

## 8 Documenting environmental protest

### Taiwan's Gongliao Fourth Nuclear Power Plant and the cultural politics of dialogic artifice

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#### **Introduction: political dissent in modern Taiwan and the anti-nuclear movement**

In the wake of Taiwan's lifting of martial law on July 15, 1987, documentary films on a wide variety of subjects have become a popular medium for the expression of political dissent; for the raising of public consciousness with reference to such topics as gender equality, authoritarian repression, the humane treatment of animals, the status of minority groups, and the role of elderly people in society; and for the exposure of environmental damage due to industrialization.<sup>1</sup> As the editors of this volume outline in greater detail in the Introduction, 1987 was a watershed date for Taiwan, politically speaking, because from then on, the formation of political parties could take place legally, dissenting political opinion was no longer considered a threat to national security, and detaining, jailing, or "disappearing" people solely on the grounds of their political beliefs ceased to be legal. That said, the date is, from another perspective, somewhat of an arbitrary one. As Denny Roy, Shelley Rigger, Mab Huang, and others have shown, for example, dissenting opinion has long been a part of Taiwan's political and social fabric.<sup>2</sup> Since the time of the traumatic "birth" of the Republic of China on Taiwan in the late 1940s, and especially with the massacre that occurred beginning with the February 28 Incident in 1947, effectively paving the way for authoritarian rule, the public expression of dissenting political opinion has enjoyed a tenuous, if stubbornly persistent, existence on the island. But from the late 1940s until 1987, referred to as the "White Terror" era, those who expressed political dissent were subject to extreme persecution. A main component of Taiwan's modern history is the record of political activists, mainly intellectuals, who have sought to challenge the government on a wide range of grounds, only ultimately to be subdued or liquidated. This chapter explores the topic of nuclear power in Taiwan as it is featured in the Taiwanese documentary *Gongliao, How Are You? (Gongliao, ni hao ma?)*. This film, taking a hybrid approach that mixes some techniques from anthropological or ethnographic cinema and some from political documentary, could not have been produced in Taiwan prior to 1987. Nonetheless, the anti-nuclear movement and

environmental consciousness in general, though perhaps slightly ancillary to the ethnic tensions that have informed the political dissent-repression bipolarity in recent Taiwan history, were predicated on the gradual gains made by the persistent tug from the opposition that has existed since the late 1940s and finally came to ultimate fruition in 1987.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the fact that attitudes toward nuclear power globally are ambivalent and fluid has meant that its status in Taiwan has been, and continues to be, subject to revision on a regular basis. Indeed, at the outset of writing this chapter, nuclear power was generally viewed as an inevitable and necessary hazard in Taiwan. Under the shadow of the recent disaster involving the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Japan, however, the Taiwanese are highly apprehensive about their own Faustian bargain with nuclear power.

If Taiwan evolved over those decades as an authoritarian regime under the geopolitical umbrella of US Cold War foreign policy, ironically wishing for the sort of freedom of expression taken for granted by the citizens of the superpower that safeguarded its existence and, by extension, ensured its ability to remain authoritarian, that evolution did not involve much in the line of political liberty. Coinciding with Taiwan's diplomatic abandonment by the United States and Japan in favor of the People's Republic of China (though close informal ties have remained), the economic climate improved rapidly, until by the early 1980s Taiwan enjoyed one of the highest per capita incomes in the developing world, a literacy rate that outstripped that of the United States, and a robust cultural sphere of literature, music, art, filmmaking, and performance that laid the groundwork for the high degree of documentary creativity we see today.<sup>4</sup>

With this economic fecundity, however, came serious environmental problems. Little anxiety was felt by the government, the business community, or even the general populace throughout the modernization period from 1950 to 1980 on the island. People were better off economically with each passing year and a blind eye was turned toward the poisoning of water, the choking air pollution in urban areas, the mounting piles of refuse, the multiplying petrochemical plants, and the burgeoning nuclear power industry, which was viewed at the time as the panacea for Taiwan's paucity of natural resources and domestic energy. This all changed in the late 1980s when, as Robert Weller terms it, Taiwan's environmental movement "mushroomed" into existence.<sup>5</sup> The first three nuclear plants in Taiwan were built with very little discussion of their environmental impact. For the fourth one, the difference in reception could not have been more pronounced. Seldom in Taiwan has there been such dogged and organized opposition to a state-sponsored project.<sup>6</sup> But in spite of all the opposition over more than two decades, and despite the fact that the project was nearly derailed at least twice, the construction of the plant goes on and the activation of the reactors is currently being scheduled.<sup>7</sup> Billions of dollars have been spent on them. Political careers have been ended by the controversies surrounding the project. At least one person has died and one been sentenced to life in prison for murder. And several people living close to the plant have died of various illnesses before the project has seen completion.

This chapter offers a meticulous analysis of an important documentary that focuses on the protest of the building of the plant. In it, I delve into the questions of how the documentary came to be made and how it is structured. I look at the way this documentary fits into the global movement against nuclear power as well as how the issue is played out locally. I am particularly intrigued by the style the documentary filmmaker has chosen for conveying the story of the protester's protracted battle with the central government. In order to fully dissect this style of representation, I consider the film in the light of documentary theory, much of which draws its inspiration from discussions of ethnographic cinema. Almost astoundingly, the film completely circumnavigates the issue of ethnic politics. Ethnic politics, born out of the tempestuous days following the February 28 Massacre and the ensuing White Terror period, is the mainstay of political tensions in Taiwan.<sup>8</sup> Chinese recently relocated from the Mainland in the 1940s, and their offspring, have been the primary beneficiaries of political privilege in Taiwan over the past half-century, and the Taiwanese people (who also came from Mainland China but settled the island several hundred years earlier) have rightly felt disenfranchised. Although environmental politics is not totally devoid of an ethnic dimension, the kind of strife that characterizes other issues, such as the political destiny of Taiwan vis-à-vis the People's Republic of China (i.e., independence or reunification), the issue of language reform, and attitudes on how history should be portrayed in school textbooks are largely absent from the discourse concerning the natural environment. I have no definite answer for why this is the case, except perhaps to observe that the environmental movement in Taiwan, historically speaking, has tended to be clustered around specific egregious incidents involving ordinary people, whereas the sort of ethnic political tensions that have gripped Taiwan through the decades, and received more attention in media, literature and film, are of a broader, more systemic nature, and, perhaps critically, they directly affect intellectuals.

#### Filming the anti-nuclear movement: an idiosyncratic approach to an inflammatory subject

The Taiwanese documentary *Gongliao, How Are You?*, directed by Cui Suxin and released in February 2004, narrates the struggle of the local residents of Gongliao, a township on Taiwan's northeast coast in Taipei County, as they resisted the Kuomintang (KMT, Guomindang)-led government's plan to construct a nuclear power plant, the fourth to be built in Taiwan and by far the largest, right in their midst. The political saga of the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant (or simply "He-Si" in Chinese) project is known to virtually everyone living in Taiwan today, as its story has been played out in the newspapers and television coverage for over two decades and coincided with Taiwan's gradual relaxation of political restraint and increase in democracy during the 1980s and 1990s. As such, the sequence of events forms a unique case study of political power, grassroots activism, and public knowledge that hitherto had been anathema to the Taiwan social scene during the post-World War II period. The documentary is a

fascinating artifact in its own right, as viewing it not only affords us the opportunity to get to know many of the central players in the grassroots resistance movement more intimately, but also provides insight into complex modes of visual representation while purporting to unveil the "truth" of the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant's checkered path toward completion.<sup>9</sup> Cui is a highly adept and talented filmmaker whose work centers on "green" issues in Taiwan. She has been involved with the Green Citizens' Action Alliance (Lüse Gongmin Xingdong Lianmeng), which sponsored this documentary, and Civil Media (Gongmin Xingdong Yingyin Jilu Ziliaoku), a web-based group that highlights environmental concerns on the island. Recent productions of hers have included mixtures of a blog with video clips of particular movements or protests.

*Gongliao, How Are You?* is of interest to anyone who works in cultural studies or, more specifically, documentary studies, in Taiwan, for several reasons. The subject of nuclear power is a global environmental issue. On one side is the opinion that has prevailed, but is by no means universally held, in the United States since the Three Mile Island disaster of 1979, in which one of the two generators suffered partial meltdown. It is considered the most serious nuclear disaster in US history, although no one was killed.<sup>10</sup> Since that incident, not a single reactor has opened in the United States. The distaste for nuclear energy in the United States, it has been argued, stems from three simultaneous factors: First, around the time of Three Mile Island the popular film *China Syndrome*, starring Jack Lemmon and Jane Fonda, hit the theatres to rave reviews and packed movie houses. Second, public officials did an abysmal job of managing the disaster both on the ground and in the media. And third, there is a well-organized and well-financed anti-nuclear movement in the United States.<sup>11</sup> To varying degrees, these three factors also obtain in Taiwan. The most recent information indicates that the Gongliao power plant's two reactors, now officially called the Longmen (Lungmen) Nuclear Power Plant, built according to the Generation III advanced boiling water reactor (BWR) method patented by General Electric, the managing contractor for Longmen, were slated to come on line in 2011 but as yet have not been activated.<sup>12</sup> The plant is being built by an American company and therefore is an example of the intertwined nature of global economics.<sup>13</sup> Its construction raises issues such as the affordability of energy in an energy-restricted country; the risk of nuclear meltdown and seepage; safe practices in the placement of nuclear power plants, considering that Taiwan is densely populated and earthquake-prone; the proper dissemination of information in a democratic society; appropriate compensation for those displaced or impacted by the construction of a nuclear power plant; the potential for nuclear proliferation; the geopolitics of energy independence; and the secure disposal of nuclear waste. With particular respect to Taiwan, the Gongliao controversy is an interesting test case of political activism that has the potential to transcend ethnicity, an unusual characteristic for a political battle in Taiwan. In fact, the political stance of the producers and the director is clearly neither that of the KMT nor that of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which for much of the time during which the Gongliao Nuclear Plant was being built was the

most prominent opposition party, but rather the Green Party.<sup>14</sup> As in many democracies, the Green Party tends to be pushed to the side in winner-take-all presidential systems but fares better in parliamentary systems, where smaller parties can often wield demonstrable power.

