The New Chinese Documentary Film Movement
For the Public Record

Edited by Chris Berry, Lu Xinyu, and Lisa Rofel
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Wu Wenguang was a primary school teacher and then a journalist for Kumming Television and China Central Television (CCTV), before making his first independent documentary, *Bumming in Beijing: The Last Dreamers* (1990), which is widely seen as inaugurating China’s New Documentary Movement. In 1991, he founded the Wu Documentary Studio and in 1994 he co-founded The Living Dance Studio with his partner, the dancer and choreographer Wen Hui, with whom he often collaborates. Between 1996 and 1997, he published a desktop magazine, *Documentary Scene*, then founded and edited the independent monthly art magazine *New Wave* (2001). He has written three books inspired by his videos, and edited a three-part collection of critical texts entitled *Document*. In 2005, Wu and Wen established the Caochangdi Workstation, where Wu co-ordinated the *China Village Self-Governance Film Project*, a collection of ten documentaries in which villagers record the introduction of grassroots democracy in China. He continues to train young filmmakers at Caochangdi and has recently completed a second installment of the *China Village Self-Governance Film Project*.

J. X. Zhang is a painter-etcher, freelance art critic and translator.
If you turn on Chinese television today, you may be surprised. News reporting outside China often gives the impression that the country is still a tightly controlled propaganda culture. Yet, you will find dozens if not hundreds of different television channels, with a spontaneous, free-flowing style of reporting. Ordinary citizens are interviewed on the street and express their opinions in a sometimes stumbling and therefore clearly unrehearsed manner. Reporters do not speak as representatives of the Communist Party and government line, but as independent journalists. With hand-held cameras, they breathlessly investigate social issues and follow stories. While certainly monitored by the state and at no time oppositional, China’s most popular medium adopts a more spur-of-the-moment style than many foreigners would expect. And if China’s reputation for a rigorously policed internet limits your expectations, the local equivalent of YouTube — Tudou.com — may surprise you, too. Here a vibrant amateur version of the same on-the-spot style found in television reporting also dominates the scene. All kinds of videos stream off the screen, from personal videos and reflections on home life to oral history and recordings of local events — some of them contentious.¹

However, this wholesale transformation of public culture has been relatively ignored by academic work to date. Outside China, that may be because these kinds of materials do not circulate internationally as readily as blockbuster feature films or contemporary art. Inside China, that neglect began to change in 1997, with the publication of our co-editor Lu Xinyu’s article on the “Contemporary Television Documentary Movement,” followed by her 2003 book on the “New Documentary Movement” in general.² This work traced the major transformations that had occurred in all kinds of actuality-based visual culture — from television news to the internet — back to the beginning of the 1990s, and in particular to documentary film and video production. Not only had the topics, style, and production circumstances of documentary changed in China, but also the new documentary aesthetic has been at the cutting edge of changes elsewhere.
in Chinese film, television, and video production. What you see today on Chinese television and at Tudou.com was pioneered by the New Documentary Movement from the early 1990s on.

Therefore, any attempt to understand China’s visual culture today must start from an understanding of the New Documentary Movement. With this anthology, we attempt to follow Lu Xinyu’s lead into the world of English-language Chinese film studies. So far, significant discussion of China’s New Documentary Movement in English has been largely confined to articles and book chapters. Here, we bring together work by some of the main scholars writing on the topic to create a sustained focus on Chinese independent documentary in English for the first time. In this introduction, we will discuss the significance of the New Documentary Movement in two ways. First, we will try to indicate why it has taken such a central role in Chinese audio-visual culture over the last two decades. Second, we will consider it in its more recent digital form as a contribution to the debates about what cinema is in the digital era, and argue that this new Chinese digital cinema treasures immediacy, spontaneity, and contact with lived experience over the high levels of manipulability associated with the special effects culture of mainstream cinema. The history of the movement is outlined and analyzed in Lu Xinyu’s first chapter for this volume, which follows on from this introduction. Looking back from today, she not only traces the development of the movement but also questions many of the assumptions that have been made about it so far. This introductory chapter, along with Lu Xinyu’s historical overview and a chapter by Wu Wenguang, considered by many as the initiator of the New Documentary Movement, comprise Part I of this volume, which is meant to offer a broad introduction to the movement.

What is the New Documentary Movement and why has it been so important in China’s visual culture? Before 1990 all documentary was state-produced, and took the form of illustrated lectures. Television news was delivered by newsreaders who spoke as the mouthpiece of the Communist Party and the government. There were no spontaneous interviews with the man (or woman) on the street, and no investigative reporting shows. Independent film production was impossible in an era where all the studios were nationally owned and controlled. The internet did not exist, and even the constitutional right to put up “big character posters” (dazibao) had been abrogated in 1978 in response to the Democracy Wall movement. However, the 1980s had witnessed a flourishing of independent thought and questioning of the status quo in response to both the disillusion with Maoism following the debacle of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) and the changing nature of relationships with the West that had followed. In 1990, former television station employee Wu Wenguang produced a no-budget independent documentary using borrowed equipment. Called
Bumming in Beijing: The Last Dreamers, it is analyzed in detail in Bérénice Reynaud’s chapter in this volume, and noted in nearly all the others. Bumming in Beijing is a video film about artists who, like Wu, were struggling to survive independently outside the state system. This is now frequently cited as the first independent documentary to be made in China. Not only was the topic one unlikely to be covered by the relentlessly optimistic state studios and television stations. Furthermore, Wu used a hand-held camera, no artificial lighting, synch sound that was often unclear, and shot things as they happened. This spontaneous style was so unprecedented that it came to have a name of its own: jishi zhuyi, or on-the-spot realism, not to be confused with xianshi zhuyi, the type of highly orchestrated realism associated with socialist realism.

