

# Screening Taiwan Soft Power: Film Festivals in and about Taiwan

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## **Abstract:**

As Dina Iordanova (2010: 18–19) has noted, ‘There is disparity in the behaviour of countries when it comes to festivals organised with the mandate to promote national cinemas. This disparity is often linked to the availability of resources directed to culture. [...] A country like Taiwan which seeks state recognition, uses film festivals as an important tool in international relations.’ This paper surveys film festivals in and about Taiwan to provide the above statement with a clearer context and investigate how Taiwan uses film festivals as a tool of cultural diplomacy to screen the island's soft power.

**Keywords:** film festival, Taiwan, cultural diplomacy, soft power

## **Introduction**

Since the first film festival—the Venice Film Festival—was organised in Italy in 1932, the number of international film festivals has proliferated while their importance and visibility has become particularly heightened over the past three or four decades. There were an estimated 170 film festivals worldwide in the 1980s, and that the figure rose to 700 by 2003 (Iordanova and Rhyne, 2009: 1). The film festival phenomenon is both global and local because ‘festivals have been the place where the interests of nationalism and internationalism converge. Film festivals bring the world to town, and they also bring your town to the world’

(Rich, 2013: 158). For this reason, film festivals play an increasingly crucial role in our multicultural experiences across the globe in the twenty-first century. It is difficult to imagine, for example, that some of the best-known filmmakers of the Chinese-language cinemas—Zhang Yimou, Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Wong Kar-Wai, Tsai Ming-liang etc.—would enjoy the global status today were it not for international film festivals like Rotterdam, Berlinale, Cannes, or Venice to discover, circulate, and champion their cinematic mastery (Iordanova, 2011: 3).

There are many different types of film festivals. Some focus on genres (e.g. comedy, short films, documentary); others highlight social concerns (e.g. human rights, women's and LGBT issues). There are festivals that exhibit regional varieties (e.g. Asian film festivals in Nottingham), and there are those which address certain identity communities (e.g. Jewish film festivals around the world). Film festivals often serve multiple purposes at the same time. For example, they can perform an industrial role by showcasing films from a specific country or region for foreign programmers and buyers while at the same time they provide a service to domestic audiences by bringing in 'acclaimed foreign films to local cinephiles who might not get the chance to see them otherwise' (Iordanova, 2011: 2). Some scholars consider that film festivals may function as cultural contact zones (Nichols 1994: 16), as international 'symbols of socio-political ambition' (Rich, 1999: 82), or as an institution that promotes 'ideas about the nation as a form of cultural currency in the international marketplace' (Stringer, 2013: 64).

The focus of this paper is on film festivals that may be considered as a tool of cultural diplomacy for Taiwan.<sup>1</sup> 'Cultural diplomacy' here is defined as the promotion of a state's cultural achievements and the deliberate projection of a nation's culture and values in order to promote and improve a country's image (Arndt 2005: 553).

As film festival expert Professor Dina Iordanova (2010: 18–19) has noted, ‘There is disparity in the behaviour of countries when it comes to festivals organised with the mandate to promote national cinemas. This disparity is often linked to the availability of resources directed to culture. [...] A country like Taiwan which seeks state recognition, uses film festivals as an important tool in international relations.’ So, how does Taiwan realise its ambition of cultural diplomacy by utilising film festivals to screen the island’s soft power? How effective is this strategy? The paper will offer a broad overview of film festivals in and about Taiwan; it will also select a number of key initiatives for further analysis. In conclusion, the paper argues that (1) film festivals in Taiwan may sometimes demonstrate cultural diplomacy values. Nevertheless, the most significant contribution of film festivals in Taiwan have so far been nurturing new generations of filmmakers and promoting a diverse cinema culture on the island as whole. In other words, domestic film festivals are invaluable in preparing fertile ground in which to nurture Taiwan’s soft power through cinema; and (2) Taiwan has practiced innovative and flexible cultural diplomacy strategies in maintaining visibility in a variety of international film festivals through partnership with industries, NGOs, and nonstate actors. The strategies are effective as Taiwan’s annual budget in culture has not been particularly generous, but Taiwan cinema’s presence in the international film arena has been noticed as Iordanova’s comment (2010: 18–19) has demonstrated. In this way, this paper will add to the existing literature on cultural diplomacy two vital but less researched aspects, namely ‘film festivals’ and ‘Taiwan’. Meanwhile it will inject into the study of Taiwan cinema a new dimension of enquiry on the local and international dynamics of film festivals.

## **Film Festivals in Taiwan**

### *A Little History: Golden Horse and Golden Harvest Awards*

There were only two film festivals in Taiwan between 1945 when Taiwan was returned to the Republic of China (ROC) at the end of WWII and 1987 when martial law was lifted.

However, since the late 1990s, there has been an explosion of regular film festivals in Taiwan.

How does the film festival culture evolve on the island from merely two festivals for over 40 years to 30 plus festivals in the twenty-first century? What kind of impact do film festivals have on the development of Taiwan cinema? In what ways do Taiwanese film festivals possess formal or informal cultural diplomacy capacity?

The first film festival-like event in Taiwan was a privately-run film award by a commercial newspaper, *Zhengxin News* (later became *The China Times*), in 1958 to celebrate the Taiwanese-language film (*taiyupian*) industry. Nonetheless, as *taiyupian* was not endorsed by the ruling Nationalist Party (i.e. Kuomintang or KMT) because it was not considered ‘national’, the Government Information Office (GIO) decided in 1962 to organise the annual Golden Horse Awards (*jin ma jiang*) instead, loosely modelled on the Academy Awards in the United States, in order to promote Mandarin-language cinema as part of the KMT’s nation-building project. Since the mid-1960s, the Mandarin-language films became increasingly popular while the local dialect film industry faded away by the early 1970s (Rawnsley, 2013: 455).

