

FRAMING FILM
FESTIVALS

CHINESE FILM FESTIVALS

Sites of Translation

Edited by
Chris Berry and Luke Robinson



Framing Film Festivals

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Every day, somewhere in the world a film festival takes place. Most people know about the festival in Cannes, the worlds' leading film festival, and many will also be familiar with other high profile events, like Venice, the oldest festival; Sundance, America's vibrant independent scene; and Toronto, a premier market place. In the past decade the study of film festivals has blossomed. A growing number of scholars recognize the significance of film festivals for understanding cinema's production, distribution, reception and aesthetics, and their work has amounted to a prolific new field in the study of film culture. The Framing Film Festivals series presents the best of contemporary film festival research. Books in the series are academically rigorous, socially relevant, contain critical discourse on festivals, and are intellectually original. Framing Film Festivals offers a dedicated space for academic knowledge dissemination.

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Chinese Film Festivals

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Framing Film Festivals

ISBN 978-1-137-55480-2

ISBN 978-1-137-55016-3 (eBook)

DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-55016-3

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017930826

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Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature

The registered company is Nature America Inc.

The registered company address is: 1 New York Plaza, New York, NY 10004, U.S.A.

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Introduction

Chris Berry and Luke Robinson

Chinese Film Festivals: Sites of Translation is the product of a year-long international research network on Chinese Film Festival Studies.¹ It is the first book about the so far relatively neglected topic of Chinese film festivals, defined as film festivals in the Chinese-speaking world *and* festivals of Chinese cinema held elsewhere. The chapters in the volume are bound together not only by their object of study, but also by a shared approach to film festivals as “sites of translation.” The film festival has always been imagined as a translation machine—a window on the world translating “foreign” cultures into “our” culture via the cinema, and vice versa. This logic underpins film festival programs, which often include a “panorama” presenting the best of the last year’s output from the host country, with the rest of the program divided up by country or region. As well as asking how Chinese film festivals translate culture, the chapters collected here also ask why the Chinese-speaking world has launched so many film festivals, what those film festivals are for, and what differences the translation

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of the festival model itself into Chinese contexts make to our understanding of film festivals in general.

In her 2007 foundational text, *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia*, Marijke de Valck notes “the global proliferation of film festivals in the 1980s and 1990s and the creation of the international film festival circuit.”² The Chinese-speaking world has become an ever more important part of that boom, and particularly in the last 20 years. Major comprehensive festivals like the Taipei Film Festival and the Beijing International Film Festival have been initiated, in 1998 and 2011, respectively, as well as a plethora of more specialized ones. Equally noticeable has been the growth in metropolitan centers on the global film festival circuit that showcase Chinese films. London alone hosted the Chinese Visual Festival, The Europe China Image Festival, and the Chinese International Film Festival in 2015.

De Valck also notes that, despite deep historical roots, “film festivals have been the blind spot of film historical research for such a long time.”³ In the last few years, that general situation has turned around. One indicator of this change is the burgeoning bibliography maintained online by the Film Festivals Research Network, which, at the time of writing, has 11 different sections and various sub-divisions.⁴ Another is that, after directing the production of a series of yearbooks, Dina Iordanova was able to edit *The Film Festival Reader* in 2013.⁵

Yet, if it is no longer possible to claim that research on film festivals is a blind spot in Film Studies, Chinese film festivals remain a blind spot in Film Festival Studies. In her 2011 monograph, Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong pointed out that the field is overwhelmingly Eurocentric, and that, despite its seminal intervention and undeniable significance, this is also true of de Valck’s book.⁶ Indeed, the only Asian festivals to get a mention in de Valck’s monograph are Pusan and Tokyo. Academic attention to East Asian film festivals in general and Chinese ones in particular has, until recently, been confined to scattered articles and book chapters.⁷ Wong’s monograph, with its global scope and special focus on the Hong Kong International Film Festival, was an important step forward, as was SooJeong Ahn’s monograph on the Busan (formerly Pusan) International Film Festival, and Dina Iordanova and Ruby Cheung’s anthology on East Asian film festivals.⁸

This book extends the recent emergence of scholarship on East Asian film festivals by focusing on Chinese film festivals in particular. It not only aims to help fill a gap in scholarship, further challenge Eurocentrism, and

develop a new area of academic research. It also opens up the question of what is distinctive or different about Chinese film festivals. If the spread of film festival culture around the world is an aspect of globalization, then is there anything new to say? Are not Chinese film festivals just like any other, but in a different place, or featuring a different set of films? Already over 20 years ago, Appadurai challenged the fantasy that globalization was making the world a perfectly smooth space of untrammelled flows in “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy.”⁹ As things flow, they encounter what is already in the places they traverse, changing and being changed in the process. The dynamics of localization were the starting point for our research network and the chapters collected here, and we approach them through the lens of translation.

Translation is an appropriate conceptual framework for our project precisely because, like Appadurai’s insights into globalization, it is theorized and understood as being about border-crossing and the inevitability of change in that process. In his famous 1921 essay, “The Task of the Translator,” Walter Benjamin rejects the ideal of fidelity as a lost cause. He writes about the German and French words for “bread” that, “In the words *Brot* and *pain*, what is meant is the same, but the way of meaning it is not. This difference in the way of meaning permits the word *Brot* to mean something other to a German than what the word *pain* means to a Frenchman.”¹⁰ The Berlin International Film Festival and the Beijing International Film Festival may both be “film festivals,” but, we ask, is what a “film festival” means to a German cinephile something other than what it means to a Chinese cinephile?

Furthermore, translation is not innocent of power dynamics. Lydia Liu’s *Translingual Practice* and *Tokens of Exchange* are the seminal texts on the understanding of translation in the Chinese experience of modernity.¹¹ She argues that while translation has been a response to the threat of colonization in which the flow has been primarily into China, that response has also been one of Chinese appropriation and transformation of those imports. These observations hold true to this day in the film festival world. For example, while the very model of the film festival is a foreign import, the frequent naming of local festivals with the local word for “exhibition” (*zhan*) rather than “festival” (*jie*) in the People’s Republic suggests an ongoing process of local and strategic adaptation to the local regulatory framework, where different bodies regulate “*zhan*” and “*jie*.”¹² Furthermore, the growing importance of film to China’s “soft power” drive means that Chinese cinema is increasingly imbricated in questions

of cultural diplomacy, both unofficial and official. The ways in which Chinese-language film festivals frame “Chinese cinema” for the foreign viewer, and why they do so, are thus also issues this volume addresses.

We understand translation in this volume as a transformative and trans-border practice of power that operates in two ways: to translate culture and to translate the film festival as idea and practice. On this foundation, we ask a variety of questions. How do Chinese film festivals translate foreign cultures into Chinese-speaking environments through their screenings and other activities? How do Chinese film festivals translate Chinese cultures to the outside world and to each other? How do Chinese film festivals translate the Western-derived concept and practice of the “film festival” into Chinese cultural environments? If the film festival was born and developed in the context of European national rivalries and anxieties about Hollywood, what are its functions in the Chinese-speaking world today? What different models of the film festival are being generated in Chinese contexts, and how can our scholarship translate those models back into global debates about what the film festival might become in the twenty-first century, already hailed by some as “the Chinese century”?

This understanding of translation and these questions structure the division of *Chinese Film Festivals: Sites of Translation* into two sections. The first considers how the concepts and practices of film festivals are translated in the Chinese-speaking world and the holding of Chinese-language cinema festivals outside it. The second focuses on how these festivals are sites for the translation of culture. Each of these two large sections addresses international film festivals in the Chinese-speaking world, specialized film festivals in the Chinese-speaking world, and Chinese-language film festivals outside the Chinese-speaking world. The sections are not hermetically sealed; many chapters deal with both the translation of the film festival model and culture. Nor are they evenly sized. And, while we cover Taiwan, Hong Kong, the People’s Republic of China, and cities that hold Chinese film festivals outside the Chinese-speaking world, we have not attempted even or comprehensive coverage, either. Rather, the coverage has been shaped by the scholarship currently being undertaken. Nevertheless, we hope the structure will facilitate negotiation of the volume.

In the first section, “Translating the Film Festival,” the first chapters on international film festivals in the Chinese-speaking world are by Chris Berry, Elena Pollacchi, and Ming-Yeh T. Rawnsley. Berry compares the history of the Hong Kong and Shanghai festivals to demonstrate how local configurations of stakeholders translate the practice of the international film festival into the local contexts and change over time as those

configurations change. Pollacchi focuses on the relatively new Beijing International Film Festival as a new “reputational” model of a film festival, and Rawnsley looks at the Golden Harvest Awards in Taiwan as undergoing “festivalization” during, and as a manifestation of, Taiwan’s democratization.

In the chapters on specialized film festivals in the Chinese-speaking world, both Hongwei Bao and Flora Lichaa investigate independent film festivals in the People’s Republic of China that have run into trouble with the authorities and had to adjust their practice to survive: the Beijing Queer Film Festival and the Beijing Independent Film Festival. Julian Stringer and Nikki Lee write about the Tudou Video Festival, sponsored by the Chinese equivalent of YouTube, and its efforts to draw on the Sundance International Film Festival to pioneer a hybrid online/offline festival. Esther C.M. Yau considers how activist film festivals have been shaped by their role in developing a culture of participation in post-handover Hong Kong, and Sabrina Qiong Yu and Lydia Dan Wu analyze how the China Independent Film Festival in Nanjing has localized its model of operation to avoid the kinds of difficulties encountered by festivals like the Beijing Queer and Beijing Independent festivals.

Finally, on festivals of Chinese cinema outside the Chinese-speaking world, Luke Robinson’s chapter on such festivals in London emphasizes how the model of the festival is adapted to allow a sole trader and his or her interests to take a crucial role in its operation.

In the second section, the focus is more on the translation of culture. However, as mentioned before, we also need to acknowledge that this is not absent from the first section. For example, Robinson’s closing chapter in the first section also emphasizes the role of those sole traders as cultural brokers selecting and presenting cultures across borders. In the chapters on international festivals, Dina Iordanova’s chapter reflects on different types of Chinese festivals and how they narrate “China” in different ways, often correcting other impressions. Ran Ma focuses on how the Hong Kong and Shanghai Film Festivals program “China,” analyzing how their differences can be attributed to the different assemblages of local determinations that they operate within. Finally, in this part, Gina Marchetti takes the case study of Clara Law’s *Red Earth* as a “festival film” commissioned by the Hong Kong International Film Festival to analyze how its representation of the city is linked to its role for the festival.

Turning to specialized festivals, Jenny Chio examines the role of the Yunnan Multi Culture Visual Festival, or Yunfest, in training rural communities to produce video that translates their cultures for urban viewers,

interrogating to what extent the dreams of “dialogue” are realized and also emphasizing how the rural filmmakers translate the expectations of Yunfest in their own ways. Focusing on Hong Kong, Su-Anne Yeo examines connections between small film festivals across borders as constituting a “minor transnationalism” that challenges the cultural imagery that is usually traded by larger entities.

A chapter by Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong closes the second section and concludes the book. She examines three very different Chinese film festivals held in New York to show how each has a different idea of China that it wants to promote, and how these ideas have changed over the years.

Taking the collection as a whole, certain themes and issues cut across and emerge as setting agendas for further research. First, film festivals emerge from the research here as singular iterations of models and practices circulating globally on the “circuit”: what are the implications of these insights for future research methods? Second, the distinctiveness of Chinese-language contexts produces and highlights a series of new film festival concepts and practices: how unique are these to the Chinese-speaking world? And, finally, the Chinese-speaking world is one where liberalism, capitalism, and parliamentary democracy are far from taken for granted, and this raises once again fundamental questions about the purpose of film festivals: are they there only to serve the material interests of various stakeholder configurations, or do they lose all credibility unless they are also the places where cinema becomes part of public life? We will discuss each of these in a little more detail.

First, the understanding of translation as a localization underpinning the chapters in this volume emphasizes that, despite taking up various international models and practices, each film festival possesses a high degree of local specificity. Each of the film festivals that Robinson and Wong investigate in London and New York presents a very distinctive image of Chinese-language culture, according to their own particular investments and ideas. Each of the festivals that we look at in the Chinese-speaking world localizes the festival practices it adopts from the international circuit in different ways. Looking forward, this emphasis on singularity raises the issue of what methods are appropriate to develop the analysis of festival specificity further. All the chapters here are informed by attendance at the festivals in question. Do we need to adopt the more elaborated and formal techniques of anthropology and ethnography, such as participant observation, and embedding ourselves within film festival organizations, if we want to give this work greater depth? Or, as Jordanova’s discussion of “stakeholder

configurations” here suggests, do we also need to adopt political economy? Can we imagine a more formal methodology for analyzing individual festival practices, requiring sampling of a number of question and answer sessions, analyzing the ticket-buying experience for an ordinary member of the public, and joining up as a volunteer and taking field-notes to gain insights into the experience from the organizer side of the fence? Would research always have to be comparative to determine where local specificity lies?

Second, the distinctiveness of the Chinese-speaking world leads the chapters in this book to introduce a series of new ideas into the field of Film Festival Studies and raise the question of where similar patterns can be found elsewhere. Three themes emerge here: relations to industry; alternative practices for running festivals; and the question of the film festival circuit. In regard to the relationship of film festivals to, and increasing participation in, the film industry, Pollacchi’s chapter on the emergence of the Beijing International Film Festival as a “reputational festival” is a good example. Here, the festival’s primary purpose is to give publicity opportunities to the industry, without even giving the public many chances to see actual films. A less extreme example, but an increasingly common practice, is examined in Marchetti’s chapter about films produced with support from and specifically for the Hong Kong International Film Festival. This example highlights the role of the festival as film producer in its own right and asking what sort of films might result from it: new cinephile favorites, sponsor puff pieces, or both? Lee and Stringer’s chapter on the Tudou Video Festival highlights not only the festival’s role in stimulating the production of films, but also the new online exhibition environment, opening up questions about how festivals as producers are pioneering new forms of cinematic work.

Other new practices in running film festivals in addition to Pollacchi’s “reputational festival” that emerge from the volume include Iordanova’s “cultural diplomacy,” “corrective,” and “business card” festivals. The second type is perhaps the one that we knew least about before. Here, the festival is driven by the desire to correct mainstream imagery. Rawnsley’s chapter is about the “festivalization” of the Golden Harvest Awards in Taiwan, where “festivalization” is part of a process of democratization and bringing the awards closer to the people. What other kinds of film events are being “festivalized” by having screenings and tours added, and what are the local reasons driving those changes? The coverage of independent festivals inside China by Lichaa, Bao, and Yu and Wu unveils a range of innovative methods for dealing with governments that regulate festivals

assertively, including evasive techniques ranging from changing venues to last-minute publicity and even private screenings, or ways of working with the authorities to enable a higher publicity profile and greater stability. How do festivals in other countries deal with intrusive governments? And Lee and Stringer's work on the Tudou Video Festival also raises the issue of the new venues and practices in the film festival world enabled by online environments. Are festivals in the Chinese-language world pioneering new models and practices in this regard?

Lee and Stringer's chapter also examines how the Tudou Video Festival not only models itself on but has also built specific links with the Sundance Film Festival. This raises the issue of the circuit. Or, to be more precise, perhaps we can conclude that the chapters here reveal that there are a number of circuits. These include the shared interests and commitments that link the festivals investigated by Yeo into an informal "minor transnational" network driven not by the pursuit of profit but by the promotion of alternative Chinese cultures. Robinson's work on the sole trader and the Chinese film festivals in London makes us think not only about the role of the determined individual in a small festival, but also how these individuals communicate, share, and compete in a larger framework. And, of course, specialized festivals like LGBTQ festivals or documentary festivals tend to participate in their own networks.

But perhaps the issue that comes up most strongly through the intersection of the chapters in the volume is the role of film festivals and public culture. Most of the early work on film festivals focused on liberal capitalist societies with a long tradition of civil society and public culture. However, it would be naïve to exaggerate the practice of film festivals as vectors of open public culture and participation, even in countries that subscribe to those ideals. Early film festival culture was driven by soft power from Mussolini's establishment of Venice, the Western world's support for Berlin, and the Soviet Bloc's patronage of Karlovy Vary. Business has always played a very big role at Cannes, with complex hierarchies and protocols closing most of the festival off to the public. But it is also the case that all these examples depend upon the interest of the public in the films being screened to maintain their credibility and give them a platform to realize their other goals.

Yet, already it seems that the very different environment in the Chinese-speaking world is challenging this assumed centrality of the public to the film festival. The People's Republic of China does not subscribe to the ideals of civil society and public debate, let alone full electoral democracy.

Hong Kong may at least nominally be operating under its pre-handover laws until 2046, but as a British colony, it was never a democratic society. And even in Taiwan, where public culture is robust, it is also relatively recent, given that the island was governed by martial law for 40 years until 1987. In these circumstances, the status of the film festival as public culture is unsurprisingly contested.

On the one hand, the “reputational festival” as discussed by both Pollacchi for Beijing and Berry for Shanghai raises the prospect of a film festival in which the films and the public are a low priority, to put it mildly. On the other hand, in the wake of the thwarted Umbrella Movement, Yau investigates how social activist film festivals in Hong Kong participate in social movements and enable audiences and volunteers to understand how citizenship is political participation. And Rawnsley’s chapter on “festivalization” places the phenomenon as part of a larger Taiwanese democratization, begging the question whether the proliferation of film festivals on the island in general should be seen as part of a post-martial law development of public culture. As almost all the chapters on specialized and small festivals here reveal that in one way or another, they are driven by an, at least, implicit vision of publicness as participation in deliberation, debates, and the determination of the social and cultural future. The results of trying to realize that vision can range from very difficult experiences like those of the Beijing Independent Film Festival, as discussed by Lichaa, and the Beijing Queer Film Festival, analyzed by Bao, to the empowering although not uncomplicated efforts to harness Yunfest to transcend the rural–urban divide, as explored by Chio. Outside the Chinese-speaking world, too, although there are few disputes between the festivals studied in New York by Wong and in London by Robinson, they embody very different ideas about what sort of culture Chinese culture is and can be.

These efforts to open up spaces of public debate extending far beyond the Chinese-speaking world. As we write this introduction, the Busan International Film Festival is in a struggle for survival after screening a documentary that offended the city and national government.¹³ And in 2015, after the government stopped the screening of a documentary about Kurdish PKK guerillas at the Istanbul International Film Festival, numerous filmmakers withdrew from the event, forcing the cancellation of its competition.¹⁴ In these circumstances, Chinese film festivals are not only proliferating, but also refocusing our attention on the ongoing struggle over the purpose of film festivals. Are they the spaces where cinema meets

its audience and becomes public culture? Or are they to be constrained as publicity events serving specific interest groups? Of course, no festival is totally one or the other. But the Chinese film festivals in this book are striving to prioritize one or other tendency in ways that once again spotlight the question of what larger purpose film festivals serve.

NOTES

1. We are grateful to acknowledge the support of the Arts and Humanities Research Council in the United Kingdom, whose generous support under the “Translating Cultures” theme made it possible for the members of the network to meet and also support a website for the duration of the project. We also thank Jasmine Lee Erhardt, who worked with us as an intern in the summer of 2015, helping with the copy-editing and preparation of the manuscript. Finally, we are grateful to all the authors for their active participation in the network, their patience with our work editing this book, and their commitment to the project.
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PART 1

Translating the Film Festival

Shanghai and Hong Kong: A Tale of Two Festivals

Chris Berry

The general issue animating the chapters in this volume concerns the specificity of film festival culture in the Chinese-speaking world. This chapter approaches that question through a comparison of two of the oldest and most well-established comprehensive international events in the Chinese-speaking world—the Hong Kong and Shanghai International Film Festivals. I have been visiting the Hong Kong International Film Festival (HKIFF) sporadically since the mid-1980s, and the Shanghai International Film Festival (SIFF), also sporadically, in the new century, and I have conducted research interviews with key players at both events. In a later chapter in the anthology, Ran Ma examines how the festivals program Chinese cinema to show how they translate “Chinese cinema” to their audiences in very different ways. Here, I consider how they have translated the international film festival model into their local contexts.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, HKIFF and SIFF are very different. There is not much evidence of any general Chinese characteristics binding them together. This diversity among film festivals is not unique to the Chinese-speaking world. For example, the BFI Flare: London LGBT Film Festival seems to have more in common with other gay and lesbian film festivals

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than it does with comprehensive international film festivals like the BFI London Film Festival, even though both of them are run by the British Film Institute, in the same venue, in the same city and in the same country. Indeed, by adopting various globally circulating models for comprehensive and specialized film festivals, the recent boom in film festivals in the Chinese-speaking world and in particular the People's Republic of China (PRC) can appear to be a simple case of copying and catching up.

However, while the next section of this chapter acknowledges that the film festival model is an import in the Chinese-speaking world, it also follows the arguments laid out in the introduction to this book and draws on translation theory to contest the assumption that importation means mere copying. Instead, it argues that translation is an active process that always involves change, and that this change can be understood as both local innovation rather than as a failure of translation and the site where the local makes itself apparent. However, this theoretical insight alone is not enough to grasp the nature of this process of change. The section goes on to ask, what is the local character of the “glocalization”¹ that occurs and how is it produced?

The chapter addresses these issues by investigating how each festival has appropriated and localized different models of the international film festival. The HKIFF was launched in what Marijke de Valck has called in her analysis of the development of international film festivals, “the age of programmers.”² The second section of the chapter shows how HKIFF has remained committed to the cinephile vision characterizing the programmer-driven festival, despite numerous recent changes that appear to suggest a different direction. However, it also argues that what might appear to be a generic cinephile vision has acquired different local meanings in Hong Kong in different eras. In contrast, SIFF was launched in de Valck’s “age of festival directors.”³ The chapter argues that, operating within this paradigm, SIFF has transformed the director-driven model in many ways, overdetermined by a drive to produce a particular Shanghai version of what Elena Pollacchi refers to as the “reputational festival” in her chapter here on the Beijing International Film Festival (BJIFF). In the case of SIFF, the reputation at stake is Shanghai’s projection of itself as a “world city.”

On the basis of these differences, I argue that we need to approach the process of translating film festival models into local contexts through the analysis of the stakeholder configuration as the actors performing the translation, and the context in which they do it. In the case of HKIFF and

SIFF, this has been two site-specific processes of mutual transformation: The film festivals have participated in the contested transformation of the cities and their culture, and the cities have transformed the festival model. In other words, this tale of two festivals really is a tale of two cities.

TRANSLATING THE FILM FESTIVAL INTO CHINESE CULTURAL CONTEXTS

In the new century, East Asia in general and the PRC in particular have been boom territories for film festivals of all kinds. In the PRC, holding film festivals is part of a general and much wider process of “connecting with the international gauge” (*yu shijie jiegui*), as the Chinese idiom puts it. This practice entails engaging with various international—more precisely, Western—standards and practices, and it has been part of the process of “reform and opening up” (*gaige kaifang*) adopted since the 1980s.⁴ Indeed, the very idea of the “film festival” (*dianyingjie*) is both a foreign cultural model and a relatively recent import. In the PRC, the “film week” (*dianyingzhou*) was the dominant mode for exchanging films with other “fraternal” socialist countries during the Maoist era and into the 1980s. The film week was also a foreign import, but one made when the “international gauge” the PRC sought to connect to was the socialist one.⁵ The first “film festival” was launched in Changchun in 1992,⁶ the same year that Deng Xiaoping’s “Southern Tour” led to marked acceleration of “reform and opening up.”⁷ One year later, the SIFF was launched, and it rapidly eclipsed the Changchun event.⁸ More recently, the first edition of the BJIFF was held in April 2011.⁹

Analyzed in this volume by Elena Pollacchi, the BJIFF proclaims itself of “international standard, Chinese character, and Beijing style.”¹⁰ What are “Chinese character” and “Beijing style,” and what difference do they make to the aspiration to achieve an “international standard”? Such abstractions are difficult to define, but other film festivals held in Beijing certainly operate in ways that are locally distinctive. 2013 was the tenth anniversary of the Beijing Independent Film Festival (BIFF). As Flora Lichaa examines in her chapter here, although modeled on the international film festival, like most other independent events in China, this annual set of film screenings has been heavily constrained, especially under the Xi Jinping regime. In response, it has had to pioneer new exhibition practices, for example, not publicizing its existence widely and screening in private rather than public spaces.¹¹ Turning to more specialized events, the Beijing Queer

Film Festival has been held since 2001 as a biennial event also modeled on similar events elsewhere, and the 2013 edition was held with comparatively less trouble than in the past. Yet, as Hongwei Bao's chapter here investigates in detail, it has also had to innovate locally in order to survive, for example, by changing venues repeatedly and letting them be known at the last minute.¹²

If these locally distinctive practices are what "Chinese character" and "Beijing style" mean in practice, how can we analyze this localness and how it is produced? As argued in the introduction to this book, the process can be understood as a form of translation. Each of the festivals mentioned in the previous paragraph has translated a different "international standard" film festival into the Chinese context. However, as indicated from the examples given, adopting foreign things is not simply a case of copying or of submission to foreign standards, because changes occur in the process of translation. Furthermore, these changes should not be thought of as the result of "failures" in translation. In *Translingual Practice*, Lydia Liu details how modernity as well as the language associated with it was translated from the West into China, often via Tokyo. She argues that this process cannot be seen simply as an imperialist imposition; not only were many Chinese active in the process of translation, but also they did so to resist imperialism and make themselves agents of modernization.¹³ Elsewhere, I have written further together with Mary Farquhar about this process of apparent submission to international standards as a means of gaining agency.¹⁴ Liu's analysis enables us to understand that translation of film festival models into the Chinese context is an act of appropriation, and that the transformation that occurs in that process is not failure but innovation enabling Chinese to intervene in the local film exhibition culture and participate on the global film festival circuit.

HKIFF: CINEPHILIA AND LOCAL IDENTITY

Approaching HKIFF with these insights in mind, it is important to note that the festival was indeed a local initiative. The first edition took place in 1977, and the adoption of the international film festival model into the Hong Kong context was not an imposition by the British colonial government.¹⁵ As Cindy Wong details in her case study of HKIFF in her monograph, the project was proposed by Paul Yeung, manager of the municipal City Hall venue, after a trip to the UK in 1975 that included visiting the London Film Festival (LFF).¹⁶ This process can be understood as a more

recent version of appropriation by colonized and semi-colonized subjects that Liu discusses in *Translingual Practice*. On the one hand, the colonial logic is clear: a civil servant in the British administration, Yeung headed to London, the imperial metropolis. Its film festival is not particularly well regarded amongst cinephiles, especially in comparison to Berlin or Cannes, but the film festival of the imperial metropolis became his model. However, it was Yeung who took it as the model and saw potential for its translation into the Hong Kong context.

What kind of a festival was and is LFF, and why did it fit Hong Kong in the 1970s? In *Film Festivals*, de Valck proposes three phases in the development of the film festival, each accompanied by a particular model of operation; the national showcase driven by geopolitics up until the late 1960s; a programmer or curator-driven model produced by 1960s cinephilia and the counterculture and lasting into the 1980s; and more recently an institutionalization phase where festivals are director or manager-driven.¹⁷ To some extent the second and third models overlap with Mark Peranson's "audience festival" and "business festival" taxonomy, although he does not indicate historical succession between the models.¹⁸

Initiated by local critics in 1953, when European art cinema was flourishing, and housed at the National Film Theatre, the LFF has always been run by the British Film Institute. It was conceived of as a "festival of festivals" event, which is a grand way of saying LFF prioritizes providing a round-up from other festivals over pursuing new film discoveries.¹⁹ In de Valck's and Peranson's terms, it was always a cinephile and audience event. It has no market and only a small range of awards.

The HKIFF imported this model. It started out as a programmer-driven and audience festival, and, like London, concentrated on rounding up the best of world cinema to present it to local audiences, with programmers writing catalog notes and introducing films in person to explain their choices and enable understanding of the films. There was no market and there were no prizes or other elements designed to appeal to the industry and its pursuit of deals and publicity. As in Hollywood, the local Hong Kong industry was highly commercial, with studios, distributors and exhibitors closely linked. Most commercial films had their distribution and exhibition sorted out before they were even made, and the industry felt no need for a market or awards to help secure distribution and exhibition deals.

Noting that the import of the cinephile model as exemplified by London was a Hong Kong initiative is only the first step in understanding

the establishment and development of HKIFF as a process of translation. In addition, we must ask who the “translators” were and why these models were attractive to them. Dina Jordanova argues in her chapter for this volume that the dynamics shaping film festivals need to be understood as “stakeholder configurations.” In the context of importing film festival models, perhaps we can understand these stakeholders as translators. Furthermore, these stakeholders/translators operate within a context. In his famous essay, “Global Cities and the Film Festival Economy,” Julian Stringer has emphasized the municipal context rather than a national or civilizational context as the most significant one for the majority of festivals; most are not only based in but often named after particular cities, as is the case with HKIFF and SIFF.²⁰ (Ironically, the Tudou Video Festival he and Nikki J.Y. Lee discuss in their chapter here is an example of a new type of festival not grounded in a particular city.) It is only by examining who the stakeholders/translators are, how they interact and the context shaping their interactions that we can begin to discern the locally specific meanings that get attached to the international model as it is adopted.

With this understanding in mind, we can see two major stakeholder groups at work in the translation of the programmer-driven model into 1970s Hong Kong: the local cinephile culture that had grown up around film club culture²¹ and the colonial government. After the 1967 anti-British riots, they had compatible aims. The riots marked a crucial shift in the relationship between the colonial government and the local population. They took place in the first year of the 1966–1976 Cultural Revolution decade in the PRC. The riots alerted the British authorities both to local dissatisfaction and to their own vulnerability—could they really defend the city if there was an intervention from the PRC? Cindy Wong concludes that, “While the colonial government put down all the protests, it was forced to become more responsive and inclusive to Chinese colonial subjects seeking their own voices and hybrid identities.”²² In other words, it produced a new social compact between colonizer and colonized.

The effort to produce a new social compact helps to explain why, on the one hand, HKIFF has been programmed by local cinephiles from the beginning, but on the other hand, was established as an activity of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department of the Urban Council. This was the branch of municipal government in the late colonial era responsible for things like swimming pools and community centers, or the equivalent of “parks and recreation.” The government saw HKIFF as part of their cultural provision for local inhabitants in the hope of improving their feelings

about the administration. Much as had been the case when the LFF was established, by programming a panorama of world art cinema, HKIFF met the needs of both ex-patriate and local elements of the population that were interested in art and experimental cinema but felt that local commercial film culture did not serve them. In an era when more of the population was locally born and had little if any experience of the PRC, the sense of Hong Kong identity was growing. By also programming retrospectives of local cinema, the festival not only promoted cinephilia but also contributed to this cultural identity movement. Later on, these uniquely local elements began to attract international attendees in the form of programmers from other festivals and made the festival one of the leaders in the Asian region. The cinephile focus was further entrenched because, being in competition with parks and libraries for taxpayer funding, the Urban Council was uninclined to spend on red carpet events, star guests, prizes, and other elements that might make it more of an industry festival.

This stakeholder configuration and the context shaping it continued through the 1990s. Then, along with the general shift in the international film festival world noted by de Valck, HKIFF underwent a second translation, taking on more of the attributes of de Valck's director-driven and Peranson's business festival models. First, close links were developed with the hitherto separate Hong Kong International Film and Television Market (FILMART). This annual event had been launched in 1997 by the Hong Kong Trade Development Corporation and rapidly became the leading film market in the Asian region.²³ The FILMART and HKIFF schedules were brought closer together.²⁴

One of FILMART's activities is the Hong Kong Asia Film Financing Forum (HAF). In an interview in 2008, then Deputy Director of HAF Ivy Ho explained that, starting in 2007, HAF became one of the activities under the HKIFF umbrella, although funding continued to be from a variety of sources, and there continued to be co-organizers. HAF puts producers together with potential projects, using the appeal of Hong Kong's legal system to promote it as a place to make Asian film deals and sign contracts. Ho's description of HAF's origins indicates that it too can be seen as another product of translation: "Project markets in Pusan, Tokyo and other parts of the world, most of them are modeled after Cinemart, a project market in Rotterdam," Ho explained. "Pusan actually started doing a project market called PPP about ten years ago. I think around the year 1999 and 2000, quite a number of Hong Kong filmmakers, they actually attended the Pusan International Film Festival. When they came

back, they all talked about the PPP.” She went on to note the downturn in the local industry at the time motivated interest from Hong Kong commercial film producers, unlike the situation in the 1970s when HKIFF was launched.²⁵ Also in 2007, HKIFF was also given responsibility for the new Asian Film Awards (AFA), the sort of glitzy, red carpet event HKIFF had eschewed to date, but which also helped to promote the industry’s interests.²⁶ In the new century, HKIFF had acquired industry stakeholders that it never had before as it took on many of the attributes of the business festival model.

As well as expanding the range of its activities, the governance of the festival was transformed by a process of corporatization, which changed it from a government cultural event into the primary activity of the Hong Kong International Film Festival Society (HKIFFS), an independent non-profit organization. As detailed in an extensive analysis by Ruby Cheung, this process was completed in 2005. Cheung demonstrates that as its activities have grown, not only has HKIFFS been able to win more funds from various public bodies, but also that it has become more dependent on commercial sponsorship. The result is a new stakeholder configuration with stronger links to commercial sponsors in general, as well as the industry. Cheung is critical of this transformation, describing it as a lose-lose situation: The awards are not high-profile enough to satisfy the expectations of sponsors, and at the same time, the cinephile community finds the new HKIFF “gives the impression of changing from a high-art event to a populist occasion led primarily by the local filmmaking industry and the appeal of individual stars in all sorts of promotional events.”²⁷ Unsurprisingly, long-term programmer and Artistic Director Li Cheuk-to does not see it that way. Responding to a question from Cheung about whether “artistic merit or commercial value” drives film selection, he insists, “We choose films based mainly on their artistic value – we believe in ‘film as art.’”²⁸

The merits of corporatization are beyond the parameters of this chapter. But what does interest me is the local significance of the translation of elements of the business festival model into the HKIFF. Although not directly discussed in Cheung’s critique, the other significant event that precedes corporatization is the 1997 transfer of power from London to Beijing, in accordance with the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration on Hong Kong. According to the declaration, Hong Kong’s legal, social and economic system was to remain unchanged until 2046.²⁹

In these circumstances, HKIFF joined the many local institutions whose continued unchanged practices might reassure Hong Kong citizens

of the preservation of the local identity and culture that HKIFF had itself participated in building in the 1970s and 1980s. At the same time, it can be argued that this local culture was increasingly measured by its difference from that of mainland China. For example, in reference to HKIFF, as Ran Ma details in her chapter later in this volume, starting in the 1990s, the festival put an ever-growing emphasis on Chinese independent films. Because these films are defined as those which have not gone through Beijing censorship, they cannot be officially screened anywhere in the PRC except Hong Kong Special Administration Region, as it has been known since 1997.

Therefore, the move toward diversification of funding and independent status as a non-government, not-for-profit organization also stands as a move designed to put the festival at arm's length from the new government and preserve these programming patterns for which HKIFF had become known. Stephen Teo reports that the "crunch point" came in 1994, when the PRC withdrew nine films in protest at the programming of other banned PRC films: "The Hong Kong Government found itself embarrassingly caught in the middle ... [and] in the post-1997 years ... more than willing to let go of the film festival."³⁰

In conclusion then, not only was there local significance to the translation of first the cinephile and then the business model of the international film festival into the Hong Kong context. Also, underpinning the more recent adoption of the business festival model into Hong Kong was a perhaps surprising strategy to retain cinephile priorities in the new post-1997 environment. The continued presence of long-term programmers, Li Cheuk-to and Jacob Wong, while managers have come and gone, confirms that the festival's local credibility—perhaps already damaged by corporatization, as indicated by Ruby Cheung's critique—would otherwise be lost. In terms of the questions driving this chapter, the adoption of both cinephile and business models has been driven by local Hong Kong issues and acquired specific Hong Kong significance.

SIFF: MUNICIPAL REPUTATION

Like its Hong Kong counterpart, SIFF was a local initiative with high input from the city government. The event was launched as a biennial event in 1993.³¹ It was announced that it would become an annual event in 2001,³² and although many published sources repeat this "fact," in actuality it went annual for the first time with the 7th edition in 2004,

as Ran Ma points out.³³ SIFF has always been a project of the city's state-owned enterprises. Initially, it belonged to the Shanghai Film Group, which was then folded into a larger conglomerate, the Shanghai Media and Entertainment Group.³⁴

Also like HKIFF, it translated the dominant international film festival model of the time into the local context. But, where that was the programmer-driven and audience-oriented festival for HKIFF in the 1970s, for SIFF in the 1990s, it was the director-driven model and the business festival. These priorities are clear in its programming practices. As analyzed in detail by Ran Ma in her chapter for this volume, SIFF has diverged from international practice by never having named individual programmers who curate and present selections to audiences. Indeed, the public face of SIFF has not been its programmers but its managing director. And, as one would expect of a business festival, it has a market (launched in 2007), prizes (the Golden Goblet) and a forum aimed more at professionals than the public.

A striking feature of SIFF from the early days to now is its determination to manifest the usual characteristics of an international business film festival, even though it has been operating in a context not so hospitable to such a venture. All the major models of the international film festival laid out by de Valck and Peranson originated in liberal capitalist cultures, mostly with strong civil societies. This made it fairly easy to adopt them in Hong Kong, where similar circumstances have pertained, although, significantly, not electoral democracy. But SIFF operates in a very different one-party socialist system that combines the legacy of an ideologically led command economy with a newly adopted but thriving market economy. Nevertheless, the festival has gone to great lengths to "connect with the international gauge." How has SIFF translated the international model into the Shanghai context? What adaptations has it had to make? And why has it been so determined to take on the form of the international model no matter how difficult the fit? I will take each of these questions in order, showing how the translation has occurred before arguing why it has followed this particular pattern.

During my 2007 visit, I asked then Vice-Director of the SIFF Forum, Shen Yang, what was distinctive about SIFF. She answered, "What's special about SIFF is its A-list status." Indeed, SIFF is the only festival in continental Asia recognized by the *Fédération Internationale des Associations de Producteurs de Film* (FIAPF) as an A-list festival. For SIFF, I suggest, A-list status confirms that they have successfully connected "with

the international gauge.” Shen explained that FIAPF “require that the festival contents be comprehensive.” Further demonstrating SIFF’s determination to conform to international standards, she elaborated, “So, we have four main areas of activity: screenings, competitions, forums, and the market.”³⁵

Although SIFF follows the FIAPF model, it does so in ways that manifest significant local adaptation. Taking the market first, most film festival markets focus on distributors acquiring rights to titles in certain territories. However, SIFF Mart is constrained by Chinese circumstances when it comes to rights trading. The PRC retains an import quota of 34 films a year on a revenue-sharing basis, and the China Film Group in Beijing retains a near monopoly on imports, so foreign producers have few opportunities to sell rights at SIFF.³⁶ On the other hand, a Chinese producer with a hot film sells its rights at Cannes, Berlin and other leading international markets. According to Stephen Cremin, SIFF Mart remains SIFF’s “Achilles’ heel”: “Locally it only competes to be less useless than the Beijing Film Market but it cannot compete with the singular regional success of Hong Kong FILMART.”³⁷

However, the SIFF Mart includes under its umbrella not only the market itself but also the SIFF Project, formerly known as the China and the Co-Production Film Pitch and Catch sessions. Like HAF in Hong Kong, this event aims to match projects with funders. These additional components have turned SIFF Mart into a site for a broader range of film industry deals than is usually included in other film markets. According to official figures cited by Ruby Cheung, these measures have met with success, and SIFF Mart is attracting more visitors every year, with more deals being signed as the Chinese film market becomes ever more important.³⁸ In other words, Cremin’s critique might be correct in regard to rights trading, but SIFF Mart has broadened out the international “film market” idea to become a hub for all kinds of Chinese-foreign film deals in an era when the Chinese film market is booming.

The SIFF Forum has also grown rapidly to become much more than a series of press conferences about films in the festival, as is often the focus elsewhere. Taking advantage of the numerous guests attending SIFF Mart, it runs sessions on all manner of local and international aspects of film culture and business. In 2013, for example, SIFF Forum included a “President Lecture” panel on the future of cinematic language with film directors Tom Hooper and Zhang Yuan. Hooper, director of *The King’s Speech* (2010), was president of the jury that year and also had

a retrospective of his films in the festival. But, in addition to this more conventional forum activity, SIFF Forum 2013 included innumerable business-related panels. Tsui Hark spoke about a topic dear to the hearts of Chinese commercial filmmakers; “Creating Content for a Worldwide Audience.” A mixed group of eight financiers and producers addressed “Classifying Equity and Debt Resources and Investment Allocation in China and Abroad,” and other men in suits discussed selecting films to invest in: co-financing and co-production; China’s relationship with Hollywood; the role of “big data” in shaping film projects; and a variety of questions about the current characteristics of Chinese film production and the film market.³⁹

This broadening and proliferation of activities associated with the market and forum independently from the screenings in the festival is not unusual for a business festival. In the case of SIFF, it can also be interpreted as compensating for the perceived weakness of the other two areas of FIAPF expectation: screening and competition. Ran Ma discusses the characteristics of SIFF’s programming in detail in her chapter here, and I have also addressed these issues in some detail in my reports on two editions of the festival.⁴⁰

To summarize those analyses, SIFF’s programming is limited by the combination of FIAPF’s requirements for A-list festivals and the conditions that pertain inside China. The translation of the international standard into the Chinese context has combined to produce a limiting result. FIAPF requires that all competition films in A-list festivals have not entered any competition anywhere else. As a newer festival, SIFF is at a disadvantage, and unable to attract the best films for its competition. As for conditions inside China, when I interviewed them, both Shen Yang of the SIFF Forum and Managing Director Tang Lijun insisted that SIFF is censorship-free.⁴¹ But self-censorship is another matter, and the event does not push the envelope. Indeed, one possible advantage of programming by committee is that no individual can be held responsible should the authorities be unhappy.

Talking to international visitors in 2007 and 2009 confirmed my impression that almost none of them came to see the movies, and that pattern has not changed. As for the local cinephile community, Kavkalu, the self-proclaimed “independent critic” (*duli pinglun*)—a title few would dare assume today—made his disappointment clear in a series of blogposts in 2006, before tragically dying in a car accident soon after. After the closing ceremonies, he lambasted the festival. Among other things, he accused

the organizers of undermining public confidence in the awards by changing the screening schedule and making it impossible for reporters to see most of the films. He went on to demand, “Who on earth picked the 17 films in competition? The quality was all over the place.”⁴²

While many films cannot be screened at SIFF, broadening the SIFF Mart and SIFF Forum enables the festival to create a space for people associated with film culture and business who do not have films at the festival. But it also begs the question of why SIFF has been so determined to adopt not only the international film festival models of the moment—the director-driven and business models—but also the most regulation-bound one, the FIAPF A-list model. Why set up a film market in a situation where so little rights trading can be done? Why set up an A-list competition when, as a newcomer festival in a culturally and politically conservative environment, it risks becoming a “best of the worst” competition?

To answer these questions, we need to turn to the stakeholder configuration and the local context. In contrast to HKIFF, Kavkalu’s complaints suggest local cinephiles may be a lower priority at SIFF. However, the committee mode of programming does provide roles for a wide range of local film culture figures, just as the proliferation of forum panels and SIFF Mart activities has provided opportunities for a wide range of film industry organizations to participate. But participation does not necessarily make someone a stakeholder—even if, as with Kavkalu, they clearly feel they have a stake in SIFF. A stakeholder has the power to shape the festival. In the case of SIFF, the municipal government was the primary and perhaps the only real stakeholder, as indicated by its establishment within local state-owned media organizations. Furthermore, although Shanghai used to be China’s film capital before and for quite a long time after the 1949 Revolution, today the industry has clustered in Beijing and film is not one of Shanghai’s leading creative industries. Therefore, it seems unlikely that the festival was set up primarily to promote the Shanghai film industry.

What were the city government’s motivations for establishing SIFF just one year after Deng’s Southern Tour further entrenched the “reform and opening up” process? Shanghai responded by seeking to rebuild its reputation as a global city, after decades of relative isolation during the Mao era. In these circumstances, the establishment of an international film festival can be seen as the acquisition of one in a range of elements signifying world city status. The Shanghai Stock Exchange opened in 1990.⁴³ The city’s Metro system opened its first line in 1993.⁴⁴ During the same period the previously underdeveloped east side of the Huangpu River flowing

through the city became the forest of skyscrapers known today as Pudong.⁴⁵ The first Shanghai Open tennis tournament was held in 1996, and it now hosts the only one of the nine annual ATP Masters events held outside Europe and North America.⁴⁶ 1996 was also the year that the Shanghai Biennial art exhibition was first held.⁴⁷ After building a German-designed track especially for the event, Shanghai began hosting the Chinese Grand Prix in the Formula One championship in 2004.⁴⁸ The list goes further.

If SIFF's initial purpose was to contribute toward Shanghai's reclamation of its world city status, then the festival is another example of what Elena Pollacchi in her chapter here calls the "reputational festival"—one whose primary purpose is a form of public relations. Pollacchi argues BJIFF provides a spotlight for the Chinese film industry, which, although burgeoning, lacks sufficient glamor opportunities. Although SIFF also provides glamor opportunities for the industry, its main purpose has been to boost Shanghai itself as a world city. This argument can be supported with how it has managed its red carpet events historically. As Pollacchi rightly points out, these red carpet events like the opening and closing ceremonies are the main opportunities for publicity, are often broadcast live on television, go on much longer than at comparative festivals elsewhere and often include all manner of people who would not otherwise be in town. Today, when the Chinese film market is a honeypot attracting filmmakers from all over the world, SIFF has no shortage of international guests. In 2013, the same year that Tom Hooper headed the jury, Jessica Chastain and Helen Mirren graced the red carpet, amongst others. The next year, Natalie Portman appeared at the closing ceremony, and Nicole Kidman was in town with her film, *Grace of Monaco* (2014).

But earlier, when the world had not quite woken up to the Chinese film market, getting a leading international—meaning Hollywood or French—star onto the red carpet was still very important to SIFF. Sharon Stone was on the jury in 2007 as well as on every red carpet available. (She became less welcome in China one year later, when she suggested the Sichuan earthquake was "karma" for Tibet.⁴⁹) The year previously, an "outstanding contribution" award helped to lure Catherine Deneuve, and in 2010, Isabelle Huppert picked up the same trophy, while Quincy Jones got a "lifetime achievement" gong. Just like the FIAPF A-list status, the presence of such stars both confirmed SIFF's status as a festival conforming to the international film festival model at the same time as it carried the local signification that Shanghai was recognized by the global order as a world

city. Today, with Shanghai's world city status well-established and facing competition from BJIFF, SIFF faces new existential dilemmas as it tries to establish new local significance for its version of the international business festival model.

In conclusion, from the contrasting cases of SIFF and HKIFF, we can see that there is no general set of Chinese characteristics that get conferred on the international film festival model as it is translated into the Chinese-speaking world. However, at the same time, these cases show that localization does occur, and that it is an ongoing process. Even when the form of the international film festival as manifested in Chinese locations is immediately recognizable, just like other manifestations of global culture such as the international airport or the business convention, it is important to be aware of the local variations in and meanings attached to those internationally circulating features. And to understand those local manifestations, we need to pay attention to the stakeholder configuration, most commonly municipally based, that enacts the translation of the film festival model into the local context.

NOTES

1. Roland Robertson, "Globalisation or Glocalisation?" *Journal of International Communication* 1, no.1 (1983): 33–52.
2. Marijke de Valck, *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), 167.
3. *Ibid.*, 191–2.
4. Dongchao Min, "What about Other Translation Routes (East-West)? The Concept of the Term 'Gender' Traveling into and throughout China," in *Gender and Globalization in the Asia and the Pacific: Method, Practice, Theory*, ed. Kathy E. Ferguson and Monique Mironescu (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 84–5.
5. Ran Ma, "A Genealogy of Film Festivals in the People's Republic of China: 'Film Weeks' during the 'Seventeen Years' (1949–1966)," *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 14, no.1 (2016): 40–58.
6. "Zhongguo Changchun Dianyingjie Jianjie" (Overview of the Changchun Film Festival China), no date, accessed 18 January 2016, <http://www.chinacff.com/Article.asp?pageclass=10601>. The standard translation of the festival's name has varied over the years, and sometimes its title has included "international."

7. John Wong and Zheng Yongnian, ed., *The Nanxun Legacy and China's Development in the Post-Deng Era* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2001).
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10. Ibid.
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“Mature at Birth”: The Beijing International Film Festival Between the National Film Industry and the Global Film Festival Circuit

Elena Pollacchi

INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to shed some light on the complex issue of how a state-driven event such as the Beijing International Film Festival (BJIFF) has attempted to translate the long-established model of the major European film festivals into a Chinese context. First established in 2011, BJIFF has from the beginning been supported both by the Beijing municipality and by the central state film authorities. The description of the fifth edition of the festival provided on its official website is worth quoting, as it offers a thorough overview of the event’s organizing bodies and mission:

Beijing International Film Festival (BJIFF) is a large-sized film activity sponsored by the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of the People’s Republic of China and the People’s Government of Beijing Municipality and undertaken by the Film Bureau of the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television

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of the People's Republic of China and the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (Beijing Municipal Bureau of Copyright).¹... BJIFF takes "Share the Screen, Shape the Future" as the keynote, aims at internationalization, professionalization, innovation & high-end, and marketization, and strives to build up a platform for promoting the Chinese film career and industry development and enhance the Sino-overseas film exchange, transaction and cooperation. It is fully embodying the feature of benefiting the people with culture, and thrive [sic] to forge a world culture exchange brand featuring "*International level, Chinese characteristics, and Beijing style.*"²

This goal of connecting local, national, and international elements is reflected in many features of BJIFF and highlights its mission to translate the international film festival model into the PRC. Between 2013 and 2015, BJIFF introduced a competitive section with an international jury (the Tiantan Awards) which, as in top-tier festivals, featured alongside non-competitive sections (the Beijing Film Panorama and Chinese Film Carnival), among other thematic programs. A film market and the opening and closing ceremonies with their glamorous red carpets are also listed as components of BJIFF.³ However, the prominence of the political agenda and the controls over film programming imposed by censorship regulations make the Beijing event quite distinct from other international film festivals. The relevance of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) political guidelines was openly remarked upon in the press conference of the fifth BJIFF, held on March 19, 2015:

The Organizing Committee has thoroughly studied the speech delivered by Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the Communist Party of China, in a symposium on literature and art.... Sticking to the right orientation and enhancing cultural confidence, it assumes social responsibilities and persistently seeks for better quality and spectacular products. Adhering to the principles of "safety, economization, quality, and civilization," integrating such elements as support by the government, operation in the market, orientation on filmmakers, and public participation, and establishing an all-around and multi-layered organization pattern that covers various fields, it focuses on enriching spiritual meaning, setting values, and enhancing cultural foundation, and strives for innovation and better development of BJIFF.⁴

In response to such guidelines, this chapter discusses how a set of structural, managerial, and organizational features has been adapted from the

Western festival model to fit the Chinese context. I argue that this process serves the needs of the expanding Chinese film industry, while at the same time promoting Beijing’s centrality to that industry. Whether this process of translation has been successful, thus enabling BJIFF to be of service to film industry professionals, is still difficult to assess; five years (at time of writing) is still too short a period to establish the role of an international film festival. However, as Luc Besson, the President of the 2015 Tiantan Awards jury, noted in his speech at the opening ceremony, although BJIFF is “just like a baby” in comparison to other events, it is rare to see “a baby so mature... he has the maturity of a Chinese old wise man.”⁵

The goals, strategies, and dynamics of BJIFF’s attempt to position itself in the already fully booked calendar of international film events deserve scholarly attention; so too its peculiarities. BJIFF openly takes Cannes, Venice, and Berlin as its models. Its mission is “to build the Festival into the No. 1 film festival in Asia and keep abreast with the world’s top 3 film festivals in three to five years.” In conjunction with this goal, a new slogan was also launched in 2015, the three Ms principle of “Master, Mass, Market”⁶ (see Fig. 3.1).

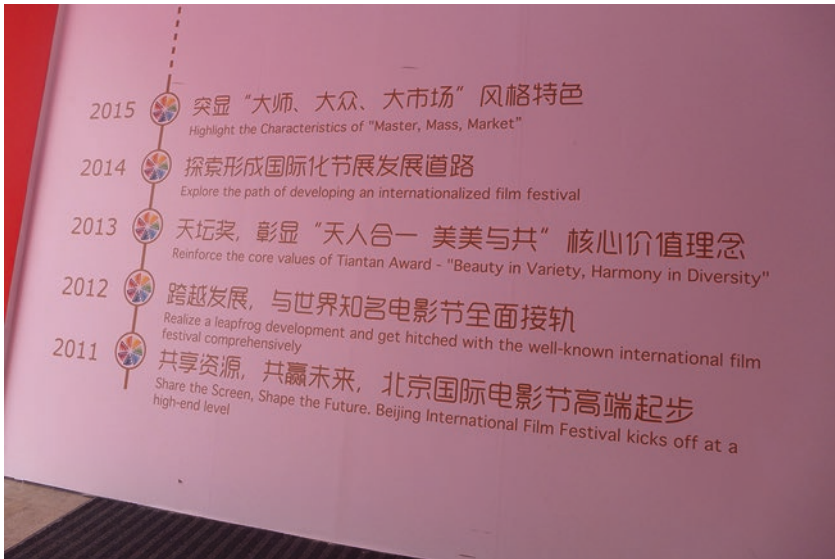


Fig. 3.1 Billboard with BJIFF slogans from 2011 to 2015 (Photo: author)

At first glance, BJIFF's peculiarities include majestic opening and closing ceremonies, which the festival lists as separate events with no connection to the opening and closing films; in most festivals, such events are related to the opening and closing films.⁷ Here, I would also argue that other singular features include the presence of a film market with an emphasis on cultural diplomacy rather than business exchanges and the role of the festival's programming team, appointed for the first time in 2015. Moreover, in terms of its organizing bodies and financial support, BJIFF differs significantly from European film events, as its scale is guaranteed by sizeable financial investment from local and central government and its management is mainly composed of state officials. Although Cannes, Venice, and Berlin do receive some state contribution, they are also supported by private funds and sponsors, and are privately managed. Finally, while the three top-tier European festivals have no domestic competitors, both the Beijing government and the central authorities have supported BJIFF in its competition with the Shanghai International Film Festival (SIFF). While the Shanghai event, which was established in 1993, currently remains the only A-list festival in China, BJIFF's communication and promotional strategies advocate for the cinematic centrality of the capital city.⁸ Indeed, an emphasis on Beijing as the *center* of the booming national film industry, and the base for an increasing number of Sino-foreign negotiations related to film activities, has become a prominent feature of BJIFF's marketing.

Despite Beijing's centrality to the festival, the role of the host city differs significantly compared with major European events. As Marijke de Valck and Julian Stringer have noted in their studies of festival space,⁹ European film festivals, particularly in their early days, served both as promotional tools for their host cities and as defensive platforms for national cinemas at a moment when Hollywood film was emerging as a dominant force globally. In Beijing, one can identify almost the opposite strategy: BJIFF is using the city to promote the festival just as the Chinese film industry has started to overtake Hollywood. In February 2015, Chinese box office revenues overtook those in the US market for the first time, and the number of Chinese screens is still growing.¹⁰ This market boom had been anticipated since 2013, when the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) confirmed China as the world's largest film market outside the USA, with growth rates that would soon make the People's Republic of China (PRC) the world's biggest market.¹¹



Fig. 3.2 The venue of the 2015 BJIFF Film Market at the Millennium Monument in Beijing (Photo: author)

Methodologically, my analysis of BJIFF in this chapter combines participant observation with the study of relevant festival documents. I have looked at information issued by the festival since 2011, mainly through its website and in its catalogs and promotional material. Information circulated in international trade publications such as *The Hollywood Reporter* and *Variety* has also been read against the evolving dynamics of the global film business.¹² Furthermore, thanks to my professional collaboration with the Venice International Film Festival as a Chinese cinema consultant and programmer, I have been able to follow the evolution of BJIFF as an invited guest. This has allowed me to observe the festival's different events and sections from an insider's perspective. Moreover, as a regular attendee at the Cannes, Berlin, Hong Kong, Busan, and Shanghai festivals, I have been able to consider the Beijing event comparatively, in relation to other global and regional festivals, while informally assessing its impact on film professionals in and outside China. This analysis thus benefits from my participation in the second (2012), fifth (2015), and sixth (2016) editions of BJIFF, and from conversations with festival attendees and film

professionals between 2011 and 2015. After a preliminary discussion of BJIFF's main features, I will look at the Beijing event through the lens of reputational capital: an intangible asset that is a source of competitive advantage in global markets. I argue that BJIFF is striving for a position in the global festival circuit while serving the needs of the national film industry and, in the process of translating the full-service model of top-tier European film festivals into the PRC, has produced a type of festival that is neither an audience nor a business festival, but rather an international film festival with Chinese characteristics.

A FILM FESTIVAL WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS: CATEGORIZING THE BEIJING INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL'S MAIN FEATURES

BJIFF's scale and grandiosity recall strategies adopted during the 2008 Beijing Olympics to guarantee the latter event extensive media visibility. Yet while the Olympics were conceived to project a certain image of China to the world—and, as Julia Lovell has pointed out, “China's reassertion of a globally dominant position”¹³—what image does the BJIFF project, and to whom?

Mark Peranson classifies festivals as either business or audience oriented, although many events combine the two models. The business festival is defined as an ever-expanding, high-budget event with a large number of guests, a major competition, and relevant market presence, while the audience festival is mainly concerned with local attendance and has a smaller business presence.¹⁴ In the light of its evolution, what ends does BJIFF serve? For whom is it ultimately conceived? The bombastic opening and closing ceremonies provide an interesting point of entry for such a discussion, for they highlight how the festival fits neither of Peranson's two categories. Although its large budget, the film market, and the participation of some prominent international guests suggest a business orientation, the sites used for the ceremonies testify principally to BJIFF's connection to central government. These sites moved from the Convention Center located in the Olympic area, which was used in 2011 and 2012, to the Temple of Heaven in 2013, the Beijing National Opera House in 2014, and finally in 2015 and 2016, the Yanqi Lake area, which had hosted the international Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) CEO Summit a year previously.¹⁵ This use of Beijing landmarks with high

political and symbolic significance—in addition to their visual impact—highlighted the centrality of the city to BJIFF, rather than pointing to the services a business festival might provide. Yet such an emphasis is better perceived from a local or regional perspective rather than a global one. In fact, while the visual feast of the 2008 Olympic opening ceremony was broadcast round the world, the glamorous red carpets of the BJIFF opening ceremony attract mainly Chinese TV viewers and circulate principally through Chinese-speaking territories. Therefore, the sites chosen for the impressive opening and closing ceremonies suggest a state-driven strategy to foster the visibility and appeal of BJIFF for domestic promotional purposes, rather than to attract international attention.

Although BJIFF does incorporate certain business festival features, such as the Beijing Film Market, meeting platforms for developing film projects, and a series of co-production and film financing forums, I would suggest that the participation of accredited film professionals in the festival remains fairly limited. This statement might appear contrary when juxtaposed with informal attendance figures issued by 2015. The online Beijing Film Market profile reported an attendance of “7,000 domestic and international professionals from the film industry, representing over 1,000 groups” for the 2014 market.¹⁶ In contrast, the Hong Kong FILMART 2015 announced a “record number of more than 7,100 buyers having taken part in the 19th edition of the event, the largest of its kind in Asia.”¹⁷ However, the Beijing Film Market 2014 report specifies that “[a] total of 248 domestic and foreign film companies and related organizations attended the Exhibition segment of [the] Market, including 125 international exhibitors.”¹⁸ The latter also includes a significant number of companies from Hong Kong and Taiwan involved in Chinese co-productions. Despite the apparently similar figures, the Hong Kong FILMART remains by far the larger market. This is due to factors ranging from the state quotas imposed on the import of international film titles into the PRC, to censorship regulations, to the limited opportunities to export Chinese titles abroad. The timing of BJIFF, which takes place only few weeks after the Hong Kong FILMART, also limits its attractiveness to film professionals.¹⁹

These issues notwithstanding, BJIFF has in the past attracted prominent international guests in relation to particular business agreements or international deals. These include James Cameron in 2012, Keanu Reeves and Lucasfilm President Kathleen Kennedy in 2013, and Oliver Stone and Luc Besson in 2014 and 2015, respectively (see Fig. 3.3). The participation



Fig. 3.3 Jury President Luc Besson and Jury member Peter Chan at the BJIFF opening ceremony, 2015 (Photo: author)

of James Cameron and Fox Studio CEOs was linked to the signing of the cooperation agreements with Chinese film groups, such as the Tianjin North Film Group and the Shandong Film Studio, for the collaborative development and expansion of 3D technologies in China; James Cameron's Cameron Pace Group (CPG) is one of the world's leading 3D technology companies.²⁰ Keanu Reeves promoted his directorial debut and Chinese co-production *Man of Tai Chi*, unveiling the film trailer at a press conference held during the festival. Arnold Schwarzenegger, in attendance in 2015, praised the growth of the Chinese film market in his speech at the festival's opening ceremony.²¹ Schwarzenegger's participation anticipated the imminent Chinese release of his film, *Terminator: Genesis*.

Such a Sino-foreign market orientation is also identifiable in BJIFF's trade magazine *The Chinese Market*, published in English and Chinese, which launched on the occasion of the festival's second year. Unlike *Variety* and *The Hollywood Reporter*, which cover the global film business, this Chinese trade publication mainly highlights the activities of domestic companies, announcing the growth of the Chinese market to an overseas

audience while also drawing attention to major industry agreements, mostly signed by American studios with Chinese companies.²² Instead of focusing on private deals like other film market platforms, the Beijing Film Market gives visibility to such Sino-foreign agreements while providing a platform to support connections with China for established partners or newcomers. This also explains the attendance of companies with ongoing interests in China-based activities, in particular Taiwanese and Hong Kong companies, but also a growing number of European representatives. As several film professionals commented to me during the Hong Kong FILMART in 2015, BJIFF allows those interested in doing business in China the occasion to “show their face” rather than providing actual business opportunities.

If the business-related aspects of BJIFF serve a function, then, they do so indirectly. On the one hand, they allow business agreements that have already been signed but not announced to be publicly celebrated with a great deal of ceremony. On the other hand, they offer certain international players the opportunity to visit China and explore its market potential. This protocol has no equivalent in Western film festivals. Instead, it recalls the Chinese tradition of foreign relations. As Ren Xiao has noted, China’s foreign relationships, which were shaped over centuries, were in the past maintained on the basis of tributary visits and rituals that often had a symbolic rather than substantive character.²³ I would suggest that, given the close links between the festival and the central government, BJIFF performs a similar function, providing a diplomatic channel through which all Chinese and international film industry players can show respect for, and pay a certain kind of tributary visit to, central state institutions. This is confirmed by the regular participation during the festival of official representatives of major European film festivals and governmental agencies such as Unifrance, the French state institution for the support of French cinema abroad. In fact, Unifrance has regularly held a French Night and a French Film Panorama in collaboration with BJIFF. Furthermore, France is the only country to regularly organize events in the BJIFF program. It is no coincidence that more French film titles are distributed in China than those of any overseas film industry besides Hollywood; the latter usually dominates the annual Chinese quota for foreign films imports.

If BJIFF was prompted by the flourishing of the Chinese film market to adopt the business festival model from the start, this model has since rapidly developed into its own kind of festival. The same could be said

when comparing BJIFF to Peranson's audience festival model. Part of such a festival's glamor includes the cheering crowds welcoming their favorite celebrities. Although the striking visual impact of BJIFF's opening and closing ceremonies, with their never-ending parade of Chinese stars, might be read as a response to the city audience, the festival's red carpets have often taken place in strictly controlled areas with only a small and select crowd in attendance. In 2012, for example, when most of the events took place near the Olympic Stadium, the entire area was closed to the public for the whole duration of BJIFF, and only accredited guests could access it. In 2015, the opening and closing ceremonies' glamorous red carpets took place in Huairou district, an almost two-hour drive north of Beijing. While all guests were driven there by the festival, the road leading to the APEC venue was restricted to authorized vehicles only. Such policies have often resulted in an atmosphere that, for a film festival, is unusual and rather surreal, with huge venues and imposing ceremonies but no real audience.²⁴ In limiting access to filmgoers in this manner, at a time when the film business is booming and with the Chinese star-system being confirmed as an essential component of this business, BJIFF is departing not only from the audience festival model, but also from the mixed audience-business festival model practiced by Berlin and Busan.²⁵

The lack of a central festival site also contributes to BJIFF's distinctive nature. For the 2015 edition, screenings took place in over 20 theaters located in different parts of the city, making it difficult to identify the festival with a specific area. Even though the festival management offices and the guest center were situated centrally, in the Beijing Hotel and the Palace Hotel near Tiananmen Square, these locations were only used for forums and public functions and not as screening venues. In consequence, the potential for contact between invited film guests and the city audience was minimized. The presence of the festival in Beijing was advertised online, and through a large off-line campaign involving street banners and posters in subway stations and trains. And yet, in spite of the emphasis on the film selection process and the quality of the festival line-up, the overall visibility of the films in the city remained marginal. Ticketing policies, screening venues, and the sheer size of the capital have all restricted BJIFF's potential development into a city festival along the lines of Toronto or Vienna.²⁶ As Skadi Loist has noted, regardless of their size, city festivals are often funded by municipal authorities and contribute "to a culturally diverse repertoire for the urban population and function as an image

generator.”²⁷ The difficulties in reaching the city audience, however, were particularly evident during BJIFF’s 2015 edition, despite a program that featured a wide range of recent international film titles. While film-related blogs and online comments were generally positive about festival screenings, it was clearly difficult to purchase tickets, as most of the films were sold out. The regular online ticketing system was available for bookings, with prices ranging from a reasonable 40 to 60 Chinese Yuan per ticket. Although most films had three screenings, in line with Venice, Cannes, and other major festivals, this meant that potential audience numbers were very limited relative to the size of the city. Moreover, as most of these film titles had previously screened at other festivals, international media interest remained minimal, while the Chinese media was mostly driven to ceremonies, red carpets, and screenings with Chinese stars or international guests. As *Variety* reporter Patrick Frater noted, “The festival seems to remain more a platform for flashy grandstanding than for matters of cultural substance.”²⁸

BJIFF’s management and marketing strategies also discourage any clear-cut classification of the festival. These strategies include promotional events at other major international festivals. Such events are an opportunity for BJIFF’s managers and CCP representatives to visit and observe long-established international film events, while networking with major festival directors and programmers. These occasions, which often take the form of cocktail parties or public functions, have certainly served as opportunities for festival diplomacy. They have also provided the opportunity to gather authoritative overseas endorsements, such as the collection of letters to the young Beijing festival signed by overseas festival directors which, in 2014, was turned into BJIFF’s communication strategy. This series of letters included one signed by Venice festival director Alberto Barbera, written on the occasion of the visit of BJIFF delegates to the festival in 2013. This was published on the festival homepage along with a letter signed by Marco Müller (at that time director of the Rome International Film Festival), and one by Russian director Nikita Mikhalkov.²⁹ Finally, the fact that BJIFF does not feature a prominent artistic director is also noteworthy. The Organizing Committee Office has a large staff, yet its activities, including the selection of titles, are presented as collective, and are handled by a long list of state-appointed directors.

All these features testify both to the hybrid nature of the BJIFF and to its ambitious goals, domestic and international. However, as with the Chinese

film industry more generally, the conditions under which the festival takes place are subject to rapid change: BJIFF must therefore respond to both the political climate and the needs of the ever-changing film market. One way to address this analytically is by adopting a contingency approach—a method used when studying global market management techniques which pays particular attention to the specific temporal and geographical contexts of the institution analyzed. Through this framework, we can assess the political and managerial strategies used to position BJIFF at the center of China’s domestic film activities at a moment when the Chinese market is increasingly attracting international interest.

STRATEGIC REPUTATION MANAGEMENT: THE BEIJING INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL AS A REPUTATIONAL FESTIVAL

Alex Fischer’s use of management theory to analyze the “film festival environment” encourages an understanding of film festivals as flexible and multidimensional. According to Fischer, “There is more to organising a film festival than simply screening films.”³⁰ In line with the contingency approach, festivals should be considered complex sets of functions and activities that respond to changing conditions, which are influenced by external forces such as the political and cultural environments, as well as by the needs of their stakeholders. Here, I adopt Taewon Suh and Lyn Amine’s definition of the term stakeholder to denote “individuals or organizations with a specific and continuing interest in [a] company and who may gain or suffer directly from involvement with the company, its services, employees or corporate actions.”³¹ Such a multidimensional approach proves useful when discussing BJIFF, as it prompts us to consider the many different contexts—local, national, and international—in which the festival’s management operates. In particular, strategic reputation management as a framework is helpful in making sense of an event that is managed by the state and connected to the national film industry, but is also aimed at establishing its position on the international film festival circuit.

Strategic reputation management draws on theories of communication, strategic management, and marketing.³² In her introduction to the concept, Sabrina Helm points out that corporate reputation “evolves as a result of consistent behaviour that eventually creates trust,” in contrast to

the idea of corporate image, which is a construct, “an immediate mental picture that individuals conceive of an organization.”³³ According to Kerstin Liehr-Gobbers and Christopher Storck, “Reputation is the collective perception of a company or institution through its stakeholders. It is the result of an exchange of personal and conveyed experiences between the organization, its stakeholders and third parties over time.”³⁴ What Suh and Amine term “reputational capital” is useful because it draws our attention to the stakeholders in an event or organization. A positive reputation impacts on different sets of group interests and activities, while offering the potential for profit.³⁵ An organization with considerable reputational capital is thus close to the idea of the “super-brand”: a company that is highly esteemed, and which therefore generates high levels of confidence, trust, and support among its stakeholders.³⁶

Thanks to their long history and established reputation, Venice, Cannes, and Berlin function as the film festival super-brands. Much like global companies, the three major international film festivals have been able to maintain their reputations despite periodic setbacks. In turn, these reputations have made them the global standard for a successful international film festival. The significance of the three major European festivals in the PRC has never wavered; only the impact of Hollywood’s Academy Awards is comparable. But if Cannes, Venice, and Berlin continue to attract global stakeholders, this is less because of the somewhat variable quality of their programming, and more because they present profitable marketing opportunities. In addition to the prestige they offer to filmmakers, actors, and film-related guests, each of these festivals is also an effective platform through which to increase the market value of film products. Films shown at Cannes, Venice, and Berlin may attract better distribution deals; filmmakers and producers can increase their reputation by presenting their work at these major events; sponsors and funding bodies can benefit from festival communication and journalists and editors can benefit from hearing about contracts and deals signed during the festivals. This system serves and maintains the reputation of the festivals while benefitting the broad range of their stakeholders.

Approached through this framework, it becomes clear that BJIFF positions itself vis-à-vis the international film festival circuit, and in particular the major festivals, as a way to increase its reputational capital. Although BJIFF’s prestige is unlikely to equal that of long-established festivals overnight, a stronger position in the film festival circuit would make

the event more attractive to domestic and international film companies, professionals, and business-related bodies. This is particularly true at present, for a number of inter-related reasons. First, the positive performance of the Chinese film market continues to attract international players interested in exploring this market in different ways. Second, the growing number of Chinese blockbusters makes any platform for promotional campaigns attractive for local companies. Finally, such platforms are even more essential for the Chinese film industry at a moment when top-tier festivals can offer visibility to only a very small number of high-budget or commercial Chinese productions annually, due to the limited number of titles they can program.³⁷

The various features and strategies of BJIFF's festival management can therefore all be read as a way of accumulating reputational capital, whether by arranging bombastic events, collecting endorsements from established festivals overseas or appointing an international general advisor for the film program. Understood in terms of reputation management, for example, the festival director has a role similar to that of a company's CEO and plays an important role in both the process of networking and marketing. From this perspective, BJIFF's management, with its collective emphasis, has historically lacked a key player. As Ariston Anderson notes, Marco Müller's appointment in 2015 could be read as a way to rectify this.³⁸ The former director of several international film festivals, including Venice, Müller was appointed as a "general advisor" (*shouxi guwen*) whom BJIFF would consult over the selection of film titles.³⁹ Müller praised the censors for allowing him to contribute 20 international titles to the festival program, but his contribution to the management and programming of the fifth edition of BJIFF remained limited and did not continue for the edition 2016.⁴⁰ However, Müller ensured the festival much better visibility in terms of international media coverage, and his extensive network of contacts in the global film industry could well represent a way for BJIFF to gradually accumulate reputational capital.

Once achieved, reputational capital can then be traded in for trust, legitimization of power or international recognition. In the case of BJIFF, the latter would help confirm Beijing's role as the center of the booming Chinese industry. Moreover, establishing a position for BJIFF among the major festivals would also offer a suitable promotional platform for domestic film releases. State and local institutions could also promote themselves as supporters of domestic cinema. Therefore, when

looking at BJIFF’s stakeholders—those who ultimately benefit from its reputation—its major interest groups are the Beijing authorities and domestic companies. This creates a system that translates the model of Venice, Cannes, and Berlin for the Chinese industry, which is otherwise heading toward a Chinese-Hollywood model. It also puts front and center state strategies to channel a specific type of domestic cinema which can boost the growth of the film market. As Ragan Rhyne has suggested in her analysis of stakeholders in the film festival circuit, “Film festivals are of relevance well beyond the study of the circulation of cinema and cinéophile communities” and can channel “diverse interests towards the goals of nation-states and global capital.”⁴¹ As the growth of the film sector continues with the expansion of screens across third-tier Chinese cities, BJIFF could also support the growth of the national film audience. Its red carpets, and its emphasis on glamor and film stars rather than film art, fit well with the current trends in the Chinese industry and resonate with the slogan of the three Ms: “Masters, Mass, Market.”

CONCLUSION

When assessing BJIFF in relation to Beijing’s current status as a global city and a crucial node in the world economy, Ragan Rhyne’s description of the Venice International Film Festival in the 1930s comes to mind. If the 1930s was a decade when “the [Venice] festival was simultaneously a site of nationalistic articulation, a forum for international relations, and a function of the commercial cinema market,”⁴² it was also a time when the growth of a popular Italian film industry was being strongly encouraged by Mussolini’s regime. BJIFF testifies to centralized Chinese state support for a certain type of cinema, as clearly indicated by the reference to Xi Jinping’s remarks in the press conference of the 2015 festival. And although private companies have taken over state studio film productions, state film institutions are still major decision-makers in the production and distribution system of the Chinese film industry.⁴³

The emphasis on politics in the Chinese context thus remains the major point of departure from the European festival model. This interplay of market-oriented activities and state guidelines is clearly displayed by BJIFF, particularly in its implementation of strategic reputation management, which provides the festival with a degree of competitive advantage.

We see this especially at the expense of its main domestic competitor, the SIFF, but also in relation to more independent events. Since the establishment of BJIFF, events such as the Beijing Independent Film Festival (BIFF) have had their activities curtailed, or even been forced to move away from the city altogether.⁴⁴

This points to an underlying tension between the centrality and the policies of BJIFF in relation to other film events, which tend to be marginalized in different ways. The 2015 BJIFF slogan, “One city, one festival,” once again resonates as a translation of a political line rather than a festival policy. According to this slogan, BJIFF ultimately aims to not only function as a platform to connect the Chinese film industry to the international film business globally, but also to establish the central role of Beijing vis-à-vis other players in the domestic and regional industry. These also include Shanghai and Hong Kong with their respective and better-established festivals, which until now have featured a broader variety of films.