Equally worthy of scrutiny is the fact that the very composition of the documentary represents an intriguing example of how the narrative of such an event can be reshaped and packaged for the audience in moving and persuasive ways, in ways that highlight information that has been little known to the general public to date, such as by filling in personal details about several of the Gongliao residents who have spearheaded the resistance to the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant. Most of these people are still relatively anonymous to the Taiwanese public. This film gives them a face that is not easily ignored. On the other hand, the documentary also elides any arguments in favor of the nuclear plant. There is no comprehensive presentation of the fact that Taiwan's energy output is woefully inadequate for its current needs, and the fact that reasonably priced energy is not available to Taiwan has jeopardized its ability to maintain a competitive edge as an economic producer in a highly contested global trade environment, a problem made especially acute by Taiwan's mercurial relationship with the PRC. Ostensibly, the filmmaker, who doubles as the narrator, portrays herself as someone curious about the experiences of the local population in Gongliao, someone who desires to probe more deeply into their minds and understand their perspective on the events. She comments at the end of the documentary that she understands their perspective much better now. But her choice to frame the composition as a type of discovery to some extent belies the fact that Cui is involved in the environmental movement in Taiwan already. She does not disclose this in the film itself, but that fact indicates that her plan is, rather, to change public opinion in Taiwan regarding nuclear power. Her film, then, differs from other anti-nuclear documentaries and from other activist documentaries in general, such as those by the influential American filmmaker Michael Moore, that adopt a clear position vis-à-vis their subject and often present a visual experience that is heavily narrated over. Although Cui's work does include non-diegetic narrative, it is not a constant, pervasive, third-person narrative. In fact, the structure of the documentary is highly complex and intricate, and many sophisticated cinematic techniques are employed to present an emotionally all-consuming account of the lives of some of the ordinary local folks who, by an unfortunate coincidence of history, became swept up in this major event and assumed roles they had never imagined for themselves.

On the surface, *Gongliao, How Are You?* might appear as innocuous as a nature documentary charting the feeding patterns of the Formosan bulbul, save for the inflammatory subject matter of the film project. A careful examination, however, reveals that Cui Suxin has crafted an ingenious structural model through which to retrace the history and also continue to follow the current events that surround the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant narrative. First broached to the public in about 1980 by the state-run energy company Taiwan Dianli Gongsi (Taidian), or Taipower in English, the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant project has

been a simmering source of contention from its inception. Three nuclear plants were built in Taiwan during the 1970s and early 1980s with two reactors each, giving a total of six operating reactors on the island.<sup>15</sup> The issue of the Fourth Nuclear Reactor first boiled over in the media and among concerned groups in the mid-1980s. This coincided with the gradual melting of state oppression and the eventual lifting of martial law in 1987, as briefly outlined at the start of the chapter.<sup>16</sup> By the late 1980s and early 1990s, the conflict between the citizens of Gongliao and the central government, still under the complete control of the KMT, with Lee Teng-hui (Li Denghui) as president, was intensifying. But it was not until 1998, some eight years after the zenith of public resistance, that Cui began fieldwork for her documentary, a project that stemmed from her graduate history studies at National Taiwan University.<sup>17</sup> Entering into a living and still building social and political controversy midway in its historical unfolding presented Cui with an interesting challenge in terms of how to edit it into a presentable project for her audience. What she chose to do was chart some of the major historical points, utilizing what amateur archival footage shot by the locals themselves and interviews she could, but simultaneously to record the events as they played out during her involvement with the project. Her production period spanned fully six years, from 1998 until 2004, when the documentary was released. This coincided with some, though not all, pivotal developments, including the first election in Taiwan in which a non-KMT party member won the presidency, the temporary halting of the project and subsequent resignation of Premier Tang Fei in 2000, and the resumption of the project a year later.

In an effort to avoid the sort of "voice-of-God" documentary that places itself at some unapproachable (and unrepachable) vantage point where it can make obvious value judgments as it goes, Cui foregrounds herself to some extent in the filming of the project, employing an autobiographical style, akin to a muted form of "interactive documentary," using Bill Nichols's schema of documentary modes.<sup>18</sup> But as I shall argue below, and attempt to flesh out in some detail in the penultimate section of this chapter, Nichols's modes cannot be made fully to fit the idiosyncratic style of documentary with which Cui has presented us. Cui appears sometimes on the periphery of the film frame, when she is obtaining something, like the archival videos that the Gongliao residents have saved, or as a passenger in a car traveling into Gongliao or to the Hua-lien (Hualian) prison, as she does. For the most part, however, with one notable exception she does not interact in a heavy-handed way with the subjects of her documentary in the way, for example, the narrator of the Australian production *Who's Afraid of Nuclear Power?* does at all times.<sup>19</sup>

She does engage in one activity, though, that is quite extraordinary and places her in a more select group of what I will call "post-*vérité*" filmmakers.<sup>20</sup> She employs at key moments in the documentary, through the use of non-diegetic voice overlay, a second-person style of narrative voice in which she addresses a specific listener. As we all know from our training in narrative studies, the second-person voice is unusual in narrative. It is generally advised that writers eschew this style of writing in favor of either the first or the third person. Despite

that, it is surprising how many narrative works actually employ the second-person voice. This voice, utilizing the pronoun "you," often addresses the reader directly. Cui utilizes the pronoun "you" as well, but she does not do so in order to address the audience. Rather, she is addressing the one person in the Gongliao anti-nuclear movement who is, like herself, an outsider. This person is Lin Shunyuan, a youth who after his discharge from the Taiwanese army traveled to Gongliao and joined in the protests against the power plant. Young A-yuan was caught up in the foment and killed a police officer while driving a van through the melee of a protest. According to all witnesses interviewed in the film, and referenced by those interviewees, the death of the officer was an unfortunate accident. The authorities did not see it that way, however, as Lin was eventually sentenced to life in prison for murder. This was during the notorious October 3 Incident of 1991. At the time when director Cui comes on the scene to produce her documentary, Lin Shunyuan has already been in prison for seven years.

The employment of direct address to Lin Shunyuan, whom she refers to familiarly as A-yuan, becomes the guiding structural device for the film. It could be the case that the remarkable story of Lin Shunyuan, the dutiful son and exemplary military man prominently displayed in the media, was what first captured the imagination of the filmmaker. No explanation is provided to the audience, only that she somehow identifies with him as a fellow outsider to the coastal enclave. But his special position as an outsider to the village activists and yet paradoxically a martyr to their cause offers Cui Suxin the opportunity of a hook by which to gain entry into the story for herself and to engage her audience aesthetically as well. The modes of documentary presentation are at least as many as the motives for producing documentaries. Bill Nichols's schema of four dominant modes—expository, observational, interactive, and reflexive—is an oft-cited framework used for discussing these various presentational modes.<sup>21</sup> However, Nichols's configuration, though tremendously influential and perceptive, has its limitations. What about cases where documentaries use a mixture of presentational modes? What about the intricate dissection of subjectivity that must be carried out in order to ferret out questions on the issues of transference, affinity, and rivalry that may crop up unconsciously between the documentarist and the object of his or her study?<sup>22</sup> Jay Ruby asserts that scholarship on the documentary does not delve deeply enough into the fundamental implications of what such terms and categories as "reflexivity" mean, leading to confusion between such modes as the self-reflexive documentary and the autobiographical documentary.<sup>23</sup> A documentary narrative may involve an expository narrator who provides continuity and signals for the audience what our interpretation of the primary visual and auditory data should be, or a "voice-of-God" narrator, or it may foreground an interactive narrator who films his or her participation with the subjects of the documentary. A documentary may elide any narratorial voice in favor of a more observational effect, thereby giving the audience the illusion of a purely objective representation of the matter.

