documentaries through interventional, risky interpretations in our different ways.

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