Asia in Transition 17

Jason Paolo Telles
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Environment, Media, and Popular Culture in Southeast Asia

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Chapter 1
Introduction: Environment, Media, and Popular Culture in Southeast Asia

John Charles Ryan and Jason Paolo Telles

Abstract This introductory chapter provides an overview of the fields of ecomedia, eco-communication, and enviropop studies in Southeast Asia with an emphasis on environmental cinema and journalism. Although scholarship in these areas has gained considerable recent momentum in Anglophone contexts, especially in relation to climate change and the Anthropocene, less attention has been placed on the interconnections between media, popular culture, and the environment in Southeast Asian countries. The overarching aim of the edited collection then is to redress the lack of attention given to the region within existing Anglophone-dominant approaches. Comprising twenty chapters by contributors based within and outside Southeast Asia, the collection emphasizes the role of media and popular cultural forms in addressing environmental urgencies in the region, including climate change, species loss, water pollution, and the loss of traditional ecological knowledge. The chapter presents an overview of the contents of the collection before considering the limitations of the volume and suggesting avenues for further research.

Keywords Ecomedia · Environmental communications · Enviropop · Film · Journalism · Southeast Asia

1.1 Introduction: Toward a Southeast Asian Ecomedia Studies

Drone video footage posted on Facebook in April 2020 shows a herd of dugongs placidly feeding on seagrass in shallow waters off Libong Island in Southern Thailand where, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the mammals were a less common sight (Department of National Parks, 2020). Also known as sea cows, dugongs

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are an herbivorous marine species acutely sensitive to habitat degradation, water contamination, noise pollution, and unsustainable fishing practices, among other factors. Before the onset of the coronavirus in Thailand, island tourism was seriously impacting seagrass beds—dugongs' primary food source—and causing more frequent, often deadly, boat strikes (Petcharat & Lee, 2020). Around the same time, in Singapore, videos of a lively otter family gallivanting outside the shopping malls, condos, and hospitals of the city in lockdown began circulating on WhatsApp. Dugongs in Thailand and otters in Singapore are two cases of the unusual, surprising, and, even, uncanny wildlife encounters captured on video and captivating the public environmental imagination during the Covid-19 outbreak.

Across the globe, the dramatic decline in human mobility in 2020 resulted in a sharp drop in water, air, and noise pollution along with reduced poaching and trafficking. To characterize the global slowdown of societies, particularly in relation to decreased petroleum-based travel, ecologists proposed the term *anthropause* (Rutz et al., 2020). After centuries of rampant industrialism and globalization, the coronavirus has forced unprecedented biospheric repose. The ecologists who formulated the idea are part of the Covid-19 Bio-Logging Initiative—a research consortium employing innovative sensing technologies to gauge shifts in wildlife behavior in response to diminished human activities during the pandemic. Through the examination of bio-logged data—including animals' GPS locations, travel speeds, and physiological conditions—the initiative aims to expand knowledge of human-wildlife interactions in the anthropause context (International Bio-Logging Society, 2020).

For many social media users, the reemergence of wild animals in Southeast Asia during the slowdown offers a tangible sign of ecological revitalization in the region. Closer analysis, however, discloses a radically different narrative. While Covid-19 has resulted in lower air, water, and noise pollution—along with reduced land surface temperatures—the pandemic has, at the same time, triggered a proliferation of plastic and medical waste in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines (Praveena & Aris, 2021). Well before Covid-19, these nations were already plagued by internal plastic garbage crises and targeted by Australia and other Western countries as outlets for contaminated waste shipped as innocuous "recycling" (Lamb & Morton, 2019). What's more, the migration of animals to urban and tourist centers obscures the actual urgency of species extinction. Consider, for instance, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species, calling attention to 31 recent extinctions. The Red List warns that 35,765 species face extermination, including forty percent of all amphibians, twenty-six percent of all mammals, and all freshwater dolphins, such as the Irrawaddy dolphin of the Mekong River (IUCN, 2020). Those recently declared extinct consist of seventeen freshwater fish species endemic to Lake Lanao in the Philippines and nine Asian oaks.

To turn the tide of ecological degradation and species loss in the region, the influential geopolitical community, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), has recently forged a partnership reflecting the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2021, aiming to realize "an ASEAN Community that engages and benefits the peoples and is inclusive, sustainable, resilient, and dynamic" (ASEAN Cooperation on Environment, n.d., para. 1). The Blueprint measures sustainability

through four key categories, namely, "Conservation and Sustainable Management of Biodiversity and Natural Resources; Environmentally Sustainable Cities; Sustainable Climate; and Sustainable Consumption and Production" (ASEAN Cooperation on Environment, n.d., para. 2). ASEAN member states have agreed to devise concrete actions involving the "seven strategic priorities" of "nature conservation and biodiversity; coastal and marine environments; water resources management; environmentally sustainable cities; climate change; chemicals and waste; and environmental education and sustainable consumption and production" (ASEAN Cooperation on Environment, n.d., para. 3). The agreement, of course, is an outcome of the member states' recognition of the need to protect and preserve the region's wealth of natural resources—which have been subject to intensive degradation and depletion from various natural and anthropogenic pressures.

It is widely known that, when it comes to decision- and policy-making for, and about, the environment, the go-to fields are the natural and political sciences. However, as John Charles Ryan (2015) states, scientific and political paradigms are not the only means of environmental management and protection in the region. In his discussion of ecocriticism in Thailand, Ryan argues that "humanities-based approaches can also raise awareness of ecological problems and catalyze change" (2015, p. 27). In the Southeast Asian context, eco-literature offers a wealth of local, Indigenous, and place-specific perspectives on human-nature relationships, environmental concerns and solutions, flora and fauna, landscapes, waterscapes, cosmovisions, and more-than-human ontologies. Literary works have been analyzed for their ecological resonances and implications in key publications such as Ryan's *Southeast Asian ecocriticism: Theories, practices, prospects* (2017) and Chi P. Pham, Chitra Sankaran, and Gurpreet Kaur's *Ecologies in Southeast Asian literatures: Histories, myths, and societies* (2018).

Alongside the emergence of Southeast Asian ecocriticism in recent years, there has also been a growing yet diffuse interest in ecocritical analyses of media and popular culture in/of the region. The burgeoning research in this area, however, remains scattered across various journals, edited books, and conference presentations. As a case in point, the 2019 conference of the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment-ASEAN, or ASLE-ASEAN, featured presentations about full-length and short films (Ong, 2019; Sánches, 2019; Valencia, 2019), social media products (Aguirre, 2019), graphic novels and comic strips (Cuartero, 2019; Manansala, 2019; Quina, 2019), environmental documentaries (Telles, 2019a), folk and contemporary music (Magpile, 2019; Pilapil-Cutad & Carriedo, 2019; Sy, 2019), photography (Cardoso, 2019), and general trends in Southeast Asian popular culture (Huq, 2019).