Figure 1.1. Zhang Xiaping’s nervous breakdown in Wu Wenguang’s Bumming in Beijing.

This nitty-gritty and low-budget jishi zhuyi style of realism became the hallmark of independent documentary in China, which took off rapidly through the 1990s. In her historical analysis of China’s New Documentary Movement in this volume, Lu Xinyu notes that most scholars writing on the topic have only included independent films like Wu’s in the New Documentary Movement. However, she questions this, noting that many of Wu’s friends and former colleagues working inside the state-owned television system were also beginning to experiment with a more spontaneous mode of documentary at around the same time. In other words, strikingly original though it was, Bumming in Beijing did not come out of nowhere. In her chapter, she locates its emergence in a larger
cultural context that also encompasses documentary photography and the new “Sixth Generation” of feature filmmakers, some of whom also took part in the New Documentary Movement.

Lu also notes that the term “New Documentary Movement” first appeared in 1992, a little while after the first films began to appear. This places the origins of the movement between two crucial dates in Chinese history: 1989 and 1992. Nineteen eighty-nine is the year of the Tiananmen Democracy Movement and its suppression. Nineteen ninety-two is the year that Premier Deng Xiaoping made his famous “Tour to the South,” in the course of which he called for increased development of the market economy. As we argue in our chapter in this volume, the 1989/1992 conjuncture shapes the cultural and artistic practices that have developed outside the new state-corporate hegemonic culture of China today. The former date signaled the suppression of a public oppositional movement while the latter presaged the commercialization of culture.

Maoist socialism had ended with the Chinese Cultural Revolution, but until the early 1990s, some still believed in the basic tenets of socialism — the official phrase was “socialism with Chinese characteristics”; meanwhile intellectuals analyzed forms of socialist alienation without rejecting socialism in its entirety. But many were disillusioned by the destruction they experienced through class struggle and continuous revolution, two basic tenets of Maoist socialism. After the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese state introduced reforms, hoping to stave off a potential crisis of legitimacy posed by this disillusionment. Economic reform eventually entailed a rejection of collective enterprise, the gradual promotion of a market economy, and the steady move toward privatization. These reforms were and are built on the premise of a continuity in the political system of governance coupled with a discontinuity in the state’s promotion of radical marketization and privatization. It would be misleading then to characterize the market economy in China as in opposition to the state.

Economic reform in the rural areas was somewhat distinct from urban reform. Rural reform, which occurred first between 1978 and 1984, entailed de-collectivization of communes, the partial decentralization of power to local governments, and the development of rural markets. Rural reform had certain unanticipated results: widespread corruption in the transfer of resources and an enormous tide of rural migrants who swept into the cities in search of work. Urban reforms entailed an analogous devolution of power to local governments and managers of state-run enterprises. As in the rural areas, the transfer of resources reorganized social relations, advantages, and interests. The small minority who benefited most visibly, including some managers but also diverse government cadres, eventually formed a new capitalist class.
These reforms created new historical conditions: the marketization of power, inequalities in distribution and rent-seeking behavior, increasingly polarized income levels, the abolition of security in employment, and lack of reforms in social benefits. The reforms had contradictory effects: they enhanced ordinary people’s sense of new possibilities but also increased frustrations with the new social inequalities that soon emerged. The Tiananmen demonstrations of 1989 were a response to these contradictions. The state’s violent suppression of the 1989 protests led, paradoxically, to a widening of the reforms. For the first time, the state began to encourage foreign direct investment in China. By 2002, China had surpassed the United States as the favored destination for foreign direct investment. In turn, China began to invest in other countries, as both government and private entrepreneurs searched for the natural resources that China’s growing economy demanded. An emphasis on consumer and mass culture began to dominate urban life. Over the next decade, a majority of state-run enterprises were allowed to go bankrupt and massive numbers of urban workers, who thought they had garnered the “iron rice bowl” of lifetime employment, found themselves permanently unemployed.

This rapidly changing historical context, with its stark contrasts, provides the impetus and the rationale for the New Documentary Movement, in the political, social, and technical senses of the term “movement.” It addressed new political themes, filmed social subjects marginalized by mainstream and official media, and transformed audio-visual culture in China, including not only independent documentary and amateur work on the internet but also broadcast television and fiction feature film production.

The people making independent documentaries were friendly with former colleagues in television stations, and in many cases they themselves were continuing to work in those stations. New TV series such as Oriental Horizon, a Chinese news magazine show in the mode of the famous American CBS show 60 Minutes, pursued many elements of on-the-spot realism. Combined with investigative tendencies, the results were immediate hits with audiences.

Other independent documentarians had friends who were young filmmakers, some of whom were also striking out on their own outside the state-owned industry. For them, on-the-spot realism also provided a signature style different from what had gone before. They felt a need to mark themselves out from two earlier tendencies. On the one hand, there was the socialist realist tradition, which had the glossy aspirational look of Hollywood but narratives driven by class struggle rather than individualized psychology. On the other hand, there were the highly stylized works of the Fifth Generation, which had marked themselves out from socialist realism by use of unusual angles, virtuoso visual design, and settings in the exotic border areas or the past. The so-called Sixth Generation,
who started working in the 1990s, used on-the-spot realism to create their own signature style, along with contemporary urban settings. Even Zhang Yimou himself picked up the observational documentary trend in the opening sequence of The Story of Qiu Ju (1992), placing a heavily disguised Gong Li among the rural crowds and filming her with hidden cameras.9

Zhang Yimou’s adoption of the New Documentary Movement style in The Story of Qiu Ju is early evidence of its wide impact. If you ask the average Chinese citizen about Wu Wenguang and Bumming in Beijing, or indeed most of the other films and filmmakers discussed in this volume, they will probably have no idea what you are talking about. But they certainly will know Oriental Horizon, and the makers of Oriental Horizon know Wu and the other documentary independents. In other words, the core films and filmmakers of the New Documentary Movement are an avant-garde. Like avant-gardes all over the world, they often set the pace and are best known in their field; while the general public might well recognize the innovations they have introduced, they would less likely be able to name artists and works.