NOTES

1. On March 18, 2013, the merging of the General Administration of Press and Publication of the People’s Republic of China (GAPP) and the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT), which incorporated the so-called Film Bureau (*dianying ju*), resulted in the creation of the larger State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television (SAPPRFT).
2. “About BJIFF,” *Beijing International Film Festival*, accessed April 6, 2015, <http://www.bjiff.com/festival/AboutBJIFF/>. The content of the webpages is updated frequently and the phrasing changed accordingly. The italics are mine for emphasis.
3. For a summary of the aims and sections of the festival, see also “Brief Introduction of the 5th BJIFF,” *Beijing International Film Festival Catalogue* (Beijing: BJIFF, 2015), 7. The printed catalogue of the festival also lists the Huairou District People’s Government of Beijing Municipality among the organizers.
4. “5th Beijing International Film Festival Press Conference,” *Beijing International Film Festival*, accessed April 6, 2015, http://www.bjiff.com/Banner/201503/t20150320_2213.html.

5. See *Divujie Beijing guoji dianyingjie kaimu dianli quancheng* [Full video of the opening ceremony of the 5th BJFF] (my translation), CCTV6, accessed August 30, 2015, <http://tv.sohu.com/20150417/n411408135.shtml>. I also attended the opening ceremony on April 13, 2015.
6. “About BJFF.”
7. Ibid.
8. The International Federation of Film Producers Associations (FIAPF) establishes the criteria for, and accredits film festivals worldwide. The A-list festivals are understood as the main international film festivals with a competitive section and are expected to meet certain industry standards. As of August 2014, the specifications listed on the FIAPF website (www.fiapf.org) included, among others, good year-round organizational resources, a genuinely international selection of films and competition juries, and good facilities for servicing international press correspondents.
9. Marijke de Valck, *Film Festivals. From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), 39–43; Julian Stringer, “Regarding Film Festivals,” (PhD thesis, Indiana University, 2001).
10. As analyses demonstrated, China’s box office performed better than the US box office during the 2015 Chinese New Year period. However, this occurred during the top-grossing season in China, which is one of the least remunerative seasons for film releases in the USA. See Ben Beaumont-Thomas, “Global Box Office Flatlines, but China Shows Strong Growth,” *The Guardian*, March 12, 2015, accessed April 11, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/mar/12/global-box-office-china-strong-growth>.
11. Statistics to this effect issued both by the MPAA and by Ernst and Young were circulated widely both in the English and Chinese press. As early as 2012, however, China was predicted to become the world’s largest film market by 2020. See “Spotlight on China—Building a Roadmap for Success in Media and Entertainment,” *EY*, accessed August 25, 2014, [http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/Spotlight_on_China/\\$File/Spotlight_on_China.pdf](http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/Spotlight_on_China/$File/Spotlight_on_China.pdf).
12. These trade publications often report informal comments circulating in the film industry, and refer to deals and agreements that are communicated directly to the publications by production and distribution companies.
13. Julia Lovell, “Prologue: Beijing 2008—The Mixed Messages of Contemporary Chinese Nationalism,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 25, no. 7 (2008): 758.
14. Cannes is often seen as the epitome of the business festival while the London Film Festival is an example of a large-scale audience festival. See

- Mark Peranson, "First You Get the Power, Then You Get the Money: Two Models of Film Festivals," in *Dekalog 3: On Film Festivals*, ed. Richard Porton (London: Wallflower Press, 2009), 23–37.
15. The APEC CEO Summit is the Asia-Pacific's premier business event, drawing economic leaders and senior business figures from the region and beyond. It was held in Beijing, November 8–10, 2014.
 16. "Key Figures of the Beijing Film Market 2014," *Beijing Film Market 2015*, accessed April 11, 2015, <http://bfm.bjiff.com/2015/en/content.html?title=GENERALINFO&subt=Profile&sid=5de974fbad0641e48ec156d829173207>.
 17. Hong Kong Trade Development Council, "FILMART Closes With Record Of 7,100+ Visitors," press release, March 27, 2015, accessed April 11, 2015, http://www.hktdc.com/fair/hkfilmart-en/s/8108-For_Press/Hong-Kong-International-Film---TV-Market--FILMART-/Press-Releases-27Mar2015.html. The Hong Kong FILMART takes place during the Hong Kong International Film Festival (HKIFF), and along with the Busan Asian Film Market (AFM) is considered one of the major Asian film markets. Just as Cannes, Venice, and Berlin are strategically positioned in three different quarters of the annual calendar, the Filmart and AFM take place in March and October, respectively, thus serving productions completed in the two different halves of the year.
 18. "Final Report of the 4th Beijing International Film Festival—Beijing Film Market," *Beijing Film Market 2015*, accessed April 11, 2015, <http://bfm.bjiff.com/2015/en/content.html?title=GENERAL%20INFO&subt=2014%20Final%20Report&sid=2899f150c930444fbc764ca8236febd1>.
 19. Together with the Hong Kong Asia Film Financing Forum (HAF), the Filmart attracts a significant number of European film festival programmers and professionals in addition to Asian film companies. These European participants would require the possibility of relevant business deals to extend their stay in Asia in order to attend the Beijing event.
 20. As I observed, during BJIFF's second edition (April 23–29, 2012), James Cameron attended all public events, with huge media exposure, immediately following the 3D re-release of *Titanic* in China. The film was "the biggest opener of all time in the country, earning \$58 million in the first six days of its show." See Bai Shi, "Party for the Stars: New Movie Deals at the Beijing Film Festival," *Beijing Review*, May 14, 2012, accessed August 20, 2014, http://www.bjreview.com.cn/culture/txt/2012-05/14/content_452204.htm.
 21. Video excerpts of the participation of such international guests are available on the BJIFF website.

22. Special issues of *The Chinese Market* are regularly published and distributed during Cannes, Venice, and Berlin.
23. Ren Xiao, “Traditional Chinese Theory and Practice of Foreign Relations: A Reassessment,” in *China and International Relations: The Chinese View and the Contribution of Wang Gungwu*, ed. Zheng Yongnian (London: Routledge 2010), 114–15.
24. The opening and closing ceremonies and the Tiantan Award ceremony of the third BJIFF, with their respective red carpets, were recorded on a promotional DVD that was distributed at other international film festivals over the course of the year. I received my own copy of the DVD when BJIFF representatives visited the Venice festival in September 2013.
25. If Berlin is still an important festival for both film professionals and the city audience, Cannes and Venice are by now mainly business festivals. Although Venice has a policy of selling tickets, its focus is on the number of accredited participants. This emphasis on professionals and journalists is also related to the fact that the three major European festivals are now conveniently scheduled in the three different quarters of the marketing year that constitute the maximum horizon for most films from the end of their post-production to their festival presentation and distribution.
26. Although not A-list festivals, the Toronto International Film Festival and the Vienna International Film Festival are established events accredited by FIAPF as Non-Competitive Feature Film Festivals that, with their range of film titles and focus on the urban audience, might constitute a model for BJIFF.
27. Skadi Loist, “Precarious Cultural Work: About the Organization of (Queer) Film Festivals,” *Screen* 52, no. 2 (2011): 268–73.
28. Patrick Frater, “Beijing Film Festival Wraps Fifth Edition in Transition,” *Variety*, May 1, 2015, accessed April 20, 2016, <http://variety.com/2015/film/global/beijing-film-festival-fifth-edition-1201484168/>.
29. I had the opportunity to attend all the BJIFF festival delegates’ activities in Venice, including the writing of the letter, which was duly filmed and photographed. The photograph was available in the news archive of the BJIFF, and as of August 2014 could be accessed online at <http://www.bjiff.com/20140408/n397913238.shtml>.
30. Alex Fischer, *Sustainable Projections: Concepts in Film Festival Studies* (St Andrews: St Andrews Film Studies, 2013), xi.
31. Taewon Suh and Lyn Amine, “Defining and Managing Reputational Capital in Global Markets,” *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice* 15, no. 3 (2007): 206.
32. *Ibid.*, 211.

33. Sabrina Helm, "Corporate Reputation: An Introduction to a Complex Construct," in *Reputation Management*, ed. Sabrina Helm, Kerstin Liehr-Gobbers, and Christopher Storck (Berlin and Heidelberg: Springer, 2011), 9.
34. Kerstin Liehr-Gobbers and Christopher Storck, "Approaching Corporate Reputation," in *Reputation Management*, ed. Sabrina Helm, Kerstin Liehr-Gobbers, and Christopher Storck (Berlin and Heidelberg: Springer, 2011), 18.
35. Suh and Amine, "Reputational Capital," 206. The concept of reputational capital, which is used at an organizational level, should be distinguished both from image, which denotes a holistic yet individual experience, and from Bourdieu's social and cultural capital, which refers to the influence of different and durable networks on individuals or groups, but lacks the flexibility of a managerial framework. See Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," trans. Richard Nice, in *Handbook of Theory of Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1986), 248.
36. For discussion of super-brands, see Grahame Dowling, *Creating Corporate Reputations: Identity, Image, and Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
37. While in the 1990s, Cannes, Venice, and Berlin were key conduits for Chinese cinema to reach world audiences, their recent line-ups have not been able to accommodate the growing number of Chinese mainstream productions.
38. Ariston Anderson, "Marco Mueller links up with Beijing International Film Festival," *The Hollywood Reporter*, January 26, 2015, accessed April 20, 2016, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/marco-mueller-links-up-beijing-767064>.
39. See BJIFF's official website announcement of Marco Müller's appointment as general advisor and his team. "Make Mulei xieshou jingying guwen tuandui zhuli diwujie Beijing dianyingjie" [Marco Müller joins hands with first rate advisory team to assist the 5th BJIFF], March 6, 2015, accessed May 15, 2015, http://www.bjiff.com/mrxw/201502/t20150213_2077.html.
40. Frater, "Beijing Film Festival Wraps Fifth Edition."
41. Ragan Rhyne, "Film Festival Circuits and Stakeholders (2009)," in *The Film Festival Reader*, ed. Dina Iordanova (St Andrews: St Andrews Film Studies with College Gate Press, 2013), 136.
42. *Ibid.*, 137.

43. For example, film release dates are not decided by film companies but through negotiations between them and the state film authorities.
44. Ryan Lattanzio, “New York Rescues Beijing Independent Film Festival,” *Indiewire*, July 14, 2015, accessed August 30, 2015, <http://blogs.indiewire.com/thompsononhollywood/new-york-rescues-beijing-independent-film-festival-20150714>.

Culture Translation Between “Local” and “International”: The Golden Harvest Award in Taiwan

Ming-yeh T. Rawnsley

There were an estimated 170 film festivals worldwide in the 1980s,¹ but in 2003, this number rose to 700.² Some exhibition venues, such as the Riverside Studios in London, disclosed that 60 percent of their screenings in 2011 were part of one festival or another.³ In the twenty-first century, film festivals are playing an increasingly crucial role in our multicultural experiences across the globe. The film festival is often imagined as a window on the world translating “international” cultures into the “national” or “local” cultures, and vice versa. However, we do not yet fully understand film festivals and their contribution to the formation of our world-views and the cultures that bind or divide us.

This chapter answers two sets of questions from the angle of cultural translation: First, how has film festival culture been translated into Taiwan? More specifically, how did the state adopt and translate the American practices and concept of film awards to suit local needs during the martial law period? Subsequently, how did the policymakers and cultural elites translate and integrate European practices and concept of film festivals

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into existing Taiwanese film awards during the 1980s and 1990s when Taiwan was democratized? Second, as both the domestic and international cultural landscapes have changed dramatically in the new millennium, how might film festivals function as a cultural broker to enhance the quality of film education and the growth of the local film industry? And how do film festivals help to project Taiwan's cultural values and soft power abroad? In answering the first questions, my hypothesis is that the film awards have been "festivalized" as part of a process of democratizing a previously closed event while developing democracy and public culture on the island as a whole. For the second questions, I will argue that the role of the film festival as a cultural broker has developed as part of a growing anxiety about influence and visibility since Taiwan was pushed out of the United Nations (UN) in the 1970s. Therefore, this chapter will add a less noticed geographical area of research—Taiwan—to the existing literature on film festivals, while at the same time injecting a new aspect of enquiry on the local and international dynamics of film festivals into the study of Taiwanese cinema.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THE RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

The case study selected for this chapter is the Golden Harvest Awards, an annual film award established by the Government Information Office (GIO) in 1978 to encourage the production of short films and documentaries. Prior to democratization, the Golden Harvest Awards only accepted 16 mm and 8 mm works and had merely a handful of categories. After 1989, it began accepting videos in addition to 16 mm and 8 mm films.⁴ Video became a prominent medium during the process of liberalization in the 1980s, used by dissidents and independent filmmakers to record and disseminate alternative audiovisual materials and views not covered by the mainstream media.⁵ This indicates that the Golden Harvest Awards have gradually evolved from a closed and activity controlled by the authorities into a more open and film expert-oriented event. However, their public profile remained low until recent years, when the increasing number of award categories, related workshops, and public screenings has attracted much more attention and wider participation from college students from both inside and outside Taiwan. More details about the Golden Harvest Awards will be discussed in the next section.

In the context of Taiwanese film festival studies, scholarly output is scarce, especially on the Golden Harvest Awards.⁶ During its history of

nearly four decades, the Awards have been briefly referenced in a limited number of publications that look at Taiwanese documentaries and short films.⁷ Apart from annual program booklets, lengthy writings dedicated to the subject are rare. One postgraduate dissertation appeared in 2011.⁸ *The Film Appreciation Journal* also commissioned a special report on the Awards' 2011 nominated films.⁹

On the other hand, alongside the sudden growth of film festivals since the late 1990s, there has been an increasing discourse on local film festivals. This discourse has been primarily produced by Taiwan's festival insiders, including festival organizers, members of juries, filmmakers, critics, journalists and bloggers.¹⁰ Many such writings are anecdotal, informational and sometimes policy-oriented with practical suggestions. A distinctive characteristic of the Golden Harvest Awards is that Taiwan's film festival insiders—especially the festival directors and appointed judges of the Golden Harvest Awards—often hold a teaching position in the film departments of colleges and universities. This has two important implications for the configuration of Taiwan's film festival circuit.

First, the division between festival observers and festival insiders can be blurred. As the perspectives of stakeholders are less diversified, it is easy for the island's film festival circuit to turn inward and become self-perpetuating. This does not mean that the local film festivals are fixated only on exhibiting Taiwan cinema or Chinese-language cinema. Far from it—in fact, many film festivals in Taiwan prominently feature non-Chinese-language cinema and filmmakers from outside Taiwan. In this regard, the Golden Harvest Awards are unique, as their main purpose is to encourage locally produced short film projects and local talents.¹¹ However, as a significant number of festival insiders are Western-trained filmmakers and researchers (who also teach film studies and film production in Taiwan), the island's film festival circuit becomes a network of members who share tacitly similar views, values and experiences directly or indirectly informed by the traditions of European art-house cinema. The concept of “festival films” has been keenly observed on film festival screens in Taiwan: “Never only or purely local, festival films nonetheless circulate ... with a cachet of locally inscribed difference and globally ascribed commonality. They both attest to the uniqueness of different cultures and specific filmmakers and affirm the underlying qualities of an ‘international cinema.’”¹² In practice, local organizers and audiences generally interpret the term “festival films” as excellent (in other words, award-winning), foreign, art-house movies that are not produced by Hollywood and not available for domestic

theatrical release. In this way, they expect to see such “international cinema” predominating the island’s film festivals.¹³

Sociologists have pointed out that the strength of “a densely knit clump of social structure”—one where most of the individuals in it are connected with one another through strong personal ties—is that the group can be highly motivated and highly functional.¹⁴ I should clarify that “strong ties” quoted here means kinship and close friendship.¹⁵ However for the purpose of this chapter, I broaden the definition of “strong ties” to include the teacher–student relationship and professionals who work in the same circle and share similar social networks. In other words, I replace the concept of “strong ties” with what Chinese people call “*guanxi*.”¹⁶

The weakness of a social structure woven through *guanxi* is that such a group can be less innovative, as the members “will be deprived of information from distant parts of the social system and will be confined to the provincial news and views of their close friends. This deprivation will not only insulate them from the latest ideas and fashions but may put them in a disadvantaged position” in a wider context.¹⁷ In a separate but related article on Taiwanese documentaries, Kuo Li-hsin commented on a collective inward-looking quality developed in recent years: “By my observation ... sentimentalism, depoliticized humanitarianism, and the inward-looking trend are dominant characteristics in mainstream Taiwanese documentary culture.... These traits in mainstream documentary culture help construct and reinforce Taiwan as an inward-looking society, further isolated from international communities and with narrower concerns and visions.”¹⁸ I believe that discussions among sociologists about the weakness of a “densely knit clump of social structure” may offer a convincing explanation for the phenomenon identified by Kuo.

As festival organizer Wu Fan has admitted, most film festivals in Taiwan do not have regular staff. However, it is often the same core group of people who work from one film festival to another because many are or were film students. Because they once knew each other, it is easy to form a temporary but efficient team at short notice.¹⁹ This is the essence of *guanxi*; it is not necessarily deliberate exclusion of outsiders, but “strong ties have greater motivation to be of assistance and are typically more easily available.”²⁰

Several experienced practitioners have recognized that many film festivals in Taiwan are strong in serving local cinephiles, but weak in two functions: facilitating dialogue and exchanges between local and international filmmakers; and promoting the Taiwan film industry through the galaxy

of film festivals and their associated activities. In other words, local experts feel that as a translation machine, Taiwan's film festivals may be good at bringing "international" cultures to the locals, but inadequate in translating the local Chinese and Taiwanese cultures to the outside world.²¹ However, despite perceiving this as a problem for many years, few feel able to suggest solutions—except continuing to seek a bigger budget for organizing more but similar film festivals in the future. As Granovetter has asserted, when "the innovativeness of central units is shackled by vested intellectual interests (or perspectives) then new ideas must emanate from the margins of the network."²² Therefore, the diversity of membership, as well as the distance the circle can expand through more varied connections, will matter to the long-term survival of Taiwan's film festivals and its film industry as a whole.

Second, as far as the Golden Harvest Awards are concerned, the closeness between policymakers, film educators, competition participants, and festival insiders allows us to detect a tentative link between the Golden Harvest Awards and Taiwan's film education and film culture.²³ Of course, the formation of a film culture consists of multiple elements and complex networks other than film festivals and film schools at the college level. Moreover, further studies are necessary to ascertain the impact of the Golden Harvest Awards on the island's filmmakers and the film environment. Nevertheless, throughout the 1970s, the 1980s, and most of the 1990s, there were only two annual film festivals in Taiwan—the two festivals associated with the Golden Horse Awards and the Golden Harvest Awards. The former was designed to encourage high-end achievement within Taiwan's film industry and was thus largely beyond the reach of students and independent filmmakers. At the end of the twentieth century, the latter became the only platform where the young generations of filmmakers in Taiwan were able to test their skills and artistic vision in a competitive setting. By analyzing the changes and the continuity of the Golden Harvest Awards, it is possible to evaluate their contribution to the development of Taiwan's film culture, however tenuous the connection may be.

I will first offer an overview of the Golden Harvest Awards in order to understand its structures and components. I then examine the negotiation and power play between different stakeholders in the festival, and how the Awards have become a mediator between various players and social sectors to facilitate the development of Taiwan's film industry by translating specific elements of Western film knowledge and practices to

the local cultural milieu. Furthermore, the development of many new Taiwan-centered film events in recent years has challenged the Golden Harvest Awards to rethink its traditional and specific roles. By exploring the current identity crisis from which the Golden Harvest Awards suffer, the discussion foregrounds the rapidly changing landscape of Taiwan's film environment, especially the sudden proliferation of Taiwan-related film festivals on and off the island. This identity crisis reveals the anxieties of Taiwan's cultural agents about the perceived imbalanced translation process from the "local" to the "international" and their deep sense of frustration and uncertainty about how to address these issues.

HISTORY, STRUCTURES AND STAKEHOLDERS

Historical Background

The first film festival-like event in Taiwan was privately held in 1958 by a newspaper, *Zhengxin News* (later *The China Times*), to celebrate the Taiwanese-language film industry. However, cinema shot in the local *minnan* language of the island was not considered "national" at the time, and therefore not endorsed by the ruling Nationalist (also known as the Kuomintang or KMT) regime, which aspired to recover power over mainland China. Therefore, in order to promote Mandarin-language cinema as part of the KMT's nation-building project, the GIO decided to organize the annual Golden Horse Awards in 1962, loosely modeled on the Academy Awards in the USA (the Oscars).²⁴ Since the mid-1960s, Mandarin-language films became increasingly popular while the local dialect film industry gradually fizzled out by the early 1970s.²⁵

In 1965, a few amateur cinema and theater enthusiasts established a magazine entitled *Theater (Juchang)* in order to bring Western avant-garde art and cultural theories to Taiwan. It systematically introduced the ideas of *Cahiers du Cinema*, French New Wave and influential European auteurs to its readers. *Theater* stopped publication after nine issues due to lack of funding, but it created a new window for Taiwan's alternative cinema, manifested in cultural elites' interest and practice in experimental short films and documentaries.²⁶ The magazine organized two special film screenings during its existence: In 1966, it showcased four experimental films by three local artists, and in 1967 eight avant-garde films by seven local filmmakers.²⁷

When the GIO decided to organize the annual Golden Harvest Awards in 1978 to fill the cultural gap for short films and documentaries left by the closure of *Theater*, Taiwan was still under martial law. Foreign-language cinema was strictly regulated and the prosperous local film markets were crammed with Hollywood and Hong Kong productions, as well as domestically produced martial arts epics, historical costume dramas, and modern “romantic literary” (*aiqing wenyi*) movies.²⁸ On the other hand, the nonfictional films made in Taiwan from the 1950s through to the 1970s were caught in the ideological fever of the Cold War. The films were mainly about the military, Taiwan’s economic achievements, natural environment, and other local interests.²⁹

The Cold War context might also explain the format of the Golden Harvest Awards as a closed film event instead of an open film exhibition. First, the US film culture and the Academy Awards were much more familiar to the people on Taiwan than European film festivals at the time. Second, Taiwan was suffering from several external shocks that had widespread internal repercussions throughout the 1970s, including the sovereignty dispute over the Diaoyutai islands with Japan in 1970, the withdrawal of the Republic of China (ROC) from the UN in 1971, and the normalization of relations between the USA and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1979.³⁰ These international political crises provoked renewed anti-imperialism on the island, which in turn inspired the rise of nativist literature and a nationalistic spirit of raising local cultural awareness.³¹ The Golden Harvest Awards could be viewed as one of the cultural schemes utilized by the KMT to appease a certain section of the cultural elites who were more in tune with Western modernism than Taiwanese localism.³² However, the authorities still wished to maintain a degree of control over cultural expression. It was easier for the government to exert that control by awarding film projects only shown to a limited number of competitors and jury members, rather than organizing a film festival open to the general public. In this way, the Golden Harvest Awards performed a critical task in its formative years as a vehicle that helped to carry the fresh, Western, and artistic ideas from the 1960s through to the 1980s, even though the exhibition of its award-winning films always remained a low-key and closed event then. Many filmmakers who received grants and prizes from Golden Harvest for making experimental short films later became instrumental in Taiwan cinema, including Wang Ju-jin, Wan Ren, Ke Yi-zheng, Tsai Ming-liang, Lee Daw-ming and Ang Lee.³³

Significantly, Taiwan experienced dramatic cultural and social liberalization 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 in 2000 by its opposition, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). The second change of government happened in 2008 when the KMT defeated the DPP and was voted back into power.

Parallel with social and political democratization, the GIO tried to introduce more diverse cultural products to the island by adding an annual international film exhibition, featuring primarily European cinema, to the Golden Horse Awards in 1980. Meanwhile, many local, younger-generation filmmakers of the early 1980s made a conscious decision to project onto the silver screen the reality of contemporary Taiwan as they understood it, not as the official rhetoric preferred. Their films broke government censorship and language policies, and became thematically and aesthetically very different from the mainstream commercial films Taiwanese audiences were familiar with. The filmmakers of the Taiwan New Cinema favored a more subtle and complex mode of filmmaking that was closer to real-life experience. Yet as “the dramatic plots faded away in the Taiwan New Cinema, so did the audience, and with them the producers and investors, pushing the film movement to the edge of financial non-viability.”³⁴ Coincidentally, the local commercial film industry also suffered from a serious decline. There were 158 local films shot in 1988, but the number dropped to 28 in 1994³⁵ and 18 in 2003.³⁶ Once the import restrictions on cinema were lifted in the 1990s, Taiwan’s commercial film market became completely dominated by Hollywood, which enjoyed as much as 95 percent of all box-office revenues on the island.³⁷

If the contribution of the Golden Harvest Awards in their earlier years were to facilitate exploration of film aesthetics and content in short films and documentaries, which culminated (perhaps indirectly) in the arrival of the Taiwan New Cinema and New Documentaries in the 1980s,³⁸ their contribution to film production during the prolonged period of production drought between the 1990s and the early 2000s became more direct, and must not be overlooked. As commercial investment shied away from local cinema, the Golden Harvest Awards became one of the few funding sources and viable platforms for filmmakers to produce and possibly showcase their creative projects to an audience. Many prominent filmmakers in Taiwan, some of whom are enthusiastically embraced by home audiences

today, were once Golden Harvest Award winners, such as Wei Te-sheng, Shen Ko-shang and Yee Chih-Yen.

Reiterating the importance of film education to a group of film students in Taipei in 2002, filmmaker Wang Tong said: “Taiwan cinema will revive one day, although it may not be today. However, when the moment arrives, you must be ready. Taiwan cinema needs talent.”³⁹ Since the Golden Harvest Awards have been a highly regarded competitive arena for local filmmakers and students, they have played an implicit but considerable role in Taiwan’s film education. Wang’s prediction in 2002 later came true, even though the recovery of the film industry was a slow and arduous process. The box-office performance of Wei Te-sheng’s *Cape No.7* (*Hai jiao qi bao*) generated momentum in 2008, and the domestic movie market finally showed signs of revival. It is estimated that between 30 and 50 feature films (including documentaries) are now produced in Taiwan each year.⁴⁰ It is difficult to envisage such a rapid increase without a home-grown talent pool waiting for favorable conditions to fall into place. It can be argued that the Golden Harvest Awards have made a particularly significant contribution to Taiwan cinema by sustaining talent when the industry was at its lowest ebb.

Structures and Stakeholders

Unlike most Taiwanese film festivals, the Golden Harvest Awards enjoy secure funding and regular administration by staff members, even though the size of the budget varies year by year. The Awards were originally financed by the GIO and are now financed by the Ministry of Culture since the GIO was abolished in 2012. The administration has been the responsibility of the Chinese Taipei Film Archive (CTFA), an institution tasked with collecting, restoring, preserving and researching Taiwan’s film cultural heritage, including that of the Republican era. CTFA is an independent organization, but is financially supported by the government. Dr. Lin Wen-chi, director of the CTFA, told me in an interview that he anticipated enhancing the role of the Golden Harvest Awards from simply a film competition and exhibition event to a more proactive player in Taiwan’s film education and film industry. However, this can only happen once the CTFA is upgraded to the National Film Centre by 2016 as planned by the Ministry of Culture.⁴¹ While Dr. Lin’s vision should not be treated as a confirmed policy statement, it nevertheless illuminates how the principle stakeholders wish to use the Golden Harvest Awards as a facilitator in

Taiwan's film education and film industry, with a major input in the shaping of the island's larger film culture.

According to my interviewees, the overall structure of the Golden Harvest Awards has maintained continuity because their purpose has always remained the same—cultivating local talent and encouraging early-career filmmakers.⁴² However, changes in certain practices are noteworthy as they may reflect the gradual transformation of Taiwan's film industry and the larger international environment in which Taiwan is situated. For example, Dr. Lin revealed that the total budget for the Awards was NTD 8 million (c. US\$250,000) in 2010; it dropped to NTD 7.73 million (c. US\$264,000) in 2011 and NTD 6.90 million (c. US\$231,700) in 2012, but then jumped to NTD 10 million (c. US\$335,800) in 2013. I suggest that the sudden increase in budget may be explained by two inter-related factors: The newly created Ministry of Culture indicates that the Taiwan government, alongside the Chinese government, has begun to see “culture” as a valuable resource to demonstrate a country's “soft power”;⁴³ and cinema is considered a viable asset within Taiwan's soft power strategy.⁴⁴ Therefore, the Ministry of Culture is not only devoting a relatively healthy budget to the Golden Harvest Awards, but also initiating a series of new Spotlight Taiwan programs, which often include a film festival-like event to showcase Taiwanese cinema abroad.⁴⁵ I shall return to this point for further discussion later.

The competition for the Golden Harvest Awards normally begins in September. Meanwhile, the CTFA appoints seven external experts to form a jury, all of whom are involved in the creative industries in Taiwan. To use the 2013 Golden Harvest Awards as an example, each of the seven jury members were drawn from animation, television, arts, advertising, documentary, popular music or commercial filmmaking, and three also teach in universities. When the jury meets for the first time, they decide among themselves what the fundamental criteria for that particular year should be. In this way, film professionals and film educators become the second set of stakeholders of the Golden Harvest Awards, as the independent jury is empowered to steer the direction of what an award-winning film should look like. Once the CTFA has collected all the submissions in November, the jury has over a month to watch them in private and agree collectively on a short list in mid-January, which is announced through a press release prepared by the CTFA. Thus, the journalists and press agents can be considered the third set of stakeholders, but their role seems more passive and marginal in the case of the Golden Harvest Awards. Upon

close examination, the publicity and publications around the Awards rely heavily on several outside forces, including the CTFA as the organizer of the Awards and the editor of a prominent film journal in Taiwan, *The Film Appreciation Journal*, as well as the film scholars and film critics who are film festival insiders.

In the 1990s, the technological and financial threshold to enter the Golden Harvest Awards was rather high for ordinary students, and as a result, the number of submissions was normally between 30 and 40.⁴⁶ Therefore, the award ceremonies of the 1990s were dominated by established filmmakers and film students from overseas (especially from the USA) who held a valid passport of the ROC.⁴⁷ Moreover, the exhibition of the award-winning productions remained a specialized event for the Awards participants throughout the 1990s.

Since the Golden Harvest Awards began accepting all audiovisual materials in the late 2000s, the number of submissions increased to a couple of hundred each year. Moreover, it was stipulated that in order to ensure a level playing field for new talent, the CTFA would no longer accept submission from filmmakers who had already won twice in the Golden Harvest Awards, or who had enjoyed commercial release of a feature film (drama or documentary). Despite structural continuity, these minor changes have made the Golden Harvest Awards very different in the twenty-first century. Although the focus of the Awards has always been on short films, the submissions in the 1990s were generally much shorter (less than 30 minutes) than today (close to 60 minutes). This may be explained by a reduction in the cost of filmmaking. Second, the number of student entrants, especially from within local colleges and universities, has risen sharply. Moreover, the number of prizes has also increased correspondingly. According to Shen Ko-shang, this has made the Golden Harvest Awards today look much more like a student affair than in the 1990s. Finally, in 2013, an overwhelming number of submissions poured into the drama category, while the documentary, experimental films and animation submissions dwindled. Wang Shao-hua, director of the Programming Department of the CTFA, speculated that this change is due to the revival of the domestic commercial film market, combined with increasing opportunities for cross-strait and pan-Asian co-productions. In particular, Wang pointed out that since the Taiwan International Animation Film Festival closed in 2008, output of animation reduced, as many local talents turned their attention to animation film festivals and markets in mainland China instead. In other words, from the perspective of encouraging film diversity,

innovation, and creativity, the lure of the market may present a different set of challenges for the organizers of the Golden Harvest Awards.

In recent years, the CTFA further enhanced its role as a local mediator between the film education and industry sectors by expanding Golden Harvest Awards-related events, including seminars, workshops, and the exhibition tour of award-winning films. Between the announcement of the short list in January and the revelation of the final winners in March, the CTFA organizes a series of master classes, normally between four and six events, targeted at the nominees. The purpose is to help the nominees gain further insight into opportunities in the film industry. To ensure quality, the selected speakers are mostly experienced filmmakers, scriptwriters, and producers in or outside Taiwan, some of whom may also be past winners of the Golden Harvest Awards.⁴⁸ In this way, the filmmakers and film professionals become important stakeholders in the Awards.

The final meeting of the jury takes place in early March. Previous judges of the Golden Harvest Awards often depict it as a battle between the willpower and stamina of individual jury members. Once the jury reaches a consensus on all official winners, each member may also nominate a special prize to encourage an individual outstanding performance or achievement.⁴⁹ As soon as the jury has made its decisions, the CTFA announces the results to the press. The jury is dissolved, and the award-winning filmmakers and films tour the island, mostly in schools, colleges, and universities, but sometimes in libraries, arts centers and museums. It is customary to arrange a short discussion with the filmmaker(s) or an expert of some sort after the screening. It is at this stage that the participating organizations for screenings and the audiences also become stakeholders of the Golden Harvest Awards.

By looking at the venues, we can deduce that the Golden Harvest Awards target a specific audience of viewers instead of a mass audience, despite the changes in regulations and the expansion of festival activities by the CTFA since the late 2000s. For this reason, perhaps the virtue of the Golden Harvest Awards should still be understood as their long-term cultivation of film culture in Taiwan and not necessarily as a short-term measure to plug holes in the local film industry. As cinema is increasingly viewed and managed as a branch of creative industry in many countries including Taiwan, recent film scholarship has expanded to focus on the political economy of production, marketing strategies, distribution and exhibition. However, as the history of the Golden Harvest Awards has demonstrated, filmmakers and their films remain the most fundamental

elements of a national cinema, while an audience with a diverse taste in cinema is also crucial in sustaining a vibrant film economy.

AN IDENTITY CRISIS?

The Golden Harvest Awards is currently perceived to be facing an identity crisis as since the late 1990s, there has been an explosion of regular film festivals in Taiwan. Festival organizer Wu Fan once said ironically that Taiwan had no film industry, but a film festival industry, and she estimated that there were more than 30 established film festivals taking place on the island in 2007.⁵⁰ The explanation for this seemingly contradictory scenario is beyond the scope of this research paper. However, Wu has offered a selected list of Taiwanese film festivals launched between 1962 and 2007.⁵¹ I adopt Wu's list with a few updates in Table 4.1, which will be useful for my discussion in this section.

Among the film festivals listed in Table 4.1, the Golden Horse Awards remain the most prominent, and continue to be dominated by high-end productions and movie stars, promoting cinema as a glamorous industry. However, two relatively new film festivals also deserve our attention: The Taipei Film Festival, established in 1998, has been credited for its artistic vision. It often awards projects that are not necessarily commercially popular but which have cultural and aesthetic merit.⁵² Also, the International Student Film Golden Lion Awards, established in 1999 and accepting works only from students, have become an important film event for the younger generation.⁵³

Moreover, since the launch of the Ministry of Culture in Taiwan in 2013, there have been a series of vibrant cultural and academic activities promoting Taiwan overseas under the Spotlight Taiwan Project initiative, which will run between 2013 and 2016.⁵⁴ The Project highlights international exchanges and funding individual academic and research institutions overseas that successfully apply for the grant. Many of the Spotlight Taiwan programs host a variety of events throughout the academic year, and, as it happens, an overwhelming number of the Spotlight Taiwan programs also feature film screening sessions to foreground Taiwan cinema. As discussed elsewhere in this volume by Luke Robinson, 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 them, whether literally or figuratively, and often in multiple directions. Therefore, cultural brokers facilitate movement across borders both

Table 4.1 Selected regular film festivals in Taiwan, 1962–2007

<i>Festival</i>	<i>Starting year</i>	<i>Primary location</i>	<i>Organizers</i>
Golden Horse Awards (competition)	1962	Taipei	Golden Horse Awards Organizing Committee
Golden Horse Awards (international film exhibition)	1980	Taipei	Golden Horse Awards Organizing Committee
Golden Harvest Awards	1978	Taipei	Chinese Taipei Film Archive
Women Make Waves Taiwan	1993	Taipei	Taiwan Women Film & Video Association
A kind of Gaze Film Festival	1997	Jinmen	Jinmen County Documentary Cultural Association and Firefly Film Company
Taipei Film Festival	1998	Taipei	Taipei City Government
Taiwan International Documentary Festival	1998	Taipei and Taichung (1998–2004); Taichung only (2006 onwards)	Cultural Affairs Commission
International Student Film Golden Lion Awards	1999	Taipei	National Taiwan University of Arts and Taipei City Government
Taiwan International Ethnographic Film Festival	2001	Taipei	Taiwan Association of Visual Ethnography
Pure 16 mm Independent Film Festival	2001–2004	Taipei	Taiwan Original Filmmaker Union and Yitai Film Company
South Taiwan Film Festival	2001	Tainan	National Tainan University of Arts
Kaohsiung Film Festival	2001	Kaohsiung	Kaohsiung City Government
Urban Nomad Film Festival	2002	Taipei	Urban Nomad Film Festival
Taiwan International Animation Film Festival	2003–2008	Taipei	Chinese Taipei Film Archive
Yilan International Children's Film Festival	2003	Yilan	Yilan County Government
Taiwan International Children's Film Festival	2004	Taipei	Public Television System

(continued)

Table 4.1 (continued)

<i>Festival</i>	<i>Starting year</i>	<i>Primary location</i>	<i>Organizers</i>
Yilan Green International Film Festival	2004	Yilan	Yilan County Government
Purple Ribbon Film Festival	2005	Taipei	Taipei County Government and Family and Sexual Violence Prevention Centre
Iron horse film festival	2005	Taipei	Laoku website
CNEX Taipei Documentary Film Festival	2007	Taipei	CNEX Foundation

literally (through networks of contacts that bridge physical and legal borders) and through their discursive ability to bridge linguistic and cultural borders. In this sense, the Spotlight Taiwan Project can be explicitly positioned as a “transcultural mediator” because its programming is defined by a particular Taiwanese cultural perspective (although, of course, this perspective is itself multicultural). Given the difficulties facing Taiwan’s international status, perhaps it is more accurate to describe the Spotlight Taiwan Project as Taiwan’s attempt to claim a cultural presence in international cultural space, rather than an aggressive strategy to contest the status quo.⁵⁵ As part of Taiwan’s cultural diplomacy and soft power mechanism, the Spotlight Taiwan Project acquires an “international” edge over the Golden Harvest Awards, which is a more established and traditional local film festival.

Under these circumstances, it is understandable that some observers question whether the values of the Golden Harvest Awards have been replaced by the Taipei Film Festival and the International Student Film Golden Lion Awards or not.⁵⁶ The organizers of the Golden Harvest Awards have also voiced their concerns that the Awards have not received the level of international recognition they deserve.⁵⁷ The organizers are debating new methods of differentiating the Golden Harvest Awards from other domestic film festivals and Taiwan-related film festivals abroad, so that they are seen as making a relevant and valuable contribution to society.

If we consider the Golden Harvest Awards a “corrective” film festival in relation to the Golden Horse Awards in its attempt to encourage alternative cinema and different methods of filmmaking, it may be argued that the various new film festivals in Taiwan are doubly so in their intention to further promote more varied stylistic and narrative feature film

events that did not previously exist on the island. For example, the Women Make Waves Taiwan (established in 1993) is gender-specific, the Taiwan International Documentary Festival (established in 1998) focuses on documentary and the Yilan International Children's Film Festival (established in 2003) encourages children's films.

The current dilemma experienced by the Golden Harvest Awards reveals the constant renegotiation and uneasy dynamics between different cultural brokers and film festival stakeholders as the overall film landscape evolves and develops. I do not believe that the Golden Harvest Awards have an identity crisis, because its aims and structural components are distinctive and have largely remained the same over nearly four decades. Although thematically its focus may not be as sharp as other examples of film festivals, such as animation film festivals, ethnographic film festivals and green film festivals, the film format it encourages—projects shorter than 60 minutes—is often associated with the world of documentary in Taiwan. As Robert Chi has stated: “Many such independent filmmakers, for example, teach filmmaking and hence have some influence over the academic training of emerging documentarians as well as the flows of cross-fertilization among different arts and media.”⁵⁸ This is particularly meaningful when the ultimate purpose of the Golden Harvest Awards is to cultivate creativity and to nurture young talent in Taiwan's film industry.

The predicament of the Golden Harvest Awards resides in the inherent conflict between its dual role as both a cultural and a government agent. Financially supported by the government, the organizers of the Awards are under pressure to demonstrate its impact in order to justify its work and budget in an increasingly competitive (domestic and international) cultural environment. Such pressure almost inevitably compels the government to look for more measurable short-term results—for example, the size of the audience, the number of reports in the media or direct conversions from an award-winning project to an output of some kind in the commercial film and media markets. However, from the cultural broker perspective, the Golden Harvest Awards must also realize that any substantial and sustainable cultural influence is almost always long-term and extremely difficult to quantify. The so-called identity crisis of the Golden Harvest Awards reflects the difficulty the stakeholders face in reconciling long-term cultural goals and short-term expectations to demonstrate its impact inside and even outside Taiwan.

CONCLUSION

Film festivals are normally conceptualized as a cultural mediator translating the “international” into the “national” and vice versa. Hence, a national film festival (such as the Golden Harvest Awards) is often structured by not only local but also international conditions. From this perspective, two brief conclusions can be drawn from this chapter: First, when the Golden Harvest Awards were established in 1978, it could be seen as one of the cultural schemes designed by the authoritarian KMT government to appease the local cultural elites who were more sympathetic toward Western modernism than Taiwanese nativism during a Cold War context. However, as martial law was lifted in Taiwan in 1987 and the Cold War ended between 1989 and 1991,⁵⁹ the Awards have been increasingly “festivalized” as part of a democratization process on the island.⁶⁰ Second, as both the domestic and international cultural climate have changed to highlight the concept of soft power in the twenty-first century, the role of film festivals as a cultural broker has been particularly emphasized by Taiwanese authorities in recent years as part of a growing anxiety about its influence and visibility internationally. In other words, it will be misleading to view film festivals as a value neutral vessel simply introducing international cultures to a national or local context, or bringing national or local cultures to an international arena. In fact, film festivals are a cultural negotiation site where many cultural agents and stakeholders contest, translate and integrate a variety of cultural values and film practices through power interplay under different circumstances.

NOTES

1. I wish to thank the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) for funding the Chinese Film Festival Studies Network, which motivated and enabled me to embark this research. I would also like to thank the networkers for their invaluable mutual support and intellectual stimulation.
2. Dina Iordanova and Ragan Rhyne, “Introduction,” in *Film Festival Yearbook 1: The Festival Circuit*, ed. Dina Iordanova and Ragan Rhyne (St. Andrews: St. Andrews Film Studies, 2009), 1.
3. Jon Henley, “Foreign Cinema is Expanding Our Horizons,” *The Guardian*, March 31, 2011, accessed June 11, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/mar/31/foreign-film-festival-expand-horizons>.

4. All the categories of the Golden Harvest Award between 1978 and 1993 are listed in *Dianying Xinshang* [The Film Appreciation Journal], “Taiwan Duli Duanpian,” [Taiwan independent short films], *Dianying Xinshang* 11, no. 5 (1993): 94–102.
5. Mi-zou and Xin-hua Liang, ed., *Beyond and after New Cinema* [*Xin dianying zhi wai/hou*] (Taipei: Tangshan, 1994).
6. I would like to express my gratitude to Mr. Tseng Kun-hsien, Director of ISBN Agency, National Central Library, for assisting me to search through his library database the Chinese-language literature on the subject.
7. See *Dianying Xinshang* [The Film Appreciation Journal], “Taiwan Independent Short Films,” 13–106 (in Chinese); Liang-feng Chen, “Jilupian Shengchan de Pingminhua,” [The popularisation of documentary production], in *Jilu Taiwan Xia* [Documenting Taiwan vol. 2], ed. Daw-ming Lee (Taipei: Chinese Taipei Film Archive, 2000), 581–613; Robert Chi, “The New Taiwanese Documentary,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 146–196.
8. Yu-fu Chen, “By Multidimensional Viewpoint to Explore the 31st Annual Golden Harvest Awards in Taiwan Nominated Animation Film,” (Master’s dissertation, Ling Tung University, Taiwan, 2011. In Chinese with an English title and abstract).
9. *Dianying Xinshang* [The Film Appreciation Journal], “Ling Yizhong Xushi/Xushi,” [Another kind of narrative/anticipation: Interviewing the nominees of the 34th Golden Harvest Award], *The Film Appreciation Journal* 30, no. 2 (2012): 13–58.
10. For further reading, see Xi-ba Zeng, “Jinsuijiang Xingsi,” [Reflection on the Golden Harvest Award], *Youth Culture* 63, no. 6 (1986): 130–132; Yong-quan Li, “Pingshen Jinsuijiang Hou de Yixie Xiangfa,” [Some afterthoughts about judging the Golden Harvest Award], *World Screen* 317 (May 1995): 104–105; You-xin Li, “Jinsuijiang yu Nanfang Yingzhan,” [The Golden Harvest Award and the Southern Film Festival], *World Screen* 421 (January 2004): 37; and *CA Designer*, “Di 29 jie Jiangli Youliang Yingxiang Chuangzuo Jinsuijiang zhi Ruwei Donghuapian Jianjie,” [Introducing the nominated animation films for the 29th Golden Harvest Award], *CA Designer* 228 (April 2007): 84–87.
11. The Golden Harvest Awards stipulate that for a project to be qualified for competition, over 50 percent of the key creative personnel must hold the Republic of China (ROC) nationality or be a formally registered student in Taiwan. Moreover, the definition of a Awards is films not exceeding 60 minutes. See the official website: <http://www.movieseeds.com.tw/gold-enharuest/rule.php> (in Chinese, accessed June 11, 2014).

12. Bill Nichols, "Global Image Consumption in the Age of Late Capitalism," *East-West Film Journal* 8, no. 1 (1994): 68.
13. Fan Wu, *Dianying yingzhan* [*Film festivals*] (Taipei: Shulin, 2009): 9, 43, 51.
14. Mark Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited," *Sociological Theory*, 1 (1983): 202.
15. *Ibid.*, 201–233.
16. For studies on *guanxi*, please see Andrew B. Kipnis, *Producing Guanxi: Sentiment, Self, and Subculture in a North China Village* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997) and Y.H. Wong and Thomas K.P. Leung, *Guanxi: Relationship Marketing in a Chinese Context* (New York: Routledge, 2012).
17. Mark Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties," 202.
18. Li-hsin Kuo, "Sentimentalism and the Phenomenon of Collective 'Looking Inward': A Critical Analysis of Mainstream Taiwanese Documentary," in *Documenting Taiwan on Film: Issues and Methods in New Documentaries*, ed. Sylvia Li-chun Lin and Tze-lan D. Song (London: Routledge, 2012), 187.
19. Fan Wu, *Film Festivals*, 9–10; 25–26; 63–66.
20. Mark Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties," 209.
21. Tian-xiang Wen, "Gudi qiongyin," [Echo from the bottom: notes on Taiwan Cinema in 1992], in *Shuxie Taiwan Dianying* [*Writing Taiwan Cinema*], ed. Tian-xiang Wen (Taipei: Chinese Taipei Film Archive, 1999), 9–10; see also Fan Wu, *Film Festivals*, 169–250.
22. Mark Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties," 216.
23. Dr. Lin Wen-chi (Director of Chinese Taipei Film Archive), interview with author, *AudioBoo.com*, December 19, 2013, Taipei, accessed June 11, 2014, <https://audioboo.fm/boos/1983297-golden-harvest-awards-series-1-an-interview-with-lin-wenchi>.
24. Ming-yeh Tsai, "Chen Qiu-yan Xiaojie Fangtan Lu," [Interviewing Miss Chen Qiu-yan], EW Cross Road, January 6, 2008, accessed July 23, 2014, http://blog.chinatimes.com/mingyeh/archive/2008/01/06/232933.html#_ednref4 (in Chinese).
25. Ming-yeh T. Rawnsley, "Taiwanese-Language Cinema: State Versus Market, National Versus Transnational," *Oriental Archive* 81 (2013): 455.
26. Feii Lu, *Taiwan Dianying: Zhengzhi, Jingji, Meixue, 1949–1994* [*Taiwan cinema: politics, economics and aesthetics, 1949–1994*] (Taipei: Yuan-Liu, 1998), 127.
27. The films screened by *Theater* in 1966 and 1967 are listed in *The Film Appreciation Journal*, "Taiwan Independent Short Films," 94.

28. Ming-yeh T. Rawnsley, "Stars as Production and Consumption: A Case Study of Brigitte Lin," in *East Asian Film Stars*, ed. Wing-fai Leung and Andy Willis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 193.
29. Ming-yeh T. Rawnsley, "Taiwanese Documentary," in *Directory of World Cinema: China*, ed. Gary Bettinson (Bristol and Chicago: Intellect, 2012), 18.
30. Gary Rawnsley, *Taiwan's Informal Diplomacy and Propaganda* (Basingstoke: Macmillan 2000), 16.
31. June Yip, *Envisioning Taiwan: Fiction, Cinema and the Nation in the Cultural Imaginary* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 19–29.
32. Very simply, the great cultural debate in Taiwan in the twentieth century was the modernist literature of the 1960s versus the nativist literature of the 1970s. The modernists sought cultural inspiration and experimental literary techniques from western modernism. Nativist literature of the 1970s advocated "back to the earth" and "question the values and ideas of the west." See June Yip, *Envisioning Taiwan*, 27.
33. Feii Lu, *Taiwan Cinema*, 125–128.
34. Chris Berry and Feii Lu, "Introduction," in *Island on the Edge: Taiwan New Cinema and After*, ed. Chris Berry and Feii Lu (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005), 6.
35. Feii Lu, *Taiwan Cinema*, 323–324.
36. Oscar Chung, "Showtime for Taiwan's Movies," *Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in New York*, February 6, 2009, accessed June 13, 2014, <http://www.taiwanembassy.org/fp.aspx?Item=79101&ctNode=3483&mp=62>.
37. Michael Curtin, *Playing to the World's Biggest Audience: The Globalization of Chinese Film and TV* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 86.
38. Robert Chi, "The New Taiwanese Documentary," 168–169.
39. Fan Wu, *Film Festivals*, my translation, 20.
40. Steven Flynn, *Steven Flynn of Taiwan Cinefest, King's College London, 30 May 2013*, YouTube video, 20:17, June 28, 2013, accessed June 28, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WzxiPSIL5G0>.
41. Lin Wen-chi, interview by author. Also see "About Us," *Chinese Taipei Film Archive*, accessed June 13, 2014, http://www.ctfa.org.tw/en_index.htm.
42. In addition to Lin Wen-chi, other principal interviewees include filmmaker Shen Ko-shang, who was the Golden Harvest Award winner in 2000 and 2001, and then a judge for the Award in 2008 and 2009; Wang Shao-hua, Director of the Programming Department of the CTFA; Tony Wu Chun-

- hui, assistant professor of film studies at Shih-Hsin University and a seasoned member of jury for the Golden Harvest Award; and Xie Jia-kun, assistant professor of film studies at National Taiwan University of Arts and also an experienced competitor and a member of jury for the Golden Harvest Award.
43. Gary Rawnsley, "China Talks Back: Public Diplomacy and Soft Power for the Chinese Century," in *The Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, ed. by Philip Taylor and Nancy Snow (London: Routledge, 2008), 276–285.
 44. Gary Rawnsley, "The Soft Power and International Communications Strategies of China and Taiwan," *Journal of International Communication* 18, no. 2 (2012): 121–135.
 45. Ming-yeh T. Rawnsley, "Spotlight Taiwan," Chinet Field Notes, March 13, 2014, accessed June 14, 2014, <http://chinet.cz/forum/spotlight-taiwan/>; Ming-yeh T. Rawnsley, "A Reflection on Cultural Brokers and 'Understanding Taiwan through Film and Documentaries'," Chinet Field Notes, July 11, 2014, accessed July 22, 2014, <http://chinet.cz/forum/a-reflection-on-cultural-brokers-and-understanding-taiwan-through-film-and-documentaries/>.
 46. Shen Ko-shang, interview with author, *Audioboo.com*, Taipei, December 13, 2013, https://audioboo.fm/boos/2304848-golden-harvest-award-series-3-an-interview-with-shen-koshang?playlist_direction=forward. Shen was the Golden Harvest Award winner in 2000 and 2001 and then a judge for the Award in 2008 and 2009.
 47. Wang Shao-hua, interview with author, *Audioboo.com*, Taipei, December 19, 2013, <https://audioboo.fm/boos/2301775-golden-harvest-awards-series-2-an-interview-with-wang-shaohua>.
 48. Wang Shao-hua, interview.
 49. My conversations with Tony Wu Chun-hui and Xie Jia-kun took place between 2009 and 2010 in Taipei.
 50. Fan Wu, *Film Festivals*, 47.
 51. *Ibid.*, 48–49.
 52. Shen Ko-shang, interview with author. Similar views were expressed by Tony Wu Chun-hui and in Fan Wu, 169–209.
 53. Shen Ko-shang, interview.
 54. "Spotlight Taiwan," *Ministry of Culture Taiwan*, 2013, accessed June 16, 2014, <http://english.moc.gov.tw/article/index.php?sn=214>.
 55. Ming-yeh T. Rawnsley, "A Reflection on Cultural Brokers."
 56. Filmmaker Shen Ko-shang and film festival practitioner Wu Fan seemed to share such reservations.
 57. For instance, in his interview with me, Dr. Lin Wen-chi of the CTFA lamented repeatedly that the Golden Harvest Award do not enjoy the limelight it deserves.

58. Robert Chi, "The New Taiwanese Documentary," 169.
59. Dafydd Fell, *Government and Politics in Taiwan* (London: Routledge 2011).
60. Kiron K. Skinner, *Turning Points in Ending the Cold War* (Stanford CA; Hoover Institution Press, 2007).

Queer as Catachresis: The Beijing Queer Film Festival in Cultural Translation

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In October 2014, the seventh Beijing Queer Film Festival (BJQFF) took place in Beijing. The festival featured film screenings at multiple locations, panel discussions inside foreign embassies, and streaming of short films online. Surprisingly, the program was not published on the festival website until after the event, and the printed catalog distributed at screening venues did not contain information about screening times or venues. Event information was passed “underground” via emails, text messages, QQ (the Chinese equivalent to ICQ, an online instant messenger), and *weixin* (a social networking app on smart phones) to and from people in the know. In the program brochure, the organizers announced “two important developments” achieved that year: the introduction of a codirector (instead of a single film festival director) and the shift from a biennial to an annual event.¹ Despite continued attempts by the Chinese state to shut the event down, it seems that BJQFF will continue to run. More importantly, this open, flexible, and experimental model of film festival organization, with multiple screening locations, convergent media platforms, and unpredictable screening times, challenges our understanding of what a film festival should be. If we consider the primary goal of identity-based film festivals to be identity and community building, and

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if we recognize the important role that BJQFF plays in China's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) movement, then questions arise as to how the festival engages with the sexual minority community and what type of queer subjects the event constructs. In this chapter, I will analyze the production of queer subjects across various editions of BJQFF. Examining the festival through the critical lens of catachresis, I query the politics of translating sexualities, film festival culture, and social movements in a transnational and cross-cultural context.

CATACHRESIS AND/AS CULTURAL TRANSLATION

In *Margins of Philosophy*, Jacques Derrida proposes that we think of language in terms of catachresis. Originally meaning "misuse of words," either in error or for rhetorical effect, catachresis points to the original incompleteness that is a part of all systems of meaning. For Derrida, catachresis concerns

first the violent and forced abusive inscription of a sign, the imposition of a sign upon a meaning which did not yet have its own proper sign in language. So much so that there is no substitution here, no transport of proper signs, but rather the irruptive extension of a sign proper to an idea, a meaning, deprived of their signifier. A 'secondary' original.²

Catachresis is not about the incorrect use of words. Rather, its analytical radicalness lies in the suggestion that words do not have original and fixed meanings; instead, meanings are constantly produced as words are used in different historical and social contexts. Catachresis is also an opportunity "insomuch as in losing the sense proper to a sign [it] exposes a reconfigured relation to that sign."³ This reconfigured relation, sometimes referred to as cultural translation, has significant political potential in the study of culture.

The term catachresis has been used by postcolonial scholars, including Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha, to articulate postcolonial positions, and to challenge the Eurocentrism embedded in the process of cultural translation. Spivak applies the concept to the master words that claim to represent a social group, such as "woman" or "proletarian." Such words are often imposed upon a group of people through certain power configurations and to serve particular ideological agendas. The use of the term catachresis, for Spivak, aims at "reversing, displacing, and seizing the apparatus of value-coding" in the context of colonialism and its aftermath.⁴

Following Spivak's postcolonial critique, Tani Barlow traces the genealogy of woman in twentieth-century Chinese feminist thought.⁵ Seen from the perspective of future anteriority, the female subject is historically fragmented and contingent. Terms such as *funü*, *nüxing*, and *nüren* are not merely different linguistic markers; they also denote distinct female subjectivities produced by particular configurations of power at specific times. These terms can be seen as catachrestic, insofar as they reveal the incompleteness and inadequacy of the sign "woman" and the violent process of social modernization and engineering that underpins it. Catachresis of the word "woman" can therefore be situated in relation to China's "translated modernity," which is also a "colonial modernity," in which the production of knowledge about gender is intertwined with the history of colonialism and nationalism.⁶

This chapter marks an effort to think about catachresis, cultural translation, sexuality, and film culture in contemporary China. It locates the Chinese queer subject in the context of the globalization of sexualities and identities by examining the production of the queer subject in queer public culture and social movements. In popular discourse, queer subjectivity has always been seen as coherent, legitimized by the "authentic" narratives of sexual minorities and transnational LGBT activism. In this discourse, the term "Chinese queer" has often been seen as a derivative from, if not an outcome of, the "global queer" modeled upon a Euro-American archetype of gay identity. However, the self-sufficiency of the Chinese queer subject and the "originality" and "authenticity" of the global queer subject both require critical interrogation. My approach in this chapter is to focus on BJQFF through the lens of catachresis. BJQFF is a queer public event that has helped shape a particular type of the Chinese gay identity over the past 15 years. By examining how the festival has produced the Chinese queer subject, and what that subject is like, I attempt to reveal the complex historical processes and power relations that have shaped queer subject formation in the contemporary Chinese context. Seen in this light, all myths of global queer "originality" and Chinese queer "authenticity" will be rendered suspect.

My take on catachresis is not without reservations. While I appreciate the important role that language plays in constructing our understanding of social reality, I also see a world of materiality—that is, of individuals, institutions, and praxis—that cannot be completely reduced to signs and representations. Although I laud postcolonial scholars' critiques of power and violence in history, I also see a dynamic process of cultural translation

that cannot be encapsulated by a paradigm of domination and resistance. As Lydia Liu reminds us, “There is a certain amount of danger in reifying the patterns of resistance and domination, however complicated they are, along the East/West divide, since the boundaries between the two are frequently permeable and subject to changing condition.”⁷ In addition, China’s postsocialist conditions—fraught with ideological contestations and negotiations of power, complicity, and resistance—require new ways of thinking about postcolonial theorizations. Although I do not aim to propose a new approach to such analysis in this chapter, it is important to bear these issues in mind when dealing with catachresis and cultural translation in a transnational context.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF BJQFF

Founded in 2001, BJQFF is the biggest and most successful identity-based independent film festival in mainland China. Eight editions have been held thus far, first at four-year intervals, then biennially from 2005, and annually as of 2014. The festival primarily features queer films produced in mainland China, but it also showcases queer films from Hong Kong, Taiwan, diasporic Chinese regions, and non-Sinophone spheres. The festival program varies from edition to edition, but it mainly consists of units such as opening and closing films, feature films, documentaries, shorts, Hong Kong and Taiwan productions, overseas productions, panel discussions, and student works. In 2014, the streaming of online shorts (*wangluo wei dianying*) was added to the program, and an edited collection of articles written by film studies scholars was included in the film festival catalog. Each edition attracts film directors, film festival curators, film scholars, and audience members from all over China and abroad, who travel to Beijing to attend the festival.

If the above account suggests that BJQFF has developed without incident, that would be misleading. The festival has from the outset faced a variety of pressures including those from the Chinese government, sometimes to the extent of being shut down. The first edition, held at Peking University in 2001, had to close earlier than planned. The second edition, held in 2005, had to shift its screening location from the Peking University campus in northwest Beijing to the 798 Modern Art District in northeast Beijing overnight. The third and the fourth editions, held at the Songzhuang artist village on the east outskirts of Beijing in 2007 and 2009 as a unit of the Beijing Independent Film Festival (BIFF), went

relatively smoothly, albeit at the expense of participation from the LGBT community. The fifth, sixth, and seventh editions, held in 2011, 2013, and 2014, respectively, had to adopt “guerrilla warfare style” tactics by reducing publicity to a minimum and constantly shifting screening venues to cope with the risk of forced closure. Before the seventh BJQFF in 2014, several of the festival organizers were called in for questioning by the police. However, BJQFF has continued to run despite all these pressures and difficulties; its mere existence is a more telling political statement than the kind of films it screens and the number of people who attend.

Different festival organizers have given varying accounts of BJQFF’s aims. Cui Zi’en—the openly queer independent filmmaker, writer, and former professor at the Beijing Film Academy who is also one of the events most senior organizers—explicitly labels BJQFF as a form of social activism, even coining the term “digital video activism” (*yingxiang xingdong*) to describe the role of queer films and queer film festivals in contemporary China’s social movements: “We advocate the type of social activism that aims to change the society with filmmaking. Films can be directly linked to, and to transform, the hard world and times we live in.”⁸ Yang Yang, another BJQFF organizer, locates the significance of the event in its contestation of dominant ideologies in China: “To question and to challenge the dominant ideology, isn’t this the value and the objective of the Beijing Queer Film Festival?”⁹ Jenny Wu Man and Li Dan, codirectors of the festival in 2014, emphasize the importance of queer films in changing ordinary citizens’ perceptions of homosexuality: “The Beijing Queer Film Festival aims to expose mainstream audiences to queer themes, and will increase the presence of queer cinema in mainstream media.”¹⁰ They also articulate their concern for and belief in a culturally diverse China:

Each of us hopes to live in a culturally rich country; this is key to leading a happy life. At the present moment, China’s economy is flying sky high, but its culture is crawling on the ground. Diversity is a necessary precondition for cultural development, and the Beijing Queer Film Festival exists to uphold China’s diversity and to plant the seeds necessary for a culturally rich tomorrow. We believe that day will come.¹¹

As can be seen from the above, each organizer frames the aims and objectives of BJQFF in relation to their own subject positions and preoccupations. They all, however, link the festival to patriotic sentiments and a commitment to praxis. The latter reminds us of the Confucian literati

tradition of *junzi* (a noble person) serving the nation and *tianxia* (all under heaven), and the Marxist/socialist intellectual tradition of *zhi-shi fenzi* (intellectuals) participating in material and cultural production to transform themselves and society. The mentality of “worrying about China” has been shared by many intellectuals and social elites in Chinese history.¹² What is particularly striking here is that although the work of the queer activists has not been officially recognized at home, they share similar concerns with mainstream, mostly heterosexual, public intellectuals in China. Instead of exploring the “trouble with normal” and imagining a radically different queer future,¹³ their political ideals and cultural imagination seem rather normative from a Western perspective. However, as Yau Ching reminds us, normativity should be understood in different ways in various social and cultural contexts.¹⁴ At times, the BJQFF organizers seem to identify more as public intellectuals than as members or supporters of the sexual minority community; in these circumstances, a national or patriotic agenda is thus prioritized over identity politics. Seen in this light, the BJQFF organizers’ “obsession with China” becomes understandable. However, this agenda has framed the different ways in which the festival has translated the concept of queer into a Chinese context.

TONGZHI, TONGXINGLIAN, KU’ER: TRANSLATING QUEER AT THE FESTIVAL

The BJQFF name has undergone several changes over the past decade: from the originally proposed China Comrade Cultural Festival (*Zhongguo tongzhi wenhua jie*) to the actually used China Homosexual Film Festival (*Zhongguo tongxinglian dianying jie*) in 2001 to the “Beijing Gay and Lesbian Film Festival” (*Beijing tongxinglian dianying jie*) in 2005; to the Beijing Queer Film Forum (*Beijing ku’er dianying luntan*) in 2007; and then, since 2009, to its current name, the Beijing Queer Film Festival (*Beijing ku’er ying-zhan*). One of the biggest differences between these names lies in the different ways of translating the word “queer” from English to Chinese, and the queer subjectivities these terms denote. As J.L. Austin reminds us, words are not simply constative, but also performative—they make things happen and create social realities.¹⁵ For Barlow, *funü*, *nüxing*, and *nüren* denote different female subjects created by certain discourses and configurations of power. I argue that the words *tongzhi* (literally “comrade,” meaning queer), *tongxinglian* (homosexual or gay), and *ku’er* (the Chinese transliteration of the English term queer) also function in the same way: They point to

different types of queer subjectivities. Indeed, BJQFF, together with other discourses in contemporary China, has brought different types of queer subjects into being. These subjectivities, in turn, have helped construct social change in China over time.

The first edition of BJQFF was held in 2001, immediately after the publication of the third edition of the *Classification of Mental Disorders* (CCMD-3), in which ego-syntonic (*zìwò hexìe de*) homosexuality was no longer seen as a mental health problem that required medical treatment. The previous year, Cui Zi'en and Shi Tou, a lesbian artist and filmmaker, were invited onto Hunan Satellite Television for an interview, thus symbolizing the “outing” of lesbians and gays to the Chinese public. This was a time when knowledge of sexual minorities was limited; prejudice against homosexuality loomed large, particularly as a result of the long-lasting pathological and criminalizing discourses surrounding it.¹⁶ But it was also a time full of hope and optimism, with China's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) suggesting the prospect of a more open society. The emergence of the *tongxinglian* subject—the term for homosexual initially used in the first edition of the festival—must be situated at this particular historical juncture. It was a subject created by the legal and medical discourses of the 1980s, intertwined with the state discourse of “opening up.” However, its optimistic and promising future did not obscure its hidden and stigmatized past. Indeed, public attitudes toward sexual minorities in China remain ambivalent: They are hailed as a sign of China's social progress via the championing of universal humanity, while at the same time such practices are criticized as incompatible with traditional Chinese values.

Although the first edition of BJQFF received official approval from the Peking University authorities for a China Comrade (*tongzhi*) Cultural Festival, it actually went public with a more ambitious, risky name: China Homosexual (*tongxinglian*) Film Festival. In doing so, it explicitly named the homosexual subject as the focus of the event. The nature of this subject was reflected in the festival's programming. While some films screened were directed by identifiably gay directors, many—for example, Zhang Yuan's *East Palace, West Palace* and Li Yu's *Fish and Elephant*—were not. In these latter films, the *tongxinglian* subject is rarely explored for its own sake, in relation to same-sex identity and pleasure. Instead, it usually appears as a national allegory for the state–society relationship and power relations in China, as in Zhang's film; as a footnote to other “grand narratives,” such as women's liberation from patriarchy in Li Yu's work; or as “a site of per-

sonal pain, national trauma, and voyeuristic pleasure.”¹⁷ These films also present the *tongxinglian* subject as alone and lonely, helplessly trapped in a repressive social system. There is no queer community in these cinematic representations; the tones of these films are dark, offering no solution to the problems explored. Chris Berry makes a compelling point about the “sad young men” trope in Chinese cinema: These figures become symbols for existential alienation in contemporary urban China, helping to define a self-fluctuating between the outmoded Confucian family and a fractured Chinese nationhood.¹⁸ The *tongxinglian* subject thus became a subject of political and social critique in China’s perpetual quest for modernity.

From the outset, the seemingly stable *tongxinglian* subject of the festival was disturbed by a queer presence: Cui Zi’en. Cui has played an important role in shaping the political stance of the festival. Inspired by poststructuralism, he has refused to settle for gay identity politics. Frequently compared to Andy Warhol or Rainer Werner Fassbinder, his films are often “droll, pointed, and pleasantly perverse... animated by an unholy trinity of themes: the sacred, the profane, and the domestic.”¹⁹ As a prolific director, one of the most important organizers of the festival, Cui’s aesthetics and queer politics have played a pivotal role in constructing the Chinese queer subject. The emergence of queer films and queer film festivals in China coincided with the introduction of queer theory from English scholarship to Chinese academia, represented by Chinese sociologist Li Yinhe’s translation in 2000 of articles written by Gayle Rubin, Teresa de Lauretis, and others, a body of texts which Li referred to as *ku’er lilun* (queer theory); and Li’s publication of her reading notes on Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* in 2001. The *ku’er* (queer) subject emerged in China’s social discourse at this historical juncture. It has been used and celebrated at BJQFF ever since.²⁰

The second edition of the BJQFF held in 2005 was therefore saturated with queer sentiment. This was reflected in the program. Documentaries such as *Beautiful Men* and *Snake Boy* chronicled the life of crossdressers and performers on the burgeoning Chinese bar scene. This reflected both the social visibility of these subjects, but also many Chinese queer filmmakers’ understanding of queer as gender performance (*xingbie biao’yan*), a creative misreading of the Butlerian theory of gender performativity.²¹ However, such a misreading was also productive. In the case of the aforementioned films, the crossdressing queer characters not only parody gender norms, challenge social norms, and imagine new selves and community belongings; they also invoke constellations of historical moments and cultural memories,

including the classical Chinese theatrical tradition of transgenderism, the Maoist stereotype of androgyny as a statement of gender equality, and post-Mao transnational imaginations of a “pink economy.” Other films screened opened up the definition of queer still further, exploring social dystopias (e.g., Andrew Yusu Cheng’s *Shanghai Panic*) or dismantling traditional identity binaries and taboos (as in Cui Zi’en’s *Star Appeal* and *Withered in a Blooming Season*). Here, we see a very open definition of queer: living at the social margins, unyielding, even antagonistic, to social norms. This sentiment was further developed in subsequent editions of BJQFF and was best captured by the blurb for the festival’s first China tour in 2009:

In the past three decades, no word has created so many confusions and paradoxes as *ku’er*. As the term challenges traditional gender binaries, it also ignores clichéd lesbian and gay theory. As it tries to establish new gender identities, it also insists on subverting its own identity politics. As it refuses to submit to the mainstream, it wanders within the mainstream.

Ku’er is rooted in sex and emotions. It encompasses everything non-mainstream and alternative: homosexuality, bisexuality, transsexuality, and transgenderism. *Ku’er* is more than these: all independent, marginal, and alternative lifestyles can be accommodated, communicated, and exchanged without distinctions under this umbrella term: anarchists, murderers, drifters, sadomasochists, the afflicted, extraterrestrials...Queer films address queer topics and issues; they also break down these rigid boundaries. Queer is characterized by an independent stance; it is not mainstream but it never refuses the mainstream.²²

This is an interesting definition. On the surface, it seems to echo a particular moment in Western queer theory: the popular “antinormativity” stance represented by the work of Michael Warner and Lee Edelman, among others. Examined more closely, though, the text also betrays slippages in cultural translation. It appears that Chinese queer directors are not completely resistant to social norms. Instead, they are trying to find ways to negotiate and reconcile with such norms, to find ways to be queer in and through them. One might accuse these directors of misreading or mistranslating Western queer theory, but my point is not to think about cultural translation in terms of (authentic) originals and (inauthentic) copies. This slippage exposes the incompleteness of the sign “queer,” which is always already an incomplete and insufficient subject that requires constant translations in situated cultural locations and at specific historical moments.

One cannot help but wonder at historical contingency: The *tongxinglian* subject could have dominated BJQFF, and BJQFF could have continued with its construction of the *tongxinglian* subject. In those circumstances, subsequent editions of the festival might have featured a proliferation of sorry-looking gay men suffering from a repressive regime and a suffocating Confucian society, or carefully constructed images of gay middle-class Chinese celebrating “global queering” and “positive identification.” The fact that BJQFF appeared in China in the early 2000s was significant in itself: By this point, the *tongxinglian* subject was less significant than the *ku'er* subject, especially with the active involvement of Cui Zi'en and Li Yinhe in the festival, and in China's queer culture generally.²³ Both Cui and Li are intrinsically queer in the theories they advocate and in the lives they live: The former celebrates polyamory and the latter lives with a transgender man. These individual stakeholders, together with social developments in post-2000 China, helped shape queer subjectivities in particular ways. Without these contingent factors, neither BJQFF, nor the queer subjects it constructs, would be what they are today.

TRANSLATING THE FESTIVAL FORM: SOCIALIST PEDAGOGY AND THE CULTURAL EXHIBITION

BJQFF was the first gender and sexual identity-based festival in China; it had no domestic precedents to draw on, although the organizers were aware of international practices. How then did the festival take root in China? To answer this question, we need to go back to the first BJQFF and examine its origins.

Queer film festivals as a form of public culture did not originate in China. According to Ragan Rhyne and Skadi Loist, queer film festivals emerged as a specialized form of identity-based film festivals from the 1970s onward.²⁴ They started as community events showcasing independent films produced by, for, and about sexual minorities in order to “correct” the negative portrayals of homosexuality in Hollywood cinema. Rhyne identifies four historical phases in the development of queer film festivals: 1977–1990, 1991–1996, 1996–2001, and 2001–2006. The third phase (1996–2001) witnessed “the international proliferation of the gay and lesbian film festival model, particularly in the emerging markets of Eastern Europe and Asia.”²⁵ Rhyne points out that the “new” festivals help US-led queer films expand their market, often in the name of LGBT rights and transnational activism.²⁶ This observation is insightful,

although it seems to imply that queer film festivals in other parts of the world were imported from the USA. However, this linear, progressive historical narrative does not map neatly onto the Chinese context. First, US-produced queer films have never had a conspicuous presence in BJQFF programming. The festival attaches great importance to independent, noncommercial productions and to non-Western queer cinema, especially Sinophone films. Second, aside from transnational influences, BJQFF also draws on socialist models of event organization and mass mobilization. In fact, BJQFF's first edition could be more appropriately described as a cultural event organized by a university student association than as a commercial or independent festival. It was informed by the cultural exhibition (*wenhua zhan*) practices popular in China's socialist and early postsocialist era.²⁷ Queer film festivals were from the outset seen as "thought work" carried out by elite university students to "develop socialist culture" (*fan-rong shehuizhuyi wenhua*) and to educate and enlighten the masses. The first BJQFF worked within the system of the communist bureaucracy and followed the Communist Party's mass line, albeit with a queer twist and with unexpected results.

According to Yang Yang, the first edition of BJQFF was organized by the Film and Television Society at Peking University, where she was a second-year university student at the time:

The student use of screening venues [Peking University library auditorium] needed official approval. That was the only time [in the BJQFF history] that we followed official procedure. The reason why the proposal was accepted was very simple and the experience could not be reproduced. We used the term *tongzhi* ["comrade"] in the proposal, and the university authorities took the term literally.²⁸

The fact that this cultural event was approved by the Communist Party, through the university's Youth League, is significant. It demonstrates that the first festival committee members tried to work within the state bureaucratic system. The organizers, mostly young students in their early twenties, had every reason to take their chances with this bureaucracy: As previously noted, 2001 appeared to be a moment of change for China more broadly, and the queer community in particular. Furthermore, Peking University, known as the most liberal of the elite universities, had historically been at the forefront of social change in modern China. However, these students underestimated the ideological struggles within the Communist Party over the degree to which China should "open up"

or preserve “traditional values”: in a rapidly changing social context, there was also every reason for the authorities to be cautious, even conservative. According to Yang Yang:

We publicized the event without taking into consideration the risks of organizing such a festival. The festival program was announced in the *Beijing Youth Weekly*. At the same time, the film *Lan Yu* won some awards at the Golden Horse Film Festival in Hong Kong.²⁹ All of a sudden the event attracted huge public attention. The [Peking University] authorities were alarmed. The first two and a half days went smoothly. We were told that undercover policemen were in the audience. We decided to close the film festival earlier than we had planned, fearing that there would be trouble after the smooth weekend screenings. After we closed the film festival on Monday, the authorities called in the film festival organizers for a “talk”. We were all very nervous because the Ministry of State Security was involved.³⁰ Students participating in the film festival organization miraculously escaped punishment in the end. The reason was that we used DVDs/VCDs [rather than 16 mm] and this did not constitute a “professional public screening” and therefore did not have a huge social impact. Furthermore, we followed official procedures and the event proposal was approved by the university authorities. The responsibility lay with the Youth League staff who approved the application. Officials at various levels had a drink with the chairman of the Film and Television Society, and the problem was solved.³¹

Yang Yang’s account of the first BJQFF raises some significant issues. First, the university approved the festival organizers’ application because they chose to use the socialist term *tongzhi* (“comrade”), then little known for its queer overtones, to refer to sexual minorities. The semantic shift from “comrade” to “queer” is interesting: It points to different subjects produced through shifting governmentalities in contemporary China. It is the openness of the social that should draw our attention: In a society where different modes of economic production, cultural production, and political culture coexist, the incompleteness of subject formations and the openness of social formations provide space for the development of new identities, communities, and experiences in social movements. Second, the fact that BJQFF did not originate in China as a community event organized by and for sexual minorities, but was initiated primarily by a group of heterosexual-identified university students, means that, from its genesis, the festival did not draw on lesbian and gay identity politics. It was queer in that it broke the boundaries of identity politics and constructed

a straight–queer alliance. Third, BJQFF did not initially follow the international queer film festival model. This was partly because of the limited communication between Chinese and international LGBT communities at the time, but, more importantly, because the event was not designed as an LGBT community event. It was a cultural event initiated by elite university students drawing on the socialist experience of event organization and cultural work. The goal of the event was not LGBT identity construction and community building, but public education. Fourth, the first BJQFF was a top-down event, (over) endowed with the desire to effect social progress and human enlightenment. It reflected liberal ideologies of individual fulfillment, though combined with the memories and experiences of the socialist past. It was elitist, although it tried to imagine a more inclusive society. These contradictions and paradoxes manifested in different ways in subsequent editions. Last but not least, narratives about the first BJQFF imagine a repressive state to be the festival’s enemy and, in doing so, constructed an “independent” queer stance that occupied the high moral ground in relation to the state. In other words, a particular construction of queer as antagonistic to the Chinese state was established through the first BJQFF, and would continue to be used as the subsequent BJQFF editions encountered more trouble with the government. Against this rhetoric, we also need to remember that BJQFF has always maneuvered and negotiated with the state—and that the organizers were aware that such maneuvers and negotiations were possible. As the state presence continues to shape the forms and trajectories of BJQFF, BJQFF also helps shape a Chinese society with diverse gender, sexuality, identity, and political cultures.