1.2 Ecomedia, Environmental Communications, and Popular Culture: International Contexts

Through its regional emphasis, *Environment, media, and popular culture in Southeast Asia* advances knowledge of the interdisciplinary fields of *ecomedia studies* (environmental media studies) and *eco-communication studies* (environmental communication studies). In general, the term *ecomedia* denotes "environmentally engaged film, television, music, visual arts, installation and conceptual art, as well as work in new-media venues like web pages, video games, and mobile operating systems" (Ziser, 2016, p. 75). As a scholarly field, ecomedia studies shed light on the interconnections between non-print forms of media, landscapes, more-than-human beings, and environmental concerns, namely, climate change, biodiversity loss, and the ecological origins of the global pandemic. On the whole, ecomedia scholarship is concerned with the analysis of environmental representation in non-print media—from radio, television, and cinema to the Internet, social media, and gaming. Although closely related to ecomedia, *environmental communication* encompasses communication activities that engage ecological contexts and concerns. Scholars in eco-communications operate from the premise that communication and media influence perceptions of nature and social attitudes toward ecological problems. Scholarship in eco-communication, moreover, acknowledges that the environment "we experience and affect is largely a product of how we have come to talk about the world" (Cantrill & Oravec, 1996a, p. 2). Broadly speaking, studies of environmental communication typically emphasize the practical—or applied—dimensions of discourse, rhetoric, journalism, media products, pop culture, and online activism. Eco-communication research comprises subjects such as environmental reporting, conflict resolution, activist movements, conservation rhetoric, greenwashing, and pop-cultural representations of ecological issues (Cox, 2013, p. 12; Killingsworth & Palmer, 1992).

The principal focus on film in *Environment, media, and popular culture in Southeast Asia* reflects the growing significance of *ecocinema* within ecomedia studies (Chu, 2016; Ingram, 2000; Kääpä & Gustafsson, 2013; Past, 2019; Rust & Monani, 2013; Willoquet-Maricondi, 2010b). Originating in the mid-1990s, the academic field of ecocinema studies focuses on the connections between cinema, the environment, more-than-human life, and ecological problems. The field develops critical approaches to a broad range of environmentally themed films as well as films lacking overt ecological content. Genres of interest include nature documentaries and wildlife television series in addition to disaster movies and Hollywood blockbusters—from Jacques Cousteau's *The silent world* (Cousteau & Malle, 1956) to Roland Emmerich's *The day after tomorrow* (2004) and James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009). Ecocinema researchers pose the following kinds of critical questions: In what ways do films—from low-budget documentaries to big-budget features—construct nature as an agent within the narrative? How does cinema influence social and cultural attitudes toward nature? How do these attitudes vary between national contexts? Does

cinema reinforce or disrupt the perception of nature as an object of aesthetic consumption? Can film promote constructive, generative, and, even, radically transformative environmental values? How can the movie industry transition toward sustainable production practices with lower ecological impact? (Chu, 2016, p. 14).

In his foundational publication, David Ingram (2000) defines ecocinema as films with prominent environmental messages. Ecocinema is environmentally conscious film. For Ingram, environmentalist films are those in which ecological issues dominate the narrative. Ingram asserts that mainstream Hollywood cinema has propagated overly romanticized attitudes toward nature, contributing in turn to the greenwashing of environmental urgencies. Through examples from American cinema, Ingram traces cultural attitudes toward wilderness, animals, petroculture, pollution, and land exploitation. Extending Ingram's groundbreaking study, Scott MacDonald (2004) develops a characterization of ecocinema as a filmmaking tradition evoking the experience of human immersion in the natural world. The fundamental role of ecocinema, for MacDonald, is to retrain "perception, as a way of offering an alternative to conventional media-spectatorship [and] consumerism" (MacDonald, 2004, p. 109). From MacDonald's point of view, ecocinema's value lies in its potential to reconfigure perception, engendering viewers' sustained, in-depth attention to natural elements and processes. Sheldon Lu (2009), likewise, defines ecocinema as "cinema with an ecological consciousness. It articulates the relationship of human beings to the physical environment, earth, nature, and animals from a biocentric, non-anthropocentric point of view" (p. 2). Scholars of ecocinema such as Lu, MacDonald, and Ingram attempt to understand how visual representations position nature through the camera frame, the editing process, and the reception of films (Willoquet-Maricondi, 2010a, p. 8). According to the scholarship of the last two decades, ecocinema and its analysis can shift viewerly emphasis away from anthropocentrism and toward Earth-centrism, biocentrism, ecocentrism, zoocentrism (focused on animals' life-worlds and the ethics surrounding their representation), and, even, more recently, phyto-centrism (concerned with the agencies of plants and their lives) (Rust & Monani, 2013).

In addition to studies of ecocinema, *Environment, media, and popular culture in Southeast Asia* examines the intersections between journalism and the environment (in particular, see Section III, "Discourses, narratives, and aesthetics"). Indeed, journalism remains vital to public awareness of—and engagement with—ecological issues in Southeast Asia and elsewhere. Before the rise of new media in the last thirty years, newspapers, television programs, and radio broadcasts furnished the main outlets for environmental coverage. With the decline of traditional print-based news, however, environmental reporters have begun to embrace freelance, online journalism. With the transition from newspapers and television to the Internet and social media, the digital landscape has become central to environmental reporting (Sachsman & Valenti, 2020). Nonetheless, despite remarkable advances in digital technologies, the question of activism and advocacy remains, just as it did early on. In his classic study *Green ink* (1998), Michael Frome defined environmental journalism as "a way of living, of looking at the world, and at oneself. It starts with a concept of social service, gives voice to struggle and demand, and comes across with honesty,

credibility, and purpose. It almost always involves somehow, somewhere, risk and sacrifice" (p. 21). Giving voice to non-human and human lives fractured by ecological injustices, journalism can influence environmental agendas by placing stories in the public domain (Sachsman & Valenti, 2020, pp. 27–28). Nonetheless, some environmental journalists argue that an advocacy position risks compromising accuracy, thoroughness, balance, fairness, and transparency—the hallmarks of journalistic ethics, in their view (Wyss, 2019, pp. 223–225).

Other chapters in *Environment, media, and popular culture in Southeast Asia* reflect the dynamic, evolving relationship between ecomedia studies, eco-communication studies, and ecocriticism—fields historically regarded as separate yet sharing theoretical and methodological concerns. Ecocriticism tends to privilege literary and cultural subjects (Clark, 2019). In contrast, the fields of ecomedia studies and eco-communication studies emphasize the environmental dimensions of journalism, technology, activism, advocacy, rhetoric, and discourse. The appearance of seminal publications such as James G. Cantrill and Christine L. Oravec's *The symbolic earth: Discourse and our creation of the environment* (1996b) coincided with the burgeoning of ecocriticism in the mid-1990s. Bringing these companionable fields into dialogue, Slovic et al. (2019) note that, "for many years, ecocriticism and environmental communication studies [and, by extension, ecomedia and enviropop studies] have co-existed as parallel disciplines, occasionally crossing paths but typically operating in separate academic spheres" (p. 3). Despite this separation—driven in part by disciplinary rigidities—the fields share an interest in human discourse alongside a conviction that enhancing communication promotes positive ecological values (Slovic et al., 2019, p. 5). Slovic, Rangarajan, and Sarveswaran underscore the considerable potential for cross-fertilization between these fields—as do Chaps. 3–5 and 11 of the current volume.