In 1965 a Chinese-language magazine, *Theatre (Juchang)*, was founded by several amateur cinema and theatre enthusiasts who were graduate students from the US. They wished to bring western avant-garde art and cultural theories to Taiwan upon their return to their hometown. The magazine introduced to its readers the ideas of *Cahiers du Cinema*, French New Wave and influential European auteurs. *Theatre* stopped publication after nine issues due to funding difficulties, but it opened a new opportunity for Taiwan’s alternative cinema, manifested in cultural elites’ interest and practice in experimental short films and documentaries (Lu, 1998: 127). This led to the creation in 1978 of the annual Golden Harvest

Awards (*jin sui jiang*) by the GIO to fill the cultural gap left by the closure of *Theatre* magazine (*The Film Appreciation Journal*, 1993: 94).

Under martial law, foreign-language cinema was strictly regulated in Taiwan and the commercially driven local film markets were filled with Hollywood features, Hong Kong imports, and domestically produced entertainment and escapism, such as martial arts epic, historical costume drama, and modern ‘romantic literary’ (*aiqing wenyi*) movies (Rawnsley, 2014a: 193). The Cold War context might also explain why the format of both the Golden Horse and Golden Harvest Awards were initially closed film events instead of open film exhibitions. Firstly, the US film culture and the Academy Awards were much more familiar to the people on Taiwan than European film festivals at the time. Hence as discussed previously, the Golden Horse Awards were fashioned after the Oscars in the 1960s. Secondly, Taiwan was suffering from several external shocks that had widespread internal repercussions throughout the 1970s. For example, the sovereignty dispute over the Diaoyutai/Senkaku islands with Japan in 1970; the replacement of the ROC seat by the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in the United Nations in 1971; and the normalisation of diplomatic relations between the US and the PRC in 1979 (Rawnsley, 2000: 16).

These international political crises provoked a renewed sentiment of anti-imperialism on the island, which in turn inspired the rise of nativist literature and a nationalistic spirit of raising local cultural awareness (Yip, 2004: 19–29). The 1978 Golden Harvest Awards could be viewed as one of the cultural schemes designed by the KMT to appease a certain section of the cultural elites who were more in tune with western modernism than Taiwanese localism. However, the authority still wished to maintain a degree of control over cultural expression. Thus, from the management point of view, it was easier for the government to assume a directive position in awarding film projects which were only shown to a limited number of competitors and jury members than organising a film festival open to the general

public. In this way, the Golden Harvest Awards performed a critical task in their formative years as a vehicle that helped to carry the fresh, western, and artistic ideas from the 1960s into the 1970s and the 1980s, even though the exhibition of its award-winning films was always a low-key and closed event throughout the decades. Many filmmakers who received grants and prizes from Golden Harvest for making experimental short films later became internationally renowned directors, including Wan Ren, Ke Yi-zheng, Tsai Ming-liang, Lee Daw-ming, and Ang Lee (Lu, 1998: 125–128). In other words, although the remit of the Golden Harvest Awards was not about Taiwan’s cultural diplomacy, it has become instrumental in cultivating Taiwan’s cinematic talent and soft power currency for the future.

It is worth noting that Taiwan experienced a dramatic process of cultural and social liberalisation and political transition in the 1980s. Martial law was lifted in 1987; the first free presidential election by popular vote took place in 1996; and the ruling KMT government was replaced by the opposition party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in 2000. The second change of government happened in 2008 when the KMT defeated the DPP and was voted back into power. Further changes of government occurred in 2016 when the DPP enjoyed victory in both national elections for the president and legislators (Fell, 2018).

Parallel with social and political democratisation, the GIO tried to introduce more diverse cultural products to the island by adding an annual international film exhibition, primarily European cinema, to the Golden Horse Awards in 1980. Although the non-competitive festival was ‘always overshadowed by the awards section’ (Iordanova, 2011: 11), it created an invaluable platform to nurture Taiwanese cinephiles. More structural amendments also occurred to the Golden Horse Awards over the years: In 1989, the Golden Horse Awards changed their title to the Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival (TGHFF) and was run by an independent organisation, the Golden Horse Film Festival and Awards Committee (Lee 2012: 170–172); and in 1996 the Committee decided to accept any film made primarily

in the Chinese language eligible for its competition, including films from mainland China. Since then, the Golden Horse has been commonly celebrated by filmmakers in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China as a high-profile industry event which promotes Chinese-language cinemas in general.

However, in August 2019 the Chinese authorities decided to block the mainland movie industry from participating in the 56<sup>th</sup> edition of the Golden Horse Awards (*The Guardian*, 2019). Beijing did not offer any explanation for the boycott, but one suspects that the reasons may be two-fold: (1) the tension between China and Taiwan has been rising since Tsai Ing-wen assumed office in 2016 and in particular the preparations for the 2020 presidential election were now well under way, and (2) China's Golden Rooster Awards (*jin ji jiang*) were scheduled to take place in Xiamen on 23 November, the same day as the 2019 Golden Horse in Taipei.<sup>2</sup> This unfortunate incident reminds us of festival practitioner Ruby Rich's statement: 'No film festivals are truly non-political' (Rich, 2013: 158). Even though the Golden Horse was not necessarily established to carry out cultural diplomacy, it seemed to have fulfilled such a function across the Taiwan Strait since 1996 when it was branded the 'Chinese Oscars' by the film industry insiders and the international media. The Chinese government's boycott further highlighted TGHFF's industry status in the Greater China region and its significance in cross-Strait relations.

### ***Film Festivals in the New Millennium***

Taiwan's film industry suffered from a serious decline throughout the 1990s and most of the 2000s. There were 158 local films shot in 1988, but the number dropped to 28 in 1994 (Lu, 1998: 323–324) and 18 in 2003 (Chung, 2009). For nine out of the 11 years from 1996 to 2006, 'the yearly revenue from Taiwanese movies accounted for less than 2 percent of total ticket sales in Taiwan' (Chung, 2009).

