Chapter 5

THE DOCUMENTARY AND NEW TECHNOLOGY

1. The Production Strategy for An Investigation of the Huangmei Opera Film Genre

1.1 Why Documentary?

Considering the subject of the Huangmei Opera film genre with its distinctive filmic characteristics and interesting social and cultural issues, especially from the perspective of its enduring popularity among fans, An Investigation of the Huangmei Opera Film Genre (henceforth AIHOFG) chose the documentary as its medium, as it could address the material and make it accessible to as wide a range of viewers as possible. The documentary is a medium that can easily incorporate film footage of the extant Huangmei Opera films. Hence, through the documentary form, AIHOFG could be a valuable resource not only for fans but also for film students and scholars with its ease of use and access.

Furthermore, making a documentary is similar to a written thesis. It includes planning, researching, interviewing, collecting and ordering materials, then assembling them into a meaningful sequence in a similar manner. A documentary can articulate its meaning through words, images and sound. And, most importantly, it can vividly convey human behaviour in a way that no written thesis can do. Thus, making a series of documentaries about the Huangmei Opera film genre became the logical choice for this doctoral project.
1.2 Half Entertaining, Half Academic

The Huangmei Opera film genre, with its lyrical music and Chinese literary tradition, is full of Chinese aesthetic and characteristic visual qualities. Furthermore, there are many interesting social and cultural issues in this film genre that need to be discussed and studied. AIHOFG selects three of the most important figures – Ling Po, Li Han Hsiang and Le Di – for the three topics of the documentary’s sections. The reason these individuals were chosen is not only that they were the most popular and impressive figures for most of the fans, but also that each of them exemplifies different subjects and issues. For example, the section on Le Di introduces the subject of sad stories or melodramas as the tradition for the Huangmei Opera films and the representation of the actor as celebrity. The section on Li Han Hsiang examines his film aesthetics, the production system and the representation of a utopian Chinese world of the imagination. The section on Ling Po discusses the popularity of the Huangmei Opera film genre, the role of the male impersonator and the issue of gender identification. All three topics not only explore the remarkable film careers of individuals, but also discuss the related social and cultural issues. They are entertaining as well as academic in focus.

1.3 Less Narration

From a perspective that a documentary should present its interpretation of the subject to the audience for consideration, like evidence for a jury, and endeavour to make the audience more involved in what it presents, just as an attorney does in the courtroom, AIHOFG adopts the method of dispensing with narration and lets the witnesses and interviewees talk. Many documentaries use narration to direct the audience in the reception of information and argument. However, sometimes this becomes a mediating presence between the audience and interview subject. An invisible narrator distances the audience from the documentary. Their relationship with a documentary of this kind is essentially passive. Also, the narrator’s voice is considered by the audience to be the voice of
the director or filmmaker. Sometimes the audience is suspicious of the information, since they think it is merely opinion or information coloured by the filmmaker. Most of the audience would more appreciate or trust interview subjects, either witnesses or experts, who are speaking as a kind of testimony in front of the camera, because the audience can not only see their figures and facial expressions but also hear their voice. Thus, by this method, the audience would become more involved with the documentary and engage with the content that it presents.

1.4 Subjectively and Creatively Constructed

Since its emergence, it has been argued that the documentary should be objective. It is important to determine what “objectivity” is. When a filmmaker decides to put the camera in position, he/she is facing the “objectivity” problem, since the camera could be placed somewhere else. How does one “objectively” decide what footage will be used in the cutting room? And what length of footage should be used to present “objective” truth? A documentary filmmaker makes countless choices during the documentary’s making, such as selecting found archival material, choosing which experts to interview, and deciding how to reshape those materials into a logical and dramatic sequence. And whether a filmmaker adopts the stance of observer, he/she cannot escape his/her subjectivity. Of course, a documentary may still aim for a truthful account, but it will necessarily be subjectively constructed.