BETWEEN INDEPENDENT CINEMA AND GLOBAL NEOLIBERAL GOVERNANCE

The organizers did not give up on holding a second edition of BJQFF, despite the difficulties encountered during the first edition. New people joined the festival committee, including Zhu Rikun, the organizer of Beijing Independent Film Festival, and Wan Yanhai, chairman of an HIV/AIDS-focused LGBT Non-Governmental Organization. Zhu’s involvement helped establish links between queer films and the independent Chinese cinema scene. At this point, BJQFF began to imagine itself part of China’s New Documentary Film Movement, in which filmmakers “self-consciously fashion themselves as committed to a social practice that they hope will open up new public spaces for

discussion of social problems and dilemmas in the postsocialist era.”³² The festival began to reflect critically on its middle-class bias: Gays and lesbians were no longer seen as people who needed greater understanding and support from society, but as a marginalized group without a voice in China’s official media and who were suffering as a consequence of China’s economic reforms and political system. In other words, “queer” was imagined on a continuum with China’s other subaltern classes—including migrant workers, rural have-nots, and the urban poor—while digital video was understood as a tool to empower the marginalized and to engage with China’s social realities.³³

If Zhu’s presence connected BJQFF more explicitly to the independent film world, the involvement of Wan located the festival within China’s LGBT movement. The latter was at this point disguised as campaigns against HIV/AIDS for the purpose of political legitimacy. Wan also linked BJQFF to transnational capital and international politics, through funding from international organizations. Since its second edition, BJQFF has been funded, to varying degrees, by various international foundations, including the Ford Foundation, that promote democracy, human rights, and civil society in China. This makes BJQFF part of the system of global neoliberal capitalist governance. Here, we see not simply the penetration of the global “pink economy” into China, but also the political economy of such an economy. The international foundations’ investment in BJQFF has a political and ideological agenda: to transform China from a socialist state to a capitalist one, and from a communist cultural hegemony to a neoliberal cultural hegemony. Lisa Rofel glosses nicely the relationship between neoliberal capitalism and queer desire in China:

Neoliberalism has been an ongoing experimental project that began in the global south, in which nation-states had to remake themselves to participate in the post-Cold War order. China’s ability to become a subject of neoliberalism supports a world in which every nation must do its (properly differentiated) part for the universally imagined plan to produce a new human nature.³⁴

Rofel reminds us that neoliberalism is not simply a top-down process from the Global North to the Global South; the Chinese state’s active endorsement of neoliberalism, marked by the Reform and Opening (*gaige kaifang*) policy of the late 1970s and China’s entry into the WTO in 2001, has also played a pivotal role. The new human nature identified by Rofel is often most effectively realized in gays and lesbians, who imagine

themselves at the forefront of social change and part of the global community. This new human nature is certainly not neutral, and its desires are by no means apolitical. Thus, from its second edition, BJQFF was integrated into a global political economy, becoming part of the international queer film festival circuit.

“GUERRILLA WARFARE”: BETWEEN THE COUNTRYSIDE AND THE CITY

Following the second edition, BJQFF migrated to Songzhuang, an artists' village in the eastern suburbs of Beijing, joining BIFF as its “queer film unit” in 2007 and 2009. There were pros and cons to this move. BJQFF could be organized without (overly) worrying about being shut down by the police, thanks to Songzhuang's geographical marginality in relation to the more politically sensitive center of Beijing. This migration was jokingly referred to as drawing on the revolutionary strategies of “retreating in order to advance” (*yitui wei jin*) and “surrounding the city with the countryside” (*nongcun baowei chengshi*), slogans popular during the Maoist era. But there was also a downside to the geographical marginality of this screening venue: It discouraged the urban queer audience from participating in the event. The queer films were shown to a group of heterosexual-identified filmmakers and artists who had little idea about homosexuality. BJQFF was thus faced with the challenge of how to balance identity and community building with educating a wider public about gender/sexual diversity. It was the organizers' privileging of “community interest,” combined with external political developments, that expedited the festival's return to the city center in 2011.

2011 marked the tenth anniversary of BJQFF. However, it was also a difficult year for independent Chinese cinema, exemplified by the government's closure of the eighth China Documentary Film Festival because of the politically sensitive “Jasmine Revolution.” Songzhuang was no longer a safe haven for independent filmmakers. The BJQFF organizers therefore decided to bring the festival back to the city:

The Plan B was to screen films at three different venues: a book club, the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, and a club specializing in documentary films at Tsinghua University.³⁵ In late May, the situation changed dramatically. The new administrative team at Ullens cancelled our screening event. We had to cancel some films, most of which were made by our friends, so as

to keep guest directors' films in the program. The screening venues were not publicized, but passed on to audience members through online instant messenger after they booked tickets. News spread quickly. State administrative organs such as the Xicheng District Cultural Commission, the police station, and the Ministry of Industry and Commerce began to have "talks" with the film festival organizers. The Cultural Commission said that films about sexual minorities were not permitted for public screening as they had not passed film censorship. The Ministry of Industry and Commerce exerted pressure on the venue providers, stating that they were not licensed to host film festivals. The police emphasized that their permission would be needed for large-scale public events: the festival was illegal and must be cancelled. On the day of the opening ceremony, government officials stayed at the original venue [the Dongjien Book Club]; the venue provider had to keep to his normal work schedule instead of showing up at the event.³⁶ Although we announced to the public that the festival was cancelled, there was no way back: guests from different countries had already arrived in Beijing. For safety's sake, we refused to allow strangers to participate, except for the 25 audience members who were already in Beijing and whose travels from rural China to Beijing were sponsored by the Ford Foundation. We searched every corner of Beijing for alternative screening locations. We brought screens and projectors to restaurants, cafes, and teahouses. We confirmed venue information and printed screening programs on a day-to-day basis. Each day we had screenings in four different venues. The organizers and the audience members had to travel all around the city. We made it at last!³⁷

As we can see from the above account, in 2011, BJQFF faced severe pressure from the government. Instead of yielding, though, the organizers came up with creative and ingenious tactics to deal with this pressure. Some of these tactics are still in use today. To cope with government closure of screening venues, the organizing committee usually has to prepare several alternative plans for screening times and venues. The festival is usually held at different venues and on different days. If one venue is discovered and shut down by the police, events at other venues will not be affected. These tactics are referred to as "guerrilla warfare" (*youji zhan*) by the BJQFF organizers, drawing on China's revolutionary experience. Tactics, according to Michel de Certeau, are attempts by the powerless to adapt to an environment created by the powerful.³⁸ Unlike the strategies of the powerful, which are usually preplanned and static, tactics are actions in a constant state of reassessment and correction, based directly on obser-

vation of the actual environment. BJQFF's "guerrilla warfare" tactics in response to the Chinese government's repressive "strategy" culminated in a highly flexible and creative form of festival organization and film programming: film screenings on a bus during the festival's sixth edition in 2013, and on a train during the seventh edition in 2014:

On the morning of 19 September, we boarded the train from Beijing to Huairou from Beijing Railway Station. There were not many passengers on the train. The forty of us, including filmmakers, guests and volunteers, packed into a train carriage. We divided people into groups of two or three. Each group shared a laptop computer. We gave each group a USB stick with Yang Yang's film *Our Story*, a documentary about the history of BJQFF, on it. After arriving in Huairou, we travelled to a prebooked venue by bus and held a Q&A there.³⁹

This screening event was humorously referred to as "Political Ceremonies: Caravan and USB" in the seventh edition of the festival catalog.

What are the implications of these organizational tactics? I would suggest that by making strategic use of the "lightness" of digital media,⁴⁰ and by making explicit reference to a nomadic way of life, BJQFF not only queered such mundane practices as traveling on a state-owned train, but also opened up the question of what constitutes a film festival. Do film festivals need a fixed timetable and venue? Does watching films on a laptop computer constitute a festival screening? In addition, if we consider the plan to stream online shorts in 2015, is online streaming an acceptable form of festival screening? If so, where do we locate the boundary between a film festival and everyday media consumption? All these questions, brought into focus by a combination of new media technologies and the political situation in China, suggest interesting new areas of investigation for film festival researchers and practitioners. While I cannot answer these questions here, I can suggest that the cultural translation of film festivals provides an interesting insight: both these categories, queer and queer film festivals, are in a constant process of formation, reformation, and transformation. Catachresis reminds us that there is no original queer or film festival culture, in the same way as there is no authentic film festival format or organizing style. In places outside of the Euro-American cultural sphere, film festivals are taking on innovative forms and producing unexpected impacts.

THE POLITICIZATION OF *KU'ER*

My limited account of BJQFF here has also demonstrated the interesting dynamics of transnational cultural flows. Queer film festivals as a format, and as public culture, did not start in China; the development of BJQFF has also been closely tied to transnational capital and neoliberal ideology.⁴¹ However, this does not mean that queer film festivals in China are copying their Western counterparts. BJQFF draws on a number of cultures in its organizing style, including socialist and revolutionary battle strategies and traditions of mass mobilization. The fact that queer subjectivities in China were (ironically) formed by a collaboration between the state and transnational capitalism has not stopped film festival organizers from speaking out against government censorship of the media and sexuality, as well as the commercialization of, and US hegemony over, LGBT issues in China.

In her preface to the fifth BJQFF catalog, Yang Yang reflected upon the significance of BJQFF:

Although this is a cultural event that originated within the sexual minority community, it is hard to overlook the political connotations of the queer film festival. The festival's home is in Beijing, the political and cultural centre of China—it explores freedom and plurality in human relations and lifestyles amidst a “red” climate drenched in communist ideology. Over the past decade, government at all levels has interfered with and forced the festival to move from west Beijing to east Beijing, and from the city centre to the countryside. This year we have finally returned to the city centre. I once hoped to organize the festival under normal conditions and to take a break from the guerrilla organizing style that has characterized all of our past four editions. Yet, when one of our screening venues recently made a sudden decision to stop collaborating with the film festival for political reasons, I had a realization. We always demonized the police and the government, making them our token enemy, but our biggest enemy is the small number of authoritative organizations that are using the powerful national propaganda machine to subtly construct mainstream ideology. And our greatest value, our ultimate goal as a queer film festival, lies in challenging and opposing this mainstream ideology.⁴²

This was the first time in BJQFF's history that the festival had been explicitly politicized. Yang's discovery was not so much about ideological state apparatuses *per se*; it was more about the BJQFF organizers' realization that it is impossible to be apolitical. If BJQFF had previously used other rhetoric to legitimize its existence—“respecting and advocating diversity,”

“contributing to social development,” “disseminating knowledge and dispelling ignorance”—now the festival targeted the Chinese government and mainstream ideology. At this point, BJQFF became a politicized event. It refused to distance itself from ideologically loaded terms such as “democracy” and “human rights,” as in the past, and it formed alliances with human rights NGOs such as Dongjen Centre for Human Rights Education. *Ku'er* had tried to reconcile with established institutions and the mainstream; it was now angry and antagonistic; it had no fear of speaking out against a repressive regime.

There are, however, disparate voices within the BJQFF organizing committee. Yang’s angry and antagonistic attitude was not shared by all. Many other members of the organizing committee, born and educated in China, seemed to be more sympathetic to the situation there; for them, changes needed to be made but things could take time. They kept coming up with new strategies and tactics to keep BJQFF going. One of those strategies included trying to involve as many international guests, especially Western journalists and diplomats, as possible in the festival, in the belief that the Chinese government would hesitate to close an international event for fear of negative international publicity. The past two editions of BJQFF saw the Dutch and American embassies both host events as part of the festival program. The festival therefore went beyond the realm of a community, cultural event and escalated into an international diplomatic event.

CONCLUSION

BJQFF’s story is ongoing. In my brief account of it here, we can see cultural translation functioning at three different levels: the translation of sexuality and identity; the translation of film festivals as a cultural form; and finally, the translation of social movements. I have tried to use the analytical framework of catachresis to account for this complex process of cultural translation. Catachresis points to the incompleteness of signs as well as the openness of the social. In contemporary China, both queer subject formations and queer public culture are still emerging. It is this incompleteness and openness, together with the determination, perseverance, and ingenuity of Chinese queers, that should give us hope. Often cited by queer people in China, this famous quote from Sun Yat-Sen not only bespeaks the fluidity of signs—in this case *tongzhi*—in its historical process of dissemination, but also opens up imaginations for a queer future: “The revolution has not succeeded yet. Queers [“comrades” in the original text], keep up the good work!”

NOTES

1. Wu Man and Li Dan, “Zhici” [Preface], in *Diqijie Beijing ku'er yingzhan* [The 7th Beijing queer film festival catalogue] (Beijing: BQFF, 2005), 2–3.
2. Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), 255.
3. Sian Melvill Hawthorne and Adriaan S. van Klinken, “Introduction. Catachresis: Religion, Gender, and Postcoloniality,” *Religion and Gender* 3, no. 2 (2013): 159–67.
4. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Postcolonialism, Marginality, Postcoloniality, and Value,” in *Literary Theory Today*, ed. Peter Collier and Helga Geyer-Ryan (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 219–44.
5. Tani Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).
6. For discussions of modernity in China, see Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity in China, 1900–1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995) and Tani Barlow, *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).
7. Liu, *Translingual Practice*, 23.
8. Cui Zi'en, “Jiedu beijing ku'er yingzhan: cui zi'en fangtan” [Interpreting Beijing queer film festival: An interview with Cui Zi'en], in *Qingnian dianying shouce* [The youth film handbook] (my translation) ed. Cheng Qingsong, 3 (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Press, 2010), 188.
9. Yang Yang, “Zhici” [Preface], in *Diwujie Beijing ku'er yingzhan* [The 5th Beijing queer film festival catalogue] (Beijing: BQFF, 2011), 7.
10. Wu and Li, “Zhici,” 3.
11. Ibid.
12. Goria Davis, *Worrying About China: The Language of Chinese Critical Inquiry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).
13. Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1999).
14. Yau Ching, “Dreaming of Normal While Sleeping with Impossible: Introduction,” in *As Normal As Possible: Negotiating Sexuality and Gender in Mainland China and Hong Kong*, ed. Yau Ching (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 4.
15. J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words?* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).
16. Homosexuality was deleted from Mainland China's Criminal Law in 1997.
17. Michael Berry, *A History of Pain: Trauma in Modern Chinese Literature and Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 28.

18. Chris Berry, "Happy Alone? Sad Young Men in East Asian Gay Cinema," *Journal of Homosexuality* 39, no. 3–4 (2000): 187–200.
19. Chris Berry, "The Sacred, the Profane, and the Domestic in Cui Zi'en's Cinema," *positions: east asia cultures critique* 12, no. 1 (2004): 195–201.
20. Apart from the festival organizers' conscious departure from gay identity politics in favor of queer politics, the use of the term *ku'er* was also strategic: *ku'er*, as a then relatively obscure term, avoided the political sensitivity of the more widely known *tongxinglian*.
21. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990).
22. "Diyi jie zhongguo ku'er yingxiang xunhuizhan" [The first China queer film festival tour] (my translation), *China Development Brief*, accessed 27 October 2014, <http://www.chinadevelopmentbrief.org.cn/org0/active-392-1.html>.
23. Li Yinhe is a strong supporter of BJQFF. She was often invited to give speeches at the BJQFF opening and closing ceremonies.
24. See Ragan Rhyne, "Pink Dollars: Gay and Lesbian Film Festivals and the Economy of Visibility" (PhD thesis, New York University, 2007) and Skadi Loist, "The Queer Film Festival Phenomenon in a Global Historical Perspective: the 1970s–2000s," in *Une histoire des festivals: XXe–XXIe siecle* [A history of festivals: the twentieth and twenty-first centuries] (my translation), ed. Anaïs Flechet, Pascale Goetschel, Patricia Hidiroglou, Sophie Jacotot, Julie Verlainne, and Caroline Moine (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2013), 109–21.
25. Rhyne, "Pink Dollars," 4.
26. *Ibid.*, 619.
27. Kirk Denton, "Museums, Memorial Sites and Exhibitionary Culture in the People's Republic of China," in *Culture in the Contemporary PRC*, ed. Michael Hockx and Julia Strauss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 43–64.
28. See Su Yingru, "Beijing ku'er de dianying youjizhan: zhuanfang beijing ku'er yingzhan cezhanren yangyang" [Beijing queers' film guerrilla warfare: An interview with the Beijing queer film festival organizer Yang Yang] (my translation), *POTS magazine*, accessed 28 October 2014, <http://pots.tw/node/10824>.
29. This is perhaps a slip of Yang's tongue. The Golden Horse Film Festival is actually held in Taipei.
30. The Ministry of State Security is China's intelligence agency and security agency.
31. Su, "Beijing ku'er de dianying youjizhan."
32. Chris Berry and Lisa Rofel, "Introduction," in *The New Chinese Documentary Film Movement*, ed. Chris Berry, Lü Xinyu, and Lisa Rofel (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011), 10.

33. Luke Robinson, *Independent Chinese Documentary: From the Studio to the Street* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 103–29.
34. Lisa Rofel, *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 2–3.
35. The club mentioned by Yang is Tsingying Film, located near the South Gate of Tsinghua University.
36. The Dongjen Book Club, also known as Dongjen Centre for Human Rights Education, is a human rights NGO based in Beijing. The director of the NGO, Li Dan, was in the sixth and seventh BJQFF organizing team.
37. See Su, “Beijing ku’er de dianying youjizhan.”
38. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 34–39.
39. Wu Man, “Bimu zhici: ku’er zhongde ku’er” [Closing speech: Queer in queer] (my translation), *Beijing Queer Film Festival*, accessed 13 August 2015, <http://www.bjqff.com/?cat=191>.
40. Paola Voci, *China on Video: Smaller-screen Realities* (London: Routledge, 2010).
41. Ragan Rhyne, “Comrades and Citizens: Gay and Lesbian Film Festivals in China,” in *Film Festival Yearbook 3: Film Festivals and East Asia* ed. Dina Jordanova and Ruby Cheung (St Andrews: St Andrews Film Studies, 2011), 110–24.
42. Yang, “Zhici,” 7.

The Beijing Independent Film Festival: Translating the Non-Profit Model into China

Flora Lichaa

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the Beijing Independent Film Festival (BIFF). It considers the problem of translating a particular foreign model of film festivals—the “festival-as-non-profit”—into the contemporary People’s Republic of China (PRC). This model relies on the existence of a social and material space free from government oversight: the existence of such space in China is, at best, contested. In consequence, independent film festivals seeking to develop the “not-for-profit” model in the PRC have had to adapt it in the face of continued government interference. Here, I use BIFF as a case study through which to trace this process of translation. Though ultimately unsuccessful, precisely because of the tightening of central control over grassroots events of all kinds, I argue that for a period BIFF existed as a variety of “third space,” challenging the traditional dualisms on which Chinese society is often built. This suggests that the success of Western film festival models in the PRC depends on the extent to which they are perceived to directly challenge government authority.

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CHINESE INDEPENDENT FILM FESTIVALS AND THE PROBLEM OF TRANSLATION

Since the late 1990s, the advent of digital technologies in China has permitted the rise of amateur filmmaking. These films were made individually or in small teams with digital cameras, outside the Chinese film industry and the government censorship system. They were thus defined as “independent” (*duli* or *minjian*) and could not be screened in China on television channels, in film theaters or at those festivals that mainly showed big-budget films, tightly controlled by the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT). In order to address this lack of visibility, independent filmmakers and film critics worked together first to create film clubs—informal gatherings where people watched and discussed independent cinema that were held in venues ranging from homes and coffee houses to university classrooms—and soon afterward independent festivals in China’s major cities throughout the 2000s.

The evolution from film clubs to festivals reflects the organizers’ desire to escape the cramped conditions of cafes, and to enhance the profile of these events, attracting the attention of a wider audience. In 2001, the first Chinese independent film festival, the First Unrestricted New Image Festival, was founded in Beijing.¹ This was followed by similar events in other cities. According to Ying Liang, director and founder of the Chongqing Independent Film and Video Festival (CIFVF), these festivals were largely modeled on the only obvious paradigm: film festivals abroad.² From the early 1980s on, foreign festivals were the only way to see Chinese “avant-garde” films banned in China; directors such as Zhang Yimou, Chen Kaige, Lou Ye and Jia Zhangke, among others, were regularly invited to festivals, such as Cannes, Berlin and Venice. At the end of the 1990s, Chinese independent films were selected to screen at smaller-scale festivals such as the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival (YIDFF), Cinéma du Réel, International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR), Jeonju International Film Festival (JIFF), Black Movie and Visions du Réel. Setting up film festivals was therefore a way for Chinese independent cinema to seek the recognition of the global film community.

The type of festival Chinese independent filmmakers have tried to import is perhaps best characterized as the “festival-as-non-profit.” This is defined by Ragan Rhyne as a new model of cultural administration that spread globally following the end of the Cold War. Rhyne argues

that most film festivals have now adopted this institutional structure, thus becoming part of a “global cultural industry” or “global third sector.”³ More specifically, the various organizational configurations that fall under the “festival-as-non-profit” model include small and medium-sized events that specialize in a particular geographical or cultural focus (e.g., Vietnamese or Kurdish cinema), specific genres (ethnographic or experimental), or cinema by or about specific social groups (women, LGBTQ - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning - and children). These specialist events, often called community-based film festivals, aim to reflect the values, interests and aspirations of a particular community.⁴ They can also be considered “corrective festivals,” the term proposed by Dina Iordanova in her chapter in this volume for events that seek to “correct” dominant discourse on a sociopolitical topic by programming alternative narratives around this issue. In line with this model, Chinese independent film festivals try to promote plural understandings of Chinese society through screenings and discussion. As community-based festivals, they present very few commercial opportunities, relying on private networks for funding and venues, and on volunteers for their organization. The main point of departure from the Western community-based festival model lies in the difficulty of programming films in publicly accessible locations without authorization from the government.

This difference between Western and Chinese film festivals creates problems of translation. While Chinese film festivals always include the term “festival” in their English names, they are designated by several names in the Chinese language, depending on their legal status. The officially recognized events, referred to as *dianyingjie* (film festivals), must be registered with the administration and submit their programs for state censorship. Independent film festivals cannot use the Chinese term *dianyingjie* as they are not officially registered.⁵ This is why their Chinese names varies from *jiaoliuzhou* (exchange week) to *yingzhan* (film exhibition). BIFF’s Chinese name was initially *Beijing duli dianyingzhan* (Beijing Independent Film Exhibition). After BIFF was amalgamated with the China Documentary Film Festival (CDFF) in 2012, as discussed later in this chapter, its Chinese name was changed to *Beijing duli yingxiangzhan* (Beijing Independent Image Exhibition).

These translation problems suggest that, despite the importation of a foreign model and of an English name, the shape and nature of a Chinese event will necessarily be different. Walter Benjamin describes this inevitable gap between the original and the translation in his essay “The Task of the Translator”:

No translation would be possible if in its ultimate essence it strove for likeness to the original. For in its afterlife—which could not be called that if it were not a transformation and a renewal of something living—the original undergoes a change. Even words with fixed meaning can undergo a maturing process.⁶

My analysis of BIFF attempts to understand how this process of transformation has taken place in relation to Chinese independent film festivals. During my doctoral research, which focused on Chinese independent documentary filmmaking, I regularly participated in Chinese independent festivals in order to stay up-to-date with the latest film releases, as well as meet the filmmakers and the main stakeholders involved in film production, distribution and criticism. From 2010 to 2013, I conducted around 40 interviews, carried out participant observation during the festivals, and gathered films and written documents produced by the independent film community. For this chapter, the case of BIFF seemed to me particularly interesting, since the festival is characterized by the tenacity of its organizers and their ability to adapt to government restrictions. During the process of negotiation between the festival and the authorities,⁷ BIFF's organizers had to reduce the size of the event, moving from publicly accessible places to the private space of their offices. As the state increased its interference in this private physical space, the festival's organizers engaged in a fight to protect it.

The process of translation involved in the case of BIFF therefore involves notions of public space, publicly and privately owned spaces that are accessible to the general populace, and private space, personal places not accessible to the general public.⁸ The festival could not continue to hold screenings in publicly accessible places since these are directly related to the wider social and political community. In Western academic research, this idea of a “political public space” is often used in reference to Jürgen Habermas' analysis of the creation of a bourgeois public sphere in France at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Opinions expressed in this public sphere play the role of mediator between the needs of society and the state.⁹ This political public space is usually considered a prerequisite for the emergence of civil society in democratic polities. However, in China, the existence of such a buffer zone remains a subject of debate. Some scholars consider the development of semiautonomous organizations a sign of the emergence of civil society, while others adopt a corporatist approach, emphasizing the government's control of any form of association.¹⁰ This debate notwithstanding, recent studies of contemporary

Chinese society note that public space, both physical and political, remains subject to strict control by the party-state. In the case of BIFF, even the private physical space of their offices—which I consider to be an individual space unrelated to public affairs in democratic polities—was placed under close surveillance by the Chinese authorities. This chapter thus reflects on the sociopolitical meaning of the private space into which BIFF withdrew, arguing that it developed as a hybrid and transgressive space that contributed to the questioning and redefining of certain dualist categories—government-independent, public-private, and national-transnational—that help shape Chinese society.

THE FOUNDATION AND TRANSFORMATION OF BIFF

BIFF was founded in 2006 in Songzhuang, an artists' village located east of Beijing on the border of Hebei Province. It was established by Li Xianting, a contemporary art critic and curator, and Zhu Rikun, the founder of Fanhall Studio, a non-profit organization working to promote Chinese independent film. In order to finance the event, Li Xianting sought the support of artists such as Fang Lijun and Zeng Fangzhi and created an eponymous foundation to raise funds.¹¹ Fanhall Studio and the Li Xianting Foundation then worked together to set up two annual festivals, CFFF, created in 2004 by Zhu Rikun, and BIFF. Zhu Rikun was responsible for the film programming and the organization, while Li Xianting sought out new funding sources and managed relationships with the local authorities.

Initially, screenings took place in the auditorium of Songzhuang's Museum of Contemporary Art, of which Li Xianting had recently been appointed director, and in Fanhall Studio's private and non-commercial film theater. In an August 2012 interview, Li Xianting explained that the first two festivals took place without any problems. From 2008, however, the authorities began to check the festival's film selection in advance and to request the withdrawal of those titles considered too "sensitive." Faced with BIFF's refusal to cooperate, the authorities sent repeated warnings to the organizers.¹² This pressure led to the cancellation of a screening of Xu Xin's *Karamay* in the spring of 2010. This documentary captures the testimony of parents who, in 1994, lost their children in a community hall fire in a city in Xinjiang Province; the parents blamed local officials for the disaster. The authorities threatened Zhu Rikun with reprisals if the film was shown during the festival, resulting in the screening's cancellation, and a formal apology from Zhu to the filmmakers at BIFF's closing ceremony.

In spring 2011, an art exhibition was launched in Songzhuang in support of the “jasmine” protests that spread through China’s major cities following the Arab Spring. The artists’ village was placed under close surveillance and CDFE was canceled. Weary of the constant pressure he had been under for months, Zhu Rikun announced his withdrawal from the organization of the two festivals. Wang Hongwei, a friend of Zhu Rikun best known for playing the lead role in Jia Zhangke’s first feature film, *Xiao Wu*, took over the management of Fanhall Studio. Zhang Qi, the wife of an artist newly settled in Songzhuang, met Li Xianting and took the lead in coordinating the activities of the foundation.¹³ During this restructuring, the authorities forbade Li and Zhang from using the Songzhuang museum for the festival and placed Fanhall Studio’s private cinema under close surveillance. Fanhall Studio’s website was also blocked. Determined to hold the screenings, the team reorganized the offices of the foundation and installed the necessary projection equipment. During negotiations with Songzhuang government officials, Li Xianting argued that the local government could not prevent him from organizing screenings in the privacy of his own home. The sixth edition of BIFF thus went ahead, despite an opening ceremony interrupted by the authorities.¹⁴

Faced with these difficulties, and the likely intensification of pressure in the run up to the 18th Chinese Communist Party National Congress in November 2012,¹⁵ the organizing team decided to amalgamate the two festivals into a common event under the BIFF banner. Two editions of the joint festival followed, in 2012 and 2013; both were held in the courtyard of the Li Xianting Foundation, and both were partially canceled. Some screenings were held at the foundation; the rest of the time, the few remaining participants had to watch films either on the foundation’s computers or on DVD copies provided by the organizing team. In 2012, small private screenings were also organized in some artists’ studios in Songzhuang. Finally, the 2014 edition was completely shut down by the authorities, who prohibited access to the foundation and confiscated its film archive.

FROM PUBLIC TO PRIVATE SPACE

This overview shows how political restrictions have led to changes within the festival organizing team and forced BIFF to reduce its size and visibility. Based on the above, one might wonder the significance of a festival that cannot take place in publicly accessible venues. To address this question,

we need to consider the purposes served by other Chinese independent film festivals. First, these events provide Chinese independent films with a domestic exhibition platform, giving young urban audiences the chance to see this cinema. Second, they are an opportunity for these films to be selected for foreign festivals, since some events are attended by overseas programmers. Independent film festivals in China are therefore part of what Dina Iordanova calls the “business of showing films,” as distinct from the “business of film distribution.” This distinction reflects the benefits directors derive from the festival circuit: it helps enhance their international recognition as a form of symbolic capital, but offers little in the way of commercial gain, other than the possibility of obtaining funding for the production of forthcoming projects.¹⁶ Last, but not least, Chinese independent festivals function as spaces for community building, enabling filmmakers, film critics and programmers to gather together and meet over the course of the year at the various different festivals.

However, since 2008, increasing government interference has led to the social and spatial marginalization of independent cinema in China. Attempts to hold festivals in locations accessible to the public have been largely abandoned. Some events, like the Yunnan Multiculture Visual Festival (Yunfest) in Kunming, Yunnan Province, have tried to find new venues in which to hold private screenings. This strategy worked for Yunfest in 2009, but could not be repeated in 2013, due to threats made by the authorities to the festival organizers. The intermediary role these festivals play between the Chinese independent film scene and overseas festivals has continued with some difficulty: only programmers who speak Chinese and enjoy the confidence of organizers and filmmakers can attend and receive DVDs of the films programmed. Community building, while possible on a small scale, has largely been dependent on the mindset and resources of the organizers. Most of the independent festivals have reacted as follows: after announcing the official cancellation of the event, the organizers and those participants still present meet informally, in cafes or at a central venue, to watch DVDs and discuss the festival’s situation.

Against this backdrop, BIFF’s distinctiveness can be summarized in two ways. First, the festival took place every year until 2014, in a reduced configuration, holding screenings in the foundation as well as in artists’ studios. These screenings were possible because BIFF’s organizers had their own private spaces and were not dependent on public institutions or private venues subject to the rules of commercial and government censorship.

This was not the case with the other festivals: the China Independent Film Festival (CIFF) in Nanjing occurred primarily at Nanjing University; Yunfest was held in Yunnan Provincial Library and at the Yunnan University in Kunming; while CIFVF took place at Chongqing University and in commercial film theaters round the city. Zhu Rikun thus claimed independence from government institutions and commercial cinemas, stating that this was one of the major differences between BIFF and other independent festivals. However, this independence was not entirely the choice of the festival organizers. Li Xianting explained that Zhang Yaxuan, a film critic and founder of the China Independent Film Archive (CIFA), originally wanted CDFD to be organized in collaboration with the Beijing Film Academy (BFA). However, Li maintained that since political controls in Beijing are more stringent than in other Chinese cities, collaboration of this sort was impossible.¹⁷ Whatever the reasons behind this decision, it paved the way for BIFF to screen films in private spaces, despite the authorities' prohibition on holding screenings in Songzhuang's Museum of Contemporary Art.

Second, BIFF has always attached importance to gatherings of filmmakers and participants both during and outside the festival proper. This is partly due to Zhu Rikun's willingness to support independent filmmakers by providing them with space for regular meetings, both at the Li Xianting Foundation where the organizing team had its offices, and at the Fanhall Studio where regular screenings were held.¹⁸ Directors gathered at these two places throughout the year to share their filmmaking experience and receive peer feedback on their latest work. Some lived in Songzhuang, paying lower rents than in the capital proper while remaining close to the foundation; others visited every time they were in Beijing. Students, researchers, programmers and journalists interested in Chinese independent cinema also came to meet the organizing team and watch films on the foundation's computers. In addition to these regular meetings, the two festivals punctuated the year, offering directors the opportunity to show the fruits of their labor to a wider audience, and to see the best films rewarded. Consequently, while other independent festivals have placed more emphasis on the role of public diffusion rather than on community building, CDFD and BIFF have always attached equal importance to these complementary functions: the "event" function, with its temporary time frame, aimed to facilitate encounters between the films and their audience, while the "living space" function embodied the temporality of daily practice for the independent filmmakers.

The latter function meant that, despite the forced retreat from publicly accessible places, BIFF still had a core reason to continue. It thus carried on performing this function in private spaces belonging to the organizers and to artists supporting the festival. One could argue that the number of people who regularly gathered at the foundation was insignificant, and that such events were little more than friends socializing. I believe, however, that the creation of such a space is important in the Chinese context, because it opened up new possibilities for social interaction. BIFF's organizers encouraged the gathering of filmmakers who shared common values and experiences, enabling them to find comfort in a community where they felt understood. The foundation thus became a place where new identities could be forged and individuals could reinvent themselves outside the traditional Chinese social ties of family, clan, ancestral village or city and place of employment.¹⁹ I would therefore argue that BIFF, as with all Chinese independent film festivals, was at the heart of a process of deterritorialization through which individuals were uprooted from a single geographical and temporal space and dispersed to new "places of anchorage." I surmise that the authorities adopted a more aggressive attitude toward the festival in 2014 because the Li Xianting Foundation had by this point become a significant symbolic place of anchorage for the Chinese independent film sphere. The confiscation of the film archive can thus be interpreted as reflecting the desire of the authorities to put a stop to BIFF not only as a festival, but also as a place for community building. However, this is only an assumption, since it is difficult to understand the government's intentions.

THE POLITICIZATION OF BIFF: FROM ELITISM TO PUBLIC RESISTANCE

If BIFF's multiple functions and access to private space enabled it to forge ahead in the face of pressure from the state, I would also argue that the resulting organizational changes and the progressive marginalization of the festival encouraged both its organizers and independent filmmakers to assert their opposition to the Chinese government's policies. This does not mean that BIFF was originally detached from politics: the organizers of the other Chinese independent film festivals and the filmmakers have always considered BIFF to be more radical than its counterparts. However, Zhu Rikun and Li Xianting did not share a common understanding of the festival's independence.

Zhu Rikun insisted on complete independence for the festival's programming and editorial line, refusing any form of self-censorship. He defended both politically sensitive documentaries and experimental videos, and did not hesitate to screen four to five hour-long films. He thus demonstrated a desire to carry out his goals without any concessions to the Chinese authorities, while also placing little importance on the views of the festival audience.²⁰ His attitude was similar to that observed by Howard Becker in his analysis of the behavior of jazz musicians: the fear of having to sacrifice artistic standards rendered the musicians hostile to their listeners. The result was a tendency toward self-segregation that appeared in both the musicians' work and in their relations with the outside community. The musicians created physical and symbolic barriers in order to protect themselves from their audience. These symbolic barriers included common linguistic conventions, in particular the use of jargon or specific references unknown to people outside their community.²¹ In effect, Zhu Rikun also adopted an elitist attitude to protect the film standards he espoused. I therefore conclude that the spatial and social isolation during the first years after the establishment of the two festivals was not only linked to political limitations but also to a genuine desire on the part of the management team to preserve the spirit of the avant-garde. From 2008, in response to BIFF's increasing marginalization by the authorities, Zhu refused to consent to this treatment, retreating voluntarily within the walls of his community, and finally withdrawing altogether.

On his part, Li Xianting advocated a vision of independence that targeted the Chinese authoritarian regime. For him, Chinese independent film festivals were both a means of supporting independent filmmaking and a way of developing exchanges among intellectuals, following the civil society model. As stated in the introduction to the festival catalog for the 2012 festival, he wanted to create links between independent filmmakers and other small communities:

What I call "small environments" has to do with "small circles", but the two are not the same. For example, the milieu of independent filmmakers is, naturally, a "small circle," but if this "small circle," in the process of interacting with society, can form an unofficial community based on common values, then it becomes what I call a "small environment" ... At a time when the whole of mainstream culture is tending toward consumerism and entertainment, at a time when we can neither change the wider environment with anger, nor fully express our anger, I believe what we can do for our culture

is to promote the formation of unofficial “small environments” in all social arenas. This is a constructive effort; it builds culture from the bottom up.²²

Li believed that the best way to contribute to the formation of these small environments was to be flexible and try to deal with difficulties strategically.²³ Zhu Rikun’s departure should therefore have allowed BIFF to engage with a wider audience. However, only a relaxation of government control over the third sector would truly have allowed independent filmmakers to shed their elitism and interact with the rest of society. Instead, BIFF’s organizers had to unite in the face of adversity and focus all their energy on the survival of the festival. Li Xianting explained in this respect that though he had wanted to study Chinese independent films since the creation of his foundation, he had not had time to do so, since he was faced with the need to focus on negotiations with officials.²⁴ Therefore, the intensification of political pressures and the departure of Zhu Rikun, who was the most involved in programming work, had an important consequence for the festival: resistance to the government’s restrictions began to take precedence over curatorial policy.

This evolution can be observed in the catalog of successive editions of the two festivals. In his editorial for the fourth BIFF in 2009, Zhu Rikun affirmed the importance of the festival’s existence, but remained unclear about the direction in which he wished to guide the event:

Since the founding of the BIFF in 2006 up to now, we are still in the process of exploring the style and direction of our film festival. These questions must still be confronted in future years as we maintain a certain kind of unfixed position, or perhaps a kind of valuable wariness.²⁵

In the editorial for the fifth BIFF, he set out the two major tasks that a festival faces: “Film festivals need to resolve two problems: first, the selection of the type of films, and second, how to show these films.”²⁶ He went on to explain his programming choices. But in the editorial for the sixth festival in 2011, after Zhu Rikun’s withdrawal, we note that the tone has changed. Li Xianting declared his determination to support independent cinema despite the current difficulties:

In May 2011, the eighth China Documentary Week directed by Zhu Rikun was forced into cancellation. This October 2011, the sixth Beijing Independent Film festival directed by Wang Hongwei has been forced to

move and yet officials want to call Songzhuang China's largest community for contemporary artists. With this kind of regrettable situation wherein the various places for film exhibition meet with so many interferences from officials, the future progress of independent cinema remains under duress ... Supporting independent cinema and providing it with a better exhibition platform is the kind of work that our foundation and all of those who love independent cinema are glad to do ... At the same time, for those involved in independent cinema, we must be even more devoted to our work, and face the upcoming challenges with a firm and peaceful mind.²⁷

This sentiment of determination was repeated in the editorial for the following year, and was illustrated on the cover of the catalog, which featured the image of someone trying to ride a unicycle on a tightrope. Finally, the introduction to the festival catalog for the 2013 edition focused entirely on the festival's difficulties and ended with a quote from Cui Weiping, a former professor at the BFA: "we must keep going no matter if we are alive or not!"²⁸ The message was clear: the organizing team was determined to continue the festival at all costs.

To clarify this transition from a commitment to support independent cinema to political activism, a parallel can be drawn with the forms of political resistance described by Václav Havel during the decade following the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia. Havel observes that individuals who refused to accept the restrictions imposed by the authorities were labeled "dissenters," although they did not initially decide to engage in dissenting activities:

You are thrown into it by your personal sense of responsibility, combined with a complex set of external circumstances. You are cast out of the existing structures and placed in a position of conflict with them. It begins as an attempt to do your work well, and ends being branded an enemy of society.²⁹

This suggests that what academic publications and media reports usually call "political activism" or "political dissent" is in this context less the result of a pro-active decision on the part of the "activists" and more a defensive reaction by said "activists" to government activity. This phenomenon has also been observed in the Chinese context. In his book, *Defending Rights in Contemporary China*, Jonathan Benney points out that the distinction between moderate and radical activist lawyers

is not so much in the strategies they pursue, or in the way they interpret law, but rather in how the state responds to them. Hence the labels attributed to a particular lawyer might change while their work stays the same.³⁰

Benney further explains that the authorities can suddenly suppress the activities of lawyers as a response to current events or new government policies. In other words, moderate lawyers are considered radical as soon as the government changes its attitude toward their activities. Václav Havel argues that this self-defensive reaction can sometimes be followed by individual or collective actions that involve direct conflict with the authorities. These actions are driven by a new sense of responsibility, which can be defined as the awareness to engage in a collective refusal to comply with government policies.³¹

In a similar manner, the English-language media coverage began to portray BIFF as a site of political advocacy after the authorities asked Zhu Rikun to cancel the screening of the documentary *Karamay*. Li Xianting then started to develop survival strategies for the festival, asserting publicly his commitment to the preservation of the Chinese independent film sphere despite government restrictions. During and after the 2012 to 2014 editions of the festival, the organizers, filmmakers and members of the audience gave interviews to the media, mainly describing police intervention in the face of the determination of the organizers and directors. It is noteworthy that this political battle was often placed in the context of the struggle for civil rights, as this comment by David Bandurski, editor of the Hong Kong-based China Media Project website and the producer of several Chinese independent films, demonstrates:

It's not just about films, it's about activism, it's about being tied in and participating in social issues and using film as a medium to explore those, so that's what they [the Chinese authorities] are really interested in nipping in the bud.³²

This image of political activism was the one that has spread beyond the actual event, reaching a wider audience through what Daniel Dayan calls “the written festival”—the multiple representations of a film festival that emerge through its journalistic coverage.³³ On the one hand, this coverage enabled BIFF’s key stakeholders to extend their influence beyond the confines of the Li Xianting Foundation, and to publicize their case to the outside world. On the other hand, it gave readers the impression

that independent cinema was mostly concerned with the fight for Chinese democracy, while ignoring issues related to the aesthetic qualities of the films produced.

BIFF AS THIRD SPACE: HYBRIDITY, TRANSGRESSION, TRANSLATION

This analysis demonstrates that BIFF's transformation had significant sociopolitical implications. To understand the nature of these implications, I propose to look at the bigger picture. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the founder-organizers of China's independent film festivals were both inspired by the first Chinese independent film festivals and by the global model of "festival-as-non-profit," gradually establishing a domestic network of independent film festivals. This rhizomatic mode of development echoes Marijke De Valck's analysis of the international film festival circuit. It refers in particular to the theory of the rhizome, developed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, to show that the creation of new festivals was the result of the deterritorialization of the existing network.³⁴ I therefore consider the proliferation of Chinese independent film festivals to be an extension of the international festival network.

As this domestic network grew, however, the new elements gradually transformed: they became both identical to and yet different from the existing ones. In the case of BIFF, this transformation was generated by a process of negotiation between the government and the festival that resulted in a retreat into private space and an affirmation of the political commitment of the festival's organizers. Following this process of negotiation, the term "independent," originally associated with a personal mode of expression, increasingly took on a sense of political activism. The term "festival," originally associated with the desire for greater visibility and public recognition, came to mean private gatherings within a small community. Although BIFF now bears little resemblance to a Western film festival, either in its configuration or its objectives, the organizers still maintain the English word "festival," and continue to claim this idea for their event, as if it validates their existence and value vis-à-vis the outside world.

These developments suggest how translation can be analyzed as an evolving process that contributes to the very fabric of culture and society: as the concept of "festival" travels round the world, it transforms national and international cultural landscapes. This broader metaphorical understanding of translation appeared in the 1980s and 1990s,

contemporaneous with the emergence of cultural and postcolonial studies. These disciplines considered culture to be a dynamic concept generated via translation, particularly in contexts of intense geographical mobility, or in postcolonial nations where subcultures were subordinate to the authority of hegemonic cultures. These theories have been criticized for their failure to overcome colonial paradigms and their neglect of historical empiricism. However, they still enhance our understanding of the consequences of introducing a global model of cultural organization (the festival-as-non-profit) into contemporary China.

My interest here is particularly in Homi Bhabha's notion of "third space," developed in his book *The Location of Culture*. Kate Sturge explains this concept as follows:

Translation is not an interchange between discourse wholes but a process of mixing and mutual contamination, and not a movement from "source" to "target" but located in a "third space" beyond both, where conflicts arising from cultural difference and the different social discourses involved in those conflicts are negotiated.³⁵

In other words, translation processes generate hybrid spaces where binary divisions such as source-target, and more generally, all antagonisms around which modern societies are built, no longer apply. These spaces are politically subversive in nature, and contribute to the constant re-formation of bounded cultural entities (generally national in scale) through frictions and negotiations.

With reference to the Chinese independent film scene, this suggests that the introduction of a global model of cultural organization allowed the creation of hybrid spaces (independent film festivals), which stimulated the rise of new forms of cultural practice and social interaction (exchanges based around common interests and experiences) among filmmakers and festival-goers. These hybrid spaces were also counter-hegemonic: the view that cultural events should be organized independently of government control challenged the power of the Chinese party-state. In response to this challenge, the government tried to reduce the visibility of the festivals and then stop them indefinitely. The response of BIFF's management team to these pressures modified the nature of the private space at the Li Xianting Foundation: this space could not operate as a public sphere because it was not accessible to the general public and remained effectively invisible to Chinese society at large. However, the foundation

demonstrated a capacity to extend its influence beyond its spatial limits, through English-language media coverage. This private space thus became politically sensitive for the government which, in turn, had to adapt to the potential threat posed by the festival's new strategies.

I believe that, over the years, the authorities have responded to these developments by setting up an increasingly systematic model of intervention vis-à-vis independent film festivals. Before an event, government representatives send threats to the organizers and prohibit access to screening venues. If the organizers still manage to hold screenings elsewhere, police and local officials will go to the opening ceremony and cut the electricity, dispersing the participants and talking to the organizers. After this interruption, the festival sometimes continues in small groups under the supervision of local officials, who oblige the organizers to announce an early closure of the event. In this way, the authorities have adapted their *modus operandi* to the independent festivals, and have continuously re-negotiated the limits of their interference with these collective activities. In reaction, festivals have had to update their strategies: Li Xianting's argument that they cannot prevent him from organizing private screenings at home was accepted in 2011, but was no longer acceptable in the years that followed. This process of mutual adaptation calls into question the division between public space, where public opinion is controlled and guided by the party-state, and private space, where people have no visibility or outside influence. In this sense, the private space of the Li Xianting Foundation could be understood, metaphorically, as a third space. It constitutes an interstitial and transgressive place where the boundaries between the antagonistic categories around which Chinese contemporary society is built—government versus independent, public versus private, national versus transnational—become porous and blurred.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has focused on the translation of the “festival-as-non-profit” model into China using BIFF as a case study. As previously noted, the lack of a truly independent third sector in the PRC shaped the way in which this model was appropriated. With no clearly defined public space independent of government surveillance, BIFF evolved not purely an outward facing event designed to raise the profile of independent cinema in China, but also as a space focused on sustaining the independent film community.

I have suggested it was a liminal space, hybrid in nature, where old relationships and identities could be dissolved and new ones constructed.

However, as Béatrice Collignon has pointed out, this interstitial space is ephemeral in nature, since it is directly related to the specific context in which it is situated.³⁶ In the case of Chinese independent film festivals, this space was created during a period of relative tolerance on the part of the government. At the beginning of their mandate in 2003, the former Chinese President and Premier Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao made it a point of honor of listening to the grievances of citizens over issues of local governance. But the exponential increase of petitioners seeking audiences in the capital in the run up to the 2008 Olympics encouraged the government to rein in various forms of popular expression.³⁷ This political clamp down has continued since 2013; the arrival of the new leadership team, comprised of Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang, led to the cancellation of most independent film festivals.

In reaction to their stigmatization by the government, BIFF's organizers asserted more firmly than ever before that they were engaged in a fight against the hegemony of dominant, state-controlled culture, drawing a distinction between the government in all its forms on the one hand, and independent filmmakers and organizers on the other hand. They locked themselves into a fixed identity, reproducing oppositional relationships that had previously been dissipated. In other words, the festival organizers crystallized the movement generated by the creation of independent film festivals, which had enabled individuals to rethink their relationship with social, cultural and political activities. This demonstrates that these festivals are composed of contradictory flows of both movement and crystallization, and that movement was mainly generated during the period of political relaxation in the mid-2000s. I therefore argue that the introduction into China of global models such as the "festival-as-non-profit" can form hybrid spaces that modify the sociocultural landscape, as long as they do not challenge the authority of the party-state. To conclude on a positive note, however, in 2014, CIFF was held in Nanjing despite the closure of all the other independent film festivals. Discussed by Sabrina Yu and Lydia Wu in their chapter in this collection, CIFF's survival (so far) gives some hope that new hybrid and transgressive spaces will emerge in China in the near future.

NOTES

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“China’s Sundance” and Corporate Culture: Creating Space for Young Talent at the Tudou Video Festival

Nikki J.Y. Lee and Julian Stringer

Festival-watchers intrigued by the recent proliferation of events in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) may be forgiven for thinking that two dominant models of Chinese film festivals currently exist. On the one hand, there are major industry showcases, such as the Beijing International Film Festival and the Shanghai International Film Festival. On the other hand, there are a plethora of independent festivals positioned in opposition to these more commercially oriented extravaganzas. Questions of whether these two models are based upon pre-existing Western sources, and the extent to which they translate prior concepts and practices into Chinese cultural environments, are considered in depth by numerous contributors to the present volume.

This chapter focuses, by contrast, on an important annual event of growing significance which has placed itself in between these two models of Chinese film festivals: the Tudou Video Festival (TVF).¹ In terms of

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ambition, planning, organization, and scale, Tudou is unique in that it looks toward the Chinese semi-professional and non-professional film and media scenes while also keeping one eye firmly on corporate opportunities and commercial ventures. (As we discuss below, the semantics of its choice of the word “video” is also relevant.) More than this, it is a hybrid entity in other ways as well: presented in both offline and online forms, it is organized in a different geographical location each year. For these reasons, Tudou challenges emerging narratives of Chinese film festivals while raising compelling new issues of cross-cultural adoption and adaptation.

Perhaps precisely because it is something of an anomaly, the TVF has to date garnered little scholarly attention in English. Certainly, its history has yet to be properly chronicled and its import grasped. In providing the first extended analysis of this major audio-visual forum, our intentions are to investigate how an innovative alternative model of the “film festival” is being developed in China today and to reflect on the implications of this for debates about what such events might become in the twenty-first century.

The TVF was established in 2008 with the ambition to become one of the country’s leading cultural events. Organized by new media giant Tudou—which merged with its rival Youku in March 2012 to become Youku Tudou, one of the world’s largest online video sites (and which is often compared with YouTube)—it drew from the outset upon the vast technological resources, commercial infrastructure, and networked activities of its parent company, becoming in the process the flagship symbol of the Tudou brand.²

To help focus and attain this lofty ambition, the early stated aim of the TVF was to become China’s equivalent of the Sundance Film Festival (SFF)—in other words, a dynamic and prestigious space dedicated to the discovery and cultivation of grassroots creative talent.³ However, the ways in which it has sought to meet this remit have changed and evolved across the festival’s seven year history, in line with a range of complex agendas and shifting historical circumstances which both resemble and diverge from the multiple factors which have themselves driven Sundance.

In assessing how the TVF has enlisted the ostensible model of the SFF, it is helpful first to draw upon recent scholarship on the rise of China’s media consumer society. Jonathan Sullivan in his work on contemporary micro-blogging and Sherman So and J. Christopher Westland in their analysis of the development of uses of the Internet in the country raise the question of whether domestic Chinese brands or services should be viewed as mere

“clones” or “copies” of Western brands or companies, if not as out and out “fakes.” (This is in part to counter Western-centric binarisms which consider whatever is perceived to be “Western” as an original or genuine archetype.) In this reading, “Chinese internet businesses have built their basic operations according to successful foreign blueprints.”⁴ Moreover, “a hybrid model—something that combines international best practice with local adaptations” appears to work particularly well in China.⁵ On these terms, the TVF benchmarks the SFF as a global gold standard, but it does not aspire merely to replicate it: the growth of high-profile Chinese media industries is propelled by pragmatic modification of international templates as much as by slavish acceptance. Instead, Tudou—one of the leading emerging brands from the fast-growing film and media market in what is currently the world’s second largest economy—imaginatively transforms Sundance as it guides its own festival on its journey toward national prominence and international visibility.

Why does the TVF, taking its cue from its star-honoring US counterpart, strive to create space for the incubation of young creative Chinese talent?⁶ To engage with this question, we will outline the historical trajectory of the Tudou event before considering its most recent edition (2014), which we attended. In the process, we propose use of a new critical concept—namely, “the corporate audio-visual festival”—to illustrate a hitherto unacknowledged cultural phenomenon of which Tudou and Sundance are paradigmatic as well as pioneering examples.

TUDOU-SUNDANCE CONNECTIONS

The story of the establishment and ongoing development of the TVF encompasses both similarities to and differences from the celebrated American jamboree held each year in Park City, Utah.

Before proceeding to the heart of our analysis, then, it is necessary to sketch a brief history of the origins and role of the SFF. It started life in 1978 as the US Film and Video Festival which became a Sundance Institute-sponsored event in 1985.⁷ In 1991, it was renamed the “Sundance Film Festival”—a key branding move for the Sundance Institute. The President and Founder of both the festival and its parent organization is the famous Hollywood actor Robert Redford whose many films include *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (dir. George Roy Hill, 1969), from which the Sundance Group—the corporate umbrella under which the festival and the institute are held—took its name.

Since its inception the Sundance festival's self-declared mission has been to showcase American independent film by building audiences for it.⁸ The Sundance Institute was initially established as a training workshop to help nascent directors make the transition to the next level of professional achievement. However, it was only after the institute took over the festival that "Sundance has been able to complete the circle and create a brand-name identity synonymous with independent film."⁹

Expansion outward soon followed. In 1996, Redford established the Sundance Channel—a satellite and cable enterprise dedicated to independent film—with Showtime Networks Inc. and Universal Studios. It was sold to AMC Networks in 2008 before being renamed Sundance TV in 2014. Redford claimed at that year's 30th SFF that "[w]e have nothing to do with distribution."¹⁰ Nevertheless, in today's (online) digital age, distribution cannot always be separated from exhibition, and the Sundance Channel is a vital carrier of the movies it promotes as well as an important corporate arm.¹¹

As the tracing of this commercial path suggests, Sundance's staging of its annual festival has proceeded in commercial synergy with its pursuit of related business opportunities. Ostensibly the Park City event is hosted in the name of creative talent; as Redford maintains, "[t]his festival is for independent film and it's for and about you filmmakers. And it's you that we are here to celebrate."¹² To be more exact, though, the Sundance festival is also for and about film distributors, publicists, agencies, and journalists and reviewers.¹³ To be still more exact: besides creating space where novice filmmakers can be incubated and their fledgling work screened, the event serves to facilitate distribution deal-making, acquisition, promotion, and talent spotting.¹⁴ At Sundance independent filmmaking circulates in the orbit of commerce.

The SFF's physical location in Park City is important in this regard. Revelers descend on the ski resort for ten days in the middle of winter to form a temporary site specific community. Yet distributors and agencies also have to be there: to attend premiere screenings; to identify and compete for hot titles that are creating a sense of buzz; and to promote films which have already secured distribution deals. Unlike other major industry events such as Cannes and Berlin, Sundance does not have its own designated market, which means that business is obliged to be carried out anyway anyhow anywhere, in places like movie theaters, restaurants, hotel rooms, and parties. Because art is not spatially or hierarchically segregated from money, creativity and commerce cohabit.

Park City's mythic reputation as a space where artistic straw can be spun into gold is legion in accounts of US and international cinema. For example, indicators of success are often drawn more sharply in the case of Sundance than other festivals, with commentators dwelling on whether this or that independent title secured a distribution deal, how much that deal was worth, and the amount of profit captured subsequently on commercial release. *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* (1989) and its director Steven Soderbergh are key names in the story of how Sundance has managed to generate the levels of interest it now commands as "the place where films came from nowhere and turned into these huge things."¹⁵ The movie created a stir among critics during the 1989 festival and also won its Audience Award. Soderbergh then became one of the most sought after directors in the USA after it took the Palme d'Or at Cannes. When released into theaters by Miramax, *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* became "the first film truly to cross over from obscure and low budget... into a mainstream hit."¹⁶

Two aspects of the brief history sketched above should be emphasized. First, in light of Sundance's core orientation, it is doubtful that this so-called bastion of US independent cinema should be identified as non-Hollywood or otherwise as outside of or beyond commercial considerations.¹⁷ Business runs as rampant at Sundance as it does at Cannes, Shanghai, or Venice.¹⁸ Second, the SFF functions as a key platform for Sundance's corporate image. For over 20 years, the Sundance Group, via the Sundance Institute, has built its market identity and consumer loyalties largely around the delivery of its own branded festival.

It is in these terms that Sundance may be called a paradigmatic and pioneering example of the "corporate audio-visual festival." The vast majority of film festivals held around the world are not creatures of private industry. Instead, they are more commonly funded and organized by a (variously constituted) coalition of state or local government, city or provincial administrators, transnational corporations, regional businesses, non-governmental organizations, and other social actors drawn from a combination of the public and private spheres. The degree to which commercial enterprises directly involve themselves in the running of a festival differs in each individual case; while the most common form of engagement is sponsorship, companies do sometimes play the role of movie producer in collaboration with specific events.¹⁹ However, it is still relatively rare for a listed business to make itself responsible for conducting its own branded festival as a central commercial activity. The corporate audio-visual festival can therefore be defined as an event that is resourced and organized

by a commercial company with the ambition of promoting its own core interests through linked channels of communication (which may or may not include celluloid film).

Aside from being China's mirror image of the SFF, the TVF provides the second preeminent example of an emerging model of the corporate audio-visual festival taking shape in today's global mediascape. Its story constitutes in many ways a parallel journey to its US counterpart, albeit with crucial dissimilarities. Some of its relevant milestones also predate the establishment of the festival's inaugural edition in China in 2008. Let us therefore now turn to the historical background to the establishment of this more recent yet already highly significant cultural forum.

One beginning of the Tudou success narrative occurs in February 2005 when US company YouTube founded its web site and quickly reshaped the international media landscape. YouTube has of course gone on to exert a powerful worldwide influence on the practices of digital broadcasting, advertising, distribution, and production.²⁰ Yet the company has always found it difficult to penetrate the China market because access to its site from within the country has habitually been blocked.²¹ In the face of a lack of competition from this powerful global leader, domestic internet businesses such as Tudou (launched in April 2005) and Youku (launched in December 2006)—and subsequently Youku Tudou—leapt eagerly into the rapidly expanding and potentially vastly profitable spaces of Chinese e-commerce.

These developments took place during a period of major transition within China's economy and media culture. The rise of Tudou and the launch of its festival in 2008 coincided with the moment when the "informal media economy" of online video streaming and sharing was being transformed into the "formal media economy" controlled by the state and copyright law.²² In that year, for instance, this bustling sector was reshuffled with the promulgation by SARFT, or the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (now the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television, or SAPPRFT), and the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology of the *Administrative Provisions on Internet Audio-Visual Program Service*—the main purpose of which was to tighten state control over all forms of online activity while reducing opportunities for copyright infringement, especially of overseas content.²³ As a result, a number of China's video streaming and sharing web sites were shut down and only companies which could meet the stipulations of the *Provisions*

were considered for licenses. Tudou and Youku not only survived this moment of dramatic reformation but have continued to grow as online business titans ever since, due in no small degree to their ability to operate under the protection—and regulation—of the PRC government.²⁴

Following its initial startup as an informal blog hosting site, Tudou’s official launch paved the way for its rapid ascent as one of China’s largest video streaming outfits.²⁵ The company’s strengths lie in its superior use of bandwidth and in hosting innovative and high quality user-generated content (UGC) videos which attract fashion-conscious and technology-savvy “digital natives” in their teens and twenties.²⁶ Its 2012 merger with Youku—which has strengths in commerce and production—continued the time-honored business tradition of rivals joining forces to forge a winning combination while consolidating Tudou’s capacity to “lead the next phase of online video development in China.”²⁷

Tudou’s business model is to appeal to young audiences by building attractive relevant content around successful foreign blueprints: in short, taking the best from elsewhere and combining it with effective local practice. Since 2008, the company has signed contracts with leading global players, such as Sony, TV Tokyo, Hong Kong TVB, and numerous Korean television channels, among others, for exclusive rights to broadcast their films and programs in China. Similarly, Youku has signed its own contracts with Chinese production companies as well as with Hong Kong and Korean television channels: it has also been described as a “mainstream online-video provider” of US movies and TV dramas thanks to its exclusive deals with Hollywood studios Warner Brothers and 20th Century Fox and the NBC network.²⁸ The range of commercially attractive audio-visual material offered (separately and in combination) by Tudou and Youku is therefore comprehensive. It includes domestic, regional, and global media programs, UGC videos and an increasing number of in-house productions.

As with the case of YouTube, Tudou’s impressive success as an online streaming site is inseparable in particular from the massive popularity of its UGC videos. The slogan of the Tudou brand is “Everybody is a Director of Their Life” (*meigeren shi shenghuo de daoyan*) or, more simply, “Direct Yourself.”²⁹ This choice of words is an adoption and adaptation of YouTube’s famous slogan, “Broadcast Yourself,” which encourages the participatory cultures of ordinary people. Significantly for Tudou’s project of product differentiation, though, the encouragement to “Direct Yourself” places relatively more emphasis on individual imagination as

well as on the pursuit of a distinctive individual lifestyle. Moreover, the Mandarin Chinese word “tudou” translates to “potato,” and in enlisting this solanaceous plant for its icon the company playfully, and subtly, transforms negative associations of media fans as passive consumers (“couch potatoes”) into positive associations of active creativity (fan-consumers as “directors” or producers of their own lives). With this brand identity firmly in place, Tudou has gone on to become one of the main exhibition sites for China’s vibrant digital filmmaking scene—a key online platform where various types of short movies, documentaries, animation, and spoofs are uploaded, viewed, and shared. (The company stipulates that anyone who uploads or publishes works on its web site agrees to grant Tudou “a royalty-free, irrevocable, permanent, assignable, worldwide, and non-exclusive license to use all the said works and contents.”)³⁰

Within the emergence of Tudou (and Youku Tudou) as a state-sanctioned online commercial powerhouse that plugs into China’s grassroots energies and aptitudes, the TVF occupies a privileged position as conveyor of the company’s mission and focus point of its corporate identity. As we have already indicated, the semantics of its choice of the word “video” is in this sense highly relevant. Unlike other Chinese media festivals which tend to tie their identities to the aura of film (even when the main format of submission is video)—for example, by advertising themselves either as *yingzhan* (exhibition of films) or *dianyingjie* (film festival)—the connotations of the term “video” highlight the possibilities of digital multimediality while suggesting a broader sense of “visual culture” and emphasizing that no content is to be presented on celluloid. As such, the festival’s Chinese name, Tudou Yingxiangjie, is designed to encompass a range of digital provision (including video) produced and circulated over the Internet and related social media. To date, the results of this branding exercise have been formidable. In recent years, the TVF has grown into a large scale online/offline hybrid with activities that range from concerts and parties to live streaming and the commissioning of original media productions. In 2012, under the strapline “Be Creative and Live,” the event attracted over 15,000 submissions, including a leading group of 200 video finalists who competed for 15 grand prizes.³¹ A year later, the festival received more than 18,000 entries, from which 200 finalists were selected for the 2013 prizes. Combined festival entries have at the time of writing generated more than 200 million views on the Tudou web site.³²

In the interviews with us that form a vital part of our research for this chapter, the organizers of the TVF frame their identification with the SFF in terms of issues of independence and creativity. According to their understanding, Sundance fulfills a complementary function to Hollywood; it serves as an addition to the corporate US media system. From the very beginning, Tudou believed that it could come to play a comparable role in China by developing a viable annual event that similarly creates space for young talent. In pursuing this strategic ambition, one of the main attractions of Sundance for Tudou is that it is a well-established festival with a long history and a track record of success. It is a major platform where the outcomes of creative endeavor can achieve high exposure as well as wide circulation.

The TVF collaborated directly with Sundance for its fourth and fifth editions in 2011 and 2012, respectively.³³ Tudou held a Sundance showcase and sent its award-winning videos to Park City.³⁴ Representatives from Sundance, including Trevor Groth (Director of Programming) and Todd Luoto (Shorts Programmer), served as Tudou jurors and helped initiate a new category at the Chinese event—the Independent Spirit Award (*duli jingshen jiang*). Luoto points to some of the common characteristics: “It was great to see that Tudou is doing a lot of the same things that the Sundance Film Festival is all about... We give a platform to artists, we support expression, and we both passionately believe in the power of storytelling.”³⁵ In describing the first video to win Tudou’s Independent Spirit Award, *Sea and Tide*, by Beijing Original Power, Luoto notes its “beautiful cinematography and excellent performances”—just the kind of supportive comment which, while perhaps offering lip-service from a foreign guest, helps initiate an emerging domain where experimental work by a younger generation can actively be encouraged.³⁶

Obstacles to maintaining formal connections between Tudou and Sundance soon emerged in the form of cultural differences, disparity in production standards between the two events, and Tudou’s status as a predominantly online brand. As Tudou began to expand, its allegiance to the Sundance model started to fade. However, by this time, Park City had already served its purpose. The TVF’s reputation as a public platform for discovering young talent and showcasing it to commercial media industries was well on the way to being established. We now explore the implications of this situation as they played themselves out at the most recent iteration of the Tudou event, its 2014 edition.

SMELLS LIKE INDEPENDENT SPIRIT? THE 2014 TVF

As they sought to move away from the Sundance model and to extend their own event's vivid corporate personality, major challenges faced the organizers of the 2014 TVF. These difficulties arose as a result of the event's ambition to transform itself by expanding significantly for its seventh outing. For example, whereas in previous years the festival's offline editions had accommodated between 2000 and 3000 visitors, the 2014 event, scheduled to take place in Shanghai between 24 and 26 May, was conceptualized as a much larger gathering with anticipated visitor flow of 20,000 people. Two dimensions of the considerable, and at times unanticipated, demands linked to this planned growth will be considered here.

First, transforming the festival for its 2014 iteration involved finding new ways of arranging Tudou's brand identity, carrying it in the process further away from association with Sundance. Crucial in this respect was a broadening of the company's rhetorical presentation of the concerns of its primary audience. As the TVF's Project Director, Cyrus Luan, explained to us in an interview conducted in May 2014, previously the event had largely served the interests of nascent filmmakers. However, it had gradually come to realize that there are many young people in China today who do not necessarily aspire or intend to produce creative work. Instead, they desire simply to record their own lives—to express themselves, preferably in an entertaining manner—which they are happy to do anyway anyhow anywhere. There is thus a huge appetite among Chinese digital natives in their teens and twenties for developing their individual voices. Luan: "Making short films is no longer an activity among those who have a passion for film, it has become an activity among those who have a passion for something. For example, one makes a short film about motor racing or rock climbing because of his or her passion for the respective activity. All these filmmakers will come to our event this year."

The online and offline versions of the 2014 festival had joint parts to play in helping this expanded audience navigate the multiple opportunities for it to invest in the key corporate message that "Everybody is a Director of Their Life." In our discussions on the role of major industry festivals such as Beijing and Shanghai, as well as the abundance of independent events positioned in opposition to them, Luan argues that Chinese short films have yet to place themselves in the context of—or effectively operate within—a compelling public platform. He further maintains, however, that on these terms Tudou enjoys a powerful competitive advantage. As

a leading online brand operating an annual physical celebration, it is able both to attract instant attention from enthusiastic audiences and capitalize on its increasingly visible real world presence.

At this point it is worth highlighting that while the Tudou festival is not based in one geographical location, it nevertheless benefits from being site specific on the Internet. (By contrast, Sundance’s profile is rooted solidly in the natural features of Park City.) Each year its online version surpasses the given period of the offline assembly. The posting and hosting of fresh content are processes that stretch across several months, with some material being made available before the festival takes place and the majority disseminated afterward. Moreover, the online festival is accessible to everybody and professedly democratic. Anyone can vote for their favorite videos and leave comments, and—as in the case of the bringing into existence of YouTube celebrities—the volume of interest subsequently propagated sometimes leads to career opportunities and even fame for those fortunate enough to upload especially noteworthy items.³⁷ In all of these ways, online participatory viewing practices create a sense of buzz around audio-visual material embedded by Tudou in the branded atmosphere of its web site. By tapping into the Internet’s economies of spectatorship, the company focuses user fascination at the same time as it raises the value of its own commercial stock.

The offline festival, too, functions as an important mechanism for delivering audience preoccupations and original concepts to sponsor and media producer alike. In the words of Luan, it is “not a one-off event. It is a platform where talents will continue to emerge and new projects will be created.” For example, a number of studios, directors, writers, and advertisers were invited to attend the 2012 event, co-hosted (not coincidentally) with the China Film Group.³⁸ In 2013, Tudou then served as producer of two short films based on videos that had won awards at this earlier festival. Similarly, in 2014, Tudou broadcast a web drama series, *Midnight Taxi* (*wuye chuzuche*)—directed by a winner of the 2013 TVF—which it had produced in collaboration with Amuse, the Japanese production company responsible for creating the television drama, *Midnight Canteen* (*shinya shodoku*), from which the new product was developed. (Amuse had also attended the Tudou event in 2013.) Indeed, at its 2013 awards ceremony Tudou announced new funding and upgraded revenue sharing schemes to “empower its UGC talents.”³⁹ Deerway, DHL, and Ford were revealed to be among these new funders who would “commission branded content productions”: the anointed young users placed on to these schemes would

then “receive extensive financial, technical, and marketing support” from Tudou.⁴⁰ As Weidong Yang, President of Tudou, declared: “This festival represents the beginning of Tudou 2.0... The 2.0 strategy means that we will fully support our users as they work to get their voices heard on mainstream network media platforms.”⁴¹

The refinement of such innovative policies underlines that by 2014 Tudou’s festival had come to function as an ambitious commercial-minded enterprise connecting China’s young talent with diverse profit-driven stakeholders. Already in possession of its own combined exhibition and distribution platform—one, moreover, that self-supplies a steady stream of popular content—the event also began to expand its role of producer, or co-producer, of unique high quality titles to meet growing national and international demand. In other terms, the event is proving itself capable of finding novel ways to pursue its agenda of facilitating the professionalization of grassroots vernacular creativity.

With this goal in sight, the online and offline events work in synergy. Marijke de Valck suggests that it is important for online festivals to also secure offline locations—which may function as venues for face-to-face interactions and the holding of “rituals and ceremonies,” such as awards galas, that “add value and attract media attention”—because it is “festival space” that “generates exclusivity and thus raises the prestige and news value of programmed films.”⁴² To be sure, its awards ceremony is the central event and main attraction of the offline iteration of the TVF as this particular activity both accrues high status and draws media attention. Equally, though—and somewhat unusually for a prominent media festival—the online version remains the driver that controls audience experiences of the offline space and determines aspects of the awards ceremony. Historically, the SFF may be, in Daniel Dayan’s words, a “written festival” (“a Niagara of printed paper... [h]uge amounts of texts were pouring out every day”), but Tudou is utterly paperless.⁴³ The festival’s script—its organization and schedule—is only available online: no program or timetable is circulated offline. Here Tudou once again differentiates itself from Sundance by playing to its strengths as an online corporate brand. As one of the giants of China’s new media economy, it prefers its annual jamboree to be narrated by online participatory posts rather than through printed materials like festival dailies.

The second major challenge facing the 2014 TVF—which also arose as a result of planned expansion and the concomitant rearrangement of its brand identity—concerns location and event management. The enhanced

ambitions pursued at this time necessitated that crucial decisions be made regarding matters of capacity. In order to explain the relevance of these, it is helpful to glance back briefly at the event’s organization in earlier years.

The sense of intimate communality offered before 2014 to visitors to the offline Tudou festival both resembles and is distinguishable from the site specific dynamics created annually by Sundance in Utah. The company’s strategy of ensuring that user memories remain mobile, that they are not tied to just one physical geography, serves two purposes. First, it channels energies into Tudou’s web site, the online brand. Second, it also highlights that each chosen environment is nevertheless important to the branded festival experience. As Luan explains, Tudou “used to hold the festival in remote corners and in the wilderness.” For example, in 2012 it took place at the Chengde Mountain Resort area 250 kilometers northeast of Beijing (the Qing Dynasty’s Summer Place); in 2013, it was held at the foot of the Great Wall (Badaling Water Pass Great Wall.) Traveling to such places heightens feelings of exclusivity and shared acquaintance among festival participants, just as it does each year in the isolated terrain of Park City.⁴⁴

The venue chosen to host the 2014 festival was very different, however. The event would now be held in the most recognizably urban of modern surroundings. The Tudou organizers characterize this favored location, the Shanghai Himalayas Museum (formerly the Shanghai Zendai Museum of Modern Art) as “a space of possibilities,” and they provide a number of reasons for its selection.⁴⁵ Because of the increased anticipated footfall, the 2014 environment had to be significant larger than on previous occasions. In addition, Tudou wanted a venue that utilizes both indoor and outdoor spaces, that could create a suitably artistic atmosphere embodying the “spirit” of the festival, and that would make everyone feel comfortable. In short, this particular place appears to have been picked because it provides a tangible manifestation of the company’s hybrid online/offline philosophy as well as a protective nest for the incubation of new creative endeavors. Also relevant is the fusion of rural and urban connotations in the design of the Shanghai Himalayas Museum—based as it is on a remote and wild mountain system that has been symbolically transplanted to the heart of the most futuristic of cities—and the fact that it is situated in the middle of Pudong, China’s burgeoning financial district and cauldron of economic growth.

Ironically, a particularly trying aspect of the various challenges facing the 2014 edition of the TVF lay outside of corporate control. Just two weeks before its scheduled opening, the event was abruptly postponed in an act of apparent *force majeure*, the organizers citing as the cause heightened

security in Shanghai at the time of Russian President Vladimir Putin's state visit to China.⁴⁶ Other possible reasons also suggest themselves though. The announcement came not long before the (highly sensitive) 25th anniversary of the events that took place in and around Tiananmen Square, Beijing, on 4 June 1989. Then, too, it was made shortly after Alibaba Group Holding Ltd and a private equity firm co-founded by its executive chair, Jack Ma, agreed to buy a £1.22 billion stake in Youku Tudou, thus massively raising the company's financial portfolio while rendering the future of the discrete Tudou and Youku labels highly unstable.