In China, the public’s knowledge of these works is further complicated by their unofficial nature and resulting difficulties of access. China’s system of cultural production continues to bear the traces of its Maoist heritage in certain ways. In the Maoist era, the Communist Party and the state not only controlled cultural production but also set the agenda. Just as entrepreneurship has been encouraged in the wider economy now, so too, cultural producers initiate their projects rather than waiting for instructions from the state. However, it remains the case that nothing can be broadcast without approval from the censorship apparatus, and no film can be shown commercially in movie theaters without similar censorship approval. As a result, these works circulate through other channels. As well as pirate DVDs, legal ones exist of some films, because the DVD censorship authority is separate from that for films or broadcasting. Screenings occur in art galleries, university classrooms, and at other informal venues, as discussed further in our chapter and in Seio Nakajima’s chapter in this volume. And, of course, many films can be downloaded. This means that while they may not be reaching a general public, they may be more easily found and seen in China than outsiders might expect. This circulation also helps to explain the ongoing wide cultural impact of the movement.

When the mini DV camera was introduced in about 1997, both the New Documentary Movement and its low-cost style received a further boost. The impact of the mini DV was remarkable. First, it changed the mode of filmmaking. The small camera made one-person filmmaking possible. In his chapter translated for this volume, Wu Wenguang himself celebrates his experience of the DV camera as a personal transformation and even a salvation. This is not
because of the technical properties of DV, but because he feels it enables him to break through the barrier between the filmmaker and their subjects, creating a communal experience rather than a hierarchical one.

Another important transformation enabled by DV was the proliferation of the movement. Affordable to most middle-class people, relatively easy to use, and easy to edit for anyone with a home computer, the DV camera could be taken up by people with no professional training or experience. In the early days, it was possible for a visitor to know all the Chinese independent filmmakers and see their films. After the introduction of DV, even the leading filmmakers had difficulty keeping track of the scope and range of production. Jia Zhangke, who has continued to make independent documentaries at the same time as his feature films have won awards at festivals like Venice (*Still Life*, 2006), hailed the post-DV era in China as the “age of the amateur.”

This intersection of on-the-spot realism in its various guises and the digital age makes China’s independent documentary movement more than the key force in China’s visual culture. It also makes it an important and different contribution to the international debate about digital culture and its impact upon what we call “cinema” today. In the People’s Republic of China, there was no earlier development of independent or amateur film culture with either 16mm or 8mm film. Therefore, when DV arrived in China soon after the upsurge of independent production, it not only enabled the growth of independent production, but also led to the identification of DV with the independent and amateur movement in its on-the-spot realism form. Around the turn of the century, China’s bookshops featured various titles on what was called the DV aesthetic, all of which also emphasized the idea of independent filmmaking and on-the-spot realism.

This Chinese understanding of the essence of DV stands in stark contrast to the common understanding in the United States and elsewhere in the West. This distinction can be exemplified by the contentions put forward by Lev Manovich in *The Language of New Media*. Here, Manovich notes that DV introduces the ability to manipulate the image at the level of the pixel. Whereas Chinese filmmakers and commentators valued DV’s ability to capture what was happening around them in a direct and unmediated way, Manovich emphasizes the ability to manipulate what is recorded in an almost equally direct manner. On this basis, he argues for a reconsideration of the history of cinema. Instead of the indexical or direct recording of reality as a watershed moment in which cinema marks itself out from painting, the digital and the possibility for the artist to manipulate every pixel provides cinema with a new lineage that once again places it within the long history of painting.

Given Hollywood’s embrace of digital’s ability to be used for spectacular special effects, it is hardly surprising that many other authors have also focused
on similar aspects in their writings on DV. But this alternative appropriation of DV in the People’s Republic should alert us to the fact that DV has no single essence, but already means different things in different places according to local circumstances.

Of course, the local significance of the New Documentary Movement in China goes beyond filmmaking, and is more fundamentally rooted in its commitment to record contemporary life in China outside any direct control of the state. That is, the New Documentary Movement filmmakers self-consciously fashion themselves as committed to a social practice that they hope will open up new public spaces for discussion of social problems and dilemmas in the post-socialist era. They have forged a novel space of social commentary and critique, not simply in the reception of the films by audiences but much more in the actual process of producing the documentaries. Most notably, this production process includes long-term relationships developed between filmmakers and subjects, in which the filmmaker might spend several years living with those being filmed, more in the manner of an anthropologist than of an investigative journalist. The social and political commentary of the film develops organically out of this relationship. These independent documentaries have the potential to craft a unique public space.

This striking manner of crafting documentary builds from a set of assumptions distinct from common understandings of documentary film in English-language academic writing. Film and video in general are considered to be a “representation” of reality. In consequence, many discussions of documentary ethics proceed from the assumption that the key issue for documentary is how to represent reality as accurately as possible. They ask how to minimize the impact of the documentary-making process on the reality that it is meant to represent. In the case of studies of activist documentary, the focus is on reception after the production of the film rather than its social engagement during production.

However, the independent documentary practice that has developed in China works from completely contrary assumptions. It understands documentary making as a part of life, not a representation separate from it. Furthermore, the documentarians see their work as part of the lives of their subjects, and they are concerned that their documentary making should be a social practice that helps those people.