The use of a second-person voice (i.e., using the narrative "you" as opposed to the first person, "I," or the third person, "they") is uncommon in documentary

but is used occasionally in written literary narrative. In classic narratives using the second-person voice, the narrator usually addresses the reader. In some cases, a narrative that employs "you" may be used by the narrator to address him- or herself as if from outside the self. But neither of these is the case in Cui's documentary. What Cui elects to do is to address one unique character in the documentary who stands apart from the other members of documentary in key ways. Lin Shunyuan is not a local. It is not exactly clear why he should want to travel to Gongliao to join in the resistance to the Fourth Nuclear Plant project. But in any event he does. Having joined in, he is involved in the death of the police officer, which results in his being given a life sentence for murder. Thus, he is doubly an outsider, because he now not only is the outsider who came to the community to participate in the protest but also is cut off from Gongliao and its anti-nuclear residents. The narrator Cui employs the second-person narrative not solely to frame the documentary for us but also to suture Lin back into the plot of Gongliao's resistance that she relates to us. A certain kind of bond grows between her and A-yuan as the film proceeds. The audience becomes privy to this through the voyeuristic act of serving as the cinematic spectator. By doing this, let us provisionally suggest that Cui moves into what Nichols might consider the most advanced mode of documentary presentation, the reflexive mode, a mode that self-consciously reveals to the spectator the actual process of the documentary even while it is presenting its central story.<sup>24</sup> Establishing the interlocutor link between herself and the most crucial absent character in the documentary, the filmmaker also becomes a performative member in the production itself, at least to some extent. The mode of this documentary is therefore more complex than that of most reflexive documentaries. One might hazard to say that the documentary mode of *Gongliao* is more of a hybrid of other forms with this added layer of narrative style, if you will, than it is characteristic of one particular mode of representation per se. In spite of enframing the film with this sort of meta-documentary level of the second-person voice, Cui's work also employs some key methods of realistic and journalistic representation, such as direct visual and audio recording of local residents in real time devoid of interactive prompting or intrusion from the narrator, use of archival footage, and the presence of non-diegetic printed intertitle subheadings that are typed onto the screen image at points in the narrative, complete with a staccato teletype sound that mimics the nostalgic effect of the old journalistic bulletin. These additional features work against the self-conscious artifice of the second-person narrative voiceover and contribute to the feeling that *Gongliao, How Are You?* is, aesthetically speaking, a sort of internal polemic that desires on the one hand to acknowledge the constructedness of its production and the alienation of the filmmaker from her subject matter while on the other hand presenting in a "realistic" or, more precisely, observational mode, and in fairly monologic fashion, the perspective of the downtrodden villagers over several years of struggle against the unyielding state. In order to truly decode the multivalent message of this film, we will need to examine more closely how the autobiographical element is deployed as a narrative framing device.

### Cui Suxin's second-person voice: dialogic artifice and aestheticized reflexivity

Cui Suxin's documentary is not the first or the only Taiwanese documentary to employ a second-person narrative mode in the disposition of its subject matter. The well-known documentary artist Wu Yi-feng (Wu Yifeng), a mentor to Cui who is listed as producer for this work, finished his own documentary entitled *Gift of Life (Shengming)* on the aftermath of the earthquake that occurred on September 21, 1999, about a year before Cui finished hers. Wu deploys a wide array of techniques from his aesthetic arsenal to craft for the audience an intensely haunting exposition of the way personal stories he features epitomize the lamentable consequences of this devastating natural disaster.<sup>25</sup> *Gift of Life* follows the movements of several individuals who lost family members—parents, brothers or sisters, and children—in the quake. At points, his documentary becomes highly interactive by engaging the subjects in discussion. At least once, the filmmaker intercedes with one of his subjects and attempts to persuade her not to commit suicide. His involvement with this particular subject self-consciously raises questions about the ability to record the deeply painful and private experiences that humans endure after family tragedy and about the implications of rendering their thoughts and words for the public cinematic spectacle. For our purposes, the most relevant aspect of his film is the choice to inlay the film with depictions of his own reflections on his relationship with his elderly father living in an assisted care facility after a debilitating stroke and his discussions with a former classmate regarding this relationship, as well as the motives for and methods of his filming of this documentary and his relationship with the subjects within it. The discussions with the classmate are all carried out in the form of letters read as voice-over in the documentary itself. His counterpart is never filmed, though Wu does insert images of his father in the assisted care facility into the broader narrative of the earthquake survivors' stories. An enormous twist comes at the end when the audience comes to find that the letters with his classmate must have been imaginary, in the sense that he was not really sending them to the friend, as the friend had died many years before the earthquake and the production of this film occurred. What the implications are, first, for a cinematic experience focusing on this major natural disaster that so obviously stresses the personal and familial issues of its author, and, second, for a work of ostensible realism that turns out to have manufactured the interchange between the filmmaker and a friend (thus manipulating the audience until near the end) totally outside the specific topic and content of the film, is something that begs to be theorized but unfortunately is not relevant to our discussion of Cui's work. What is relevant, though, is the structuring technique of the second-person voice in the form of the epistolary style. Cui's work shares this style, of course, but it differs in decisive ways as well. For Wu, the epistolary expression involves someone not associated in any concrete or experiential way with the topic of the earthquake or the lives of its victims. By contrast, Cui's recipient is intimately connected to the events of the nuclear protest, and in fact it is

precisely because of his ties to it that he is now imprisoned and unavailable for direct interview. Second, Wu's epistolary interchange is truly dialogic. He receives letters back that form a substantive part of the discussion in his film, letters filled with searching questions and comments on Wu's choices for how he develops his own cinematic representation. Cui's interlocutor never responds and his voice is never recorded in an interview for the film. Ironically, however, her counterpart actually exists while Wu's is now part of his imagination. Thus, there are some critical differences that distinguish the two documentaries. At the same time, nevertheless, the way Wu uses the epistolary method as a way of providing continuity, a narrative scaffolding by which he can organize his narrative for the audience, is something that Cui fully exploits. Moreover, the effect of creating at least the impression of self-reflexivity through the use of the second-person voice is something that both films share.

Like Wu, Cui Suxin establishes the second-person narrative voice immediately, in the opening moments of the film, grafting it onto the visual image of her car driving through the tunnel and entering the harbor near Gongliao, her initial address to an interlocutor different from "us," the audience, but still unknown to us. She indicates this is a horizontal relationship between herself and a third party, not an address directly to the audience, by allowing us to overhear the fact that she is writing letters to the mystery recipient. Cui thereby secures the epistolary structure as the dominant mode of narration right from the outset. The effect of constructing the narrative this way yet withholding the identity of the recipient is to create a sense of suspense in the spectator, because we do not know who she is addressing or why. All we know is two things: she emphasizes her presence, holding out at least the promise of self-reflexivity, and she signals a relationship with another figure who is neither us nor a participant in the resistance safely ensconced in the township of Gongliao. The initial effect of suggesting a cross dialogue is the creating of a dialogic or participatory impression where the audience is listening in on a conversation. She attempts to form a bond based on affinity with this unidentified interlocutor and also a reasonable expectation on the part of the audience that we may eventually hear from him. We do not know yet who he is or what his role is in the nuclear resistance movement. We only know that "like me" (as she says) he is an outsider to Gongliao. She observes the similarities between the two of them. They are both attracted for some reason to Gongliao. They are both young and from different places in Taiwan.<sup>26</sup> She then reveals things about her own production but for the time being withholds other information about him. She mentions she is a graduate student in history interested in sorting out for herself the whole morass of incidents and information that have accumulated around the Gongliao nuclear project. She notes that it is 1998 and she is just now beginning her narrative. She even tells us she is now turning on her camcorder (even though it obviously is already on). She expresses her strong desire to give voice to the local people, to record their personal stories. She also reassures her interlocutor that she will record this information *for him* and continue to correspond with him as she goes. Cui's narrative mode is more than just a second-person narrative voice, for it is not to be understood

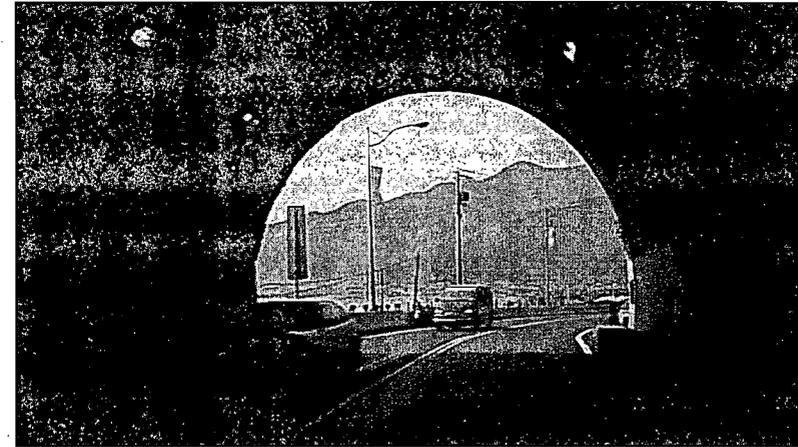


Figure 8.1 Emerging from the tunnel and entering the fishing village of Gongliao.

as merely oral, although materially speaking that is what it is. Through the selection of the epistolary method, she wishes it be known that she is actually writing letters to her recipient, that she is articulating her relationship to the documentary subject through writing as if we are reading her letters to the mystery recipient as we look over her shoulder while she writes, not hearing the direct address of a voice-over narrator.