The precise motivation for the postponement of the 2014 TVF may never be known. At any rate and for whatever reason, the event was rescheduled for 16–17 August and moved to the Aviator's Park at the 2010 Shanghai World Expo site.⁴⁷ Once again, this new venue combines indoor and outdoor spaces (the former especially important considering the city's sweltering summer weather). Once again, it is a large modern facility recently constructed in Pudong, the country's commercial core.

CONCLUSION

This chapter demonstrates that the adoption and adaptation of the US SFF into China's TVF is a complex and multi-faceted process that occurs over time. Based on our empirical research at Tudou 2014, we identify similarities and differences among these events' respective missions to create space—geographical/virtual and developmental—for young talent. In closing, we would like to advance three conclusions regarding scholarly work on Chinese festivals in particular and the concept of the “film festival” more generally.

First, we concur with the view that Chinese media businesses are currently building their basic operations by indigenizing successful foreign blueprints. The social and economic outcomes of these processes are ongoing and difficult to predict: as the postponement of the 2014 Tudou event further suggests, they are also susceptible to the winds of political change. China's leading Internet companies participate in vital ways in the country's “state-corporate hegemonic culture,” and the TVF is no exception.⁴⁸

Second, we raise the question—which at this point must remain no more than a subject for further research—of what will happen in the future when the creative energies unleashed by corporate titans like Tudou are brought fully to maturity. In looking toward the semi-professional and non-professional film and media scenes while also keeping one eye firmly

on commercial opportunities, the TVF perhaps provides a glimpse of what may be coming around the corner. After all, the consequences of untold numbers of digital natives in their teens and twenties visiting the company’s web site hundreds of millions of times have yet to be properly calibrated. The event validates the cultural values of grassroots production and offers enhanced opportunities for commercial growth. But this is to say nothing of the vexed questions of social media data mining and electronic surveillance of China’s young netizens.

Third, there is a need for media historians and critics to acknowledge and account for the corporate presence in the organization of festivals. Tudou and Sundance are the preeminent examples of what we term the “corporate audio-visual festival.” However, similar forces may also be at work (albeit less visibly) elsewhere. Much could be learned in this respect from the scholarly analysis of corporate intervention in the art scene, especially around the increased integration between commercially branded experiences and public cultural environments, or “the phenomenon of disappearing unmarketed cultural ‘space.’”⁴⁹ Festivals are not just industrial institutions of and for exhibition, distribution, and production. They are also implicated in the realms of advertising, commerce, and other aspects of corporate culture.

While some argue that these days every cultural and art space is touched by the hand of commerce, our research suggests that the TVF is seeking to develop innovative models of operation. Most festivals situate themselves in a single location (often within a global city) that facilitates their ability to secure funding and sponsorship from municipal or regional councils, film commissions, tourist boards, service industries, and other public stakeholders. In order to acknowledge and justify such forms of financial and logistical support, they have to provide evidence of ticket sales among other metrics. However, as a corporate entity Tudou neither requires public funding nor needs to pursue immediate profit through sponsorship or sales. Instead, its festival is its own means and its own end: it is a self-sustaining platform able to deliver brand identities and channel brand experiences. The TVF has always been a free event (if exclusive to guests and online users who secure tickets). A further mark of its flexible outlook and potential for ongoing growth is that it plans to introduce admission charges from 2015.

What is the future of the corporate audio-visual festival? Two recent grand gestures on a global scale provide possible portents of things to come. In August 2014, the rescheduled TVF was advertised prominently on a large hoarding placed by tudou.com in Times Square, New York: “TAKE A SELFIE WITH THIS BILLBOARD,” it read, “WIN **FREE**

TRIP TO SHANGHAI AND HANG OUT WITH THE COOLEST YOUNG CHINESE FOR 3 DAYS!⁵⁰ At the same time, preparations were under way for the September 2014 Alibaba New York stock flotation—the largest ever such offering.⁵¹ Against the backdrop of China’s economic ascent in the twenty-first century, the metamorphosis of a celebrated US festival of independent film into a forward-looking and newly internationalizing Chinese digital platform—a key asset in the world’s biggest corporate power move—was being taken to a different level altogether. History is currently being made, but not by the “film festival” as we know it. Think on, festival-watchers.

Acknowledgments For generous help and support, we would like to thank Cyrus Luan (Project Director) and his staff at the TVF, Qin Stella Pan (Youku Tudou), Patrice Pujol, Min Rose, Gianluca Sergi, Sabrina Yu, and members of the AHRC Chinese Film Festival Studies Research Network.

NOTES

1. tdf2014.tudou.com. See also www.tudou.com.
2. For information on the development of Youku Tudou, we are indebted to Patrice Pujol, “The Case Study of Youku Tudou,” unpublished research seminar paper, Department of Culture, Film and Media, University of Nottingham, February 2014.
3. This chapter draws on a series of interviews conducted with Cyrus Luan (Project Director) and other organizers of the TVF in Beijing (October 2013) and Shanghai (May 2014, August 2014) as well as via numerous Skype conference calls and email correspondence. Any attributed quotations not cited in the notes derive from these personal conversations.
4. Jonathan Sullivan, “A Tale of Two Microblogs in China,” *Media, Culture and Society* 34, no. 6 (2012), 773–83; Sherman So and J. Christopher Westland, *Red Wired: China’s Internet Revolution* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 2010), 193.
5. So and Westland (2010), 193.
6. A “sun dance” is a North American Indian ceremony performed at the summer solstice.
7. For background information on the Sundance Institute, see www.sundance.org.
8. See Lory Smith, *Party in a Box: The Story of the Sundance Film Festival* (Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith Publishers, 1999); John Anderson, *Sundancing: Hanging Out and Listening in at America’s Most Important Film Festival*

- (New York, Avon Books, 2000); Peter Biskind, *Down and Dirty Pictures: Miramax, Sundance and the Rise of Independent Film* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004).
9. Smith (1999), 86.
 10. Quoted in Andrew Stewart, “Robert Redford’s Sundance Press Conference: ‘We Have Nothing to Do with Distribution,’” *Variety*, 16 January 2014, <http://variety.com/2014/film/news/robert-redfords-sundance-press-conference-we-have-nothing-to-do-with-distribution-1201061411/>.
 11. Overseas offshoot events have also been held in the UK in 2012, 2013, and 2014 under the title “Sundance London.” The planned 2015 Sundance London event was canceled in January of that year for reasons yet to be made public.
 12. Quoted in Anderson (2000), 94.
 13. See Smith (1999), Anderson (2000), and Biskind (2004).
 14. *Ibid.*
 15. Corporate executive Larry Estes quoted in Biskind (2004), 105.
 16. Smith (1999), 137.
 17. See Sherry B. Ortner, *Not Hollywood: Independent Film at the Twilight of the American Dream* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).
 18. Sundance’s institute and film festival have even been the subject of a report prepared by the prestigious Harvard Business School. See Mukti Khaire and Eleanor Kenyon, “The Kid Grows Up: Decisions at the Sundance Institute,” Harvard Business School Case 812–051, December 2001. (Revised September 2014). Consult also Anne Thompson, *The \$11 Billion Year: From Sundance to the Oscars. an Inside Look at the Changing Hollywood System* (New York: HarperCollins, 2014).
 19. Gina Marchetti’s chapter in this volume offers further discussion of this important topic.
 20. See, *inter alia*, Jean Burgess and Joshua Green, *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009).
 21. At the time of writing online access to YouTube remains blocked in China. However, it has been reported that it can be accessed within the 17 square miles of the Shanghai Free Trade Zone; it can also be made available by using a Virtual Private Network (VPN) service. See Victoria Woollaston, “China Lifts Ban on Facebook—But Only for People Living in a 17 Square Mile Area of Shanghai,” *Daily Mail*, 25 September 2013; <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2431861/China-lifts-ban-Facebook-people-living-working-small-area-Shanghai.html>.
 22. Poujol (2014); Elaine Jing Zhao and Michael Keane, “Between Formal and Informal: The Shakeout in China’s Online Video Industry,” *Media, Culture and Society* 35. no. 6 (2013), 724–741.
 23. Zhao and Keane (2013), 728–30.

24. In September 2013, the number of monthly visits to Youku Tudou reached over 300 million, surpassing those of all other competitors. See “Online Video in China: The Chinese Stream,” *The Economist*, 9 November, 2013 (source: iResearch).
25. According to Tudou, by December 2011 monthly visits to its site had reached approximately 200 million. See “Tudou Overview: 2011,” <http://www.tudou.com/about/en/milestones.html#>.
26. Poujol (2014); Shepherd Laughlin, “2011 Tudou Video Festival Awards: The Best of China’s Online Films,” *CNN Travel*, 17 May 2011, <http://travel.cnn.com/shanghai/life/2011-tudou-video-festival-awards-best-chinas-online-films-629109>.
27. Youku Tudou Chair and Chief Executive Officer Victor Khoo, quoted in Ben Rooney, “YouWho? Chinese Online Video Companies Merge,” *CNN Money Invest*, March 12, 2012, http://money.cnn.com/2012/03/12/technology/youku_tudou/.
28. Clifford Coonan, “Hollywood’s New Chinese Gold Mine: Youku Tudou,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, 30 August, 2013, no. 30–31, 36.
29. Tudou’s corporate slogan resonates in the context of artist Ai Weiwei’s words regarding China’s “current state of technical advances that enables every average person to make their dreams come true in their everyday lives.” Ai Weiwei, “Foreword,” in *Warhol in China* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2013), 7.
30. For a wide-ranging discussion of this topic, see Paola Voci, *China on Video: Smaller-Screen Realities* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010). Work submitted to Tudou is subject to the company’s full terms and conditions. See “User Agreement,” <http://www.tudou.com/about/en/agreementEn.html#s4>.
31. Tudou Holdings Limited, “Tudou Holds Awards Ceremony for 2012 Tudou Video Festival,” 4 June 2012, *GlobeNewswire*, <http://globenewswire.com/news-release/2012/06/04/478436/258064/en/Tudou-Holds-Awards-Ceremony-for-2012-Tudou-Video-Festival.html>.
32. Youku Tudou Inc., “Tudou Video Festival Empowers UGC Talents with Sponsors and Marketing Support,” 13 June 2013, *PR Newswire*, <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/tudou-video-festival-empowers-ugc-talents-with-sponsors-and-marketing-support-211350651.html>
33. According to Sundance, its own connection with China stretches back to 1995 when it sent an American delegation (including Quentin Tarantino) to showcase a selection of titles at the first festival of US independent film to be held in the country. (See “30 Years of Sundance Film Festival,” <http://www.sundance.org/festivalhistory/>). In a more recent effort to globalize its brand while functioning as a cultural ambassador for America, the Sundance Institute organized a series of “Sundance Film Festival—Hong Kong Selects”

- screenings at the recently launched Metroplex in Kowloon Bay, Hong Kong, in September 2014. (See Dave McNary, “Sundance Film Festival Expanding to Hong Kong,” *Variety*, 31 July 2014, www.variety.com).
34. 2011 is also the year of Tudou’s US initial public offering on the NASDAQ Stock Market. The expansion of its festival at this time through the establishment of formal links with Sundance is therefore connected to the company’s efforts to accumulate overseas exposure and develop its international reputation so as to attract transnational financial investments.
 35. Quoted in Laughlin (2011).
 36. *Ibid.* To cite the case of another example, the 2013 winner of the category, *Playground*, was invited to the Generation Kplus short film section of the 2014 Berlin International Film Festival. It is an impressive work of around 17 minutes in which the camera roams freely and without interruption inside and outside an elementary school building.
 37. For example, 2011 Golden Potato Award winner Wang Zizhao went on to launch a popular talk show, “Speak Out,” on Tudou.
 38. Tudou Holdings, “Comments & Business Outlook: Second Quarter 2012 Revenue Highlights,” *Geoinvesting*, 6 August 2012, http://geoinvesting.com/companies/tudou_tudou_holdings/research/comments_business_outlook/0038986.
 39. Youku Tudou Inc., “Tudou Video Festival Empowers UGC Talents with Sponsors and Marketing Support,” *PRNewswire*, 13 June 2013, <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/tudou-video-festival-empowers-ugc-talents-with-sponsors-and-marketing-support-211350651.html>.
 40. *Ibid.*
 41. *Ibid.*
 42. Marijke de Valck, “Convergence, Digitisation and the Future of Film Festivals.” In *Digital Disruption: Cinema Moves On-line*, eds. Dina Iordanova and Stuart Cunningham (St Andrews: St Andrews Film Studies, 2012), 125.
 43. Daniel Dayan, “Looking for Sundance: The Social Construction of a Film Festival.” In *The Film Festival Reader*, ed. Dina Iordanova (St. Andrews: St Andrews Film Studies, 2013), 56. Originally published in 2000.
 44. *Ibid.*
 45. The Shanghai Himalayas Museum describes itself as a “Museum with Attitude... a privately-funded, non-profit art institute focusing on art exhibition, education, collection, research and academic exchanges... committed to exploring and re-shaping the landscape of Chinese art and culture.” *Shanghai Himalayas Museum Inaugural Exhibition* catalog, 2013, 106. The museum first welcomed visitors in June 2013. (The Shanghai Zendai Museum of Modern Art was opened in 2005.)
 46. Putin’s trip coincided with the signing between the two countries of a 30-year gas deal worth billions of dollars.

47. We attended the rescheduled 2014 Tudou event in August after visiting Shanghai at the time of the festival's original scheduled slot in May.
48. Chris Berry and Lisa Rofel, "Alternative Archive: China's Independent Documentary Culture." In *The New Chinese Documentary Film Movement: For the Public Record*, eds. Chris Berry, Lu Xinyu, and Lisa Rofel (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 136.
49. Naomi Klein, *No Logo: No Space, No Choice, No Jobs* (New York: Picador, 2002), 45. See also Chin-tao Wu, *Privatising Culture: Private Art Intervention Since the 1980s* (London and New York: Verso, 2002).
50. Capitalization and emphasis in original.
51. The Alibaba Group's initial public offering on the New York Stock Exchange took place on 19 September 2014.

What Can Small Festivals Do? Toward Film Festivals as Testimony to Expanded Civic Engagement in Post-Handover Hong Kong

Esther C.M. Yau

INTRODUCTION

Film festivals have celebrated and inspired from the very outset. A buttress to cultural reproduction, the early festivals in Europe established cycles of anticipation, recognition, replacement, commemoration, and renewal. These are essentially the same as cycles of commodity circulation. It is thus not surprising that major film festivals today are hubs in a global cultural economy: they draw publicists, distributors, and investors to world premieres of new films each year. Competition and repetition among festivals is the norm, especially for the hundreds of events that have sprung up in cities and towns annually between the 1990s and early 2010s. Many such festivals highlight celebrity presence, give out awards to attract film entries, and use conventional cultural approaches to secure government and private funding.¹ During this same period, independent films, with their staunch defense of personal vision, have moved from the margins to the center of the film industry and industry festivals.² To diverge from

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established festival practices and industry norms has therefore increasingly become anathema to most festivals.

The international film festivals of Cannes, Berlin, and Venice are the major events that glow with world premiere titles and stars among the festival constellation of thousands. They have annual programs of over 200 titles. The festivals of Sundance, Telluride, Toronto, Locarno, Busan, and a few others are also sizeable hubs that receive large numbers of competing entries; they have annual programs of up to 200 titles. These are the places that “discover” Chinese, Taiwanese, and Hong Kong cinemas and their directors, as well as shape the tastes of the world audience. As for documentaries, currently there are more than 87 specialist documentary film festivals in the world.³ The Yamagata International Film Festival, which began in 1989, is a major festival, with over 210 films screened in the year 2013.⁴ It is a special global platform for radical documentaries, new nonfiction film concepts, and young practitioners.

Mapping festival change from the 1930s to the early twenty-first century, Marijke de Valck identifies a shift from European national cinemas to international films. Thomas Elsaesser indicates that European cinephiles territorialized certain cinemas and festival screenings in the years after World War II. Retroactively, their enjoyment of “must see films” and infatuation with the masters were revealed as the personal indulgence of regressive fantasies. Once international film festivals prevailed from the 1980s onward, cinephilia became a global phenomenon,⁵ though some cinephiles nevertheless channeled their critical energies into screen theory and university film studies.⁶ Even though cinephiles and festivals apparently need each other, large festivals are generally regarded as launching pads for directorial careers on a global stage, and as a place for business.⁷

This scenario seems to say that small festivals do not matter much to contemporary festival culture. Yet, most would agree that the events that continue to expand the boundaries of cinema as an art form and serve civic culture are those where the constraints of corporate sponsorship and industry rules are minimal. Whether due to a special interest focus, the vision of their founders, or the appearance of new talent, many small festivals are precisely such places, or aspire to become them by establishing alternative non-industry networks. Small festivals screen an average of 50 titles or fewer. Some neither use mainstream media for publicity nor give out awards; the ones that have itinerant and education-based screenings usually benefit more than a single city or rural location. Whereas the screening of films on celluloid used to be regarded as the very criteria for a “true” film festival,⁸ small festivals now screen titles in digital

videodisc (DVD) format; moreover, this transition has become a moot issue since commercial theaters adopted digital technology. On the other hand, how small festivals serve film festival culture or public culture—or indeed both—remains a subject for study.

To investigate how small Chinese-language film festivals can translate and modify film festival culture and strengthen civic culture, I examine two small, distinctive festivals in Hong Kong: the hong kong social movement film festival (hksmff)⁹ and the Chinese Documentary Festival (CDF). I am interested in discovering whether their events replicate the “competition and repetition” approach of larger festivals, or if they make their own distinct interventions into festival culture and to what ends. My method of study combines festival program research with field research that involved participant observation. Research into program content includes attending to less obvious aspects such as language and the implied circuits that filmmakers establish by appearing in different festivals throughout the world. My field research comprised of attending screenings and festival events, conducting interviews, and engaging in spontaneous conversations with festival organizers, volunteers, and a few young directors. Having served as CDF’s award adjudicator in the summer of 2014, in addition to co-teaching an undergraduate documentary course with the festival’s founder, added an experiential dimension to this process. Having attended some events and missed others also affected my interpretation. For example, during the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement in September and October 2014, I attended two hksmff screenings, one of which was held at the Hong Kong Art Centre just a seven-minute walk from where protestors had camped out for several weeks. However, I missed the outdoor CDF screenings held in Cheung Chau, though I knew the island very well as a child. The distinctive identity of each festival activity is especially important for its connections to local civic participation.¹⁰ I take the existence and practices of these festivals as a living testimony to the high value placed on freedom of cosmopolitical public expression in Hong Kong’s first two post-handover decades.

DISSENT AND CIVIC CULTURE IN THE EARLY POST- HANDOVER YEARS

Hksmff and CDF were established during an eventful period when social and political activism started to prevail in post-handover Hong Kong. Hksmff first screened films on a few university campuses in October and November of 2003, shortly after the city had recovered from the attack

of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) which resulted in the loss of about 200 lives. The previous summer, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) government had drafted a bill to legislate Article 23, an antisubversion article, into the city's Basic Law.¹¹ The local population took this as a direct threat to freedom of speech; consequently, on July 1, 2003, over half a million people marched in protest against this legislation.¹² In the years that followed, a flurry of political activity erupted, initially around the first direct elections to the Hong Kong Legislative Council, then over the first local and nonpublic election of the SAR Chief Executive. Grassroots social movement groups that had emerged during the colonial era were increasingly vocal in opposition to the government's neoliberal policies, and demonstration marches became frequent. Public debate at the time focused on whether Hong Kong's political arrangements should prepare the city for further democratic reform or for convergence with a system that China would find acceptable.¹³ The July citywide demonstration in 2003 and the election activities of 2004–2008 period were captured by local independent documentary filmmakers, notably Tammy Cheung. In 2004, Cheung founded Visible Record as a nonprofit organization to host CDF and to distribute documentaries.¹⁴

Not surprisingly, documentary cinema became the defining medium for both hksmff and CDF. Since the late 1990s, Hong Kong documentary practitioners have developed ways to integrate expository, observational, and personal modes when representing local agency and marginal voices protesting various injustices. Following the anti-World Trade Organization (WTO) protests that took place in Hong Kong in December 2005, for example, documentary became the only form featured in the third hksmff program; films screened such as *Her Anti-WTO* and *Our Heavy Yet Beautiful December* combined observational and expository modes to depict local protests. The 2008 and 2009 CDF Special Section screenings carried Cheung's *July* and *Election*. Both works are observational documentaries that focus on the citywide demonstrations and election campaigns of 2003 and 2008.

All the above suggests that these festivals raise consciousness and contribute to Hong Kong's civic culture. While this is indeed true, it is necessary to unpack certain assumptions linked to this deduction. In *The Dynamics of Social Movement in Hong Kong*, for example, Stephen Chiu and Tai Lok Lui use "consciousness-raising" to describe social movements in the city that do not incite collective action by mass mobilization. Groups that have mobilized are said to have directly challenged the policies of the

colonial administration before the 1997 handover, and to have openly criticized the SAR government afterwards.¹⁵ To say that these festivals are consciousness-raising thus distances them from opposition-based mobilization, aligning them with social movements that have agendas conducive to a “decolonisation without independence,” such as the environmental and gender awareness movements.¹⁶ Some might even argue that regardless of their agendas, as a result of receiving public funding from the Arts Development Council, CDF, and hksmff (and the latter’s partner organizations Video Power and v-artist) have avoided taking part in any mobilization against the government.¹⁷

There is a problem, however, with this binary identification of some Hong Kong social movements as “consciousness-raising” and others as representing “direct social mobilization.” While social movements certainly aim at long term, structural transformation, many local social movements have also engaged in short-term mobilization. Gender awareness groups, for example, have engaged in direct action, a notable instance being the activism of the Hong Kong Women’s Coalition on Equal Opportunities. Members of the Coalition appeared in an August 2015 protest regarding the court conviction of a female protestor accused of using her breast to assault a policeman while alleging the latter of indecent assault. Male and female protestors outside the police station in Wanchai wore real or fake bras over bare backs or on top of T-shirts to call attention to the ludicrous verdict.¹⁸ Without drawing media attention, hksmff called for participation in the 2005 anti-WTO demonstration, and staged screenings that amounted to an open challenge to corporate spatial hegemony in Hong Kong’s Central District. To the extent that the festival practices discussed in this chapter consciously integrate knowing with doing, they do not fit neatly into the binary of consciousness-raising versus mobilization.¹⁹ Indeed, the young people who are active in the festivals’ post-screening discussions often mix critical and creative skills in the making of documentaries and in civic engagement.

Arguments for the value of both critical and creative skills abound in the West. During a period of public education budget cuts in the USA, Martha Nussbaum defended the humanities by saying that critical thinking, creativity, imagination, and the capacity to empathize are exactly what the arts and humanities can contribute to business activities and civic culture. Deficiencies in humanities training, on the other hand, can adversely affect the citizenry and a polity’s democratic future.²⁰ Using the term “awareness economy,” Christophe Fricker argues instead for the

“epistemic and ethical guidance” that the arts, humanities, and social sciences can provide industry and business. Competence in handling ambiguity, developing arguments, and suggesting courses of action is essential in the twenty-first-century workplace.²¹ Whether in civic culture or just the business sector, cultivation of these talents requires resources. I suggest that the nonprofit hksmff and CDF are participatory opportunities to exercise creativity, critical thinking, and the capacity to empathize; and they support ethical perspectives unrestricted by national politics. These events outside the classroom take a bottom-up approach to building a civic culture that buttresses activism in the broadest sense. The critical and creative skills they cultivate can in turn identify blind spots in the education and business sectors that are important for any “awareness economy,” and in civic life. The distinctive ways in which each festival materializes these objectives are discussed in the sections below.

COMMUNITARIAN PARTICIPATION AND THE HONG KONG SOCIAL MOVEMENT FILM FESTIVAL

Hksmff was launched in 2003. Intended to increase awareness in Hong Kong of global and local social movements, the event also pursues distinct goals of self-education and communitarian participation. Its organizers insist that they run an “international film festival of the poor” that dispenses with red carpets, receptions, and awards. The festival location, screenings, and discussions effectively avoid the pomp of privilege and success. Publicity is by way of the Internet, student newspapers, leaflets, and posters, as well as personal communication. The goal is “narrowcasting” to individuals who will attend the festival over the long term, rather than as occasional consumers. Communitarian participation is expressed through a festival slogan composed of words connected by three dashes: “movies—moved—musing—movement, left besides us.”²² The dashes link the act of documentary viewing with thoughts (critical and emotive) expressed in screenings and discussions, and with actions taken at the sites and scenes of various social movements. Connecting heightened awareness with activism suggests a movement-based outlook that intervenes in the apathy and cynicism said to characterize the local population.

In fact, hksmff has an advocacy background. It was first organized by the Social Movement Resource Centre (hereafter, the Resource Centre) of the Hong Kong Federation of Students (HKFS).²³ Lenny Guo, a composer and political rock performer from the band *Blackbird*, is said to have ini-

tiated the idea for hksmff while working as a Resource Centre member. HKFS is widely known for its leading role in Hong Kong's 2014 civil disobedience movement (popularly known as the Umbrella Movement),²⁴ and for many years, it had an elected office of student representatives from eight Hong Kong universities. The Resource Centre, as HKFS's funded subsidiary, ran hksmff on the theme of democratic social movements by holding screenings of narrative features and documentaries on the campuses of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, City University, and Polytechnic University. In 2005, the Resource Centre organized students to challenge Hong Kong SAR government policies that included reducing subsidies for University tuition and hospital medical care, establishing the West Kowloon Cultural District, and allocating land to house a Disneyland theme park. Joining local opposition to these probusiness, economically neoliberal policies, the Resource Centre and Video Power together made their voices heard in demonstrations and rallies.

Also in 2005, protests took place against the WTO Ministerial Conference held in Hong Kong in December. During that week, Korean farmers and women protestors demonstrated in Hong Kong, using their bodies fearlessly and creatively, both inspiring local activists and attracting media attention.²⁵ Partnering with Video Power, the third edition of hksmff screened the anti-WTO documentary *WTO Shipwrecks in Cancun* as its opening feature, followed by antiglobalization documentaries from Taiwan, Brazil, and Hong Kong. Screenings were organized around five topics: Against Labor Exploitation, Battle for Public Space, Battle for Non-Urban Space, Consumption Burning, and Transnational Businesses and the World Bank.²⁶ In addition to the standard blurb that introduced each title in the program, a festival brochure was published that included short commentaries on critical issues. This brochure also announced a special presentation, inviting people to participate in antiglobalization protests from December 13 to 18, 2005. The Resource Centre issued a joint statement with Video Power in the third festival brochure that stated: "We are a group of Hong Kong citizens and our shared understandings are against the exploitation of labor and environment and the destruction of cultural diversity by the capitalist society [sic]."²⁷ What reads like a brief manifesto is in fact the political stance that hksmff has adopted since; the following year, for example, hksmff focused on films that examined the policies underpinning global capitalism.

During and after the anti-WTO struggles, HKFS cut down its funding of the Resource Centre and applied administrative measures to reduce

the latter's influence.²⁸ In response, the Centre participants declared autonomy, renaming the centre "autonomous 8a." After the split, hksmff was effectively funded through personal donations and a share of the Arts Development Council subsidy for Video Power, later through v-artist.²⁹ From the very beginning, hksmff screenings were free. They continue to be so, as the festival accepts onsite donations but does not draw an income from ticket sales, unlike other festivals in Hong Kong.

The festival's principle of self-reliance over income and sponsorship is complemented by an ethos of experiential learning. Lee Wai-Yi, one of hksmff's main organizers, reiterates that they run "an international film festival of the poor" that puts self-sufficiency ahead of budget size. To meet the cost of screening rights and programming fees, in 2005, hksmff initiated what it called "work exchange" (*jiaogong*). This entails directly contacting individual filmmakers to obtain screening rights in exchange for subtitling their documentaries into Chinese, thus doing away with distribution percentages and subtitling fees.³⁰ "Work exchange" turns subtitling into a currency and a training opportunity, while also making non-Chinese-language documentaries available to a Chinese audience. Subtitling English, Spanish, Japanese, and Indonesian films into Chinese exposes the festival volunteers to less familiar languages and idioms. Through experiential learning, these amateurs become more experienced at work previously undertaken solely or predominantly by professionals. Poverty is treated not as a lack but as an asset, allowing the organizers to explore alternative ways to run a small film festival.

I would argue that such a communitarian approach precipitated the kind of civic cooperation and creative participation that appeared during the 2014 Hong Kong Umbrella Movement. Hksmff organizers help volunteers to become "coworkers" (*gonggong*) who are involved in decision making and work systematically toward a common goal; the unpaid coworkers select titles, write summaries for the program and brochure, provide "viewing clues" to guide choices, and lead extended post-screening discussions.³¹ Other festivals, concerned about compromising professional quality, may not allow amateurs or volunteers (*yigong*) to play such a prominent role, but it is hksmff's intervention in making amateurs learn what experts are paid to do that ensures a democratic and participatory process along with a consistent grassroots-oriented outlook.³²

Nonhierarchical relations and self-directed cooperation were also two features of the Umbrella Movement. The young participants in civil disobedience who protested the highly controlled selection process of the

SAR Chief Executive managed supplies, maintained recycling to protect the environment, and brought toiletries to public bathrooms near the occupied areas in Admiralty District on Hong Kong Island. Those with artistic training and craft-making skills made sculptures and gave out free memorabilia. Volunteer carpenters made tables and desks for students to set up outdoor study rooms. This kind of egalitarian practice resembled the communitarian participation practiced at hksmff. With freedom of individual expression and the opportunity to build civic culture, the students and young people of the Umbrella Movement educated themselves on how to become independent reporters and writers. Many used social media and the Internet to initiate activities and share ideas that constituted the intellectual and emotional experience of the social movement. In effect, through this process, the young people unlearned a status-based “commodity self” and took up an activist approach to building civic culture.

There is more to hksmff’s programming of films about advocacy and activism. The festival organizers are committed to an ethical handling of images in the documentaries and a perspective that respects the dignity and equality of the subjects of these images. They have in mind a worldview that guides the selection of nonmainstream documentaries as well as an overall festival aesthetic. The event features local and regional titles (Hong Kong, mainland China, Taiwan, and Japan) as well as transnational ones (Australia/UK, Canada, Germany/India, Spain, Ukraine, and others) (see Table 8.1). These titles include critiques of capitalist globalization and developmentalism, films advocating for workers’ and civil rights, and documentaries addressing issues of gender and sexuality. The festival programs provide “viewing clues” to help the audience identify titles related to particular subjects.³³ These clues cultivate a cosmopolitical awareness of connections linking resistance and activism in various regions with local social movements. One coworker said that translating subtitles for documentaries from Indonesia, the Philippines, and India had broadened her horizons, encouraging her to consider issues geographically closer to Hong Kong, as opposed to those in the USA and Europe, places that she thought she knew from watching imported films.³⁴ This suggests an expanded geographical awareness no longer limited by the skewed cinematic map drawn by commercial releases on local screens.

The choice of screening venues reinforces this communitarian approach. Indoor screenings are held in the same public spaces and places where labor unions, community centers, and nonprofit or religious organizations do

Table 8.1 Awareness and activism in the programming of the Hong Kong social movement film festival^{1a}

Issues	Local (Hong Kong)	Translocal (other regions)
Against capitalist globalization	<p><i>Our Heavy Yet Beautiful December</i> (Video Power and 8a, 2005) (F)</p> <p><i>Her Anti-WTO</i> (Kong King-chu, 2006) (F)</p> <p><i>Lo Siu-lan and the Link—Anti-privatization of Public Asset</i> (Chinese Grey Power, 2007–2008) (S)</p> <p><i>Local Shorts Step: notychannel diary 1 + billy + Big Mouth Inc. and the guerrilla kids</i> (not my channel + Billy + loudspeaker Hong Kong, 2003 and 2004) (S)</p> <p><i>Exodus of Nowhere Episode One</i> (v-artist, 2002–2013) (F)</p>	<p>Non-Chinese</p> <p><i>Kilometer 0—The WTO Shipwrecks in Cancun</i> (produced by AIRE, Big Noise Tactical Media, Promedios, Denver Revolution, Calle y Media, 2003, Mexico) (S)</p> <p><i>Money as Debt I & III</i> (Paul Grignon, 2006 and 2011, Canada) (F)</p> <p><i>The Corporation</i> (Mark Achbar, Jennifer Abbott, Joel Bakan, 2004, Canada) (F)</p> <p><i>Praba 2000: World Bank IMF Under Siege</i> (the Prague Independent Media Center, 2000, Czech Republic) (S)</p> <p><i>Be More Human</i> (Video Press, 2001, Japan) (F)</p>
Politics and elections	<p><i>Why Not Chan King-fai</i> (Lun Pui-Ki, 2003) (S)</p> <p><i>Do You Hear the People Sing?</i> (Short Video Series) (Video Power, etc., 2006) (S)</p>	<p>Taiwan</p> <p><i>The Truth of Gold</i> (Consumers Acting for People and the Environment, 2005) (S)</p> <p>Non-Chinese</p> <p><i>The Hour of the Furnaces</i> (Fernando E. Solanas, 1968, Spain) (F)</p> <p><i>This Is What Democracy Looks Like</i> (Seattle Independent Media Center and Big Noise Films, 2000, US) (F)</p> <p><i>Grain of Sand</i> (Jill Freidberg, 2005, US/Mexico) (F)</p> <p><i>A Single Spark</i> (Park Kwang-Su, 1995, South Korea) (F)</p> <p><i>A Little Bit of So Much Truth</i> (Jill Irene Freidberg, 2007, Mexico / US) (F)</p> <p><i>Collections of Autonomous Video Works</i> (ICE, Vacuum Cleaner, Video Power, Old District Renewal TV Station, 2006, Australia, UK, HK) (S)</p> <p>China</p> <p><i>Why Are the Flowers So Red</i> (Ai Xiaoming, 2010) (F)</p> <p><i>Three Days in Wukan</i> (Ai Xiaoming, 2012) (F)</p> <p><i>Tale of Two Villages</i> (Chen Xinzhong, 2006.) (F)</p>

- Labor's lives and rights
- Iron Born Roses* (Strike Production Team, 2007) (F)
- Diamond and Dust* (Subo Shum and Lee Wai-Yi, 2005) (F)
- Beautiful Life* (Chan Ho-Lun, 2012) (S)
- Homecoming* (Kwok Zune, 2009) (S)
- Inside-Out* (Grass Media Action—Wong Hei-Man, 2013) (S)
- Resistance against enforced development
- Home Where the Yellow Banners Fly* (H15 Concern Group, v-artist, 2006) (S)
- The Street, the Way* (v-artist, 2002–2012) (F)
- The Pier, the Other Shore* (Autonomous 8a, Local Action, v-artist, 2010) (F)
- Raging Land Trilogy* (Choi Yuen Support Group, v-artist, 2009, 2010, 2011) (F)
- Drifting* (Lam Sum, 2011) (S)
- Walk on! Shun Ning Road!* (v-artist, 2010) (F)
- The Street, the Way* (v-artist, 2002–2012) (F)
- Habitus and Footprints* (My Home Project, 2004) (S)
- Environmental advocacy
- Non-Chinese Many Strays Make a Nest—Proletarian Unrest in Delhi Industrial Belt* (Barbel Schonafinger, Anne Gebhardt, 2010, Germany/India) (S)
- China The Train to My Home Town* (Ai Xiaoming, 2009) (F)
- Taiwan A Music Documentary of the Workers' Band: Black Hand Nakasi* (Lin Chi-Wen, 2007) (S)
- Home Video on Blue Harbour* (Susan Chen, 2008) (S)
- Non-Chinese The Bourgeoisie Returns to the Centre* (Szum TV, 2012, Poland) (F)
- Strong Roots* (Aline Sasahara and Maria Luisa Mendonca, 2001, Brazil) (S)
- China Meishi Street* (Ou Ning, 2006) (F)
- Taiwan Video Documentary of the Losheng Preservation* (produced by Happy LoSheng Youth Union, Black Hand Nakasi, etc., 2005) (F)
- Green Bulldozer: The Rise of Tour New Homeland* (Huang Sun.-Quan, 1998) (F)
- Non-Chinese The Sacrifice* (Emanuela Andreoli and Wladimir Tchertkoff, 2003, Ukraine) (S)
- Living On The River Agano* (Sato Makoto, 1992, Japan) (F)
- Video Summary of an Anti-Nuclear Protest* (LaborNet Japan, 2011, Japan)
- Taiwan Let It Be* (Yen Lan-Chun and Cres Juang, 2004) (F)
- How Are You Gongliao?* (Tsui Su-Hsin, 2005) (F)
- Farmers in the City* (Hung Chun-Hsiu, 2004) (F)

(continued)

Table 8.1 (continued)

<i>Issues</i>	<i>Local (Hong Kong)</i>	<i>Translocal (other regions)</i>
Gender and sexuality		<i>Non-Chinese</i> <i>Out at Work</i> (Kelly Anderson and Tami Gold, 1997, US) (S) <i>China</i> <i>The Vagina Monologues: Stories from China</i> (Ai Xiaoming, 2004) (S) <i>Taiwan</i> <i>Lesbian Factory</i> (Susan Chen, 2013) (S)

^aA selection based on published SMFF program content

Key: S Short (less than 60 minutes), F Feature

their everyday work. The outdoor screenings take place in community centers (e.g., a garden next to the Yau Ma Tei Community Centre), on rooftops (Nathan Road Wing Wong Building and Kam Lun Building), inside labor unions (the Industrial Relations Institute), at religious organizations (Hong Kong Christian Institute, Ekklesia Hong Kong), and at experimental cultural spaces (Yau Ma Tei Pitt Street No.18, Hong Kong Indie Media). On university campuses, screenings are held in freely accessible open spaces, instead of inside rented auditoriums and classrooms. The only hksmff venue that resembles those of other festivals is the Hong Kong Arts Centre, where a single screening is held annually at no cost to the festival.

Such a communitarian use of space is sure to clash with policing in corporate zones. On October 6, 2012, hksmff attempted to publicly screen two animated anticapitalist and educational documentaries, *Money As Debt* and *Money as Debt III*, in Central District, Hong Kong's main business quarter. After the organizers set up a projector on a folding table at the sidewalk next to the HSBC headquarters, the bank security staff declared the premises private and attempted to get the organizers and audiences off the sidewalk. Undaunted, everyone stayed for an hour to watch the documentaries before the security guards targeted the equipment. The folding table became the object of a "tug of war" between the guards and festival organizers. The latter, together with coworkers, protected their equipment and sought to reason with the guards. The next day, they returned to the same place to hold another screening. They set up on the sidewalk while the security guards cordoned off the area right outside the bank premises. Another scuffle ensued when security officers attempted to move the people off the sidewalk. Not long after the organizers restarted the interrupted screening on the roadside, policemen arrived and warned people to get off the road. The hksmff organizers and coworkers brought along video cameras, wireless mikes, and amplifiers; they recorded the interruptions while requesting an explanation, addressing the security guard as workers. The next day, media reports about the incident on Hong Kong's TVB television channel misidentified the people involved as the same protestors who initiated the 2012 Occupy Central movement, even though the latter had by this point already ceased camping out on the ground floor of the HSBC headquarters, and these screenings were entirely unconnected.³⁵ The erroneous media identification of the Occupy Central protestors and the hksmff screening event inadvertently conflated the latter with the former, even though such irresponsible and unverified reporting in defense of the status quo is what responsible journalism should shun, and what hksmff has worked to change.

Awareness of contested space has been an important part of Hong Kong's growing civic culture. If the incident above raised the consciousness of those participating, it was as a result of a physical experience of corporate territorial hegemony.³⁶ There was no spontaneous mobilization to directly counteract the security guards' use of force, yet each person's decision to stay and view the whole of *Money as Debt* outside the HSBC headquarters under these conditions suggested a spirit of resistance. A similar spirit is identifiable in other land-related contestations of neoliberal economic policy. For example, resistance to the demolition of older buildings to make way for upscale businesses at Wanchai's Wing Lee Street and the removal of village houses at Choi Yuen Village to make way for high-speed rail construction did not change the government's plan. Nonetheless, the hksmff organizers and members of v-artist returned to these locations to show documentaries about this resistance, turning these screenings into a commemoration and an extension of the local community's activism. In a different instance, protestors in an occupied Mongkok street during the Umbrella Movement tried to organize similar film screenings but were stopped after unidentified men taunted them with threats.

The length of time given over to post-screening discussions reflects the same communitarian outlook.³⁷ Calling these discussions "musings," hksmff has consciously departed from the standard short question and answer format in which the director is the center of attention, and surrounded by an audience seeking answers. For budget reasons, hksmff rarely affords international directors to appear in person. When this does happen, however, the open and extended discussion led by a coworker involves the director and viewers in more than an hour's dialogue. At every session, a video record is made that incorporates (with their consent) viewers' musings on public issues.

SINOPHONE CIVIC LIFE AND THE CHINESE DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL

Since its inception in 2008, CDF has pursued two primary objectives: increasing the appeal of documentaries for a Hong Kong audience, and cultivating young practitioners.³⁸ Its distinctive characteristics are a Chinese-language focus and a proactive approach to documentary culture. Festival preparation takes place in the same office as the nonprofit documentary distributor Visible Record, as both were founded by Hong Kong documentarians Tammy Cheung and Augustine Lam. Cheung founded

the Chinese International Film Festival of Montreal in 1986 while studying for her MFA degree in filmmaking at Concordia University, serving as the event's director for some time. This festival brought China's Fifth Generation films to a diasporic Chinese audience in Canada. Upon her return to Hong Kong, Cheung began making documentaries of public events using an observational approach influenced by Frederick Wiseman. Her first four observational documentaries (*July*, *Election*, *Secondary School*, and *Rice*) are about politics, education, and welfare in the city. As Chris Berry has suggested, the director did not intend her films to initiate social movements or a revolution.³⁹ Nevertheless, her work aimed to capture the authentic, spontaneous behavior of her subjects rather than reiterate established views of election campaigns, the secondary school experience, or charitable activities for the elderly. In the same spirit, CDF's screenings and workshops help young practitioners and students to identify and observe situations where the public and personal spheres intersect.⁴⁰ The festival has two award categories: Shorts and Features. In 2014, it incorporated a Hong Kong Documentary section into the program. A year later, a two-film Mockumentary section was also added.

Given its identity as a festival built on Chinese-language documentaries by ethnic Chinese directors, CDF connects across ideological barriers. Calling the event "the world's first annual film festival to focus on Pan-Chinese documentaries,"⁴¹ Cheung's aim is to build a platform for ethnic Chinese documentarians, regardless of their level of experience. I therefore propose that CDF is where Sinophone civic culture and documentary culture come together in Hong Kong. The use of "Sinophone" in this discussion recognizes the symbolic significance of speech and accent in language cultures, and it deemphasizes the evocation of nationality and ethnicity in the word "Chinese." In documentary films using expository and observational modes, agency and meaning are imparted not just through image, but also through sound-voiceover narration, interviews, and spontaneous speech (hence the phrase "talking heads").⁴² As a conceptual trope in film studies, language cultures are richly connotative; Hamid Naficy's idea of "accented cinema," for example, encompasses an alternative mode of artisan or collective production based round exilic or migrant makers and audiences, and films with a bilingual or multilingual soundtrack.⁴³ Similarly, Shu-Mei Shih's concepts, "Sinophone visuality" and "Sinophone studies," conceive of place-based language cultures and multilingualism unbounded by ethnicity and nationalism.⁴⁴ Even though CDF uses "Chinese" in its name and makes no mention of "Sinophone"

in its materials, this term describes the festival well. Its screenings are not guided by nationalist sentiment; rather, the films are selected to motivate dialogue on issues of public concern, generating a Sinophone-oriented civic culture characterized by multilingualism and nonmainstream documentary modes.

On the question of language cultures alone, CDF has built bilingual and multilingual competencies into the festival experience. While the documentaries are subtitled in Chinese and English, Mandarin/Putonghua is also added to Cantonese and English in the award ceremonies. The documentary soundtracks, however, feature a variety of additional spoken languages and accents. The 2015 festival program alone, for example, lists the dialects of Taiwan (Hokkien), Shanxi province, and Gansu province, along with the Uighur, Tagalog, and Vietnamese languages, as spoken by subjects appearing in the selected documentaries.⁴⁵ One can call these documentaries “Sinophone” precisely to emphasize that the issues they present are entangled with the language cultures of different places, conditions, and histories. The civic awareness that they cultivate is not about, or limited to, a Han Chinese ethnicity. Instead, the audience gets to view places, situations, and histories that are shaped by the forces of empire and modernity rather than by Chineseness.

To illustrate the orientation of viewers to Sinophone civic culture, I have collated a table of the award-winning CDF documentaries (see Table 8.2). Titles in this table are organized according to subject, to show content that overlaps with hksmff screenings. These subjects include: elections and politics, labor rights and lives, resistance to developmentalism, ecology and environment, gender and sexuality, and local lives. This list shows that although neither Tammy Cheung nor CDF have particular advocacy objectives, the documentaries themselves address key issues in civic culture that are pertinent to people and places in the twenty-first century. These award categories have mostly featured entries from mainland China and Taiwan, with fewer from Hong Kong and elsewhere. Nevertheless, to the festival audience, a documentary’s country of origin is less important than how it exposes viewers to an in-depth consideration of trauma and memory, war-induced separation, domestic abuse, coming out, or buried pasts.

Attentiveness to the presentation of selected films is also a mark of CDF. The latter distinguishes the event from the Hong Kong International Film Festival (HKIFF), and is particularly noticeable when the same documentary film is screened at both events. For example, the documentary *Oh, the San Xia* received its world premiere at the 37th HKIFF in March 2013, and was screened at CDF in September of the same year. The

Table 8.2 Awareness and activism demonstrated in the awarded titles and special screening of the Chinese Documentary Festival^a

<i>Issues</i>	<i>Local (HK)</i>	<i>Translocal (mainland China)</i>	<i>Translocal (Taiwan)</i>
Against capitalist globalization			<i>My Fancy High Heels</i> (Ho Chao-Ti, 2010) (S) (CH) <i>Socket'n Roll</i> (Ho Chao-Ti, 2013) (F) (2nd RU)
Politics and election	<i>Days After n Coming</i> (Lo Chun Yip, 2012) (F) (SS) <i>Election</i> (Tammy Cheung, 2008) (F) (SS) <i>The District Councillor</i> (Chan Wai-Yi, 2008) (S) (SS)	<i>The Transition Road</i> (Zhou Hao, 2010) (F) (1st RU) <i>The Cold Winter</i> (Zheng Kuo, 2011) (F) (1st RU) <i>Petition</i> (Zhao Liang, 2009) (F) (SS) <i>Brave Father</i> (Li Junhu, 2007) (S) (CH) <i>Care and Love</i> (Ai Xiaoming, 2007) (F) (1st RU) <i>Doctor Ma's Clinic</i> (Cong Feng, 2007) (F) (CH) <i>Emergency Room China</i> (Zhou Hao, 2013) (F) (CH) <i>Bing'ai</i> (Feng Yan, 2007, China) (F) (CH) <i>Where Should I Go?</i> (Li Junhu, 2010) (F) (2nd RU) <i>Heavy Metal</i> (Jin Huaqing, 2009, China) (S) (1st RU) <i>Whisper of Mingin</i> (Wang Wenming, 2013, China) (F) (CH) <i>The Warriors of Qitang</i> (Ruby Yang, 2009) (S) (2nd RU)	
Labor's lives and rights			<i>Money and Honey</i> (Lee Ching-Hui, 2011) (F) (1st RU) <i>An Exposure of Affected Hospital</i> (Chu Hsien-Jer, 2007) (S) (1st RU) <i>Spring</i> (Huang Shiu-Yi, 2008) (S) (2nd RU)
Medical care			
Resistance against enforced development			<i>Life with Happiness</i> (Lin Wan-yu and Hsu Ya-ting 2006) (S) (CH)
Environmental advocacy			<i>Lake-cleaning People</i> (Huang Mei-Wen, 2007) (S) (2nd RU) <i>The Poisoned Sky</i> (Chi Wen-Chang, 2009) (F) (SS) <i>Black</i> (Ke Chin-Yuan, 2013) (S) (1st RU)

(continued)

Table 8.2 (continued)

<i>Issues</i>	<i>Local (HK)</i>	<i>Translocal (mainland China)</i>	<i>Translocal (Taiwan)</i>
Education	<i>KJ</i> (Cheung King-wai, 2008) (F) (SS)	<i>Dream on the Wall</i> (Huang Mingming and Gao Luli, 2010) (S) (CH)	<i>My Little Naughties</i> (Jiang Jimin, 2007) (S) (1st RU) <i>School on the Road</i> (Kuo Shiao-Yun, 2013) (F) (CH) <i>If There Is a Reason to Study</i> (Adler Yang, 2013) (F) (2nd RU)
Gender and sexuality	<i>Different Path, Same Way</i> (Yung Chi Man, 2012) (S) (SS)	<i>Wheat Harvest</i> (Xu Tong, 2008, China) (F) (2nd RU) <i>I'm Here</i> (Choi Ian-Sin, 2012, Macau) (S) (Special Mention) <i>Mei Mei</i> (Gao Tian, 2005) (F) (SS) <i>Though I Am Gone</i> (Hu Jie, 2006, China) (F) (CH) <i>Mother Wang Peiyong</i> (Hu Jie, 2010) (F) (SS)	
Testimony of historical trauma	<i>Qaragghu Taigh: The Villages Afar</i> (D) (Saipulla Mutallip, 2014) (F)	<i>Buried</i> (Wang Libo, 2009) (F) (CH) <i>The Juvenile Laborers-Under-Indoctrination</i> (Xie Yihui, 2013) (F) (SS) <i>Luo Village: Ren Dingqi and Me</i> (Luo Bing, 2011) <i>The Book of Gelagu</i> (Hu Jie, 2013) (F) (2nd RU)	

^a A selection based on published CDF program content

Key: S Short (less than 60 minutes), F Feature, CH Champion, 1st RU 1st Runner-up, 2nd RU 2nd Runner-up, SS Special Selection, D Award of Merit of Hong Kong Documentary Award

HKIFF program presented this documentary with a brief synopsis, two film stills, and credits. The CDF program brochure presented the same title with a short biography of director Wang Libo, his Director's Note, a list of Wang's previous awards and festival screenings, and two pages of background information on the Three Gorges Dam project in China.⁴⁶ CDF's presentation does not follow standard practice; instead, it anticipates classroom and other pedagogical uses. While HKIFF premiered the film, the title was unlikely to stand out from the other documentaries screened in a packed festival schedule. In contrast, by situating the same film in relation to both festival culture and civic culture, CDF framed the screening as an act of social pedagogy, while also helping potential viewers to make a well-informed viewing choice, or even do follow-up reading. It is no surprise that such attentiveness has brought about an increase in the number of entries to the festival's award categories, as well as to its Hong Kong Documentary section.

CDF also holds festival seminars and workshops to educate viewers about documentary form and history. The seminars *Documentary Forms and Styles* (2008), *Documentary Film in Hong Kong* (2009), *The Styles and Development of Taiwan Documentaries* (2010), and *The State of Documentaries in Mainland China* (2011) provided each year's attendees with basic information on documentaries. The seminars *Creative Freedom and Documentaries in Mainland China* (2011), *Hong Kong Documentary Film Development* (2012), *The Prospects for Documentaries in Mainland China* (2013), and *The Development of Taiwanese Documentaries* (2014) provided annual updates on documentary filmmaking in the region. These were complemented by seminars with social themes such as *The Next Generation: Becoming and Education* (2009), *Economic Development and Environmental Protection* (2011), *Relationships with Foreign Domestic Helpers* (2012), and *Documentaries and Social Movements* (2014). The directors of each year's award-winning documentaries were funded by the Lee Hysan Foundation to come to Hong Kong and speak at the seminars. These arrangements, in addition to holding major festival events and screenings at the Hong Kong Arts Centre, Hong Kong Space Museum, The Grand Cinema, and Aco Books (an art and culture outreach space), ensure CDF a high degree of recognition among a young and educated audience used to watching literary (known to most as *wenyi*) films.

The annual Visible Record Master Class is where CDF identifies aspiring practitioners. Initially, in 2012, the festival included a Selection of Student Films from the Academy of Performing Arts; in 2013, it included entries from university students in Hong Kong and from Shenzhen University

across the border. Also in 2013, Visible Record received sponsorship to run a Young Talent Training Camp that became a documentary master class co-taught by directors from Taiwan and Hong Kong. The island of Cheung Chau, accessible from Central District by ferry, was chosen as the first site for this camp. Filmmaking was taught through structured workshops and daily practice, with students completing documentary shorts depicting local lives on the well-populated island. An absence of automobile traffic, low-rise residences, cement roads for pedestrians, and a relaxed island lifestyle made Cheung Chau an ideal site for the camp. Many participants developed stories rooted in, and with the consent of, the local community, avoiding tourist attractions such as the island's annual Bun Festival. The final shorts usually lasted between 6 and 30 minutes; they were collated into a compilation film called *Cheung Chau Diary* that showed at both the 2013 and 2014 festival. The same shorts were also screened at an island location for Cheung Chau residents. In 2015, the village of Tai O on Lantau Island was selected as the training site. This original arrangement, also supported by the Lee Hysan Foundation, has helped develop "young talent" that has gone on to gain recognition at overseas film festivals.⁴⁷

CONCLUSION: TOWARD FESTIVAL PRACTICE AS TESTIMONY TO EXPANDED CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Following a lengthy discussion of what these two festivals have achieved, my conclusion is short. As small festivals, hksmff and CDF have distinct objectives and practices that set them apart from what I call the "competition and repetition" type events modeled after A-list and industry film festivals. Whereas these events may entail niche programs to attract an audience, the small festivals that I have discussed above have done away with the liberal implications of cinephilia and instead motivated young people to expanded civic engagement. The platform they have provided for exposure and experiential learning is fuelled by the vision and compassion of many translocal and Sinophone documentaries. Small budgets and a putative social apathy have not stopped both festivals from moving forward. They draw a young generation into the public sphere by engaging with issues that concern personal lives and futures. In my view, these small festivals are a living testimony to the growing civic engagement in post-handover Hong Kong. Their screenings of advocacy documentaries, expanded festival activities, and emphasis on communitarian participation

attest to a heightened valorization of freedom of public expression in this city—specifically in its post-1997 incarnation as a Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China.

I find further evidence for this expanded civic engagement in the city-wide civil disobedience movement of September to early December 2014: the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement. This event was the largest student and grassroots movement in support of universal suffrage and democratic election reform in post-handover Hong Kong. The participation of students and young people in class boycotts and unlawful occupation of public space was unprecedented, as were the police arrests and use of tear gas and pepper spray against the protestors. At the time, the seventh edition of CDF was already over, while the 12th hksmff continued its scheduled screenings undisturbed by this highly visible resistance movement. Many young people, including university graduates, shot their own documentary records of the Umbrella Movement, often for the first time. Three months later, the Hong Kong Independent Film Festival (HKindieFF) screened five films as part of an Umbrella Movement Shorts Selection.⁴⁸ The 2015 CDF program included two Umbrella Movement documentary shorts: *Van Drivers* and *Karl* were made by two young women, one of whom grew up in mainland China. The 2015 hksmff program, on the other hand, did not carry any titles on the fight for universal suffrage in the 2014 Umbrella Movement. Instead, it featured social movement documentaries on labor organizing, antinuclear power, sustainable economic practices (including farming in Hong Kong and nonhierarchical work relations in Catalonia), and an “exodus of nowhere” series that address the politics of ethnicities, migration, borders, gender politics, and the gap between rich and poor.⁴⁹ In sum, by providing a platform for visible evidence of social and political engagement, these two small festivals modify and enrich festival culture, and they bear witness to a spirit of nonviolent dissent and communitarian participation that is writing a new chapter in Hong Kong’s contemporary civic culture.

Acknowledgements Research for sections of this chapter was funded by the RGC General Research Fund for the project entitled “Transformative Witnessing and Everyday Ethics: A Study of Cultural Memory of Chinese Films and Public Discourse.”

NOTES

1. Mark Peranson, "First You Get the Power, Then You Get the Money: Two Models of Film Festivals," in *Dekalog 3: On Film Festivals*, ed. Richard Porton (London and New York: Wallflower, 2009), 23–37.
2. See John Berra, *Declarations of Independence: American Cinema and the Partiality of Independent Production* (Bristol: Intellect, 2008), 143–60.
3. This figure is based on the total number of world documentary film festivals on Wikipedia. See "List of Documentary Festivals," *Wikipedia*, accessed July 30, 2015, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_documentary_film_festivals.
4. "YIDFF Facts and Figures 2013," *Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival 2013*, accessed July 30, 2015, <http://www.yidff.jp/2013/>.
5. Marijke de Valck, *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), 15–20.
6. Thomas Elsaesser, "Cinephilia or the Uses of Disenchantment," in *Cinephilia: Movies, Love and Memory*, ed. Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagener (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), 32.
7. A diagram that gives evidence of "small" and "medium" festivals serving as career launch pads in the global film circuit can be found in Lee Jameson, "The Sights, the Sands, the Films, Let's Euro-fest," *Film Independent*, accessed April 5, 2014, <http://www.filmindependent.org/resources/the-sights-the-sands-the-films-lets-euro-fest/#.Uzeo7aiSySo>.
8. Jeffrey Ruoff, "Introduction: Programming Film Festivals," in *Coming Soon to a Festival Near You: Programming Film Festivals*, ed. Jeffrey Ruoff (St. Andrews: St. Andrews Film Studies, 2012), 21 fn 7.
9. Lower case is used for "hong kong social movement film festival" and its acronym "hksmff" based on the official name used in all publications. The organizers explained to me that the use of lower case symbolizes equality.
10. A festival controversy occurred around a 2009 screening of Xu Tong's *Wheat Harvest* (2008) at the Hong Kong Arts Centre. The primary protagonist of this film is a Beijing-based sex worker. Some members of "autonomous 8," the organization responsible for running hksmff, protested against the film's screening on the grounds that it put the sex workers depicted at risk, and that the director did not obtain consent from the workers for their appearance in the film. CDF worked with the director to make cuts and sought clarification from media reporters. See "*Kangyi Maishou: Fandui Yingxiang Chengwei Qiling Gongju*" [Protesting *Wheat Harvest*: against images as tools for bullying], accessed October 15, 2014, <https://docuethics.wordpress.com/>. The same documentary was later shown at the International Film Festival Rotterdam with an introduction addressing its controversial nature.
11. According to Article 23, the most controversial bill of the Basic Law of the SAR, the government shall enact laws to prohibit and to criminalize national security offenses (treason, secession, sedition, and subversion)

- against China's Central People's government. Opposition to the article identified the vague terms defining subversion as a serious threat to civil liberties. See Fu Hualing, Carole J. Petersen, and Simon N. M. Young, ed., *National Security and Fundamental Freedoms: Hong Kong's Article 23 Under Scrutiny* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010).
12. Francis L. F. Lee and Joseph M. Chan, *Media, Social Mobilization and Mass Protests in Post-colonial Hong Kong: The Power of a Critical Event* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2011), 1.
 13. Tai Lok Lui and Stephen Wing Kai Chiu, "Introduction—Changing Political Opportunities and the Shaping of Collection Action: Social Movements in Hong Kong," in *The Dynamics of Social Movement in Hong Kong*, ed. Stephen Wing Kai Chiu and Tai Lok Lui (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2000), 1–20.
 14. Chris Berry, "Hong Kong Watcher: Tammy Cheung and the Hong Kong Documentary," in *Hong Kong Culture: Word and Image*, ed. Kam Louie (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 213–228; Esther M. K. Cheung, Nicole Kempton, and Amy Lee, "Documenting Hong Kong: Interview with Tammy Cheung," in *Hong Kong Screenscapes: From the New Wave to the Digital Frontier*, ed. Esther M. K. Cheung, Gina Marchetti, and Tan See-Kam (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011), 151–64.
 15. Lui and Chiu, "Introduction," 12.
 16. *Ibid.*, 12–14.
 17. Video Power was an independent group of activists and video artists. Its members were actively involved in social movements and made documentaries during the 1990s and early 2000s before the group disbanded. V-artist produces documentaries to serve local communities. Using an immersive approach, its members ("v-artists") run activities to develop the core values of equity and justice within grassroots communities and to convey them to the public. The main organizers of hksmff are all members of v-artist. The latter's annual application to the Arts Development Council for funding therefore includes hksmff as a regular budget item.
 18. Wilfred Chan, "'Breasts are not Weapons', say Hong Kong Protestors," *CNN.com*, August 3, 2015, accessed August 5, 2015, <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/08/02/asia/hong-kong-breast-assault-protest/>. On August 29, 2016, the accused won an appeal against the jail sentence of 3.5 months and was considered for community service instead, while remaining convicted.
 19. Tammy Cheung, interview with the author, May 23, 2014, Hong Kong.
 20. Martha Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 10, 53–55. For discussion of the term "civic culture" see Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, ed., *The Civic Culture Revisited* (London: Sage Publications, 1989).

21. In his manifesto for the Durham University conference, “Beyond Crisis: New Vision for the Humanities”, Christophe Fricker proposes that the “core competencies” to learn from the arts, humanities, and social sciences consist of skills to illuminate ambiguities, identify limitations, recognize shifting values and emerging participants, develop counterarguments, point out discrepancies, and reveal courses of action. See Christophe Fricker, “Towards an Awareness Economy,” *Durham University Centre for Humanities Innovation*, accessed June 5, 2014, <https://www.dur.ac.uk/chi/tasks/9/>.
22. *Disijie Shehui Yundong Dianyingjie: Sizhounian Tekan* [The fourth social movement film festival: fourth anniversary special brochure] (Hong Kong: hksmff, 2006), 4 (my translation). I have used Chinese *pinyin* as notation for all Chinese characters that appear in publications from China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.
23. The Social Movement Resource Centre is concerned with four main issues: public space, land (compensation and resettlement), arts and cultural intervention, and gender and sexuality. Its acronym is “smrc 8F” (later, “smrc 8a”), a reference its address on the eighth floor of a commercial building in Mongkok, a district in Kowloon where protestors blocked an intersection during the 2014 Umbrella Movement. Information from Lee Wai-Yi, Klavier Wong, and Enoch Ng (hksmff organizers and volunteers), interview with author, August 7, 2014.
24. Stephan Ortmann, “The Umbrella Movement and Hong Kong’s Protracted Democratization Process,” *Asian Affairs* 46, no. 1 (2015): 32–50.
25. Some local activists joined the Korean farmers by jumping into Victoria Harbor to swim to the barricaded Hong Kong Convention Centre where the MC6 was held. Local media that reported the male protestors’ “violence” noted a soft “protest energy” when Korean women protestors performed the theme song of a very popular television drama *Daejanggeum* (*Jewel in the Palace*). This was taken as an example of an affective mobilization that merged popular culture with social protest. See Lisa Yuk Ming Leung, “*Daejanggeum* as ‘Affective Mobilization’: Lessons for (Transnational) Popular Culture and Civil Society,” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 10, vol.1 (2009): 51–66.
26. Documentaries screened in these groupings included *Praha 2000: World Bank IMF Under Siege*, *How Are You Gongliao?*, *Strong Roots*, and *Habitus and Footprints*.
27. “Special Presentation: There’s a Place for You in the Rally against the WTO,” *The 3rd social movement film festival*, accessed September 1, 2015, <http://smrc8a.org/v1/smff2005/emain.htm>.
28. Lee, Wong, and Ng, interview.

29. The Arts Development Council has funded CDF and hksmff (the latter through v-artist). Grant recipients and their funding period/amount can be found online at “ADC Grant Recipients/Projects,” *Hong Kong Arts Development Council*, accessed September 1, 2014, <http://www.hkadc.org.hk/en/content/web.do?page=adcGrantsProjects>.
30. Lee, Wong, and Ng, interview.
31. See “*Shehui Yundong Dianyingjie*” [The social movement film festival], *autonomous 8a*, accessed July 30, 2015, <http://smrc8a.org/category/involvement/smff/>, (my translation); “2015 nian Dishisanjie Xianggang Shehui Yundong Dianyingjie: Zhengji Gonggong!” [The 2015 13th hong kong social movement film festival: recruiting coworkers!], *autonomous 8a*, accessed July 30, 2015, <http://smrc8a.org/2015/486/> (my translation).
32. V-artist holds Grass Media Action workshops to impart grassroots perspectives on social issues and to support the making of documentaries. Its web site—<https://grassmediaction.wordpress.com/>—has a link to hksmff.
33. There were five “viewing clues” in the 2005 hksmff: Against Exploitation of Labour; Struggling for Public Space; In Defense of the Non-City Space; Alternative Consumption; and Giant Monster Inc.—Global Corporations and the World Bank. In the 2006 hksmff, there were four: Autonomous Community; Free Persons on the Cross; Autonomous Art Space; and Raids by Mobile Art. In the 2013 hksmff, there were seven: Environment; Globalization; Labour; Alternatives; Deliberation; Media; and Gender. Finally, in the 2014 hksmff, there were six: Reconnect; The Power of the Collective in Music; Education or Education in Prison?; A View to Dismantle: Gender; Frontier of Resistance/Border of Conformance—What is “Us”?; Human is the Essence. This information can be accessed on the hksmff web sites.
34. My thanks to Klavier Wong for this account. Lee, Wong, and Ng, interview.
35. See “*shehui yundongjie kangyi huifeng yinhang cubao daya fangying 10 Yue 6 Ri Shengming*” [Social movement film festival statement protesting HSBC’s violent suppression of its October 6 screening], *hong kong social movement film festival 2012*, accessed August 3, 2014, <http://smff2012.wordpress.com/2012/10/07/statement1006/> (my translation). The English version is “A Statement against the HSBC’s Privatization of Public Space and Against the Police which is Only by the Side of the Rich [sic],” *hong kong social movement film festival 2012*, accessed August 3, 2014, https://smff2012.wordpress.com/2012/10/08/6thoct_statement/. Hksmff responded by making a short YouTube documentary of the clash using footage of their own and from the media (“*Huifeng Huangguo 2012-10.6-7: she yun dianyingjie shinian zui heian de liang tian*” [“The HSBC empire: the two darkest days in a decade of the social movement

- film festival”] (my translation), YouTube video, 21:39, posted by v-artist, October 11, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L2xeP4qGRN0>, accessed November 7, 2015).
36. The hksmff organizers and coworkers treat the space as a public one and thus have shared rights of use. They go for comanaging a common theater stage through coordination and collaboration in neighborhoods.
 37. Lee, Wong, and Ng, interview.
 38. For a comprehensive discussion of the Chinese Documentary Festival, see Ma Ran, “Chinese Independent Cinema and International Film Festival Network at the Age of Global Image Consumption” (PhD Dissertation, University of Hong Kong, 2010). I emphasize the festival’s interventions and localization as a result of my own research and participant observation.
 39. Berry, “Hong Kong Watcher.”
 40. Cheung, interview.
 41. CDF’s Facebook page, accessed October 9, 2014, https://www.facebook.com/visiblerecord.hk/info?tab=page_info.
 42. Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 167–79.
 43. Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
 44. Shu-Mei Shih, *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations Across the Pacific* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007); see also Shu-Mei Shih, Chien-Hsin Tsai, and Brian Bernards, ed., *Sinophone Studies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).
 45. CDF has shown documentaries in many different languages and dialects. The 2012 CDF documentaries, for example, included: *The Sixth Resettlement*, in Lahu (a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in southwest China) with Chinese and English subtitles; *Ebb and Flow*, in Mandarin and Taiwanese Hokkien with Chinese and English subtitles; *Dream Hair Salon*, in Mandarin and Vietnamese with Chinese and English subtitles, and *Money and Honey*, in Mandarin, English, and Filipino with Chinese and English subtitles. In 2014, CDF screened the documentary *Qaranggbu Tagh: The Village Afar* which is in Uighur with Chinese and English subtitles. The documentary is shot in Xinjiang by a Uighur director, but was considered a “Hong Kong” entry since the director, Saipulla Mutallip, has obtained Hong Kong resident status after living in the city for seven or more years. These are all examples of films that problematize the use of “Chinese language” as an umbrella term for documentaries that include a mix of languages and dialects.
 46. “Oh, the San Xia,” *37th Hong Kong International Film Festival*, accessed November 13, 2014, <http://37.hkiff.org.hk/eng/film/title/37117-oh-the-san-xia.html>; the two-page introduction appears in Visible Record Limited, *Chinese Documentary Festival 2013*, 30–32.

47. The 2014 YTTA section screened *32+4*, a 32-minute, personal documentary in Cantonese and Chaozhou (southern Chinese) dialects. Made by Chan Hau-Chun, the film received the Principal Prize of the 61st International Short Film Festival Oberhausen. Chan is a female graduate of the School of Creative Media at City University Hong Kong.
48. See “Umbrella Movement Shorts Selection,” *Hong Kong Indie Film Festival 2015*, accessed July 30, 2015, http://www.hkindieff.hk/asian_indie06.html.
49. See “*Qianyan*” (Foreword), *hong kong social movement film festival 2015*, accessed September 18, 2015, <https://smff2015.wordpress.com/%E5%89%8D%E8%A8%80/>.

The China Independent Film Festival and Chinese Independent Film Festivals: Self-Legitimization and Institutionalization

Sabrina Qiong Yu and Lydia Dan Wu

If the term “Chinese independent film” is still largely confined to academic discourse, the concomitant term “Chinese independent film festival” has increasingly caught overseas media attention in recent years thanks to the authorities’ constant intervention in independent film festivals across the country. Since the emergence of the first Chinese independent film festival—Unrestricted New Image Festival in Beijing in 2001—independent film festivals have proliferated in China, including Yunnan Multicultural Cultural Festival (Yunfest), the China Independent Film Festival in Nanjing (CIFF), the Beijing Independent Film Festival (BIFF) in Songzhuang (a suburb of Beijing), Chongqing Independent Film and Video Festival (CIFVF), Hangzhou Asian Film Festival (HAFF), Beijing Queer Film Festival (BJQFF), and China Women’s Film Festival (CWWF), also held in Beijing, to name a few. However, since 2011, the official clampdown on grassroots cultural events and public gatherings has impeded expansion of the network of Chinese independent film festivals.

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BIFF and CIFF suffered from venue relocation, suspensions, and fines, while CIFVF, Yunfest and HAFF were closed down indefinitely.

In his reports on independent film festivals in 2011, Shelly Kraicer writes, “it is striking to see how critically engaged cinematic discourse is with Chinese politics and culture at the present moment: when nervous, insecure officials feel the need to interfere; and where practitioners and analysts engage with anger and passion.”¹ Indeed, if independent film festivals to a large extent fail to attract industry, media, or even audience, they have instead created a dynamic discursive space where filmmakers, curators, critics, and researchers engage freely in discussions not only on independent films and filmmaking but also on a wide range of cultural and political topics. Although the size of Chinese independent film festivals is usually small, they have gone far beyond traditional festival venues. They take place in cafés where festival organizers and participants gather and communicate, in online forums where post-festival discussion continues, and in festival or festival-stimulated publications where previously voiceless indie filmmakers can unflinchingly express their opinions.

However, due to well-reported state interference and the word “independent” in their names, critical attention has focused on the political side of these film festivals. Independent film festivals and their organizers are often constructed as the victims of an authoritarian government and as dogged “dissidents” who are fighting for freedom of expression in a highly restricted political environment. While this image is certainly justified, we would like to point out that apart from being discussed as a political event, Chinese independent film festivals should also be scrutinized as cultural institutions. According to Julian Stringer, the film festival “constitutes one of the key institutions” through which contemporary world cinema is circulated and understood. He proposes that one of the primary purposes of film festival studies is “to expose the organizational logic and workings of the film festival as an institution.”² In this chapter, we seek to demonstrate that while lacking some stakeholders which are conventionally deemed key for the survival and success of a film festival, Chinese independent film festivals should still be seen as a cultural institution that has played an irreplaceable but under-valued role in film industry and culture in contemporary China. By establishing certain patterns and practices throughout their first decade, Chinese independent film festivals have constituted a to-be-institutionalized field. Despite the crisis and difficulties they face at present, and some incompatibilities between Chinese independent film festivals and the common perception of what constitutes

a film festival, we suggest that Chinese independent film festivals have offered an alternative model of film festival, emerging from the particular political and cinematic context of twenty-first-century China.

We agree with Chris Berry's 2009 assertion that independent events are "crucial to the artistic health of China's film industry, which is otherwise hobbled by censorship and commercial oligopolies."³ Indeed, as we will illustrate in the following pages, independent film festivals have proved to be an effective institution that facilitates the discovery of new film talents as well as fostering a healthy critical environment for contemporary Chinese cinema. This is especially important when considering the fact that their officially approved counterparts, Shanghai International Film Festival (SIFF) and Beijing International Film Festival (BJIFF), have not fulfilled these two functions in any noticeable way. We argue that Chinese independent film festivals have created an alternative public sphere in a restricted social environment, effectively sustaining the seemingly unsustainable independent film circle. We will use the CIFF to explore the organizational logic and workings of Chinese independent film festivals and how they enrich our understanding of film festivals as cultural institutions in a specific national context. Our research is based on five interviews we conducted between 2013 and 2015 with two key members of the CIFF organizing team, Cao Kai and Zhang Xianmin, and a careful reading of CIFF festival publications over the past 11 years.

ARE CHINESE INDEPENDENT FILM FESTIVALS *ACTUALLY* FESTIVALS?

There are some discussions around whether or not Chinese independent film festivals can be called film festivals. In fact, the Chinese title of most Chinese independent film festivals is *ying zhan* (film exhibition) rather than *dianying jie* (film festival). In his report on the sixth CIFF (entitled "When Is a Film Festival not a Festival?"⁴), Chris Berry points out that Chinese independent film events eschew using "festival" in their title to skirt censorship by the Film Bureau of the State Administration for Radio, Film and Television (SARFT, renamed the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television [SAPPRFT] since 2013), which has absolute control over films and film festivals in China. While Berry presents the choice as a clever strategy, it does seem difficult to classify these independent events as film festivals when using international standards

and accepted definitions. There is a critical consensus that important European international film festivals, such as Berlin, Venice, and Rotterdam, have set the standard for contemporary film festivals. Mark Peranson identifies two ideal models of film festival, which are the business festival and the audience festival. Both models involve seven interest groups, namely distributors/buyers, sales agents, sponsors, government, audiences, critics, and filmmakers. Each interest group is involved to different degrees depending on the needs and expectations of a particular film festival and/or benefactor.⁵ Therefore, the film festival can be viewed as negotiating with various social resources such as government (cultural policies and funding), distributors and sales agents (marketing), critics and audiences (cultural evaluation), and sponsors (commerce).

Peranson's definition applies mostly to large-scale international film festivals. Unsurprisingly, a few important interest groups are missing from the map of Chinese independent film festivals. First, due to the fact that they are not approved by SAPPRT, the government has never been an accessible social resource for independent film festivals—instead, it has become an increasingly real obstacle that threatens the survival of these festivals. Second, the involvement of distributors, buyers, and sales agents is very limited, if not non-existent. Elsewhere in the world, receiving awards at a film festival often leads to financial support for filmmakers, but this is rarely the case at Chinese independent film festivals. In China, “independent films” usually refers to films that do not obtain permission from the authorities, in other words, the famous “dragon seal” issued by SAPPRT. After all, who would risk investing in films that cannot even be shown in cinemas? Third, instead of being government bodies, NGOs, or the industry, sponsors of Chinese independent film festivals are usually private companies or the friends of the organizers—therefore these festivals are characterized by instability and discontinuity. Finally, the audience of the independent film festivals is tiny. In some extreme cases, there was no outside audience but only insiders comprised of filmmakers, curators, and volunteers. For example, as one of us (Lydia Wu) witnessed, in the first screening of the ninth Beijing Independent Film Festival in 2012, the power was cut and the festival was forced to shut down and continued at some secret venues with only filmmakers attending the screenings. Given the absence of these main stakeholders, Chinese independent film festivals cannot easily fit into the category of either business festival or audience festival.