Interestingly since the late 1990s, an increasing number of film festivals were organised in Taiwan. Festival insider Wu Fan once said ironically that Taiwan had no film industry, but a film festival industry (Wu, 2009: 47). I shall argue that this seemingly contradictory scenario demonstrated the growth of a cinema culture in Taiwan despite the low production rate. Prior to democratisation, the Taiwanese population could only be satisfied with two film festivals—the Golden Horse and the Golden Harvest Awards—but neither was easily accessible as the former was a high-end industry event and the latter a filmmaker-oriented affair. Now that many socio-political limitations were removed, civil society was thus able to get itself organised and to plan for film festivals according to their various interest and concerns. In my paper published elsewhere, entitled ‘Cultural Democratisation and Taiwan Cinema’, I discussed four factors to illustrate how Taiwan has experienced cultural democratisation since the 1990s (Rawnsley, 2016: 373–388); the development of an active domestic film festival scene was one of the major factors.

‘Film festivals are important’, I explained, ‘as they do not only help facilitate exchanges between local and international filmmakers, but also help stimulate public interest in, and access to, diverse tastes, values and cultures from a variety of films not normally available through theatrical release’. I further argued that ‘[o]n a practical level which is particularly relevant to Taiwan’s context, these film festivals offer independent local filmmakers an opportunity for monetary award and public screening of their work. Therefore the development of film festivals in the late 1990s and the early 2000s have made a significant contribution to the sustainability and vitality of Taiwan cinema by simply keeping local film talents afloat when the industry was at its lowest ebb’ (Rawnsley, 2016: 384).

According to Wu Fan (2009: 47), there were more than 30 established film festivals taking place in Taiwan in 2007. However, the official Taiwan Cinema website listed only 16 regular film festivals in August 2019.<sup>3</sup> I have compiled a table below based on the two

identified sources above to offer an overview of 22 film festivals in Taiwan between 1962 and 2019.

**Table 1: Selected Regular Film Festivals in Taiwan, 1962–2019**

	<b>Festival</b>	<b>Starting Year</b>	<b>Primary Location &amp; Time of the Year</b>	<b>Organisers</b>
1	Golden Horse Awards ( <i>jin ma jiang</i> ) (competition)	1962	Taipei November	Golden Horse Film Festival and Awards Committee ( <a href="http://www.goldenhorse.org.tw/awards/about/overview/">http://www.goldenhorse.org.tw/awards/about/overview/</a> )
2	Golden Horse Award (international film exhibition)	1980	Taipei November	Golden Horse Film Festival and Awards Committee ( <a href="http://www.goldenhorse.org.tw/film/about/overview/">http://www.goldenhorse.org.tw/film/about/overview/</a> )
3	Golden Harvest Awards ( <i>jin sui jiang</i> )	1978	Taipei March	Taiwan Film Institute ( <a href="http://movie seeds.tfi.org.tw/news/index.php">http://movie seeds.tfi.org.tw/news/index.php</a> )
4	Woman Make Waves Film Festival ( <i>Taiwan guoji nüxing</i> )	1993	Taipei October	Taiwan Women Film & Video Association ( <a href="http://www.wmw.org.tw/tw/wmwff">http://www.wmw.org.tw/tw/wmwff</a> )

	<i>yingzhan</i> )			
5	Taipei Film Festival ( <i>Taipei dianying jie</i> )	1998	Taipei June-July	Taipei City Government <a href="https://www.taipeiff.taipei/index.aspx">https://www.taipeiff.taipei/index.aspx</a> )
6	Taiwan International Documentary Festival ( <i>Taiwan guoji jilupian yingzhan</i> )	1998	Taipei May	Taiwan Film Institute <a href="https://www.tidf.org.tw/zh-hant">https://www.tidf.org.tw/zh-hant</a> )
7	International Student Golden Lion Award ( <i>Guoji xuesheng dianying jin shi jiang</i> )	1999-2011	Taipei November-December	National Taiwan University of Arts and Taipei County Government <a href="https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Movie/金獅獎-臺北縣電影藝術節國際學生影展-128945897146408/">https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Movie/金獅獎-臺北縣電影藝術節國際學生影展-128945897146408/</a> )
8	Taiwan International Ethnographic Film Festival ( <i>Taiwan guoji minzuzhi yingzhan</i> )	2001	Taipei October	Taiwan Association of Visual Ethnography <a href="https://www.tieff.org">https://www.tieff.org</a> )

9	Pure 16mm Independent Film Festival ( <i>Chun 16 duli yingzhan</i> )	2001– 2004	Taipei	Taiwan Original Filmmaker Union and Yitai Film Company
10	South Taiwan Film Festival ( <i>Nanfang yingzhan</i> )	2001	Tainan  November	The STFF members are originally students in Graduate Institute in Film in National Tainan Art University, co-founded with Taiwan female director and professor Huang Yu-Shan. Now the STFF members are from various specialties and all big fans of cinema.  ( <a href="http://festival.south.org.tw">http://festival.south.org.tw</a> )
11	Kaohsiung Film Festival ( <i>Kaohsiung dianying jie</i> )	2001	Kaohsiung  October- November	Kaohsiung City Government  ( <a href="https://www.kff.tw/TW#811">https://www.kff.tw/TW#811</a> )
12	Urban Nomad Film Festival ( <i>chengshi youmu yingzhan</i> )	2002	Taipei  May	Urban Nomad Film Festival  ( <a href="http://urbannomad.tw">http://urbannomad.tw</a> )
13	Taichung International Animation Festival	2003– 2008. 2015 restarted.	Taipei  (2003- 2008)  Taichung	Taiwan Film Institute and Taichung Visual Development Foundation ( <a href="https://twtiaf.com/2018/">https://twtiaf.com/2018/</a> )