Included within our conceptualization of ecomedia studies is the analysis of popular, or mass, culture and the environment. This latter specialization—pop culture and the environment, sometimes termed "enviropop" (Meister & Japp, 2002)—is genealogically connected to ecocultural, or green cultural, studies. In *The country and the city* (1973), ecocultural studies pioneer Raymond Williams critiqued representations of pastoral and urban life in English literature since the sixteenth century. Williams emphasized the need to trace and redefine, through the process of historicization, the dualistic construction of country and city at the center of modern thinking. Williams' work inspired the emergence of ecocultural studies in the 1990s, dedicated, as Adrian Ivakhiv (1997) observes, to "supporting the conditions for pluralism and difference in human–human and human-extrahuman relations" (sect. 2, para. 6) and, more broadly, to conceptualizing nature and culture in relational complement—rather than stark ontological contrast—to one another. As Jhan Hochman wrote in the late 1990s:

> Absent a green component, cultural studies' prevailing concerns are with (popular) texts/practices primarily impacting upon ethnicity/race, gender, sexuality, economic class, and age (particularly youth subcultures). A struggling newcomer to this nexus of concerns is nature (plants, animals, and elements). The task of green cultural studies is the examination

> of proliferating cultural representations of nature—i.e., lexical, pictorial, and actual manipulations of plants, animals, and elements—for their potential to affect audiences affecting nature-out-there or what I often call *worldnature*. (Hochman, 1998, p. 2, emphasis original)

Toward the aims articulated by Hochman, Ivakhiv, and other ecocultural specialists, enviropop research interrogates engagement with nature and its representation in activist movements, youth cultures, virtual reality, gaming environments, music videos, comics, slang and vernacularisms, consumer transactions, advertising campaigns, and other "mass" cultural phenomena and materials (see, for example, Chaps. 3, 5, 6, 10 and 18 of this volume).

1.3 Ecomedia in Southeast Asia: Environmental Film

In contributing to the development of ecomedia and eco-communication studies in the region, *Environment, media, and popular culture in Southeast Asia* offers rich perspectives on how the region's ecologies have been "textualized" through media and popular culture products. A popular media form considered within Southeast Asian ecomedia studies is ecocinema. As also elaborated previously, ecocinema includes "films that overtly engage with environmental concerns either by exploring specific environmental justice issues or, more broadly, by making 'nature,' from landscapes to wildlife, a primary focus" (Willoquet-Maricondi, 2010a, p. 9). Willoquet-Maricondi and others argue that ecocinema seeks to induce reflection in viewers and audiences about their membership in the Earth community and thereby come "to understand the value of [the ecosphere] in a systemic and nonhierarchical way" (Willoquet-Maricondi, 2010a, p. 10). A key feature of Southeast Asian ecocinema is its representation of forests as settings, backgrounds, and subjects in their own right. This prevailing emphasis reflects the fact that the region holds fifteen percent of the world's tropical forest cover. In this context, Chulphongsathron (2021) defines the "cinematic forest" not merely as a "background or cinematic landscape" but also "as a network, a web of relations between humans, nonhumans, and other forces" (p. 184). This attention to ecological networks in Southeast Asian ecocinema, he adds, enables us to perceive and understand history beyond the engrained anthropocentrism of other cinematic forms.

As a case in point, Vietnam's feature film industry and products are significant areas of interest for Southeast Asian ecomedia specialists. Environmental concerns in Vietnam pertain in particular to land and forest degradation, wetland loss, biodiversity decline, water and air pollution, wildlife trafficking, and climate disturbance. Throughout the 1960s, moreover, the US military sprayed millions of gallons of toxins across Vietnam, including the defoliant infamously known as Agent Orange. These despoliations have acutely affected Indigenous Vietnamese who now comprise more than thirteen million individuals or approximately fifteen percent of the country's population. An ongoing issue negotiated by Indigenous Vietnamese

activists is the inequitable land distribution paradigm that impedes subsistence-based livelihoods. These concerns feature prominently in Vietnamese ecocinema. For instance, directed by Ngô Quang Hải, *Story of Pao* is a 2006 drama based on a novel by Nguyen Bích Thủy about the Hmong of northern Vietnam. The film depicts Hmong interdependencies with the mountainous landscape and alludes to the disruption of long-standing human-nature relations. *Story of Pao* is an example of a film promoting awareness of the environment, conservation, climate, politics, and human-nature interactions while encouraging reflection on what it means to inhabit the Earth community sustainably. Additionally, independent Vietnamese art-cinema produced by Phan Dang Di, Siu Pham, Nguyen Hoang Diep, Nguyen Vo Nghiem Minh, and other directors increasingly engages with ecological concerns such as extractivism (Giang, 2015; Lovatt, 2020).

In the Philippines, although not explicitly concerning environmental issues, many films narrativize people's understandings of nature. For instance, Eulalio Guieb III, a contributor to this collection, interrogates how filmmaker Ishmael Bernal's *Nunal sa Tubig* (1976) portrays the social life of a coastal island community in Laguna de Bay. More than identifying modes of portrayal, his analysis "maps out the sites of domination, resistance, and struggle from this structural imagination" (Tolentino, 2000, p. xix). Another example is Patrick Campos' (2016) exploration of the representations of Philippine rural landscapes in American films such as *The American Soldier in Love and War* (1903); in twentieth-century Philippine films such as *Dalagang Bukid* (1919), *Giliw Ko* (1939), and *Biyaya ng Lupa* (1959); and in "new rural films" from the Philippines produced from 2005 to 2008, including *Ang Daan Patungong Kalimugtong* (2005) and *Manoro* (2006), among others. Horror films, too, are important to understanding representations of the natural world and human-nature traditions. For instance, Regina Regala (2019, p. 141) explores, through an ecofeminist lens, the ways in which images of monsters and the monstrous are "denatured" in films such as *Magandang Gabi sa Inyong Lahat* (1976), *Haplos* (1982), and *Vampira* (1994).

Singaporean ecocinema, meanwhile, features several films investigating concepts of urban space through a focus on *heartland*, a term referring to "the public housing estates built by the nation's Housing and Development Board (HDB), and in which 85 per cent of the population currently live" (Poon, 2013, p. 560). Heartland films are those that are "primarily concerned with the domestic stories of a typical Singaporean or Singaporean family living in an Housing and Development Board (HDB) flat" (Jinde, 2019, p. 3). Since the nation-state is predominantly an urban environment with very little remaining forest cover, Singaporean filmmaking exhibits an emphasis on intertwined social, economic, and environmental issues related to urban ecologies and human interactions with nature in city spaces (Jinde, 2019; Law et al., 2011; Poon, 2013; Sa'at, 2012; Yeo, 2004).