It is worth noting that in Peranson's models, government is listed as a stakeholder due to their intention to promote national cinema rather

than their role as cultural policymaker. Ragan Rhyne notices that policy stakeholders have received less critical consideration, and proposes to add policy discourse to the four discourses that operate on the film festival circuit as identified by Janet Harbord—*independent filmmakers and producers, media representation, financing and legal transactions, and tourism and the service economy of host cities*⁶—to “reflect an often hidden but equally as significant discourse.”⁷ One important policymaker in the international film festival circuit is the International Federation of Film Producers Associations (FIAPF). FIAPF’s role as a regulator of international film festivals is to provide accreditation to film festivals around the world and to create “institutions via construction of the rule system.”⁸ While the accredited film festivals should comply with the standards and principles formulated by FIAPF, they also benefit from the systematic operation that guarantees access to international resources such as funding, distributors, and transnational cooperation. The institutionalized structure regulated by FIAPF hence creates a well-functioning system that drives all the participants (filmmakers, programmers, buyers, and producers) to fame and economic success.

When it comes to Chinese independent film festivals, however, it appears that the organizational field does not exist. There is no authorizing agent like FIAPF to regulate these film festivals. In fact, independent film festivals were born in the milieu of boycotting the censorship of the then SARFT, with a spirit of resisting authority and restriction, as well as a desire to distinguish themselves from two government-sponsored film festivals (SIFF and BJIFF). Both were established under the supervision of SARFT, and the former is a FIAPF-accredited festival. It seems that no standards have been set and no principles have been formulated for Chinese independent film festivals. A chain of film exhibition, exchange, production, and distribution has certainly not been established due to the absence of a few major stakeholders, as analyzed above. However, we argue that although it is hard to identify official bodies as stakeholders in these festivals (such as SAPPRT), the state plays a significant role in the emergence and development of independent film festivals. Any serious examination of Chinese independent film festivals cannot afford overlooking the role of the state as policymaker, even though at a glance, the existing policies seem only to suffocate these festivals.

As mentioned earlier, in China, film festivals need to be approved by the state and are constantly under strict government control. Only SAPPRT-approved films (so-called dragon seal films) can be shown in such festivals.

The primary goal of independent film festivals is to exhibit films without a dragon seal and therefore they lack legitimacy, which explains the lack of state support and incessant state intervention. From the very beginning, independent film festivals seem to have been driven by a self-legitimization complex. We can observe the operation of self-legitimization from at least three aspects. First, they model themselves on the established international film festivals by copying their programming practices and the ways they mobilize social resources, in the hope of being recognized by the global film festival network. Second, they negotiate political pressure by making or refusing to make compromises and, in some cases, by seeking cooperation with official bodies, in the hope of being tolerated by the authorities. And third, they form an independent film festival circuit by collaborating and networking with both domestic and international institutions in order to build alliances. Of these three aspects, dancing with the authorities has probably played the most decisive role in shaping the landscape of Chinese independent film festivals. In the rest of the chapter, we will use CIFF to scrutinize the process of self-legitimization and institutionalization on the independent film festival scene in response to high pressure from the state. We choose to study CIFF because it is known as one of the three most established and longest-running independent film festivals in China. The other two are the China Documentary Film Festival (CDOFF), which merged with BIFF later, and Yunfest. All three were established in 2003, but CIFF is the only one that is still active. We also selected CIFF because, as Chris Berry rightly noted at its sixth edition, although “by international standards CIFF is a relatively small and under-resourced event... the very particular circumstances of China mean that CIFF can claim to be the most important film festival in the country.”⁹

CIFF: A DECADE OF SELF-LEGITIMIZATION AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION

Launched in September 2003 in Nanjing by Cao Kai, Ge Yaping and Zhang Yaxuan,¹⁰ CIFF symbolizes the dissemination of independent film resources from Beijing to Nanjing.¹¹ It was sponsored by a privately owned gallery, RCM Museum of Art,¹² which also serves as the main organizer and screening venue, in partnership with Nanjing University and Nanjing Arts Institute, which both also provide venues for screenings. After the experiment of the first three editions, CIFF started to call

for entries, invite programmers to select films and set up a jury to give awards to fiction films. At that time, CIFF was the only platform that showcased independent fiction films, because Yunfest and the CDFE were dedicated to independent documentaries. The introduction of programming and awards symbolizes CIFF's transformation from its infant state to a more established film festival, and conveys the organizers' ambition of modeling the event after international film festivals. In the following years, CIFF continued to grow by holding academic forums, organizing training programs, publishing daily booklets, and so on. The Organization and Promotion of International Festival forum at the fifth edition, and the inclusion of the New Swiss Films Screening Section at the seventh edition and the Oberhausen International Short Film Festival Selection at the eighth edition clearly show CIFF's intention to become international. In its first decade, CIFF had developed into an up-to-standard film festival, consisting of fiction film and short film competitions, the nomination of top ten documentaries¹³ and experimental films of the year, and the showcasing of all kinds of independent films, but especially experimental films and animation. It is safe to claim that CIFF is one of the most important platforms for the exhibition of cutting-edge independent Chinese films, and has provided a reliable route for new film talents to come of age.

Many award-winning film directors have shown their work or won an award at CIFF, and then began to attract critical attention and get further filmmaking opportunities. This list includes future Berlin Golden Bear winners Wang Quan'an, whose *The Waking of Insects* (2002) was shown at the first CIFF, Diao Yinan, whose *Uniform* (2003) was included in the third edition and *Night Train* (2008) in the fifth edition, as well as Venice Horizons Documentary Award winners Wang Bing,¹⁴ whose *Three Sisters* (2012) was submitted to the ninth CIFF, and Du Haibin, whose work appeared at both the first and third CIFF. The list also includes leading Tibetan director Pema Tsenden, whose *Old Dog* (2011) won the CIFF Grand Jury Prize at the eighth edition, and Geng Jun, whose *The Hammer and Sickle are Sleeping* (2013) was awarded the Short Film Grand Jury Prize at the tenth CIFF before it won Best Short Film at the 51st Golden Horse Awards in Taipei. Therefore, despite the lack of typical key players such as industry and audiences, CIFF's contribution to Chinese cinema—discovering and fostering new film talents who receive little support from both the state and the industry—is undeniable and remarkable. It is also difficult not to notice the visible presence of the famous Sixth Generation Director Lou Ye at CIFF. He was a jury member at the fourth CIFF when

the festival first introduced awards, and won the Highest Award at both the sixth and ninth editions for *Spring Fever* in 2009 and *Mystery* in 2012. Lou Ye gained his name from his controversial earlier films *Suzhou River* (2000) and *Summer Palace* (2006), which led to him being banned from filmmaking twice for a total of seven years. The official ban obviously prevented Lou Ye's work from being approved by the then SARFT, so CIFF functioned as an alternative space in which this talented director could continue his eye-catching cinematic experiments.

After the unexpected cancellation of the ninth edition following pressure from local authorities, a new generation of curators started to take over the CIFF organization. The tenth CIFF took place in Nanjing, Dalian, and Xiamen in 2013 in order to avoid attracting attention from the authorities. The 11th CIFF returned to Nanjing and ran without disruption. However, the 12th CIFF took place in a highly compromised way due to heavy interference from the authorities. It is hard to predict the future of CIFF, as nobody knows whether the next edition can take place as planned. The festival is therefore highly contingent on the political climate and unpredictable decisions of policymakers. Nonetheless, various critics, independent filmmakers, and international festival partners have called CIFF "the only true film festival in China" or "the most important film festival in China."¹⁵ We would argue this reputation not only results from CIFF's effort to establish a film festival conforming to international standards and its contribution as the birthplace and training ground for a new generation of film talents, but also its ability to dance with the authorities and pursue legitimacy in a highly unfavorable environment where the state as policymaker holds absolute power over any illicit cultural activity or cultural institution.

John Berra observed about the seventh CIFF that "although still politicized, the sector is not only showing signs of the formation of its own industrial networks but an awareness of how to work around the state, rather than to stubbornly work against it."¹⁶ Indeed, as indicated by building partnerships with local universities, CIFF intended to work with official bodies from the beginning. Local propaganda department officials were even invited to attend the opening ceremony and the forums at the eighth CIFF. A number of critics have noticed the deliberate exclusion of politically sensitive films in CIFF's programming and awards,¹⁷ which shows the organizers' effort to sidestep SAPPFT restrictions and negotiate political pressure. While some critics voice their discontent with this compromise and see it as a sign of deep fear of the state power,¹⁸ it is undeniable that

CIFF has benefited from its cooperative attitude and a “substantial degree of official and semi-official ‘cover.’”¹⁹ Compared to other independent film festivals, CIFF is seen as the steadiest one. In 2011, when all the major Beijing-based independent film festivals—DOChina, BIFF, and the BJQFF—were either canceled or continued under heavily compromised circumstances, CIFF held its most successful edition. In 2014, when another two major independent film festivals—YunFest and BIFF—were harshly shut down, CIFF managed to run its 11th edition quietly on the campus of Nanjing University of Arts. As Shelly Kraicer rightly points out, for CIFF, “purity isn’t such an issue.”²⁰ While CIFF has always attached equal importance to independence of films and their popularization, its organizers believe that “the matter of survival is forever the top priority” of the festival.²¹ The remaining issue is therefore how to maintain lenience from the authorities and obtain a bigger space to survive. In fact, to be or not to be is not an issue exclusive to Chinese independent film festivals. In her book about European film festivals, Marijke De Valck argues that the larger festival network will always work toward stability and that, “because festivals depend on many other actors for their survival they necessarily have to compromise.”²² To borrow De Valck’s words, compromise with the authorities might have made CIFF less sharp as a cultural institution, but it has proved a wise strategy to survive a coercive political climate. CIFF’s willingness to negotiate with the authorities may be shown most convincingly in two new practices introduced at its eighth edition, which, as we will argue, were both driven by its desire for self-legitimization and institutionalization.

Since the eighth CIFF, a new section has been added to showcase films approved by SARFT/SAPPRFT but still embodying the spirit of independent films. Considering the accounts from the three main curators of that year, we suggest this bold decision can be explained from three angles. First, pragmatically, it compensates for the declining quality and quantity of fiction film submissions. Shen Xiaoping refers to a bittersweet dilemma CIFF is facing: when previously unknown directors start to make progress at the festival, they can raise funds a bit more easily and start to strive for the official permission of a dragon seal in the pursuit of audiences and profits.²³ For example, Yang Jin’s *A Black and White Milk Cow* (2005) and *Er Dong* (2008) were shown at the third CIFF in 2005 and the sixth CIFF in 2009, respectively, but in 2012, he made his first dragon seal film *Don’t Expect Praises*, which was selected by Berlinale 2013 and bought by CCTV6 in China. Consequently, directors like Yang Jin might

stop submitting their work to independent film festivals. Furthermore, according to Zhang Xianmin, the inclusion of dragon seal films can also increase the legitimacy of the festival, which is otherwise known for showing underground or illegal films.²⁴

Second, at the theoretical level, this is an attempt to open up the discussion of what means to be independent. As Yang Cheng claims, it “represents an open understanding of the very concept of independent films as well as the desire for a more diverse and vigorous ecology of independent films by CIFF.”²⁵ In a short article explaining the reasoning behind the introduction of this new section, Wang Xiaolu supports these works because “they become part of the mainstream system carrying a number of qualities of independent films”²⁶ and “opening up new possibilities for independent films.”²⁷

Third, strategically, the decision to include state-approved films is an experiment to extend the social space of CIFF from a small circle of independent filmmakers and critics to a wider public, helped by the decision to screen dragon seal films in a local cinema rather than in university lecture halls or art galleries. Wang Xiaolu hopes that, “as a part of CIFF, the special section expands the screening space of independent films outside the colleges and makes a closer connection between general crowds and independent films. It might bring some transformation for the film festival.”²⁸

It is not surprising that this new move to include dragon seal films would raise controversies. The term “dragon seal independent film” is itself ambiguous. One has to ask how independent a film can be after it is censored by the state. Would the decision to include dragon seal films harm the spirit of independent film festivals? After all, many independent filmmakers refuse to send their work for official approval in order to safeguard artistic freedom and independence. With these questions in mind, we interviewed Cao Kai,²⁹ the founder and artistic director of CIFF. Cao Kai is a firm supporter of this new strategy. He said that it is a good way to keep contact with former independent filmmakers who made their name at CIFF but have gone on to make dragon seal films. Like Yang Cheng, he emphasized that film festivals should adopt a more inclusive and flexible understanding of the concept of independence. We also note that the festival organizers seem quite open-minded about this new addition. They willingly invite further discussion in a future seminar in which directors of such films can talk about the process of getting approval from SAPPRFT and self-censorship,³⁰ and they are also willing to make “necessary adjustments.”³¹

Since only two editions including dragon seal films have taken place, it is probably too early to evaluate the impact of this new initiative. However, the double identity of Pema Tsenden's *Old Dog* may demonstrate the validity of this newly coined term "dragon seal independent film." *Old Dog* won the Jury Award at the eighth CIFF, so it is undoubtedly an independent film. However, the version shown at CIFF is the director's cut. A different version was sent for official approval and got the dragon seal, enabling the film to be released in mainstream cinemas and consolidating Pema's reputation as the leading Tibetan director. As a result, *Old Dog* is truly a "dragon seal independent film," albeit in a compromised way.³² After *Old Dog*, Pema made the government-sponsored film *The Sacred Arrow* (2014), which took part in the feature competition at the 17th SIFF. However, Pema also still keeps close contact with the independent film circle and is mostly identified as an independent filmmaker. Pema's smooth move between independent and mainstream film seems to support CIFF's proposition of embracing a more open and flexible definition of both independent films and independent film festivals.

Another new direction that emerged at the eighth CIFF is the collaboration with mainstream cinemas. The screenings of dragon seal independent films took place in the Lumière Pavilions, a luxurious commercial cinema in Nanjing, as a way of helping independent films to go beyond a small community and reach a wider audience. After this successful experiment, CIFF had planned to widen and deepen its collaboration with commercial cinemas during the ninth edition. Unfortunately, in 2012, CIFF, together with other independent film festivals in China, fell victim to the tense political climate caused by the change of government leadership. It is highly regrettable that the ninth CIFF could not go ahead, as it would have been a breakthrough in the history of independent film festivals.³³ It was the first time that CIFF was organized in collaboration with four local cinemas that had agreed to provide screening venues for films without a dragon seal. Film tickets had been printed out at the price of 10 RMB (US\$1.60 approximately) per screening, and the plan to advertise the event in local media was underway before it was unexpectedly shut down. As films without sanction from SAPPRFT cannot garner theatrical distribution, the collaboration between CIFF and four local cinemas would have been a significant leap for Chinese independent films, enabling independent films to bypass censorship and reach a more diverse audience. It would also have been an encouraging step for CIFF to realize its mission of popularizing independent films.

Although this promising prospect was ultimately crushed by the authorities, two new moves by CIFF reveal its ambition to bridge the gap between independent and mainstream cinema, and between the *minjian* (grassroots) and the official. Together with other measures discussed above, they reflect a conscious effort to institutionalize this under-supported and small-scale film festival and to legitimize this half-legal and clandestine event. In an interview with Cao Kai,³⁴ he confirmed CIFF's strategy of collaborating with official bodies as a way of survival and development. In the postscript of the tenth CIFF publication, co-curator Wang Fei admits that the growing pressure in the independent film area has prompted the organizing team to come up with new activities, so that the novelty of CIFF may "come from the external pressure."³⁵ CIFF's flexibility and creativity in negotiating with the authorities seems to have contributed to CIFF's longevity in an ephemeral and highly contingent world, where the state plays the foremost role in deciding not only existence or death but also, albeit to a lesser extent, structure, programming, size, and visibility of these independent film festivals. In this sense, CIFF and other Chinese independent film festivals, just like SIFF and BJIFF, are also state-controlled film festivals, with more freedom but also more restriction, and by no means independent from the state.

CIFF: A BATTLEFIELD OF ANTI-ELITISM AND THE BIRTHPLACE OF INDEPENDENT FILM CRITICISM

While media and critical discourses on Chinese independent film festivals focus on their conflicts with the authorities, other important dimensions receive less attention. In the second half of the chapter, we examine what Shelly Kraicer calls in his report on the eighth CIFF "internal conflict" between filmmakers, curators and critics/theorists,³⁶ and how this tension helps to tease out CIFF's effort to create alternative spaces in which different players in the independent film circle can communicate and better understand each other. This also helps the festival itself to become more visible and contributes to its process of self-legitimization and institution-ization. Before turning to that, it is necessary to discuss CIFF's self-positioning as a semi-educational institution. As briefly mentioned above, Chinese independent film festivals have been trying to support each other and network to form a strong alliance. For example, Zhu Rikun, founder and former curator of the Songzhuang-based CDFP and BIFF, was also involved in the curation of the third and fourth editions of CIFF; and

Zhang Xianmin, CIFF's academic leader, is also closely connected to BIFF. It is not uncommon for an independent film to tour at different independent film festivals to increase visibility and aggregate cultural capital, and some similar faces appear at almost every independent film festival. Although failing to attract a wide audience, Chinese independent film festivals have managed to build a community with a sense of camaraderie. The collaboration between different independent film festivals is remarkable, and largely thanks to an adverse political and cultural environment.

However, if mutual support is crucial to the survival of Chinese independent film festivals, it is equally important for them to develop different identities so as to justify their position in the film festival circuit. For instance, Yunfest and CDFE are platforms for the exhibition of documentaries; BJQFF and CWFF are sexuality and gender-themed festivals; and CIFF and BIFF are comprehensive festivals. Apart from showcasing different types of films, independent film festivals also rely on other strategies to build distinctive profiles. Luke Robinson and Jenny Chio notice that the inclusion of the Participatory Visual Education strand, which prioritizes "giving 'voice' to otherwise 'silent' communities" over the artistic quality of films, has distinguished Yunfest from other independent film festivals, and "has increasingly served as a marker of the festival's uniqueness and identity."³⁷ CIFVF firmly positioned itself as a local festival for local audiences and refused to set up awards while also downplaying the importance of filmmakers. By comparison, CIFF aims to foreground its educational function and is committed to nurturing audiences and critics of independent films. To that end, CIFF has always attached great importance to academic forums and has hosted a series of lively discussions on topics such as independent directors, documentary, and experimental film. When explaining the rationale behind the documentary forum at the eighth CIFF, Wang Xiaolu writes,

The study of China independent documentary is currently fragmentary and full of gaps. We hope we can speak out in the forum to make people note the theoretical value of independent documentary. The forum will also display the latest research achievements of these scholars. We anticipate a comprehensive overview and discussion of Chinese documentary so far, and the future research of independent documentary could be promoted in this way.³⁸

CIFF's academic aims are best manifested in its efforts to document independent films and film festivals. The yearly festival publication includes not only information on the exhibited films, but also accounts from

the curators and academic articles from critics and scholars, all in both Chinese and English. An overview of the production and exhibition of independent films in different areas of China appears in a few editions and demonstrates the festival's ambition to document the development of contemporary independent films. Compared to other independent festivals, CIFF's endeavor is impressive and unique, and has produced rich material for researching Chinese independent films and film festivals.

Two other regular activities also speak to CIFF's aspiration to become a semi-educational institution. One is the Youth Film Critic Lecture Program held in 2009 and its continuation, the Independent Film Lecture Program in 2012 and 2014, with the goal of cultivating more independent filmmakers and film critics. The other is the Youth Screening Program, held annually in Nanjing, including screenings of CIFF's award-winning films and post-screening discussions. This activity has taken place six times since 2009 and has increased visibility of independent films among local audiences. The emphasis on the festival's educational role can be partly attributed to its proximity to universities as well as to the academic background of two key figures in CIFF, Zhang Xianmin and Cao Kai, both university teachers. According to Cao Kai, "CIFF is an academic platform for inter-college communication"³⁹ and a number of universities in Nanjing form "an essential part of CIFF."⁴⁰ Not only do local universities provide venues, but university students also make up the majority of CIFF's audience.

In a recent anthology on the topic of film festivals and activism, Dina Iordanova emphasizes the close connection between pedagogy and activism, and notes that "a special feature of activist festivals is their frequent involvement with educational institutions, which also function as implied stakeholders in the project to mobilize public opinion and nurture committed cultural citizens."⁴¹ Can CIFF be seen as an activist film festival, given its self-positioning as an independent film educator and its close collaboration with universities? Let us first have a closer look at what constitutes an activist festival. While most film festivals are driven by profit or fame, Iordanova argues that activist film festivals are "engaged in an effort to correct the record on a certain issue by highlighting lesser known aspects for the benefit of improved public understanding."⁴² She also points out that activist festivals have a specific set of stakeholders: the government and the film industry play very limited roles, and it is usually non-government organizations (NGOs) and charitable trusts which provide financial support for activist film festivals. According to Iordanova's definition, some themed Chinese independent film festivals such as

BJQFF might be called activist film festivals. One of the organizers of BJQFF, Cui Zi'en, who is also a long-time queer activist, declared that the festival "was started as a platform to question and challenge mainstream culture."⁴³ Elisabeth L. Engebretsen observes a queer social activism in the fifth BJQFF's strategies toward expanding inclusion, diversity, and participation, and argues it helps "push queer voices up from the underground, generate self-respect and pride, and present knowledge of non-normative sexuality to the general population."⁴⁴ In the past few years, media exposure of the authorities' clampdown on independent film festivals has somehow endowed these festivals with the quality of social activism. Internationally well-known Chinese political activist Ai Weiwei's involvement in BIFF through the screening and awarding at the tenth edition of *Peaceful Yueqing* (2012) produced by Ai Weiwei Studio certainly reinforces this impression.

Nonetheless, we should be cautious in attaching the label of activism to Chinese independent film festivals. "Activist" in the Chinese context is a politically sensitive term, almost equivalent to dissident in the eyes of the authorities. To survive in a coercive political environment, it would be unwise for Chinese independent film festivals to claim activist status. In fact, while BIFF and BJQFF probably have a more visible activist agenda, other independent film festivals such as Yunfest and CIFF are relatively low-key in promoting their goals, and are more cooperative with the state out of a desire "to maintain open channels of communication."⁴⁵ Furthermore, there are not many NGOs and charitable organizations in China and they do not function in the same ways as those in the West. This means independent film festivals, which are not approved by the government, cannot rely on such organizations for continued financial support as activist festivals elsewhere in the world do. Instead of categorizing CIFF as an activist festival, we consider its effort to mobilize critical opinion and nurture audiences for independent films as part of its strategy of self-legitimization and self-institutionalization. However, this emphasis on public enlightenment often puts it in a controversial position. As Paul Willemsen argues, "the more a festival pursues an 'educative' policy, the more it will be attacked by journalists and the less it will be supported by institutions."⁴⁶ But attacks on CIFF do not just come from the state or media, but also from inside of the independent film circle, as demonstrated by the Nanjing Manifesto incident.

At a documentary forum entitled Politics, Ethics, and Methods at the eighth CIFF, a group of film academics were invited to discuss ethics in

documentary filmmaking. This provoked controversy, especially among filmmakers. A few filmmakers and festival participants drafted a 24-item document titled “Shamans · Animals” as a formal response to the discussion at the documentary forum and posted it around the festival venues next day. This document has been called the “Nanjing Manifesto” and in it, independent filmmakers repudiate academic hegemony over independent filmmaking. A follow-up open discussion was organized by CIFF at the end of the festival, and the hot debate continued in mostly online forums. Later, CIFF published a collection of transcripts from festival discussions and articles from both sides of the debate. Before analyzing the implications and meanings of this debate, we quote a few items from the manifesto to give some idea about what it looks like:

Critics cannot dictate history. Critics should learn from authors (filmmakers) and not pretend to be their mentors. Artists teach themselves in the course of shooting their films; they establish their own ethical principles.—Cong Feng

Talk too much about theory, and you sound pretentious. Overemphasize theory and you sound authoritarian.—Hu Xinyu

Please use the word “intellectual” correctly and carefully. And please don’t use that word at this kind of independent film festival. It is not a term of praise, but rather a pretext to occupy a position high above the ordinary people. Is it really so hard to be modest and put yourself in someone else’s position?—Wang Shu⁴⁷

Initial impressions of these furious expressions show independent filmmakers’ explicit discontent with critics steering the discourse around filmmaking. They highlight their own identities as authors, and reject film critics and academics in a firm and radical way. A careful reading of the Nanjing Manifesto leads us to detect an anti-elitism and anti-authority tendency among independent filmmakers toward the intellectuals represented by film curators and the academic guests they invited. On the one hand, CIFF is undoubtedly elitist. As discussed earlier, the constitution of CIFF sets an elitist tone for the festival, given the academic background of two main organizers and many jury members, its close relationship with higher education institutions, and its emphasis on academic forums and publications. Furthermore, CIFF’s commitment to enlightening the public and fostering film criticism indicates prioritizing audience over filmmakers,⁴⁸ which sets it apart from the Songzhuang-based festivals. The latter, as Robinson and Chio notice, are “far less open to audience members from

outside the Chinese independent film scene.”⁴⁹ It is therefore not difficult to understand the filmmakers’ overt dissatisfaction. A few commentators attributed the construction of the authority of critics over filmmakers to the organization of the film festival—because the invited speakers at the forum were all film critics and academics, while filmmakers were not given equal opportunities to speak for themselves.⁵⁰ In response to this criticism, Zhang Xianmin refers to two kinds of authority, one constructed through artists’ refusal to share and their rejection of criticism, the other constructed through institutions such as film festivals, as a result of lack of transparency in the programming process, curators’ double identity as both film critic and festival curator, and the obscurity of some critical discourse.⁵¹

The Nanjing Manifesto event seems to confirm Peranson’s argument that film festivals can be seen as political actors, because they are subject to pressure from interest groups and are “in constant struggle for power.”⁵² However, this struggle or tension is not necessarily a bad thing and was in fact encouraged by the organizing team, which saw it as a good opportunity to open up the discussion on independent films beyond the festival. After all, CIFF had declared one of its missions as “encouraging communication and interaction between independent filmmakers, audience, and researchers.”⁵³ At the summit of the hot debate on independent filmmaking ignited by the eighth CIFF, Cao Kai posted a thread on his Weibo in which he was optimistic about the conflict manifested in this debate, claiming that independent film fundamentalists would become even more unyielding and contentious in the future, but that real independent film criticism would be established in the process.⁵⁴ Regardless of whether the supporters of the Nanjing Manifesto should be seen as fundamentalists, it seems Cao’s prediction is coming true.

In 2012, in order to continue the debate initiated by the Nanjing Manifesto, Yunfest organized a weeklong forum and invited around 20 independent documentary filmmakers and film critics, including Zhang Xianmin, to attend. The event took place in Yueyang in Hunan province and hence was called the Hunan Meeting (*Xianghui*). During this meeting, the filmmakers proposed a magazine to record their own experiences and thoughts and enhance dialogue between independent filmmakers, and, subsequently, *Film Author* was launched.⁵⁵ The editorial committee is composed of 14 independent filmmakers and most of them are also authors of the Nanjing Manifesto. It can therefore be seen as a follow-up action and part of the anti-elitism and anti-authority trend. In its first issue, apart from

one by Zhang Xianmin, all articles were written by filmmakers. The magazine includes more articles from critics and scholars in its later editions, but it is primarily a magazine by and for independent filmmakers. Although some articles in *Film Author* continue the ethos of the Nanjing Manifesto, the independent filmmakers, also as the magazine editors, obviously try to take a more balanced approach. While filmmakers' experiences undoubtedly take center stage, the magazine does pay attention to film criticism and film festivals. It frequently publishes articles from the curators of CIFF, Zhang Xianmin and Cao Kai in particular, and film scholars, including Lu Xinyu, at whom the Nanjing Manifesto was aimed. *Film Author* is an e-journal with free access and has a different editor for each edition. There is not a fixed structure and different editors can decide their own topics and style. All these features speak to a grassroots ethos and an attempt to create an alternative space where filmmakers can emphasize their own identity, and facilitate dialogue between critics and filmmakers.

As of June 2016, *Film Author* had released 11 book-length issues and become an effective platform where independent filmmakers voice their opinions and communicate their working ethics and thoughts about films. It also starts to function as an independent film archive and a discursive space for Chinese independent films, given they have almost no presence in mainstream media and orthodox academic discourse. The appearance of *Film Author* seems quite timely when authorities are heavily interfering with independent film festivals across the country, and the exhibition and dissemination of independent films has become increasingly difficult. While *Film Author* was triggered and continuously supported by CIFF, two key members of CIFF, Cao Kai and Zhang Xianmin, have also started WeChat groups. Cao's group is mostly made up of independent filmmakers and Zhang's of independent film festival organizers, but both groups include filmmakers, curators, and critics.⁵⁶ Members share information on independent films or independent film festivals and express opinions on related issues. It seems CIFF has indeed helped to create a few alternative spaces in which independent films can be freely discussed and circulated, and different stakeholders of the independent circle can communicate more effectively.

We argue that despite being criticized for its elitist position and authority, CIFF has contributed to the cultivation and maturity of a healthy critical environment for Chinese independent films and in fact for Chinese film in general. In an anthology published in 2010, film scholar Zhu Dake lamented the lack of independent film criticism in China. He pointed out

while film is seen as a political tool in China, film criticism has been always in the position of “the tool of the tool.”⁵⁷ Zhu argued that without independent film criticism there will not be true independent films in China. Ironically, it is an unauthorized independent film festival that has made the real effort to foster independent film criticism. Furthermore, we note independent filmmakers’ struggle for discursive power did lead to some adjustments in the organization of festivals, if not particularly at CIFF. For example, in the following year, BIFF started to invite both researchers and filmmakers as speakers at its forums in order to give voice to authors. Curator Dong Bingfeng writes that the conflict exemplified in the Nanjing Manifesto has prompted independent film festivals to reflect on their own position and policies as well as creating a new way of working and a more effective system.⁵⁸ So, if CIFF was a battlefield, both sides have won.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have used the example of CIFF to discuss the issues surrounding the survival and development of Chinese independent film festivals. We argue that the concept of independence in the political and industrial circumstances of current China is highly contestable and unstable. While Songzhuang-based film festivals are probably more content with their function of building a small indie community (see Flora Lichaa’s chapter on BIFF) and stand firm in defense of their independence, for other major independent festivals such as CIFF and Yunfest, survival and steady development are prioritized over insistence on a pure and inflexible definition of independence. As discussed above, in a society where any public gathering not approved by government is deemed illegal, independent film festivals’ claim to be independent proves a utopian fantasy. The development of Chinese independent film festivals has always been accompanied by a self-legitimization complex. The state, as an invisible stakeholder, plays an irreplaceable role in shaping the independent film festival scene. In the case of CIFF, negotiating with the authorities, creating new forms and strategies, its emphasis on education, and its commitment to facilitating communication and cultivating independent film criticism, can all be seen as a self-conscious process of institutionalization and a constant endeavor to be legitimized. Unlike the usual lament over the struggle of independent film festivals with heavy-handed state interference, we believe that, with more skillful negotiation with the authorities and a more open attitude toward the definition of independence, Chinese independent film

festivals might survive and even flourish, as demonstrated by the persistence of the existing festivals and the constant emergence of new *minjian* (grassroots) film festivals.

We also argue against applying Western definitions of the film festival to the Chinese context, and trying to decide whether any Chinese independent film festival can be regarded as a “true” film festival. At the outset, Chinese independent film festivals such as CIFF no doubt wanted to emulate esteemed international film festivals, but the specific social, political, and cinematic conditions in China make such an attempt both frustrating and impossible. We have drawn attention to some local new forms and features by a close examination of CIFF, but more innovative practices at CIFF and at other independent film festivals await further investigation. Although Chinese independent film festivals do not function in the same way as the established international film festivals as a value-adding process or film distributor, they provide the only space in which a large number of independent films can be seen and therefore play a vital role in sustaining the whole independent film circle in China. A close analysis of Chinese independent film festivals that have “managed to find a measure of freedom within a world of restriction”⁵⁹ challenges and enriches our understanding of what a film festival is. Indeed, Thomas Elsaesser’s general comment on film festivals could not be more accurate in describing the unique contribution of Chinese independent film festivals: Chinese independent film festivals have “in effect created one of the most interesting public spheres available in the cultural field today.”⁶⁰

NOTES

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2. Julian Stringer, “Regarding Film Festivals: Introduction,” in *The Film Festival Reader*, ed. Dina Iordanova (St Andrews: St Andrews Film Studies, 2013), 62.
3. Berry, Chris, “When Is a Film Festival Not a Festival? The 6th Independent Film Festival,” *Senses of Cinema*, No. 53 (December 2009), accessed September 12, 2015, <http://sensesofcinema.com/2009/festival-reports/when-is-a-film-festival-not-a-festival-the-6th-china-independent-film-festival/>.
4. Ibid.

5. Peranson, Mark, "First You Get the Power, Then You Get the Money: Two Models of Film Festivals," *Cineaste* 33, no. 3 (2008): 37–43.
6. Harbord, Janet, *Film Cultures* (London: Sage, 2002).
7. Rhyne, Ragan, "Film Festival Circuits and Stakeholders," in *Film Festival Yearbook 1: The Festival Circuit*, ed. Dina Iordanova with Ragan Rhyne (St Andrews: St Andrews Film Studies, 2009), 17.
8. Thomas B. Lawrence and Roy Suddaby, "Scandinavian Institutionalism—A Case of Institutional Work," in *Institutions and Institutional Work* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006), 178–204, quoted in Jesper Strandgaard Pedersen and Carmelo Mazza, "International Film Festivals: For the Benefit of Whom?" *Culture Unbound*, 3 (2011): 148.
9. Chris Berry, "When Is a Film Festival Not a Festival?"
10. In an interview in June 2015, Cao Kai told us that Zhang Xianmin was fully involved in the CIFF from its fourth edition, and became one of three key members of the organizing team with Cao Kai and Ge Yaping, until the ninth edition.
11. CIFF celebrated its tenth anniversary in Newcastle, UK in May 2014. See www.chinaindiefilm.com for further information.
12. The gallery was closed down in 2012 as a direct outcome of official interference. The ninth CIFF was not able to take place as planned.
13. CIFF has set up two awards for documentary films for the first time at the twelfth CIFF in the autumn of 2015.
14. Wang Bing was given the Distinguished Contribution Award for Independent Films between 2000 and 2010 at the eighth CIFF.
15. The first remark is made by Lou Ye, quoted in Wang Xiaolu, "A Summary and Interviews about the Fourth CIFF," (filmagazine.org, 2007); the second is from Chris Berry, "When is Film Festival Not a Festival?", 2006.
16. John Berra, "Seventh China Independent Film Festival," *Electric Sheep*, November 21, 2010, accessed September 3, 2015, <http://www.electricsheepmagazine.co.uk/news/2010/11/21/7th-china-independent-film-festival/>.
17. *Ibid.*; Shelly Kraicer "Fall Festival Report"; Cheng Meixin, "Chinese Independent Films in 2013," August 25, 2014, accessed September 3, 2015, http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_5919c7840102v17x.html.
18. *Ibid.*, 2013.
19. Shelly Kraicer "Fall Festival Report."
20. *Ibid.*
21. Cao Kai, "Preface: The Power of Assembly," in *The Fifth China Independent Film Festival*, ed. Zhang Xianmin and Cao Kai, (RCM The Museum of Modern Art 2007), 9.
22. Marijke De Valck, *Film Festivals from European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2007), 207.

23. Shen Xiaoping, "Preface: No One Is Born to Make Independent Films," in *The Ninth China Independent Film Festival* (RCM The Museum of Modern Art, 2012), 2.
24. Interview with Zhang Xianmin, by Sabrina Qiong Yu, July 12, 2015, Beijing.
25. Yang Cheng, "Postscript," in *The Ninth China Independent Film Festival*, 2012, 111.
26. Wang Xiaolu, "The Adventurous Journey," in *The Eighth China Independent Film Festival*, ed. Wei Xidi, (RCM The Museum of Modern Art, 2011), 188.
27. Ibid.
28. Wang Xiaolu, "Postscript," in *The Eighth China Independent Film Festival*, 2011, 252.
29. Interview with Cao Kai, by Lydia Dan Wu, September 26, 2013, Nanjing.
30. Wang Xiaolu, "Somewhere in Between: Extinguish or Expand?" in *The Ninth China Independent Film Festival*, 15.
31. Yang Cheng, "Postscript," 111.
32. Lou Ye's *Mystery* is another example of a film that got the dragon seal, but its director's cut entered the competition and won the highest award at the Ninth CIFF.
33. CIFVF from its inception used two local cinemas as screening venues, but the cinemas did not charge the festival or audiences. The owners of the cinema are friends of the CIFVF organizers, so this differs from CIFF's cooperation with local commercial cinemas.
34. Interview with Cao Kai by Sabrina Qiong Yu, September 15, 2014, online interview via Wechat.
35. Wang Fei, "Postscript," in *The Tenth China Independent Film Festival* (CIFF, 2013), 131.
36. Shelly Kraicer, "Fall Festival Report."
37. Luke Robinson and Jenny Chio, "Making Space for Chinese Independent Documentary: The Case of Yunfest 2011," *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, 7, no. 1 (2013): 32.
38. Wang Xiaolu, "Postscript," 253.
39. Cao Kai, "Preface," 7.
40. Ibid., 8.
41. Dina Iordanova, "Film Festivals and Dissent: Can Film Change the World?" in *Film Festival Yearbook 4: Film Festivals and Activism*, ed. Dina Iordanova and Leshu Torchin (St Andrews: St Andrews Film Studies, 2012), 14.
42. Ibid., 13.
43. Elisabeth L. Engebretsen, "Queer 'Guerrilla' Activism in China: Reflections on the Tenth-anniversary Beijing Queer Film Festival 2011," *Trikster*, October 10, 2011, accessed September 3, 2015, <http://trikster.net/blog/?p=527>.

44. Ibid.
45. Luke Robinson and Jenny Chio, "Making Space for Chinese Independent Documentary," 29.
46. Paul Willemsen, "On Pesaro (1981/1985)," in *The Film Festival Reader*, ed. Dina Iordanova (St Andrews: St Andrews Film Studies, 2013), 20.
47. Lao Kai, "Criticism of the On-site and Off-site—CIFF 8 'Nanjing Declaration' Event and Micro-blog Discussion Summary," trans. Sabrina Qiong Yu and Lydia Dan Wu in *China's Independent Documentary "Nanjing Declaration" Event Literature Documentation*, China Independent Film Festival (Nanjing) Organization Committee, 2011–12, 8–10.
48. However, we should note that there are different opinions on the priority of the festival among the organizing team. Some feel that CIFF should serve filmmakers more than audience while some think the opposite.
49. Luke Robinson and Jenny Chio, "Making Space for Chinese Independent Documentary," 23.
50. Shui Guai, in *China's Independent Documentary "Nanjing Declaration" Event Literature Documentation* (CIFF organising committee, 2011–12), 10; Li Tiecheng, *ibid.*, 263–5.
51. Zhang Xianmin, "Criticising Hunan Meeting," *Film Author*, no. 1 (2012): 13.
52. Peranson, 38.
53. "Introduction to CIFF," in *2003–2013 China Independent Film Festival*, (CIFF 2013), 3.
54. Quote in Cao Kai, "The Scene of Doomsday: From Chinese Independent Films," *Film Author*, no. 3, (2012), 373.
55. The journal is mainly circulated on Weibo and WeChat. It can also be downloaded at <http://site.douban.com/228178/>.
56. The authors of this chapter are the members of both groups, invited by Zhang Xianmin and Cao Kai.
57. Zhu Dake, "Preface," in *Film Criticism: Visual Sign and Chinese Interpretation*, ed. Nie Wei, (Shanghai; Sanlian, 2010), 4.
58. Dong Bingfeng, "Postscript: Ten Years is Not Far," in *The Tenth Beijing Independent Film Festival—Document* (Li Xianting's Film Fund, 2013), 175.
59. John Berra, "Seventh China Independent Film Festival."
60. Thomas Elsaesser, "Film Festival Networks: The New Topographies of Cinema in Europe," *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), 101.

Sole Traders, Cultural Brokers, and Chinese-Language Film Festivals in the United Kingdom: The London Taiwan Cinefest and the Chinese Visual Festival

Luke Robinson

INTRODUCTION: LOCATING CHINESE-LANGUAGE CINEMA IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

One of the more striking developments in London's cinema scene over the past ten years has been the rapid growth of specialist film festivals dedicated to Chinese-language cinema. While the city has long been serviced by festivals screening a range of East Asian cinemas—the now-defunct London Pan-Asian Film Festival was launched in 1998, for instance—events exclusively dedicated to Chinese-language film are relatively new: the longest-standing example, the Filming East Festival, started in Oxford in 2007, and only moved to London the following year. These festivals are comparatively small in scale, rarely lasting more than a few days to a week. Usually annual events—some have fizzled out over time, while others keep going—they take place in a variety of venues, from commercial theatrical

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chains, to smaller independent cinemas, to university lecture theaters; though they often charge for tickets, they are not-for-profit events. Finally, their programming is eclectic, encompassing fiction and nonfiction, experimental and more mainstream productions, with a balance between independent and commercial cinema largely from the People's Republic of China (PRC), Taiwan, and Hong Kong.¹

These festivals are conspicuous because they represent a departure from the ways in which Chinese-language cinema has usually reached a British audience. Theatrical release of contemporary Mandarin and Cantonese-language film in the United Kingdom (UK) has been, at best, uneven. Between 2005 and 2013, the number of annual cinema releases in both languages ranged between 11 films (in 2008) and one (in 2013, when apparently no Cantonese and one single film in Mandarin were released into British cinemas).² The biggest box office successes during this period—*Hero*, *House of Flying Daggers*, and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, all of which rank among the UK's top ten foreign-language film earners since 2001—give some sense of the kind of work receiving commercial distribution: blockbuster genre films, helmed by prominent directors, with plenty of visual effects and some recognizable (even to an Anglophone audience) stars.³ Other Chinese-language films have usually entered the country via international film festivals. Historically, the London Film Festival (LFF) has been a key conduit for Chinese-language art cinema.⁴ Further north, the Edinburgh International Film Festival (EIFF) has also been an important site of exhibition, with the festival's most recent artistic director, Chris Fujiwara, championing contemporary independent Chinese auteurs, such as Wang Bing. But the new, specialist events are rather different from these established beasts. Quite aside from the scale and focus of their programming—in London and Edinburgh, Chinese-language cinema only ever appears as one element in a broader cinematic canvas—these new festivals have no formal institutional support.⁵ They are usually managed by one or two people who often work full time elsewhere and do not make a living running the event. While these people are assisted in their work by volunteers, they are usually involved in many different facets of festival organization, including day-to-day management, programming decisions, and sourcing films for the festival. Finally, although funding streams often vary, in practice considerable financial support for such festivals comes or has come out of the pockets of this handful of individuals. It is not just the programming, but also the managerial, financial, and operational structures of these specialist festivals, that sets them apart from London

and Edinburgh. While as events they resemble what Mark Peranson terms “audience festivals,”⁶ or what Ruby Cheung calls “themed” or “specialised” festivals,⁷ those organizing them are perhaps more accurately described as “sole traders.”

SOLE TRADERS AND/AS CULTURAL BROKERS

Sole trader in this sense is a term coined by Dina Iordanova. In a discussion of the networked nature of film festivals, Iordanova describes sole traders as those individuals whom she sees as key to securing these very networks. They are the men and women who actually circulate from film festival to film festival, creating personal connections between one event and the next. More likely to be self-employed than permanently attached to any single organization—“sole” in this sense as beholden to no one but themselves—they are nonetheless critical to facilitating the movement of film product between geographically distant and otherwise unrelated festivals. This is a result of the network of contacts that they have built up during their travels.⁸ But if Iordanova sees sole traders as critical nodes in a network, Markus Nornes goes further. He describes such people as “conduits,” points of obligatory passage that world cinema—specifically, in Nornes’ discussion, Asian cinema—has historically had to navigate in order to enter the overwhelmingly European and North American-dominated festival circuit.⁹ Before 2000, Nornes argues, individuals such as Tony Rayns, Donald Richie, Kawakita Kashiko, Chiao Hsiung-Ping, and Wong Ain-Ling exercised extensive power over the kinds of Asian cinema that were screened in Western film festivals. With their linguistic skills and local connections, these were the people programmers from Europe and North America consulted when they wanted advice on what to watch and who to speak to “in country,” and on which films to screen “back home.” These individuals therefore did not just facilitate the movement of films across borders, but also shaped this flow. In effect, they used their personal knowledge and predilections to mold Euro-American ideas of what Asian cinema was. They were, in other words, tastemakers.¹⁰

In effect, Iordanova and Nornes position these individuals as cultural brokers. In economics, a broker is a mediator, someone who facilitates the passage of goods between buyer and seller, usually for a profit. This sense of the broker as intermediary is retained in one understanding of cultural brokerage, in which the broker is someone—a museum curator or an art dealer, for example—who facilitates the movement of cultural

objects between networks of groups, individuals, or institutions, often across national borders.¹¹ But in ethnography and ethnology a cultural broker is also understood as a mediator in a more abstract sense. In this literature, the cultural broker is someone who mediates between cultures. Often though not exclusively of bicultural or multicultural background, this individual is intimate with the norms of several different sociocultural contexts; they are thus adept at bridging barriers of language and cultural practice, allowing them to facilitate intercultural understanding.¹² Here, the cultural broker is also an interpreter, someone who localizes symbolic meaning through what Eric Hinderaker terms specific “brokerage acts,” or particular practices of translation.¹³ Combining these two senses of the term, the cultural broker emerges as someone who acts as a middleman or woman, facilitating the movement of people, goods, and ideas across borders, while also acting as the “translator” for this material, literally or figuratively, often in multiple directions. In a festival context, then, a cultural broker not only enables the movement of films across geographical and legal boundaries through their professional network of contacts, but also “translates” this material—bridges the cultural and linguistic divisions that might otherwise render these films unfamiliar or incomprehensible—in ways that both influence how festivalgoers understand what they are watching, and allow them to enjoy it.

INSTITUTIONS, INDIVIDUALS, AND THE QUESTION OF TRANSLATION

Approaching the organizers of these specialist festivals as a new class of cultural broker is useful for two reasons. First, it directs us to think about how the particular skills, connections, and experiences of these people shape the nature of the festivals they run. Richie and Rayns were and are professional film scholars and critics; the organizers of these small, specialist festivals, by and large, are not. Why, then, do they put on events? How do their backgrounds shape the kinds of events they are building? What kinds of personal and professional connections do they bring to this work, and to what extent do these relationships shape the form and thrust of the festivals themselves? Such questions help us tease out the roots of particular events, their similarities and their differences. Second, and equally important, the concept of the cultural broker brings the problem of translation to the fore in a way that is not always explicit in the term sole trader,

or associated analytical methodologies, such as stakeholder analysis. This issue is not new to film festivals studies. Indeed, Marijke de Valck, in one of the first monographs written on the subject, argues that translation is central to what festivals do:

Festivals are cultural canon builders, exhibition sites, market places, meeting points, and city attractions. Therefore, they are constantly dealing with a variety of agendas ... Like ants, film festivals have become an entity that endures, a rhizome or network that circulates through historic conditions and developments and is capable of translating its constitutive relations according to changing circumstances.¹⁴

Here, de Valck seems to suggest that mediating between different constituencies and adapting to changing circumstance has been critical to the survival of the global film festival network. But the translation discussed takes place at a macro, institutional level, and in a rather abstract manner. What is the relationship between this translation and the web of connections that underpins festival networks? What is actually being translated, and how? Who is involved and what effect does this have on the practice of translation? Looking at the work of sole traders may provide some answers to these questions, since as brokers they are both responsible for maintaining these networks and for the specific acts of brokerage that translate the films passing through them.

My focus on particular individuals here is not intended to minimize how structural factors impact specialist Chinese-language film festivals in the UK: far from it. Clearly, macro-level questions—how festivals are shaped by local or national government policy, for example—are important to consider. Instead, the point is to note how a focus on particular social actors can complement institutional analysis, allowing us to map how these individuals mold a festival in concert with broader structural dynamics. To this end, for the rest of this chapter I will consider two case studies. Both are specialist Chinese-language festivals based in London: the Taiwan Cinefest and the Chinese Visual Festival. In both instances, I will focus on how the festivals aim to translate certain concepts or ideas for local audiences through film selection and ancillary practices, although what is being translated, and how, varies for each festival. The Taiwan Cinefest, I argue, translates the idea of “Taiwanese cinema” for its viewers through tried and tested commercial practices. The Chinese Visual Festival, in contrast, engages in practices of translation I term pedagogical

or moral, central to which is the communication of a particular idea of what “China” is (and is not). These differences are shaped by the industrial, cultural, and political contexts in which both festivals are located, but also by the goals of the key individuals running the festivals—Stephen Flynn of the Cinefest, Sylvia Zhan Xuhua and Xie Jingjing of the Chinese Visual Festival—the particular networks they utilize to source films for programs, and the relationship of the festivals to other kinds of work these people currently do, or were previously involved in. What these distinctions therefore demonstrate is not only how these particular individuals work as cultural brokers—both in terms of networking and translation—but also how this brokerage in turn shapes the nature of the film festivals they run.

THE LONDON TAIWAN CINEFEST

The London Taiwan Cinefest brands itself as “Europe’s largest independent Taiwanese film festival.”¹⁵ The event took place annually in London from 2009 to 2012—expanding to include screenings in Glasgow in 2010 and a touring event in Paris during its last iteration—and is the brainchild of Steven Flynn. A British national and independent film producer, Flynn first became interested in Asia while studying International Relations at university, and acquired a taste for Chinese-language media while teaching English in the PRC after graduation. On returning to the UK, he decided to simultaneously develop his production career and launch a film festival dedicated to Chinese-language cinema. After assessing the existing festivals of Asian cinema in London—including Chinese-focused events such as the China Image Festival, but also festivals run by the Korea Foundation, Japan Foundation, and Asia House—he decided that there was room in the calendar for a niche event dedicated to film from Taiwan.¹⁶ Thus the Taiwan Cinefest was born.

In the past, the Cinefest’s London iteration has typically lasted between three and five days. Its locations have varied, though Flynn has usually tried to rent cinemas in the city center for at least some screenings every year.¹⁷ Programs have incorporated a variety of genres, including documentaries, features, and short films. Moreover, the festival has tried to ensure UK premiers as a central strand of its programming, often complementing these with special appearances from directors or actors, particularly for opening night films.¹⁸ Despite this scale and range of activity, however, in many ways the Cinefest remains a one-man event. Flynn himself positions

the festival as such, both in how he discusses its genesis—“a lot of festivals start with an individual who has a passion ... and wants to extend that ... it’s as simple as that”—and in his explanation for why he has put the Cinefest on a temporary hiatus: he needs to focus on his current production slate.¹⁹ Nevertheless, there are also key organizational ways in which the festival really is a sole trader event. Flynn, as director, is the only permanent member of staff. He recruits about ten other volunteers annually to work in other roles for the festival, mostly through London universities and calls on social media: it is not unusual for him to receive between one and two hundred applications for those ten roles, which are comparatively easy to fill.²⁰ This means that continuity is difficult, with new staff having to be trained every year; it also means that Flynn is closely involved in all areas of the festival, and clearly keeps overheads low. This latter point is important, since Flynn is essentially responsible for the festival’s finances. Its initial seed money came out of his pocket: the first year made what he describes as a “tactical loss,” with a view to the longer-term development of the event’s potential.²¹ Since then, he has aimed to make the festival a self-funding enterprise that, while not profit seeking, does try at least to be financially self-sufficient.²² It has acquired various different sponsors or partners on a year-by-year basis—including Taiwanese run or branded businesses and the Taipei Representative Office in the UK—but these provide the event with subsidies in kind, rather than significant financial support: costs are effectively recouped from ticket sales.²³ Thus, it would appear to be this financial and organizational self-sufficiency that is signified by the branding of the event as independent, one which seeks to distance the Cinefest from assumptions of third party management, be that governmental or commercial, and ensure a degree of “flexibility and control over what we do.”²⁴

FROM ART HOUSE TO GENRE FILM

This is important to recognize, because the films screened at the festival are not largely independent cinema in the art house sense. The Cinefest describes its showcased content as “new and award-winning”;²⁵ the kinds of features that it screens, however, are primarily low budget, commercial genre films that play regularly in Taiwanese cinemas, if not in British ones. In 2009, for example, the runaway Taiwanese box office hit *Cape No.7* screened at the festival; in 2011, Flynn programmed Taiwanese American pop idol Wang Leehom’s directorial debut, *Love in Disguise*, a romantic

comedy about a famous pop star who pretends to be a music conservatoire undergraduate in order to pursue an old school flame. The same is true with documentaries, where the festival has gone for mainstream successes such as Lin Yu-Hsien's *Jump, Boys!* rather than more experimental work. This is not to say that the Cinefest has not programmed films by directors with Taiwanese New or post-New Wave associations—in 2010, for example, Chang Tso-chi's *How Are You, Dad?* played—but these cases are the exception rather than the rule.

Why is this? Partly money and prestige. Flagship films and A-list Taiwanese directors seeking a theatrical distribution deal will eschew screening at a small-scale London film festival to avoid undercutting a potential distributor's window. In this sense, the commercial market has an unavoidable impact on what the Cinefest does. But this does not preclude smaller independent art house programming; the emphasis on low-key commercial genre film also reflects Flynn's own interests, and where the festival sits within his personal career trajectory. As a non-Taiwanese, he clearly feels no particular obligation to emphasize high culture when showcasing the island's accomplishments overseas: his own personal taste—"I have a commercial bent"²⁶—is more mainstream. Furthermore, there is clearly a degree of symbiosis between the festival and his production work. In interview, Flynn keeps these two activities discursively distinct: he emphasizes that the festival is "a cultural operation," "a public good" that was "never really designed to become a commercial animal," unlike his day job.²⁷ Indeed, in saying that he is setting the festival aside temporarily to focus on his production career, the former is seen implicitly as an impediment to the latter—at least at this particular moment in time. In practice, however, these two worlds clearly overlap. Flynn conducts much of his own initial scouting for the Cinefest at the major international film festivals—Cannes, Berlin, Toronto, Hong Kong—he visits for his production work.²⁸ He estimates that 80 percent of the films the Cinefest has screened have been negotiated through sales agents, many of whom are present at the film industry events attached to these festivals.²⁹ While pitching for a film at a market does not always make sense, it appears that the kinds of relationships and networks that Flynn exploits as a film festival director are also in part the relationships he has established as an independent film producer. This in turn has some bearing on the Cinefest's programming. Finally, to make the festival financially viable in the long term, he suggests that it would have to become a formal distribution channel, partnering with Asian film companies and agents as a platform to pitch

their films to European and North American distributors.³⁰ The festival in this particular iteration would therefore clearly be a complement to Flynn's production business.

TRANSLATION AS COMMERCIAL PRACTICE: MAKING SENSE OF TAIWAN CINEMA

The content of the Cinefest is thus largely market oriented or mainstream. How, then, does this frame the acts of brokerage *as translation* that occur at the festival, particularly in relation to positioning this product for potential audiences? This is an issue that Flynn acknowledges as problematic. While the films screened at the Cinefest are foreign language films, and thus naturally attract what Flynn calls a "world cinema" crowd,³¹ they suffer from what he describes as a lack of "buzz."³² They do not come crowned with the Golden Lions or Silver Bears that marked Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Edward Yang, Tsai Ming-Liang, and even Ang Lee as quality art house cinema, nor are they generically recognizable to a British audience in the manner of Hong Kong kung fu films. Thus, says Flynn, when considering what will or will not "translate ... you choose based on ... a marketing short handle of describing the film for an audience."³³ In practice, this means selecting the elements of a film "that I [Flynn] can relate [to] how someone would buy into [it]."³⁴ This could come down to something as basic as striking marketing: one of the reasons that Flynn chose Joe Lee's *The Spin Kid* for the festival was the distinctive poster campaign, which features the lead actor made up for a temple religious ceremony while wearing DJ headphones. Alternatively, it could mean amplifying certain genre elements of a film so that it becomes readable to a local audience: Doze Niu's *Monga* was easy to position because its gangster elements could be emphasized in the publicity, for example.³⁵ Given what he sees as the limited appeal of Taiwanese stars and directors to an audience beyond the Taiwanese expatriate community,³⁶ Flynn emphasizes genre and visual style as key ways in which these films can be made appealing to the local viewer.

Two things are clear here. First, the practices of translation are themselves commercial. Marketing and publicity are key means through which the films are localized for the British viewer, and the emphasis within these is on those cinematic elements—genre and look in particular—that have long been central to selling cinema in the marketplace. This seems inevitable, given both the nature of the films selected and Flynn's own background. More interesting, however, is what the festival is translating

for the non-Taiwanese viewer. These practices seem to be conveying an imagined national cinema. The Taiwanese films screened at the Cinefest fit neither the image of Taiwanese cinema as high art, nor more popular understandings of Chinese-language cinema as martial arts film. They do not largely feature stars that non-aficionados can identify, or come trailing awards that can be prominently featured. Positioning them thus requires an emphasis on individual film elements whose appeal requires no further commentary—such as Lan Cheng-Lung’s face in *The Spin Kid*—or which can be easily matched to genres already in general circulation through British film culture, as with *Monga* and the gangster film. Here, infra-structural determinants and individual predilections combine to shape not only how translation is effected, but also what is being translated in the first place.

Since so much of the London Taiwan Cinefest is dependent on Steven Flynn, to understand how the festival functions as a site of cultural brokerage it is necessary to understand the role he plays within it. Yes, the festival programs are partly a result of commercial distribution dynamics; these unavoidably structure what agents, distributors, and directors are willing to let screen at a specialist London event. But these programs also reflect Flynn’s own personal tastes and, as importantly, the event’s relationship to his career as an independent producer. Since both of these are commercially and industrially oriented, they shape the broader networks to which the festival is connected, and the kinds of films it is oriented toward screening. In turn, this configures how cultural translation occurs within the festival—the specific brokerage acts that Flynn and his team execute—and indeed, the broad thrust of what it is they are required to translate for a potential festival audience. Here, then, the individual as cultural broker is clearly critical to the movement of Chinese-language cinema to the UK, and to the ways in which it is presented to the London viewer. Turning now to the Chinese Visual Festival, I would argue that the same is true as a general dynamic; the ways in which this manifests, though, are quite distinct.

THE CHINESE VISUAL FESTIVAL

The Chinese Visual Festival is a London festival of visual culture from the Chinese-speaking world. Based out of a number of the city’s universities—it has at various points used the premises of London South Bank

University and Birkbeck College, and is now associated with King's College London—the event has run annually since 2011. It covers visual culture in the broadest sense, curating film, art, and even traditional Chinese musical performance, but its focus has primarily been contemporary art and documentary film. While the artists exhibited have largely come from mainland China, the film programming has broadened to incorporate documentaries and features from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and even outside the Asia Pacific region. In 2014, for example, the festival had a workshop specifically aimed at local filmmakers of Chinese ethnicity, thus engaging directly with the issue of film production in the diaspora.

If the Taiwan Cinefest is helmed by one person, the Visual Festival is the brainchild of two—programmers Sylvia Zhan Xuhua and Xie Jingjing—with a third, James Mudge, joining at a slightly later date. Zhan, who is originally from the PRC, is curator of the festival's contemporary art program. She studied Fine Art and Art History at the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Art, before working in the city as a designer. There she witnessed the growth of the independent film and art scene, exemplified by Ou Ning and Cao Fei's U-thèque Organization, an independent film and video collective established in 1999. Zhan originally came to the UK to study paper conservation at Camberwell College of Art. She stayed on, working in the museums and galleries sector, establishing a company, China Culture Connect, which organizes Chinese culture-related events, and studying arts management.³⁷ Xie is also from the PRC, and the festival's primary film programmer. She studied English in Guangzhou as an undergraduate and Film Studies as an MA student. Like Zhan, she was also connected to the city's independent film scene through U-thèque. However, she also worked for the Guangzhou International Documentary Film Festival (GZDOC), initially as a translator and interpreter, then as assistant to the festival director, and then as head programmer of the festival's public screenings section in 2007. After moving to London for personal reasons, she was commissioned by a Parisian collector of Chinese contemporary art to curate a program of documentaries in London. During this process, she and Zhan were introduced to one another by a mutual friend. When funding for this program failed to materialize, they decided to hold a festival anyway: thus, the first iteration of the Chinese Visual Festival was born.³⁸ Mudge, who covered the festival for the specialist film website BeyondHollywood.com, came on board initially as media manager in 2012, and festival manager thereafter.³⁹

BETWEEN THE INDEPENDENT AND THE MAINSTREAM

Like the Taiwan Cinefest, the Chinese Visual Festival is not run as a profit-making enterprise. Initially, both Zhan and Xie invested private money in the event; further support was forthcoming from China Culture Connect.⁴⁰ Although the festival now charges for tickets, no one organizing the event draws a salary, and sponsorship is either in kind or tied to particular programs.⁴¹ While the permanent organizers have more clearly defined and distributed responsibilities than Flynn, it is clear that people make contributions beyond mere titles: Xie is supported in her role as programmer by Mudge, with additional help from scholars at King's College London.⁴² Nevertheless, the festival has clearly been molded by Zhan's and Xie's individual interests. First, its scope—the particular combination of art and cinema, the emphasis on documentary—arises from their own personal expertise, and is quite distinct from that of any other London-based, Chinese cultural festival. Second, it is clear that the breadth of films shown reflects Xie's own experience both within and without China's formal media systems. GZDOC, where Xie was employed, is the only officially approved festival of its kind in China; it is in fact jointly run by the Guangdong Provincial Government and the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television, the government organ with overall responsibility for film and television regulation. As such, the festival has always been far more industry-oriented and much less political than its unofficial counterparts, both in terms of the activities conducted there and the material screened.⁴³ This is reflected in some of the Chinese Visual Festival's programming, which has mixed independent films with more mainstream material that has domestic broadcast potential. For example, in 2012, Olympic year, one of the documentaries screened at the festival was Ou Ning's *Meishi Street*. An independently produced, participatory documentary that tackles resistance to gentrification in central Beijing through the eyes of a single "stuck nail" tenant, *Meishi Street* illuminates the negative consequences of pre-Olympic development for the poorest residents of the Chinese capital.⁴⁴ But the same year, the festival also screened a series of documentary shorts called *August, Beijing*. Produced in collaboration with GZDOC, this collection included films such as Yan Fei's *Are You a Sportsman?*, the story of a young boy from Zhejiang camping out at Beijing Airport, hunting for athletes' autographs.

The human interest in these two films is clearly quite different; so too is the impression conveyed of the Olympic experience.

Shifting personal and professional networks partly explain this combination of programming. Xie's own connections have now been supplemented by a call for submissions, personal introductions from filmmakers and artists, and scouting trips to independent film festivals in the PRC, such as the Beijing Independent Film Festival (BIFF) in Songzhuang and the China Independent Film Festival (CIFF) in Nanjing. The pool of potential selection has thus widened considerably over time.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, retaining this connection with GZDOC has been quite deliberate. Xie says she tries to go to the festival whenever possible, not just because she used to work there, but also precisely because she has "always believed in sourcing from both within and outside of the broadcasting system to find the most varied combination of films."⁴⁶ This issue of variety speaks to a key objective of the Chinese Visual Festival, however: to counter what both Zhan and Xie see as an excessive emphasis on the negative in Western discourse around, and media representation of, the contemporary PRC. Xie says quite explicitly that, when working at GZDOC, she noticed a particular emphasis in the way international film festivals selected Chinese documentaries.⁴⁷ Commissioning editors and festival programmers from overseas were only interested in material that dealt with social problems or current affairs; other genres, such as science or history documentaries, were ignored. The result, Xie says, is that what she terms "exposure documentaries" dominate western festival programming, something that she tries consciously to avoid:

Most factual programs about China, except lifestyle ones, tend to be very negative about the country. [This] is true [of] most independent production[s] ... This is why I always want to balance between positive and negative stories in programs ... I do not want to show Chinese lives as just grim, depressed, and harsh because it is simply not true.⁴⁸

The key would thus seem to be curating a group of films, from a variety of different sources, with a range of perspectives on contemporary China, without committing the festival to a specific political line. As Zhan says, "our point of view isn't that of CNN or the BBC, but neither is it that of CCTV."⁴⁹

TRANSLATION AS MORAL PEDAGOGY: THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF CHINA

Unlike the Taiwan Cinefest, what is being translated here for a London audience is more the idea of an ethno- or national culture than that of a national cinema. As the festival press releases sometimes stress, it is about “presenting the reality of the Chinese speaking world to global audiences”;⁵⁰ the actually existing China behind the headlines, if you like. In this respect, the Chinese Visual Festival is what, in her chapter in this volume, Dina Iordanova terms a “corrective festival”: an event intended to address an imbalance in representations of China outside China proper. This term catches how the festival’s vision is shaped as much by issues of cultural politics as by commerce; what perhaps should be emphasized in this instance is the fluidity of this corrective drive, as well as the lived experience that fuels it. The Chinese Visual Festival is not a government event. Its direction does not stem from a policy directive, but has evolved in part as a result of Xie’s and Zhan’s own experience as cultural brokers, whether professionally, in the workplace, or more informally, as PRC nationals resident abroad. The festival therefore does not seek to promote government policy: Xie is rather trying to mediate between what she and Zhan have come to perceive as different poles of representation—official and unofficial, “local” and Western—that structure how China is perceived and represented across a range of social agents and institutions.⁵¹ What kind of cultural translation thus arises from such positioning, and how does it differ from that of the Taiwan Cinefest?

As with the Taiwan Cinefest, one of the key ways in which the Chinese Visual Festival attempts to communicate its message is by finding points of mutual reference between a British audience and the Chinese-language material screened. Unlike the Cinefest, however, the focus is less on points of common cinematic reference and more on sites of shared social or cultural experience. Thus, in the first year, the festival showed Zhu Chengguang’s documentary *For the Love of Shakespeare*, about children in China learning to recite Shakespeare, and Li Junhu’s *Brave Father*, which addresses the problem of how poor families afford university tuition fees for their children. The literary connection seemed an obvious point of contact in the former, while the latter theme was a hot topic in the UK, with protests against the rise in tuition fees for English university students having taken place the previous year. The films therefore seemed accessible for a London audience.⁵² Thematizing screenings has also been a way

of framing them round common issues: the 2012 festival, for example, took the Olympics as its point of departure.⁵³ Finally, where these other options have been inadequate, the curators have positioned the films for a non-Chinese audience through short introductions or talks after screenings. Sometimes these discussions have been led by academics—one of the advantages of being based in university spaces—sometimes by members of the organizing committee, but usually they have focused on elements of a film that Xie and Zhan feel require further elaboration, or have been an opportunity for Xie to explain her reasons for programming a particular work in the festival.⁵⁴

I would suggest, then, that the kind of cultural translation taking place at the Chinese Visual Festival is best described as moral-pedagogical. I adapt this phrase from Chi-Hua Hsiao's analysis of amateur subtitle groups in the PRC. Hsiao describes how these subtitlers of illegally distributed American TV shows view their own cultural brokerage practices—translating English-language dialogue for a Chinese-language audience—not as illegal activity but as moral enterprise: not-for-profit pursuits that “mediate between groups or persons of different cultural backgrounds for the purpose of reducing conflict or producing change.”⁵⁵ This comes very close to the kind of brokerage that Xie and Zhan appear to understand themselves as engaged in. Primarily noncommercial in bent, with translation practices drawn less from marketing and advertising than from education, the festival's goal is clearly more than entertainment. Xie and Zhan's aim is rather to address “misunderstanding[s] and lack of understanding about Chinese among the British public” through visual culture;⁵⁶ central to this process is the identification of common experiences that, if projected through cinema, may humanize China in the eyes of foreign viewers and thus open up space for further intercultural dialogue. As with the Taiwan Cinefest, infrastructural determinants and personal experience here combine to structure the kind of brokerage that the festival organizers are engaged in. The results, however, go beyond what I would consider to be mere taste formation.

CONCLUSION

Understanding the growth of small specialist Chinese-language film festivals in London requires attention to who runs these events as well as the contexts from which they have emerged. The skeleton nature of their organization, what I have here characterized as sole trader, means that one

or two people can exercise considerable influence over why these festivals are established, how they are managed, and what they screen. In the case of the Taiwan Cinefest, Steven Flynn's production career, contacts, and tastes all combine with the realities of commercial distribution to create a festival with a focus on mainstream genre film. In the case of the Chinese Visual Festival, particular perceptions of the Western mediascape mingle with the experience and contacts of Sylvia Zhan Xuhua and Xie Jingjing to create an event focused primarily on nonfiction and fiction film from the PRC, but with an attempt to balance independent and mainstream productions. In both instances, the direction of these festivals, and the particular vision of those involved, requires quite specific kinds of brokerage practices to interpret the films screened for a London audience. These practices include the commercial and the pedagogical, with effects ranging from cinematic taste formation to more self-consciously political interventions into intercultural communication. However, attention to the sole trader as cultural broker in both case studies allows us to knit together the disparate threads of professional networks, film sourcing, festival programming, and cultural translation to present a more detailed picture of how and why these festivals have brought Chinese-language cinema to London. As a microhistory, this chapter has therefore fleshed out a small but increasingly significant facet of the UK's ever-expanding film festival scene.

More conceptually, I hope I have also demonstrated the value of culture brokerage as a framework for thinking about how these festivals operate. By highlighting the question of translation, the phrase alerts us to certain qualitative issues that sole trader as a term, or stakeholder analysis as a methodology, elide. At the same time, by drawing issues of translation into dialogue with questions of professional and personal connections—the network—it allows us to build up a more nuanced picture of how individuals may negotiate with structural constraints, whether cultural or industrial, when establishing and running a film festival. Limitations of space have not allowed me to explore other kinds of translation practice that occur in these festivals: juggling between regimes of value, for example, or translating between festival organizer, film agent, and filmmaker in the act of bargaining for particular works to program. These are questions for another time, but they hint at other ways in which the relationship between translation and the film festival can be pursued—ways that also require attention to the particular practices of cultural brokerage, and how specific individuals on the festival circuit enact them.

NOTES

1. “Independent” here means slightly different things depending on which area of the Chinese-speaking world one is discussing. Independent film in China, whether fiction or nonfiction, usually refers to work made outside state-run or corporate media that has not been submitted to the relevant regulatory body for approval, and therefore cannot be formally broadcast, exhibited, or distributed within the PRC. Such films are therefore neither commercial in bent, nor always ideologically sound in their handling of sensitive subject matter. Independent film in Hong Kong or Taiwan usually refers to low-budget work produced on the margins of the commercial cinema industry, but the phrase does not necessarily have the same political overtones as when used in relation to media from the PRC.
2. UK Film Council, *Statistical Yearbook 2009*, 34, accessed September 9, 2014, <http://www.bfi.org.uk/sites/bfi.org.uk/files/downloads/uk-film-council-statistical-yearbook-2009.pdf>; British Film Institute, *Statistical Yearbook 2014*, 54, accessed September 9, 2014, <http://www.bfi.org.uk/sites/bfi.org.uk/files/downloads/bfi-statistical-yearbook-2014.pdf>.
3. British Film Institute, *Yearbook 2014*, 56.
4. For example, the festival was also central to building an awareness of, and an audience for, Hong Kong New Wave cinema in Europe. See Cindy Wong, “Distant Screens: Film Festivals and the Projection of Hong Kong Cinema,” in *Hong Kong Film, Hollywood and the New Global Cinema*, ed. Gina Marchetti and Tan See Kam (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 184.
5. In contrast, LFF is run by the British Film Institute, a national charity governed by royal charter that is responsible for film education, heritage, and certain elements of the film industry, such as production, across the UK. EIFF is also run by a charity—the Centre for the Moving Image—that runs the festival, the Edinburgh Film Guild, and a cinema, the Edinburgh Filmhouse. This institutional support holds true for other, smaller pan-Asian festivals through which Chinese-language cinema has circulated in the UK, such as that organized by Asia House in London; the China Image Festival, a PRC-focused festival first held in London in 2009, which is backed by the Chinese government; and the London Chinese Film Festival, a festival that ceased to operate before I started this research, but which was organized by the London Chinese Culture Centre [Ruby Cheung, “Funding Models of Themed Film Festivals,” in *Film Festival Yearbook 2: Film Festivals and Imagined Communities*, ed. Dina Iordanova with Ruby Cheung (St Andrews: St Andrews Film Studies, 2010), 85]. One possible exception would be the Terracotta Festival, also based in London, which screens Asian commercial genre film, and is not institutionally or governmentally affiliated in any way.

6. Mark Peranson, "First You Get the Power, Then You Get the Money: Two Models of Film Festivals," *Cineaste* 33, no. 3 (2008): 37–43.
7. Cheung, "Funding Models," 74.
8. Dina Iordanova, "The Film Festival Circuit," in *Film Festival Yearbook 1: The Festival Circuit*, ed. Dina Iordanova with Ragan Rhyne (St Andrews: St Andrews Film Studies, 2009), 34–35.
9. Markus Nornes, "Yamagata—Asia—Europe: The International Film Festival Short Circuit," in *The Oxford Handbook of Japanese Cinemas*, ed. Daisuke Miyao (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 250.
10. A fact Nornes acknowledges obliquely when he notes that, although these people exercised enormous veto over what Asian cinema did and did not make it to Europe and North America, "Thankfully ... those informants had wonderfully eclectic taste." Nornes, "Yamagata—Asia—Europe," 259.
11. See, for example, the discussion in Richard Kurin, *Reflections of a Culture Broker: A View from the Smithsonian* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Press, 1997), 12–26.
12. Carmen Birkle, "Between the Island and the City: Cultural Brokerage in Caribbean-Canadian Short Fiction," in *Diasporic Subjectivity and Cultural Brokering in Contemporary Post-Colonial Literature*, ed. Igor Maver (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2009), 60–61.
13. Eric Hinderaker, "Translation and Cultural Brokerage," in *A Companion to American Indian History*, ed. Philip J. Deloria and Neal Salisbury (Malden: Blackwell), 358.
14. Marijke de Valck, *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), 102.
15. This is how the festival is positioned in its most recent publicity material. See, for example, "Taiwan Cinefest 2010 Comes to the UK in March," *Taiwanese Representative Office in the UK*, accessed September 9, 2014, <http://www.taiwanembassy.org/content.asp?mp=132&CuItem=128975>; "Taiwan Cinefest 2011 Comes to London in May," *Taiwanese Representative Office in the UK*, accessed September 9, 2014, <http://www.taiwanembassy.org/content.asp?mp=132&CuItem=198175>.
16. Steven Flynn, interview with the author, London, July 29, 2014. Flynn says he is fairly liberal when defining what makes a film Taiwanese: it could be Taiwanese produced, shot by a Taiwanese director, or feature a Taiwanese star (Steven Flynn, interview with the author, London, May 30, 2013). In practice, however, most of the films screened at the festival tick all these boxes.