Film critic Andrew Britton (1992, vol. 1, p. 29) notes, “Documentaries are engaged, in a sense that they lay no claim to objectivity, but actively present a case through their structure and organisation of point of view.” Indeed, a documentary is identified as a kind of representation of reality, and the filmmaker represents the truth or reality by his/her interpretation. For example, during the making of AIHOFG, because of a strong faith that the Huangmei Opera film genre is a unique film genre that appeared in a particular era with relationship to political and social background in Chinese communities, important considerations were an appropriate logical order for the footage and the shaping of the interviews
to consolidate this understanding. A documentary is an expression of a documentary filmmaker’s point of view. It presents one’s vision of the subject.

Making a documentary is similar to creating an artwork, since it requires the filmmaker not only to select but also to manipulate images and sound materials. John Grierson, the pioneer of the British documentary movement, describes the documentary form as the creative interpretation of actuality (Barsam 1976, p. 15). He refers to the documentary as an opportunity to perform creative work (Winston 1995, p. 51). From this perspective, a documentary can be identified as a branch of expressive art that integrates with the true events and the distinguishing creativity of individual filmmakers. As mentioned earlier, making a documentary is about how to shape materials into a logical and dramatic sequence. Identifying with the thought that a documentary should be treated as an organised story and the documentary filmmaker should be the storyteller, AIHOFG endeavours to tell a good story with fascinating characters, legend, interesting issues and an integrated point of view. Only through this can AIHOFG be creative and unique.

2. The Process of Making the Documentary

2.1 Overall

Understanding the concept that making a documentary is not about “point-and-shoot” and that the bottom line in producing a really good project is good planning, AIHOFG, like other film productions, involved three stages – pre-production, production and postproduction (Figure 5.1).

2.2 Pre-Production

Proposal and Treatment

In pre-production the basic ideas and approaches of the production were developed and set into motion. It is in this stage that the production can be set on a course. Pre-production for AIHOFG actually started the day
FIGURE 5.1
The Process of Making
the Documentary

Pre-Production
- Proposal & Treatment
- Subject Research
- Finding People
- Scripting
- A List of Questions

Production
- Selecting Equipment
- Camera Set-up
- Lighting Set-up
- Microphone Set-up

Postproduction
- Reviewing Materials
- Constructing the Story
- Selecting Editing Software
- Editing Practice
when the proposal was written. The proposal is a set of general ideas about the Huangmei Opera film genre and the outline of the documentary (Figure 5.2). Writing a proposal not only helps the filmmaker to do the organisational and thematic analysis of the documentary, but also prepares the director to direct the film to say something specific during the shooting. It also allows the filmmaker to place a persuasive statement of intention before some institutions and interviewees for soliciting support from them.

**An Investigation of the Huangmei Opera Film Genre**

**Object**

Huangmei Opera was originally a body of tea-collecting songs that developed in the Chinese region of Huangmei, around 200 years ago. In the 1960s a number of these songs were incorporated into a movie called ‘The Love Eterne’, that was extremely popular in both Hong Kong and Taiwan. Countless people went to see the movie, and the foreign press called Taipei a ‘crazy city’ because of the fervour around the film. About 50 films, based on the combination of historic love story and Huangmei folk tunes established in ‘The Love Eterne’, were subsequently made after its success, creating a genre that lasted into the 1970s. These films, however, still enjoy strong cult popularity, especially among women.

The aim of this project is to harness the capacities of new digital video technology and advanced design to create a documentary for the exploration of the Huangmei Opera film genre, developed from the particular perspective of the fan. Over the course of three, interrelated sections, I aim to explore the relationship between the distinctive filmic characteristics of the genre and their enduring popularity for their fans. A challenge will be the need to respect and reflect the distinctive filmic style of the Huangmei Opera genre, with its emphasis on lyrical tunes, simple words and Chinese literary traditions. Furthermore, these films depended on artificial studio effects to create the fantasy Chinese landscapes and characteristic visual qualities that made them so popular with their audiences. I aim to design something that embraces the viewers in this fantasy, recreating the nostalgic atmosphere around these movies.