In contrast, Indonesian cinema is particularly diverse in its themes, genres, and narratives, shaped by the archipelago's heterogeneous ecologies, cultures, and politics across approximately 17,000 islands. During its early years of independence in the 1950s, Indonesia saw the rise of war films narrating experiences of the fight for independence. The 1960s marked the return of drama, action, and horror films. At

the same time, films produced by the state "played a crucial role in constructing the nation visually and narratively" (Irawanto, 2020, p. 112). At present, environmental films have become a significant component of Indonesian cinema (see, for example, Chap. 8 on the film *Sexy Killers*). In 2019, the Indonesia Eco Film Festival, or IDEFF, featured over a dozen films addressing environmental issues of sustainability, wildlife conservation, and waste management. With the theme "Sustainable Living: How Our Daily Lifestyle Affects the Environment," the festival included *Wasted* by American filmmaker Karim Chrobog; *Pulau Plastik* (*Plastic Island*) by Ewa Wojkowska from the Polish NGO Kopernik and Indonesian musician-activist Gede Robi; and *The human scale* by Danish filmmaker Andreas M. Dalsgaard (The Jakarta Post, 2019, para. 3). Yet, despite environmental film festivals such as these—especially those offered online in response to Covid-19 movement restrictions—little research has been conducted on this topic from ecomedia and eco-communication perspectives.

While ecocinema in Malaysia is particularly active, the field of ecocinema studies has not yet gained significant traction among Malaysian scholars. An event of relevance to Malaysian ecomedia studies is the Kuala Lumpur Eco Film Festival, or KLEFF. Founded in 2008 by the NGO EcoKnights, the festival aims "to accelerate mainstreaming of sustainable living and stewardship of the environment through the power of audio visual materials and activities" (KLEFF, n.d.). Since its inaugural showing, the festival has presented films by both Malaysian and international filmmakers including the short, animated film *The Secret Life of Durian Trees* (2020), illustrating the pollination ecology of the durian. Although a complete review is not possible here, we note that environmental films and their analyses within ecocinema studies have similarly achieved some footing in Thailand (Chutikamoltham, 2015; Ingawanji, 2006) and Timor-Leste (Palmer, 2021).

1.4 Eco-communication in Southeast Asia: Environmental Journalism

Environmental journalism in Southeast Asia and elsewhere is rapidly transitioning from books, newspapers, and magazines to documentary films, interactive online media, and, more recently, virtual reality (VR) platforms. As demonstrated by Chaps. 12 and 13 of this volume, scholars are increasingly concerned with the coverage of environmental issues by Southeast Asian news media outlets. Climate change has become one of the most urgent issues covered by the media in the region as the impacts of this environmental issue have intensified. Throughout Asia and elsewhere, climate change has caused "increasing frequency and intensity of droughts and storms, and rising sea level" (Francisco, 2008, p. 7). Acutely in Southeast Asia, climate change has brought adverse effects to the region in the form of climate-related destabilization along with natural disasters such as tropical cyclones, floods, landslides, droughts, and sea-level rise (Francisco, 2008; Yusuf &

Francisco, 2009). Studies of the coverage of climate change in Southeast Asian-based media have gained visibility in recent years, with most research emphasizing the representation, framing, and narration of the issue by various news platforms (Chainan & Sutthisima, 2021; Evans, 2016; Freeman, 2017; Manzo & Padfield, 2016; Naguimbing-Manlulu, 2021; Pham & Nash, 2017; Rosemary & Evensen, 2021). Other studies have looked into the sourcing of climate stories in countries such as Singapore and Thailand (Comfort et al., 2020); climate change communication and media practices in Singapore (Ho & Chuah, 2017); and the factors affecting environmental coverage, including of climate change, by Cambodian media outlets (Ket, 2015). Reports on coal and renewable energy have also mushroomed in Southeast Asian news media, as exemplified by a multi-country research project led by Climate Tracker, an environmental NGO, in 2020. For this project, researchers and journalists from Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, and the Philippines investigated the ways in which their countries' media companies frame energy issues (Dzulfakar, 2020; Hoang, 2020; Kunnuwong et al. 2020; Nguyen & Hoang, 2020; Ulandari & Hardjakusuma, 2020; Yang & Telles, 2020).

A range of works also combine filmmaking and journalism—allowing ecocinema to become ecoreporting. In the form of ecodocumentaries, such news media, indeed, have the potential to "entertain, inspire, engage, educate, create awareness, and initiate political activism amongst people" (Alex & Deborah, 2016, p. 6). In Southeast Asia, ecodocumentaries tend to focus on the region's rich biodiversity, as well as the manifold environmental issues and concerns affecting people, places, and non-human beings. For instance, five documentaries were showcased in the Visual Documentary Project organized in 2014 by the Center for Southeast Asian Studies of Kyoto University under the theme "People and Nature in Southeast Asia." Including *More Than a Tree* by Philipp Danao and Khin Myanmar of Myanmar and *The Last Generation* by Darang Melati Z and Riza Andrian of Indonesia, the films illustrate the complex relationships between people and environment in the region, and therefore can be considered ecojournalism that employs the documentary film genre. These films moreover demonstrate the fluid cross-over between the academic fields of eco-communications (journalism) and ecomedia (film) in Southeast Asia.

Also, a case in point is the documentary film *Sexy Killers* (2015), investigating the relationship between the coal mining industry and Indonesian political bodies (and also examined in Chap. 8). The film is the final installment in a twelve-part documentary series by Laksono Ekspedisi Indonesia Biru, highlighting development and environmental impact in Indonesia. *Semesta* (2020), meanwhile, depicts the lives of seven individuals from various Indonesian provinces engaged in local environmental activism—informed by their own religious and cultural backgrounds—in an effort to mitigate the impacts of climate change on their communities. What's more, a particularly noteworthy ecodocumentary in Indonesia—and recipient of the Wild and Scenic Film Festival Spirit of Activism Award—is *Our Mother's Land* (2021), presenting stories of female grassroots activists struggling for environmental justice in their rural communities (Mongabay, 2021). Also appearing in 2021, the documentary film *Pulau Plastik* (or *Plastic Island*) exposes the impacts of single-use plastics in Indonesia, specifically "the extent of the plastic pollution crisis in the country,

how it reaches the food we eat, and ends with information about what can be done to solve this crisis" (Joe, 2021, para. 3).