	( <i>Taichung guoji donghua yingzhan</i> )		(2015-present)	
14	Yilan International Film Festival for Kids ( <i>Yilan guoji ertong dianyingjie</i> )	2003-2008	Yilan July-August	Yilan County Government
15	Yilan Green International Film Festival ( <i>Yilan guoji lüse yingzhan</i> )	2004	Yilan Autumn	Yilan County Government ( <a href="https://www.ygiff2018.com">https://www.ygiff2018.com</a> )
16	Youth Film Festival ( <i>qingchun yingzhan</i> )	2004	Kaohsiung April-May	Kaohsiung Film Archive ( <a href="https://www.facebook.com/yffkfa">https://www.facebook.com/yffkfa</a> )
17	Purple Ribbon Film Festival ( <i>zi sidai dianyingjie</i> )	2005-2010	Taipei	Taipei County Government ( <a href="http://dodobear.pixnet.net/blog/post/29436411-2010">http://dodobear.pixnet.net/blog/post/29436411-2010</a> 第六屆紫絲帶電影節-周旭薇導演最新力作)
18	Iron Horse Film Festival ( <i>tiema yingzhan</i> )	2005	Taipei	National Labour Union and Taipei City Government ( <a href="https://www.facebook.com/SJFilmFestival/">https://www.facebook.com/SJFilmFestival/</a> )

	renamed Social Justice Film Festival ( <i>shehui gongyi yingzhan</i> )			
19	CNEX Documentary Film Festival ( <i>CNEX jilupian zhuti yingzhan</i> )	2007	Taipei September	CNEX Beijing, CNEX Hong Kong, CNEX Taipei ( <a href="http://www.cnex.org.tw/index.php">http://www.cnex.org.tw/index.php</a> )
20	Golden Horse Fantastic Film Festival ( <i>jin ma qihuan yingzhan</i> )	2010	Taipei April	Golden Horse Film Festival and Awards Committee ( <a href="http://www.goldenhorse.org.tw/ghfff/about/overview/">http://www.goldenhorse.org.tw/ghfff/about/overview/</a> )
21	KuanDu International Animation Festival (	2011	Kuandu, Taipei October- November	National Taipei University of Arts ( <a href="http://kdiat.tnua.edu.tw/zh-tw">http://kdiat.tnua.edu.tw/zh-tw</a> )
21	Taoyuan Film Festival	2013	Taoyuan August- September	Taoyuan Cultural Foundation ( <a href="http://tyff.taoyuancf.org.tw">http://tyff.taoyuancf.org.tw</a> )

	<i>(Taoyuan dianyingjie)</i>			
22	Taiwan International Queer Film Festival <i>(Taiwan guoji kuer yingzhan)</i>	2014	Taipei & Kaohsiung October	Taiwan International Media and Education Association <a href="https://www.tiqff.com/about">https://www.tiqff.com/about</a>

If we look at the listed organisers in more detail in Table 1, we observe that the film festivals in Taiwan, like most contemporary film festivals around the world, ‘are primarily administered and funded through public/private partnerships’ (Rhyne, 2013: 136). This means that most of the film festival organisers ‘have adopted the institutional structure of the non-profit organisation, a unique formation that may or may not receive funding from the state but participates in the kind of service provision and cultural management that has historically been the exclusive domain of governments’ (Rhyne, 2013: 136).

Another key characteristic that we witness from Table 1 is the varied issues/concerns (e.g. women, children, youth, labour, green/environment, domestic violence, and LGBT), genres (e.g. documentary, animation, 16mm, and ethnography), and geographical locations (covering from the north, the middle, to the south of Taiwan) that these film festivals represent. Once we combine these film festivals and discuss them as a whole, it can be argued that the festivals listed in Table 1 embody the ‘vertical mosaic’ of Taiwan as a multicultural society (Iordanova, 2010: 17). Moreover, the fact that several Taiwanese cities host their own

film festivals (e.g. Taipei, Kaohsiung, Taichung, Yilan, and Taoyuan) also demonstrates each city government's desire to use festivals as sites of competition and tools of city branding.

To examine these film festivals individually, among Table 1 the Golden Horse Film Festivals and Awards remain the most prominent, which continues to be dominated by high-end productions and movie stars and promotes Chinese-language cinemas as a glamorous business. Meanwhile, three relatively new film festivals deserve our attention: (1) Woman Make Waves Film Festival (*Taiwan guoji nüxing yingzhan*), founded in 1993, dedicated to the cinematic arts by female talent both in Taiwan and abroad. It is the third longest running film festival in Taiwan and has nurtured many local female directors and festival programmers; (2) the Taipei Film Festival (*Taipei dianying jie*), established in 1998, has been credited for its artistic vision. It often awards projects that are not necessarily popular commercially but which have cultural and aesthetic merit. The festival has been recognised by scholars as a valid attempt to build Taipei as a cinematic global city (Chen, 2011: 142-153); and (3) the International Student Golden Lion Award (*Guoji xuesheng dianying jin shi jiang*), established in 1999 and accepting works only from students, became an important film circuit for the younger generation.<sup>4</sup> Although the Golden Lion Award ceased in 2011, its creation signalled the recognition of the importance to nurture young talent, which echoes the remit of the Golden Harvest Awards.

The importance of the Golden Harvest Awards has been increasing in recent years. According to my interview with the former director of the Taiwan Film Institute (TFI), Professor Lin Wen-chi, the total budget for the Award was NTD 8 million (c. GBP 157,108) in 2010; it dropped to NTD 7.73 million (c. GBP 151,806) in 2011 and NTD 6.90 million (c. GBP 135,506) in 2012, but then jumped to NTD 10 million (c. GBP 196,385) in 2013. This figure has remained to the present day. I suggest that the increase in budget in 2013 may be explained by two inter-related factors: (1) the then newly created Ministry of Culture

indicated that the Taiwan government, alongside the Chinese government, began to see ‘culture’ as a valuable resource to demonstrate a country’s soft power (Rawnsley, 2008: 276–285); and (2) cinema was considered a viable asset within Taiwan’s soft power strategy (Rawnsley, 2012: 121–135). Hence the Ministry of Culture does not only devote a relatively healthy budget to the Golden Harvest Awards, but also initiates a series of new Spotlight Taiwan programmes which often includes a film festival-like event to showcase Taiwan cinema abroad (Rawnsley, 2014b; Rawnsley, 2014c). In the next section, I shall discuss film festivals outside Taiwan, including Spotlight Taiwan Program in more detail.