Thus, many of the chapters in this volume join the move beyond the purely textual focus that continues to dominate mainstream film studies to address the social practices embedded in the films. The questions these chapters address include: Given the difficulties with independent filmmaking in China, can this practice provide an unexpected opportunity for ordinary citizens to make
themselves heard? How do these documentarians as well as their subjects grapple with the way power is at once open to contest and resistant to change? How do they articulate in the film- or video-making the production of politics, inequality, difference, and community? To what extent can we say that these documentarians are oppositional activists? How do they operate within specific institutional, historical, sociological, and ideological constraints? And how do the documentarians as well as the subjects within the documentary produce specific identities (national, regional and trans-regional, class, gender), cultural and ideological perspectives, and aesthetic values?

The chapters in Part II of the book, “Documenting Marginalization, or Identities New and Old,” address one of the most important features of the movement: attention to those hitherto neglected in China’s media. This aspect of the movement cannot be over-stressed. The suppression of public dissent after Tiananmen did not lead to a withering away of critical voices and the New Documentary Movement is a central place where they can be found. Due to the nature of these documentaries — the lack of voiceover and thus the seeming absence of ideological framing, coupled with the fact that the “common folk” speak in their own voices — the state has found it difficult to respond with direct intervention. Thus, the movement presents both implicit and explicit social and political critique. It also offers a sense of the contradictory emergence of new subjectivities as a result of the market economy and its transnational imbrications. In her magisterial chapter on Wang Bing’s *West of the Tracks*, Lu Xinyu examines the significance of his decision to look at the death of a heavy industry district that once symbolized the triumph of socialism. She argues that the film demands attention to the price being paid for marketization, in terms of both personal upheaval and the abandonment of socialist ideals. The film stands as a monument to the otherwise undocumented destruction that accompanies the more frequently celebrated construction that is going on in other parts of China. On the other hand, Chao Shi-Yan’s chapter focuses on social identities that have emerged with marketization, namely gay and lesbian sexual identities. He compares two films about lesbians, one produced by a self-proclaimed heterosexual woman, the other by a lesbian. Chao argues that while observational documentaries have addressed certain important political questions of representation in China, they raise other sorts of contradictions when questions of identity come into the picture. By identifying with lesbians, the filmmaker Shi Tou is able to experiment with styles of filmmaking that do not concern themselves with observational distance or objectification.

In the third part of the book, “Publics, Counter-Publics, and Alternative Publics,” we turn to the spaces the films circulate in, the spaces documented by the films, and the spaces they create. Independent films in China are shown in a
wide variety of spaces, including film clubs, university classrooms, and private homes. Seio Nakajima answers the often-raised question of whether and where these “independent” and therefore “underground” productions are screened in China, by conducting an ethnographic investigation of the film clubs of Beijing and their role in the circulation and discussion of the new documentary films. In his study he found at least four different types of film clubs in Beijing: (1) “politically oriented film clubs,” (2) “commercially oriented film clubs,” (3) “‘art for art’s sake’ film clubs,” and (4) “artistic, commercial film clubs.” Nakajima goes on to analyze the kinds of debates that occur in these spaces about the films that are screened. These debates address not only the distinctions between documentary and fiction film but also the influence of the West on Chinese filmmaking practices. Paola Voci examines the Beijing of the New Documentary Movement in “Blowup Beijing: The City as a Twilight Zone.” With allusions to Michelangelo Antonioni and the eponymous television series of the 1960s, Voci examines what she argues is a central feature of Chinese documentaries: their tendency to highlight the barely visible locations of Beijing’s marginal inhabitants. Unlike the conventional images of Beijing, these films make accessible an unofficial, unconventional, and unlikely Beijing. Finally, Berry and Rofel turn to the complicated question of the social and political status of these films. Rather than label them as “oppositional,” “underground,” or “resistance” films, we argue that “alternative,” understood in a specifically Chinese context, is the most appropriate nomination of the movement.

The chapters collected in the final section of the book, “Between Filmmaker and Subject: Re-creating Realism,” return to investigate in more detail some of the formal features of documentary film discussed at the beginning of this introduction. While many have noted the distinctive visual quality of the new documentary films, their aural qualities have been less frequently examined. Bérénice Reynaud rectifies this lacuna with detailed analysis of the voice and its complex deployments in Bumming in Beijing. In his chapter, Luke Robinson interrogates the often-noted turn to “private” filmmaking with the arrival of the DV camera, and, through analysis of key works, asks if this turn really means a retreat from the social or another way of approaching it. Finally, both Yomi Braester and Yiman Wang are interested in the ethical issues that have been coming to the fore with the development of the New Documentary Movement. Braester challenges the presumption of cinematic objectivity in the movement. He focuses on the many instances of intrusion by the filmmaker into the scene, including prodding subjects into action. Analyzing four films in detail, Braester not only raises questions about intrusions into others’ seemingly private lives but also demonstrates how these intrusive films rely on a notion of auteurship that implicitly highlights the inherent theatricality behind the supposedly
spontaneous interactions in other documentary films. Wang examines “personal” documentaries made with the benefit of DV technology and the redefinition of documentary ethics that proceeds from them by configuring new relationships between the documentary maker and the subjects. She addresses two apparently contradictory statements by personal documentarians — an identificatory “I am one of them” and a theatrical “they are my actors” — to analyze the relations between experiencing, witnessing, and performance.