Motive, purpose, and goal are defining aspects of the documentary. The purposes of Cui's work are at least threefold: Obviously, she is creating a documentary for popular consumption that may influence the broader public by giving them a view of the personal plights of the various local characters who have become involved with the anti-nuclear movement. That the figures featured in the film clearly appear to be ordinary citizens of this woebegone community makes for arguably a more persuasive group of players than had Cui chosen to feature primarily experts or seasoned activists in the film. Some do appear, but they are placed within the context of the fact that this is an ordeal foremost of the local populace in the affected area. She also has a personal discovery quest of her own displayed throughout the film as she reflects on what compels her to undertake the endeavor. Finally, she overtly cites her intended reader as the motivating force and the beneficiary of her discoveries and her recordings. The audience must be vigilant in trying always to remain mindful of the extent to which all these ostensible motivations are themselves part of the artifice of the documentary filmmaking process. Subtle techniques are liable to creep in at unforeseen moments and wield powerful influence over the audience's scopophilic regimes as we are inducted more deeply into the representational apparatus of *Gongliao*. For example, even at the beginning we are likely to be drawn

into the visual narrative by the intricate editing together of screen images. As has already been acknowledged, Cui begins her project self-consciously, seeming almost to proclaim to the audience what her position is vis-à-vis the target of her observation. But even as she notes that her initial long take is a point of view (POV) shot recorded from the car as she enters the village, there is a straight cut to an underwater image of fish and a reef, with the sound of submerged water suffusing the *mise-en-scène* (like scuba diving) that is clearly a third-person viewpoint. This second shot is fused with the first by virtue of the continuity effected through the unbroken non-diegetic voice-over that Cui continues to intone. The title of the documentary then fades into the screen and the image of the underwater sea fades out, becoming black, being saturated with the underwater sound, only to fade into a neon-lit night image of the town of Gongliao. The opening shot sequence is actually a sophisticated example of film editing that avails itself of a wide variety of techniques to create interest in the viewer as we participate in the narrator's effort to piece back together the history of Gongliao's devastation at the hands of the government and the ensuing anti-nuclear movement over the past nineteen years.

The fact that Cui suspends information on the recipient of the letters for a considerable expanse of time is intriguing to the audience. Altogether, Cui "writes" approximately ten letters to Lin Shunyuan, and these epistolary addresses punctuate the film throughout, from beginning to end. The second one appears about four and a half minutes into the film. In it, she remarks that she is beginning to familiarize herself with the situation. This letter comes as a non-diegetic voice placed over a somewhat comical visit by the Taipei County Commissioner, Su Tseng-chang (Su Zhenchang), the first of several displays of political favor-carrying. The narrator provides no additional concrete details regarding the identity of her interlocutor, only that he cannot be there. Cui begins the letter, as she does them all, with the greeting "Ni hao ma?" (How are you?). Coincidentally or not, this initial remark echoes the title of the film: *Gongliao, ni hao ma?* The use of the refrain "Ni hao ma?" to begin each letter establishes an affinity between the village of Gongliao and the mystery reader. He cannot be an impartial and distanced observer. However, they cannot be exactly the same either, for the necessity of the letters is precisely predicated on the fact that he is not "here," cannot be "here," and this "here" is now Gongliao, the place from which the narrator writes. There must be a compelling reason preventing him from being in Gongliao. Asking how someone is, normally an empty politeness, in this case also points to the underlying reason why such a conflict should occur in the first place: there is deep fear about the environmental and health ramifications of nuclear power.

By the third letter, which occurs around the twelve-minute mark, the narrator begins to reveal some information about the recipient's participation in the historical events of the Gongliao resistance while simultaneously foregrounding her inquiries to local residents and requests to obtain copies of videos through the years from their own personal archives. She mentions that the recipient arrived in Gongliao shortly before the October 3 Incident, implying that he was

involved, but does not fully divulge what this incident was. The October 3 Incident, in which the police officer was killed in a confrontation between local protesters and the government authorities, is described in detail not by Cui but by the local anti-nuclear participants themselves through direct recording of their stories. These accounts are cross-cut with images from the October 3 Incident based on their personal archival footage and still photographs.

It is only with the fourth letter that the spectator, having learned of the incident through the participants' points of view both from their oral record and from their visual archive (which have been edited together by Cui), has been methodically prepared to learn that the recipient is indeed the imprisoned activist Lin Shunyuan. Presented this way to us, through Cui's documentary of the protesters' recounting of the events, the death of the police officer appears as a deeply unfortunate, but certainly unintentional, act. They maintain that it was an accident. The status of the interviewees—ordinary people with ordinary jobs forced into the role of reluctant activists—gives credence to their account. The layering of these interviews together with supporting archival footage and stills ultimately gives the impression that Lin has been made a scapegoat by the government authorities, who needed someone to blame for the officer's death. It must be added that at no time does Cui make an effort to relate the official side of the story, that of the police and the state. We never find out the name of the deceased officer or see any photographs of him. This disembodied portrait of the nameless, faceless exponent of political authority prevents the audience from establishing a cathexis with him. The way Cui presents the revelation of the police officer's death—simultaneously to us and to Lin in the form of the letter—elicits the maximum amount of sympathy for Lin.<sup>27</sup> For example, she expressly mentions the fact that many elderly members of the community are deeply indignant over the wrongful murder conviction and subsequent life sentence that Lin received. This opinion is asserted as the visual image of idyllic scenery in Gongliao is played over the screen. The feeling of suspense is accentuated by the fact that the admission of Lin's implication in the death of the officer is not made until twenty minutes into the film. The conclusion that Cui reaches, which is designed to be the inevitable conclusion for the spectator, is that Lin Shunyuan's absence from the community is nothing less than an instance of the White Terror perpetrated against Taiwan's ordinary citizens by the oppressive state for the past half-century.<sup>28</sup>

The principal rhetorical strategy in *Gongliao* of using the epistolary mode conveniently leaves little room for sympathy for the government position on nuclear power. From the beginning, it places Lin Shunyuan in the role of the silenced martyr, isolated from the community he once served and defended, and severed from the two-way informational flow that would maintain the connection of community and local power. That at no point in the film is her own direct interaction with Lin explicitly depicted—it is mentioned in passing in one of Cui's "letters" after the fact but not shown on screen—adds to the dramatization of Lin's severance. His position as a silent recipient who never responds to the letters, despite the fact that he is allowed a furlough to return briefly to the

community, a visit that is recorded and presented on screen, turns the tables on the traditional method of state-sponsored silencing in Taiwan. This silence is all the more palpable and more indicative of his disenfranchisement than a direct articulation of his predicament, whether in the third person or the first person, could ever be. A-yuan is viewed as a powerless victim of the political conflict. His status in the documentary is first as an absent presence, looming over the first twenty minutes of the film, and then as a return of the (politically) repressed. He does appear in the film for the furlough during an emotional scene where the community members greet him at the train station. He is permitted to speak briefly. He hugs several of the key activists, who now look considerably older than their images in the archival footage. Also noted are the names of the members whom he cannot be reunited with because they have died by then. But his return to prison and the ironic but ultimately misinformed expectation that he would be released in another year underscore his absence, an absence that exemplifies his position as the embodiment of the unredressed iniquities that Gongliao and its residents have suffered during their twenty-five-year ordeal. Nevertheless, as Jiang Chunhe, one of the key members of the anti-nuclear group, states after visiting A-yuan in the Hualian prison (the actual encounter is not filmed—the camera only shows him in the parking lot), himself only two months away from death, is that the activists remain resolute in their opposition to the nuclear plant.

The unbroken litany of letters allows the narrator to mark developments in the story in “real” time (i.e., as her own documentary project evolves) or as she “now” witnesses them without overtly falling into the expository “voice-of-God”



Figure 8.2 A-yuan on prison furlough reuniting with the local activists in Gongliao.

mode. However, the fact that the effect of her letters to Lin essentially achieves this goal anyway amounts to her choice of the epistolary narrative method being equivalent to some kind of perhaps masked “voice-of-God” mode. It seems partially tempered or deflected, in other words, by the fact that she is narrating across the screen to Lin while the audience appears to be listening in on it. Nevertheless, the fact remains, for all intents and purposes, that she indeed is conveying the information directly to us, even if it may not seem so. As the epistolary style continues, so does her ability to shape the structure of the documentary progress as well. What she tells A-yuan at certain points is subtly supported by visual images of protests and at other points accompanies more personal tragedies within the group of individuals themselves, such as the death of Lin Jinhe, an activist who learned of the initial cancellation of the project (in 2000) only three days before his death. For him and his loved ones, the victory (it turned out to be a temporary one) was bittersweet: he was informed of it but died before he could participate in the celebration of it. The lasting effect of the epistolary narrative is to further relate the unrelenting stance of the government, for although Lin is allowed a brief prison furlough, and can receive some guests, his furlough to visit the village near the end of the film is temporary, punctuated by reminiscences of those who have died, and merely shows the emotional reunion with other activists. Cui Suxin’s final letter, embellished by an artful visual spectacle, concludes that the seething wound of the Gongliao affair is the wrongful incarceration of the innocent Lin Shunyuan, now an avatar of the nuclear resistance movement.