17. The first year, the opening night film—Chung Mong-hong's *Parking*—was screened at The Gate cinema in Notting Hill, part of the Picturehouse chain. The second year, the festival took place at the independent Riverside Studios in Hammersmith, further to the west of the city, and outside London Underground Zone One, the public transport center of the city. Although this had its advantages, not least that the Riverside handled all technical issues for the festival, in 2011 and 2012, Flynn elected to screen many of the festival films in the Apollo Cinema off Piccadilly Circus (now part of the Vue chain). This was simply because he felt Hammersmith was too peripheral a location for the Cinefest, given that all the other London Asian film festivals took place in Zone One (Flynn, interview, 2014).
18. From 2010 to 2012, for example, the directors of all the festival's opening night films were present for Q&As after the screenings.
19. Flynn, interview, 2014.
20. Flynn, interview, 2013.
21. Ibid.
22. Flynn, interview, 2014.
23. The Representative Office has provided the Cinefest with human resources support, such as free publicity, and contacts. Other sponsorship in kind from commercial partners, usually Taiwanese-owned businesses, has included plane tickets and hotel rooms (Flynn, interview, 2014).
24. Flynn, interview, 2013.
25. See for example "Taiwan Cinefest 2010," "Taiwan Cinefest 2011."
26. Flynn, interview, 2013.
27. Ibid.; Flynn, interview, 2014.
28. Busan was the one festival that Flynn flagged up as key for Asian cinema that his production work had not taken him to (Flynn, interview, 2014).
29. Steven Flynn, email to the author, August 10, 2014.
30. Flynn, interview, 2014.
31. Flynn, interview, 2013.
32. Flynn, interview, 2014.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid. Advance marketing for the festival described it as "a Taiwanese twist on the epic gangster film." See "Taiwan Cinefest 2011."
36. Flynn, interview, 2014.
37. Sylvia Zhan Xuhua, interview with the author, London, August 4, 2014.
38. Ibid.; Xie Jingjing, email to the author, August 9, 2014.
39. James Mudge, interview with the author, London, August 3, 2014.
40. Zhan, interview.

41. For example, although in 2014 the festival received some funding from the Taipei Representative Office in London, this was specifically to support the screening of a Taiwanese documentary program and associated events.
42. Xie Jingjing, email to the author, August 5, 2014.
43. See the discussion in Tianqi Yu, “Going Global—Guangzhou International Documentary Film Festival 2013,” *Studies in Documentary Film* 8, no. 1 (2014): 76–79.
44. For more on *Meishi Street*, see Luke Robinson, “Alternative Archives and Individual Subjectivities: Ou Ning’s *Meishi Street*,” *Senses of Cinema* 63 (July 2012), accessed January 18, 2016, <http://sensesofcinema.com/2012/miff2012/alternative-archives-and-individual-subjectivities-ou-nings-meishi-street/>.
45. The 2011 press release positioned the film program as “shorts and feature length documentary films from the Guangzhou International Documentary Film Festival China,” which is clearly no longer the case. “Chinese Visual Festival 2011—Lost in Transformation,” *Chinese Visual Festival*, accessed September 9, 2014, <http://chinesevisualfestival.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Chinese-Visual-Festival-30-June3.pdf>.
46. Xie, email, August 5, 2014.
47. Ibid.
48. Xie, email, August 9, 2014.
49. Zhan, interview.
50. “2013 Chinese Visual Festival: Official Announcement,” *Chinese Visual Festival*, accessed September 9, 2014, <http://chinesevisualfestival.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/CVF-2013-Press-Release.pdf>.
51. As Xie puts it, “While in GZDOC, I had to very carefully smuggle in independent Chinese films to get official license to show in cinemas, [but] my efforts are at the other end in CVF” (Xie, email, August 9, 2014). In other words, correction is about balancing the dominant tendencies of a particular event or institution, rather than systematically promoting a particular position or point of view regardless of context.
52. Zhan, interview.
53. Although this took place in the festival’s initial two iterations, thereafter it was dropped, because it restricted the number of films that the curators had to choose from (Xie, email, August 5, 2014).
54. Xie, email, August 5, 2014. Following the screening of *Brave Father*, for example, a doctoral student provided context for the film, explaining the *hukou* system and how it worked (Zhan, interview, 2014). In 2014, when the festival programmed a Pema Tsenden retrospective, this was accompanied by an extended panel discussion entitled “Art and Culture in Tibet

Today,” which considered the director’s work against the broader backdrop of the renaissance in Tibetan cultural practices since the 1980s.

55. Chi-Hua Hsiao, “The Moralities of Intellectual Property: Subtitle Groups as Cultural Brokers in China,” *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 15, no. 3 (2014): 220, 225.
56. Xie, email, August 5, 2014.

PART 2

Translating Culture

Yingying, Zhenzhen, and Fenfen? China at the Festivals

Dina Iordanova

EVOLVING TRANSLATION

In this chapter I explore how the film festival circuit facilitates the appearance of diverse and educational Chinese themes into the West's public sphere.¹ The proliferating festivals and festival showcases—mainstream and alternative, diasporic and domestic, officially sanctioned and underground—channel multiple narratives: from the budding feminist Qiu Ju, through seditious *tongzhi*, to the forlorn sisters from Wang Bing's film.

Why would we care about these three little village girls from Wang Bing's documentary *Three Sisters*—Yingying, Zhenzhen, and Fenfen? Why would we want to sit and watch them care for the goats and labor in the pigsty rather than opt for a sleek martial arts film full of slick special effects? Like other Wang Bing films, *Three Sisters* makes for demanding viewing; it looks more like Italian neorealism than a Shaolin fantasy, more like *La Terra Trema* than *La Dolce Vita*. What does the showing and seeing of such films in the context of film festivals do?

These films facilitate the emergence of a more diverse, varied, and complex China in the minds of non-Chinese viewers—an emergence of individual human experiences that anyone can relate to, and which takes

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place through the conduit of festivals. Even if working in an uncoordinated fashion, the circulation of films through the festivals unpacks, complicates, and ultimately “translates” the narrative of a country, gradually dropping the formulaic clichés and limited range of stereotypes, and substituting them with a multitude of characters and a more complex, multi-faceted, and multi-layered understanding.

This process of opening up, surfacing, and translation can have far-reaching consequences. Names of cities beyond Shanghai and Beijing gradually emerge and settle in the minds of the audience. Their image of Chinese people may still gravitate between the straight-faced and black-suited comrades who give speeches in pompous red surroundings on one hand, and busloads of garish female tourists headed to the Burberry outlet in Hackney on the other. Yet a uniform version of China is no longer viable for the multi-centered “post-American” world. The story needs to be augmented if a real dialogue is to occur; the commonplace “rise of the middle-class consumer” needs to be counterbalanced by stories from the “real” China.

The discovery of Chinese cinema certainly takes place through the festival circuit, and so to a large extent does the discovery of China itself. Films and festivals indeed construct, suggest, and sustain certain narratives of countries. It is fascinating to see this process of “translating” and “unfolding” a culture at work. Here, I show how the putative scenarios related to China’s current “breakthrough” define the variety of festivals and other events that facilitate the “translation.” I identify three types of festivals: the cultural diplomacy festival, the corrective festival, and the business card exchange festival. I explore each in its own right, showing how they represent different stakeholder configurations, and in the process further developing my specific approach to the study of film festivals.

This discussion is a concrete extension of some general assertions made in the introduction to my book *The Film Festival Reader*.² I build on the premise that to understand the specifics of a festival, one needs to analyze the unique configuration of its stakeholders, which in this case directly reflects varying existing views of the way China will evolve in the near future. Furthermore, one needs to study how the film festival structures and narrates itself, what its components are, what constitutes the play of power between its participants, and how this play is re-enacted in the time and space of the festival and beyond. To employ a technological metaphor in this technological age, such examination focuses on the festival’s “hardware” (venues, hub), its “software” (films, programming, sidebars),

as well as the “interface” of its components (the coverage, the party). Once a solid understanding of the stakeholder configuration has been established, I believe it will lead to further studies analyzing how the festival inscribes itself into its local context and insinuates itself into the global galaxy of other festivals.

FESTIVALS: SCENARIOS AND STAKEHOLDER CONFIGURATIONS

Most of the festival interest in Chinese cinema and in Chinese film festivals and screenings is, in one way or another, determined by the current global ascent of China, which combines the promise of a booming market with strict censorship. In terms of potential, China today is comparable to Russia during the last years of the Soviet period, except that we are still to see which direction China will go. There are various possible scenarios, yet all the attention is, once again, driven by the prospect of opportunity and not impartial. All this is happening in a general context of relative weakening of the West in the aftermath of the 2008 global economic crisis. In this framework, newly empowered China is a force to be reckoned with. While the rhetoric is one that welcomes China’s arrival, the interest is in seeing China open up to the “free world,” whatever this concept may imply. As a result, the framework is one of selective translation, one in which the “free world” selectively chooses the narratives that come through.

Therefore, depending on the view about China’s “arrival” into the “free world,” I distinguish roughly three groups of Western-based stakeholders with vested interests in how this arrival is managed. These stakeholder groups are linked to three distinct categories of Western-based film festivals and screenings that have sprung up in reaction to the status quo.

The cultural diplomacy festival, the corrective festival, and the business card exchange festival each have a specific constellation of stakeholders. In all three cases, the films, while a necessary component, are not the only definitive factor, and often not the most important one. Each narrates and writes itself in a specific way, to borrow Daniel Dayan’s insightful comment, by seeking to address and influence different facets of public opinion.³

Who are the stakeholders and what is the stakeholder configuration? In the case of film festivals, these include sponsors, partners, board members, guests, audiences, venues (via their respective representatives), journalists,

and so on. It is the specific stakeholder configuration—the relationships between these players—that largely determines what will be the selection of films, what the relative importance of the films in the context of the event will be, which filmmakers will be invited and featured, what concurrent events will happen, what the social program will be, the dress code, the accommodation and meals schedule for the event, the marketing, the media coverage sought, and so on. All these elements, taken together, give the festival a unique profile and create the festival’s “narrative.”

The cultural diplomacy film festival’s main stakeholders hail from what can be described as the cultural diplomacy set. The scenario that underwrites this festival is one that facilitates dialogue between cultures and presents the complexity of new China to attentive Western audiences at an opportune moment, thus enabling wider dialogue and mutual appreciation. No immediate economic or social goals are expressed in this scenario, but a general rapprochement is strongly implied. The typical board for such events would include politicians, high level officials who sit in for their respective organizations, established intellectuals who are at ease with the status quo in both China and the respective Western counterpart, as well as culturally inclined professionals (lawyers, accountants, and doctors). The board members are not paid, but regard what they are doing as a direct extension of their job. The driving force behind the event often includes immigrants who are successfully acculturated and who seek to create self-employment opportunities for themselves. The sponsors are the Chinese authorities (either directly financing the festival or just giving their blessing), and domestic organizations of some power and prestige. The partners are recognized institutions, such as high-profile cultural or political organizations, interest groups, and quangos. Sponsorships and partnerships are frequently donated “in kind” in the form of venues, access, clout, leverage, political influence, and connections—thus substantially enhancing the value of the event, which may be organized on a relatively modest budget. The venues are usually nice central locales, controlled by the cultural institutions involved. Audiences are regular patrons of such venues, extending to include successful immigrants. The program is diverse, often competently curated and generally reflecting a politically correct line with a smattering of tolerable nonconformity. The guests are usually high-profile likable intellectuals, not necessarily from the field of film but able to speak bigger truths beyond film (award-winning writers, spiritual leaders). Concurrent events are not necessarily linked to film, but feature Chinese culture at large. Accommodation and meals are at tested

venues; the dress code is business casual, avoiding glamor but implying stability and respect. The social program for the guests includes cultural sightseeing and a wine reception with high-class catering and perhaps some relaxing music performed by immigrant (or sojourning) Chinese. Concurrent events include concerts, dance performances, or literary readings and are intended to please wider arts constituencies. The publicity is carefully planned and, with a limited budget, reaches out to well-targeted magazines and media that will run serious profiles of the event.

The second type, the corrective festival, has a different set of stakeholders. These are mainly intellectuals from academia, indie filmmaking, critics, and the liberal professions. There are almost no commercial sponsors; rather, assistance is sought from research bodies, including universities and museums, and avant-garde art organizations. Partnerships are entered on an ideological basis and have no commercial dimension. The committee (“board” is too corporate and therefore not used) is unpaid and comes together ad hoc, consisting of like-minded intellectuals of leftist and liberal persuasions. There is heavy reliance on volunteer labor. The venues are often auditoria or other free access community halls, rarely high-profile central spaces provided by arts organizations that represent cutting edge developments in global art. The screenings are free for the most part, and audiences largely consist of college students and intellectuals. The program features mainly indie films, and the invited guests consist mostly of indie filmmakers. The concurrent events are mainly debates on a chosen political issue, and are often of equal importance to the films (and sometimes outshine the films). Accommodation and meals are modest, there is no red carpet or flashlights, and the dress code is emphatically informal. The public social program is mainly limited to the discussions and debates and the party, if any, is intimate and austere (but often involving significant quantities of BYOB, “bring your own booze”). The marketing budget is next to nothing, publicity is of the DIY (“do-it-yourself”)-type and deploys guerrilla-marketing techniques. The media coverage consists of indie websites, word-of-mouth, and blogs. If there are press releases, they are likely to attract reaction mainly from local broadcast media and leftist newspapers if a special approach is made to them, usually through the personal contacts of the organizers. In terms of newsworthiness, such events are treated by the media as “softer than soft”—after all, the festival is not about some co-production treaty that may supposedly benefit “real people.” The narrative that underwrites this type of festival is that China is a duplicitous force that only appears to be opening up but in fact clings

to severe censorship and human rights violations. As a result, the “hidden story” must be brought to light through showcasing corrective narratives found in the respective films.

The third type, the business card exchange film festival, roughly expresses the dream scenario of film industry executives in the West who salivate over the huge Chinese market (and their respective readiness to turn a blind eye on the shortcomings in China’s human rights record). The stakeholder configuration here is profoundly different: mainly corporate-savvy types are initiated into the festival. The board is comprised of influential moneyed and/or networked individuals. The sponsors are large corporations who have readily entered into partnership on the promise of significant returns. The audiences are large and mainstream, because the events take place at centrally located theatrical chains (who often also partner with the festival). The program revolves mainly around what may be perceived as entertainment or blockbuster films. The invitees may be directors but are more likely some glamorous (but uncontroversial) star, as well as industry executives whose names no one knows but who are given star treatment nonetheless. The concurrent events are mainly parties, photo-ops, or high-profile on-stage industry discussions, taking place at ostentatious venues and covered by heavy artillery mainstream news media, with cameras pointed at handshakes in the limelight. Accommodation is at top hotels and meals are at Michelin-starred restaurants (who may often be sponsors or partners). Glamor is of defining importance and the dress code is formal or high-fashion suitable for a photo-op, a required element of the event. The social program consists mainly of parties, as any talk on political issues or artistic matters is treated as boring. Professional PR agencies are often employed, and the publicity is through glossy brochures, dynamic websites, and precisely targeted press releases. The media coverage sought is high profile, and can more often than not be found within the fashion pages of newspapers or multinational lifestyle magazines.

In what follows, I will look at concrete examples of the three types of festivals, following through with Daniel Dayan’s approach to the festival as “collective performance,” defined by norms that are deployed and “translated into behavioral sequences” to scrutinize how a festival performs and talks about itself, as usually reflected in the rhetoric of the event, its promotion, program, guests, and coverage, as well as films.⁴

THE CULTURAL DIPLOMACY FESTIVAL

The cultural diplomacy film festival is nothing new. Most countries sponsor film festivals or screenings that showcase their culture abroad as part of a concerted cultural diplomacy effort. France and Germany are leaders in this respect, and they, as well as other countries (Japan, Turkey, and Israel) realize this task through the institutional backing of their cultural ministries, as well as via designated non-governmental cultural organizations, such as the Goethe Institute, and the Instituto Cervantes.

Back in 2010, in reference to special screening events organized to mark Hu Jintao's visit to the United States and at the Chinese mission to the United Nations in New York, I wrote that "China appears to organize one-off cultural diplomacy events to coincide with diplomatic initiatives but does not sponsor festivals that may be taking place on regular basis."⁵ Even in 2013, when I had the opportunity to give a public lecture on these matters in London, I did not consider the sponsored festival important to China's breakthrough to the West.⁶ However, my thinking has evolved, not least because I have observed several instances that made me realize there is a wider Chinese cultural diplomacy effort than I previously knew about.

Among the many recent instances that altered my thinking, first and foremost was when I picked up the March 2014 issue of the English-language magazine *Where? Paris Monthly Guide*, available at the British Embassy in France and also at various Parisian hotels. The cover announced the visit of "the famous" Shanghai Ballet Company, which I had also seen advertised on posters in the metro. Because I had never heard of this famous ballet before, I thought it was a shortcoming of my education. On opening the magazine, I actually found very little coverage on this visit. It was briefly discussed on page 19 alongside three other events. I also learned that these shows were taking place at the Palais des Sports de Paris, a remote peripheral venue—in other words, not exactly in the heart of cultural Paris. On one hand, the event made it to the cover of the monthly Parisian magazine and was pushed at tourists. On the other, it was not quite an event that would make it to the city's main cultural roster. In general, this is representative of the ambiguous situation of sponsored Chinese culture presence in the West—it appears to merit prominence and attention, but in practice, the reader proceeds with caution.

Turning to film festivals specifically, the most obvious but also the least successful type of sponsored event is the usually clumsy and inept efforts

of the People's Republic diplomats to use cinema to promote China. One example is the two-day long Chinese film festival, traditionally organized by the Permanent Mission of the People's Republic at the United Nations Headquarters in Geneva on the occasion of the UN Chinese Language Day in April. By coincidence, I happened to be visiting the UN Headquarters in Geneva during the festival in April of 2012. My host, an Indian national and an UN veteran public servant, told me that when the festival was first launched years ago, it appeared attractive. However, due to the selection of films, all interest had faded away. The films that screened in 2012 included *Confucius* with Chow Yun Fat, *Close to the Sun*, and *Love, Come Back*.⁷ Indeed, it seemed that few UN employees were flocking to the screenings; the long marble corridors were completely empty and no one rushed to see the films. Even the concurrent lecture on Chinese medicine seemed to draw more attention.

While the above festival and other similar events are directly organized by Chinese diplomats in the West, a host of events are sponsored by partnerships of Chinese organizations and Western cultural institutions, precisely along the lines, I described in the previous section. One such event is the Festival du Cinéma Chinois de Paris (Chinese Film Festival in Paris, <http://www.pariscff.com>), established in 2004. The festival's website does not list sponsors but rather provides "friendly links" to the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of the People's Republic of China (SAPPRFT, <http://www.sarft.gov.cn>), the China Film Archive (<http://www.cfa.gov.cn>), and the Beijing International Film Festival (<http://www.bjiff.com>). The French counterparts are respectively the City Hall of Paris, the French Ministry of Culture and Communications, and the Cannes Film Festival.

This festival in Paris takes place in late October and features a combination of recent films, archival finds, shorts, animation, and workshops. As with many similar events, even if formally run by a "foundation," it seems to be a one-person project in practice—in this case, of British Chinese artist Deanna Gao.⁸ Based in the prestigious and costly 16th arrondissement, Ms. Gao has established very good local connections in Ile-de-France and has managed to involve competent and reputable French such as Juliette Binoche and Serge Bromberg of Lobster films. She has also capitalized on links within the diaspora as well as with archives. In 2013, the highlight of the program was the panorama of early documentaries, from the 1930s to 1940s, of director Sun Mingjing (1911–1992).⁹ Quite appropriately, the festival aims to reach out to non-Chinese audiences. Therefore, the venues

it uses (La Pagode, Max Linder, and Le Lincoln) are located nowhere near the concentrations of Chinese-speaking population in Paris in the 13th arrondissement and Belleville, but rather in upscale neighborhoods mainly populated by white and upper middle-class French—the so-called *bo-bos* or bourgeois-bohemians. The programming is predictably neutral, and includes archival selections, children’s fare, and cine-concerts, as well as recent mainstream releases. These have included *American Dreams in China* and *Guns and Roses*, an anti-Japanese guerilla-comedy-thriller-cum-martial arts film. The latter was screened in the presence of the festival’s “ambassador,” Chinese actress Tao Hong, who had just arrived from a similar cinematic-diplomatic mission in Brazil. Predictably, the guests of the festival include officials from China and France whose names no one beyond film administration circles would ever know, and everything else, including partners, media coverage, and so forth, is more or less in line with my aforementioned general descriptions of the elements composing the sponsored festivals.

It is noteworthy, however, that in 2011 a new Festival du Cinéma Chinois en France (<http://www.festivalducinemachinois.com>) was launched in Paris, sponsored by SAPPRT and the Chinese Cultural Centre, with French organizations such as CNC (Centre National du Cinéma) and Pathé.¹⁰ This festival takes place in even more mainstream cinemas, opening at the Gaumont-Marignan on the Champs Élysées. It is attended by even higher profile stars closely linked to fashion and mainstream media, such as Gong Li, and Catherine Deneuve. It then travels to six other cities across France, from Strasbourg to Biarritz. The French co-chair for the 2014 edition is Pathe’s Jérôme Seydoux, currently number 39 on France’s rich list.¹¹ The program consists mainly of big budget films, apparently chosen by People’s Republic of China (PRC) representatives. Media and corporate partners include CCTV, Xinhua, *People’s Daily*, Air China, Huawei, and Bank of China, among others. Apparently, the older festival run by Deanna Gao, while still receiving sponsorship, is now regarded as insufficiently high-profile to manifest China’s newfound soft power, so both the Chinese and French authorities have decided to sponsor only one national film showcase. The situation in France is that normally SAPPRT attempts to maximize the spread of China’s soft power by only sponsoring one festival per country, as confirmed by our Paris-based colleague Flora Lichaa.¹² The Mairie de Paris also only sponsors one Chinese film festival, per their policy to sponsor one festival per country.

Whereas these two Paris-based festivals are a clear fit for the cultural diplomacy festival, it is important to note that there are hybrid variations, where more veiled forms of sponsorship can be observed. For example, all events assisted by the local Confucius Institute could be regarded as indirectly sponsored by the Chinese authorities (along the lines of sponsorship by the British Council or Goethe Institute). Once one analyzes festivals more closely, more and more instances of such indirect sponsorship can be discovered. There are also numerous corporations with strong Chinese interests, which engage in film festival sponsorship. While on the surface these appear as private and corporate sponsorships, in fact it is another veiled form of support given with the government's blessing.

Yet another context in which this kind of sponsorship comes through is the number of variations on Western-programmed Chinese-language cinema showcases that do not necessarily focus on the PRC, but rather feature a combination of films from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and sometimes other territories. An example is the Toronto International Film Festival's *A Century of Chinese Cinema* showcase, which also formed the basis for related events like those held at the University of California, Los Angeles, in 2013, or at the British Film Institute in London in 2014. In all such cases, there is indirect official Chinese sponsorship via corporations. But, when films from the PRC are scheduled alongside films from Taiwan in contexts that are out of line with the PRC's official position, it becomes clear that the PRC authorities are willing to turn a blind eye when pragmatism suggests it.

THE CORRECTIVE FESTIVAL

The corrective festival is a variation on the activist festival and performs itself as such; it can range from angry disclosure of injustices to gentle presenting of original curatorial visions. The activist film festival is the subject of a collection Leshu Torchin and I worked on back in 2012. In our respective contributions to the volume, we tried to offer definitions and discussion of its particularities, ranging from its intent to "providing a pulpit" and "building context" through to their specific stakeholders, global activist film circulation through festivals, and the distinctive conduits that have emerged in the Internet era.¹³ Activist festivals operate on the assumption that film can change the world. The core motivation is advocacy, which can be slanted in different directions. However, it usually proceeds from an assumed absence of "truthful" or "complete"

representation, and the implied presence of “incorrect” and “partial” representation in the efforts of official cultural diplomacy, or the “sponsored” festival. The premise is that cultural diplomacy’s officially sanctioned selections, by default, exclude critical representations, and are therefore biased and one-sided. To realize a “truer representation,” the program must be put together by detached and independent curators. The objective is to challenge and enrich the official narrative by complicating it and bringing snubbed themes and disregarded storylines to light.

The rhetoric usually revolves around terms such as “real” image (as opposed to manipulated or one-sided), “unveiled” (as opposed to censored, controlled) or at least one that is “complex” and thus “comprehensive.” The festival puts forward a specific curatorial concept and showcases a selection of films that, alongside carefully planned talks, are meant to represent certain realities and thus correct biased media coverage and mainstream discourses.

Besides its specific motivation, curatorial slant, and political message, the corrective festival actively seeks to cultivate an audience and educate it; concurrent discussions and events are often more important than the films. Key stakeholders here are intellectuals who normally possess a certain critical mass of knowledge but are, by default, not in a position of power. They neither have nor want to have any political or commercial affiliations, so the only thing they can do is to insert alternative narratives. This determines the types of people who are recruited to the planning committee (individuals who are similarly detached and independent), the partners (most frequently the venue that hosts the event), and the sponsors. The interests of mainstream festival stakeholder groups, such as industry or city authorities, are not served here, whereas the featured filmmakers often have a higher degree of involvement than usual, and so do specialist media.

The way the festival writes and performs itself revolves around the dichotomy of real and hidden. The “corrective” slant is often reflected in the very title of the event, as in the Reel China@NYU Documentary Festival. The seventh edition of this biennial event took place in April 2014.¹⁴ Another example would be Forbidden No More: The New China in Ethnographic Film Festival and conference, which took place at Haverford College in Pennsylvania in February 2012. It focused on new ethnographic films about contemporary China and featured films that explore “the changing social landscape of China.” Made by both Western and Asia-based filmmakers, the selection of films is meant to “consider

contemporary China through a myriad of lenses.” Similarly to Reel China’s website, the Haverford event’s website lists a variety of typical sponsors and partners.¹⁵ Here, of course, the title of “forbidden no more” is a marketing tool used by the curators of the event to suggest that their “exhibition” will provide a remedial insight beyond the one-sided and incomplete narrative of the country that is supposedly in circulation due to the restrictive policies and moves of cultural diplomacy. The corrective festival is geared toward shaping local public opinion. Its rhetoric often highlights the fact that films shown at the festival may not have been in distribution in China—because, of course, they showcase aspects of reality that the authorities there “do not want you to see.”

Predictably, the program of the corrective festival aims to counterbalance the media coverage of China’s ascent to consumerism. It revolves around critical realist features and documentaries, and it relies on a certain pool of directors, such as Wang Bing, Wu Wenguang, Pema Tseden, Wang Xiaoshuai, and Cui Zi’en.¹⁶ I would even claim that a circuit of such events, enhanced by some generalist or specialist festivals in the West, has functioned (and still does function) as an important springboard for the careers of a number of independent directors, such as Jia Zhangke, Zhang Yang, and Lou Ye.¹⁷ The selection favors films that expose an extensively corrupt system (*Petition; When Night Falls*); revisit painful episodes of history (Wang Bing’s camp film *The Ditch* and *Fengming*); depict the orderly deconstruction of the Communist project (Jia Zhangke’s *Still Life* and *24 City*); explore ‘violent China’ (*Blind Shaft; A Touch of Sin*); or visit forsaken corners of this vast country (*Ghost Town; Yumen*). Often, the films are promoted in the program with a note specifying that the films are not in distribution in China. The documentaries are often designated as “epic,” not least because of overstretched running times. Comments Chris Berry, “Chinese independent documentaries are made neither for TV nor for movie theatres, and have no commercial circulation. As a result, filmmakers are very relaxed about the narratives. There is a sense in which they are made to be watched without budgeting for time ... it means they are all quite distended and loose.”¹⁸

The series *Chinese Realities/Documentary Visions* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York is a high-profile example of the corrective festival. The series ran between May 8 and June 1, 2013, and was curated by distributor Kevin B. Lee, who used to work for dGenerate films and MoMA assistant curator Sally Berger.¹⁹ With a strong curatorial concept, it revolves around documentaries that span over two decades, going as far

back as 1990 with *Bumming in Beijing* and coming up to 2012 with *When Night Falls*). It also uses a number of feature films that fit the “narrative” that the curators want to put forward by having a certain “documentary” quality to them suitable for “correcting the record” (*Story of Qiu Ju; Mama; Old Dog*). As a constructed narrative of the curators’ vision of modern day China, the notes on the event talk of the “proliferation of the ‘reality aesthetic.’” While the rhetoric is mainly about the emergence of “new documentary” and “bracing alternative visions” of “uncensored personal expression” and “newfound fascination with unbridled realism,” the bottom line is that the series aims, by “including state-approved productions, underground amateur videos, and Web-based Conceptual art,” to provide a panoramic vision of China’s epochal transformations.²⁰

THE BUSINESS CARD EXCHANGE FESTIVAL

The scenario that informs this third type of festival is that the West is not interested in China in itself but in China as an opportunity.

The stance of “an opportunity not to be missed” comes through most succinctly in legendary investor Jim Rogers’s appeal—“See their films!”—from *A Bull in China* (2007), the now classical book on investing in what is regarded as the world’s most lucrative market. Credit Suisse’s website claims that Rogers is so bullish he believes educating his daughters about China is the best thing he could do for them. He has bought them DVDs of Chinese films, and has even hired a Chinese nanny so they can master Mandarin. “The most sensible skill that I can give to somebody born in 2003 is a perfect command of Mandarin,” he is quoted as saying.²¹ Antony Boulton, one of Britain’s most successful fund managers, is not far behind. He moved to Hong Kong a few years back to run a new fund called China Special Situations.

It is this mindset that one needs to enter the vast Chinese market and position oneself to ensure an influx of revenues and profits that is behind the business card exchange festival. How is this different from the cultural diplomacy festival? Whereas the latter is designed around ideas of “soft power” and aims to project an image, this one is focused on removing obstructions for the flow not of films but of content (and not of cinema but of entertainment). It is a festival motivated by laissez-faire ideology, and even if it may be seen to flirt with the authorities, it does not want to be sponsored and therefore controlled by them. It is all about straight market talk and, as I have written elsewhere, it is about festivals

that function as “clusters of creativity and commerce” that are meant to bridge “the film industry with politics and other spheres.”²²

The people behind this type of event are the film industry’s big business players, typically Hollywood studios and distributors and some smaller but well positioned European and Asian companies. They also include newly minted Chinese film industry executives who realize they are holding the keys to this extremely desirable territory. Nothing much may have happened yet, but the essential business card exchange that is at the core of such events has been taking place for nearly a decade now.

For example, Cannes International Film Festival is the ultimate industry event of the year where market estimates, audience profiles, and market strategies are discussed. It now routinely holds Asian co-production summits and other events. Correspondingly, its North-American counterpart, Toronto International Film Festival, has established an Asian Film Summit, which charged participants an extra C\$170 in addition to their C\$595 festival passes in 2014. It is likely to create a good additional revenue stream for the festival. Chinese attendees are usually members of the new class of moneyed film industry executives, some rich enough to make it onto the Forbes list or the gossip pages of the Cannes chronicles.

However, there are several events in China that are more important, because it is here that the real gatekeepers entertain and check out avid Western guests on their own territory. The Qingdao International Film Festival, to be held for a first time in September 2016 and organized by tycoon Wang Jianlin’s Dalian Wanda Group in close collaboration with the American Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, may well prove to be the quintessential representative of this category. On the basis of information available at the time of writing, there is every reason to believe that, like the large film festivals in Shanghai and Beijing, the Qingdao festival will probably not become famous for the films. Situated in China, these events masquerade as film festivals organized for the audiences, with films, awards, and all usual attributes of an ordinary festival dedicated to the art of film. In fact, they function as gatekeepers to a lucrative market, where guests are networking, hoping to be one step ahead for the long anticipated moment when China will finally fully open up its vast marketplace for foreign film imports. As “business card exchange” festivals, both Shanghai and Beijing have an idiosyncratic configuration of stakeholders, with an emphasis on industry players and distributors. The festivals’ being “in love with power, prestige and glamour” is just a routine part of

the corporate experience, paired with socialist-style cultural diplomacy and political deal-making.²³

In regard to the festival in Shanghai, Chris Berry observes that in spite of the poor film selection and other paradoxes, “more guests attend from around the world every year, and more of those guests are repeats.”²⁴ Of course, the Shanghai film festival is not about films. Interestingly, even if it features a market, it cannot yet be described as the main festival where one does business, as the deal-making here only started in 2010.²⁵ Shanghai, however, is a place to exchange business cards, meet people, and establish connections early on; it is where Westerners can put their newly printed two-sided English–Chinese business card into the hands of business suited Chinese officials. This is where the “added value” of this festival occurs. The Shanghai Film Market even promotes itself with the slogan, “China’s ONLY film market [sic]”—even if it is still to demonstrate that it does any meaningful business.²⁶ The returning guests at Shanghai would not be put off by the absence of worthy films, as they do not really come for the movies. Many of them do not even come anywhere near the screenings.

In fact, it is no surprise that often one can see more attention given to the parties and the fashion shows that take place at such festivals. Notions of brand-awareness and displays of opulence are more important than the films. The glamor events are indispensable to these film festivals. They are a shaping factor which must be recognized and discussed as such—not least because many of the stakeholders behind the festivals see it as yet another (and good) opportunity for promotion, fundraising, or pure celebration, as opposed to their interest in cinematic art.

A China-focused manifestation of the business card exchange festival is the China Image Film Festival (CIFF), which lists its location as Leicester Square in London and describes itself as “the most influential” and “the most anticipated Chinese theme event hosted abroad.” It has adopted the slogan of “impress the world,” as in “the most influential large-scale Chinese film festival in Europe—China Image, Impress the World.” It is noteworthy that after the fifth event in November 2013, most of the information on the festival seems to have disappeared from the Internet and the former website seems to be defunct at the time of writing in June 2014. The Wikipedia entry does not seem to have been updated beyond 2012. Another stated goal was “cultivating the overseas market”; “CIFF consistently features the best representative Chinese films of the year for overseas audience to experience and perceive.”²⁷

I confess that, in my over ten years of studying festivals, I had never heard of this supposedly “largest Chinese movie feast in Europe,” until hearing Chinese film specialist Chris Berry mention it in 2013, and noting that the above claims have nothing to do with reality; they are all rhetoric designed for financial backers back home. Indeed, even if the festival’s stated goals are to provide the outstanding contemporary Chinese films with an international platform open to the world audience, it is yet another business card exchange platform using the pretext that it would help the Chinese film industry to cultivate the overseas market. China Image’s fifth edition in 2013 screened 20 films and distributed 20 awards. In its coverage of the event, China Daily quoted an Ivor Benjamin, chairman of Directors Guild of Great Britain, according to whom the festival “allows the British audience to see how people ‘live, love, work, fight and die on the strange and exotic land, China.’”²⁸ In fact, the most that this festival does is give London-based film executives an opportunity to exchange business cards with Chinese bureaucratic figureheads (i.e., when the latter are not shopping at Harrods), in the context of hosting the Sino-Anglo Business and Finance Forum at the Houses of Lords, at the Industry Forum and at the closing and opening galas.

On the surface, all the festivals mentioned here are bona fide festivals that “tick all the boxes” for their respective type. However, they are also festivals that mainly service one particular kind of stakeholder, the film business executive, who is not here for the films. At such festivals, industry and political needs lie behind a façade of public service rhetoric. However, it is not particularly difficult to see how the interests of the audiences (brought here to save face) are being neglected, in favor of setting up political and commercial alliances.

CONCLUSION

So what does the future hold? Will people in the West still be interested in the China where Yingying, Zhenzhen, and Fenfen are growing up? What is the likelihood that the great film cultures of China and the West will come closer together in a meaningful way? Which one, if any, of these festivals is likely to endure and which will become extinct?

Unless unforeseeable circumstances dampen the excitement, the “translation” of and interest in China will not only continue, but also grow exponentially. For now, the putative scenarios discussed above are all operating more or less equally: China as a great culture that wants

to control the way it presents itself to the world (“cultural diplomacy”); China as a multi-faceted and unruly territory that needs to be portrayed in all its complexity (“corrective”); and China as lifetime once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to profit (“business card exchange”). Both the cultural diplomacy and the corrective festival still have enough of a head of steam to run for several years. Perhaps surprisingly, it is the business card exchange festival that is most likely to fulfill its function, because it may well soon graduate into a solid deal-making platform. Then, this type of festival may even come to care about the films on the program.

While the corrective film festival showcases (many of which revolve around the dichotomy of officially sanctioned versus independent or censored cinema) are busy with the unswerving project of facilitating the representation and even the “translation” of the “real” China, the pragmatics are likely to keep busy with the sensible down-to-earth project of setting up for business. The rhetoric on freedom, ironically, will most likely be swallowed by the business discourse.

NOTES

1. I am grateful to Chris Berry, Ruby Cheung, and Jean-Michel Frodon for giving me numerous insights into these matters in personal communications in recent years. I would like to acknowledge the assistance of Suroor Alikhan, Hongwei Bao, Tit Leung Cheung, Deanna Gao, Benoit Ginisty, Flora Lichaa, Aaron Magnan-Park, Elena Pollacchi, Luke Robinson, and Sabrina Yu in preparing this text. In addition, my thinking was shaped in conversations with Soo-jeong Ahn, Cho Young-jung, Mark Cousins, Michael Curtin, Jeroen de Kloet, Alex Fischer, Aaron Gerow, Michael Keane, Li Cheuk-to, Gina Marchetti, Markus Nornes, Peter Scarlet, Ma Ran, Julian Stringer, Goran Topalovic, Cindy Wong, Esther Yau, and Zhen Zhang.
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Programming China at the Hong Kong International Film Festival and the Shanghai International Film Festival

Ran Ma

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, film festival studies have increasingly shifted its attention to looking at the curatorial agendas and programming practices at festivals. In the anthology *Coming Soon to a Festival near You—Programming Film Festivals*, Jeffrey Ruoff echoes Marijke de Valck¹ by characterizing global film festivals as having a mode of “authored programming.” Here, the festival curator or programmer is celebrated as the “auteur, critic, historian” who would not only interact with an “ideal spectator” but also “intervene in the discourse of film history” by extending “archival endeavours” and identifying new trends in global cinemas.² Nevertheless, if we could borrow Boris Groys’s insight into contemporary art curatorial practice that programming constitutes an *illustration* that makes the selected film works “become visible,”³ then this gesture involves complicated mechanisms of visibility that cannot be adequately addressed by simply exploring authorial motivations on the part of programmers, directors, and stakeholders who manage to “keep the show running.”⁴ Important

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though those motivations are, I propose that programming can also be understood as the dynamic, networked process through which a specific film festival articulates its politics of participation, agenda-setting, and positioning within the film festival circuit. This process is realized through its spatial and temporal manifestations, the choreography of events, and logistics. As film festivals have become highly institutionalized and professionalized within the global cultural economy, programming accordingly tends to index and negotiate these processes by diversifying the selection of films, enriching pre- and after-programming events and registering self-referential cycles in, for instance, promoting “festival films.”⁵

“Programming China” examines how the mechanisms and politics of visibility are demonstrated and practiced in the programming of Chinese-language cinemas—specifically films from the People’s Republic of China (PRC) at film festivals held at Hong Kong and Shanghai. The Hong Kong International Film Festival (HKIFF) is a unique case of a film festival that has navigated the British colonial era and redesigned itself since 1997 in the unparalleled polity, the Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the PRC. Meanwhile, the Shanghai International Film Festival (SIFF) was established in the early 1990s, when the Chinese film industry underwent intensified reform and restructuring into the market economy. Currently it figures as a model for other Chinese official film festivals to follow and compete with.

My survey, which focuses more on the HKIFF, first concerns how both festivals are institutionally and discursively connected with Chinese national cinema, or the lack thereof. Here, I understand programming as discourses and practices to “make visible” the festival’s entangled (dis)connections with the national in its “multiple, proliferating, contested, and overlapping” manifestations.⁶ As Chris Berry contends, “we face innumerable different Chinese senses and instances of the ‘national’ in Chinese cinema” and “any attempt to account for the national in Chinese cinema must engage with the potentially endless project of distinguishing and explaining each of these senses and instances.”⁷ Therefore, I turn to each festival’s fraught attempts and experiments in leveraging its connections to China in terms of three interrelated and sometimes overlapping aspects: (1) Chinese film culture, specifically embodied as the discursive trope and thematization of a certain body of Chinese-language films; (2) China, the party-state, grasped in the festival’s negotiation with the Chinese state’s ideological constraints and bureaucratic regulations; and (3) Chinese film

industries, focusing on the festival's role as marketplace and its integration into variously scaled industrial schemes.

This survey also interrogates how the festivals situate themselves in relation to regional as well as global festival networks, as manifested in their programming of PRC mainstream and independent films. Furthermore, this chapter draws attention to how each festival translates, modifies and strategizes international trends and norms for film selection and scheduling in enhancing its competitive edge regionally and globally. On one hand, programming at HKIFF and SIFF has indexed each festival's encounter with the transforming trajectories of the global festival system by following the models and practices of the European and American festivals. For instance, HKIFF was originally modeled after London International Film Festival, known as "the Festival of Festivals." In mainland China, however, it was not until late 1980s, with the intensification of the opening-up and economic reform, that film exhibition and screening events were officially launched, named, conceptualized and modeled as "*dianyingjie*," or "film festivals."⁸ On the other hand, when international models and standards of programming are practiced locally, the dynamics of translation should not be simply evaluated in terms of sameness or equality. Rather, as Anna Tsing argues in another context, difference is "both a pre-established frame for connection and an unexpected medium in which connection must find local purchase."⁹ I highlight difference in local programming practices; arguably, it is through negotiating these differences that the local has developed linkages with regional and global film festival networks.

Last, although not the focus of this chapter, "Programming China" also demonstrates that host cities such as Hong Kong and Shanghai (and also South Korea's Busan) have used film festivals to strengthen their status as what Michael Curtin calls "media capitals"¹⁰ by structuring transnational flows of media and capital in this region.¹¹ In his short note, Abe Markus Nornes interrogates the Eurocentrism of the international film festival circuit and concisely maps out why Asian film festivals matter. Although this chapter is not focused on HKIFF and SIFF's contributions to the consolidation of "regional synergies and distribution networks" in Asia,¹² the study of both festivals' programming looks beyond China and Chinese film cultures to illustrate the value of Asian film festivals as crucial players in circulating and promoting Asian cinemas, which have also profoundly transformed local and regional film cultures.

HONG KONG INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (HKIFF)

This study tentatively chronicles the development of HKIFF into three stages: (1) the foundational period, from 1977 to 1997, namely its year of establishment to the year marking the transfer of sovereignty back to the PRC; (2) the period of transition, from 1997 through 2004, during which the festival, while remaining affiliated with the Hong Kong government, gradually experimented and adapted to the cultural economies of the new polity of the Hong Kong SAR; and (3) the period of post-corporatization, since 2005. In 2004, the festival was restructured as a non-profit and non-government organization called The Hong Kong International Film Festival Society (HKIFFS). While acknowledging that the handover year of 1997 profoundly impacted Hong Kong's sociocultural and political life as a whole, we should realize that the operating apparatus of HKIFF was not fundamentally altered before corporatization. Changing patterns of HKIFF's programming can be observed through these three periods, within which its programming of PRC cinemas can be located.

First, programming during the foundational period emphasized Asian cinema, while also introducing world cinema and international auteurs to Hong Kong audiences.¹³ Originated in a flourishing cosmopolitan cinephile culture, HKIFF came into being when "there were no international film festivals in Asia, and few Asian films were shown in festivals" anywhere worldwide.¹⁴ According to Stephen Teo, the international profile of HKIFF in the 1980s was considerably enhanced by the fact that foreign film professionals could discover new Asian titles and talents here.¹⁵

The transitional period witnessed the festival's steady growth as an audience-oriented festival. However, the mushrooming of international festivals in this region between the 1990s and early 2000s challenged HKIFF's prestige as a platform for Asian cinemas. To be more specific, as the festival evolved, its "pan-Asianism" was not effectively reinforced and institutionalized until the festival was "forced to respond to the wider film festival world, especially as defined by regional integration and competition in East Asia."¹⁶ We therefore can also situate the festival within the global festival network of the same period, specifically the realignment of regional power relation triggered by the Busan International Film Festival (BIFF). Founded in 1996 and driven by the phenomenal success of Korean cinema and the Korean government's substantial support for enhancing the international visibility of its national film industry onto a world arena, BIFF rapidly became a leading Asian festival. During this

period, HKIFF diversified their programming of Chinese films by setting up several independent cinema-centered categories.

Since corporatization in 2005, HKIFF has reconceptualized its programming agenda, which now advocates a pan-Chinese cinema assembling films from the mainland, Hong Kong, and Taiwan and through which it also seeks to regain a privileged status among rival Asian film festivals. Specifically, this period sees contrasting trajectories among Hong Kong cinema, Taiwanese cinema, and Chinese independent films. The programming of Chinese-language films on one hand coincides with the decline of Hong Kong cinema and outbursts of popular auteurs and genres from Taiwan.¹⁷ On the other hand, 2004 also marked the year of thaw (*jiedong*) for Chinese independent cinema. After late 2003, the Chinese cultural authorities in the form of the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT)¹⁸ and its Film Bureau made it more possible for independent filmmakers to apply for screening permits, therefore legitimizing their works. These policy revisions need to be understood in association with the Chinese state's decision to deepen film industry reform after 2000.¹⁹ At the same time, the festival's Asian cinema programming ambitions have been translated into setting up the Asian Film Awards' flagship event and consolidating its Asian cinema-centered film project market.²⁰

The programming of PRC films at HKIFF during these three periods needs to be analyzed from two angles. First, we could understand the festival's tripartite China connections to the mainland, Hong Kong, and Taiwan through its programming. While the selection of films has been made by experienced programmers and consultants based on a wide spectrum of criteria and channels, the process needs to be located historically within sociocultural and political exchanges, influences, and even confrontations. These interactions have involved the Chinese party-state, the mainland's film industries, and the Hong Kong festival, as well as various players in the wider Chinese-language film world. Second, the history of programming PRC cinemas at HKIFF can also be viewed as part of the festival's engagement with the world festival system, particularly its Asian counterparts.

The Foundational Period

HKIFF came into being when world film festivals were already embracing an era of programmers. European and American festivals set the trend for claiming autonomy in discovering films and arranging screenings from

national committees. At this time, the festival was organized by the Urban Council, a government bureau in charge of providing multifarious services for the citizenry of Hong Kong. As early as the second HKIFF in 1978, the council started to hire programmers to coordinate both its international and retrospective sidebars. Although it had no responsibility to set agendas for a national cinema, HKIFF also functioned as a vital platform for defining and promoting Hong Kong cinema and a local film culture through programming, archiving in the form of publications, and orchestrating pedagogical and cinephile events.²¹ It is important to note that because it was an audience-centered film festival, the HKIFF did not set up a competition section until the introduction of a Fédération Internationale de la Presse Cinématographique (FIPRESCI, or International Federation of Film Critics) Award in 1999.

Two PRC entries debuted at HKIFF in 1981: *Anxious to Return* (1979) by the Third Generation film director Li Jun and *Look, What a Family!* (1979), a light comedy by the Fourth Generation female filmmaker Wang Haowei. Neither film was new. Produced in 1979, both showcased the production level of the recently restarted state-owned studios in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution. They were part of a limited repertoire sent by the Chinese state to festivals worldwide in the early 1980s. It should be made clear that it was not until the emergence of underground filmmaking in mainland China in the early 1990s that Chinese filmmakers ventured into submitting works to international film festivals without seeking official permits. Prior to that, PRC's entries were invariably sanctioned and submitted to the international festivals through the Chinese cultural authorities. During this period, the presence of officially recommended Chinese films at HKIFF might at best signify an enriched dimension of the festival's overall programming agenda to showcase Asian cinemas, despite the fact that they were not directly picked by the programmers.

The ninth HKIFF in 1985 brought Chen Kaige's *Yellow Earth* (1984) to global attention.²² Pondering the phenomenal rise of the Fifth Generation and the "rebirth" of Chinese cinema, Tony Rayns emphasizes the active role that film festivals play by stating, "the world network of international film festivals (backed up by art-cinema distributors and TV buyers) minimizes cultural barriers and puts films into global circulation very efficiently."²³ The "discovery" of the Fifth Generation has twofold significance regarding the programming of PRC cinemas at HKIFF. First, for the following editions, the mainland Chinese lineup mostly consisted of films by Fifth Generation auteurs such as Tian Zhuangzhuang, Huang

Jianxin, Zhang Junzhao, Wu Ziniu, and Zhang Yimou. Second, maybe unlike the situation with other discovered national cinemas, new titles by the Fifth Generation would often move on to premiere at more prestigious festivals, such as Cannes, Berlin, and Venice and compete for their Grand Prix. Without any competition section of its own yet, HKIFF became one of only many nodes that relayed the award-winning Chinese films into global circulation.

In the 1990s, the HKIFF started to shift its attention to the PRC's developing independent film movement that converged creative thrusts from the realms of both documentary and fiction filmmaking. Although Hong Kong was then rarely a site for a world premiere and only one stop on a Chinese indie's international tour, HKIFF was one of the few locales in Greater China to screen these independent titles. Therefore, it was a crucial platform for these underground works to engage with a Chinese-speaking audience, however limited it may have been. In addition, the programming gesture of highlighting Chinese independent cinema was not without its political resonances. It may firstly speak of Hong Kong society's complicated relationship with a post-Tiananmen China; a motherland to which it was destined to be returned. Perhaps independent cinema's naturalist approach to recording contemporary China's urbanization and modern transformations, as well as marginalized social groups and subjects, carved out a space of critique and dissent that could resonate with HKIFF audiences, most of whom are cosmopolitan middle-class. Second, the programming of independent titles spiced up the previously bland relationship between the festival and the PRC cultural authorities. In the mid-1990s, the Film Bureau uncompromisingly punished film outlaws who "illegally" screened their films overseas. For Hong Kong, surpassing the Chinese censor and screening Chinese independent films registered the festival's programming autonomy. The issues surrounding these titles also foreshadowed the local cultural and political problems embedded in the "one country, two systems" apparatus that followed the PRC takeover. For instance, at the 18th HKIFF in 1994, the Chinese state responded to the festival's "inappropriate" programming by forcibly withdrawing nine entries that did not acquire proper papers before they were sent to Hong Kong.²⁴ According to Stephen Teo, the standoff between the programming staff and Chinese film officials "became something of a deadly exercise over the remaining years of 1990s."²⁵ Viewed in a different light, the festivals' notoriety, owing to its frictions with the Film Bureau, was also leveraged as its symbolic ideological edge to boost its sociopolitical profile

as protector of and advocate for film, art, and freedom of artistic expression. Since 1994, despite the Film Bureau's warnings and threats, HKIFF even celebrated its intransigence by programming even more mainland independent titles that were not submitted to the authorities.

Into a Pan-Chinese Cinema

Since the late 1990s, HKIFF has gradually distinguished the programming of mainland Chinese films, most of which are independent titles, by locating them in new independent and digital filmmaking sidebars. In 1999, HKIFF introduced a sidebar titled "The Age of Independence: New Asian Films and Video" in collaboration with the Wanchai-based Hong Kong Arts Centre, which could be considered a timely response to the emerging wave of digital filmmaking along with the introduction and popularization of digital video cameras across Asian countries. Such programming strategies have also testified to the growing international recognition of Chinese independent cinema on the global film festival circuit, foreshadowing the launch of a section called "Chinese Renaissance" (*zhongguo xintiandi*) in 2005 at the 29th HKIFF; and between 2005 and 2008, it constituted a major category exhibiting the latest works of Chinese independent cinema.

We could understand these programming advances from several perspectives. First, between the 1997 handover and 2003, the institutional organization of the HKIFF went through a period of change and disorientation, before the festival finally restructured itself into an "independent nonprofit entity" in 2004. However, despite this change, major funding still comes from the government through the Art Development Council. Accordingly, its team of programmers also underwent a process of readjustment during the institutional transition.²⁶

Second, as previously mentioned, the rise of the BIFF after 1996 generated a model for regional festivals to emulate and compete with. The multilayered mechanisms contributing to Busan's success have demonstrated how a festival efficiently leverages its linkages with the local (the port city of Busan), the national (national cinema and its cultural industry), the regional (Asian film industries), and even the global. This success has encouraged, if not forced, other Asian film festivals, including HKIFF, to re-evaluate and reposition themselves accordingly. For example, since its inaugural edition, Busan has aggressively pursued a pan-Asian focus by setting up a competition category called "New Currents" that endorses

debut or sophomore works by Asian filmmakers. For the 2003 HKIFF, after setting up the FIPRESCI award in 1999, the festival installed three film awards, namely Firebird Awards for Young Cinema, Asian DV (Digital Video) Competition, and Humanitarian Awards for Documentaries. These became new slots for Chinese independent titles. In so doing, HKIFF also participated in the global trend of multiplying festival awards and programs to attract promising film works and talents, a proven mechanism to sustain the healthy cycle of creativity and to maintain the festival's profile in the attention economy. Furthermore, HKIFF joined several other Asian festivals that highlighted the potential of DV: from its inaugural year of 2000, South Korea's Jeonju International Film Festival (JIFF) has run a Jeonju Digital Project financing and producing three digital shorts; Japan's Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival allowed video works into its competition category for the first time in 2001; and in 2003, two Chinese independent film festivals were respectively launched at Kunming (Yunnan Multi Culture Visual Festival, also known as Yunfest) and Nanjing (China Independent Film Festival), both of which presented a lineup of mainly DV documentaries and narrative films.

Following both global and regional programming trends, HKIFF has gone further since 2005 to experiment with new ways of distinguishing itself. In 2007, the already privatized HKIFFS integrated the HKIFF, the Hong Kong-Asia Film Financing Forum (HAF, established in 2000) and the Asian Oscar-like Asian Film Awards (AFA, established in 2007), followed two years later in 2009 by a campaign of rebranding and repackaging. Accordingly, the marketing "acrobatics" were devised to "better position the HKIFF and to make sure that it continued to be relevant" when faced with its Asian rivals.²⁷ It is also tempting to consider this rebranding as part of the SAR government's city-marketing campaign of "Brand Hong Kong" starting in 2001 to present Hong Kong as "Asia's World City"—"a natural, vital and multicultural gateway not only to and from China, but also to the rest of Asia and beyond."²⁸

Worth further thought is the rebranded HKIFFS claim to promote "international appreciation of Asian, Hong Kong and Chinese film culture (*huayu dianying wenhua*)."²⁹ How should we understand the festival's foregrounding of its regional significance? In particular, how do we make sense of its proclaimed mission as an advocate for Chinese-language (*huayu*) film culture?

As evidence of its declared dedication to "Chinese film culture," an umbrella section of Pan-Chinese Cinema (*huayu dianying*, hereafter

PCC) was set up in 2009 to merge three existing sidebars: Hong Kong Panorama, Chinese Renaissance, and Young Taiwanese Cinema. However, in order to avoid political controversies caused by the designation of “country of origin” when listing basic information for films from the three Chinas, since 2002, the HKIFF has started to only tag the “language” of the entries: Putonghua (Mainland China), Mandarin (Taiwan), and Cantonese (Hong Kong). Nevertheless, the “pan-Chinese” banner speaks to HKIFF’s ambition to secure its leading role among film festivals in Greater China. Hardly any other international festival in the PRC or Taiwan could program and present Chinese-language cinemas on a similar scale or with equal dynamism. This issue will be returned to in the section on SIFF. Between the 33rd edition in 2009 and the 38th in 2014, HKIFF was experimenting schizophrenically in programming a plurality of Chinese cinemas in its PCC laboratory. In 2011, Chinese Renaissance was absent from PCC; in the next year, the whole PCC section disappeared. In 2013, PCC had a high-profile comeback with four sub-sections, with Chinese Renaissance renamed as Chinese New Talent (a collection of four independent films from PRC) and the addition of Wings Project. Initiated by independent filmmaker and producer Jia Zhangke, this was a collection of four features by young Asian filmmakers. In 2014, PCC only accommodated Hong Kong Panorama and Young Taiwanese Cinema, with the mainland Chinese entries dissolved into other sections, such as a retrospective dedicated to the filmmaker, Jiang Wen.

To some extent, the flexible deployment of PCC illustrates the fundamental programming logistics of balancing the cycle of film production and the effort to discover worthwhile titles on the programmers’ part. Also, the trifurcated geopolitical categorization adopted by PCC might be itself a *modus vivendi* for programming Chinese-language films, given the fact that transnational co-productions between these three locales have become quite common. In keeping this categorization unfinalized and unstable, the programming reflects this transnational potential. A good example might be *American Dreams in China* (2013) by Hong Kong auteur Peter Chan: placed in the Hong Kong Panorama at HKIFF 2014, it is actually a mainland-Hong Kong co-production, with its leading protagonists predominantly speaking Putonghua and English. Indeed, it is important in this regard to note that, since 2005, interventions from the Chinese cultural authorities have become less visible. This change is less

an indicator of weakened censorship than a reflection of the complicated industrial and institutional disposition of the various strands composing PRC cinema nowadays. For instance, with the influx of private capital into the independent film sector, many Chinese independent filmmakers and producers now do seek screening permits before participating in festivals overseas, blurring the old definition of the “Chinese indie.” Nevertheless, this is not to suggest that HKIFF’s programming vision has become conservative or been “tamed.”

Though the current NPO (non-governmental organization) status of HKIFF does not guarantee total programming independence from Chinese censors, the festival can still take advantage of Hong Kong’s SAR status to retain relative autonomy in programming controversial independent titles. In 2010, not only the uncut versions of two highly controversial documentary works, Zhao Liang’s *Petition* (2009) and Xu Xin’s *Karamay* (2010) were screened, but also both filmmakers showed up for discussion. In 2009, the indie cinema-themed online forum fanhall.com (xianxiangwang) was closed down for two months because it posted interviews with Zhao Liang, who had spent 12 years making this brave work. In this 315-minute director’s cut, Zhao documents his subjects’ harrowing and nightmare-like experiences as homeless groups living in suburban Beijing in order to petition for justice from the central petition office.³⁰

Finally, HKIFF’s China connections need to be understood in industrial terms, by studying HKIFF’s strategic incorporation of a platform for Asian projects. HAF was taken over by the festival in 2006 and has gradually established itself as a venue, facilitating capital flow and talent exchanges between the three Chinas via co-production projects and diversified financing opportunities. As a result, the presence of PRC films at HKIFF goes beyond its exhibition strands to include projects pitched at HAF. Once realized, these shortlisted projects could extend HAF and HKIFF’s transnational networking as they circulate on the worldwide festival circuit. In addition, while leveraging its enhanced global profile, HAF may in turn open up new funding opportunities and help PRC projects develop co-production partners, further locking them into the film festival circuit. For example, the 2014 HAF gave its new Fushan Documentary Award to Chinese auteur Zhao Liang’s new documentary project titled *Dust*. Retitled as *Behemoth* (2015) upon receiving this award, it appeared in the competition category at the 2015 Venice International Film Festival as a Sino-French co-production.

SHANGHAI INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (SIFF)

It would be impossible to understand the mechanisms and problematics of programming at the SIFF without first understanding the PRC's centralized cultural system, of which the festival is part. Approaching SIFF as a "state-sanctioned film festival" demonstrates that its similarity to the many other authorized and state-supported cultural events in China today. The festival must still negotiate an awkward position between the socialist state apparatus, with its top-down regulation and policy implementation through various levels of official bureaus, and the drastically marketized cultural industry where corporatized state-owned entities and private firms mingle. From its foundation year of 1993 until 2002, SIFF was biennial; since 2004, it has been annual, although its 2003 edition was canceled because of the SARS outbreak. In the 2000s, besides core organizers the Chinese Film Bureau and the municipal government of Shanghai, entities such as the Shanghai Municipal Administration of Culture, Radio, Film & TV and the media conglomerate Shanghai Media & Entertainment Group (SMEG, *Shanghai wenguang chuanmei jituan*) have also become involved. In 2006, SMEG founded a branch called Shanghai International Film and Television Festival Co. Ltd (*guoji yingshijie gongsi*) to take charge of its festival enterprises—namely the film festival and an international television festival.

Meanwhile, because authorized status as a *dianyingjie* (film festival) in the PRC implies a whole set of strict censorship and administrative procedures, SIFF needs to be contrasted to another type of Chinese festival that the official label of "*dianyingjie*" fails to register—independent film festivals that have specialized in programming Chinese independent films since the early 2000s.

SIFF's aspirations as an "international" festival have been translated into a set of knowledge-transfer strategies by aggressively participating in globally standardized organizational frameworks and programming practices. Upon its establishment, the festival took initiative in applying for accreditation by FIAPF (*Fédération Internationale des Associations de Producteurs de Films* or International Federation of Film Producers). It won A-List status (also known as the "Competitive Feature Film Festivals"). Unlike the HKIFF, SIFF's main *Jinjue* (Golden Goblet) competition category, for which it usually selects 16 films, has existed since its inaugural edition in 1993, in order to meet FIAPF's basic requirements for A-list accreditation. Such maneuvers have sped up the festival's entry into the global

festival system despite its late establishment. However intriguing or controversial it might be, SIFF both claims earlier FIAPF-accredited A-list festivals such as Venice, Berlin, and Cannes as models and sees itself as a potential competitor. As I have previously outlined, it also signifies how the cosmopolitan city of Shanghai views itself within a network of rival media capitals. This testifies to Julian Stringer's argument that it is cities rather than national film industries that "act as nodal points" on the international film festival circuit.³¹

Programming China at SIFF

Approaching SIFF's programming proves challenging. Criticized by French critic Jean-Michel Frodon as "functioning far below the reasonable expectations of programming," SIFF's elusive programming mechanisms and rationales are typical of a state-sanctioned film festival in the PRC.³² On one hand, SIFF engages with diversified strands of PRC cinemas through its shifting programming schemes, which actually come to accommodate and highlight budding Chinese talents and works from the independent sector. On the other hand, SIFF translates the international ideals and standards of festival programming through the localized practices of *xuanpian*, which is literally equivalent to "programming."

SIFF's programming manifests and negotiates its position within the interwoven power relations of the Chinese state's regulation and bureaucratic confinement, the transforming Chinese film industry and its institutional framework, and the international film festival system and its heterogeneous constituents. To be specific, SIFF's official status inside China requires that it exhibit only Chinese films that have already passed censorship and received a "Film Public Screening Permit" (*dianying gongying xukezheng*, also known as the "Dragon Seal" [*longbiao*]). However, being also defined and confined by its FIAPF A-list status, SIFF necessarily also selects foreign titles. For instance, its *Jinjue* lineup has generally been an eclectic assemblage of predominantly European films and occasionally Asian titles. Despite the constant presence of mainland films in the *Jinjue* competition, they have never won the Best Film award, with the exception of 2002's *Life Show* (2002) directed by Huo Jianqi. SIFF's efforts at international linkage are noticeably out of step with the pace of reform and liberalization in the PRC's film system. The fact that the SIFF's competition films must be submitted to and censored by SARFT has forced the festival to adopt cautious and conservative stances regarding film

selection, even though it has relatively more freedom to choose films for its panorama and other exhibition sections. For example, the state-owned China Film Group Corporation (CFGC) still dominates the import and distribution of foreign films in China. Although CFGC has promised to selectively import films that were positively received at SIFF, it remains questionable how effective SIFF and its film market are in overcoming an inherited and unsatisfactory system, and facilitating connections between the local market and overseas film producers and exhibitors. For instance, as a *Hollywood Reporter* interview with one of the festival programmers in 2011 disclosed, Shanghai's difficulties in attracting world premieres also lie in the fact that chances for theatrical release are hardly guaranteed.³³

As mentioned on the section on HKIFF, 2004 marks the turning point for many previously blacklisted independent filmmakers (such as Jia Zhangke, Wang Xiaoshuai, and Lou Ye) to move above ground and make their first legitimized films. The intensified reform of the Chinese film industry and changes to film policies also allowed SIFF to broaden its programming of Chinese films. Due to the corporatization of SMEG's festival enterprises since 2006, SIFF formed a comparatively more professional and expert programming team under the leadership of Tang Lijun, the former managing director. Arguably, the festival has therefore been given more autonomy to respond to international trends in its programming.

SIFF has mainly placed its Chinese-language and especially PRC films in the Focus China (*jujiao zhongguo*) umbrella category and divided it into three parallel sub-sectors: Movie Channel Media Award (hereafter MCMA), Most Focused Chinese Films, which showcases the latest genre films and award-winning works from the Chinese-language film world, and Chinese New Films (*zhongguo xinpian*), which celebrates and promotes a selection of recently produced small or medium budget films from highly diversified production backgrounds, and especially private firms. Set up in 2004, MCMA is run by the festival together with the CFGC-owned China Central Television Movie Channel, which is also PRC's only national-level movie channel. In 2015 MCMA launched its live broadcast voting jury system: a group of media and film professionals, such as critics, producers, and journalists openly voted and awarded prizes to short-listed films from the sidebar of Chinese New Films. For the 2014 SIFF, while its Most Focused Chinese Films presented more critically acclaimed works such as the Berlinale Golden Bear winner *Black Coal, Thin Ice* (Diao Yinan, 2014), Ning Hao's Chinese Western thriller *No Man's Land* (2013), and several popular titles from Hong Kong, its MCMA showcased

titles such as novelist Quan Ling's directorial debut, a small-budget art-house work produced by Jia Zhangke's company Xstream Pictures and called *Forgetting To Know You* (2013), and Emmy award-winner, Canada-based filmmaker Fan Lixin's latest documentary *I Am Here* (2014), about a reality talent show.

Generally speaking, Focus China has had an inconsistent lineup of Taiwan and Hong Kong titles, indicating SIFF's underdeveloped vision of "pan-Chinese cinema." Through the Chinese New Films and MCMA programs, the festival is also reacting to the changing ecology of the Chinese film industry by cultivating its affiliations with the independent film sector and, specifically, with private production companies. Furthermore, it was also after 2004 that SIFF set up the region-specific *Asian New Talent Award*, another section that accommodates legitimized Chinese independent titles. Probably not unlike the HKIFF, Shanghai's experiments with new awards and new programs are also meant to position the festival to compete with its rivals in Asia.

SIFF's programming of PRC films has two aspects, because, besides choreographing films through various sidebars, "programming" can also be understood to entail coordinating film pitches and co-production projects for its marketplace. Such events are usually only open to a limited circle of festival professionals. However, if SIFF has shown less autonomy and creativity presenting its film lineup due to various institutional constraints, through its forum program, it has launched various events, including seminars, and master-classes. These spaces facilitate and enhance dialogue among film and media professionals and entrepreneurs across a wide spectrum of market, industry, technology, and other topics, usually with a geopolitical emphasis on film cultures and industries in Greater China and Asia.

More importantly, the festival has progressively built up its links with both national and international film industries through its extended marketplace, called SIFFMART. Currently, this consists of the SIFF Market trading platform, which promotes business exchanges across all aspects of film, media and technology, and also the SIFF Project pitching platform. SIFF Project integrated two existing pitching schemes in 2011: Co-production Film Pitch and Catch (Co-FPC) and China Film Pitch and Catch (CFPC). Established in 2006, Co-FPC grew out of the festival's former Sino-European Co-production Film Forum, and had the aim of facilitating co-production opportunities for either Chinese-language projects or overseas projects "with Chinese elements, looking for co-producer

or partner in China” (SIFF). Founded in 2007, CFPC targeted discovering and financing promising film projects by younger generations of filmmakers from the Chinese-speaking world. Each CFPC pitching session assembled eight Chinese-language feature film projects. Their filmmakers were first given the chance to consult with a group of high-profile film professionals (such as veteran producers and directors). The core event featured a 15–20-minute public presentation where the filmmakers and producers would pitch films in front of a jury and festival professionals-cum-audience, followed by a question and answer session in which the presenters would be challenged by both jury and audience members. 2014 saw the SIFF Project framework reconfigured, with the CFPC transformed into the *New Talent Project*, which expanded to accommodate ten Chinese-language projects. This space is only open to debutant or sophomore directors, while the pitching process remains basically the same. Nowadays, major Asian film festivals, such as the aforementioned BIFF, the JIFF, and HKIFF have reinforced their role by becoming not only as an interface for business exchanges, but also producing film projects through their robustly promoted pitching schemes. The Asian Project Market (BIFF), Jeonju Project Market (JIFF) and HAF often lure the applicants with diverse types of awards for projects at different stages of production. Although SIFF cannot screen Chinese independent films that have not obtained screening permits, its pitching forum has actually functioned to co-opt the independent film community by offering marketing and funding opportunities at an earlier stage. Despite its short period of development (2007–2013) and budgetary constraints,³⁴ CFPC and its successor New Talent Project have helped to successfully launch and promote independent art-house projects such as Han Jie’s *Mr. Tree* (also from Jia Zhangke’s Xstream Company), and *The Piano in a Factory* (Zhang Meng, 2010), both of which were featured in the 2009 CFPC, as well as the previously mentioned Berlinale winner, *Black Coal, Thin Ice* (2010 CFPC). Similar to HAF’s strategy in selecting promising Chinese titles that would tour film festivals worldwide, SIFF Project builds the festival’s profile more effectively than simply programming mediocre titles for its *Jinjue* Award.

Xuanpian Versus Programming

Finally, I want to briefly return to Frodon’s observations about SIFF’s below-average programming. Although in Chinese, we understand and

translate “programming” into “*xuanpian*,” and “programmer” as “*xuanpianren*,” it might be necessary to turn to the *gaps and differences* existing between SIFF’s practices and conceptualization of *xuanpian* and *xuanpianren* and the popular understanding of *programming* and *programmer*. Instead of simply emphasizing that A-list festivals in Europe and the USA have presented a “better” and “more authentic” model for programming, I argue that the perceived gaps between “*xuanpian*” and “programming” have not merely mirrored linguistic incongruences in translation but also illustrate SIFF’s negotiation of its position in the global film festival hierarchy both in conceptual and practical terms. Therefore, a more productive approach is to observe how the Shanghai festival has gradually formulated a vocabulary and concepts to articulate its programming ideals as well as practices. It is tempting to argue that it is within the gradual progress of translations and transplantations that the festival is able to both update its operational framework according to the “international trends” (such as installing digital film or short film sections, and adding film award and film markets), and develop local practices and discourses of programming in sync with Chinese sociocultural and political contexts.

Usually, SIFF’s festival catalog provides an Organizing Committee (*zuzhi weiyuanhui*) list of names, composed predominantly of Chinese Communist Party officials, and without mentioning any festival “director” or “programmer.” Prior to 2008, SIFF’s *xuanpianren* team consisted of experts and scholars, some of whom may have had difficulties reading English subtitles. Therefore, the festival had to hire interpreters to assist their understanding. In following years, the selection team was expanded to include film directors, critics, and film theater managers as well as producers.³⁵ For the current SIFF selection process, the team of selectors consists of roughly 100 people, 50 of whom are experts and gatekeepers in charge of evaluation and selection, with the others being mostly post-graduate students at local universities who take care of technical issues and preliminary categorization. There are three stages, the final round of which is the most important since it is then that the basic lineup is confirmed. Furthermore, if entries finally win awards at SIFF or other film festivals, SIFF will cash award the selector who recommends the title.³⁶

The issue of *xuanpianren* at SIFF came to light in May 2014, roughly a month before the 17th edition, when the film festival took the initiative of publishing a long list of “film selectors” (*xuanpianren*) and its “Film Selection Process” (*xuanpianren jizhi*),³⁷ although the whole set of practices had been in place for some time already. In the light of such

a high-profile publicity stunt, it may be surprising to learn that the SIFF used to refuse to acknowledge the very existence of film scouts and selectors, never mind elaborate upon them. If we take into account the collective nature of the film selection process, and that not even the most eminent selector has the authority to independently finalize the competition entries, then it is to the reasons for the eclectic assortment of films at SIFF are clear. On the other hand, however, the semi-democratizing practices of selection also nourish and inform the local cinephile culture, a topic that deserves further academic exploration.

CONCLUSION

Instead of emphasizing the differences between programming orientations and strategies, I argue that both HKIFF and SIFF are closely interwoven into the international film festival network, in the process generating a much more complicated and historically layered landscape of films from the PRC. Indeed, HKIFF also seeks via its programming to pursue “different Chinese senses and instances of the ‘national’.” In particular, the notion of “Chinese film culture” advocated by the rebranded HKIFF exemplifies what Berry describes as “a larger cultural order that can claim to pre-exist the modern nation-state and is often asserted ... as the basis for a supra-state Chinese cultural affiliation.”³⁸ Situated within disparate cultural-political milieus, HKIFF and SIFF necessarily exhibit varied approaches to configuring, reconfiguring, and balancing their China connections to suit each festival’s own positioning, both locally and regionally, in response to the fast-changing reterritorialization of the global film festival network and the accompanying challenges.

NOTES

1. Marijke De Valck, *Film Festivals From European Geopolitics To Global* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007).
2. Jeffrey Ruoff, “Introduction,” in *Coming Soon to a Festival Near You: Programming Film Festivals*, ed. Jeffrey Ruoff (St. Andrews: St. Andrews Film Studies: 2012), 9–10.
3. Boris Groys, *Art Power* (Cambridge: the MIT Press, 2008), 46.
4. Dina Jordanova, “East Asian and Film Festivals: Transnational Clusters for Creativity and Commerce,” in *Film Festival Yearbook 3: Film Festivals and*

- East Asia*, ed. Dina Iordanova and Ruby Cheung (St. Andrews: St. Andrews Film Studies: 2011), 12.
5. Marijke De Valck, "Finding Audiences for Films: Programming in Historical Perspective," in *Coming Soon to a Festival Near You: Programming Film Festivals*, ed. Jeffrey Ruoff (St. Andrews: St. Andrews Film Studies, 2012), 32.
 6. Chris Berry, "From National Cinema to Cinema and the National: Chinese-Language Cinema and Hou Hsiao Hsien's 'Taiwan Trilogy'," in *Theorising National Cinema*, ed. Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemsen (BFI Publishing, London: 2006), 149.
 7. *Ibid.*, 155.
 8. For more on pre-1980s' film festival practices in the PRC, refer to Ma Ran, "A Genealogy of Film Festivals in the People's Republic of China: 'Film Weeks' during the 'Seventeen Years' (1949–1966)," *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 14, no. 1 (2016): 40–58.
 9. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 245.
 10. Michael Curtin, "Media Capital: Towards the Study of Spatial Flows," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 6, no. 2 (2003): 202–228.
 11. Stephanie DeBoer, *Coproducing Asia: Locating Japanese-Chinese Regional Film and Media* (Minnesota, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).
 12. Abe Markus Nornes, "Asian Film Festivals, Translation and the International Film Festival Short Circuit," in *Film Festivals Yearbook 3: Film Festivals and East Asia*, ed. Dina Iordanova and Ruby Cheung (St. Andrews: St. Andrews Film Studies, 2011), 37.
 13. Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong, *Film Festivals: Culture, People, And Power On The Global Screen* (Rutgers University Press, 2011), 204–5.
 14. Roger Garcia, *The 30th Hong Kong International Film Festival* (Hong Kong, Hong Kong International Film Festival Society, 2006), 19.
 15. Stephen Teo, "Asian Film Festivals and Their Diminishing Glitter Domes: An Appraisal of PIFF, SIFF and HKIFF," in *On Film Festivals*, ed. Richard Porton (London: Wallflower, 2009), 110.
 16. Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong, *Film Festivals*, 217.
 17. Scholars have offered insights into the decline of Hong Kong cinema since the 1990s. For instance, for Stephen Teo, the reason mainly lies in the local industry's structural feature of transnationalism: "Promise and Perhaps Love: Pan-Asian Production and the Hong Kong-China interrelationship," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 9, no. 3 (2008): 341–358.
 18. In 2013, the SARFT merged with the General Administration of Press and Publication to become The State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT). This chapter still prefers the older title of SARFT.