The documentary will thus use the technological capacities of digital video technology to recreate the bygone graphic style of the genre’s promotional posters, and also the Chinese landscape painting on which they drew. It will also incorporate film clips, photos and sound bites to recreate the experience of these films. Furthermore, the images will be transformed differently in chroma, shapes, lineation and composition. The sound will be manipulated with tune, pace and rhyme in a creative way.
in the form of their participation. Meanwhile, the information worked up in the proposal can structure the presentation into a treatment form that describes what would be seen and heard from the screen (Figure 5.3).

**Figure 5.3**

The Treatment

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**Project Three: Brother Lian - Ling Po**

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**Content**

This topic will explore the social and cultural aspect around this film genre and the phenomena.

1. Ling Po was the famous actress in the ‘Huangmei Opera’ films of the 1960s. Most of her roles needed her to be dressed like a man, and she was the representation of this kind of movie.

2. Probably her most famous movie is *The Love Eterne* in which she starred the role Brother Lian who attracted most of the fans, especially among woman.

3. Because she was dressed as a man and played a male role, the authority didn’t think it proper for her to receive a Best Actor Award, they set a Best Acting Award for her.

4. Until now, Taiwan media still call her ‘Brother Lian’. Further discussion of the social and cultural issues will be in this session.

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**Form**

This project will focus on the phenomenon of female fans’ fervour around Ling Po.

1. Visual design:
   (1) Using her photos, posters, film clips, shooting footages and moving types interrelate to each other. Furthermore, the images will be transformed differently in chroma, shapes, lineation and composition.
   (2) An animation will add to this level make it more interesting.
   (3) This session will use red colour to express the passion of the joy.

2. Sound design
   (1) Using some joyful ‘Huangmei Opera’ music
   (2) Voice over from the interview of Ling Po will go underneath at the sound part.
   (3) The sound will be manipulated with tune, pace and rhyme in a creative way.
Subject Research

When the proposal and treatment had been agreed and approved, the pre-production of AIHOFG started to proceed with more detailed research into the subject matter. At the detailed research stage, the aim is to learn about the topic and material and to pull together ideas about them. There is also the mission of finding out who knows about the topic and has ideas or information relevant to the subject. In this phase the real investigation is ready to begin, and all the information and material that the film is to present is systematically gathered together and checked for accuracy. Identifying with the thought that broader research can make a good documentary, AIHOFG researched as much as possible. Books, magazines and the internet were helpful in researching the subject. Film archives and tape libraries were accessed often. Private collections of films, papers, still photographs and sound recordings were also useful.

Finding People

Finding relevant experts and subjects to interview was another tough job in research for AIHOFG. It started by researching contact information from books, websites and personal contact. Then a contact list of those interviewees who are related to the subject would be established (Figure 5.4).

After creating a contact list, the next step for finding people was to carry out the phone calls, faxes and emails to the interviewees. It took time and went through many connections to obtain the interviews for the making of AIHOFG. A good example was finding the most important key person, Ling Po, who was the most famous Huangmei Opera film actress and who has been living in Canada since the early 1980s. The first contact was through her agent but this didn’t receive any response. Then a connection was made with Li Kuwn, who co-starred with Ling Po in many movies. Through Mr Li, a letter introducing the project as well as a copy of the first documentary project were given to Ling Po. As a result, she finally agreed to be interviewed for the documentary. This occurred almost a year after the first attempt to contact her had started. Many people declined to be interviewed as they were either nervous or unwilling to appear in front of camera for various other reasons. In this
case, a back-up plan was to interview others who were lesser known but had comparable knowledge of the subject. This approach actually worked far better than originally thought, although it did require the production to be much more flexible.