### The incorporation of journalistic techniques and the power of “realistic” observational documentary

We have focused in great detail on the epistolary technique that Cui uses to structure her film narrative, but to do so exclusively would risk leaving the mistaken impression that the documentary is simply a subjective representation from Cui’s own point of view. There is, in fact, a large dose of realistic or expository technique in the film that conveys another dimension to Gongliao’s saga. Much of Cui’s documentary includes direct recordings of interviews and the activities of the local Gongliao residents who organized to form the Anti-nuclear Self-help Association (Fanhe Ziju Xiehui) as well as Professor Zhang Guolong, an anti-nuclear academic activist from National Taiwan University. The documentary is a commingling of these interviews, which for the most part elide the interviewer’s questions and her role itself, and observations of the interactions between the anti-nuclear organization and various government figures. Their decision to choose protest as the chief method of resistance has not succeeded in stopping the project, but it certainly has delayed it. Intertitles punched on the screen to the sound of a teleprinter present factual information, such as names and occupations of people interviewed, places where events occurred, and dates, complement the visual representation of demonstrations, followed by the direct recordings of activists such as Yang Guiying and Lin Shengyi, leaders of the

anti-nuclear group. The melding of these techniques illustrates how various methods are combined to create the effect of documentary realism. The intertitles lend the documentary the feel of broadcast journalism, but this realistic effect is undermined by the visual aesthetics of the film. The film presents the natural environment of Gongliao as if on a par with its naïve and innocent human residents. It is pure representation of natural beauty that is being victimized by the outside force of a potentially Promethean and poorly understood, but highly volatile, form of late-industrialized energy. The fact that the ideology that informs the film is of a Green Party political persuasion allows Cui to gingerly sidestep the issue of ethnic politics.<sup>29</sup> The two major political parties are portrayed differently but neither is shown in a particularly flattering manner. The KMT is featured as an ominous force, virtually without a face. It is best personified by a brief shot recorded during the 1999–2000 presidential campaign when the anti-nuclear group was seeking a hearing with each of the three major candidates: Lien Chan (Lian Zhan), James Soong (Song Chuyu), and Chen Shui-bian (Chen Shuibian). Lien Chan is shown simply walking past the crowd at a distance with his back to the camera, never showing his face to the crowd (or the camera). Silently ignoring the protesters betrays a blithe indifference to the situation of the seaside community. His back recalls the facelessness of the government. Soong, a maverick in the pan-blue camp who ran against both Lien and Chen, is depicted as at first attempting to ingratiate himself with the group but quickly being reduced to a mute stare. As the camera lingers on his pathetic countenance, the audience can only imagine what he must be thinking as he ransacks his mind for some sort of political soothsaying that will mollify the residents and thus allow him to extricate himself from an awkward campaign moment. The DPP, by contrast, is depicted as alternatively excessively and insincerely solicitous to the locals and ineffectual in its efforts to aid them. The attempts of Su and Chen to glad-hand the locals are placed in stark contrast to the gravity of the situation the community members are encountering and lobbying against. When asked for help, the DPP representatives tend to respond that the locals first need to support the DPP politically so that they can defeat the KMT and wrest control of the government from the ruling party. Only then can they put a halt to the project once and for all. That they do not control the presidency before 2000 is cited as an argument for the Gongliao residents to throw their weight behind the DPP, although at the time, the nuclear issue was largely skirted by both major political parties. Ironically, the leader of the KMT at this point is Lee Teng-hui, who subsequently shifted his allegiance to the pan-green (i.e., Taiwan Independence—not to be confused with Green Party) alliance. The flaw in the DPP strategy is first exposed when prominent party members claim after their successful presidential bid that they also need control of the Legislative Yuan in order to halt the project, a goal they failed to realize during the first decade of the twenty-first century, and indeed have never achieved. The only politician portrayed even slightly sympathetically is Lin Xinyi, more of a high-ranking government bureaucrat than a politician. He convenes meetings to hear the complaints of the locals in a substantive way and works to scuttle the project



Figure 8.3 Yang Guiyang with broadcast-style intertitles on the screen beside her.

in 2000, leading to the resignation of Premier Tang Fei, a KMT member who agreed to serve as the first premier in the DPP administration of Chen Shui-bian. If the DPP members appear as superficial lightweights and almost half-wits, the KMT is depicted as a completely sinister pack of liars hell-bent on completing the project at all cost. By the end of the film, the KMT-controlled Legislature has put the project back on track, and it is still proceeding toward completion at the writing of this chapter. The Green Party in Taiwan plays a fairly marginal role in this tug-of-war between the two main factions and eschews ethnic politics. Unfortunately, the zero-sum political game the two main party alliances play leaves little oxygen for other political parties in Taiwan to gain viability.

The conclusion of the film neither portrays the movement in a victorious light nor conveys a feeling of despondency. The ending, rather, is somewhat ambivalent and wistful, fusing together several aesthetic elements used in the film into a reflective montage. A final letter to A-yuan is presented through voice-over. In it, the filmmaker speaks of the valiant roles these various ordinary people have played on behalf of the ideal of a nuclear-free country and how proud their children and grandchildren will be. Idyllic visuals of the rocky shore and beach are presented once more to the audience. A previous clip of a folk singer from a Taipei protest is reprised as a way of bringing the film to an artful end, and as the music continues, shifting to a non-diegetic style, Cui adds one more unusual element while the credits roll: she first acknowledges those who have died during

the lengthy protest. This poignant and somber ending illustrates the sacrifices the anti-nuclear locals have made but also implicitly commemorates their successes; the fact that the plant has not yet been completed suggests that the resistance has gone on so long that it has outlived several of the key players.

### Documentary reflexivity and participatory cinema

There is a trace of an internal polemic in Cui's documentary that pits the ostensibly self-reflexive (not autobiographical) style of the overarching narrative against the realist and observational style of broadcast journalism used to situate the struggle of the local protesters. Beginning the documentary by foregrounding herself within the framing of the cinematic experience, Cui invites us to assume she is creating a self-reflexive film in the manner of such classics as Dziga Vertov's *The Man with a Movie Camera*, Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin's *Chronicle of a Summer*, and Tim Asch's *The Ax Fight*. But the viewer must ask: Is Cui's documentary genuinely reflexive, or even autobiographical, itself? And if not, then how can we categorize it? But to categorize it, we need to mull over not just the question of how it was made but what was its purpose, what was (is) its effect, and what is implicitly as well as explicitly being documented in it?

On the most empirical and overt level, the film documents the protest of the Gongliao residents and their resistance to the building of a nuclear power plant in their midst. On a more profoundly epistemological level, however, the film not only documents an important historical moment in recent Taiwan but is a product of history itself. *Gongliao* is emblematic of the broader phenomenon in Taiwan over the past two decades of the increasing awareness of and alarm over damage to the natural environment. In other words, it is part of the raising of environmental consciousness on the island. If the people of Taiwan were totally unconcerned by environmental issues, the film likely would not have been made. Conversely, the goal of the film is not, and cannot simply be, the documenting of the locals themselves. Rather, it is the implicit documenting of its narrator/filmmaker gradually coming to "understand" their plight—the growth and change in her own viewpoint. Even if this is part of an artifice of documentary production, what Bill Nichols calls the "fiction of objectivity," there still is authenticity in the artfully self-inscribed way of communicating to the audience the urgent imperative to challenge the government's unchecked march into the nuclear era.<sup>30</sup> Nichols tries to exhaust the investigation of "realism" in *Representing Reality* by looking beyond the issue of how realism is a trope in the construction of cinematic exhibition and considering the way documentary film can reveal a deeper, historical reality about the subject.<sup>31</sup> He argues that the realist documentary "situates the filmmaker in the historical world."<sup>32</sup> The crucial insight is that history becomes much more than a sequence of events. It reflects changes in our view of cultural identity. This is clearly true in *Gongliao*, for the film is illustrative of the shift to a more environmental consciousness in Taiwan, reflected by the drive to document (what Nichols calls an "epistophilia"),<sup>33</sup> a fascination, in this case, to "understand" the people most directly and most negatively affected

by the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant. But the power of the documentary does not stop there, because if it did, it would merely accomplish the task of inciting the audience's sympathy, the result of making the audience feel, in Jill Godmilow's phrasing, "Thank God that's not me."<sup>34</sup> Of course, that morbid fascination is an essential step in the audience's reaction to the film, but it must go beyond that to "resist closure," as Godmilow adds.<sup>35</sup> *Gongliao* is part of a history not yet fully written. The story of the local activists is filmed on a trajectory, chronologically, but the ending exceeds the film that is presented to us because the purpose of the film is not exclusively to film their story. The purpose is to incite the audience to activism in the Taiwanese environmental movement. Thus, the film as a manifestation of history itself must by definition be open-ended, to point toward a future moment when nuclear power plants, the marginalization of local populations, and governments impervious to their citizens' objections are no longer the mainstay of modernization. This is an aspect of the notion of "participatory" cinema that makes *Gongliao*, and others like it, post-*vérité*. That is to say, for *Gongliao* to succeed as a film project with a (partially concealed) political agenda of its own, it cannot entirely be a self-enclosed presentation of the nuclear problem in the end. It must point toward its own incompleteness, suggesting in a very subtle fashion, so as not to call too much attention to its tentativeness, that the crux of the film hinges on the viewer thinking beyond it.