19. For further discussions on the reform of Chinese film industry since the 2000s, refer to Emilie Yeh Yueh-yu and William Darrell Davis, "Re-nationalizing China's Film Industry: Case Study on the China Film Group and Film Marketization," *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 2, no. 1 (2008): 37–51.
20. For more on FILMART see Ruby Cheung, 2011. "East Asian Film Festivals: Film Markets," in *Film Festival Yearbook 3: Film Festivals and East Asia*, ed. Dina Iordanova and Ruby Cheung. (St. Andrews: St. Andrews Film Studies, 2011), 40–61.
21. Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong, *Film Festivals*.
22. *Ibid.*, 212.
23. Tony Rayns, "Chinese Vocabulary: An Introduction to *King of the Children* and the New Chinese Cinema," in Chen Kaige and Tony Rayns, *King of the Children and the New Chinese Cinema* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 1.
24. Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong, *Film Festivals*, 213–4.
25. Stephen Teo, "Asian Film Festivals," 114.
26. Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong, *Film Festivals*, 216–7.
27. *Ibid.*, 219.
28. *Brand Hong Kong*, accessed on July 20, 2014, <http://www.brandhk.gov.hk/>.
29. Hong Kong International Film Festival Society, accessed July 20, 2014, <http://society.hkiff.org.hk/>.
30. See interview with Zhao Liang, *Nanbu Zhoukan* [*Southern Weekly*] June 5, 2010, accessed January 11, 2016, <http://www.nbweekly.com/culture/books/201006/12093.aspx>.
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33. Jonathan Landreth, "Shanghai International Film Festival Bows Amid Logistical and Programming Challenges," *The Hollywood Reporter*, last modified on June 11, 2011, accessed August 3, 2015, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/shanghai-international-film-festival-bows-197014>.
34. *Ibid.*, and Ruby Cheung, "East Asian Film Festivals: Film Markets," in *Film Festival Yearbook 3: Film Festivals and East Asia*, ed. Dina Iordanova and Ruby Cheung (St. Andrews: St. Andrews Film Studies, 2011), 50–51.
35. Li Chun. "Shanghai Xuanpianren" [Programmers at Shanghai], [jiemian.com](http://www.jiemian.com), June 16, 2015, accessed Aug 4, 2015, <http://www.jiemian.com/article/305383.html>.

36. Author's interview with one of the SIFF consultants, Wu Jueren in Aug 2014.
37. The English texts are taken from the film festival's official webpage (English version). Refer to the SIFF official report "Behind the Curtain, Who selects the films?" accessed July 20, 2014, <http://www.siff.com/InformationEn/ViewDetail.aspx?ParentCategoryID=94f5c83e-0220-4455-b464-254554e66063&InfoGuid=227986b4-89fb-4645-b3f7-df5261e8533f>.
38. Chris Berry, "From National Cinema," 155.

Clara Law's *Red Earth*: The Hong Kong International Film Festival and the Cultural Politics of the Sponsored Short

Gina Marchetti

International film festivals invest in the production of films—shorts and features—as part of their mission to stimulate innovative filmmaking and keep their own screens replete with fresh work. With decreased funding from government institutions worldwide as a result of neoliberal policies, sponsorship by the private sector has become increasingly important. As a consequence, film festivals face the dual challenge of maintaining the quality of the films they exhibit as well as attracting corporate sponsors and broadening the audience base to make up for the shortfall left by the withdrawal of state funding. Film festivals invest in films by established auteurs for good reasons. While the support of film production seems altruistic, it also enhances the festival's "brand"—displaying its ability to attract elite talent and recognize promising novices. As national funding for art cinema declines in our era of neoliberalism, festivals step in to finance promising works to support their mission of advancing film art, cultivating informed audiences, and, directly or indirectly, contributing to local cultural industries (from the film business to tourism, fashion, advertising, television, music, and newspaper and magazine publishing).

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As the premier international film festival in the Chinese-speaking world, the Hong Kong International Film Festival (HKIFF) has followed this trend by producing films that open locally and travel globally through the festival circuit. Part of this interest in sponsoring films reflects a distinct change after 2005 when the festival separated from the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR)'s government and became a private entity, the Hong Kong Film Festival Society. This move can be seen as part of a general trend away from government sponsorship worldwide, but it also reflects the impact the 1997 change in sovereignty had on the evolution of the festival. The festival has had to adjust to the shifting dynamics of its place in the region since 1997. The People's Republic of China (PRC) has launched its own international festivals in Shanghai and Beijing, eroding HKIFF's role as a gateway to China for the film industry. Regional film festivals with healthy government subsidies, such as the Busan International Film Festival, make it difficult for Hong Kong to compete as well. HKIFF's interest in financing films as part of its mission, therefore, differs in some respects from similar initiatives at other festivals. The commercial incentive of "branding" through film production tells only part of the story, and these productions also serve to assert Hong Kong cinema's independent voice and vision at a time of increasing political and economic pressures from the People's Republic as the most important market for its feature films. HKIFF then balances between mainland China and the rest of the world, and its sponsored shorts act as an example of competing pressures and interests.

In *Film Festivals: Culture, People, and Power on the Global Screen*,¹ Cindy Wong traces the history of HKIFF from its roots as a government initiative to enrich the cultural lives of local residents to its current status as a major regional broker and established, local institution, with an international reputation as a "gateway" for Chinese-language cinema.² In the post-Mao era, the festival has been particularly important in introducing works by the Fifth and Sixth generations of filmmakers from the PRC and also serving as a "neutral" meeting point for Sinophone filmmakers from Taiwan, mainland China, and various places in the Chinese diaspora separated by political as well as geographic borders. Throughout the late British colonial period (1977–97), the festival functioned as part of the local government under the auspices of the Urban Council. After the Handover, HKIFF floated through several government departments, including the Provisional Urban Council, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, and the Arts Development Council.

Although HKIFF has maintained continuity in their key personnel and indirect governmental support through grants and use of public venues, working with private sponsors has been rocky. Cindy Wong notes, for example, that Cathay Pacific Airlines withdrew its support after only two years because the festival was too “niche”—lacking in broad visibility and popular appeal.³ HKIFF responded to their new circumstances by including some competitive sections in what had begun as a non-competitive festival, coordinating with the business-oriented FILMART to allow for overlap between the media marketplace and the festival, creating the Hong Kong-Asia Film Financing Forum (HAF) as a mechanism for bringing filmmakers and financiers together, and promoting the Asian Film Awards (AFA) to bring more glamor to the festival. HKIFF Society also expanded into programming beyond the spring event with retrospectives and other activities throughout the year. Directly producing films with corporate partners is another example of the way in which the festival has responded to these new circumstances by strengthening its ties to corporate donors and enhancing its own “brand” on screen. Films directly commissioned for screening at HKIFF provide only a small piece of the financing puzzle; however, they offer a good example of the increased involvement of festivals in film production and distribution beyond exhibition and marketing.

Since these festival-sponsored motion pictures promote filmmakers cultivated by HKIFF curators, this strategy works well to solidify HKIFF’s place within the circuit as a trendsetter and taste arbitrator between Asia and the rest of the world. To do this, the projects selected for financing generally must “translate” the importance of ethnic Chinese auteurs’ vision to world cinema, and funded films usually boast the imprint of an established regional filmmaker known in Cannes, Berlin, Venice, or Rotterdam.⁴ Funds for younger filmmakers enhance the festival’s reputation for “discovering” new talent and parlaying that into special (and often exclusive) relationships with filmmakers who tend to offer their work to a particular festival on a regular basis.

These funded projects can serve as rallying events for the festival audience. Domestic viewers see how their filmmakers contribute to art cinema, and international visitors have a guaranteed screening of “festival quality” local work to justify the trip to HKIFF rather than to competing festivals in other parts of Asia.⁵ Beginning in 2012, HKIFF produced annual omnibus features called *Beautiful*, collaborating with the Chinese Internet service Youku (the PRC’s version of YouTube, which is banned in China). Many renowned auteurs whose films screened at HKIFF

previously contributed to these projects, including local New Wave directors Ann Hui and Mabel Cheung, Taiwan New Cinema filmmakers Tsai Ming-Liang and Wu Nien-jen, as well as filmmakers from the PRC, Korea, and Japan. The 2014 edition included Shu Kei and Christopher Doyle in addition to other Asian-based directors. Because of the collaboration with Youku, these omnibus productions help to translate the language of international art cinema for mainland Chinese audiences. Shanghai and Beijing then become important nodes on a wider circuit of festival circulation beyond Europe and America in addition to Tokyo, Taipei, and Busan, while Hong Kong hangs onto its reputation for bringing mainland China and the rest of the world together through the cinema.

Hong Kong, of course, did not invent the omnibus film or the festival-sponsored short. In fact, some of the filmmakers HKIFF features in *Beautiful* make similar films for other festivals and cultural institutions. Tsai Ming-Liang, for instance, owes much of his continuing visibility at international film festivals to these sponsored films. In *Tsai Ming-Liang and a Cinema of Slowness*, Song Hwee Lim writes eloquently of the importance of Europe as a source of funding for Tsai and links his “cinophilia” with very specific film citations and aesthetic choices to his understanding of his place within the festival circuit:

One of the ways Tsai has mobilized discourses of cinophilia in his filmmaking is by constructing narratives that offer intertextual reading pleasures that have the potential effect of securing favorable international reception and future investment.⁶

While Tsai’s feature *Visage* (also known as *Face*), made to honor the Louvre in Paris, indicates that these commissioned films can be ambitious, the director’s more modest short film *Walker* made for HKIFF’s *Beautiful* does for Hong Kong’s film festival what *Visage* did for the Louvre by linking an acclaimed, controversial film auteur with an established cultural institution to celebrate and expand its audience.

While *Visage* cites French New Wave cinema as its principal intertextual reference, *Walker* features Lee Kang-Sheng (“Hsiao Kang”) as a Buddhist monk. With an eye to Hong Kong’s reputation as a postmodern metropolis with a reputation for martial arts genre films featuring fighting Shaolin monks, Tsai plays with the expectations of the festival audience. Hsiao Kang walking the streets of Hong Kong at a glacial pace provides a humorous commentary on both the velocity of the city and its screen

reputation for kung fu action. Beyond this, *Walker* testifies to Tsai's standing as an established Asian auteur, since Tsai and Hsiao Kang have collaborated since the beginning of the director's career, and the performer has been acknowledged as Tsai's onscreen alter ego. Juxtaposing Hsiao Kang's slow-motion performance with Hong Kong's commercial cinematic reputation for fast-paced action, Tsai upholds the values associated with the European art film as it captures this emblem of Asia for globalized, and presumably Westernized, urbanites. Of course, not all viewers feel inaugurated into an elite club by appreciatively viewing Tsai's film. However, even detractors help to spread Tsai's reputation as an auteur and cinematic provocateur. Tsai says the following about the online reception of *Walker* in mainland China on Youku:

There have been more than four million clicks to see the video, but an even greater number of people wrote in to complain about it. They said they found it unbearable, that Lee Kang-sheng was walking too slowly, that someone should push him, or hit him on the head to make him react.... *Walker* was made as a conscious act of rebellion against the way cinema is perceived in today's society.⁷

In fact, this short has spawned an entire series of films featuring Lee Kang-Sheng as a slow-walking Buddhist monk out of sync with the rapid pulse of the urban cities that host these international festivals, and Tsai has made similar motion pictures for festivals in Venice and Marseille.

Not all of these shorts have been shown exclusively in cinemas. Some, such as HKIFF's *Walker*, find a venue online, while others take the form of video installations or become part of other events. Tsai's *Sleepwalk*, for example, was created for a video installation in the exhibition space of the antique prison at the Doge's Palace in Venice, which housed the Taiwan pavilion for the Architectural Biennale in 2012. As in *Walker*, Hsiao Kang, dressed as a Buddhist monk, walks slowly through the cardboard architectural installation the pavilion housed within some of John Ruskin's famous "stones" of Venice. Whether taken as a metaphysical meditation on the encounter between urban modernity and the Buddhist sense of spiritual eternity, or as a joke—a performance piece that reclaims space for different aesthetic sensibilities—Tsai manages to create an opening for himself within the festival circuit. In this case, Tsai had a short in the Venice International Film Festival as well as the Architectural Biennale that year. Through the monk/Hsiao Kang, Tsai places himself in dialogue

with Europe, its history, its buildings, and its aesthetics. The fact that this encounter also incarcerates him in the old prison makes a wry comment on the complex relationship between Chinese filmmakers (whether from Taiwan, the PRC, Hong Kong, Singapore, or elsewhere) and the Western world. Europe may “imprison” him, but it also frees him to be an artist with a global reputation.

When Hsiao Kang as the monk walks through Hong Kong, he brings a specific artistic idiom associated with European festivals to Asia, and when he meanders through the streets of Marseille, he comments on the apparent “exoticism” of the East for Western spectators. Both Europe and Asia benefit from Tsai’s ability to create this cosmopolitan bridge through his oeuvre, as they project an image of a global avant-garde sensibility to their local audiences and international guests.

DISSECTING HKIFF’S SHORTS: CLARA LAW’S *RED EARTH*

While Tsai’s slow-walking series successfully travels the festival circuit, it proffers only one example of the ways in which sponsored shorts from Hong Kong function as art and commerce. Clara Law’s *Red Earth* (2010) provides another case in point. In time for the Hong Kong premiere of her feature *Like a Dream* (2009), Clara Law completed this short film financed by the Hong Kong Film Festival Society, as a companion to the feature. It is what could be called a “festival film,” made expressly for exhibition at international festivals. In this case, HKIFF “brands” the short, which was picked up and screened at the 67th Venice International Film Festival and put online as well. In addition to the festival branding, the film benefits from contributions by Canon, Blackberry, and the Hyatt Hotel and gives them added publicity and prestige through their visual presence on screen in a clearly artistic venture. Commercial connections involving cultural capital and lifestyle choices play an important role in many film festival productions, and *Red Earth* illustrates this quite well.

In fact, *Red Earth* serves as a “trailer” for *Like a Dream*, and, presumably, viewers of one film may be inclined to see the other at the festival, as they share more than director and star. In *Red Earth*, Daniel Wu plays a character not dissimilar from Max, the male protagonist of *Like a Dream*. In the feature, Max, an Asian American computer entrepreneur, finds himself in pursuit of a Shanghai woman he knows only in his dreams. Her lower class double helps in the pursuit, and, as in Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* (1958), Max attempts to remake the less refined woman into his

dream ideal. Photographs play a critical role in the plot as the protagonist attempts to grasp the woman of his imagination on film (see Fig. 13.1). In *Red Earth*, Daniel Wu plays a very similar well-to-do transient businessman who takes photos of his immediate environment, while waiting for a mysterious woman to reappear in his life at the appointed time and place he has noted in his Blackberry. Speaking American-accented English in the voiceover, the spectator hears the narrator before seeing his face, showing his race, and adding the veneer of “model minority” to the neatly attired man on screen. Still photographs, and their disappointing claims to capture the “truth” of existence, thematically link *Red Earth* and *Like a Dream* together, and, at one point in *Red Earth*, the narrator explicitly poses the question of whether he is dreaming in the voiceover.

However, the two films diverge in several significant ways. Whereas *Like a Dream* avoids Hong Kong as a location, *Red Earth* is set entirely in the SAR, during an apocalyptic moment when the sun does not go down in the city until it eventually sets for eternity. While Hong Kong women filmmakers often work within the genres of romantic comedy and domestic melodrama, Law's *Red Earth* marks a rare entry in the category of science fiction—albeit within the experimental mode. The dreamscape of *Like a Dream* and the apocalyptic landscape of *Red Earth* resonate to provide a bleak vision. However, *Like a Dream* does not explicitly acknowledge its debt to Hitchcock. In fact, Clara Law claims that she has not seen *Vertigo*; however, she does not discount the fact that she operates in a cinematic environment of postmodern allusions. When asked about the Hitchcock references, she demurs:



Fig. 13.1 Daniel Wu as the amateur photographer in *Red Earth*

I actually have never watched *Vertigo*. Eddie [Fong—Law’s scriptwriter/producer/husband] has watched *Vertigo*—but it really doesn’t matter. If you were influenced... It is [more about] whether the emotions or the experience that the characters were going through was authentic. And if it’s true and honest, then it doesn’t matter whether it’s the shadow of this film or that film.⁸

Red Earth, on the contrary, pays direct homage to Chris Marker’s *La Jetée* (*The Pier*, 1962), announced in a title as the film opens, and this marks its difference from its companion feature. The festival short trumpets its art film pedigree, while the transnational romance has no need to cater to the cinephilia⁹ of its anticipated mainland Chinese audience, which may have little knowledge of international cinema given the limitations placed on film imports.

The link to Marker’s film is crucial. Like *La Jetée*, most of *Red Earth* relies on still images—with some occasionally coming to life and moving—to tell its futuristic tale. Although *Red Earth* does not propel its protagonist into the past or catapult him into the distant future in search of an energy source to save the planet, it does have the same quality of fractured time that Marker exploits so eloquently in his classic short. However, layers of citations, going beyond Marker’s film, inextricably bind *Red Earth* to the cultural world of the international film festival. This analysis uncovers how the circles of cultural quotations that make up *Red Earth* allow it to fit within the film festival environment and distinguish it from its companion feature *Like a Dream*.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CITATIONS

As a HKIFF-sponsored short, *Red Earth* carefully navigates a path between serving as a trailer for the feature *Like a Dream* and functioning as a commercial endorsement for its sponsors. The film festival relies on the good will of companies providing products and locations for the production, but it also has an eye on the way the short mirrors the festival’s other offerings. In other words, it makes the art film part of a complete lifestyle experience that includes luxury goods, exotic locales, and the cultural capital associated with philosophical questions of existence and current affairs such as environmentalism.¹⁰

The reference to Chris Marker’s film accomplishes this quite well. As a classic short science fiction film routinely taught in university settings

and shown in French film programs, viewers who may be familiar with the source or other works inspired by it (such as Terry Gilliam's *Twelve Monkeys* [1995]) can be assured that their knowledge does not go unacknowledged by the festival. They are hailed as savvy viewers, and *Red Earth*, as a companion to the feature *Like a Dream*, invites them to look at both films in a new light within the context of the type of art cinema promoted by HKIFF. If a screening of *Like a Dream* could be dismissed as simply another romantic melodrama designed to appeal to the mainland Chinese audience, the companion *Red Earth* repositions it as a legitimate art film with a pedigree stretching back to the gems of French cinema. Using *Red Earth* to link *Like a Dream* to *La Jetée* therefore serves a very important function. The opening title of *La Jetée* could describe the story of *Like a Dream*'s Max, haunted by the violent image of his parents' deaths; it reads: "This is the story of a man marked by a childhood image." In this way, *La Jetée* acts as part of a triad that connects *Like a Dream* to *Red Earth* in such a way as to elevate the romantic melodrama for festival audiences by reminding viewers that it also has roots in an art film tradition. Daniel Wu cements the films together by using his star power to mediate between the popular romance and the more ambitious philosophical short.

Adding Hitchcock's *Vertigo* into the equation multiplies this effect. In fact, *Like a Dream* stands in relation to *Vertigo* in the same position that *Red Earth* does to *La Jetée*. *Red Earth* picks up the themes of voyeurism, obsession, lost love, and mortality from *Like a Dream*, just as Chris Marker drew on identical themes from *Vertigo* to make *La Jetée*. Emiko Omori points out the connection between Marker's and Hitchcock's films in her documentary *To Chris Marker, an Unsent Letter* (2012), and she observes that the scene in *La Jetée* featuring the time traveler and his lover looking at the rings on a tree trunk pays homage to *Vertigo*'s Muir Woods location outside of San Francisco. Catherine Lupton goes further:

The allusions to Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) are legion: the slice of sequoia on which the hero indicates his place outside time; the arrangement of the woman's hair, which recalls the spiral hairstyle of Madeleine/Judy in *Vertigo*; the presence of exotic flower arrangements, when the hero first spies the woman in a department store, invoking the Podesta Badocchi florist where Scottie first spies on Madeleine; the natural history museum echoing the preserved Spanish mission and the painted wooden horse in Hitchcock's film. What they cumulatively conjure up is another story of a

man who, like Scottie in *Vertigo*, seeks to turn back time by recreating the image of a lost woman, and who fails.¹¹

Clara Law's films rely on similar motifs to connect their protagonists in the ultimately futile pursuit of the mysterious feminine ideal as well, but with the caveat that she liberally quotes from the work of these legendary directors to comment on these themes.

While Max chases his ideal woman in Taipei (a city that he does not recognize because it only appears in his sleep), *Red Earth's* unnamed protagonist waits for his dream girl in a nondescript hotel room. In the case of *Red Earth*, the preponderance of the film takes place in the transient non-place¹² of a luxury inn, specifically the Grand Hyatt. As in most chain hotels around the world, nothing visually specifies Hong Kong as the location for this Hyatt. The unremarkable hotel room, lobby, restaurant, lounge, pool, function rooms, and grand staircase share a bland, uniform, international style with their clean lines, neutral tones, and cool lighting. Only the statue of Buddha's head in the suite itself situates the interior in a vaguely Asian place (see Fig. 13.2). However, the view outside the window tells a very different spatial story. Although the narrator only calls Hong Kong "this city" in the film, the visuals of the International Financial Centre (IFC) tower, the Bank of China building, and the dramatic skyline of Victoria Harbor, illuminated by celebratory fireworks when the sun finally sets, place the film quite clearly in Hong Kong at its specific location. The hotel setting, however, underscores the narrator's



Fig. 13.2 The Buddha in the hotel room in *Red Earth*

nomadic existence, and parallels director Law's own feeling of just passing through her former hometown on her way back to Australia, where she currently resides.

Given the importance of location to all film festivals,¹³ the insistence on featuring the Hong Kong cityscape as a major part of the *mise-en-scène* makes sense. Part of what the festival promises its audiences is a particular location—local, regional, and international—in which to congregate and watch films. *Red Earth* showcases the harbor, Hong Kong's historical connection to world trade, through its depiction of this English-speaking businessman at a hotel overlooking the port city. Moreover, the water of Hong Kong harbor connects the short to the other films it references. All four films rely on water to float the dreams they conjure. In addition to *Red Earth*'s Victoria Harbor in Hong Kong, *Like a Dream* features tributaries of the Grand Canal in Hangzhou and the Huangpu River in Shanghai; *La Jetée* has the observation pier at Paris's Orly Airport near the Seine, and, of course, Hitchcock makes superb use of the San Francisco Bay in *Vertigo*.

The films have more in common as well. All four highlight time as a theme. In their apocalyptic visions, *La Jetée* and *Red Earth* zero in on time. *Like a Dream* and *Vertigo* develop the theme differently, but it remains critical to their plots, as their characters cannot escape the ramifications of their pasts. Flashbacks in *Like a Dream* merge Max's nightmares and glimpses of his childhood with the lives of the female doppelgängers in a montage that defies any coherent sense of spatial or temporal continuity. Images of clocks punctuate the dreamscape; high angles often dwarf Max and his dream girl in compositions in which the back of a single, ominous clock dominates the screen. In Chinese, the word for clock ("zhong") is a phonym with the "end point," connoting "death," so an existential contemplation of the insignificance of a single human life in the vastness of time shadows Max's search for his romantic ideal.

Clara Law creates *Like a Dream*'s double in *Red Earth*, and the diptych needs to be read together just as Marker envisioned *La Jetée* as a philosophical meditation on *Vertigo* (as well as a companion to *Le Joli Mai*, which Marker filmed around the same time in 1962). In an essay on *Vertigo*, Marker notes that the vertiginous feeling created in Hitchcock's film has a crucial temporal dimension:

The vertigo the film deals with isn't to do with space and falling; it is a clear, understandable and spectacular metaphor for yet another kind of vertigo, much more difficult to represent—the vertigo of time.... The entire second

part of the film... is nothing but a mad, maniacal attempt to deny time, to recreate through trivial yet necessary signs (like the signs of a liturgy: clothes, make-up, hair) the woman whose loss he has never been able to accept. His own feelings of responsibility and guilt for this loss are mere Christian Band-Aids dressing a metaphysical wound of much greater depth....¹⁴

Marker picks up on this “vertigo of time” in his *La Jetée* and extends in his futuristic vision of a cruel world that may not be worth saving, just as Clara Law intensifies her philosophical engagement with cinema, meaning, and reality in *Red Earth*. Daniel Wu’s mother (who has a doctorate in psychology) describes the gist of Law’s film on her son’s blog as follows:

The film calls for an examination of: “What does it mean to be human beings on this earth? Where are we heading in terms of environmental concerns? Is civilization really necessary if we had to poison the earth, diminishing our mental capacities, numb our senses, stifle our emotions, and destroy all things natural? If all is to end, will ‘God’ be able and willing to create the world and human beings again?”¹⁵

If the dreamscape of Taipei disintegrates in *Like a Dream*, Hong Kong serves as ground zero for the apocalypse in *Red Earth*. The entire world endures perpetual daylight and then a plunge into darkness, but Daniel Wu’s character sees it all from the specific location of the Hong Kong Grand Hyatt hotel near the harbor.

Just as *La Jetée* takes up the existential issues of time, death, the meaning of humanity, and the mystery of femininity opened by *Vertigo*, *Red Earth* turns its attention to several themes on the edges of *Like a Dream*. If Law keeps her former home of Hong Kong out of the picture in the feature, it takes center stage in the short. It concretizes Ackbar Abbas’s oft-quoted observation that Hong Kong cinema sees the territory on the verge of the Handover as “déjà disparu.”¹⁶ In *Red Earth*, Daniel Wu’s unnamed character literally observes the disappearance of Hong Kong as he photographs a final self-portrait with the last flash he manages from his digital camera. His anonymous dream girl, Hong Kong, the world itself, and his own narcissistic image all represent a “love at last sight” that functions on several allegorical levels in the film.

Moreover, topics that would perhaps keep the feature off mainland Chinese screens become the source for the drama in *Red Earth*. These include: human degradation of the environment; the inadequacy of science to explain the physical world; religion as an alternative source of

meaning, and prayer as a possible solution to human iniquity; the impotence of politicians to redress the imbalance of nature; and capitalism (“excess”) as the cause for the apocalypse. (Although, as can be the case in the contradictions of postmodern cinema, the critique of capitalism, in this case, coincides with the importance of product placement in the film—the Blackberry planner and Canon 5D camera take pride of place in the *mise-en-scène*.) Rather than attempting to romance the mainland Chinese audience through Max’s flirtations with the doubles as in *Like a Dream*, *Red Earth* links the end of the world with the “end” of Hong Kong—turning away from God and humanity—grasping at consumer goods, worrying about the consequences of environmental Armageddon on job prospects, clients, and the value of stocks and bonds.

In *Red Earth*, the mystery represented by the feminine is immediately linked to the fate of the earth, as the narrator remembering the woman with whom he has an assignation in the hotel asking if he knows his “carbon footprint.” Camera shy, the woman coyly covers her face with her hand when the narrator tries to photograph her. Moreover, he does not remember her name, and only knows about their appointment because of his Blackberry. In this case, rather than an obsessive interest in a memory from childhood (*La Jetée*’s connection between the face of the woman and the death of the man who turns out to be the time traveler who witnesses his own demise, Max’s link between his mother’s death and his dream girl in *Like a Dream*, or Scottie’s manic attempt to recreate his beloved Madeleine in the form of Judy), *Red Earth*’s protagonist seems, at first, not that “into” the woman he casually met. He remembers her interest in pollution and global warming, but not her name or her face. At one point, likely hallucinating during the oppressive days sequestered in the hotel because of the dangers of the sun’s radiation, he hears the doorbell and a woman’s laughter, glimpsing a red blur in the hotel room’s peephole, and a running, doubled streak of a red dress and scarf. Although he seems to see the scarf abandoned at the foot of the lobby’s grand staircase, no one else has seen the mysterious woman. Near the end of the film, after the sun no longer rises, he hopes for a glimmer of light to see her face again and imagines, in his cold hotel bed, the warmth of her body next to him. At first quite casual about the relationship, the deepening of his emotions surrounding this woman parallels his own spiritual journey in recognizing his limited but undeniable role in killing the earth. He comes to accept the inevitability of his own mortality and his own relative insignificance in the infinity of time as part of his obsession with the elusive woman. In

La Jetée, the world survives but the protagonist dies. In *Red Earth*, both share the same fate.

The mystery of the woman in *Red Earth* symbolizes the mystery of the cinema—the impossibility of capturing or “knowing” reality. As the certainty of physics evaporates with the failure of the sun to set, the narrator asks, philosophically, if a “table is a table, a flower a flower?” The protagonist later laments that the images he captures likely have no meaning or purpose, since no future humans will ever see them, but he still feels compelled to take snapshots, and his “selfies” record his own—and humanity’s—end.

In fact, the human dimension of the tragedy provides the film with many compelling images. At one point, the protagonist, after losing sight of his hallucinatory dream girl, focuses on an elderly couple standing at the window of the hotel’s lounge. They clasp hands and hold them up in a W-shape against the pane of glass, as orange light bathes their faces. A poignant close-up of the old woman; with her eyes closed; and head tilted up to the sun, visualizes an element of hope, as well as resignation to fate. Maria Callas’s rendition of the Puccini aria “Vissi d’arte” is used as a sound bridge in the following scene, which serves as an epiphany for the narrator. Step-printed, the character bows down in front of the Buddha’s head on the coffee table in his room. In the voiceover, the narration continues: “I’ve never believed in anything, I’ve never prayed for anything, I’ve never done anything for this world. I’ve had a good life, I’ve been blessed, no wars, no poverty. Living excessively. I’ve had it all... let it end then.” As he bows to Buddha, images that may or may not be from his digital camera appear. They show green trees in a park, leafy shadows on a garden fence, and what looks like a suburban home far from the glaring orange light of the Hong Kong skyline. The images share the quality of the time traveler’s first encounter with pre-apocalyptic Paris in his journey to find the woman from his memories in *La Jetée*—lush, alive, ordinary, but refreshing. His acceptance of fate has a caveat as the screen flashes images of a little blonde girl, and the question comes up, “What about them?” When the sun finally sets, he continues the thought, “What am I waiting for? What else can I do?” However, the questions remain unanswered as celebratory sounds of horns and fireworks intrude on the soundtrack.

The questions remain open as the world and the film go black. Images of the sun over a bucolic field with leaves and grass, and another brief shot of a child after the credits brighten the bleak ending a little; however, *Red Earth* ultimately reflects on the relationship between filmmak-

ing, the meaning of photographic images, and the end of world (or, at least, the end of Hong Kong). The lyrics of “Vissi d’arte” from the tragic opera *Tosca* perhaps speak more to Law’s position as a diasporic filmmaker lamenting the inadequacy of her art than to the feelings of the amateur photographer we see on screen:

I lived for my art, I lived for love,
 I never did harm to a living soul!
 With a secret hand
 I relieved as many misfortunes as I knew of.
 Always with true faith
 my prayer
 rose to the holy shrines.¹⁷

Puccini’s tragedy echoes Hong Kong’s colonial end. The city is not the same after 1997; the colony—if not the world—is gone, and Law’s film obliquely references this through the quintessentially European form of grand opera. Puccini speaks directly to elite audiences who can appreciate high culture references.

Red Earth, unlike *Like a Dream*, acknowledges its debt to European cultural “masters” such as Puccini and Marker because it operates in the realm of the international “festival film.” The short can be regarded as expertly crafted; a self-reflexive commentary on the motion picture medium; an intertextually rich compendium of allusions to the “classics” of world cinema and Italian opera; an expression of putatively universal concerns for issues confronting humanity in general (environmentalism, excesses of consumerism, iniquities of corporate capitalism); a specific visualization of a “foreign,” exotic Chinese place; a modernist aesthetic treatment of time, space, perspective, and subjectivity; and a philosophical meditation on the meaning of existence as well as the reliability of human knowledge about reality.

In this case, the ideal audience reflected in the film may be closer to the old couple watching the endless sunset from the hotel lounge rather than the young Chinese women in *Like a Dream* or the elusive girl in red in *Red Earth* (see Fig. 13.3). The transient non-place of the luxury hotel reflects those temporary spaces occupied by international film festivals—screening venues, press rooms, and the ubiquitous hotel lobbies, bars, and restaurants where festival audiences as well as movie professionals gather. The voiceover address in English reminds viewers of the lingua franca of



Fig. 13.3 The old couple against the skyline of Hong Kong in *Red Earth*

the film festival circuit. Asian American Daniel Wu, who is a fixture in the Chinese diaspora, floating between Asia and the West and most at home in the SAR, serves as our guide through both narratives—deracinated, hybrid, perpetually in crisis, shallow, insensitive, materially privileged, but oddly suitable for expressing the postmodern predicament and the loss of any stable sense of identity, time, space, or meaning. *Red Earth* serves, then, as a suitable trailer for the transnational feature *Like a Dream*, a calling card for Clara Law as an international art film auteur, an advertisement for Canon, BlackBerry, and the Grand Hyatt, and an affirmation of the lifestyle associated with HKIFF filmgoers. All of these functions rest on a web of citations to confirm the pedigree of this quintessential “festival” short.

Indeed, *Red Earth* serves as a concrete example of the balancing act HKIFF must perform as a result of its status as a private corporation positioned between mainland China and world film screens. In “Corporatising a Film Festival: Hong Kong,” Ruby Cheung points out the challenges of negotiating between the interests of its audience members and the economic bottom line as follows:

From the festival-goers’ point of view, the corporatised HKIFF may not necessarily further improve their chances to see films from every possible corner of the world. Indeed, audiences may in effect move down from the top of the festival’s stakeholder list to be replaced by film industry practitioners and commercial sponsors. This shift of power from a government to a commercial enterprise has inevitably forced the high-art aims of the film festival to spiral downwards while its commercialism and stronger links with the mainstream film distribution network have grown up. The consequence

could be a counterbalance of the corporatised HKIFF's attempt to build a profile more in line with those most esteemed film festivals, which have their explicit and primary goals of catering for art-house and *auteur* cinemas.¹⁸

Through cinematic citations, *Red Earth* maintains these critical links to European *auteur* cinema as well as to quality Hollywood productions. However, Law's short does more than this when juxtaposed with the feature *Like a Dream*, which explicitly addresses the mainland Chinese market. The short allows the feature to be seen as more than it may appear to be—an art film by a noted female *auteur* as well as a commercial romance for Chinese screens. As a filmmaker who rose to prominence with acclaimed features made during the colonial period, Law bridges the period before and after the Handover, with an eye on Western as well as Chinese audiences seen from her new home in Australia. As indebted as it may be to particular commercial enterprises, *Red Earth* still manages to link environmental concerns, consumer excess, and capitalist indifference in a way that targets the very forces that enabled its creation. In this way, it represents the same sort of balancing act HKIFF must master in order to serve local viewers, sponsors, critics, and their mainland Chinese counterparts. These divided interests make for a contradictory mix of images, citations, and ideas.¹⁹

Functioning under the “one country, two systems” policy, Hong Kong often has difficulty asserting its own path without running afoul of the Central Government in Beijing (as the 2014 Umbrella Movement demonstrated). The decision of HKIFF to become a private corporation in 2005 can be then understood as something more than a business decision, a desire to be free from government red tape, or as a way to expand its artistic offerings. Rather, severing the formal ties with the Hong Kong government frees it from direct pressure from political forces—although indirect influences through grants and conservative corporations remain. *Like a Dream* speaks to the mainland marketplace, *Red Earth* addresses the cosmopolitan cinephile, and HKIFF manages to accommodate both on its capacious screens.

NOTES

1. Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong, *Film Festivals: Culture, People, and Power on the Global Screen* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2011). See also Dina Iordanova, “East Asia and Film Festivals: Transnational Clusters for Creativity and Commerce,” in *Film Festivals and East Asia*, ed. Dina

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2. Zhang Yingjin, “Chinese Cinema and Transnational Cultural Politics: Rethinking Film Festivals, Film Productions, and Film Studies,” in *Screening China: Critical Interventions, Cinematic Reconfigurations, and the Transnational Imaginary in Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (Michigan: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 2002), 15–41.
 3. Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong, *Film Festivals*, 218–9.
 4. Abé Mark Nornes, “Asian Film Festivals, Translation and the International Film Festival Short Circuit (2011),” in *The Film Festival Reader*, ed. Dina Iordanova (St. Andrews: St Andrews Film Studies, 2013), 151–3.
 5. For more on regional competition with particular attention to the Pusan International Film Festival in Korea, see Dina Iordanova and Ruby Cheung, ed., *Film Festivals and East Asia* and Soo Jeong Ahn, *The Pusan International Film Festival, South Korean Cinema and Globalization* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011).
 6. Lim Song Hwee, *Tsai Ming-Liang and a Cinema of Slowness* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2014), 62.
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Rural Films in an Urban Festival: Community Media and Cultural Translation at the Yunnan Multi Culture Visual Festival

Jenny Chio

One of the distinctive hallmarks of the Yunnan Multi Culture Visual Festival (hereafter referred to as Yunfest), a biennial independent documentary film festival held in Kunming, Yunnan Province, has been its inclusion of community-based video documentaries produced by rural, often ethnic minority, filmmakers, mostly from across China. From the first Yunfest in 2003 up to and including the 2013 festival—the event’s final edition, which was planned but canceled at the last minute—the Yunfest program featured a stream that showcased community-based, participatory videos made by and depicting the lives of rural, ethnic minority and other marginalized groups from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Southeast Asia, and, occasionally, the United States and Europe. In 2003, this program stream was called “Face to Face”; between 2005 and 2013, it was titled “Participatory Visual Education.”

This chapter explores how Yunfest’s organizers and participating filmmakers created and sustained the social, political and cultural value of rural media-making within an urban film festival. What distinguished the

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Participatory Visual Education (PVE) program at Yunfest was its explicit emphasis on bringing rural filmmakers to Kunming, the provincial capital, to attend the festival. This ensured not only that filmmakers had the opportunity to field questions and discuss their works, but also to participate in the experience of the festival itself—from watching other people’s films, including more “mainstream” Chinese independent documentaries shown in the other program streams, to being addressed as a filmmaker in a public forum. In turn, I argue that the festival at times became a space of cultural translation in a process that entailed a doubled movement: first, for urban film festival audiences to see rural China as presented in documentaries made by rural Chinese; and second, for rural Chinese filmmakers to be seen as filmmakers in the context of the film festival—in an urban, modern social space. Over the years, the main screening venues for Yunfest included major public institutions in the city such as the Yunnan Provincial Museum, Yunnan Provincial Library and the Yunnan University Anthropology Museum, as well as local commercial cinemas.

For rural filmmakers, the process of cultural translation often begins with their participation in externally sponsored community media training workshops. Many of the rural films shown at Yunfest over the years were funded and facilitated through such programs, as will be discussed later. From taking part in a workshop, usually organized in county-level towns, to exhibiting their films at the festival, these filmmakers and their works are explicitly engaged in a process of translating their experiences and ideas across known social binaries (urban-rural, cultural majority-minority, rich-poor). Indeed, as I aim to show, by analyzing the work of rural documentary filmmakers in their production and consumption contexts, it becomes clear that these documentary videos are, or should be, participatory both in their making and in their seeing. In a parallel instance, for example, Jennifer Deger argues that in her collaborative image-making work with indigenous Yolngu people in Australia there is a “degree to which this work was created by a group of people with a shared understanding of how images both provoke and demand the active participation of viewers in processes of seeing and making visible.”¹ Likewise, the context of the PVE screening program at Yunfest, with its emphasis on bringing filmmakers, films and audiences into real-time physical contact and discussion, also extends the obligation and responsibility of participation into the space of the festival itself, suggesting that the burden of translation should not rest on the shoulders of the filmmakers alone.

In this chapter, I focus specifically on the PVE stream at Yunfest, which over the years has featured a range of documentaries produced by rural, ethnic minority Chinese through community media training programs organized under the auspices of rural development and anthropological research projects. Many of these programs were run by scholars from research institutions such as the Yunnan Academy for Social Sciences and Yunnan University, as well as organizers and filmmakers based at the local offices of national and international development organizations.² First, I outline some of the defining features of the PVE program stream. The efforts of the scholars and supporting institutions who funded and organized many of these rural community media workshops, combined with the participation of rural filmmakers at festival screenings and discussions, transformed the film festival into a space in which rural experiences and perspectives were translated for an urban context. This cultural translation occurred both in the content of the films themselves and in the structure of the Yunfest screenings. The second half of the chapter offers a few case studies of media-making at the rural margins, including an analysis of two screening and discussion sessions during the 2011 edition of Yunfest. My conclusion presents some preliminary ideas on the necessity and significance of further work on Yunfest and its influence on media-making in rural China.

A HISTORY OF PARTICIPATORY VISUAL EDUCATION AT YUNFEST

A brief outline of Yunfest's PVE program stream illustrates the festival's central commitment to promoting community-based media and to creating a space for dialogue on issues related to the experiences of rural, ethnic minority and other marginalized groups. Logistically, Yunfest began under the direction of Professor Guo Jing, who in the early 2000s was employed by the Yunnan Provincial Museum where he supported a variety of local documentary film screening events. He later established the Visual Education Department of the BAMA Mountain Culture Research Institute within the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, which oversaw Yunfest from the mid-2000s onwards.³ The first Yunfest, held in 2003, was organized around the idea of dialogue through video. As Guo wrote in his preface to the catalog,

Because we are far from the center, far from the influential broadcasting nerve centers, we need an original perspective. The region south of the clouds (Yunnan) is a border area. Neither in the political or commercial mainstream, it provides its impressions from the margins... This allows for a space where a multiplicity of perspectives can coexist, and different voices can be heard, different voices allowing for the development of real dialogue. "Different voices" and "dialogue": these can be taken as two central themes in the Visual Festival.⁴

In the initial iteration of the festival, the community films were grouped under the heading "Face to Face", which featured documentary films and photographs from Hong Kong, the United States (focusing on the work of Kentucky-based Appalshop, a long-running US community media organization established in 1974) and southwest China. The latter included work from a project directed by Guo, run under the auspices of BAMA, and called "AZARA Video Workshop: Participatory Video Education." This particular project, one of the first in the province to utilize the relative affordability of digital video (DV) to facilitate community media productions, featured collaboratively made films shot by anthropologists and rural residents in three Tibetan villages in Yunnan. Other work from China included photographs from the Photo Voice project, which supplied rural villagers with cameras to document their cultural livelihoods and was funded by The Nature Conservancy, a globally prominent non-profit environmental conservation organization headquartered in the United States.

In 2005, PVE was introduced as the name of the entire Yunfest community media program. It featured 27 films and an explicit mandate to showcase the work of filmmakers from Yunnan. Two of the 27 films were from outside China (one on indigenous community media in Alaska, another on swidden agriculture in Japan). Of the films from China, the majority were produced through community media programs and workshops organized by Guo and the BAMA Mountain Culture Institute, The Nature Conservancy, and local Chinese organizations such as the Kawagebo Culture Society in Deqin, northwest Yunnan, and the Center for Biodiversity and Indigenous Knowledge, based in Kunming. According to the 2005 Yunfest website, funding for many of these projects came from international donor organizations such as the Ford Foundation and Conservation International.⁵ Six films included in the PVE program were produced as part of larger scholarly projects by university researchers in

Kunming and Beijing, and two were films made by regional television stations or their employees.

As Yunfest itself gained prominence in the broader landscape of independent documentary film in China, so too did the PVE stream.⁶ The 2007 edition of Yunfest featured 31 PVE films, although that year's festival was moved at the last minute, and without any official reason, from Kunming to smaller venues in the city of Dali.⁷ In 2009, Yunfest returned to Kunming with 41 films in the PVE program as well as a day-long discussion panel on "Documentary Film and Rural Society."⁸ The films in the 2009 PVE program were no longer limited to Yunnan but included community-based documentary media from across China. Works from more well-known community media projects by Chinese independent filmmakers and artists, such as Wu Wenguang's China Village Documentary Project and Ou Ning's Dazhalan Project,⁹ were screened. A conceptual shift from the 2005 to 2009 PVE programs can be seen in the organization of these films in the catalog. Whereas the 2005 films were listed individually, most films in the 2009 PVE program were grouped under the titles or names of the larger community media projects of which they were a part. These included the first series of films produced under the community documentary training project, From Our Eyes¹⁰ (then funded by Shan Shui Conservation Center, a Chinese environmental organization), and multiple projects funded by the Hong Kong-based rural development organization, Partnerships in Community Development. This relatively small alteration in the program reflects, I believe, changing conditions for the production of rural media in China, where such films are increasingly seen as valuable *parts of* broader projects under the funding umbrella of large, often international, development and donor agencies, rather than solely as individual works. The implications of this shift in recognition and naming will be discussed later, both in terms of how this influences the production process and the imagination of these films as a form of cultural translation, and how it shapes the screening experiences, where rural media is subsumed under broader discursive frameworks (and attendant expectations) of development and modernization. Conversely, the consequences of overlooking the influence of funders and other organizing forces have been assessed by Matthew Johnson in his critical reading of the China Village Documentary Project. He notes that these films were typically presented as "direct encounters" with village filmmakers and without much attention to the EU-funded project of which they were originally a part. In this case, Johnson argues,

the films made by village participants have largely been celebrated as independent, unmediated works, thus obscuring the transnational negotiations and networks between organizers in the EU and China that enabled their production.¹¹

The last Yunfest actually held in Kunming took place in 2011. That year, the PVE stream grew to accommodate over 17 different community media projects, screening over 50 films.¹² Again, like previous years, the majority of films were from rural China, although there was a special selection of films on agriculture in the United States, development in Laos and community issues in urban Shanghai. Last minute negotiations between the Yunfest organizers and government officials in Kunming resulted in the PVE screenings being held almost exclusively at the Yunnan University Museum of Anthropology, rather than in the Yunnan Provincial Library as planned and where the majority of Yunfest's films were shown.¹³ As in 2007, no official public explanation was given for why the PVE films were shifted to the new location, although many festival attendees surmised it had to do with the prevalence of films by and about Tibetans in China, and the upswing in violent, public protests and self-immolations in Tibetan communities since 2008. Indeed, by 2011, the overall political atmosphere was increasingly tense; that year, Yunfest was not the only independent film festival to face government restrictions. In 2013, despite having finalized a full screening program—including a PVE program of 32 films from 6 different community media projects across China—the festival was canceled entirely.¹⁴

Even as Yunfest gained national and international attention as an important site for independent documentary film culture in China throughout the early 2000s, the growing size of the PVE stream at each Yunfest demonstrates just how significant these films were to the intended experience of the festival as a whole. Documentary film in China, as represented by the Yunfest catalog, included work from a diversity of perspectives and backgrounds, from state television employees to self-proclaimed documentary filmmakers to researchers and first-time documentarians, whether students or rural villagers. The plurality of films and filmmakers at Yunfest therefore increased the expectation and the obligation for active participation on the part of its attendees, a characteristic obvious from the very beginning with the first edition's focus on dialogue through video.

THE CROSS-CULTURAL POTENTIAL OF PVE

Looking back over the PVE programs from 2003 to 2013, some common characteristics emerge. The films classified as PVE generally fell into two categories: first, films produced by participants of community media training programs, usually related to issues of rural development, cultural heritage and sociopolitical change; and second, films about rural or ethnic minority cultural practices produced by researchers and filmmakers with a scholarly intent or emphasis. The first type of film was most prevalent in the PVE program stream; the other festival streams, including the Competition films, Youth Forum, Showcase (non-competition documentaries), Film Forum (a special series of films by international documentarians) and Media Mélanges (documentaries from other Asian countries) often featured films that addressed rural social issues but were not necessarily produced in an explicitly scholarly or community-centered mode.¹⁵

Thus, in order to explore the potential benefits and consequences of screening films under the PVE program rubric, it is vital to disaggregate the various points at which these films, including their production and consumption, may highlight the possibilities of cultural translation, of creating the opportunity for bridging a socially recognized “gap” or form of difference. The inclusion and screening of community media at Yunfest renders the time and space of the film festival into a *potential* venue for cross-cultural translation across the rural and the urban, between ethnic minorities and the Han majority in China. The inclusion of community media in Yunfest’s overall program reflected the values of the organizers, namely Guo and his colleagues at the BAMA Mountain Culture Institute, and their ambitions for the festival itself as a social space for dialogue and discovery across sociopolitical boundaries, real and imagined.

Even before screening at Yunfest, however, the films produced by rural, ethnic minority participants in video training workshops are often intended expressly to represent, and to translate into terms understandable by mainstream urban audiences, the range of contemporary experiences and concerns dominating lives and livelihoods in culturally, politically and economically peripheral regions of the country. This process of cultural translation associated with community media comes by virtue of being produced through a training workshop run by urban Chinese and funded by outside, often international, donors with their own agendas.¹⁶ Likewise,

the training gained through participation in the workshops, the experience of shooting and editing a documentary film, and the experience of seeing and discussing one's work with an audience in a provincial capital city, all constitute a second act of cultural translation—the translation of the presumably “urban,” or at least modern, subjectivity of “media-maker” by individuals who have been marked, by both external and internal logics of identity and status, as un-urban, un-mainstream and un-modern.

Another example from Australia, where media collaborations in indigenous and Aboriginal communities have been widely promoted in government policies and critically assessed by scholars, illuminates how cultural translation operates in production and consumption contexts. Philippa Deveson argues that a 1968 government-sponsored film project on the impact of a major bauxite mine on a Yolngu Aboriginal community at Yirrkala (in the Northern Territory) began with Yolngu participation and a conscious awareness of “the potential of film as a medium of communication.”¹⁷ When project director Ian Dunlop, an Australian anthropological filmmaker, arrived to make the film, Yolngu immediately began directing him on what to shoot, and “Yolngu became active participants, even producers, of films for which they had a clear purpose, and with which they continued to engage making the most of the medium's potential for both intra- and cross-cultural communication.”¹⁸ Devenson notes two reasons for the perceived efficacy of film for Yolngu:

First, from the beginning, Yolngu clearly saw the value of film as an instrument of education and, through this, political and legal persuasion. Second, film was taken up as a means of recording their culture for future generations of Yolngu, and even of directly addressing those generations.¹⁹

This awareness of film's ability to communicate across political, social and even temporal boundaries played a vital role in shaping Yolngu participation in documentary filmmaking projects, both in the production and the circulation of particular works. However, it occurred alongside a recognition of the local import of these films for cultural preservation. Devenson recalls, anecdotally, that when one of the primary Yolngu filmmakers she worked with, Wukun Wanambi, attended an academic conference with her in Melbourne in 2008, he chose to speak about the pressing political issues facing his community rather than filmmaking. Although initially concerned about the lack of congruence between the proposed presentation topic and his actual speech, Devenson concludes,

Wukun was doing what Yolngu have always done—that is, taking the opportunity of a public forum to make a political statement. He was in fact demonstrating Yolngu agency in action—by using the conference as an opportunity to further a Yolngu agenda, in the same way his fathers had responded to the opportunity for cross-cultural communication presented by the Yirrkala Film Project.²⁰

I dwell at some length on this example from Yolngu country because I believe Devenson and Wanambi's experiences, as collaborators in a film-making project in remote Australia and as co-presenters at an academic conference in urban Melbourne, offer an insightful parallel to the process of cultural translation at the PVE screenings of Yunfest.

While their goals at Yunfest may not be quite as explicitly political—indeed, many of the films were framed within current Chinese state discourses about rural development—these filmmakers also, by virtue of their willingness to participate in community media workshops and festival screenings, recognized the potential for their films to speak across social and economic boundaries to urban Chinese, and to future generations both rural and urban. Part of this mandate came from above, from workshop funders who provided financial support for projects that directly addressed issues such as environmental conservation and cultural heritage. Films such as *Hemp Weaving* by Miao filmmaker Hou Wentao, and *The Wonders of Water* by the late Tibetan filmmaker Wangta, thus take up these topics. However, in making these works, rural filmmakers also attested to the social and cultural value of documentary film not just for outside funders and scholars, but also for themselves and their communities. Wangta, who made two films through programs organized by Guo Jing and his colleagues, remained extremely active in From Our Eyes training workshops and screenings, and traveled frequently to participate in events as both a mentor and a student until his untimely passing in 2012.²¹ Hou Wentao continued recording and making films after participating in a community media workshop in 2006, and planned to establish a village-based documentary group to record local Miao cultural traditions.²² Furthermore, given that both the community media workshops and Yunfest were often organized by the same Kunming-based scholars, it would have been clear to participants from the start that their films would very likely be screened at the festival and that they themselves would be invited to attend, show their film, and participate as a filmmaker.

Like Wanambi, therefore, Yunfest thus became a potential venue for thesecond act of cultural translation—to present oneself as a rural filmmaker in an urban festival.

By considering the PVE program from a wider perspective, namely from the community media workshops to the actual film festival space, the cross-cultural potential of PVE becomes clearer and more complex. To reiterate, these rural Chinese documentary films engage in a first level of cultural translation by virtue of their production within the framework of community media training workshops run and funded by outside, non-rural, and mostly non-ethnic minority scholars and organizers. The second level of cultural translation, then, happens when the films are screened at Yunfest, in front of an audience that is potentially open to the urban public in Kunming. Although the majority of audience members of the PVE program at the 2011 Yunfest were other rural filmmakers, along with a handful of scholars, what mattered was the fact that Yunfest took place in an urban context and that anyone from the public could attend. It was the imagination of an urban public audience for rural documentaries, alongside the very real presence of the filmmaker standing before an audience in Kunming, that allowed for the possibility of cross-cultural translation in the film festival space. As I will demonstrate in an example below, the opportunity to attend Yunfest as a filmmaker required rural filmmaker Wang Zhongrong to negotiate his own subjectivity and self-positioning at the festival while in the process of explaining his commitment to documentary filmmaking to a public audience.

Of course, the community media training workshops and PVE/Yunfest as a screening site can only create the conditions of possibility for the exchange of knowledge and experiences. It is important to stress that the potential for rural media to translate ideas, perspectives and experiences across social divides lies not in the content of a documentary film, but rather in the spaces of its production and consumption. The space of Yunfest becomes a place with the potential for boundary-crossing to occur, a space where the film festival audience is shown what rural China “looks like” on video, and where rural filmmakers (including other rural media producers attending the festival) can be seen as modern media producers and consumers. The doubled movement involved in cultural translation thus raises a more fundamental question about how media production, particularly when utilizing digital technologies, is often inherently associated with modern subjectivities.

MEDIA FROM THE MARGINS

Wanning Sun has analyzed numerous instances in China of cultural production by migrant workers, including documentary videos, poetry, magazines and photography. One particular case helps illuminate how the uptake of media technology is often assumed to lead to the formation of modern, urban subjectivities for socially and politically marginal groups. However, this example also suggests how this uptake alone is not necessarily enough to foster transformations in the social consciousness of the wider public. Wang Dezhi, whom Sun describes as a “self-appointed ethnographic filmmaker” in Picun—a large migrant community on the outskirts of Beijing—is exceptional in his commitment to producing documentary and feature films about migrant life.²³ At one level, Wang Dezhi “attributes his development from rural migrant youth into filmmaker to his exposure to cultural elites, academics, and filmmakers when he was an activist at the Picun [migrant workers cultural activism] center,” as well as the influence of Chinese independent documentary films and filmmakers.²⁴ He had seen such works at screenings and festivals in Songzhuang village, home of the Li Xianting Film Foundation and the Beijing Independent Film Festival (see Flora Lichaa’s chapter in this volume for discussion of this festival). Wang Dezhi was not only inspired by and adopted the documentary aesthetics and topics of urban Chinese filmmakers, many of whose films dealt directly with the brutal effects of urbanization, rural poverty and political marginality; he also incorporated his own activist sensibilities into his filmmaking. His films sought to depict migrant lives from the migrants’ points of view for a migrant worker audience, with the ultimate goal of raising class-consciousness and awareness of social conditions. However, Sun argues that as a result of his commitment to making films about migrant life for migrants themselves, he has found few willing viewers in Picun; migrants in Picun wished to escape their lives when they consumed media products, not be reminded of their daily hardships and struggles. As Sun explains, “the rural migrant audience for such films is marginal at best—an ironic recapitulation of their status in Chinese society itself.”²⁵

If Wang Dezhi had had the chance to join in a community media workshop, one organized and run by urban scholars and funded by international and domestic development agencies, it is perhaps possible that his films would have found a more receptive audience. That said, these viewers would not necessarily be the audiences he claimed to seek—the

migrant workers of Picun. Wang Dezhi's situation is a stark reminder of the participatory effort involved in cultural translation. While he enthusiastically "translated" mainstream, urban, Chinese independent documentary film styles and topics into his own work as a local activist-filmmaker, he encountered greater difficulty in translating this urban documentary film practice into a form that would be appreciated by his target audience. To his credit, Sun notes, this lack of local interest did not dissuade Wang from continuing to make films and supporting the Picun migrant activist community center in other ways, and certainly Wang's own commitment to advocacy for migrant rights has been remarkable and successful.²⁶

Wang Dezhi's efforts do however point toward the confluence of factors that renders cultural translation *more possible* at a film festival like Yunfest. The infrastructural support provided by workshops and venues like the PVE program offered rural filmmakers the imagination of an existing urban audience, a reason to invest their time and energy into making a documentary film. Furthermore, Yunfest was literally a physical space in a political, social and economic center (the capital of Yunnan) that brought rural media and rural filmmakers out of the margins, giving both them and their films the time and space to be seen and heard. In ideal circumstances, the PVE screenings would have allowed rural filmmakers to both appreciate the space for self-reflexivity effected through the "othering" process of seeing one's work on screen, and to prompt audience members to consider the lives of others through engagement with the film and filmmakers during discussion. In practice, of course, the reality of PVE screenings and of fostering "dialogue through video" at Yunfest was much less straightforward.

Two cases, based on my observations during the 2011 Yunfest, help to illustrate the challenges and underlying assumptions about cultural and social differences that frame the screening of rural documentaries in an urban film festival space. As noted earlier, in 2011, the PVE program was moved at the last minute from the main venue at the Yunnan Provincial Library to a classroom in the Yunnan University Anthropology Museum building.²⁷ One immediate result of this change in venue was that on the first day most of the audience members were other community media organizers and filmmakers, whose works were scheduled to be shown and who had been informed of the new location. The very first screening was a new film by Wang Zhongrong, a Miao resident of Taimoshan village just outside of Kunming. He was one of the first participants in the community media training programs organized by Guo Jing

and his colleagues from 2004 to 2005. Wang showed his third film, titled *Taimoshan Story Part I*, about life and ritual practices in his village.²⁸ In it, he documents a series of collective village labor projects, from bridge building, ditch digging and road paving, and ends with wedding preparations, including scenes of a pig being slaughtered and villagers enjoying the feast. Stylistically, the film engages an observational aesthetic, with some conversations subtitled into Chinese (in the film most villagers speak either a local Miao dialect or a regional variant of Mandarin Chinese), few interviews, and no voice-over.

After the screening, Wang Zhongrong fielded questions in standard Mandarin; he began by explaining that the collective work depicted in the film was a type of traditional labor and that these projects took place every year and were organized by the village. An audience member asked him if villagers migrated to find work elsewhere, followed by another question about why he did not migrate. Wang replied that people from Taimoshan did not migrate much, despite it being only 45 kilometers from Kunming, and moreover, that when they watched the news, all of the thieves in the city were reportedly rural villagers who could not find work in Kunming and resorted to stealing. Implying that he would rather not be associated with this group, but without suggesting one way or another if he thought it was actually true or merely a common stereotype, Wang added that he would rather stay in the village making films. "I'm not someone who likes to be a migrant worker," he said. He explained that he began making videos in 2005, and to the question of how he developed this particular interest, he replied he could not say, only that "a hobby is a hobby." Other villagers were also interested in DV filmmaking, he added. The last question, from a child perhaps seven or eight years old, asked if his filmmaking was for financial or social purposes, and how he managed to pay for it. Wang responded, politely but evasively, that "the things one does for oneself don't require a lot of money."

The topics raised in this brief discussion were somewhat unsurprising, given current concerns in China over rural-to-urban migration and rural social stability. And yet, the unfolding of the conversation also revealed the difficulties in translating rural experiences through a documentary film screening in an urban context, even when audience members and filmmakers meet in a relatively open space for dialogue. The fundamental problem is that these dialogues are framed from the outset around pre-existing social binaries and their attendant expectations: rural or urban,

poor or rich, marginal or mainstream. Rather than asking about content of the film, for example, the first questions posed to Wang were about rural labor migration, a topic frequently reported on in the news but not discussed much, if at all, in his documentary. When responding, Wang took on the role of Taimoshan village representative, explaining that the villagers did not migrate much, and also justified this statement by referencing news reports and common stereotypes of rural migrants as thieves in the cities. In so doing, he reaffirmed the “rurality” of Taimoshan residents while adopting some degree of agency over urban assumptions by refuting the expectation, first, that all villagers migrate or desire to migrate, and second, that villagers are morally suspect. At the same time, while being positioned as a rural village resident, Wang also sought to embody the modern, and arguably urban, subjectivity of a film director. When asked about his own personal motivations and capabilities as a filmmaker, his responses were vague. Perhaps this was because it is difficult to elaborate on one’s own intentions; alternatively, perhaps it was his way of adopting the self-consciously noncommittal stance of many contemporary film *auteurs* who (as I observed during the discussions for the main competition screenings) also displayed a similarly deliberate reluctance to discuss their personal motivations and ambitions. However, compared to an urban filmmaker in China—one whose works circulate through networks of domestic independent film festivals and possibly even overseas among film scholars and China enthusiasts—Wang Zhongrong’s ambivalent self-positioning only seemed to render him more marginal, to the point where the final question zeroed in on his financial situation and how he could afford to make films. While, in the world of art versus commerce, some filmmakers might wear their economic precarity with pride as a symbol of independence, for Wang, this question in the context of the PVE screening room ran the risk of reinforcing his economic and social marginality.

However, Wang Zhongrong’s peripheral status was also the result of his relative autonomy. His 2011 film was produced outside of any organized community media training workshop, forcing him to singlehandedly shoulder the burden of explanation. For Wang to show his film and occupy the position of an independent rural filmmaker before an audience of workshop participants, urban scholars and city residents demonstrated both great humility and confidence on his part. His desire to share his work publicly came at the cost of having to answer broad, generalizing questions about being rural in China today, but his participation in Yunfest suggested that this was a price he was more than willing to pay in return for the opportunity to be regarded as a filmmaker.

All of the other films screened in the PVE schedule were part of larger workshops and initiatives, which granted these rural documentaries a conceptual framework for interpretation—in other words, a purpose. A second anecdote from the 2011 Yunfest PVE program, this time on the discussion of films made by participants in the China Village Documentary Project, highlights the benefits and disadvantages of viewing rural media as part of larger umbrella programs with specific themes and emphases. Many scholars have discussed the origins of this project, in which Wu Wenguang invited ten rural villagers to learn documentary filmmaking at his studio space in Beijing, with funding and support from European Union and Chinese government organizations; one of the most critical voices is that of Paola Voci.²⁹ As Voci points out in her reading of the project, Wu has insisted over the years on presenting the films as a group, as parts of a single project that he created and has sustained, which Voci argues suggests his desire to retain control over the framing and interpretation of these films. Moreover, in the first rendition of the project films released in 2006, each film begins with a still image featuring the individual filmmaker's name, gender, home village and home province.³⁰ By starting each film in this way, the

persona [of the filmmakers] is thus clearly positioned as an individual subjectivity, but also simultaneously deprived of 'true' cinematic authorship... Conversely, in these movies the villagers cannot free themselves from their social belonging and are therefore defined not simply as makers of their documentaries but, first and foremost, as subaltern men and women, who thus need to explain and justify their incursion into filmmaking.³¹

Seen in this light, the questions Wang Zhongrong fielded, and his responses to them, can be understood as precisely an attempt by the audience at Yunfest to find an explanation and justification for his "incursion into filmmaking." Wang did not have a program organizer or curator guiding his work, whereas Wu Wenguang, Voci notes, has served as the speaker and representative for the films of the China Village Documentary Project at most screenings in China and at almost all international screenings.³² At the 2011 Yunfest, only Wu was present for the screening and discussion; he explained that since only two out of four new films from 2009 were selected for screening, and there was not enough funding provided to bring all four filmmakers to Kunming, rather than cultivate feelings of envy among the filmmakers, he came alone.³³ On the one hand,

this was a pragmatic decision stemming from financial and political considerations. On the other, rather than the festival space becoming a means to traverse the rural-urban binary, these screenings instead relied upon Wu Wenguang, an urban independent filmmaker and artist, to explain his perspectives and experiences as a broker and coordinator of the film training program, rather than addressing the films and filmmakers themselves.

In spite of, or perhaps because of, this, Wu's discussion raised a number of important questions and issues related to rural filmmaking and community media. When asked what his motivations were for training rural villagers in documentary filmmaking, and why he found it interesting, Wu replied that in fact it was not difficult to use DV technologies to give people a voice and that individuals like Wang Zhongrong were also doing this type of work. He then posed a series of rhetorical questions back to the audience about the development of self-awareness in rural filmmakers: Would rural villagers make videos if there were no overarching organizations? Just showing their videos in their villages was not interesting for these directors, he claimed—it was more fun and desirable for them to go elsewhere to show their films, to Kunming, Beijing or overseas, or to use the language of my analysis here, to be able to translate themselves, and not just their work, into different spaces and contexts. Is DV a weapon?, he continued. It records, but can it help solve village problems? Recording video is one thing, he added, but actually speaking is another. As for the motivation of the rural filmmakers, he surmised, did they really want to address village problems (such as water pollution in one of the films shown, Jia Zhitan's *My Village 2008*) or did they just want to become famous documentary filmmakers?

The points raised by Wu revealed, to a certain extent, his own frustrations with his documentary training project as it had unfolded. He ended his discussion by describing the new project he was developing: working with young Chinese students, artists and other filmmakers on recordings of collective memories of the Great Famine.³⁴ He conceded that not many of the rural filmmakers from the China Village Documentary Project had stayed on, especially the younger filmmakers, whom he claimed just wanted to “have fun with video” rather than take documentary seriously. Arguably this could be in part because of the lack of resources (and perhaps the lack of effort on the part of all parties) to recognize these rural filmmakers as *filmmakers* and not just as rural villagers with cameras. Indeed, it is probably a given that rural filmmakers like Wang Zhongrong or Wang Dezhi are few and far between—the promise of a biennial festival screening in Kunming is probably not enough to motivate many young rural villagers to devote

their own time and money to making films that their fellow villagers do not necessarily want to watch. If this is the case, then, what is the value of devoting an entire festival program stream to community media, much of it produced in rural China? Is it just to provide urban audiences with a glimpse of life in rural, far-away places? Or is there, as Wu Wenguang added in his comments at the 2011 Yunfest, something more that community media and rural films can do?

CONCLUSION: DOUBLED TRANSLATIONS

These two anecdotes from the 2011 PVE screenings at Yunfest illustrate, on the one hand, how the urban festival failed in some respects to cultivate the cross-cultural translation of rural films for audiences and the filmmakers. Wang Zhongrong struggled to justify himself as both rural and a filmmaker, while Wu Wenguang expressed a sense of disappointment with the prospects of deeply integrating filmmaking in a meaningful, transformative way into a rural context. Nevertheless, both of these anecdotes also demonstrate moments of working at or striving toward a more meaningful rendering of rural experiences through the documentary film mode and the emergent possibilities therein. When rural films are shown at an urban film festival and their producers engage in discussions with a mixed audience of other rural filmmakers, urban scholars and the city public, there is the potential for these films, and these filmmakers, to exceed the limits of the recorded content. Because Yunfest prioritized discussion and gave extended time for questions after the PVE film screenings, the program avoided becoming merely a “window” through which audience members could *look at* rural lives, but instead attempted to function as a “contact zone”³⁵ through the emphasis on “dialogue through video.”

This the first possible space of cultural translation at Yunfest; as the development of the PVE strand shows, though, fostering contact across perceived social differences and experiences is something that has to be consciously developed through deliberate curation and programming. It also demands the active participation of audience members to ask questions and voice their own opinions. For example, by presenting himself as a filmmaker, Wang Zhongrong negotiated the social divides and binaries framing his perceived identity as a rural villager; in this festival space, for a brief moment, he could at least assert some agency in being acknowledged as both rural and a filmmaker. This, then, is the second moment of cultural translation, when rural subjectivity is brought into an urban

space, opening up the possibility of transforming the very basis of what it means to be rural in China. In 2014, I serendipitously met a development worker with the Guizhou provincial office of Partnerships for Community Development, whose community media videos over the years were frequently screened at Yunfest in the PVE program. She mentioned that she knew a number of ethnic Dong youth in rural Guizhou who were shooting material for films they hoped to screen at the 2015 Yunfest, should it take place. Her comment indicated that Yunfest and the PVE program have had an influential and lasting impact on rural imaginations of media, society and subjectivity—at least in some parts of China. Thus, for all of the problems and challenges faced by PVE and rural community media projects, at the very least, analyzing the transformative potential of screening rural films in an urban festival allows for a fuller understanding of the significant role Yunfest has had on documentary filmmaking, rural community media practices, and ongoing questions of agency and subjectivity in the representation of rural, ethnic minority experiences in China today.

NOTES

1. Jennifer Deger, “Constellations of Us: Backstories to a Bark TV,” *Journal of Australian Studies* 35, no. 2 (2011): 222.
2. For a critical analysis of the influence of transnational organizations on Chinese documentary film, see Matthew D. Johnson, “Bringing the Transnational Back into Documentary Cinema: Wu Wenguang’s *China Village Documentary Project*, Participatory Video, and the NGO Aesthetic,” in *China’s iGeneration: Cinema and Moving Image Culture for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Matthew D. Johnson, Keith B. Wagner, Tianqi Yu, and Luke Vulpiani (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 272–81.
3. Much of this information is drawn from the Yunfest website (<http://www.yunfest.org>) in addition to information collected during interviews and conversations with relevant Yunfest organizers.
4. Guo Jing, “Documenting in a Time of Artificial Images,” *Yunnan Multi Culture Visual Festival*, trans. Tom Dickinson and Yang Kun, accessed August 27, 2015, <http://yunfest.org/e-last/xu.htm>.
5. “Participatory Visual Education,” *Yunnan Multi Culture Visual Festival*, accessed August 27, 2015, <http://yunfest.org/e-program/community/intro.htm>.
6. For more on Yunfest see Markus Nornes, “Bulldozers, Bibles and Very Sharp Knives: The Chinese Independent Documentary Scene,” *Film Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (2009): 50–55; also see Luke Robinson and Jenny

- Chio, "Making Space for Chinese Independent Documentary: The Case of Yunfest 2011," *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 7, no. 1 (2013): 21–40.
7. Unofficially, this move was precipitated by conflicts with city officials over the inclusion of the film *Though I am Gone*, about the murder of a teacher at the hands of her students at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution.
 8. "Participatory Visual Education," *Yunnan Multi Culture Visual Festival*, accessed August 27, 2015, <http://yunfest.org/yunfest09/e-community/index.htm>.
 9. For details on these projects see Paola Voci, *China on Video: Smaller-screen Realities* (London: Routledge, 2010), Chap. 7; see also Johnson, "Bringing the Transnational Back."
 10. This community media program is called *Xiangcun zhi yan* in Chinese; the English translation has changed over the years from Eyes of the Village to Eye of the Villager, to most recently, From Our Eyes. I use this most recent English translation throughout.
 11. Johnson, "Bringing the Transnational Back."
 12. "Participatory Visual Education," *Yunnan Multi Culture Visual Festival*, accessed August 27, 2015, <http://yunfest.org/yunfest2011/en/pve/index.htm>.
 13. During the festival, due to high viewer interest and demand to see documentaries from Qinghai Province, a special evening screening of a few films was organized in one of the rooms at the Yunnan Provincial Library, though this was not noted or included on any of the distributed festival schedules. On the questions and conflicts over film festival space at the 2011 Yunfest, see Robinson and Chio, "Making Space."
 14. The list of films selected by the jury for 2013 can be found online at Yunfest's website. See "2013 Diliujie Yun zhi Nan Jilu Yingxiangzhan," *Yunnan Multi Culture Visual Festival* 6, accessed August 30, 2015, <http://yunfest.org/list2013.htm>.
 15. Participatory video as a concept and tool for social change has gained increasing prominence with research conducted on the methodology and the sociopolitical and cultural impacts of such projects. For example, see the work of Pat Aufderheide on Vincent Carelli in Brazil and the Video nas Aldeias (Video in the Villages) project, "'You See the World of the Other and You Look at Your Own': The Evolution of the Video in the Villages Project," *Journal of Film and Video* 60, no. 2 (2008): 26–34. On process and method, see E-J Milne, Claudia Mitchell, and Naydene de Lange, *Handbook of Participatory Video* (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2012).
 16. Johnson calls this an "NGO Aesthetic," which he describes as "a visual culture of citizen empowerment" intended to render "lower-class society into legible terrain." Johnson, "Bringing the Transnational Back," 257.

17. Philippa Deveson, "The Agency of the Subject: Yolngu Involvement in the Yirrkala Film Project," *Journal of Australian Studies* 35, no. 2 (2011): 155.
18. *Ibid.*, 153.
19. *Ibid.*, 155.
20. *Ibid.*, 154.
21. See essays in the BAMA report published in honor of Wangta after his death. Available at <http://yunfest.org/bama/report/bama11.pdf>.
22. An extensive collection of interviews with and first-person essays by Hou Wentao was published as part of the From Our Eyes reports from 2012. Available at <http://yunfest.org/bama/report/x3.pdf>.
23. Wanning Sun, *Subaltern China: Rural Migrants, Media, and Cultural Practices* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014), 133–42.
24. *Ibid.*, 133.
25. *Ibid.*, 137.
26. Besides gaining the attention of scholars like Sun, Wang has also participated in events at prominent institutions in Beijing to promote his work in Picun. See "LEAP Magazine Lecture series: Migrant Advocacy in Picun Village," *Ullens Center for Contemporary Art*, accessed August 30, 2015, <http://ucca.org.cn/en/program/leap-magazine-lecture-series-migrant-advocacy-in-picun-village/>.
27. See Robinson and Chio, "Making Space," for an extended discussion of the politics of space at the 2011 Yunfest.
28. "Taimoshan Story Part 1," *Yunnan Multi Culture Visual Festival*, accessed August 27, 2015, <http://yunfest.org/yunfest2011/en/pvc/14.html>.
29. Voci, *China on Video*, 2010.
30. This is also the case in films produced by participants in workshops organized by From Our Eyes, although here I only discuss Voci's critical reading of Wu Wenguang's project.
31. Voci, *China on Video*, 157.
32. *Ibid.*, 155. Voci also makes a pointed argument about the naming of the films, which after the first round, were all standardized to be called "My Village [Year]," thus further subsuming their individuality within the broader project name and brand.
33. Synopses for all four films are included in the Yunfest program. See "Body and Memory—CCD Workstation Documentary Collection," *Yunnan Multi Culture Visual Festival* 5, accessed August 30, 2015, <http://yunfest.org/yunfest2011/en/pvc/6.html>.
34. The Great Famine occurred between 1958 and 1962 during the Great Leap Forward. Wu's project is now called the Folk Memory Project and has recently been showcased and archived at Duke University. See Gwen

Hawkes, "The Memory Project at Duke: Film Screenings and Events Coming this October," *Duke University Libraries*, published September 12, 2014, accessed August 30, 2015, <http://blogs.library.duke.edu/blog/2014/09/12/memory-project-duke/>.

35. On museums as contact zones, see James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), drawing on the initial arguments from Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 2008 [1992]).

Translating the Margins: New Asian Cinema, Independent Cinema, and Minor Transnationalism at the Hong Kong Asian Film Festival

Su-Anne Yeo

INTRODUCTION

Film festivals are part and parcel of globalization. Chinese film festivals not only play important roles within regional screen industries in East Asia, thereby contributing to regional economies, but they also facilitate cross-border links between minor screen cultures that are non-mainstream or alternative. This chapter analyses the evolution of the Hong Kong Asian Film Festival (HKAFF) in order to suggest that these two processes—screen regionalism and what Françoise Lionnet and Shu-Mei Shih call “minor transnationalism”—overlap.¹ By looking closely at the festival, this chapter sheds light on the tensions between commercial strategies to promote a regional film market based in the Special Administrative Region (SAR), and more activist practices of screen selection, competition, and mediation meant to foster local and transnational public cultures.

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HONG KONG: A TALE OF TWO GLOBALIZATIONS

In her essay “Postcolonial Hong Kong Cinema: Utilitarianism and the Trans(local),” Laikwan Pang identifies two main trends in post-handover Hong Kong film.² One is towards partnership with the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in the form of studio-produced blockbusters that can facilitate Hong Kong access to the Chinese market. An example of a blockbuster would be Peter Chan’s *Warlords*. This type of filmmaking is dominated by big players, such as China Film Group Corporation, Huayi Brothers & Taihe Film Investment Co. Ltd., and Beijing Polybona Film Distribution Co. Ltd., which provide both production financing and distribution. The dialogue in these blockbuster films is in Mandarin.