### An Investigation of the Huangmei Opera Film Genre

#### A Contact List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ling Po: Actress</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ling Po was the most famous actress of Huangmei Opera films in the 1960s. She has been living in Canada since the 1980s. Every year, she visits Asia for her show business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Li Kuwn: Actor</td>
<td></td>
<td>Li Kuwn was a famous actor in Hong Kong and Taiwan in the 1960s. His most impressive performance was as a servant in the Huangmei Opera movie <em>The Love Eterne</em>. Li is living in Taiwan and still performs in movies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chiao Hsiung Pieng: Film Critic</td>
<td></td>
<td>Chiao Hsiung Pieng is also known as Peggy Chiao. She is an internationally renowned Chinese film critic, and wrote several books about Li Han Hsiang. In recent years, Chiao has also been the producer of many Chinese movies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Scripting
In feature films, the most important part of the pre-production process is scripting. By contrast, in many cases the documentary is unpredictable and cannot be scripted in detail in advance. Yet scripting the beginning and ending sequences had been done in the pre-production stage of AIHOFG. The purpose of this was to ensure that the thinking in visuals and effects terms began to take shape from the start. Basically, the script describes the visuals, sequence by sequence, and provides information of transitions and effects for the scenes (Figure 5.5).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audio</th>
<th>Video</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Voice over:  
(Reading Le Di’s notes by a female voice)  
Talking about her early childhood relationship with her grandmother. | Clips from the movie *The Love Eterne* |
| Voice over:  
(Reading Le Di’s notes by a female voice)  
Talking about how she started her career as an actress. | Le Di’s childhood photos |
| Interviewee (Fans of Le Di):  
Talking about the story of the movie and why Le Di attracted fans. | The photos of the young Le Di with her mother and grandmother. |
| Interviewee (A Film Scholar):  
Talking about why Chinese people love sad stories | Some movie clips and photos of Le Di |

*FIGURE 5.5*

The Script
A List of Questions

In many ways preparing a list of questions is a documentary filmmaker’s most valuable aid in shooting on location. It is a detailed list of the questions that are to be asked during the interview (Figure 5.6). Those questions are formed in doing the research for both subject and interviewee. A list of questions would keep in mind what was necessary and what important elements shouldn’t be missed during the interview. This is very useful for controlling the schedule, especially when the production has a tight schedule. On many occasions during the making

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions for Lau Sheng Cheng:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Why most of Huangmei Opera films were made in Hong Kong?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Could you describe Hong Kong film industry and studio system at that time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Why Huangmei Opera films were so popular in both Taiwan and Hong Kong?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Some people said that movies could reflect a society. What kind of a society did Huangmei Opera films reflect at that time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Why most of fans were female?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Ling Po is an actress. Most of her roles were male, why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Why female fans were so crazed about Ling Po?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Why Huangmei Opera films were no more popular in the 1970s?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Could Huangmei Opera films be popular again?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions for Lin Ming Hang:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What did Huangmei Opera come from?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What is the beauty of Huangmei Opera music? Could you demonstrate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What are the differences between Huangmei Opera music and other Chinese music? Could you demonstrate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Why Huangmei Opera music was so popular in both Taiwan and Hong Kong?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What is the beauty of Huangmei Opera films?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of AIHOFG, the interviewees didn’t give much time for the interview. In this case, the decision of skipping the less important questions and going directly to the core of the interview had to be made in order to squeeze in relevant material in the time given.

2.3 Production

Digital Video Technology

Before going on the road to shoot, an important decision needs to be made as to what camera equipment should be used. Especially when there was limited financial support and only a small production team worked for AIHOFG, the best choice was gear that is inexpensive and easily accessed. The solution was the new Digital Video (DV) technology. Ever since the mini DV and DVCam formats came out, it has been a tremendous stimulus to filmmaking both in the professional and non-professional fields.¹ And, because of its sophisticated technology and inexpensive price, it made AIHOFG possible.