### **Overseas Film Festivals Relevant to Taiwan**

Taiwan was not particularly active in the international film festival arena until the 1980s. In earlier decades, Asia-Pacific Film Festival (APFF) was a major international platform in which the Taiwan film industry participated because the ROC was one of its seven founding members.<sup>5</sup> In an article published elsewhere, I explained how the GIO was in charge of taking film delegates from Taiwan to attend the APFF during the 1970s (Rawnsley, 2014a). Under such circumstances, Taiwan performed quite well at the APFF. For example, Taipei hosted the festival several times and was a regular winner for the Best Actor, Best Actress, and Best Picture awards over the years. However, the Asia-Pacific Film Festival, established in 1954, was considered by critics ‘the oldest festival in the world no one knows about’ (Abe Mark Nornes, cited in Iordanova, 2011: 11). In other words, while the ROC on Taiwan’s engagement in APFF was quite apparently a state-led cultural diplomacy initiative at the height of Cold War, such activity did not necessarily create as much international cultural capital that the ROC government might have wished for.

The rise of Taiwan New Cinema in the early 1980s marked the beginning when Taiwan cinema started to attract serious attention internationally. For example, the Venice Film

Festival (VFF) gave the Golden Lion for Hou Hsiao-hsien's *A City of Sadness* (*Beiqing chengshi*) in 1989—the first major award given to a Taiwanese film—which paved the way for a successful relationship between the VFF and Taiwan cinema. As film festival scholar and VFF insider Elena Pollacchi has stated:

The 1990s were years of cultural discoveries for [European] film festivals. Films from mainland China and Taiwan established their prominent position within major festivals [...] in Europe [...]. In 1994, the Golden Lion award to Tsai Ming-liang's *Vive l'amour* (*Aiqing wansui*) confirmed the Venice festival's special attention towards auteurs from Taiwan. Moreover, thanks to the European arthouse distribution system, which was well in place at that time, Taiwanese films received theatrical distribution and helped establish a certain line of Taiwan cinema that came to be identified mainly with such directors as Hou Hsiao-hsien, Ang Lee and Tsai Ming-liang. Within the Italian media landscape of the 1990s, these three filmmakers, together with the Fifth Generation of mainland Chinese directors, first and foremost Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige, composed the emerging image of 'Chinese cinema'. The distinction between productions from Taiwan, Hong Kong and the People's Republic of China (PRC) was principally specified in festival catalogues, occasionally sparking some debate on the way countries were listed, in particular Taiwan and Hong Kong prior to the 1997 handover (2017: 39).

This means when Taiwan began producing artistically interesting and culturally challenging films from the 1980s onwards, Taiwan cinema and their auteurs—that is, Taiwan's soft power asset—became increasingly significant players in the international arthouse film circles. On the back of this development, more and more innovative film-related cultural

activities were planned and carried out by different foreign institutions, often with some financial input from Taiwan. Therefore, even though Taiwan's annual government budget for culture was less than 1 percent, observers have recognised the importance of film festivals featured in Taiwan's cultural diplomacy strategies (Jordanova, 2010: 19).

In this section, I divide the international film festivals relevant to Taiwan's cultural diplomacy into three types: (1) Established festivals which do not focus on Taiwan, but there is potential for Taiwan to create cultural diplomacy value for itself by participating in them, such as Venice, Cannes, and Berlin film festivals, etc. I shall use the *Taipei Factory* film project at Cannes and Venice as examples; (2) Taiwan-focused film festivals organised overseas by institutions in the host country with a direct input from Taipei representative offices overseas. I shall use Japan as a case study for more detailed explanation; and (3) Taiwan film festivals organised by foreign institutions with some financial support from Taiwan's government cultural agencies. The Spotlight Taiwan Program, which supports many Taiwan-themed film festival-like events all over the world in this way, will be the focus of the discussion.

### ***I. The Taipei Factory Project at the Cannes and Venice Film Festivals***

As Jordanova (2011: 3) has pointed out, several western film festivals are 'known as discovery sites for new East Asian cinema'. The first tier of such festivals is Rotterdam, the Far East Fest in Udine, and Vancouver; and the second tier includes Toronto, Venice, Locarno, Berlinale's Forum, and the Hawaii International Film Festival. Taiwan cinema generates a degree of international cultural credentials by simply being a regular and strong presence in these prestigious international film galas.

In addition to participating in the official competition of the festivals, which is decided by each festival's organisers, Elena Pollacchi discovered that major festivals, such as Venice

and Cannes, have in recent years become more willing to expand suitable opportunities without interfering their main events to accommodate different foreign institutions' needs for some form of public diplomacy. For example, Pollacchi highlighted two omnibus film projects sponsored by Taiwanese governmental offices: '*Taipei Factory*, which opened the Director's Fortnight in Cannes 2013, and *Taipei Factory II*, the first Italian-Taiwanese co-production, a "special screening" of the Venice Film Festival 2014' (2017: 40). These two film projects deserve our attention because they indicate the changing and unchanged practices in European film festivals on the one hand, and the fresh approaches that Taiwan takes to perform cultural diplomacy by working with international and local film industries on the other hand.