We hope that the chapters here will begin to draw the attention that China’s New Documentary Movement deserves in the international English-speaking world. Furthermore, we hope and believe that this volume will stimulate further debate, not only on the movement itself, but also on the wider culture that it has pioneered. There is an even more notable lack of work on the protean textual output of internet and amateur visual culture in China today, especially work that goes beyond issues of ownership and control to actually engage with the texts themselves. We hope this anthology will help to provide a springboard for more work of that nature. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the filmmakers and the authors of the volume, as well as our editors and readers at Hong Kong University Press. We also thank the Pacific Rim Research Program of the University of California for funding that enabled our research for this volume.
Appendix 1: Biographies of Key Documentarians

Compiled by Chen Ting and Chris Berry

All those filmmakers whose works are discussed in any detail in the book are included in this appendix. Many of them, as noted, also produced experimental films or dramatic films. The listings focus on their documentary output.

Ai Xiaoming

Born in Wuhan in 1953, Ai Xiaoming studied at Central China Normal University and Beijing Normal University. She is a professor in the Department of Chinese Languages and Literature at Zhongshan University in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, where she has also led the Sex/Gender Education Forum since 2003. She is a feminist academic, human rights activist, and documentarian.

- 2004  White Ribbon
- 2004  Vagina Monologues (co-directed with Song Sufeng)
- 2005  Painting for the Revolution: The Peasant Painters of Hu County
- 2005  Tai Shi Village
- 2006  What Are You Doing with That Camera?
- 2006  Epic of Central Plains
- 2006  People’s Representative Yao
- 2007  The Garden of Heaven (co-directed with Hu Jie)
- 2007  Care and Love
- 2007  Red Art (co-directed with Hu Jie)
- 2008  The Train to My Hometown (co-directed with Hu Jie)
- 2009  Our Children
**Chen Jue**

Chen Jue was born in Beijing in 1961, and studied at the Beijing Broadcasting Institute. He began working for China Central Television (CCTV) in 1985. As a producer and director he has been involved in numerous innovative and award-winning programs and series, and in the early 1990s he was one of the pioneers of the New Documentary Movement within the television system.

- 1991  *Tiananmen* (TV series)
- 1992  *I Graduated!* (co-directed with Shi Jian for SWYC Group)

**Cui Zi’en**

Cui Zi’en is a research fellow at the Beijing Film Academy and a prolific writer of short stories, film criticism, screenplays, and other work, as well as a producer and director of independent dramatic, experimental, and documentary feature and short films. Only those works with documentary elements are listed below.

- 2003  *Feeding Boys, Ayaya*
- 2004  *Night Scene*
- 2007  *We Are the … of Communism*
- 2009  *Queer China, “Comrade” China*

**Du Haibin**

Du Haibin was born in Shanxi Province in 1972 and graduated in still photography from the Beijing Film Academy. His documentary feature, *Along the Railroad Tracks*, won best film at the First Chinese Independent Documentary Festival and also a special prize at the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival. His most recent film, *1428*, won best documentary at the 2009 Venice International Film Festival.

- 1998  *Dou Dou*
- 2000  *Along the Railroad Tracks*
- 2002  *Underneath the Skyscraper*
- 2005  *Beautiful Men*
- 2005  *Movie, Childhood*
- 2006  *Stone Mountain*
- 2007  *Umbrella*
- 2009  *1428*
Appendix 1

**Duan Jinchuan**

Duan Jinchuan was born in Chengdu in Sichuan Province in 1962. He graduated from the Beijing Broadcasting Institute in 1984 and went to work in Tibet for Lhasa Television Station. He returned to Beijing to work as an independent documentary filmmaker in 1992, and established China Memo Films in 1998. One of the films in his Tibet Trilogy, *No. 16 Barkhor South Street*, was the first Chinese film to win the prestigious Grand Prix at the Cinéma du Réel festival in 1996.

- 1986 *Highland Barley*
- 1988 *The Blue Mask Consecration*
- 1991 *Tibet*
- 1993 *The Sacred Site of Asceticism* (co-directed with Wen Pulin)
- 1994 *The Square* (co-directed with Zhang Yuan)
- 1996 *No. 16 Barkhor South Street*
- 1997 *The Ends of the Earth*
- 1997 *The Men and Women of Jiada Village*
- 1999 *Sunken Treasure*
- 2002 *The Secret of My Success*
- 2005 *The Storm* (co-directed with Jiang Yue)

**Hu Jie**

Hu Jie was born in 1958. He served as a soldier for fifteen years and graduated from the Oil Painting Department of the People’s Liberation Army Art Academy in 1991. In 1995 he left the army and became an independent documentary maker. Since 2004, he has worked with Ai Xiaoming on various films about women, gender, and human rights education. His films have been shown widely outside China.

- 1995 *Yuanmingyuan Artist Village*
- 1996 *Remote Mountains*
- 1996 *Female Matchmaker*
- 1998 *The Trash Collector*
- 1998 *The Janitors*
- 1998 *Construction Workers*
- 1998 *The Factory Set Up by the Peasants*
- 2002 *Bask in Sunshine*
- 2003 *On the Seaside*
2003  *Folk Song on the Plain*
2004  *Looking for Lin Zhao’s Soul*
2004  *The Elected Village Chief*
2006  *The Silent Nu River*
2006  *Though I Am Gone*
2007  *The Garden of Heaven* (co-directed with Ai Xiaoming)
2007  *Red Art* (co-directed with Ai Xiaoming)
2008  *The Train to My Hometown* (co-directed with Ai Xiaoming)
2009  *National East Wind Farm*

**Hu Shu**
Hu Shu was born in 1967 in Guiyang in Guizhou Province. He graduated from the School of Journalism at Fudan University in Shanghai in 1989, and has worked in Guizhou Satellite Television since 1994.

1998–99 *Leave Me Alone*

**Hu Xinyu**
Hu Xinyu was born in 1969 and teaches in the Music Department of the Taiyuan Teacher’s College in Shanxi Province.

