



## Duckweed (aka Floating Weeds) Fú píng

Director: Edward Yang

Production Company:

Taiwan Television Enterprise (TTV)

Producers: Sylvia Chang, Chen Chun-tian

Written by: Edward Yang

Based on a short story by: Di Yi

Cast:

Su-Yun Ko (*Yue-hua*)

Ming-Hsiang Tso (*Cheng Hsiung*)

Dai Ling Li (*Li-ling*)

An-Ni Shih (*little sister*)

Taiwan 1981

148 mins

Video

English subtitles prepared by the Asian Film Archive

The screening on Mon 31 Mar will be introduced by season curator Hyun Jin Cho

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## Myriad Voices: Reframing Taiwan New Cinema

# Duckweed (aka Floating Weeds)

Part of the *Eleven Women* TV series, *Duckweed* marked Edward Yang's directorial debut following his return to Taiwan. Co-producers Sylvia Chang and Chen Chun-tian envisioned a platform for emerging talent, focusing on women's stories and Taiwanese identity. This two-part episode follows Yue-hua, a young woman from the countryside, as she moves to Taipei to pursue a modelling career. Here Yang's deft storytelling captures the clash between rural and urban life, hope and disillusionment.

## Edward Yang

Taiwanese New Wave pioneer Edward Yang has been overshadowed by his contemporary Hou Hsiao-hsien. But it was Yang who lit the New Wave bonfire to begin with, first as a rookie contributing the short *Desires* to the omnibus project *In Our Time* (1982), a film that became for Taiwanese culture the equivalent of *Bicycle Thieves*, *Days of Being Wild* and *Where Is the Friend's House?* all rolled into one. Four simple tales of urban childhood and maturation, emerging into a serendipitous confluence of economic downturn and the easing of political strictures by the Kuomintang, the movie electrified both a moribund formula industry on the verge of being overwhelmed by Hong Kong crowd-pleasers and its audience, who had long given up hoping to see their lives represented on screen.

After that Yang made just seven features in 17 years, only two of which were released in the UK: *A Brighter Summer Day* (1991) and *A One and a Two* (Yi Yi, 2000). He came late to filmmaking after first receiving degrees in electrical engineering and computer design and pursuing a related career at the University of Washington in Seattle. Forever flirting with graduate film study, he joined a course at the University of Southern California but dropped out after only one term in frustration at the narrow focus on Hollywood cinema. He also frequented UW's film programmes, becoming a Herzog and Antonioni devotee. Back in Taiwan in 1981, he landed a few jobs (including writing a script for the Hong Kong TV movie *The Winter of 1905*) and directed his quarter of *In Our Time*, thus solidifying with Hou, Chen Kun-hou, screenwriter Wu Nien-jen (also the star of *A One and a Two*), then-playwright Tsai Ming-liang and others Taiwanese cinema's distinctive voice.

Yang was the urban maximalist to Hou's country minimalist: his characteristic canvas is broad, multi-charactered, multi-generational and ruled by contrasting perspectives. His debut feature *That Day on the Beach* (1983), the first film shot by Christopher Doyle, makes intricate use of flashbacks to examine the frustrated ambitions of a middle-class woman trapped in an unhappy marriage. *Taipei Story* (1984) traces the disintegrating relationship between a successful career woman and her restless partner, who dreams of going to California. *The Terrorisers* (1986) tracks the destabilised lives of three couples, while the four-hour *A Brighter Summer Day* paints a heartbreaking portrait of social unease during the gang-plagued nascent nationalism of 1959. *A Confucian Confusion* (1994) and *Mahjong* (1996) mirror each other, dissecting new Taipei culture by way of opposing social tapestries: yuppies and petty scam artists. *A One and a Two* hones in on one family's middle years – when children seem nothing but trouble, ageing parents begin to die and lost opportunities haunt – but Yang's empathetic volleying between points of view gives the film dizzying epic juice. Always concerned with the Taiwanese social now, Yang's best work still throbs with the regrets and memories of history, displaying an understated eye and ear for the tearful poetry of a modern life which moves too fast for its wounds to heal.

This kind of ambitious, novelistic filmmaking couldn't have been easy, and perhaps Yang's aesthetic was changing: during the years of battling cancer he had been preparing an animated film with Jackie Chan titled *The Wind*. Just imagine.

Michael Atkinson, *Sight and Sound*, September 2007

Programme notes and credits compiled by Sight and Sound and the BFI Documentation Unit

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