According to Pollacchi, *Taipei Factory* (2013–2014) was state-industry cooperation which aimed to increase the presence of Taiwan film activities at major film festivals. She wrote:

The project's main sponsor and organiser was the Taipei Film Commission, the semi-governmental office for film activities under the leadership of the city mayor and different film commissioners from the film industry. In the three years during which the project was conceived and developed, the Taipei Film Commission was also very active in the promotion of Taiwan film activities at international film festivals. In addition to its institutional role of supporting films shot in Taipei and promoting the capital city as a film location, the Taipei Film Commission regularly organised social events during all major festivals to celebrate talents from Taiwan and make them visible to international press and festival guests.<sup>6</sup> The *Taipei Factory* project was conceived as a series of omnibus films directed by up-and-coming Taiwanese filmmakers in collaboration with international directors and actors. This

set of works should premiere at major international festivals, as international visibility and promotion of Taiwan as an attractive film business partner would balance the significant state investments. The project was quite ambitious since it aimed at securing the festival premiere during the early stages of production by means of agreements with different festivals. The two completed omnibus films provide an interesting attempt to guarantee visibility for Taiwan cinema while profiling Taiwan as a site for international collaborations (2017: 46).

As a result, *Taipei Factory I* enjoyed its premier at the Cannes Directors' Fortnight in May 2013 as the funder anticipated, received a positive response from the audience, and stimulated energetic discussions about Taiwan cinema (Taipei Film Commission, 2013).

*Taipei Factory II*, which was conceived as the first Italian-Taiwanese co-production, was not able to secure a slot in the official selection due to the VFF's submission policy. The final film was presented instead as an independent special screening at the 2014 Venice Film Festival and then a few months later at the Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival in November 2014 (Pollacchi, 2017: 48).

Depending on perspectives, there may be different views on how effective the *Taipei Factory* project really was as a cultural diplomacy tool. If one focuses on the artistic and/or commercial values of the final product, then the reviews for *Taipei Factory I* at Cannes might be a little disappointing: 'There is unquestionable budding talent on show here, but overall *Taipei Factory* feels like a worthy cross-cultural experiment that gets lost in translation' (Dalton, 2013). Meanwhile *Taipei Factory II* only received a limited theatrical circulation in Taiwan. Moreover, from the festival organisers' point of view, Pollacchi's overall assessment of the *Taipei Factory* project was that '[s]uch activities fit well in the

framework of current film market activities but appear at odd with the presentation at festivals such as Cannes and Venice' (2017: 48).

Nevertheless, even though the impact of *Taipei Factory* among media and audiences did not go beyond festival venues, the experience of the project helped mobilise talent from Taiwan and their partner countries and circulated images of cross-cultural encounters. As Pollacchi has stressed:

Regardless of its artistic achievements, a project such as *Taipei Factory II* might resonate positively within the Italian and European networks of film professionals. This is a factor that festivals might take into consideration when programming such films, as this responds to the current festival paradigm of serving the needs of the film industry (2017: 48).

In other words, if we agree that cultural diplomacy should have different short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals, then Taiwan's effort in promoting cross-cultural collaboration in international festivals and cultivating local film talent by broadening their international experience and outlook may exercise a longer-term impact which are more profound than initially realised.

## ***II. Screening Taiwan in Japan***

In addition to a state-industry initiative like the *Taipei Factory* project introduced in the previous section, Taiwan also engages in state-led film exhibitions overseas as part of its comprehensive cultural diplomacy programme. I shall discuss how Taiwan government has been institutionalising Taiwan film festivals in Japan since the 1980s as an example to

illuminate this practice based on much of the study conducted by film festival researcher Ran Ma (2017: 53–68).

In 1985, the GIO managed to launch the ROC Film Festival and toured six Taiwanese films in Tokyo and Osaka for over two weeks with the help of the Motion Picture Producers Association of Japan when the KMT government lifted a ten-year ban on the import of Japanese films to Taiwan in January 1984 (Huang, 2014: 134). As Ma commented:

This hard-won film festival in Japan, with the designation of ‘ROC’ in its title and the appearance of the GIO’s deputy director at the opening ceremony in Japan, was intended to foreground Taiwan as an independent entity, separate from the PRC, in a diplomatic context (2017: 59–60).

Understandably the event prompted serious protest from Beijing. After much negotiation and compromise between Japan and Beijing, and Japan and Taipei respectively, the second ROC Film Festival did not take place until 1988 and the third ROC Film Festival never materialised (Ma, 2017: 60).

From the 1990s onwards, the GIO (abolished in 2013 and part of its functions were assumed by the Ministry of Culture) has changed tactics by collaborating with a variety of Taiwanese and/or Japanese cultural and industrial organisations to ‘develop a “Taiwan Film Festival” (TFF) into a steady, flexible programming theme that has been launched either as an independent event or a sidebar attached to a Japanese international festival’ (Ma, 2017: 60). As Ma has noted, ‘through co-organising and co-sponsoring such events, the ROC cultural authorities have in effect delegated the TFF theme to localised bodies such as a one-off festival executive committee or the festivals themselves’ (2017: 60).

This strategy enables Taiwan's overseas representative offices to maximise policy trends and cultural nuances of their host country for mutual benefit. For example, in 2015 a 'Taiwan Film Festival' took place in the city of Jōetsu, Niigata, which

showcased a mixture of six productions made after 2008, including *Kano* (2014), a box-office hit directed by Umin Boya and produced by Wei Te-sheng, reminiscing the first high school baseball team, Kano, from the then colony Taiwan that made into the final round of the national-level high-school baseball championship in 1931. This Jōetsu exhibition orchestrated the participation of the ROC's Ministry of Culture, Taiwan Culture Center and a Jōetsu-based NPO for urban regeneration. Though run by an independent festival committee, this event was opened by the speech from the head of Taiwan Culture Center, and the mayor of the Jōetsu city. This remote but historic city was chosen also because when the Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek was serving the Imperial Japanese Army in 1908, his division was based at Takada, a region currently merged into Jōetsu (Ma, 2017: 61).