2003  *The Man*
2006  *Zigui*
2009  *Family Phobia*

**Huang Weikai**
Huang Weikai was born in 1972. He graduated from the Chinese Art Department of the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts in 1995. He worked as a cameraman on Ou Ning and Cao Fei’s *Meishi Street* and *Sanyuanli*. Since 2002, he has been making experimental films. His documentary films are listed below. Both have been screened widely at international film festivals.

2005  *Floating*
2009  *Disorder*
**Ji Dan**

Ji Dan began producing independent documentaries in 1994. *Gongbu's Happy Life* was a film shown at the Taiwan International Documentary Festival and Yunfest 2003. *The Elders* was shown at the International Documentary Festival Amsterdam and the Taiwan Ethnographic Film Festival. She has also filmed many documentary programs for NHK Television.

- 1999 *Gongbu's Happy Life*
- 1999 *The Elders*
- 2003 *Wellspring* (co-directed with Sha Qing)
- 2006 *Spirit Home*
- 2007 *Dream of the Empty City*
- 2009 *Spiral Staircase of Harbin*

**Jia Zhangke**

Jia Zhangke was born in Fenyang in Shanxi Province in 1970, and studied film theory at the Beijing Film Academy in the 1990s. The adoption of a documentary style, with the use of location, hand-held camera, and so forth, has been a major feature of his many award-winning feature films. But he has also made documentary works. At the time of writing, he is working on a documentary about Shanghai.

- 1994 *One Day in Beijing*
- 2001 *The Canine Condition*
- 2001 *In Public*
- 2006 *Dong*
- 2007 *Useless*

**Jiang Yue**

Jiang Yue was born in 1962 and graduated from the China Drama Academy before joining the Beijing Film Studio in 1988. He and Duan Jinchuan set up China Memo Films together in 1998.

- 1991 *Tibetan Theater Troupe of Llama Priests*
- 1992 *The Residents of Lhasa's Potala Square*
- 1992 *Catholics in Tibet*
- 1995 *The Other Bank*
- 1998 *A River Stilled*
- 2002 *This Happy Life*
Jiang Zhi
Jiang Zhi was born in Hunan Province in 1971. He graduated from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 1995, and lives and works in Shenzhen as a multimedia artist. His output ranges from photography to novels.

1998  Forefinger
2005  The Storm (directed with Duan Jinchuan)
2002  The War of Love
2005  The Storm

Ju Anqi
Ju Anqi was born in Xinjiang Province in 1975, and graduated from the Directing Department of the Beijing Film Academy in 1999.

1999  There Is a Strong Wind in Beijing
2003  Quilts
2007  Night in China
2009  Gipsy in the Flower
2007  The Moments
2001  The Empty Cage
2002  Little Red
2004  Our Love

Kang Jianning
Born in 1954, Kang Jianning graduated from Beijing Sports College in 1970 and continued there as a teacher for ten years before transferring to work in television. He has worked as the deputy director of Ningxia Television, and has been responsible for pioneering new directions in documentary within the television system. Listed below are just a few of his most important works.

1991  Sand and Sea
1994  Yin Yang
2000  Soldier
2002  Listen to Mr. Fan
1999  There Is a Strong Wind in Beijing
2003  Quilts
2007  Night in China
2009  Gipsy in the Flower
**Li Hong**

Li Hong was born in 1967. She studied at the Beijing Broadcasting Institute and works in television.

- 1997 *Out of Phoenix Bridge*
- 2002 *Dancing with Myself*

**Li Jinghong**

Li Jinghong was born in Beijing in 1959, graduated from Tianjin Handicraft University, and ran a clothing factory before becoming involved in documentary production.

- 2004 *Sisters*

**Li Xiao**

Li Xiao is head of documentary production for Shanghai TV’s Documentary Channel, and an active documentary filmmaker in his own right. He has co-produced films with NHK of Japan, CBS of Canada, and PBS of the United States. The following are his primary works as a documentary director.

- 1992 *Boatman on Maoyan River*
- 1996 *Distant Village*
- 1996 *Strange Homeland*
- 2000 *Factory Director Zhang Liming*
- 2007 *Tangshan Earthquake*

**Li Yifan**

Li Yifan was born in Wuhan in 1966. He studied at the Sichuan Film Arts Institute and the Central Drama Institute in Beijing. He now lives and works in Chongqing, and is also a photographer and video artist. *Before the Flood*, which he directed with Yan Yu, won the best film award at the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival and numerous other awards.

- 2004 *Before the Flood*
- 2007 *The Longwang Chronicles*
Liang Zi
Born in Beijing, Liang Zi entered the army at the age of sixteen and became a documentary photographer. She has also written documentary reportage.

2005  Landlord Mr. Jiang

Ning Ying
Ning Ying was born in Beijing. She studied cinema at the Beijing Film Academy and later at Italy’s Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia. She was assistant director for Bernardo Bertolucci on The Last Emperor (1987) and has gone on to direct a number of dramatic features, as well as promotional films. Since 2008, she has been head of the Film Department at the Central Academy of Fine Arts.

2001  In Our Own Words
2002  Railroad of Hope
2003  Looking for a Job in the City

Ou Ning
Ou Ning works as an internationally active artist, graphic designer, editor, and event organizer. In Guangzhou, he founded the independent film and video organization, U-thèque. In 2009, he was appointed as the chief curator of the Shenzhen and Hong Kong Biennale of Urbanism and Architecture. He currently lives in Beijing, where he is director of the Shao Foundation.