In the Philippines, ecodocumentaries have also flourished in the country's broadcast media. Journalistic in orientation, these films usually feature the country's natural resources, including its endemic flora and fauna, as well as issues of pollution, climate change, environmental degradation, and illegal wildlife trade. Large television companies in the Philippines have invested in producing such ecodocumentaries. Examples include *Signos: Banta ng Nagbabagong Klima* (2008), *Planet Philippines* (2009), *Wildlife for Sale* (2011), *Oras Na* (2012), and *Philippine Seas* (2017); episodes of the weekly documentary programs *I-Witness, Reporters Notebook,* and *The Atom Araullo Specials* that feature environmental problems; and explicitly environmental broadcast programs such as *Born to be Wild.* The other popular television company in the Philippines, ABS-CBN, has also produced episodes for their weekly documentary programs *Matanglawin, Failon Ngayon,* and *The Correspondents* that address environmental concerns. Analyses of these media products suggest that the dominant framing of the environment and ecological issues is "ecotopianism" (Telles, 2015). Meanwhile, non-human animals continue to be subjects of the "human gaze," specifically through the tropes of objectification and infantilization deployed in the news and public affairs media in the Philippines (Telles, 2019b).

It should be noted, as well, that a steadily growing source for environmental information in Southeast Asia is the green blogosphere, facilitating public discourse on ecological issues while challenging the traditional hierarchy between experts and audiences (Cox, 2013, p. 180). As news companies, government agencies, and NGOs migrate content to social media, coverage of the environment and ecological issues have permeated Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other social networking platforms. As a case in point, from 2011 until the 2021 coup d'état in Myanmar, media liberalization facilitated the rapid expansion of Internet-enabled mobile technologies and social media penetration. Facebook in particular became the dominant social media platform used by Burmese people within Myanmar as well as members of diasporic Burmese communities to disseminate information about environmental urgencies. As in other Southeast Asian nations, rapid digital uptake catalyzed the global transmission of media accounts of the nation's sociopolitical and environmental urgencies. Performer-reporter-activists working between 2011 and 21 devised a variety of performative literary-journalistic strategies to disseminate messages of political dissent and promote freedom of expression, including messages of environmental justice. Groups such as Peacock Generation and Oway Voice; as well as performers like Maung Saung Kha and Mayyu Ali employed social media to advocate interlinked societal and environmental reform (Ryan, 2019). Burmese digital ecopoetry and environmental activism facilitated through social networking sites and independent news outlets such as *The Irrawaddy* should become subjects of further studies.

1.5 Overview of Chapters

The foremost objective of *Environment, media, and popular culture in Southeast Asia* is to redress the paucity of attention given to the region within Anglophone-dominant approaches to ecomedia, eco-communication, and enviropop. Consisting of twenty chapters by scholars based within and outside the region, the collection reaches toward this goal through a focus on most Southeast Asian countries—with the exception of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Malaysia, gaps in our coverage that we encourage subsequent scholars to fill—as well as media and popular cultural forms that have been overlooked in previous research. Key topics include the visualization of non-human beings through time-lapse technologies (Chap. 5), revolutionary music and folk culture (Chap. 6), photojournalism and urban activism (Chap. 7), the lived experiences of islandic ecologies (Chap. 9), social media eco-memes (Chap. 10), regional maps and their colonialist mediation (Chap. 14), and graphic novels (Chap. 18). Section I, "Activism, indigeneity, and the sacred," demonstrates the potential of ecomedia studies to stage generative exchange with Indigenous studies, postcolonial ecocriticism, critical plant studies, and ecomusicology. The quintet of chapters comprising this opening section reflects the evolution of ecomedia studies through intersections with companionable fields. The chapters reveal a scholarly interest in what happens when literary narratives and theories intergrade with media, popular culture, film, and activism in Southeast Asia. An additional emphasis is tourism industries' impacts on rural communities through dominant, popular constructions of Indigenous people and folk cultures.

Bringing ecocinema studies into contact with ecocultural studies of bees and insects more generally, Chap. 2 by Balthasar Kehi, Lisa Palmer, and Tamsin Wagner provides an account of the authors' research into the apiarian cultures of Timor. The political demarcation between Timor-Leste and West Timor, Indonesia has subsequently divided the water, land, and traditional ecological practices of the people of Lookeu. Nonetheless, Timor's wild honey bees (*Apis dorsata*) traverse this partition through migrations sustaining the flourishing of people, places, and insects. In community-based honey-harvest ceremonies, queen bees are courted by men dressed as Asian palm civets (*Paradoxurus hermaphroditus*). The men's songs express gratitude and entreat the bees to return. The authors' ethnographic film, *Wild honey*, addresses this divided community that, despite diminished agrodiversity and increased marketization pressures, remains committed to preserving the bees' free movement across political constructions. The authors consider the film's portrayal of the postcolonial immediacies affecting the apiarian cultures of this border region. In doing so, their scholarship contributes to what Jussi Parikka (2010) calls "insect media"—a framework critically examining the intersections between insects, media, technology, and popular culture.

Highlighting the influence of literary fiction on activism through a field-based or ethnographic approach, Chap. 3 by Meredian Alam examines the environmental identities of female activists inspired by Indonesian author Tosca Santoso's novel *Sarongge*, published in 2013. Santoso's writing fictionalizes the ecological

implications of private corporate interests on community access to land. Interviews conducted by Alam with women involved in the environmental movement in Bandung, Indonesia indicate that their activism was inspired, to a significant extent, by the novel's female protagonist, Karen, who struggles for Indigenous people's rights. The interviewees revealed the ways in which reading the novel fortified their dedication to environmental justice. The narrative thus furnished a model through which they could cultivate key environmental values of self-sacrifice, resilience, and commitment to apply in their activism. Alam's analysis underscores the insights gained when ecomedia and eco-communication research comes into transdisciplinary dialogue with studies of environmental literature, known also as ecocriticism (Slovic et al., 2019).

The critical issue of Southeast Asian Indigenous peoples' access to land under threat of capitalist appropriation recurs in the context of Vietnam in Chap. 4 by Tran Ngoc Hieu. Informed by postcolonial critique, the chapter assays Vietnamese activist and filmmaker Nguyễn Trinh Thi's *Letters from Panduranga*, released in 2015. The documentary film is a response to the Vietnamese government's proposal to construct nuclear facilities in Ninh Thuận Province, impacting the traditional lands of the Cham people, an ethnic minority community of South Vietnam. Tran foregrounds Nguyễn's use of the self-reflective genre of the "essay film" to understand cinematic mediations of Indigenous Vietnamese people while challenging viewers' perspectives on environmental issues such as energy, sustainability, and Indigenous rights. Tran concludes that *Letters from Panduranga* unsettles the colonial legacies and developmentalist ideologies of contemporary Vietnam. In its experimentation with cinematic language, Nguyễn's documentary can be understood in postcolonial-ecocritical terms. Huggan and Tiffin (2010) maintain that "one of the central tasks of postcolonial ecocriticism as an emergent field has been to contest—also to provide alternatives to—western ideologies of development" (p. 27). Extending Huggan and Tiffin's assessment, Tran's chapter importantly brings postcolonial concerns to bear on Southeast Asian ecocinema studies.