*Gongliao* is participatory on two levels. The filmmaker who sets out on her project to "understand" the village activists by self-consciously foregrounding her own role in the production of the work, using the "interactive mode" of documentary production,<sup>36</sup> actually must first enlist the villagers themselves in the documentation of their own plight. She solicits and is provided with the footage that the villagers—not just activists at this point but actually observers of their own experience, and of the government's actions—have carefully recorded and preserved through the years. The villagers reveal themselves as something more complex than a village of subjects that are to be observed and dissected for the camera. They participate in the *observational* mode of film documentation<sup>37</sup> that constitutes the main body of Cui's film. They are, as David MacDougall argues in another context, being observed "bearing witness" to what they believe the state is inflicting upon them with no regard to their own well-being.<sup>38</sup> This bearing witness is the sine qua non of their resistance movement. As they state in the film, everything is copiously documented for the historical record. We can also assume that they view Cui as their means to a wider audience and therefore endeavor to induct her into their point of view. Cui's film can be described, MacDougall continues, as a prime example of "intertextual cinema,"<sup>39</sup> a work of multiple authorship, in some ways conflicting views of reality, where the boundary between observer and observed is blurred.

Given this broader notion of what *Gongliao* is, taking into consideration the implicit historicity of its emergence on the film scene, imagining its effect on the audience, recognizing the multidimensionality of its productive properties, the film displays a quality of diffused subjects and objects. The signifier and the signified are tightly intertwined, and the more we investigate its structure and

purpose, the less certain we are as to who is the subject and who is the object of the film's gaze. *Gongliao* is not, as rigorously defined by Jay Ruby, an example of "reflexivity," where the question of how the film was structured and for what reasons is asked and put to critique within the film itself, as in such classics as Rouch and Morin's *Chronicle of a Summer*.<sup>40</sup> The film is not even sufficiently substantive on the account of Cui's own position and background to be considered "autobiographical" in Ruby's reckoning.<sup>41</sup> One crucial factor disqualifying the film from being a bona fide work of reflexivity is its editing. Far from foregrounding the process of constructing her narrative development, the element that is exactly teleological in the progression of the film, Cui conceals from us the decisions that went into shaping the individual shots—their length, their source in some instances, their sequence—and thus she still exerts ultimate, omniscient control over the final product of the film.<sup>42</sup> The editing, by sequestering from the autobiographical, participatory, and quasi-self-reflexive framing of the project, allows Cui to retain the "illusion"<sup>43</sup> of objectivity and thus realism. But perhaps this sense of realistic objectivity is necessary to the cause of inspiring the audience to generate within their hearts the sort of spirit of resistance that Cui documents in the local villagers themselves. Of course, the spectator can hardly find fault in Cui's clever suppression of the cinematic scaffolding. We can easily imagine the villagers' tacit sanctioning of this tactic for the sake of effectiveness. As an "observer who plays the role of initiate,"<sup>44</sup> Cui develops through her own experience filming them "a shared intimacy" where she and the residents of Gongliao are collaborators, where they empower her to speak on their behalf as a result of immersing herself in their lives and experiences.<sup>45</sup> *Gongliao, How Are You?* may not be a reflexive film. It is, however, a fine example of participatory cinema where the filmmaker, the subjects of the film, and even the audience must eschew the tempting attitude of passivity (whether as observing subjects or as observed objects) and together assist in realizing the film's ultimate and proper significance. The mixture of the emergence of a new awareness that binds the object of the documentary, the documentary artist, and the spectator into a "new subjectivity" whose purpose is to take action against nuclear power is what makes this film, in Michael Renov's words, "post-*vérité*."<sup>46</sup> *Gongliao, How Are You?* is interested in its own structure to a certain extent but is not restricted to that. The verbal interaction in the film between the narrator and A-yuan in the last analysis becomes a point of identification for the audience as well as these two characters. In the end, the style is not *vérité*, stressing the reality of its contents, but is post-*vérité* by implicitly conceding its constructedness and using this recognition itself as a narrative device. If it is enough to incite people to participate in the nuclear resistance movement, then Cui will have accomplished her task.

### Conclusion: *Gongliao, How Are You?* and the global anti-nuclear movement

It is difficult to assess the sort of effect a documentary such as *Gongliao* has had on the public in Taiwan. Generally, the past three decades have been an era of great skepticism regarding the relative merits of nuclear energy when weighed against its perceived dangers. Admittedly, this is not a universally held belief. Generally, conservatives in the United States are less cautious about the use of nuclear power and bridle against the perceived obstructionism or nimbyism of the left. Yet when it comes to the unavoidable question of nuclear waste disposal, a fact more inexorable than the more remote possibility of nuclear meltdown, the issue becomes a political hot potato. Many advocate for the thrift and "cleanliness" of nuclear power, but few want the residual waste from a nuclear plant stored in their state. In Iran, nuclear power is currently a dominant issue. For Iranians, the goal of nuclear independent power is a matter of national pride. In natural resource-poor countries such as Japan and France, nuclear energy is seen as a necessary risk and has been embraced, or at least tolerated, much more readily than in the United States. With the People's Republic of China looming near Taiwan's shore, the contrast environmentally, economically and politically could not be starker. Environmental issues in Taiwan are dealt with and adjudicated in vastly different ways from those in the PRC. China is building more nuclear plants all the time, and little attention is paid to dissent. Energy independence for Taiwan is understood as a matter of national security. This pressure surely is a factor in the determination of the government to proceed with the expansion of nuclear power. What this documentary makes us ask is, at what risk? There can hardly be an exit strategy for a 200-mile-long island of twenty-two million people. The predicament regarding nuclear waste storage is even more acute in Taiwan than it is in the United States. In the United States, it looks as though the current energy crisis, as well as advances in nuclear technology, will eventually force a reexamination of the broadly felt apprehension regarding nuclear power that has characterized the post-Vietnam War era. Some have argued, for example, that nuclear energy is much cheaper and more reliable than other forms and presents no global warming threats. But even recent documentaries, such as *Who's Afraid of Nuclear Power?*, counter the conventional arguments that nuclear power is simply our misunderstood friend. In Taiwan, another state that is resource-bereft, economic pressures may be the requisite trump card that sees the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant, and likely other reactors, to completion.

*Gongliao* does not appear to be a documentary that promises to show all sides of the argument, as the economic one is nowhere apparent in it. Rather, it is an intricately designed work whose ostensible goal is to present the story of the ordinary people who have organized against the nuclear plant project. The documentary aspires to give voice to them, as it implicitly suggests that their personal story has been overlooked during the whole debate, even if some of their arguments have reached a prime-time audience. In this sense, *Gongliao* is a much

different production from the classic anti-nuclear documentary *A Question of Power*, first aired multiple times during the years 1986–1988 on public television in the United States. *A Question of Power* indeed was a powerful representation that served to solidify the views—and fears—of a generation of Americans, and it was distributed widely in Europe and the rest of the English-speaking world as well. Presented as a classic “voice-of-God” expository documentary, *A Question of Power* enlisted the Hollywood actor Peter Coyote’s silver voice as a means to drive home the point that nuclear power was such a risky endeavor as to outweigh any benefits it might provide. As problematic as that cinematic form may appear in comparison with the sophisticated types of documentary and ethnographic film that emerge from the academic community, it has some merits worth noting. For example, we are clear as to its point of view from the beginning. There is no question about its being a film that advocates a particular point of view, the elimination of nuclear power. Although it appears didactic and doctrinaire, there is a clarity of purpose about it that is refreshing. *Gongliao, How Are You?*, when examined in this light, is less explicit in its disclosure of purpose. For all its attempts at autobiographical, dialogic, or reflexive modes of representation that indicate a desire to delve into the local community and understand their position, *Gongliao* is as much a film of advocacy as is *A Question of Power*. There is something disingenuous in its mode of presentation. But the film does convey the long-fought battle of the Gongliao residents and the isolation of the imprisoned Lin Shunyan in a passionate way. If the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant does come onstream, as it likely may soon, I would venture to wager that it will be safer than it would have been if there had been no popular protest over the years. Nuclear power plants in Taiwan will never again be conceived capriciously. The villagers, the intellectuals, and the environmental activists may not have stopped the building of this plant, but their efforts have made a difference. The documentary that portrays their resistance helps communicate their plight and fosters sympathy for it among the intelligentsia in Taiwan. The epistolary method may be problematic but it offers an engaging structural model that captures the enthusiasm of the audience and furthers the cause of environmentalism.