This has echoed what Dina Iordanova (2010: 17) has observed: 'festivals that are organized with the blessing of governmental and publicly-backed NGOs stand a better chance of visibility and of promoting their causes in the public sphere'. Clearly a cultural diplomacy initiative is most effective when it can be backed by Taiwan and the host country's official or semi-official infrastructure and policy goals. However, not all host countries can be as receptive as Japan in the above examples to Taiwan's cultural diplomacy needs at all times. Therefore, the Taiwanese cultural authorities have developed a Spotlight Taiwan Program since 2013 to encourage foreign cultural and academic institutions to apply for funding and to design and organise their own Taiwan-themed cultural events. As the participating institution

can enjoy considerable creative and administrative autonomy when they receive funding, Spotlight Taiwan Program has witnessed over the past six years a wide range of Taiwan-focused cultural exhibitions, activities, and film festivals all over the world.

### *III. Spotlight Taiwan Program*

This section requires further research to offer more up to date information regarding the quantity, quality, and the impact of Spotlight Taiwan projects worldwide.

Generally speaking, when the Ministry of Culture was first established in 2013, it received a large private donation from a Taiwanese-American citizen, Dr Samuel Yin. The then Minister of Culture, Lung Ying-tai, decided to use this fund to enable willing foreign institutions to organise a series of Taiwan-themed cultural activities in the applicants' countries for their fellow citizens. Such an initiative resulted in an explosion of international nonstate actor-led cultural events on Taiwan in numerous locations in the globe. When the private fund ran out a couple of years ago, the Ministry of Culture incorporated Spotlight Taiwan Program into its regular annual budget plans and thus enabled the funding scheme to continue.

Most of the Spotlight Taiwan projects were several-months-to-one-year-long programmes. For example, University of Edinburgh's 'Contemporary Taiwanese Art, Culture and Cinema in Scotland' in 2013 included a lecture series and art forum. One of its major activities was the Taiwan Filmfest from 27 November to 3 December 2013, showcasing seven new films and documentaries from Taiwan in local cinemas in Edinburgh. Three filmmakers, Shen Ko-shang (沈可尚), Tsai Yin-chuan (蔡銀娟) and Chang Jung-chi (張榮吉) were invited to the festival to meet with audiences in Scotland. The three filmmakers also attended and delivered a talk each at the 'Taiwan in Motion' Workshop at the university. They were followed by a speech on 'Culture, Democratization and Taiwan Cinema'

(Rawnsley, 2014b). The success of the Edinburgh events led to the establishment of a more permanent Taiwan Academy, which every year brings contemporary Taiwanese arts, culture and cinema to audiences in Scotland.<sup>7</sup>

The Centre of Taiwan Studies (CTS) of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London also hosted a series of eleven Taiwan film screenings from November 2013 to March 2014 as part of their Spotlight Taiwan programme, ‘Understanding Taiwan through Film and Documentaries’. The Programme Director at SOAS, Dr Dafydd Fell, explained that he intended to integrate these film screenings into the Centre’s teaching curriculum. Thus not only were the venues located deliberately within the university instead of local cinemas, but also the selection of documentaries outnumbered feature films. Moreover, Dr Fell acknowledged that he used films primarily as text to help students understand contemporary Taiwan. Therefore, he paid particular attention to the social and political issues addressed in a film.

As the eleven film screenings were spread over five months, the ‘Understanding Taiwan through Film and Documentaries’ programme at SOAS should not be understood as a ‘film festival’ per se. However, it contained a film festival-like event on 10–14 February 2014, when five film screenings were scheduled across five days. Each screening was accompanied by a question and answer session with a filmmaker or a specialist, followed by an informal reception, and all the events were advertised and open to the public (Rawnsley, 2014c). Although ‘Understanding Taiwan through Film and Documentaries’ did not receive further funding from Spotlight Taiwan scheme after its initial period, CTS at SOAS continued to arrange Taiwan-themed film weeks as regular extra curriculum activities due to popular local demand.

To paraphrase Luke Robison (2017), cultural brokers act as a link to mediate the movement of people and goods across borders, while at the same time acting as the

‘translator’ for these goods and people, whether literally or figuratively, in multiple directions. This is to say that cultural brokers facilitate cultural movement across borders not only through network of contacts that bridge physical and legal borders, but also through their discursive ability to bridge linguistic and cultural borders. In this sense, all the Spotlight Taiwan projects can be explicitly positioned as ‘transcultural mediators’ because their programming—whether it focuses on ‘Contemporary Taiwanese Art, Culture and Cinema in Scotland’ (Edinburgh), ‘Understanding Taiwan through Film and Documentaries’ (SOAS), or ‘A Study on Taiwan Indigenous Culture’ (Estonia)<sup>8</sup>—is defined by a particular cultural or ethnic perspective (this is not to deny that Taiwanese society is in fact multicultural and includes a variety of ethnic groups).

Moreover, it is worth noting that there are several stakeholders in Spotlight Taiwan projects: Firstly, Taiwan’s Ministry of Culture and overseas cultural bureaus are the principle stakeholders as they set a policy framework and provide financial support. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that policymakers and government administrators do not seem to assume a directive role in the process. This is an imperative marker when assessing the impact of the Spotlight Taiwan Program as a whole. Secondly, the role of the project directors (i.e. cultural brokers) of individual Spotlight Taiwan initiatives is highly important; and it may be fruitful to situate these cultural brokers within their respective institutions instead of seeing them as isolated individuals. Hence within this set of stakeholders, each cultural broker brings into the Spotlight Taiwan cluster different institution dynamics. Third, while films feature prominently within many Spotlight Taiwan programmes, filmmakers often appear merely minor stakeholders. This apparent contradiction may be indicative of the nature of the Spotlight Taiwan Program and its nuanced differences from the more conventional diaspora and international film festivals. More specifically, many Spotlight Taiwan film festivals are more inclined toward cultural diplomacy/cultural exchange events instead of cinephile,

industry, or filmmaker-oriented events. Fourth, local cultural institutions (including local cinemas) may be another stakeholder in some of the Spotlight Taiwan programmes; and the fifth stakeholders are invited guests, observers and participants/audiences.