Because DV is lighter, cheaper and more portable than traditional video cameras (Figure 5.7), it allows an increasingly wide range of

¹ The difference between mini DV and DVCam is that DVCam offers more professional controls and features. Additionally, the width of the data track recorded on DVCam is nearly 50 percent wider than mini DV and consumes nearly twice as much tape. According to Sony, this design makes the format deliver better image quality but recording time will be cut in half (CCD and Effective Pixel Count 2004).
people to make films, documentaries, music videos and family memories. Meanwhile, due to its lightweight and compact size, DV is less intrusive during the shooting. Unlike earlier bulky traditional video cameras that would intimidate many interviewees, DV’s smaller size makes it easier to capture the nature of the scenes, which is important for documentary filmmaking.

In addition, DV doesn’t need as much light to shoot as traditional cameras; it is easy to set up and work with. Sometimes when the shooting requires a quick set-up and there is no time for elaborate lighting, DV can still reproduce good image quality under the low light conditions (Figure 5.8). With its ease of use, the filmmaker can keep the crew as small as possible. DV also records sound with CD quality, as is commonly used in professional recording. Furthermore, both image and sound information are stored digitally and can be copied and edited without any loss of quality. With its ability of delivering such good image as well as sound quality, many professional filmmakers have begun using DV.

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2 DV uses a computer chip, CCD (Charge Coupled Device), to scan images and convert them into electronic signals. According to Sony, the effectiveness of a CCD is determined by its size and the number of active pixel elements it contains. The higher the number of pixels a CCD contains, the higher the picture quality the camera can achieve. Typically, a larger size CCD results in better images because it contains more pixels. Furthermore, the number of CCD being utilised in a camera can also affect the amount of colour detail being reproduced. Normally, three CCD cameras reproduce colours much better and more accurately than single CCD cameras (CCD and Effective Pixel Count 2004).
The inexpensive DV tape was also beneficial for the making of AIHOFG. Traditionally, shooting film stock for documentary making was highly expensive due to its high shooting ratio, and intimidated filmmakers without very significant financial support. Especially with the short-term recording ability of traditional film stock, many filmmakers were bothered by having to change and load film stock on location. However, with DV tape’s cheapness and long-term recording ability, it gives more freedom to shoot interviews for as long as the tape is running in the camera. During the making of AIHOFG, there was a result of approximately 60 hours of interviews yet with a minimum expense. This is far more than would have been possible in the past.

**Shooting Practice**

As mentioned earlier, the documentary is something presented to the audience for consideration, like evidence to a jury, and the director, like an attorney for the defence, should decide on how best to present the evidence and under what conditions. Deriving from this concept, AIHOFG adopts a shooting skill in which the filmmaker sits to one side of the camera during the interview and the interviewee talks to him/her off-screen. This technique is more honest in acknowledging the film’s process and the interviewees are presented like witnesses who are testifying in front of the camera (Figure 5.9). Meanwhile, with this camera set-up, the audience, like a jury, experiences its role in observing and freely judging what the filmmaker is showing to them because they are aware of the way in which the interviewee’s responses are elicited.
2.4 Postproduction

Constructing the Story

The interviews of AIHOFG resulted in 60 hours of footage, but only around two hours of finished documentary were required from the DV tapes. It would be a huge task to edit the documentary. The first thing was to review the material that had been captured and to think about the structure of the documentary. This structure could be somewhat different to the original script from the beginning, in the pre-production phase. This was because sometimes we didn’t receive what we expected to get during the production phase, as interviewees had been changed or material missed, and some material obtained was just not what had been imagined. As a result, it was necessary to reconstruct the documentary during the postproduction.

When viewing the interviews and shooting materials, it was preferable to take notes and transcribe every word of the interviewees. It was a tedious job but this helped the editing work later and ensured no creative opportunities were missed. After transcribing the interviews and viewing the materials, the next step was to select sections and structure them into sequences. This provided a sketch of the structure for the documentary’s final form (Figure 5.10). Usually, constructing a documentary is either by a chronology of events or by order of cause and effect. As mentioned before, a documentary is treated as an organised story and the documentary filmmaker is the storyteller. And the postproduction is the phase in which to really shape the documentary into

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**FIGURE 5.10**
A Structure Flowchart