## Notes

- 1 For this project, I surveyed a number of award-winning and well-received documentaries recently produced in Taiwan. Although not overtly environmentalist, documentaries such as Wu Yi-feng’s *Shengming* (Gift of life), which follows the lives of several ordinary Taiwanese individuals whose family members perished in the 1999 earthquake; Zhu Xianzhe’s *Yangshengzhu—liulang gou* (Caring for life—stray dogs), which chronicles the efforts of two women who tend to stray dogs, often injured or severely neglected, in Taipei; and Yan Lan-chuan and Juang Yi-tse’s *Wu mi le* (Let it be), which depicts the impoverished lives of rice farmers in southern Taiwan, all contain palpable undertones of an environmental consciousness. There is a general, if subtle, trend among these and other Taiwanese documentaries, in my opinion, to feature people in situations of weakness or neglect. It is as if such documentaries as Mayaw Biho’s *Tiantang xiaohai* (Children in heaven), which focuses on

- the circumstances of vagrant but bucolic life among shanty dwellings on river shoals around Taipei, and Tang Xiangzhu’s *Shan you duo gao?* (How high is the mountain?), which relates a family’s attempt to inter an elder in his ancestral burial ground, are willfully attracted to the overlooked elements in society. Perhaps the impetus to shed light on what mainstream society ignores has become a stylistic trend in Taiwanese documentary.
- 2 Mab Huang’s pithy monograph *Intellectual Ferment for Political Reforms in Taiwan, 1971–1973* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies, 1976) was one of the earliest scholarly works to deal in a substantive way with the intellectual class of dissent in Taiwan. A thorough description of the pivotal, if short-lived, journal *Daxue zazhi* (The intellectual), Huang’s book provides us with a thoughtful summary of leftist intellectuals in Taiwan during the late 1960s and early 1970s who laid the crucial groundwork for further challenges to the government to come, and at no little risk to themselves. More recently, Shelley Rigger’s two books, *Politics in Taiwan: Voting for Democracy* (London: Routledge, 1999), a historical overview of politics in the past half-century leading finally to a more detailed discussion of the legitimated electoral system in Taiwan, and *From Opposition to Power: Taiwan’s Democratic Progressive Party* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2001), arguably the most intricate dissection of the internal anatomy of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), are essential reading for those wishing to put into context all the minutiae of current events that accumulated together comprise the democratization process in Taiwan. A book that views the contemporary political scene within the broader frame of the entire twentieth century is Denny Roy’s *Taiwan: A Political History* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003). While not as detailed as Rigger’s twin treatments, and not as focused as Huang’s, Roy’s perspective nevertheless helps us see the several wholly different incarnations of Taiwan’s political society from Qing rule, through the Japanese colonial era, into KMT rule, and finally bringing us to the present, more pluralist, age.
  - 3 An interesting aesthetic rendering of this uneasy relationship between the repression and return of political dissidents on the one hand and the nearly ahistorical nature of environmental protest in Taiwan occurs in Wan Ren’s film *Chaoji da guomin* (Super Citizen Ko). The elderly Ko, a dissident from the late 1940s and early 1950s who serves a long jail sentence, is wandering around Taipei in the 1990s after years of incarceration and life in a nursing home. He stumbles upon a demonstration march against the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant, and the effect on the film spectator is one of postmodern dissonance as two vastly different discursive frames come colliding into each other with neither understanding, nor really acknowledging, the other. Sylvia Lin mentions this scene in her *Representing Atrocity in Taiwan: The 2/28 Incident and White Terror in Fiction and Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 164.
  - 4 John Copper’s periodically revised *Taiwan: Nation-State or Province* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999) contains a succinct and factual summary of Taiwan’s “economic miracle.” See chapter 5, “The Economy,” 127–156.
  - 5 See Robert P. Weller, *Alternate Civilities: Democracy and Culture in China and Taiwan* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1999), 111–125, for a thumbnail survey of the environmental movement in the early post-martial law days in Taiwan. He also cites (17) data indicating that demonstrations increased from ten cases in 1981 per year to 278 cases per year in 1991.
  - 6 The building of a major petrochemical plant, called a naphtha cracker, was halted in southern Taiwan in 1988 when some 20,000 protesters converged on the site, upset at the leeching of contaminated water. See Roy, *Taiwan*, 179. Roy argues that a broad cross section of the Taiwanese populace was highly concerned with the problem of pollution by the mid-1990s. Weller gives evidence that there actually still were ingenious tactics around these protests employed by such savvy industrialists as Wang

- Yongqing in the building of Taiwan's sixth petrochemical plant in Yunlin (also in southern Taiwan) in 1993. See Weller, *Alternate Civilities*, 115.
- 7 Roy (*Taiwan*, 233–244) briefly outlines the lurching positions of the government, the conflicts between the executive and legislative branches, and the machinations of the two main political parties on this issue.
  - 8 Ethnic politics in Taiwan can be very provocative but constitutes a rich field of material for study. Two essential works that demonstrate the breadth of approaches to ethnic politics in Taiwan are Stéphane Corcuff's edited volume of essays *Memories of the Future: National Identity Issues and the Search for a New Taiwan* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2002) and John Makeham and A-chin Hsiao's collection *Cultural, Ethnic, and Political Nationalism in Contemporary Taiwan* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). Neither book devotes attention to the issue of the natural environment, a sign, perhaps, that the issues of ethnicity and the environment are coterminous.
  - 9 I first viewed the documentary at a conference on Taiwan studies in Boulder, Colorado, in 2005, not too long after its release. The filmmaker was supposed to attend but was forced to cancel the trip for personal reasons. Subsequently, her production studio sent me a copy of the DVD.
  - 10 There was a less famous but in terms of human toll more serious accident at the Idaho National Laboratory near Idaho Falls in 1961 in which three workers were killed. When a control rod was improperly removed, a meltdown and subsequent explosion occurred, instantly killing the three workers. Their bodies were so heavily contaminated that they had to be buried in lead coffins. The event is mentioned in the well-known documentary *A Question of Power* (David L. Brown, 1986), but is actually the subject of its own documentary: *The SL-1 Reactor Accident*, written and produced by Diane Orr and C. Larry Roberts in 1983. Two books have been written on the subject as well: William McKeown's *Idaho Falls: The Untold Story of America's First Nuclear Accident* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2003) and Todd Tucker's *Atomic America: How a Deadly Explosion and a Feared Admiral Changed the Course of Nuclear History* (New York: Free Press, 2009). Amazingly, the stationary, low-power reactor, which was completely contaminated in the accident, was buried in an unlined sarcophagus on the laboratory grounds and remains radioactive today. At a subsequent date, the site was capped to keep animals from penetrating it.
  - 11 See J. Samuel Walker's reasonably comprehensive retrospective treatment of the best-known nuclear disaster in the United States, *Three Mile Island: A Nuclear Crisis in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). Although Walker claims that his work is a completely independent scholarly contribution published through the peer-review academic system, it must be pointed out that he is the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's official historian. The book has been criticized by some for its avoidance of technical data and its reluctance to criticize the NRC itself. Nonetheless, no more comprehensive exposition exists to date and the reviews are largely positive.
- There are a large number of anti-nuclear groups active in the United States, including groups of a general environmental nature and groups that were born out of opposition to specific nuclear reactor projects. These include but are not limited to the following: Abalone Alliance, Clamshell Alliance, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace USA, Indian Point Safe Energy Coalition, Nevada Desert Experience, No Nukes Group, Nuclear Control Institute, Nuclear Information and Resource Service, Physicians for Social Responsibility, Public Citizen Energy Program, the Shad Alliance, and the Sierra Club. The Greens/Green Party USA (G/GUSA) has as a part of its platform proposals allowing for incentives to phase out nuclear power plants and the elimination of fossil fuel consumption.
- 12 Estimates of the total cost of construction exceed US\$6.5 billion. See "Lungmen Nuclear Power Scheme." Online, available at: [www.power-technology.com/projects/lungmen/](http://www.power-technology.com/projects/lungmen/).

- 13 The turbines in the reactors are actually contracted to Mitsubishi. Other parts of the reactors are also subcontracted to General Electric's Japanese partners Hitachi and Toshiba. For more information, see "Nuclear Power in Taiwan." Online, available at: [www.world-nuclear.org/info/inf115\\_taiwan.html](http://www.world-nuclear.org/info/inf115_taiwan.html).
- 14 As Ming-Sho Ho shows, the DPP generally took an anti-nuclear stance that in part fueled its support from certain elements of the anti-KMT contingent, especially environmentalists. However, that stance was undermined by the DPP's attempt to co-opt a wide variety of factions, including forces loyal to Lee Teng-hui, who, after all, was the leader of the KMT all the while the Fourth Plant was being planned and built. Cui choreographs this contradiction in several places in her film. See "The Politics of Anti-nuclear Protest in Taiwan: A Case of Party-Dependent Movement (1980–2000)," *Modern Asian Studies* 37 (3) (July 2003): 683–708.
- 15 The website "Nuclear Power in Taiwan" ([www.world-nuclear.org/info/inf115\\_taiwan.html](http://www.world-nuclear.org/info/inf115_taiwan.html)), clearly pro-nuclear power, offers much information on the history of nuclear power in Taiwan and observes that Taiwan imports 99 percent of its energy. Four of the reactors were built by General Electric according to its boiling water model and two were built by Westinghouse using its pressurized water method. Nuclear power provides approximately 19 percent of the electricity in Taiwan, coal-fired plants provide 38 percent, and liquid natural gas (LNG) provides 20 percent. Taiwan is the fifteenth-largest consumer of nuclear power in the world. According to this website, Taipower plans to start the reactors in 2011 and 2012. It is also considering six more reactors, with plans to install them at existing plant sites. The problem of nuclear waste disposal is not yet fully decided. Currently, there is a low-level radioactive waste storage facility on the island of Lanyu, populated mostly by indigenous Yami people, and this has created a whole other environmental and political issue in a separate part of Taiwan. The crisis led Taipower to sign a contract with North Korea in 1997 to ship 200,000 barrels of low-level nuclear waste to that reclusive state for final storage. See "Higher Radiation Readings of Taiwan Waste to Be Sent to North Korea" ([www.klimaatkeuze.nl/wise/monitor/473/4686](http://www.klimaatkeuze.nl/wise/monitor/473/4686)) from the online publication *WISE*, an Amsterdam-based anti-nuclear news service. Unfortunately for Taipower, the deal with North Korea, and other such deals, fell through, and the authorities are now left with the unenviable task of bribing locals, usually very poor members of indigenous ethnic groups, to allow storage of the waste near them. This saga has even garnered the interest of mainstream US publications such as *The Huffington Post*. See "Taiwan Nuclear Waste Stored by Poor Village for Government Money" ([www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/04/20/taiwan-nuclear-waste-stor\\_n\\_189110.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/04/20/taiwan-nuclear-waste-stor_n_189110.html)).
- 16 I was living in Taiwan at the time. The president of Taipower, a Mainlander from Guangdong Province named Chen Lan-kao (Chen Langao), fondly referred to as "Chen Luangao" or "Chen the Blunderer" by his detractors, participated in some televised debates about the plant. One of my language teachers recorded a debate for class and we studied it thoroughly. Coincidentally, I was living in an apartment in the Taipei suburb of Xindian at the time, and my live-in landlord worked for Taipower. This was at a time when Three Mile Island was still vividly in the minds of most people, and the Chernobyl disaster of 1986 was soon to add to those fears. Notably, according to my landlord, Taipower had plans to build over twenty more nuclear reactors in Taiwan over the ensuing two decades. Obviously, those plans, if they existed, have been radically curtailed in the wake of open resistance, not just locally but in widespread areas throughout Taiwan, to the building of such plants. Chen Lan-kao once even lobbied for the reprocessing of its weapons-grade nuclear spent fuel with the help of the French government. See "Taiwan Acts to Widen Its Nuclear Technology" ([www.nytimes.com/1982/06/23/world/taiwan-acts-to-widen-its-nuclear-technology.html](http://www.nytimes.com/1982/06/23/world/taiwan-acts-to-widen-its-nuclear-technology.html)). He also was implicated in a scandal involving the selling of coal resources but died before the final appeal was settled.