In Chap. 5, John Charles Ryan focuses on popular time-lapse visualizations of Sumatra's famous and cosmopolitan titan arum—an endangered Southeast Asian plant known for its massive inflorescence and tuber. Situating the digital mediation of titan arum within the history of time-lapse, Ryan interrogates the ethics of this increasingly common mode of visualization. Since the late-nineteenth century, time-lapse has been regarded—in largely techno-utopianistic terms—as a medium for decoding the enigmatic worlds of plants and, even, engendering empathy for their perceived suffering. As such, time-lapse is framed as an innocuous method to animate plants' otherwise imperceptible movements, thereby affirming the dynamism of the botanical world. Against this grain, Ryan argues that time-lapse risks constructing *creaturely plants* by manipulating their temporalities and privileging their reproductive parts over their biological and cultural embeddedness. Formulating an intermedial vegetal ethics in response, Ryan draws upon recent developments in critical plant studies and posthumanism, specifically concepts of hetero-temporality, intermediation, and trans-corporeality. An intermedial ethics of time-lapse, for Ryan, would

attend to whole plants, emphasize human-non-human ecologies, resist the aestheticization of the vegetal body, narrativize the temporal diversity of vegetal life, and address urgent in-situ conservation issues affecting the long-term viability of species in their places of origin.

From plants and time-lapse to fisherfolk and music—from the botanical to the littoral—the first section turns to Chap. 6 where Jose Monfred C. Sy considers the intervention performed by Philippine revolutionary music in mediating relations between folk cultures, marine environments, and capitalist structures. As Sy contends, scholars have often regarded the countryside as determining the characteristics of revolutionary art, literature, and media. Such critical assessments place less emphasis on marine environments—littoral zones—as milieux of production, struggle, and transformation. The musical group Aplaya positions the lives of fisherfolk as a central aesthetic concern. Developing an innovative hydroaesthetic framework, Sy examines how Aplaya's music mobilizes social change in rural fishing communities, transforms littoral zones into sites of resistance, and enlarges the prevailing terrestrial aesthetics of the Philippine protest movement. Subverting the bourgeois construction of water as an appropriable commodity, Aplaya's hydroaesthetics constitutes a counter-discourse to marine exploitation in the Philippines. Aplaya's songs therefore advance ecocultural studies' aim to dismantle hierarchical distinctions between the city and the country. In this way, Chap. 6 contributes to the growth of ecomusicology—the study of the intersections between music, culture, and nature (Allen & Dawe, 2016)—in Southeast Asia.

Section II, "Political ecology and urban spaces," foregrounds the role of ecomedia and popular culture in mediating power relations, geopolitical conflicts, and citizen perspectives on urban environments in Southeast Asia. In this vein, Chap. 7 considers how photos taken by a group known as the Nightcrawlers of Manila construct poor urban communities as subjects of exclusion, decay, and disposal. Through an analysis of the Nightcrawlers' images, Jose Kervin Calabias identifies the emergence of an urban poor political ecology under President Duterte's *Oplan Tokhang* program. This necro-politics reconfigures urban bodies as sites of "waste/garbage"—the material-discursive matrix from which the Nightcrawlers produce stylized images of death. Calabias develops the idea of *salvage aesthetics* to signify the interrelated livelihoods of the urban poor and the photographers themselves—in which death itself becomes the precondition of urban existence and the focus of photographic practice.

Section II's emphasis on political ecologies and urban spaces continues in Chap. 8 with Agung Wardana and Satrya Wibawa's analysis of the documentary film *Sexy killers*. In 2019, Indonesia held a presidential election involving a rematch between the candidates Jokowi-Ma'ruf and Prabowo-Sandiaga Uno. Released just ahead of the election, the film addresses the fraught political economy of the coal mining industry in Indonesia, disclosing the alleged ties of senior Indonesian officials to the country's mining oligarchies with shares in coal-power plant developments. In this highly contested political space, Wardana and Wibawa conduct a close reading of the film to understand how it has been used by environmental activists to influence the election process and force discussion of pressing ecological concerns in Indonesia's political sphere. Their chapter thus calls attention

to the significant role of ecocinema within environmental politics in Southeast Asia.

The idea of a *political ecology* is elaborated in Chap. 9 by Eulalio Guieb III through a detailed analysis of mangroves habitats and the aquaculture industry on the island village (*barangay*) of Jandayan Norte, Central Philipines. In the village context, everyday ecosocial practices contribute significantly to the popular culture of Jandayan Norte in terms of the daily struggle over access to resources. Guieb frames the village as a milieu of ecological exchange coupled to the circulation of currency and privileges. Market forces and government policies provoke transformations in residents' livelihoods, leading to the reconfiguration of ecosocial dynamics. In particular, Guieb's chapter elucidates the relationship between mangrove forests and brackish water fish farming, as impacted by markets, policies, and paradigms of resource management. The example of Jandayan Norte reflects the deep-seated social and political complexities inherent to conservation work in the Philippines, namely the challenges negotiated by economically disadvantaged villagers residing near marine conservation areas.

Deepening Section II's emphasis on geopolitics and social media-based activism in the Philippines context, Jason Paolo Telles in Chap. 10 interrogates the use of fish imagery in memes to express dissent against the ostensibly favorable stance of the Philippine government toward Chinese intrusion in the West Philippine Sea. Telles characterizes the fish memes as *satirical anthropomorphism*—a strategy that frames marine creatures in particular ways to optimize visibility and, in some cases, achieve virality on social media. Although the memes are intended for purposes of environmental activism, their representation of fish and other aquatic organisms tends to fall into the traps of objectification and appropriation. Striking dialogue between critical animal studies and ecomedia studies—and invoking the concept of the human gaze—Telles opens up new ground in the ecomedia-based analysis of the visual dimensions of Facebook memes.

Chapter 11 by Henrikus Joko Yulianto brings ecomedia and eco-communication studies into generative exchange with the field of *ecopoetics*—understood as the study of environmental poetry. Yulianto identifies common ground between ecopoems and digital media insofar as both use signs and codes as language. Not only functioning as literary devices, images in ecopoetry can also be interpreted as visual expressions within poetic forms of ecomedia. On this basis, Yulianto explores the correlation between images (as concepts or signifiers) and their references to objects (or the signified); in this way, ecopoetics traverses ecomedia, and vice versa. Yulianto's theoretical assertions are concretized through an analysis of Indonesian poet Afrizal Malna's *Anxiety myths* (2013), a collection that interweaves *telegraphic language* with cinematic montage to convey images of urban ecology. The poems' epigrammatic, episodic images—juxtaposed through cinematic montage and jump cuts—result in an immediacy and directness of expression. In Malna's work, this interconnected typography—in conjunction with recurrent images of natural landscapes and cultural objects—yields an ecological vision inducing cognizance of urban ecologies and advocating conscientious dwelling in place.