### The Structure of “Scenic Writing Director: Li Han Hsiang”

1. **Li Han Hsiang’s background**
   - (1) Li Kuan and Sung Chuen Sau talk about how they met with Li Han Hsiang
   - (2) How Li Han Hsiang emigrated towards Hong Kong and began his director career in Shaw Brothers

2. **The history of Shaw Brothers**
   - (1) How Run Run Shaw established Shaw Brothers
   - (2) How Li Han Hsiang carried out Huangmei Opera films and made the most popular movie *The Love Eterne*

3. **The unique film style of Li Han Hsiang**
   - (1) Li Han Hsiang used artificial studio effects to recreate a fantasy ancient Chinese world with lyrical and poetic feeling.
   - (2) Li Han Hsiang developed his cinematic aesthetics to guide audience to reveal this fantasy world.
   - (3) Li Han Hsiang studied Chinese landscape painting, garden design and ancient costume carefully and adapted them into his films.
   - (4) Li Han Hsiang coordinated Chinese historic story, literary, poetry and music to create a cinematic world that was filled with Chinese humanism and aesthetics.
a good story. In this phase, what was really filmed needs to be thought through and organised so that the documentary can be more logical and thematic for viewers.

The Advantage of the Digital Nonlinear Editing System
Since the digital nonlinear editing systems were introduced in 1988 (Ohanian 1998, p. 45), this new technology has developed enormously, especially over the past few years. In particular, the convergence of emerging DV technology and maturing PC technology created the digital nonlinear editing system with better hardware and cheaper software, and brought professional quality video editing onto our desktop.

Traditional analogue video editing is the copy editing process where shots are selected and copied from the source tape to the edited tape. Typically the principle of editing on tape is called “linear editing” because it has to start with shot one of a sequence and then add shot two, then shot three and so on until the program is complete. Problems arise in this linear system when changes are made. To change the order of a sequence or add a new shot to the original edited tape, all sequence shots need to be re-edited to complete the program. Unfortunately, this process imposes a major time penalty and results in a loss of image quality.

However, the digital nonlinear editing system is the new recording medium such that the source materials are converted to a digital format and recorded onto a hard disk drive. Then the entire editing work is processed in the computer. The process of nonlinear editing is more like the typing process in the computerised word processor. Sound and images can be manipulated in the computer just as text can be easily copied, pasted and moved in a word processor. And, most importantly, since all materials are digitalised there is no compromise or loss of the sound and image quality during the editing process. Because of its tremendous flexibility and speed, the digital nonlinear editing system is expanding the creativity and communication possibilities for many filmmakers.

The digital nonlinear editing system is also cheaper and occupies less room than traditional video linear editing equipment. For a traditional linear video editing system to be capable of performing simple effects
and titles, it requires at least two playback videotape machines and one
recorder. A special video effects mixer, a sound mixer, a title computer
and an editing control unit are also required. Not to mention the need
for plenty of TV monitors for viewing the playback and recorded image
and sound. All of these cost a lot and require considerable space to set up
(Figure 5.11). However, thanks to the DV technology and sophisticated
computer technology, a laptop digital nonlinear editing system can now
produce professional video output with complicated video effects and
titles at relatively low cost. For example, AIHOFG was edited entirely in
an inexpensive laptop computer on a tiny desk (Figure 5.12).
3. Editing and Design Practice

Because AIHOFG intends to explore a particular kind of Chinese film, an opening montage sequence showing a film reel being loaded onto a projector is designed to bring the audience into a film atmosphere similar to the experience of viewing a movie (Figure 5.13.1–6). When the opening montage sequence ends with a shot which focuses on the beam from the film projector (Figure 5.13.6), it implies a looking back on the Huangmei Opera film genre itself, as well as suggesting that it is “a movie about movies”.