- 17 For biographical information on Cui, see Wang Yuyan's informative MA thesis "Jilupian zuowei shehui yundong de zaiju: *Gongliao, ni hao ma?* de Shuxie Celüe" (Documentaries as a vehicle for social movements: the writing strategies of *How are you, Gongliao?*), Cheng-chih University Graduate School of Journalism, 2006.
- 18 See Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), chapter 2, "Documentary Modes of Representation," 32–75 *passim*, esp. 44–56. The "interactive" mode, wherein the filmmaker actually penetrates the film frame either visually or audibly (or both), can occur in many different ways, with the most common being interview. Another common method of the interactive mode is narration by the filmmaker that involves offering either oral history or his or her experiences in the film production process. The critical element that all share, according to Nichols, is that they "all draw their social actors into direct encounter with the filmmaker" (47). Cui does utilize some techniques that Nichols discusses, such as the "masked interview" technique where the filmmaker asks questions from outside the film frame or sometimes the people in the film answer questions that the spectator assumes were asked. But what is truly distinctive about Cui's film is her attempt in it to establish a dialogue with one of the people who is never interviewed.
- 19 That exception is the "interaction" Cui has with Lin Shunyuan, the analysis of which comprises a large part of this chapter. *Who's Afraid of Nuclear Power?* (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2006) adopts a different tack from Cui. First of all, it primarily concentrates on the general issue of nuclear power in contrast to the protest of a single, particular plant. Second, the narrator of *Who's Afraid of Nuclear Power?* is not averse to confronting and engaging interviewees in combative debate. This documentary does not go so far as the Michael Moore oeuvre to create a full-blown persona around the documentary narrator, but neither does the narrator recede into the liminal or penumbral area where Cui resides for the better part of her documentary.
- 20 I am drawing on Michael Renov's insightful rethinking of the documentary form in *The Subject of Documentary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004). What is post-*vérité* about Cui's documentary is the way she first sets up the film as a documentary/journalistic-style presentation of the plight of the villagers, embellishing it with verbal observations on her own experience when encountering them while filming it, but then goes on to use the dialogic or epistolary form as an aesthetic and structuring device that moves beyond simple representation of reality *per se* to highlight her own subjective development in the film.
- 21 See his *Representing Reality*, especially chapter 2. A variety of scholars have embellished this schema with such modes as "poetic" and "performative."
- 22 Renov's work is particularly trenchant on this point.
- 23 See his *Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film and Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). Ruby generally presumes we are speaking of the anthropological documentary; thus, we need to acknowledge that there may be some fundamental differences of form that are simply dictated by differences of motive or purpose. The ethnographer obviously has different objectives from the political activist, differences that affect the choice of topic as well as the approach to the topic itself. Nevertheless, his profound exploration of both the blindnesses of documentary production and the scholarly analysis of them is of vital utility in any context, including this one.
- 24 I will endeavor to refute the notion that it is reflexive, and that it is solely one mode for that matter, later in the chapter.
- 25 The earthquake was estimated to have killed over 2,400 people with some 11,000 serious injuries, with US\$10 billion worth of damage and over 80,000 homes severely damaged or destroyed. See Dr. George Pararas-Carayannis's website on natural disasters for detailed information ([www.drgeorgepc.com/Earthquake1999Taiwan.html](http://www.drgeorgepc.com/Earthquake1999Taiwan.html)). Wu's film won the runner-up prize at the 2003 Yamagata Documentary Film Festival.

- 26 In some ways, the alienation that Cui hints at is reminiscent of Jill Godmilow's intriguing manner in *Far from Poland* of cobbling together archival footage from her intended subject with her own first-person direct address to the camera where she discusses (and to an extent confesses) her limited ability to adequately represent her subject due to the fact that she was denied a visa to enter Poland. Cui's film, however, ultimately does not pursue the self-reflexive nature to the depths that Godmilow does.
- 27 I am simply analyzing the intricate way Cui presents this information to the audience for her desired effect, and not trying to suggest another way to judge the incident. I would aver that it is excessive to convict Lin of murder under the circumstances regardless of the disparity between how the local activists remember the episode and how the officials perceive it. It seems implausible to me that Lin would intentionally kill an armed police officer under the circumstances, and even less likely that his action somehow could have been premeditated. The only two viable options are that it was an accident that occurred in the mayhem, as the local activists contend, or that it was done in anger in the midst of the conflict. Thus, in the worst of circumstances Lin should have been tried for something on the level of manslaughter. This is my opinion not as a legal scholar but just as someone who has examined the incident as an outsider.
- 28 This potent trope of the political narrative has been carefully analyzed by Sylvia Lin both in her book on fictions and films of atrocity in Taiwan and now as her most recent project on Taiwanese documentary. See her *Representing Atrocity in Taiwan*.
- 29 The one explicit reference to ethnicity comes at about the forty-one-minute mark when an archaeological dig at the nuclear power plant site recovers some relics of the Katedralan, an ancient indigenous group that primarily resided in the valley regions of northern Taiwan. Intertitles punctuate the image of the dig. It is November 1999. The Control Yuan of the central government censures Taipower for failure to protect the cultural relics, but construction at the site continues unabated.
- 30 See Nichols's interesting analysis of realism in chapter 6 of *Representing Reality*, "The Fact of Realism and the Fiction of Objectivity," 165–198.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 165–166.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 184.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 178.
- 34 Jill Godmilow participated in a wide-ranging and in-depth interview entitled "How Real is the Reality in Documentary Film: Jill Godmilow, in Conversation with Ann-Louise Shapiro," published in *History and Theory* 36 (4) (December 1997): 80–101. This quotation appears on page 83.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 86.
- 36 Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 44–56.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 38–44.
- 38 See David MacDougall, "Beyond Observational Cinema," in Paul Hockings, ed., *Principles of Visual Anthropology*, 3rd ed. (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2003), 125.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 130.
- 40 Ruby's discussion of the defining features of reflexivity in documentary or ethnographic cinema are the most rigorous I have found in my reading. See his *Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film and Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 155. The three films mentioned above, Vertov's *The Man with the Movie Camera*, Rouch and Morin's *Chronicle of a Summer*, and Asch's *The Ax Fight*, all exhibit the reflexive mode by virtue of their method of production. Vertov's early path-breaking work specifically trains the camera back onto itself, exhibiting for the audience how visual illusion is created for the film frame. Rouch and Morin, working in a totally different epoch, are more social in their approach. They stress throughout the film that their actions could actually have a causal effect on the subjects they interview. Near the end, they invite all the subjects back to view the film production at that stage and encourage them to discuss and analyze what they see. This discussion of the

film project is then folded into the ultimate cinematic product at the end for us, the true spectators of the film, to see. The tack that Asch takes is completely different. He films a brief ax fight among Yanomami people in Venezuela but then returns both visually and orally to the act several times over to dissect what actually went on and how the camera's eye might actually, at first blush, deceive the viewer into drawing incorrect conclusions about the motivation for the fight.

41 Ruby, *Picturing Culture*, 155.

42 Ruby is particularly eloquent on the problem of editing and its fundamental place in the development of a visual narrative on the screen. *Ibid.*, 178ff.

43 Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 178.

44 Ivone Margulies develops this concept in her discussion of Edgar Morin and Jean Rouch's revolutionary film and the connection with Morin's other writings. See her "Chronicle of a Summer (1960) as *Autocritique* (1959): A Transition in the French Left," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 21 (2004): 181.

45 *Ibid.*, 181.

46 See Renov, *The Subject of Documentary*, 178–181.

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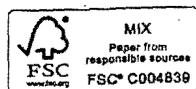
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