2003  Sanyuanli
2006  Meishi Street

Sha Qing
Sha Qing was born in Beijing in 1965. He began working in documentary in Tibet in the late 1990s, and helped to edit Ji Dan’s Gongbu’s Happy Life and The Elders. Wellspring won the Ogawa Shinsuke Prize at Yamagata in 2003.

2003  Wellspring (co-directed with Ji Dan)
Shi Jian
Born in 1963, Shi Jian graduated from the Beijing Broadcasting Institute in 1985 and began working as a director and producer for China Central Television (CCTV), where he continues to work to this day. In 1993, he launched Oriental Horizon, a series which became an important site for the development of new documentary within the television system. In 1996, he launched China’s first hit talk show, Tell It Like It Is. As an independent producer, he helped to establish the Structure Wave Youth Cinema Experimental Group (SWYC Group) at the beginning of the 1990s.

1991 Tiananmen (TV series)
1992 I Graduated! (co-directed with Chen Jue for SWYC Group)

Shi Lihong
Shi Lihong is an environmental activist and filmmaker. She spent ten years working on the film Mystery of Yunnan Snub-nosed Monkey with her husband, Xi Zhinong. The film won a TVE Award at the Wildscreen Film Festival. In 2003, they founded China Wild Film together, and in 2004 she made her first solo film, Voice of the Angry River, which was screened at the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival. She has also line-produced numerous environment-themed documentaries for international producers.

2002 Mystery of the Yunnan Snub-nosed Monkey
2004 Voice of the Angry River

Shi Tou
Professional artist Shi Tou graduated from the Guizhou Art Academy. She appeared as a lead actor in China’s first lesbian feature film, Fish and Elephant, in 2001. Her oeuvre includes documentary video and photography.

2001 Living Buddhas
2002 Gangxiang — Call to Spirits
2004 Dyke March
2005 Wenda Gu: Art, Politics, Life, Sexuality
2006 Women Fifty Minutes
2007 We Want to Get Married
**Shu Haolun**
Shu Haolun received an MFA in filmmaking at Southern Illinois University in the United States, and has recently been working on dramatic films. His first documentary, *Struggle*, was his graduation work. It focuses on the efforts of a lawyer to represent those injured in industrial accidents in the factories of southern China. He is currently based in Shanghai.

- 2001 *Struggle*
- 2006 *Nostalgia*

**Wang Bing**
Born in Shaanxi Province in 1967, Wang Bing graduated in photography from the Lu Xun Art Academy in Shenyang, Liaoning Province in 1995, and in cinematography from the Beijing Film Academy in 1997. *West of the Tracks* was shown at the Berlin International Film Festival and went on to screen around the world.

- 2003 *West of the Tracks*
- 2007 *Fengming, a Chinese Memoir*
- 2008 *Crude Oil*

**Wang Shuibo**
Wang Shuibo was born in Shandong Province in 1960. He studied and taught at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, before moving to Canada in 1989. He is an artist and filmmaker. His animated documentary *Sunrise over Tiananmen Square* was nominated for an Academy Award.

- 1998 *Sunrise over Tiananmen Square*
- 1999 *Swing in Beijing*
- 2005 *They Chose China*

**Wang Wo**
Wang Wo is a trained graphic designer. He is also an independent artist. He was born in Hebei Province in northern China in 1967 and studied at the Central Academy of Arts and Design in Beijing.

- 2006 *Outside*
- 2007 *Noise*
Wei Xing

Wei Xing was born in 1960. He has worked for Yunnan Television since 1986, where he has been a prolific maker of documentary programs. His best known film, *A Student Village*, was also originally made for the station.

2000  *A Student Village*

Wu Wenguang

Born in Yunnan in 1956, Wu Wenguang was one of the first filmmakers to work in the Chinese New Documentary Movement. He has also written widely about it. Together with his partner Wen Hui, he founded the Living Dance Studio. In 2005, they also established the Caochangdi Workstation Art Centre in Beijing, where he has organized numerous classes, screenings, and other events, including the China Village Documentary Project.

1990  *Bumming in Beijing — The Last Dreamers*
1993  *1966, My Time in the Red Guard*
1995  *At Home in the World*
1999  *Jianghu: Life on the Road*
1998  *Diary: Snow, 21 November 1998*
2001  *Dance with Farm Workers*
2005  *Fuck Cinema*

Yan Yu

Yan Yu was born in Chongqing in 1972. He began his career as a photojournalist at Chongqing Television. He worked there from 1994 to 1998, and then moved to Beijing to work in documentary and advertising photography. He co-founded Fanyu Studio in 2001. *Before the Flood* won the Wolfgang Staudte Award at the Berlin International Film Festival, the Cinéma du Réel Scam International Award, the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival Grand Prize, and the Yunfest Grand Prize.

2004  *Before the Flood* (co-directed with Li Yifan)
2008  *Before the Flood II*
Yang Lina
Yang Lina was born in Jilin Province in 1972. She graduated from the Acting Department of the People’s Liberation Army Art Academy in 1995, and began making documentaries in 1997.

1999  *Old Men*
2001  *Home Video*
2007  *My Neighbors on Japanese Devils*
2008  *The Love of Mr. An*

Ying Weiwei
Also known as Echo Y. Windy, Ying Weiwei has screened *The Box* at film festivals around the world. She works for Shanghai Television, where she continues to produce documentaries.

2001  *The Box*

Zhang Hua
Born in Zhejiang Province in 1970, Zhang Hua was a professional hairdresser before getting involved in documentary film.

2004  *Kuang Dan’s Secret*
2006  *Road to Paradise*

Zhang Yuan
Born in Jiangsu Province in 1963, Zhang Yuan graduated in cinematography from the Beijing Film Academy in 1989. He pioneered independent feature filmmaking in China with his film *Mama*, and in 1997 rejoined the mainstream film system with his feature *Seventeen Years*. Many of his films work at the intersection of documentary and fiction, such as *Sons* (1996), in which the lead actors re-enacted scenes from their real lives. He has also made independent documentaries.