FIGURE 5.13
An Opening Montage Sequence
The opening sequence is succeeded by melody footage from a Huangmei Opera film with the Chinese title which copies the typographic style of the Huangmei Opera films in the 1960s and gives the audience a nostalgic feeling (Figure 5.14). Each Huangmei melody footage is related to the topic and mood of each section. For example, the melody of the section “Brother Lian: Ling Po” is more pleasant and suggests that it is about the joy of the Huangmei Opera film genre and the fans’ enthusiasm for Ling Po. The opening melody in “Classic Beauty: Le Di” is more sorrowful and relates the sad theme of this section. The lyrical tone for the opening in “Scenic Writing Director: Li Han Hsiang” gives the audience a hint that it is about the aesthetics of the Huangmei Opera film genre.

The opening sequence splits into two screens between film sprockets, suggesting a traditional filmstrip (Figure 5.15). On one screen is the original clip with the melody underneath, while on the other, several interviewees highlight the content of the section. This design is not only consistent with the relationship with film and the nostalgic feeling given, but also stresses the issues that will be explored later in the documentary.
A rolling short introduction gives information to those who are not familiar with the subject and the Huangmei Opera film genre (Figure 5.16). The opening sequence ends with a freeze frame of the subject and a title that gives a footnote to the subject (Figure 5.17). The black and white colours lend the documentary a nostalgic identity.
A graphic card at the beginning of every section is inserted to provide clues for the audience (Figure 5.18). This graphic card, copying the style of “insert title” from early silent films, would not only create a rhythm for the documentary but also lend a nostalgic identity with a Chinese classic frame and white title on a black background.

For AIHOFG, most of the time a “dissolve” effect is used to make the transition from scene to scene. “Dissolve” is a less noticeable visual effect that creates changes of scene without interrupting the attention of the audience. This effect suits the mood of AIHOFG perfectly since the Huangmei Opera film genre is lyrical and literary. In many sequences, there are lots of interviews being used either to testify to the events or discuss the issues of Huangmei Opera films. Usually, film clips, shooting footage and still photos are inserted to illustrate aspects of the interviews. When the viewers hear an interviewee talking in front of camera, instead of only seeing the interviewee’s “talking head”, they appreciate seeing some images related to what the interviewee is saying. This technique brings together the voice from the interviewee with the image from another source, making it more persuasive.
Most of the movie clips in AIHOFG are song sequences quoted from Huangmei Opera films. These song clips not only relate to the interviews but also create a rhythm and tempo for the documentary with their beautiful and harmonic music. Meanwhile, an “overlap” editing method between interviews and song clips is employed for the documentary (Figure 5.19.1 and 2). For example, when Ling Po is talking about how she started her career as a singer, without waiting for the end of her voice, a vocal piece will go underneath. As soon as her voice is done, the singing is brought up and transits her image to the song clip. This editing device keeps the sound track alive and makes the transition between sequences more natural and rhythmic.

A rolling credit and a song clip are assembled for the ending sequence (Figure 5.20). Again, the song clip is related to the topic of each section. For example, the ending sequence for “Brother Lian: Ling Po” is that she plays a young scholar surrounded by women. It not only corresponds with the gender theme of the topic but also remains consistent with the pleasant mood of this section.
4. Conclusion

The project of AIHOFG began in 2001, and it took three years to complete the documentary making process, which involved researching, interviewing, location shooting and editing. Each section of the documentary depicts one key figure and relates to different social, cultural and aesthetic issues. Most of the time, the documentary adopts a Griersonian approach for the production strategy, dispensing with narration, subjectively and creatively constructing the film. At the same time, the shooting, editing and design practice endeavour to make the audience more involved in the content as well as have them identify as witnesses to the story.

Innovations in DV technology lowered the cost of the production and made AIHOFG possible. The capable and affordable nonlinear editing applications expanded the flexibility and creativity in postproduction. This new technology will continue to improve and become better and even cheaper. The line between professional and consumer is getting blurred, and the financial threshold for sophisticated documentary production is lowered. The sophistication and low cost of new digital technologies benefited AIHOFG, and will continue to aid those people who have the ideas and inclination to create a documentary but are without supporting finances.