

The Taiwan New Documentary: A Critical Overview

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The 1980s witnessed the birth of the New Taiwan Cinema. At the same time, a new form of documentary filmmaking was taking place in the midst of street demonstration and participating actively in the shaping of the emerging civil society. Often designated as “anti-mainstream media” to bear witness to the power of the people, this type of documentary filmmaking was self-consciously and conspicuously ‘grassroots’ in its vision and voice. Ever since then, the new Taiwan documentary has enjoyed increasing popularity and continued to exert influence in the public sphere, the most recent illustrative example being *Beyond Beauty: Taiwan from Above* (Chi Po-lin, 2013) with its astounding box office income of NT 120,000,000 (equivalent to USD 4,000,000) and the following investigation of environmental violations by the government in the repercussions of the film screenings.

This paper discusses the development and current state of the new Taiwan documentary (NTD). It identifies the stages of the development of the NTD over the past decades and uses several prominent examples to explore the complicated relationship between documentary filmmaking, social commitment, commerce, and art. The paper ends with a tentative speculation on the strength and weakness of the NTD in comparison with contemporary Chinese independent documentary that has attracted international attention and investment.