From ecopoetics to ecoreporting, Section III, "Discourses, narratives, and aesthetics," features four contributions on environmental journalism, map-making, and agrarian documentaries. The section begins with Sharifah Nurulhuda Alkaff, Khairunnisa Ibrahim, and Najib Noorashid's assessment of climate change reporting by Brunei Darussalam's broadcast media. As the authors explain, in 2016 Brunei Darussalam became one of the first ASEAN member states to ratify the Paris Agreement to confront climate change—a decision reflecting the government's resolve to protect the environment. The chapter examines whether the country's news media, specifically *Borneo bulletin*—Brunei Darussalam's oldest English language daily newspaper—is similarly committed to this vision. Their findings suggest a misalignment between the country's media and the government's policies; scarce emphasis has been placed on environmental news coverage in the paper. For the authors, the newspaper's climate change reporting inscribes the *authority-order norm*, foregrounding the country's cooperation with international bodies committed to the issue rather than elaborating the practical measures devised by the country to address its particular urgencies.

Shifting from Brunei Darussalam to Vietnam, Chap. 13 by Le Thanh Trieu, Dung Q. Nguyen, and Giang T. T. Nguyen analyzes reports about climate change published on Vietnam's mainstream, online news portals. Considering the frames used by websites in their reporting from 2010 to 2019, the authors highlight the hierarchical dissemination of climate change news from newsrooms to readers. Moreover, the chapter identifies a lack of audience engagement in the comments sections as indicative of the Vietnamese media's constrained role in shaping public opinion on climate change. Serving an informative function, mainstream online environmental journalism in Vietnam tends to communicate official narratives about national adaptation but lacks interactive spaces fostering public discourse. The *governmental responsibility* frame recurs in the reporting through frequent allusions to government agencies, reinforcing the actual position of Vietnamese journalism as controlled by the state. In contrast, social media has the potential to elicit new understandings of climate change, leading to opportunities for subsequent research on citizen-based climate reporting in Vietnam.

From newspapers and websites to maps and other cartographic media, Chap. 14 by Tami Banh opens by underscoring the history of volatile power dynamics in the Mekong Delta—a transnational site of various political upheavals and contingencies. For more than three centuries, competing parties have transfigured the river and its delta ecologies through bold engineering visions informed by nation-building ideologies. Banh traces this intensive ecological transformation by investigating how maps have facilitated imperial agendas and mediated the reorganization of the Mekong's ecosocial terrain. Unlike previous research on ecological change in the Mekong Delta region, Banh's study addresses the crucial role of cartographic representation. Through the framework of *critical cartography*, the chapter places mapping practices and their analysis firmly within the domain of ecomedia studies and, more specifically, deconstructs historical maps and documents gathered by the author from international archives and libraries to identify dominant narrative constructions of

the Mekong. These map-driven narratives, according to Banh, facilitate the ongoing reconfiguration of the region.

The final chapter of Section III returns to ecocinema with Natalie Boehler and Andrea Riemenschnitter's analysis of Thai director Uruphong Raksasad's fictional documentary *Agrarian Utopia* from 2009. The film narrates the daily struggles of a group of landless rice farmers and their interactions with the environment, deconstructing the Thai agrarian myth and its preeminence in the imagining of national identity. The film's perspective is literally embedded in the landscape, as the director exposes the camera to natural elements in order to generate a sense of immediacy and decay. Boehler and Riemenschnitter contend that Raksasad's filmmaking can be understood as a practice of ecological critique concerned with how human-non-human formations intersect with the entrenched power structures of Thai institutions. The aesthetics of *Agrarian utopia* elucidates the multitiered relations between humans, more-than-humans, landscapes, narratives, cinema, and political institutions in Southeast Asia as well as the ever-increasing prominence of cinema in mediating people-place dynamics in the region.

Section IV, "Imperialism, nationalism, and islands," comprises five chapters demonstrating the potential for further exchange between ecomedia studies, memory studies, island studies, postcolonialism, and related fields. This potential is evident in Chap. 16 by Marcella Polain who employs a memory studies framework—informed by autoethnography and ficto-criticism—to explore the ecological implications of Singapore's imperial past. As Polain elaborates, of the nation-state's original islands, only about fifty remain, each having a specific ecological and social composition that risks being lost through urbanization. The chapter's ficto-critical structure—underlain by the concept of the palimpsest—enables Polain to reflect on how memory, autobiography, and imagination generate strata of unofficial history that counter institutional silence and disrupt claims to truth. Based on archival research conducted by the author, the chapter brings autoethnography into contact with ecomedia studies through a reading of blogs and other social media about colonial Singapore. Personal and collective memory is energized through heterogeneous forms of "data"—online maps, images, and other digital materials in addition to analogue photos and home movies.

The final four chapters address ecomedia issues in the Philippines. The role of the imagination in ecomedia, as considered by Polain, is also taken up in Chap. 17 by Shelley Tuazon Guyton through an analysis of the interconnections between mediatized disaster and Filipino subjectivity. How do media construct disaster as a sociopolitical formation and moral urgency? In the Philippines, both traditional and social media remain crucial for communicating the urgency of typhoon hazards—in the form of disaster alerts—but also for codifying expectations about how to confront and respond to environmental catastrophes. The chapter develops a critique of the media's role in propounding notions of Filipino subjectivity through disaster discourse. Engaging with the concept of the imagined community, Guyton considers how disaster figures in narratives of national identity in the Philippines. In particular, common terms in disaster risk reduction—resilience and *bayanihan* are prime examples—have become implicated in

the moral construction of Filipino identity. For Guyton, the news media facilitates logistic and moral expectations regarding how citizens should behave in the face of disaster through the use of language that associates catastrophe-response with being Filipino.

The islandic emphasis of Section IV continues in Chap. 18 with Maria Karaan's formulation of the concept of an *archipelagic choreography* in her reading of Philippines *komiks* (comic books and graphic novels). Emiliana Kampilan's 2019 *komiks* titled *Dead Balagtas: Tomo I: Mga Sayaw ng Dagat at Lupa* (*Dances of the Sea and Earth*) weaves between Tagalog cosmogony; the geological formation of the archipelago; (neo)colonial histories; and love stories informed by current social, cultural, and political friction. Although the textual narratives privilege human relationships, the artworks depict non-human bodies moving with, and through, other bodies. Kampilan destabilizes the presumed fixity of cartographic representation through a dynamic graphic-textual choreography of the island. In doing so, the artist counters the spatiotemporal stasis of the map and reconstitutes archipelagic space-time through assemblages of beings. Kampilan's work thus imbues the Philippine archipelago with a vitality that resists totalizing imperial constructions.