1994  *The Square* (co-directed with Duan Jinchuan)
1999  *Crazy English*
2000  *Miss Jin Xing*
Zhao Gang
Zhao Gang was born in Chengdu in Sichuan Province, and graduated from Sichuan University in 1985. He makes documentary programs for Chengdu Television Station.

2003 Winter Days

Zhao Liang
Zhao Liang was born in Dandong on the border with North Korea in 1971. He studied photography at the Beijing Film Academy. He works as an artist, video artist, photographer, and screenwriter, as well as a documentarian.

2001 Paper Airplane
2005 Farewell Yuanmingyuan
2006 Return to the Border
2007 Crime and Punishment
2009 Petition

Zheng Dasheng
Zheng Dasheng was born in Shanghai in 1968. He graduated from the Directing Department of the Shanghai Drama Academy, and undertook graduate studies at the Chicago Art Institute. Partly funded by China Film Group, DV China was aired on China Central Television in 2004. Zheng Dasheng works for the Shanghai Film Studio, and he has also been directing kunqu operas.

2003 DV China

Zhou Hao
Born in 1968, Zhou Hao is a director with the 21st Century Film Workshop. He has previously worked as a reporter for the Xinhua News Agency and Southern Weekend. He is based in Guangzhou.

2002 Houjie
2006 Senior Year
2007 Using
2009 The Transition Period
Zhu Chuanming
Zhu Chuanming was born in 1971 on a tea plantation on Lushan, Jiangxi Province. He worked in a petrochemical factory for five years before entering the Photography Department at Beijing Film Academy. Besides his documentary works, Zhu Chuanming also regularly publishes stories, poems, and essays in Chinese literary magazines.

- 1999  *Beijing Cotton Fluffer*
- 2001  *Extras*

Zuo Yixiao
Zuo Yixiao was born in Shanghai in 1974 and studied at Shanghai University. He worked as an editor at the Propaganda Department of Shanghai Television for three years, and is currently studying scriptwriting at Beijing Film Academy.

- 2004  *Losing*
Chapter 1

1 When we originally drafted this introduction, filmmakers, artists, and intellectuals in China were somewhat optimistic about the possibilities for cultural productions and exhibitions in China. There was a more general optimism in China about a shift towards greater freedom of expression. Since then, however, there have been worrisome signs that the Chinese government has stepped up its interventions. These include the temporary closure of a well-known independent film website; the refusal to allow feminist scholar and documentary maker Ai Xiaoming to enter Hong Kong on at least one occasion; the well-publicized struggles with Google over censorship; and the jailing of Tibetan documentary maker Dhongdup Wangchen. It is difficult to predict any particular future scenario and we do not assume linear historical developments in one direction or the other. However, at the very least we imagine the dialectical tensions over non-government-sponsored cultural works will continue.


Notes

5 For more on this era, see Wang Jing, *High Culture Fever: Politics, Aesthetics and Ideology in Deng’s China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).


9 Zhang Yimou, one of the best known of the Fifth Generation filmmakers, made numerous films that were allegorical critiques of the Cultural Revolution. Most recently, he directed the opening spectacle of the Beijing Olympics.

10 Jia Zhangke, “Yeyu dianying shidai jijiang zaici daolai” (The age of amateur cinema will

11 Zhang Xianmin and Zhang Yaxuan’s Yigeren de yingxiang is a prime example.


13 See, for example, Michelle Pierson, Special Effects: Still in Search of Wonder (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

### Chapter 2


3 Author’s interview with Wu Wenguang in “Trends toward the Individualization of Writing,” in Lu Xinyu, Documenting China: The New Documentary Movement in China (Beijing: Sanlian Shudian, 2003).


5 The 1989 Tiananmen Incident involved hundreds of thousands of students and citizens protesting a range of issues, including students’ demands for better university conditions and more democracy in government, as well as citizens’ opposition to government corruption. The protests in Beijing centered in Tiananmen Square, where students and some citizens camped out and refused to leave. Protests were also held in all major cities in China. The protests ended on June 4, 1989, when the central government called in the army to shoot down the protesters in Tiananmen Square.

6 Ningxia is a province located in the north central part of China, far from Beijing. The province is rather poor; it is remote from the cultural centers on the coast of China.

7 Zhou Enlai was second in power to Mao, serving as the premier of the People’s Republic of China from its founding until Zhou’s death in 1976. His efforts to dampen the worst violence of the Cultural Revolution meant that his popularity never waned, and hence the immense outpouring of grief by citizens upon his death. See Dick Wilson, Zhou Enlai: A Biography (New York: Viking Press, 1984).
This list contains the roman letter version of Chinese names or the translations of music band names as they appear in chapters in the book, along with the original Chinese characters. It does not contain the names of authors whose works appear in the notes.

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<tr>
<th>Chinese Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ai Xiaoming</td>
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List of Chinese Film and Video Titles

This list contains the English titles of all the Chinese documentary and feature films and television series mentioned in the book, together with the Chinese original titles, the names of the filmmakers or the television production company, and the year of release. The Chinese characters for the directors’ names can be found in the list of Chinese names.

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<th>English Title</th>
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<td>Ancient Road of Tangbo</td>
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<td>CCTV</td>
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<td>At Home in the World</td>
<td>四海为家</td>
<td>Wu Wenguang</td>
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<td>Bask in Sunshine</td>
<td>圣光</td>
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<td>新中国的诞生</td>
<td>Gao Weijin</td>
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