Are we able to measure the short-term, medium-term or long-term impact of Spotlight Taiwan? Clearly audience research will be crucial to answer these questions. However, while quantitative data will be able to offer an overview, a qualitative analysis may be equally useful in unpacking the complex dimensions of the sociocultural influences that the Spotlight Taiwan Program aims to achieve.

Given the difficulties facing Taiwan's international status, perhaps it should be argued that the Spotlight Taiwan Program is the island's attempt to claim a cultural presence in the international cultural space rather than an aggressive strategy to contest the status quo. From this perspective, in their study of how to evaluate soft power, Christopher Hill and Sarah Beadle (2014: 12) may have suggested appropriate solutions: it is 'best done through a qualitative focus on the structural assets or weaknesses of a given country, which governments deploy with greater or lesser intelligence and degrees of priority in relation to harder forms of power'. Hill and Beadle explain that a government has three options in doing this: traditional diplomacy, public diplomacy, and to work with private associations in a state-private network (2014: 12). As the Spotlight Taiwan Program leans towards the state-private network approach, the elements which constitute such networks may provide us with tantalizing clues to unlock some of the challenging issues of measuring impact and understanding how 'soft power', or perhaps 'cultural diplomacy' is a more suitable term in the context of this article, works.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has discussed different types of film festivals in and about Taiwan, together with their relevance to Taiwan's cultural diplomacy and soft power. While film festivals outside Taiwan may have more direct cultural diplomacy values than domestic film festivals, it is important to highlight that film festivals within Taiwan are crucial in their capacity to cultivate Taiwan's film talent, as well as to promote film education and cinema culture as a whole. It can be argued that film festivals in Taiwan are vital in accumulating cinema as an asset of Taiwan's soft power. Without such assets, Taiwan cinema or international film festivals will not be as effective a tool for the island's cultural diplomacy.

The way the Taiwanese cultural authorities utilise international film festivals to further their public diplomacy ambitions is increasingly innovative and impactful. For example, the *Taipei Factory* project at Cannes and Venice represents a state-industry collaboration; the ROC Film Festival/Taiwan Film Festival in Japan was a state-NGO cooperative model; and the Spotlight Taiwan Program symbolises a formation of state-private or state-nonstate actor relationship.

As Carla Figueira (2020) noted, scholars have recognised that state-centric public diplomacy (PD) alone can rarely achieve effective PD outcomes, particularly in the long-term, due to public scepticism and distrust of state agencies. Therefore, the involvement of nonstate actors and individuals becomes important in helping realise PD goals because they 'are more credible in the eyes of the foreign publics engaged' (Ayhan, 2019: 67). Gienow-Hecht (2010) also argues that increased distance between the agent and a political or economic agenda, as well as having an interactive structure, are factors that contribute to the success of a cultural diplomacy programme. Moreover, this partnership approach between state and nonstate actors—e.g. industries, NGOs, individual cultural brokers discussed in this paper—sits well with the overall prospective for the future of diplomacy as proposed by Hocking et al. through the framework of integrative diplomacy that stresses 'the importance of collaboration

between professional diplomats and the representatives of a variety of international actors’ (2012: 5).

In addition to what Edward Murrow has termed ‘the last three feet’ (cited in Rawnsley 2018),<sup>9</sup> Taiwan’s active involvement in international film festivals can potentially further achieve two fundamental foreign policy objectives: (1) ensure a favourable environment for Taiwan’s preservation and long-term development; and (2) foster good relations with other state actors, which is clearly expressed in article 141 of the constitution:

the foreign policy of the Republic of China shall . . . cultivate good-neighborliness with other nations, and respect treaties and the Charter of the United Nations, . . . promote international cooperation, advance international justice and ensure world peace (Department of Policy Planning, 2016)

Considering Taiwan’s lack of formal diplomatic ties in the international arena and the ongoing threat from the PRC, the simple re-stating of the existence of Taiwan and expression of her cultural values and soft power in any international dimension will be invaluable for enhancing the country’s foreign policy and long-term survival.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is an extension of my previous research project on film festivals, published in 2017, ‘Cultural Translation between “Local” and “International”: The Golden Harvest Award in Taiwan’, in Chris Berry & Luke Robinson (eds), *Chinese Film Festivals: Sites of Translation*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 57–78. The focuses of the two papers are different, but they share much similar basic information. I have ensured that the material is updated where appropriate.

<sup>2</sup> The Golden Rooster Awards were established in 1981 by the China Film Association. In 1992 the Golden Rooster and the Hundred Flowers Awards (*bai hua jiang*) were combined into a single national film festival with the two awards taking place on alternate years since 2005. The Golden Rooster has traditionally been hosted by different Chinese cities until in 2019 when it was announced that the awards will be rooted in Xiamen for at least 12 years (Xiamen University, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.taiwancinema.com/FilmFestivals> (accessed 11 August 2019, in Chinese).

<sup>4</sup> My interview with filmmaker Shen Ko-shang, Taipei, 5 July 2014. Shen was once a participant and awardee of the Golden Lion Award, and later he also acted as a jury member.

<sup>5</sup> The founding members of the Asia-Pacific Film Festival in 1953/1954 were: Japan, ROC, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand.

<sup>6</sup> The function, structures and roles of the Taipei Film Commission are strictly connected to domestic political strategies in relation to the film sector and involve both the Ministry of Culture and the Taipei City Government. In 2015, a change of commissioners and policies has made the international role of the Taipei Film Commission less prominent at foreign film festivals.

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<sup>7</sup> The Taiwan Academy in Scotland's official website is: <http://www.taiwan-academy.eca.ed.ac.uk/about/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.tlu.ee/en/spotlight-taiwan>

<sup>9</sup> It means that direct personal contact is the most effective and meaningful element of public diplomacy.