Also developed in the context of the Philippines, Chap. 19 by Trisha Remetir investigates the cinematic imaginaries of human-bird interactions through a reading of the fence in Filipino filmmaker Mikhail Red's *Birdshot* from 2016. Red's narrative tracks the implications of a girl's choice to sneak into a conservation area and kill a haribon, or Philippine eagle (*Pithecophaga jefferyi*). Remetir emphasizes the fence delineating the nature reserve in order to understand the film's construction of human-bird relationships in the Philippines. This focus discloses two intertwined strands in Red's film—namely the designation of conservation spaces and conceptions of nature sanctioned by the state. Red's dominant trope of the reserve boundary suggests that the logic of state conservation is contingent on a stark life or death dichotomy between humans and other creatures. Remetir's analysis discloses how human-bird relations are connected to broad-scale ecological displacements and the imperial residues of land appropriation.

In the collection's final chapter, Leonard Thomas Shaw emphasizes cinematic representations of islandic spaces in the Philippines. Various "getaway" films depict islands as mythic, paradisical spaces where travelers search for the *self* while constructing the island as *other*. Often elided in popular representations of islands, however, are material conditions rooted in sociohistorical discourses. While the island offers a place to discover one's romanticized sense of self, larger questions of social structure and cultural history are cast off. Through a critique of the film *Siargao* from 2017, Shaw calls into question cinematic representations of islands that elide local culture and environment. The chapter draws attention to the material conditions that underpin islandic life in *Siargao* and problematizes their obfuscation in the tourist-traveller paradigm. Shaw articulates a sense of islandic space grounded in complex histories and ways of living.

1.6 Conclusion: Avenues for Further Research

Broad in scope and geared toward opening diverse channels for further studies, *Environment, media, and popular culture in Southeast Asia* introduces key ecomedia, eco-communications, and enviropop issues in relation to Southeast Asian contexts. The book's broad ambit elicits an array of areas for subsequent scholarship. This final section elaborates five areas in particular: (i) Anthropocene cinema; (ii) climate journalism; (iii) media-related environmental justice in Southeast Asian countries not featured significantly in the collection; (iv) the relationship between media and environment among Indigenous and ethnic minority groups; and (v) graphic novels and other forms of environmental media.

One direction for ecomedia studies in Southeast Asia is toward Anthropocene cinema—films confronting the immediacies of the current age, specifically the perils of humankind understood as a biospheric agent degrading planetary systems. Comprising documentary and feature films—fiction and non-fiction, long and short films, alike—this emergent ecocinematic genre is geared toward poignant, emotional, immersive, and informative experiences of the grand abstraction known as the Anthropocene. As environmental humanities scholars have pointed out, the medium of film is well-matched to the profound strangeness of the present epoch: "The Anthropocene is to natural science what cinema, especially early cinema, has been to human culture. It makes the familiar world strange to us by transcribing the dimensionalities of experience into celluloid" (Fay, 2018, p. 3).

An example of Southeast Asian Anthropocene cinema is the dystopian Vietnamese film *Mars in the Well*, in which 2053 Saigon, Vietnam, is submerged in water and citizens are forced to move to higher ground. Within the scope of Anthropocene cinema, the genre of climate change cinema has gained footing. In the Vietnamese context, the film *2030* is a futuristic science fiction romance directed by Nguyễn Võ Nghiêm Minh and released in 2014. The film dramatizes the effects of climate change on southern Vietnam where communities have retreated to houseboats while companies build floating farms and technological intervention is needed to grow food. In response to climate change politics in the Southeast Asian news media, cli-fi films—and academic research into them—are expected to become more prominent including within environmental film festivals.

Further research might examine climate journalism as an emerging specialization within environmental journalism in Southeast Asia. Studies indicate that the global public regards climate change as an abstract phenomenon difficult to comprehend in tangible terms (Schäfer & Painter, 2020). Nevertheless, general knowledge of climate change is primarily derived from news media sources. A recent study by Reuters, for example, found that television is the public's most significant source of information about climate change, followed by online-born news sites, social media, and blogs. Television's prominence is likely due to its visual register: "Watching glaciers melt or seeing images of plastic clogging up our oceans can often have more impact than reading a news article containing scientific details of climate change" (Andi, 2020, p. 53). Social media, however, is the leading source for climate news among

the 18–24 age group. In this context, climate reporting entails collecting, assessing, selecting, and publishing information about climate-related issues. The sources used in climate journalism are not only technical and scientific but represent a broad spectrum of stakeholders. Considering this, we suggest that, in the next decade, the study of ecomedia, eco-communications, and enviropop in Southeast Asia is likely to grapple to a greater extent with the representation of climate change, species loss, and environmental justice in journalism and film.

We also encourage the exploration of ecomedia issues and genres in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Malaysia, and other Southeast Asian nations not represented in this volume. In Laos, for example, recent television programs and films offer multifaceted understandings of human-nature relationships and ecological issues. A case in point is the Lao children's program *Ban Khong Khoy* produced by UNICEF and Lao government's Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism, in which some of the main characters are animals. A critical animal studies approach could be deployed to assess how Lao producers—through the portrayals of Sister Elephant, Brother Buffalo, and other animal personae—depict normative human-animal relationships in the Laotian context. It is interesting to note that the animals in the television programs are not anthropomorphized to the extent seen in children's programs in other countries. Moreover, the mediated animals are often projected as members of the village who have equal status with humans.

Another critical area for subsequent investigation is the use of media forms for environmental justice and cultural heritage protection among Indigenous and ethnic minority groups across the region. Throughout Southeast Asia—from Timor-Leste and Indonesia to Myanmar and Vietnam—Indigenous people make use of a range of media and pop-cultural forms to communicate their perceptions of the environment, human-nature relationships, and ecological issues, such as climate change. This is particularly urgent given that these groups continue to be victimized by imperial and colonial violence, exclusion, othering, and misrepresentation. Research could elaborate how such groups employ media and popular cultural products to give voice to ecological precarities. Some work has already been done in the Philippines, specifically on how contemporary vernacular music and music videos produced by the Indigenous people of Luzon Island communicate perspectives on human-nature relationships, ecological balance, and ecocentrism (Calabias, 2014; Telles, 2018). These studies, however, address only a small segment of the vast spectrum of Indigenous ecocultural mediations in Southeast Asia. In the Philippines, furthermore, radio broadcasts by Indigenous communities, such as the Radyo Sagada and Radyo Lumad, tend to emphasize ecological concerns.

What's more, the intersection between media, popular culture, and ecological knowledge among the Dayak people of Borneo offers yet another possibility for subsequent analysis. Consider, for instance, the films promoted by the "If Not Us Then Who?" group that "supports a global awareness campaign highlighting the role indigenous and local peoples play in protecting our planet" (If Not Us Then Who, n.d.). The project includes Dayak people and their environmental perspectives as communicated through the short documentary films *Iban Ways: Ritual to Make Peace with Spirits,* directed by Kynan Tegar, a young Dayak Iban filmmaker