Another trend is towards partnership with other East Asian and Southeast Asian countries in the form of multi-partner financed art house films promoted under the rubric of “New Asian Cinema.” An example of New Asian Cinema would be *Invisible Waves*, a collaboration between the Netherlands, Thailand, South Korea, and Hong Kong that was shot by Pen-Ek Ratanaruang. This type of filmmaking is driven by specialized distributors (and sometimes financiers) such as Fortissimo Films and Magnolia Pictures, both of which have offices based in Hong Kong. As a set of industrial and aesthetic strategies, this New Asian Cinema resembles the Pan-Asian Cinema identified by Darrell William Davis and Emily Yueh-Yu Yeh in their analysis of East Asian screen industries and their responses to globalization.³ The dialogue in these art house films varies from production to production—for example, *Invisible Waves* features Thai, Japanese, Korean, and English—but is usually in a language other than Cantonese.

This bifurcation of Hong Kong cinema into blockbusters or commercial art house films is unhelpful on two counts. First, it minimizes the fact that both these genre forms are fundamentally commercial in orientation. The regional relationships they represent are therefore different in degree but not in kind. Second, it ignores the contribution of Hong Kong’s independent film sector. In his essay, “Urban Cinema and the Cultural Identity of Hong Kong,” Leung Ping-Kwan draws attention to an identifiable impulse in Hong Kong cinema post-1997 to explore the marginal and alternative spaces of the territory with films that “challenge the past representation of various minority communities: the gay community, the youth in the poor housing estates, the prostitutes from the north.”⁴ Unlike blockbusters or the New Asian Cinema, these films are

mostly small scale, very low budget, and made with the support of the Hong Kong Arts Development Council (HKADC). Independent filmmaker Simon Chung recalls: “I was actually the first applicant [to the HKADC] with my first film, *Life is Elsewhere*.... Later on the council also funded features.”⁵ Thematically, many of these films draw attention to underrepresented communities and to non-normative perspectives in ways that extend beyond sexuality. For example, Chung’s *Stanley Beloved* features a protagonist, Kevin, who is mixed-race; Evans Chan’s *The Map of Sex and Love* sets its story on Hong Kong’s Lamma Island, a part of the territory known for its alternative lifestyle; and *The Delta*, by Ira Sachs, features dialogue in English and Vietnamese. Thematically, aesthetically, and institutionally, these films thus exist on the margins of Hong Kong cinema—not to mention cinema in the rest of Asia and in the West—while also presenting a more complex and less celebratory picture of both Hong Kong and the PRC than do the Hong Kong-Chinese blockbusters engineered for commercial success.

It is tempting to frame this independent film culture as a “local” response to the regional dynamic embodied by blockbusters and Pan-Asian art house film. I would rather argue that it represents a different, quite distinct mode of transnationalism—what, following Françoise Lionnet and Shu-Mei Shih, I term “minor transnationalism.”⁶ Minor transnationalism differs from transnationalism “proper” in a number of key ways. First, where we associate the latter with global flows from the “margins” to the “centre,” from a subordinate culture to a dominant one—in filmic terms, the historical circulation of primarily art house films from Asia to the West through international film festivals—minor transnationalism instead connotes connections between margins. Implicit in the phenomenon is therefore an understanding that it involves a process of cultural translation *between* peripheral screen cultures rather than *from* a screen culture that is subordinate to one that is dominant. What is being translated in this process is not a monolithic or essentialist notion of “Asia” for Western consumption, but rather a diversity of lived and mediated experiences within Asia for its many inhabitants. Second, unlike most global flows, minor transnationalism is neither profit-driven, nor built upon Westphalian nation-state imaginaries. In consequence, it seeks to make connections that are neither commercial nor hierarchical, that stem from a sense of identification and belonging that is not primarily national, and which may serve as a potential counter to the pernicious effects of the expansion of neoliberalism, inequality, and atomization.

In this chapter, I wish to explore how the conflict between the two transnational dynamics prevalent in Hong Kong's contemporary film culture more broadly plays out in film festivals specifically. My focus here is HKAFF. I argue that HKAFF is a material and discursive site that reveals the tensions and contradictions between these two modalities and strategic responses to globalization: on the one hand, this minor mode that is peripheral-to-peripheral, and on the other hand, what we could describe as the major mode that promotes deregulation, privatization, and free trade—though on a local and regional scale. An analysis of HKAFF shows how the festival has served a dual purpose. First, as an exhibition site for New Asian Cinema, in order to establish and sustain a commercial market for films produced and distributed by EDKO Films Ltd. (a stakeholder in the festival, hereafter EDKO) within the territory. Second, as a platform for independent cinema from Hong Kong, the PRC, and Taiwan, across the region and beyond, in order to open up a transnational space for cultural connection and exchange. This has been particularly important for the festival's other major stakeholder, Ying E Chi (hereafter YEC), a not-for-profit organization that represents independent filmmakers in the SAR. However, analysis of the festival's programming, its patterns of prize awarding, and the annual Message from the Director all suggest how over the life cycle of the festival EDKO's interests gradually won out over YEC's. In consequence, in 2008, HKAFF split into two distinct events. I conclude my chapter with an analysis of the new festival YEC established in 2008—the Hong Kong Asian Independent Film Festival (HKAIFF), since 2010 known as the Hong Kong Independent Film Festival (HKindieFF)—outlining how the event more explicitly exemplifies Hong Kong minor transnationalism than HKAFF.

THE HONG KONG ASIAN FILM FESTIVAL: FROM THE MARGINS TO THE MARKET

HKAFF was launched in 2004 as a collaborative partnership between YEC and the Broadway Cinematheque (hereafter BC). Initially established as a response to the unprecedented recent production by YEC members of six feature-length independent Hong Kong films, the inaugural festival took place over 11 days and screened 20 programming sections, mostly focused on low-budget Hong Kong cinema.⁷ Visiting directors to the inaugural festival included internationally acclaimed auteurs such as Fifth

Generation Chinese filmmaker Tian Zhuangzhuang, as well as local filmmakers such as Vincent Chui and Tammy Cheung.⁸ By 2007, however, the event had grown exponentially, with more than 80 films in 63 categories being shown over 17 days.⁹ Shortly after, YEC and BC parted ways. Following BC's trademarking of the festival name, the event was split into two separate entities. HKAFF continued to be presented by BC in the same venue. YEC, however, launched a new festival—the HKAIFF—which it inaugurated in 2008 at The Grande cinema, an 11-screen theatre in Kowloon Station.

Understanding HKAFF's particular trajectory requires analysis of the event's two main stakeholders. Established in 1996, BC is part of the Broadway Circuit of cinemas. Comprised of a cinema, bookshop, DVD shop, and café, it bills itself as a local hub for art house and non-mainstream cinema. However, the Broadway Circuit is itself owned by EDKO, one of the major producers, distributors, and exhibitors of domestic and foreign films in Hong Kong and mainland China. EDKO was founded in 1996 by William Kong, who is probably most famous as the producer of Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, and it owns a back catalogue that also boasts *Hero*, *The Flowers of War*, and *Lust, Caution*. The company is thus heavily involved with both the New Asian Cinema and a certain kind of pan-Chinese blockbuster. YEC, in contrast, is a non-profit organization that strives "to unite independent filmmakers" and to distribute and promote Hong Kong independent films.¹⁰ Established in 1997, it was founded by a group of independent filmmakers, including Mark Chan, Vincent Chui, Simon Chung, Chow Keung, Wai Lun-Kwok, Kal Ng, and Yu Lik-Wai.¹¹ YEC has a catalogue of 67 titles,¹² which it distributes through limited theatrical screenings; television and Internet broadcast (the former in Europe, Asia, Australia, and North America); international film festivals and themed film festivals (independent, Asian, LGBT, and so forth); and VCD and DVD sales both online and offline. These titles are often consciously "marginal": 15 titles in the current catalogue (or 25 per cent) are by filmmakers who are gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, or transgender, and who openly address queer themes.¹³ The organization also promotes local films to civic institutions, such as city hall and government agencies, social institutions, such as colleges and universities, and cultural institutions, such as arts centres and film groups. YEC's investments are therefore very much in Hong Kong's non-commercial, independent film culture, and its approach to cinema driven by concerns that are not exclusively about capital accumulation. Simon Chung makes this clear in a comment on Hong

Kong queer cinema that speaks to YEC's understanding of its place in the local film scene: "It's more than men having sex with men ... It is a way to see the world ... a particular sensibility."¹⁴

If YEC's decision to partner with BC, and thus by extension EDKO, initially appears counterintuitive, it must be understood in the context of changes to the Hong Kong exhibition sector in the 1990s. These changes included the expansion of multiplexes, the closure of art house cinemas, and the proliferation of non-theatrical or alternative sites of exhibition. According to Stephen Teo, the replacement in the 1990s of the old movie houses with multiplexes was the most fundamental structural change to occur in the Hong Kong film industry. This development was and is one of the hallmarks of media globalism and regionalism. The decade also saw "a rise in admission prices as cinemas upgraded facilities ... higher prices and more sophisticated, albeit smaller, auditoriums raised the expectation for quality products which were met by imported Hollywood films."¹⁵ Says Venus Wong, a former employee of YEC: "In Hong Kong, you seldom get any other choices other than Hollywood films. Or maybe some major films from Japan or Korea."¹⁶ Laikwan Pang argues that large distributors, such as Media Asia and EDKO, have become extremely powerful, and exhibitors such as UA and AMC now dominate the Hong Kong scene.¹⁷ The Imperial Cinema in Wan Chai closed in 2004 after 35 years, and the Cine-Art House Cinema closed in 2006 after 18 years, in part because of high overheads; the latter re-opened in 2009 in Amoy Garden Shopping Arcade in Kowloon Bay.¹⁸ According to Jimmy Choi, former head of the film and video department of the Hong Kong Arts Centre (HKAC):

Back in the old days cinemas used to screen short films with the feature films. But the practice has ceased for many years. The [Hong Kong] Arts Centre, for a time, used to screen short films of less than ten minutes in length with feature films, and split the proceeds with the creator. But now time means everything to cinemas and they have no time for short films.¹⁹

YEC's launch of HKAFF at BC can thus be understood as strategic. Faced with a structural readjustment of the local exhibition sector that favoured commercial conglomerates over independent players—itsself the product of a similar industrial consolidation occurring at a regional scale—working with EDKO (if at one remove) was clearly a way to open up exhibition space for non-mainstream cinema in Hong Kong.²⁰ In some ways, this tactic was effective. According to Esther Yeung, the former general manager

of YEC, HKAFF became the non-profit distributor's most important annual event.²¹ I would suggest, however, that the kind of commercial logic inherent to EDKO's regional cinematic transnationalism very quickly started to take precedence over YEC's minor transnational practices. The result was an increasing marketization of the festival, and the ultimate split after the 2007 edition, from which HKAFF emerged. One way to trace this shift is through an analysis of how the "value-adding" processes through which the festival bestows cultural, and ultimately financial, capital on particular films has changed over time. I therefore adapt Marijke de Valck's trio of practices that are central to this process in European international festivals—selection, competition, and mediation²²—to consider how HKAFF's ongoing marketization was made manifest through three elements of the festival from 2004 to 2007: selection of the Opening Night films; the competitive Film Awards; and finally, the programming booklets' Message from the Director to festival-goers.

FROM MINOR TO MAJOR TRANSNATIONALISM

One of the ways in which a film festival declares its organizational values is through the scheduling and placement of films. The Opening Night programming slot at a festival is typically the most prominent place within the festival line-up and therefore one of heightened importance.²³ There are at least two possible programming strategies here: by opening the festival with a major film with big stars, a famous director, and commercial or critical potential, the festival might seek to elevate its media profile and public standing, and thus strengthen its brand image. Alternatively however, a festival might choose to support a minor film, one by an emerging director or one without obvious commercial attributes, precisely to lend the film and its independent vision maximum publicity and exposure.

An analysis of HKAFF's Opening Film titles from 2004 to 2007 is instructive because it reveals an evolution in programming strategy from supporting minor films to supporting major ones. As such, it reveals how the non-commercial programming impulse of YEC was placed under increasing institutional pressure. When HKAFF was launched in 2004, the idea was to open the festival with a debut film from a local director.²⁴ That year, HKAFF's Opening Film was *When Beckham Met Owen*, by Hong Kong independent filmmaker, Adam Wong Sau-Ping. However, by 2007, the programming direction of the festival had changed. That year, the final year in which HKAFF would be co-presented by YEC and BC, there

were two titles in the Opening Film programming section: Stanley Tam's *Breeze of July* and Ang Lee's transnational co-production *Lust, Caution* (Table 15.1).

The programming categories for the inaugural HKAFF were Opening Film and Closing Film, Gala Presentation, In Competition (Independent Spirit Award), Asian New Vision, Docu-Power, and Short Highlight [sic].²⁵ In contrast, the programming categories for the much expanded fourth HKAFF were: Opening Film and Closing Film, Festival Gala, New Talent Award, Asian Wide Angle, Chinese Cinema: A New Generation, Docu-Power, Asian Shorts (1, 2, 3, and 4), plus Special Presentation, Director in Focus, Cineaste Delight, and Midnight Craze.²⁶ Thus, the majority of new programming added to HKAFF appeared to focus on commercial art (auteur) cinema and genre cinema, rather than on independent filmmaking per se.

The independent programming sections at HKAFF that might be associated with a minor transnational approach include: Asian Wide Angle, Chinese Cinema: A New Generation, Docu-Power: Up Close and Personal, Asian Shorts (1, 2, 3, 4—4 being the Best of JVC Tokyo Video Festival).

Table 15.1 Opening night films at HKAFF 2004–2007^a

<i>Year</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Director</i>	<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Production financing</i>
2004	<i>When Beckham Met Owen</i>	Adam Wong Sau-Ping	Hong Kong	Independent
2005	<i>Three Times</i> +	Hou Hsiao Hsien +	Taiwan +	
	<i>b420</i>	Mathew Tang	Hong Kong	Independent
2006	<i>My Mother is a Belly Dancer</i>	Lee Kung-lok	Hong Kong	Focus Films October Pictures
2007	<i>Lust, Caution</i> +	Ang Lee +	USA China Taiwan Hong Kong +	Hai Sheng Film Production Focus Features Haisheng Films Mr Yee Productions River Road Entertainment Sil-Metropole Independent
	<i>Breeze of July</i>	Stanley Tam	Hong Kong	Independent

^aAll figures taken from relevant festival programme booklets

In Asian Wide Angle at the fourth HKAFF, there were 13 films from territories across the region, including Macau, Taiwan, Japan, India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Iraqi-Kurdistan France. According to the festival programming booklet that year, the films addressed

A wide range of issues—women’s status in Japan, local consciousness in Taiwan, illiteracy in the Philippines, [the] caste system in India, Buddhist philosophy in Sri Lanka, as well as the political situation in post-Saddam Iraq. Not only do these films appeal to both refined and popular tastes, they give us a better understanding of our neighbouring countries.²⁷

Another of the ways in which a film festival conveys its identity is in its judging and conferring of awards. Again, there are at least two possible competition strategies here: by conferring an award on an established or emerging auteur, the festival might seek to affirm a mainstream mode of production or practice of filmmaking, one that is oriented towards critical or commercial success. Alternately, a festival might seek to affirm an alternative mode of production or practice of filmmaking through its choice of an award-holder who is less willing to conform to filmmaking conventions or norms.

An analysis of the HKAFF’s awards from 2004 to 2007 is instructive. At the inaugural event, the festival announced the first annual Independent Spirit Award, an award that “celebrates creativity under limited resources,” and the recipient was Hong Kong independent filmmaker, Adam Wong Sau-Ping.²⁸ However, the following year, the award was renamed the New Talent Award, and the prize was given to an independent filmmaker from outside of the SAR, the Japanese director, Ichii Masahide.²⁹ In his analysis of the experimental films of the 1960s and 1970s, S.N. Ko observes that independence in Hong Kong has served two different purposes: first, to offer an alternative form of cinematic expression to the commercial mainstream; and second, to encourage and “train” aspiring young filmmakers, several of whom will subsequently enter the industry.³⁰ Masahide’s career since receiving the Award has encompassed two other feature films, a TV mini-series, and a TV movie.³¹ This change in nomenclature and recipient suggests that the HKAFF awards shifted from serving the first purpose of supporting an alternative mode of filmmaking to serving the second purpose as an incubator for new industrial talent (Table 15.2).

The final way in which a film festival declares its institutional values is through the Message from the Festival Director(s), or Forward, in the

Table 15.2 Film awards at HKAFF 2004–2007^a

<i>Year</i>	<i>Award name</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Recipient</i>	<i>Nationality</i>
2004	First Independent Spirit Award	<i>Magic Boy</i>	Adam Wong Sau-Ping	Hong Kong
2005	First New Talent Award	<i>Perth: The Geylang Massacre</i>	Djinn (Ong Lay Jinn)	Singapore
2006	Second New Talent Award	<i>Rain Dogs</i>	Ho Yu-Hang	Malaysia
2007	Third New Talent Award	<i>Dog Days Dream</i>	Ichii Masahide	Japan

^aFigures taken from various sources. For the first Independent Spirit Award Winner, see “Background,” *The Fourth Hong Kong Asian Film Festival*, accessed April 15, 2009, http://bc.cinema.com.hk/adhoc/hkaff_2007/about/index.html; for the first New Talent Award, see “Cineodeon Features,” *Asian Film Archive*, accessed April 15, 2009, <http://www.asianfilmarchive.org/cineodeon2008/CineodeonFilms.aspx>; for the second New Talent Award, see “Malaysian Director Ho Yuhang Got New Talent Award” for RAIN DOGS,” *Focus First Cuts*, accessed April 15, 2009, <http://www.focusfirstcuts.com/mediacenter.swf>; for the third New Talent Award, see “Ichii Masahide Wins Big in Hong Kong,” *Pia Film Festival*, accessed April 15, 2009, <http://pff.jp/english/award.html>

festival programme booklet.³² Although often overlooked, the message is important because it sets the tone for the festival and draws attention to the event’s annual highlights. Furthermore, the message is part of the institutional and promotional discourse of the festival that frames audience reception of the films, filmmakers, and even national and regional cultures. Again, there are several possible discursive strategies here: by focusing on the most familiar or popular films, auteurs, and national cinemas, the message can reinforce existing attitudes and viewing practices. Alternately, by spotlighting unfamiliar or challenging programming, the festival director can intervene in the status quo.

A closer look at the Forward within the inaugural HKAFF programme booklet is instructive because it specifically highlights the screening of short films and documentary films which feature a “voice that is always under represented.”³³ Likewise, the message in the second Annual HKAFF programme booklet by Gary Mak (director of BC) reveals a critical self-reflexivity about the shortcomings of a regional screen industries strategy that would seem at odds with BC’s corporate ownership by EDKO. Mak asks:

What is Asian cinema? Does Asian cinema refer to what are most accessible in Hong Kong such as Japanese animation, Korean melodrama, or Chinese Kung Fu? How about those from South East Asia? How are they represented in an Asian Film Festival? ... The more prosperous the economy of the country, the more prosperous its film industry is going to be. Having said that, a weak economy does not stop a country producing cinematic gems. Films particularly from Iran, India, Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines this year, are the most underrepresented but the most heartfelt ones. Don't let them slip away again. Come and support these films!³⁴

According to Koichi Iwabuchi, "the alliance of major media corporations in East Asian countries [has engendered] a new international hierarchy in production capacity, with Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, and Taiwan in the top tier. These media capitals are becoming commercially and ideologically hegemonic in the region."³⁵ Mak's comments acknowledge this hegemony while calling on the festival's audience to actively support the work of other, less prominent Asian film industries showing at HKAFF. In doing so, his message suggests tensions within the festival over whether to adopt a major or a minor transnational orientation. This self-reflexivity was, however, less evident in subsequent festival programming booklets. In 2007, for example, the Message from the Director boasted that HKAFF was now "the biggest Asian film event in Hong Kong and the most notable platform for bringing together new filmmaking talents in Asia."³⁶ Critical ambivalence about the geographical power differences obscured by the term "Asian film" is here replaced by unapologetic public relations and relatively straightforward cheerleading for an industry-oriented approach to what a festival should be doing.

As the above discussion suggests, between 2004 and 2007, HKAFF evolved from a small, primarily grassroots festival characterized by a low-budget, local opening film, an Independent Spirit Award presented to a local filmmaker, and a festival message that focused on giving voice to the unrepresented, into a major, professionalized, corporatized exhibition platform characterized by a multi-million dollar studio co-produced opening film, a New Talent Award presented to a Japanese independent filmmaker, and a message focused on the scale and success of the festival as a platform for new entrants to the film industry. This is not to say that the inaugural festival was completely without commercial traits: HKAFF always operated in what Wendy Gan terms a "mixed-commercial mode."³⁷ However, it does demonstrate the problems faced by YEC in its attempts

to negotiate a position within the regional screenscape. Collaboration with the film industry in the form of BC and EDKO ultimately resulted in an all-out festival focus on New Asian Cinema in order to accommodate the latter's pan-Asian strategy: transnationalism as a commercial strategy thus won out at YEC's expense. While the reasons behind the collapse of this festival partnership were highly contested,³⁸ it is not unreasonable to assume that this was a major factor. The rather different strategy that YEC adopted when programming HKAIFF in 2008 and 2009, and subsequently HKindieFF from 2010 onwards, only underscores this point.

AN IMAGINED COMMUNITY OF INDIES

The inaugural HKAIFF in 2008 re-affirmed YEC's commitment to an independent vision through the festival's Opening Film programming slot, Message from the Director, and extra-screening activities. The festival opened with the premiere of the ultra-low budget, first time feature film *King of Spy*. Furthermore, the programme booklet proclaimed:

At HKAIFF, you may not find any superstars, red carpets, or fancy terms. What we have here are simply feature films, documentary films, and short films produced with sincerity ... We believe in sharing a platform for indie films' screening; sharing and discussion are the most crucial issue above everything else.³⁹

HKAIFF was clearly signalling that it was returning to its roots, establishing continuity between the new festival and the earlier rather than later iterations of HKAFF.

However, independent does not translate as purely local. From the start, YEC sought to establish connections with similar events and institutions outside the SAR. On December 27 and 28 of 2008, shortly after the launch of HKAIFF in November 2008, the organization held a two-day screening of Hong Kong independent filmmaking in the Songzhuang Arts District of Beijing. This was supported by the HKADC, and organized in conjunction with the Li Xianting Foundation and Fanhall Films, coordinators of the Beijing Independent Film Festival (BIFF) and China Independent Documentary Film Festival (CIDFF) (see Flora Lichaa's chapter in this volume for details on these events). This kind of exchange was also integrated into the institutional structure of the festival. In 2011, after HKAIFF officially changed its name to the HKindieFF, the festi-

val launched the Chinese Independent Filmmaking Alliance, a collaboration between Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, Chongqing, and Shenzhen. It aimed to promote independent screenings and cultural exchange.⁴⁰ Such engagement was extended to programming. The first programming section of the festival, entitled “Indie Focus—Ogawa Shinsuke,” screened from November 7 to 22 at the Agnès B Cinema at the HKAC.⁴¹ It comprised seven films by the eponymous Japanese documentary filmmaker, as well as two post-screening seminars, one called “From the Identities of Ogawa Shinsuke to His Films,” and the other called “Ogawa Shinsuke—Documentaries that Transcend From Social Movements.”⁴² The second programming section was entitled, “Chinese Independent Filmmaking Alliance,” and screened from November 16 to December 16 at the HKAC.⁴³ The third programming section was a programme of ten independent films entitled “Indie Nations,” which screened from January 10 to 16, 2012, at the Agnès B Cinema at the HKAC. Festival curator Vincent Chui declared on the event’s website under the heading “Giving Together, Growing Together,” “It is hard for us not to feel marginalized in these few years, but if we can join together from the periphery, perhaps we can wage a counter-encirclement. Who knows?”⁴⁴

Chui’s statement clarifies how the transnationalism of HKAIFF and HKIndieFF is minor rather than major. Geographically, it connects margins to margins: the flow of people and films is intra-Asian rather than trans-Pacific, moving between Japan, the PRC, and the Hong Kong SAR, rather than from the latter to the USA. But more importantly, it also connects peripheral film communities. By circulating films produced at the limits of their respective media ecologies, and cinematic genres like non-fiction that have traditionally been marginal to the commercial mainstream, these transnational exchanges have created alliances and connections that were based on shared values rather than capital accumulation. At same time, they have also cut across national-political identities: the aim is to forge an “imagined community of indies” from Hong Kong, Asia, and around the world, rather than one based on shared ethno-cultural or national values.⁴⁵ These activities therefore do more than simply illustrate the opportunities facing independent screen organizations under globalization that work in a more peripheral-to-peripheral mode. They also offer a filmic and socio-cultural model for Hong Kong-mainland Chinese cooperation that potentially re-imagines and reconfigures dominant relations between the SAR and the PRC, producing new forms of identity and belonging that exceed the logics of both the market and the nation-state.⁴⁶

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have sought to trace how the conflicts between different modes of globalization have played out through the spaces of Hong Kong independent film festivals. Using HKAFF as a case study, I show how the twin purposes of the festival—as a platform for the exhibition of both commercial art house cinema and of independent Hong Kong cinema—were resolved in favour of the former, in line with the strategies of EDKO, one of the festival partners. HKAFF thus became integrated into the business networks of the regional film industry, a form of globalization I term major transnationalism. Ying E Chi, the non-profit organization that formed half of the HKAFF partnership, departed, resulting in the formation of HKAIFF and then HKIndieFF. Both these events have tried to encourage the establishment of minor transnational links through the region; connections that are not profit-focused, but instead committed to connecting independent film cultures “at the margins” of commercialization and globalization. These establish the basis for communities of identification and practice that cross national borders and restructure socio-political hierarchies, running counter to the internal logics of the film industry and international realpolitik while focusing on everyday experience.

The significance of this minor transnational strategy can only really be assessed against the epistemic and ontological dimensions of such a shift. This is particularly important in the context of Hong Kong’s colonial history with Great Britain and its subordinate relationship to mainland China as an SAR. As several scholars and writers have observed, under British rule in the 1970s, the colonial government adopted a modernization strategy of importing foreign culture in the form of performing arts and fine arts groups from Europe and America as way of raising the “quality” of local culture in Hong Kong.⁴⁷ By privileging relations within Asia rather than between Asia and the West, or between and within independent communities rather than between the independent sector and the cultural mainstream, these film festivals have opened up spaces in which to construct new modes of knowledge and experience, of self and Other, time and space. Because they are not intent on accumulation, they are able to promote a notion of Asia as Method,⁴⁸ that is, Asia as a critical perspective, rather than Asia as Brand. In his book of the same name, Kuan-Hsing Chen describes a process of de-imperialization in which

Societies in Asia can become each other’s points of reference, so that the understanding of the self can be transformed, and subjectivity rebuilt.

On this basis, the diverse historical experiences and rich social practices of Asia may be mobilized to provide alternative horizons and perspectives.⁴⁹

These critical perspectives are indispensable to engaging with both the opportunities *and* threats of globalization and the positive and the negative implications of the rise of Asia, particularly China. Chen understands Asia as Method as a way to transform subjectivity and re-imagine Asia through a new kind of knowledge production. This re-imaging process is part of a broader effort on the part of scholars such as Chua Beng Huat, Koichi Iwabuchi, Wang Hui, Kim Soyung, Ashish Rajadhyaksha, and others to de-Westernize cultural studies and media studies within the region. This effort included the establishment of the journal, *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, in the late 1990s.

By staging cultural connections and exchanges within and between peripheries, HKAIFF, HKindieFF, and even the earliest iterations of HKAFF, can all be understood as enacting a form of decolonization that does not valorize or resort to nationalism. Thus, this decolonizing process disrupts the post-colonial telos of colonialism, nationalism, and liberation. Additionally, by fostering dialogue and debate rather than simply economic cooperation and integration, these events can be understood as enacting a form of globalization that does not valorize, or take for granted, capitalism. They therefore contest globalization's drive towards ever increasing expansion and capital accumulation. This is significant because most analyses of flexible citizenship and flexible accumulation assume that cross-border processes are necessarily market-oriented and profit-driven.⁵⁰

What is at stake in differentiating a minor transnational approach from that of a regional screen industry one is precisely the agency that it affords for non-elites or semi-elites, including minority communities of all persuasions. Says Simon Chung

In Hong Kong, it gets very lonely I would say because your audience base is small, and you're always working in the margins. But then when you go to other film festivals, you realize that people all over the world are doing the same thing. And you feel sort of less lonely that way.⁵¹

With respect to new notions of time, it makes possible a historiological understanding of Hong Kong and Asia, one that is sceptical of progress, rather than a historiographic one.⁵² What is at stake in situating minor transnationalism in a Hong Kong context at a certain historical juncture is precisely the way in which the concept sheds light on what is particular

and time-bound about globalization, rather than what is ostensibly universal and ahistorical. With respect to new notions of space, it makes possible a relational geography, one that is sceptical of the spread of empire, rather than a cartographic one.⁵³

By ultimately adopting a strategy of forging periphery-to-periphery cross-border links, Ying E Chi and the festivals it has founded have helped to develop and promote an independent culture in the SAR that critically engages with issues of post-colonialism and globalization. As a result of the interventions, there has been an increase in the circulation of screen media offering alternative perspectives, such as queer films and videos, and independent documentaries. Furthermore, as the result of the minor-to-minor circuits that have emerged from these connections, many of which are also grassroots rather than elite-driven, opportunities for independent Hong Kong cinema to circulate beyond the territory have arisen. Ying E Chi's initial participation in HKAFF with EDKO's Broadway Cinematheque underscores its willingness to be part of screen regionalization rather than separate from it. However, HKAFF's subsequent transformation first into HKAIFF, and then into HKindieFF, reveals the organization's commitment to new cultural models and ways of working that assume equity and solidarity rather than hierarchy and competition, as well as the role that film festivals can play in translating such ideas into film culture.

NOTES

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2. Laikwan Pang, "Postcolonial Hong Kong Cinema: Utilitarianism and (Trans)local," *Postcolonial Studies* 10, no. 4 (2007): 422.
3. Darrell William Davis and Emilie Yueh-Yu Yeh, *East Asian Screen Industries* (London: British Film Institute, 2008).
4. Leung Ping-Kwan, "Urban Cinema and the Cultural Identity of Hong Kong," in *The Cinema of Hong Kong: History, Arts and Identity*, ed. Poshek Fu and David Desser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 249.
5. Simon Chung, interview with the author, April 4, 2009, Hong Kong.
6. Lionnet and Shih, *Minor Transnationalism*.
7. *The First Hong Kong Asian Film Festival Programme Booklet* (Hong Kong: First HKAFF, 2004), no pagination, accessed April 15, 2009, http://bc.cinema.com.hk/adhoc/hkaff_2004/index.html.

8. Ibid, n.p.
9. *The Fourth Hong Kong Asian Film Festival Programme Booklet* (Hong Kong: Fourth HKAFF, 2007), 3.
10. "About Ying E Chi," *hktdc.com*, accessed February 2, 2009, <http://www.hktdc.com/services-suppliers/Ying-E-Chi-Ltd/en/1X06LJ5A/>.
11. Deidre Boyle, "Hong Kong Media Journal," *Wide Angle* 20, no. 2 (Fall 1998): no pagination.
12. Figures taken from online film catalogues from 1997 to 2007. See "Film Catalogue," *Ying E Chi*, accessed February 2, 2009, http://www.yec.com/en/film_catalogue.php.
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14. Rachel Mok, "A Queer Argument," *BC Magazine*, 2008, accessed June 15, 2010, http://www.bcmagazine.net/hk.bcmagazine.issues/bcmagazine_webissue268/03-queer.html.
15. Stephen Teo, *Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimensions* (London: British Film Institute, 1997), 253.
16. Venus Wong, interview with the author, April 10, 2009, Hong Kong.
17. Pang, "Postcolonial Hong Kong Cinema," 418.
18. Bong Miquiabas, "Establish an Art Cinema on Hong Kong Island," *Time Out Hong Kong*, April 27, 2009, accessed June 11, 2010, <http://www.timeout.com.hk/film/features/23097/establish-an-art-cinema-on-hong-kong-island.html>.
19. Ka Ming and Teresa Kwong, "ifva Ready for Transformation: An Interview with Jimmy Choi—The Man Who Started It All," *The Tenth Hong Kong Independent Short Film and Video Awards Programme Booklet* (Hong Kong: Tenth ifva, 1996), 13.
20. As Simon Chung says: "In Hong Kong, it's a constant struggle [to expand the audience base for independent film] ... that's why theatres like the Cinematheque are so important." Chung, interview.
21. Esther Yeung, "Forward," *The Second Hong Kong Asian Film Festival Programme Booklet* (Hong Kong Second HKAFF, 2005), 4.
22. Marijke de Valck, *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 2007), 125.

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25. *First Hong Kong Asian Film Festival Programme Booklet*, n.p.
26. *The Fourth Hong Kong Asian Film Festival Programme Booklet* (Hong Kong: Fourth HKAFF, 2007), no pagination, accessed April 15, 2009, http://bc.cinema.com.hk/adhoc/hkaff_2007/about/index.html.
27. *Fourth Hong Kong Asian Film Festival Programme Booklet*, 24.
28. *First Hong Kong Asian Film Festival Programme Booklet*, n.p.
29. *The Second Hong Kong Asian Film Festival Programme Booklet* (Hong Kong: Second HKAFF, 2005), no pagination, accessed April 15, 2009, <http://bc.cinema.com.hk/adhoc/hkaff/>.
30. S.N. Ko, "Hong Kong Independent Rhythms," in *i-Generations: Independent, Experimental and Alternative Creations from the 60s to Now*, ed. May Fung (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2001), 11.
31. Masahide's output can be viewed on his page at the International Movie Data Base. See "Masahide Ichii," *Internet Movie Database*, accessed August 24, 2015, <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm3635493/>.
32. In HKAFF programme booklets, the term used is Forward or Background, but this section is more normally described as Message from the Director. I have therefore used this latter term throughout the main text of this chapter, while retaining Forward or Background in the notes.
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34. Gary Mak, "Forward," *The Second Hong Kong Asian Film Festival Programme Booklet* (Hong Kong: Second HKAFF, 2005), 5.
35. Koichi Iwabuchi, "Reconsidering East Asian Connectivity and the Usefulness of Media and Cultural Studies," in *Cultural Studies and Cultural Industries in North East Asia: What a Difference a Region Makes*, ed. Chris Berry, Nicola Liscutin, and Jonathan D. Mackintosh (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 29.
36. "Background," *The Fourth Hong Kong Asian Film Festival Programme Booklet* (Hong Kong: Fourth HKAFF, 2007), 3.
37. Wendy Gan, *Fruit Chan's Durian Durian* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005), 19.

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39. *The First Hong Kong Asian Independent Film Festival Programme Booklet* (Hong Kong: First HKAIFA, 2008), 5.
40. “Chinese Independent Filmmaking Alliance,” *Hong Kong Independent Film Festival 2011–12*, accessed June 10, 2012, <http://www.hkindieff.hk/cifa/eng/aboutcifa.html>.
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42. “Post-screening Seminars,” *Hong Kong Independent Film Festival 2011–12*, accessed June 10, 2012, <http://www.hkindieff.hk/eng/seminar.html>.
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45. “Part 3.2: Indie Nations,” *Hong Kong Independent Film Festival 2011–12*, *Hong Kong Arts Centre*, accessed June 10, 2012, <http://www.hkac.org.hk/en/calendar.php?id=729>.
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47. See Bernice Chan, “Breaking Through the Utilitarian and Unilateral Mentality of Cultural Exchange,” in *A Decade of Arts Development in Hong Kong*, ed. Stephen Lam (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Arts Development Council, 2006), 82–98.
48. Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Towards De-Imperialization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).
49. *Ibid.*, 212.
50. See, for example, Aihwa Ong, “Flexible Citizenship Among Chinese Cosmopolitans,” in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, ed. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 135.
51. Chung, interview.
52. Drawing from the work of Johannes Fabian, Chris Berry, and Mary Farquhar define historiology as “subaltern accounts of the past [that] use

tropes such as memory to emphasize... ordinary people's experience of colonization and modernity." See Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar, *China on Screen: Cinema and Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 32.

53. Irit Rogoff distinguishes between relational geography and classical geography; the latter assumes a system of nation-states and a mapping that occurs from the centre outwards. See Irit Rogoff, "Geo-Cultures: Circuits of Arts and Globalizations," Special Issue: The Art Biennale as a Global Phenomenon, *Open* 16 (2009): 106–15, accessed November 14, 2011, http://www.skor.nl/_files/Files/OPEN16_P106-115.pdf.

Translating Chinese Film Festivals: Three Cases in New York

Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong

In order to understand Chinese film festivals, we need to explore how they participate in contemporary processes of globalization and multilayered global flows. Myriad agents, both inside and outside China, use Chinese film festivals to forge diverse global relationships with China. Chinese film festivals outside China can be organized by international Chinese cinema cinephiles, overseas Chinese (including Chinese immigrants and native-born “ethnic” Chinese), or Chinese in China who want to project specific images and/or create commercial relationships with the rest of the world. Hence, the varied manifestations of overseas Chinese film festivals attest to different processes as well as strategies. What makes these Chinese film festivals different from those in Greater China is that they are “foreign.” This very foreignness necessitates translation in these film festivals: first, via literal translation through subtitling or dubbing; and second, in a larger cultural context, where ideas about different aspects of Chineseness are articulated through the film texts, the festival contexts and the learned ideas of what constitutes Chineseness in the minds of the varied stakeholders and participants in the festivals. Atom Egoyan and Ian Balfour,

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via Fredric Jameson, suggest that “a world system is brought to bear in the production and reception of a vast array of films, however asymmetri- cally, across the globe and that the international film festival is a ‘highly articulated and integrated world system.’”¹ Hence, Chinese film festivals abroad navigate multiple and complicated terrains among national cin- emas—Chinese cinema, diasporic cinema, and the globalization and asym- metry of world cinema.²

In these festivals, Chinese films themselves can represent exotic curios, affirm statements of transnational identities or embody concerted efforts for cross-cultural understanding, or be commodities for exchange. Overseas Chinese film festivals need to be studied as processes that facili- tate the flow of different kinds of Chinese cinema through varied processes of cultural translation to define China to varied participants. The festivals create structure for Chinese cinema and help to frame specific meanings for the events as well as the cinematic texts. Through these film festivals, multiple processes of cultural translation take place between China and the world. Chinese film festivals are not simply Chinese films en masse; they make the screenings of Chinese cinema into events—where people gather in real time and space to celebrate and promote Chinese cinema. These “happenings”—press, promotions, websites, pamphlets, screenings (often attended by filmmakers or experts) and parties—envelope the films to further intercultural dialogues. To elucidate these processes, I examine three festivals that illustrate Chinese/US relations. These festivals, chosen for their strengths and accessibility, also evoke wider processes evident in both well-known festivals like the Festival des 3 Continents in Nantes³ and more ephemeral events like the 2014 Chinese film festivals and other events that celebrated 50 years of Sino-French relations.⁴

Specifically, this paper investigates global practices, examines their rela- tionships to China and Chinese diaspora in this global era, and interro- gates globalization from the vantage point of Chinese cinema, through analyses of three Chinese film festivals in New York City: the New York Asian Film Festival (NYAFF, since 2002), operated by Subway Cinema; the Asian American International Film Festival (AAIFF, which started as the Chinese American Film Festival in 1978); and the New York Chinese Film Festival (NYCFF, 2010–2013, organized mainly by Chinese from the People’s Republic of China [PRC]). New York City, being one of the most global and diverse of US cities and the capital of finance as well as media, is a city that has the wherewithal to facilitate many articulations of global exchanges and translation. While it has fewer Chinese immigrants

or Chinese Americans than cities on the US West Coast, New York still has a relatively large Asian American population who yearn for a cinema that speaks to them in some ways. More importantly, New York has fairly sophisticated movie audiences who strive to see diverse cinema from all over the world, making it possible to have a wider audience base to support these festivals.

These three festivals represent different articulations of Chinese cinema on a global scale via film festivals; this article investigates the festivals' varied relationship to China and the idea of China through Chinese cinemas, as each embodies relations among different populations and their mutual imaginations and articulations of the place of Chinese in New York and, to a larger extent, in the United States. NYAFF is a fan-based film festival of popular Asian cinema, with a heavy emphasis on kung fu and action films. Organized initially by people who had little connection to China and Asia in general, it has highlighted genre films through the years. NYAFF is also an Asian film festival; therefore, we can only understand how the festival perceives Chinese cinema through it being part of a wider "flattened" imagination of Asians. Furthermore, Koichi Iwabuchi's ideas on transnational reception and cross-border flows of media culture help frame our understanding of specific cross-cultural translation processes within this festival.⁵ AAIFF is again an Asian, rather than specifically Chinese, film festival; in fact, it is an Asian American film festival organized by "Americans"—people in the United States with Asian backgrounds. The AAIFF has its roots in an activist art organization and has maintained its mission as a supporter of Asian American independent cinema. This definition of Asianness, however, is more strategically political. Through film, Asian Americans of different backgrounds see their shared experiences in the United States as a rallying force for them to demand their rights in the country. The kind of cinema AAIFF promotes is mostly diasporic cinema, akin to Hamid Naficy's accented cinema.⁶ However, as the diasporic population has changed in the United States, the festival has become more diverse and has programmed cinema from Asia as well. Unlike the NYAFF, the AAIFF is a festival for committed cinema, often adopting an activist frame of cultural translation. The third festival, NYCFF (dormant since 2013), was a PRC-organized event. While affiliated with the Chinese American Arts Council, it was primarily an event organized by the China Central Television (CCTV) movie channel—CCTV6—and sanctioned by State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT). NYCFF only showed mainstream popular cinema from the

PRC and could be considered as a form of soft power, where the PRC used its media products to reach out to the world. However, there have only been four editions of this festival, which attests to its lack of sustained support. Through this festival, the idea of branded nationalism will be explored.

These three festivals represent three levels of US/Chinese engagement. They also articulate three different ways in which Chinese, and to some extent Asian, foreignness is translated in the North American context. The NYAFF represents an event organized by an outsider to China and Chinese cinema, who is American but not Asian and looking in from outside. The festival grabs a Chinese product and emphasizes Chinese or Asian cinematic foreignness, thus differentiating its brand of Chinese or Asian cinema to an audience that seeks the thrill of the exotic other. The AAIFF represents local albeit transnational people demanding to represent themselves as Americans; this festival refuses to accept the label of being foreign. The organizers understand that Chinese and other Asian Americans are still perceived to be foreign in the eyes of many Americans, but assert that diversity does not equal foreign, therefore “de-translating” difference into everydayness. The NYCFF embodies another outsider position (Chinese from the PRC). Rather than having people of the United States presenting China and Chinese cinema, NYCFF brings Chinese cinema to foreigners abroad. This lack of concrete established stakeholders in New York may explain its short lifespan. This festival employed a specific translation strategy that asserted mainstream popular Chinese cinema as Chinese, while refusing to allow Chinese cinema that had succeeded in international film festivals, like Cannes and Venice, to define Chinese cinema to the Western world.

Seen from another perspective, NYAFF remains a haven for adoring fans of popular Asian cinema, flaunting its foreignness and perpetuating certain practices of Orientalism. AAIFF is an American festival with Chinese and Asian backgrounds, a diasporic and alternative film festival that turns its foreignness on itself. NYCFF brought select Chinese cinema to the West, cementing mutual differences. Unlike the other two festivals, NYCFF also projected the festival back home to China, mostly through the Chinese or diasporic press emphasizing Chinese cinema’s success in the West. This entailed an awkward translation between China and the West where the West is perceived to both bring prestige, thus acknowledging its position in the world, and to be a rival so that China demands recognition of its cinema. These festivals have also changed over the years

and their dynamism further sheds light on the complicated relationships between various Chinas and the United States, or even convoluted ideas of the East and the West, involving constant negotiation and contestation.

Although these festivals neither stand at the summit of the global film festival hierarchy nor are major business events, they pose interesting questions on how transnational film is used by national, regional and transnational producers, and spectators to express, negotiate or affirm positions and identities among states, cities and their peoples through the lived practices of film festivals. These film festivals also constitute parts of larger identities that specific cities, regions or nations seek to present as cosmopolitan, open or worldly, which would require further exploration than is possible here. Instead, I will review materials that explore the festivals as three different “types” to frame my discussion:

- the NYAFF as a cinephilia film festival that invites films from afar to enrich local cultures
- the AAIFF as a diasporic film festival that continues to work with its local communities to assert basic rights and nurture alternative independent cinema
- the NYCFF as a film festival that deliberately traveled abroad to reach beyond its border for transnational as well as national recognition.

THE NEW YORK ASIAN FILM FESTIVAL

The New York Asian Film Festival (NYAFF), as noted, is very much a fan-driven festival and its organizers are proud of this label. In awarding the inaugural Daniel Craft Award in Excellence in Action Cinema in 2013, for example, Grady Hendrix, a co-founder, described his fellow founder Daniel Craft, who had passed away shortly before:

I am going to call Dan a bad name, Dan was a fan ...⁷ being enthusiastic isn't cool anymore, everyone wants to be hip and removed and ironic and snarky, a fan is someone who is in love.⁸

Hendrix had recalled in 2009, when awarding the Rising Star Award, that the founders were “a bunch of white guys doing this festival.”⁹ Today, the NYAFF remains a pan-Asian festival run primarily by cinephiles who are enamored of popular Asian cinema, especially male-oriented action cinema, including kung fu, horror, sci-fi and thrillers.¹⁰ These “fans” are

thus less likely to include art house films that travel on international film circuits, even though the festival occasionally does reach out to a wider female or family audience by including romances and comedies.

According to Grady Hendrix, the founders of Subway Cinema were actually lovers of Chinese films who used to frequent the Music Palace Cinema in Manhattan's Chinatown. In 1999, the property went on sale. Hendrix, together with Paul Kazee and Goran Topalovic, tried to save the cinema, but it closed in 2000. These Hong Kong film fans wanted to find a way to keep seeing and showing popular Chinese cinema in New York. So, they decided to start a film festival, with five guys contributing US\$1000 each.¹¹ Hendrix, who blogs about Asian cinema as *Variety's* Kaiju Shakedown, started Subway Cinema with Daniel Craft, Paul Kazee, Goran Topalovic and Marc Walkow,¹² all Hong Kong film enthusiasts.

Therefore, from its very inception, the founders were interested in a Chinese film festival that showcased popular genre cinema. Years later, in 2011, Hendrix explained why the founders wanted to start the festival:

We realized that the Music Palace was doomed, and that meant the only movies people would be bringing to NYC from China and Hong Kong were going to be Zhang Yimou films and whatever the bloodless cultural gatekeepers deemed "suitable" for us masses. No one was going to be bringing the fun. No Wong Jing, no Johnnie To, no Tsui Hark.¹³

In another interview, Hendrix continued to ask,

Who would bring over the movies where dudes punch people so hard their heads explode, or where a superhero dressed as Garfield defeats evil with bad kung fu or where you get to see the deadly penis gun? No one else stepped up to fill the gap, so we felt like it was our duty.¹⁴

In many ways, the NYAFF is the New York version of London's Terracotta Far East Film Festival, or the Udine Far East Film Festival, without the gravitas. More importantly, the founders have a certain idea about what Chinese or Hong Kong cinema should be. These films are foreign, and that foreignness provides a different sense of humor and action from Hollywood movies, elevating but also perpetuating the general stereotypes of the kung fu kicking Chinaman to cult status. Meanwhile, this Chineseness is perceived as part of some vague Asianness, further flattening diverse cultures into an easily identified whole.¹⁵

The NYAFF started in 2002. It was held in smaller venues, such as the Asia Society and Anthology Film Center. It has advanced its public profile since then, arriving at the Independent Film Channel (IFC) Center in 2008. Since 2010, it has held an annual, two-week event at the temple of New York high culture—the Lincoln Center. The festival is successful because of a well-developed fan base for popular Asian cinema, and more specifically, for Hong Kong action films, in the West since the 1970s.¹⁶ The audiences include fans like the founders, younger audiences who have inherited this fascination with Asian action cinema, and others in the Asian diaspora who want to have access to their home cinema on a big screen and in a film festival setting with its bells and whistles, as well as filmmakers and action choreographers.

The draw of a particular type of action cinema also helps explain the festival's Othering phenomenon,¹⁷ which represents a Western-based fandom engaged in an exotic and Orientalist exchange. As Bill Nichols has shown in analyzing how film festivalgoers enter the realm of the unfamiliar in watching an Iranian film,¹⁸ organizers and audience of NYAFF share some of this act of translation. For example, when discussing the contribution of Lau Kar-Leung in the introduction to a tribute, Subway Cinema states,

A genius of mayhem, this action auteur is as philosophical as Kubrick and as kinetic as Chan, a Godzilla-sized talent who towers over the martial arts movie landscape... The first director to treat kung fu realistically, pitting style against style (Northern Fist vs. Southern Leg! Monkey Boxing vs. Drunken Boxing!), he made movies where martial arts were a philosophy, training elevated the soul, virtue was more important than survival, and invincible enemies were stabbed in the eardrums.¹⁹

The description mingles familiar Hollywood references (Kubrick) with Asian icons (Chan, Godzilla!) while also adducing a certain level of sophistication in distinguishing martial arts styles. This is also in your face, male cinema; Subway Cinema, at one point, had a table at New York Comic-Con.²⁰ These associations suggest a specific culturally constructed idea about Asian mass media, a world of kung fu and comics.²¹ Indeed, the festival is built around a whole fascination with media products that have been slighted by high culture. The founders remain dedicated fans; most of them continued to finance the film festivals on credit cards as late as 2008 and have confessed their passion for these media products.²² Its ascendance to

the Lincoln Center, however, speaks more to US elite cultural institutions' struggle to survive. In an age where traditional high culture, like classical music or art cinema, fails to attract new audiences, the Lincoln Center needs to recruit a younger, hipper crowd. Yet, the NYAFF has scarcely shed its Orientalist tinge with "eyeball-exploding Asian films."²³

The many Asian cinemas converge with an eclectic range of Asian selections and experts, often qualified in terms that set the festival apart from the diction of other festivals:

Special Hong Kong guest director Tsui Hark will appear to speak about one of the festival's areas of focus: on Wu Xia or martial arts film called *Hong Kong's Flying Swordsman*. Korea's film section will put more of a focus on intense action thrillers, which have ballooned in popularity in recent years, and include the sprawling Korean corruption epic, *The Unjust*. Japan's shosection-wing [sic] includes the big budget adaptation of the popular Japanese television series, *Karate-Robo Zaborgar*, about a robot who turns into a motorcycle and performers [sic] karate in a kind of a *Transformers* meets *kung fu* marriage of genres! Filipino exploitation cinema will be showcased throughout the festival, and feature Mark Hartley's documentary *Machete Maidens Unleashed*, as well as the classic 1980 Filipino exploitation film, *Raw Force*. Other spotlight films include *Abraxas*, which follows a band of punk-rock Buddhist Monks and *Bangkok Knockout*, an insane Thai action film.²⁴

Even when the festival recognizes the different nationalities of the films, the descriptions definitely highlight their common thread—over-the-top exploitative fare. This, according to the festival, is Asian cinema. Kwai-Cheung Lo asserts,

The only historical reason that Asia has been and still is considered a unit is its intricate relations to the West. The notion of a single Asia is itself a fantasy of the West and reveals the Orientalist, imperialist, and colonial desires of the eighteenth century onward.²⁵

Beyond a fan cult cinema festival and as it develops, NYAFF has become a wider and more crowd-pleasing Asian popular cinema festival with the elite culture stamp of the Lincoln Center.²⁶ In 2002, for example, the festival at the Anthology Film Center showed horror and action films from Hong Kong, despite excessive gore.²⁷ Meanwhile, in 2014, the NYAFF also included a comedy about North Korea's Kim Jung Il (*Aim High in Creation*) and romances like *Il Mare* and *Au Revoir L'Été*, amidst a panoply of gangster, horror and similar offerings.

To understand the NYAFF is to grapple with transnational fandom and the implication of a generalized exchange between fans in New York and East Asian cultural productions. The organizers of NYAFF are similar to fans of Japanese popular culture, where Koichi Iwabuchi sees “the transnational audience/fan alliance against the control of media cultures and activities” that demands an “Inter-nationalized understanding of cross-border flows and consumption of media cultures.”²⁸ All these different articulations of the festival give the festival a veneer of rebelliousness, yet they are embedded within the global structure of defining asymmetrical differences between the East and the West.

While the films shown in NYAFF are mostly popular mainstream cinema in Asia, when these films are transplanted to New York and cloaked in the aura of an Asian film festival held at the Anthology Film Center, the IFC or the Lincoln Center, these films acquire new significance and status. At the same time, the audience may be reading films for cultural themes that take on different meanings in their cultures of production, where guns are more likely found on screen than they are at home. This is one way for the audience to define and tame Chinese and Asian cinema; a process of translation that fixes and flattens Asian Cinema as kung fu, violent, yet great fun to watch.

We need to further explore how the meanings of specific films or kinds of film change with the contexts they are shown in.²⁹ This change can be understood as an inevitable consequence of cultural translation. The audiences abroad are inevitably different; they come from different countries, cultures and often classes. As much as most film festivals continue to talk about their communities, people who frequent film festivals are mostly more educated than people who go to local mainstream commercial cinema. All the literatures on active audience affirm that different audiences form different interpretive communities.³⁰ As I have noted earlier, this can also apply to less apparently central themes like gender and masculinity.³¹ Hence, the *Swordsman* series, which featured early on in NYAFF programming (including a 2001 retrospective on Tsui Hark) has also been picked up by LGBTQ festivals because of Brigitte Lin’s gender-bending role. In 2014, however, an appearance by Tsui at the NYAFF sidestepped these questions to emphasize more mainstream adventure and “popular” themes: “Wu xia films are visual marvels, teeming with flying swordsmen, magical blades and glowering female steel-slingers. The line-up will include Tsui Hark’s mega-hit, *Detective Dee and the Mystery of the Phantom Flame* (an Indomina release), and several retrospective titles like Tsui’s astonishing, feral masterpiece, *The Blade*.”³²

Audiences abroad are agents belonging to different interpretive communities. The context in which these films are shown and promoted are drastically different from their “original” contexts. While many in Hong Kong would walk into a neighborhood theater to see a Tsui Hark film that had been advertised across local media, the New York audience, be they of Asian descent or not, have to make an effort to see these films that are not shown in neighborhood cinemas or preceded by a great deal of promotion. The New York audiences constitute specialized audiences who have taken the initiative to learn about this kind of cinema and are invested in it. At the same time, the knowledge these audiences acquire is again mediated through multiple layers of translation: certain ways to understand Chinese or Asian cinema; the ways these films have been promoted to specific markets; and the specific geo-political relations between countries all contribute to a new understanding of these films.

We may usefully compare NYAFF with specialized festivals that are more about cinemas from different geographic and cultural regions. One of the earliest attempts to highlight Asian cinema in Europe came through the Festival de 3 Continents at Nantes, founded in 1979 when the organizers wanted to correct mainstream film festivals’ failure to include films from Africa, South America and Asia, albeit emphasizing more serious alternative art cinema. Yet this festival, like the NYAFF, has less to do with the diasporic population of Nantes than with the desires of cultivated fans in a cosmopolitan city and nation to bring and define, through cinema, certain ideas about Asia. Udine is similar with its emphasis on Far East popular cinema. In fact, Udine can be seen as an audience or cinephilia festival that concentrates on films from Asia, evoking a specific vision of Asia in the eyes of the Europeans. Here, Asian immigrants or transnationals are not the intended audience even if they may appear as subjects. In contrast to this formation, we turn to the AAIFF, where immigrants and ethnic populations are indeed the primary audience as well as content producers.

AAIFF: ASIAN AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL IN NEW YORK

The AAIFF should be a festival that requires no translation to audiences in the United States. It is a thoroughly US film festival run by people who are “Americans,” be they citizens or legal residents. Yet because Chinese Americans and Asian Americans are still perceived to be different from

Americans of European descent, they need to promote Asian American cinema and Asian American film festivals in order to turn the translation process around and assert that Asian Americans are not foreign, but Americans.

The AAIFF, started in 1978, is one of the oldest Asian American film festivals in the United States. It was created in 1975 by a New York City Chinatown media organization, Chinese Cable Television (CCTV) at a Chinatown loft rented by future Hong Kong filmmaker Tsui Hark, who was studying experimental theater at Columbia. CCTV was a community media organization that primarily helped Chinese in New York to make programs for cable access. It changed its name to Asian Cinevision and in 1978 started the AAIFF to showcase Asian American cinema. One of its founders, Tom Tam, was an experimental filmmaker who felt that he knew few other Asian American filmmakers and claimed that he wanted to start the festival to see if there were other Asian American films.³³

This initial festival was deeply embedded in the social and political culture of the United States at the time. The civil rights movements and the immigration reforms of the 1960s and 1970s had created a decade of growth in identity politics in all its manifestations, including the assertion of what were then termed “hyphenated identities” in the United States and the questioning of European Americans as the only Americans. Disparate Americans of Asian descent understood that to be recognized and to have the numbers to influence American politics, they needed to be Asian Americans, not separate groups who competed among themselves. Not only was there an AAIFF, but there were also Chicano film festivals, Black or African American film festivals, Native American film festivals for people actually who have never moved, and even a growth of other hyphenated festivals among European American ethnics. Other forms of Chinese American cultural expression also claimed cultural space in North American societies, like *The Woman Warrior* (1975) by Maxine Hong Kingston and angry Asian American works like *The Big Aiiieeeee* (1974), edited by Frank Chin, Jeffery Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada, Shawn Wong and other members of the Combined Asian Resources Project (CARP). This was also the time when students demanded that universities started having ethnic studies, including Asian American studies.

In contrast to the NYAFF, the AAIFF was very much run by assimilated and activist people with immigrant roots, but also included students and immigrants from Hong Kong and other parts of Asia who saw themselves

as part of the living communities of artists and activists. It clearly stated that cultural reaffirmation was one of its goals; however, this was far from an easy task, because constructing an Asian American identity that is not singular remains a balancing act. The festival was run primarily by third generation Chinese American Daryl Chin,³⁴ who specialized in media arts, and immigrants from Hong Kong like Danny Yung, a pioneer in experimental and avant-garde art in Hong Kong. In many ways, the Hong Kong New Wave was connected to these people across continents, defining dynamic global forces at play. For two years, there was also an affiliated Asian American Independent Video Festival, very much dedicated to avant-garde works. The loose group was also affiliated with Basement Workshop, an Asian American art organization, and alternative art publications like *Bridge* and *Yellow Pearl*. The content of AAIFF—alternative, serious, challenging—is a far cry from the NYAFF, where Asian cinema is macho, gory and fun.

The first programs in AAIFF in 1978 included mainly shorts and documentaries; 30 films were shown in five and half hours. The organizers took works from another Asian American media organization from the West Coast, Visual Communication of Los Angeles, which championed works that said, “We are Asian and American and we are telling our important stories.” But the questions of subject and range were ever present. Daryl Chin writes,

Being Asian American does not necessarily have to mean being an immigrant, dealing with ‘foreign’ culture because one’s home life is still derived from the old country, or living in a ghetto..... After the very first Asian American Film Festival, we asked ourselves whether or not a film qualified as Asian American just because the filmmaker happened to be Asian American. After looking at all the movies which came through the first festival, our decision was yes.³⁵

The festival tries to fight the label of being foreign in the United States, yet also seeks to affirm Asian American as a distinct category. On the other hand, there has also been a debate with the organizers to define Asian American cinema beyond subject matter and the ethnicities of the filmmakers. Daryl Chin also has questioned the formal qualities of the films chosen for Asian American film festivals; he calls some Asian American works, especially those whose only objective are to demand Asian American spaces in US society with no regard to cinematic form, as “noble and

uplifting and boring as hell.”³⁶ There was an ongoing debate between form and identity-related content issues as well. Wayne Wang’s *Chan is Missing*, for example, was first screened at AAIFF as a highly experimental film called *Fire over Water* before it was later totally re-narrativized. Ethnic film festivals like the AAIFF, continue to struggle with form and content, as well as issues like accessibility and the programming of works that challenge conventions. However, despite all the debates focusing on what kinds of film AAIFF supports, it remains a community-based festival that connected to other events and outreach from the very inclusive Asian American communities.

The more recent incarnations of the festival are still run by Asian Americans, both native-born and immigrants, showcasing Asian American works as well as encompassing a more expansive definition of Asian works from China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Japan, India, Pakistan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Nepal and other Asian countries. This range makes this festival very different from other festivals that not only show diasporic works, but also program works from the home countries of their diasporic populations. In many ways, this model of a home-grown film festival requires a city or country with a long history of immigration and a substantial educated diasporic population that demands sound immigration policies. Therefore, such festivals are very much confined to the New World at this point, rather than appearing among new diasporic populations in Europe, for example.

Nonetheless, many of these diasporic cinemas would not be recognized by the mainstream in the United States or abroad. Nor do they travel on the A-list festival circuit, or even among second tier festivals like Hong Kong, London or South by Southwest (SXSW) film festivals. Is this a question of quality or interest? How is this foreignness defined? Unfortunately, AAIFF’s refusal to project familiar Orientalist images and its commitment to show formally challenging work diminishes its popular appeal. Even in New York, the festival has to continue to contest images of China and Asia propagated through festivals like the NYAFF. Outside of the United States, one might argue that it is hard to get attention because the diasporic works are American but often challenge another region’s idea of what US cinema is; stereotyping can be mutual.

This became clear when a Chinese American film like Wayne Wang’s 1989 work, *Life Is Cheap, but Toilet Paper Is Expensive*, shown in AAIFF in 2001, was picked up by an Asian film festival like Puchon Fantastic Film Festival in South Korea in 2014. The new readings of the film have

little to do with Wayne Wang being American, or that the film's character is an Asian American in doing a job in Hong Kong, but instead refer to the contemporary democracy movement in Hong Kong as a reaction to Chinese rule.³⁷ The film was made a few years after the Chinese and British governments signed the joint declaration that returned Hong Kong to Chinese rule in 1984, expressing worries about the outcome of the handover. Wayne Wang himself has redefined his movie within the 2014 context, asserting the film's resonance with the 1989 "Tiananmen Square Thing" by saying that,

Hong Kong right now is going through the same thing. The government of China is trying to control Hong Kong, saying 'you have to honor me and give me face.' There was a big demonstration against the Hong Kong government and against China, and this is still going on.³⁸

Film texts and the festivals that show them cannot dictate the meaning of the texts when the works move in time and space. Complicated processes of translation take place, attesting to the polysemy of film texts and the ability of a film festival to control their meanings. An Asian American film at an Asian American film festival is front and center about identity politics in the United States. However, when it travels in time and space, even to a different film festival, it can acquire new meanings, influenced by all the contextual elements of the new festival. This raises future questions as transnational Chinese populations become more established in Europe and other parts of the world and may approach their own representations as Chinese or European or from some other position or identity.

NYCFF: CHINESE PROJECTIONS ABROAD

The NYCFF was not a "home-grown" New York film festival. It was indeed "foreign" in its origin. Its resources came from China; programming decisions were made in China and more importantly, the curation of the film festival, as represented by the films it programmed, were all approved by Chinese authorities. Thus, one could argue that the cultural translation that took place in this festival was one of China translating a controlled articulation of its self-image to the United States. As a matter of fact, this festival attracted scant attention from the New York press and was hardly known by most New Yorkers, be they Asian cinephiles or New Yorkers of Chinese or other descent, which may explain its transience.

The NYCFF started as an annual event in 2010, and was supported by SAPPRT, CCTV's movie channel CCTV6 and its website M1905.com,

and the Chinese American Art Council. In that year, it had its opening gala at the Lincoln Center and two days of screenings at an AMC theater in Times Square. The festival continued to rent the space at the Lincoln Center for its opening gala, yet its program was not part of the activities of the film society of the Lincoln Center, unlike that of the NYAFF. The festival only showed popular films, including mainland Chinese films and Hong Kong co-productions, such as *So Young* by Zhao Wei, *My Kingdom* by Gao Xiaosong, *Ip Man* and *The Sorcerer and the White Snake*. It also presented awards, for example, giving Outstanding Asian Artist Awards to stars like Zhang Ziyi, Aaron Kwok and Sandra Ng. Wang Baoqiang won for his role in the popular *Hello, Mr. Tree*, not for the international film festival favorite *Blind Shaft*. The festival showcased Chinese crowd pleasers, not Chinese independent or art house fare that tended to question different aspects of Chinese lives or simply could not draw a mass audience and be economically viable within China. In 2010, the festival also invited the pop singer Zhang Liangying, winner of the Super Girl contest in 2005, to perform at the opening ceremony. Hence, the festival tried to promote China as an important cultural player, even though this goal was scarcely achieved.

Like the NYAFF, NYCFF was *not* a festival that would show Jia Zhangke's *A Touch of Sin*. But, unlike the NYAFF, it was devoid of non-Chinese participation on all levels—organizers, press or audience—except for a few American faces who promote Sino-American trade. Consequently, this festival did not gain any traction, given that it had no media coverage from any local New York press other than the diasporic Chinese press in the city, and it apparently has been discontinued. It did, however, have web coverage from sources in the PRC and web presence at M1905.com, which is part of CCTV and where anyone could watch the opening ceremony.³⁹ In a YouTube video posted by Sinovision English Channel Archive,⁴⁰ the narrator or reporter describes the 2013 NYAFF as a red carpet event, with a grand pan of the façade of the Lincoln Center. The narrator continues on to say that “Chinese stars are not the only ones hyped up about the event’s exposure to [sic] Chinese films.” This then cuts to an interview with an American who is the president of National Committee on United States–China Relations, Stephen Olin. With a big smile, he congratulates the event for its big “mob,” referring to its audience. He continues, “what I like [sic] is those mobs to be, have more Westerners in the crowd, rather than it being only Chinese faces.”⁴¹ Therefore, we can conclude that NYCFF had no New Yorker translating Chinese cinema to

other New Yorkers as in the NYAFF, but only Chinese speaking about themselves to a yet-to-materialize Western audience.

Still, this is the only festival of the three that was indeed an exclusively Chinese annual film festival in New York. It was a festival that originated in China, was first announced in China and was a deliberately calculated showcase of China to the United States. It was Chinese, but not an Asian film festival because the Chinese in the PRC have been defining themselves, of course, as Chinese, not Asians. Since the NYCFF was neglected by New Yorkers, it also escaped Kwai-Cheung Lo's predicament of being subsumed into a Western-constructed Asia, cited above. There are similar Chinese film festivals in Los Angeles, Paris, Sydney, Cologne, London and other cities in the West. This festival was a manifestation of Chinese soft power, a way in which China projected its image abroad, not unlike the two billboards of Xinhua News Agency and the Chinese ad space in New York's famed Times Square. Yet, all of these manifestations of soft power have dimmed their lights in New York City.

As of July of 2015, I could not find any reference to the 2014 NYCFF or a program for Fall 2015. The NYCFF can indeed be seen as what Koichi Iwabuchi describes as "Branded Nationalism": "the uncritical, practical uses of media culture as resources for the enhancement of political and economic national interests, through the branding of national culture ... collaborative relationship between the state and media cultural industries and among culture, economy and politics."⁴² The NYCFF fitted this description aptly with its support from SAPPRT and CCTV, cooperation from Chinese film production companies, and the interests of Americans who want to enter the Chinese movie market.

In this sense, the festival was not dissimilar to the many French Film festivals we see all over the world associated with embassies, the Alliance Française and diplomatic relations like the celebration of Sino-French friendship. Often, many simply accept these festivals as French, as a "typical" French way of exporting its culture and values. The process can also be seen in its financial support of many film projects in its ex-colonies. One can also find a Turkish film festival in Lebanon, supported by the Turkish consulate, and a German film festival in Hong Kong, supported by the Goethe Institute. What is interesting about similar Chinese festivals is not their innovation but that we are seeing this kind of branded nationalism becoming an accepted and expanded strategy as the Chinese make a concerted effort to promote similar film festivals all over the world. However, without a strong historical record on film promotion, like the French, we

have yet to see if the Chinese effort can sustain itself in other parts of the world, especially since it seems to have ceased in New York City.

Nonetheless, while the NYCFF did not become an important cinematic event in New York City, it created much more publicity aimed at audiences in China. For example, press releases seem to have been distributed to many web media outlets in China, where one finds page after page of coverage on the festival, mostly of the movie stars attending the event. It also had a particular way of approaching the relationship between China and New York, which can stand in for the United States or even the West. Hence, a PRC source concludes,

New York is the economic and financial center of the United States; it is highly developed media and entertainment industries. To host a Chinese film festival here is very meaningful. The film festival, through the screen, will help New Yorkers of all backgrounds to see the true nature of Chinese, and to understand the hopes and dreams of the Chinese.⁴³

In many ways, this passage conveys a desire for international and intercultural understanding. Poignantly, it also evokes a sense that the West does not understand China and that China needs to continue to explain itself via film. This brings us back to the idea of branded nationalism as a product in progress; the translation process is still truncated, with films still seeking meaningful Western reception.

CONCLUSION

This brief study of “Chinese” film festivals in New York City must be put into the context of the international flow of Chinese images, and to a lesser extent, Asian images. All these examples demand cultural translation, in the sense that these festivals exist only via the movements of people, ideas and products, mixing these and forcing encounters of people and media content that utilize different levels of translation and interpretation.⁴⁴ All three festivals I have examined here create, use and affirm specific identities within transnational flows, whether targeting populations yearning for exotic fare, grappling with the politics of diasporic populations or facilitating global trade and local or homeland perceptions of international status. In all these cases, labels, programming, context and reception evoke ambivalent relationships with China, be they based on ethnicities, nationalities, multicultural understanding, foreign connections or more abstract globalization.

I also see these film festivals as sites of transnational articulations, not only in the films they show, but also through their structures, sponsorships,

political economics and receptions. Putting these festivals in the context of transnational global flow underscores that these flows are multilayered and asymmetrical⁴⁵; the stakeholders of these exchanges do not occupy equal positions. On a global scale, Chinese cinema, including Chinese films of different kinds and from different regions, occupies different, and at present, weaker positions than Hollywood and European art cinema. Hence, we can only suggest the nuanced relationship among films and film festivals, their related institutions, production companies, distributors, exhibition venues and people involved, including producers, promoters, makers and audiences. Similarly, those who attend—whether cinephiles (some of them male martial arts fans), displaced immigrants, commercial representatives or acculturated Americans in varied and changing contexts—add new contexts and interpretations to works in motion. It is through the encounters of these separate yet related flows that we can understand the varied cultural translations that are taking place in this arena through cinema and the film festivals that promote them.

What I am trying to do here is to exemplify and understand differences among film festivals that explicitly articulate the idea of foreignness within transnationalism and which employ strategies of cultural translation in terms of an other or difference—an “other” from afar. Some of these festivals are about and by people sharing the same or linked spaces, like AAIFF; others bring together people from afar, like interested locals at the NYAFF. The NYCFF was the smallest festival with the shortest history; its aim to show China to New Yorkers was more aspirational than a reality. Yet, this also represents a new geo-political reality with a stronger and more assertive China where use of soft power for branded nationalism potentially alters ways to translate China to the West.

There are myriad ways to translate China to the people of New York, even though they may not be equal. At the present time, the NYAFF seems to have an upper hand in defining Chinese and Asian cinema—as “eyeball exploding”—to New Yorkers, if impact can be measured by numbers of attendees. Nonetheless, other articulations that challenge this definition, from experimental films shown in AAIFF to some of the films shown at NYCFF that are not simply stereotypical Asian genre films, for example, Zhao Wei’s *So Young*, would not be welcomed by the fan boys of NYAFF. Meanwhile, other Chinese films that travel in the international film festival circuit, slighted by the NYAFF and NYCFF, are screened in other film festivals in New York, from the New York Film Festival to

Tribeca Film Festival, to film programs at the Museum of Modern Art and others. Within all these encounters, we can glean other important differences in perspective, content, audience and discussion.

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2. Film Festivals

- A Kind of Gaze Film Festival 一种凝视影展
- Beijing Gay and Lesbian Film Festival 北京同性恋电影节
- Beijing Independent Film Festival 北京独立电影节
- Beijing Independent Film Festival 北京独立影像展
- Beijing International Film Festival 北京国际电影节
- Beijing Queer Film Festival 北京酷儿影展
- Beijing Queer Film Forum 北京酷儿电影论坛
- China Comrade Cultural Festival 中国同志文化节
- China Documentary Film Festival 中国纪录片交流周

- China Homosexual Film Festival 中国同性恋电影节
 China Image Film Festival 英国偶像国际话语电影节
 China Independent Film Festival 中国独立影像年度展
 China Women's Film Festival 中国民间女性影展
 Chinese Documentary Festival 华语纪录片节
 Chinese Visual Festival 华语视像艺术节
 Chongqing Independent Film and Video Festival 重庆民间映画交流展
 CNEX Taipei Documentary Film Festival CNEX 主题纪录片影展
 Festival du Cinéma Chinois de Paris 巴黎中国电影节
 Festival du Cinéma Chinois en France 法国中国电影节
 Filming East Festival 东方电影节
 First Unrestricted New Image Film Festival 中国独立映像展
 Golden Harvest Awards 金穗奖
 Golden Harvest Awards Festival 金穗奖巡回影展
 Golden Horse Awards 金马奖
 Guangzhou International Documentary Film Festival 中国(广州)国际纪录片节
 Hangzhou Asian Film Festival 杭州亚洲青年影展
 Hong Kong Asian Film Festival 香港亚洲电影节
 Hong Kong Asian Independent Film Festival 香港亚洲独立电影节
 Hong Kong Independent Film Festival 香港独立电影节
 Hong Kong International Film Festival 香港国际电影节
 hong kong social movement film festival 香港社会运动电影节
 International Student Film Golden Lion Award 国际学生影展金狮奖
 Iron Horse Film Festival 铁马影展
 Kaohsiung Film Festival 高雄电影节
 London Taiwan Cinefest 伦敦台湾电影节
 New York Chinese Film Festival 纽约中国电影节
 Pure 16mm Independent Film Festival 纯16独立影展
 Purple Ribbon Film Festival 紫丝带电影节
 Qingdao International Film Festival 青岛国际电影节
 Shanghai International Film Festival 上海国际电影节
 South Taiwan Film Festival 南方影展
 Taipei Film Festival 台北电影节
 Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival 台北金马影展
 Taiwan International Animation Film Festival 台湾国际动画影展
 Taiwan International Children's Film Festival 台湾国际儿童影展
 Taiwan International Documentary Festival 台湾国际纪录片影展
 Taiwan International Ethnographic Film Festival 台湾国际民族志影展

Tudou Video Festival 土豆映像节
 Unrestricted New Image Festival 中国独立映像节
 Urban Nomad Film Festival 城市游牧影展
 Women Make Waves Taiwan 台湾国际女性影展
 Yilan Green International Film Festival 宜兰国际绿色影展
 Yilan International Children's Film Festival 宜兰国际儿童电影节
 Yunnan Multicultural Cultural Festival (Yunfest) 云之南纪录影像展

3. Chinese Names and Filmmaker Names

8a 八楼

Ai Weiwei 艾未未

Ai Xiaoming 艾晓明

Autonomous 8a 自治八楼

Beijing Original Power 北京原创动力

Black Hand Nakasi 黑手那卡西

Cao Kai 曹恺

Evans Chan 陈耀成

Chan Hau-Chun 陳巧真

Chan Ho-Lun 陈浩伦

Mark Chan 陈锦乐

Peter Chan 陈可辛

Chan Wai-Yi 陈惠仪

Chang Tso-chi 张作骥

Chen Jun 陈军

Chen Kaige 陈凯歌

Chen Miao 陈苗

Susan Chen 陈素香

Chen Xinzhong 陈心中

Andrew Yusu Cheng 程裕苏

Lawrence Cheng Tan-Shui 郑丹瑞

Cheung King-wai 张经纬

Mabel Cheung 张婉婷

Tammy Cheung 张虹

Chi Wen-Chang 纪文章

Chiao Hsiung-Ping 焦雄屏

Chinese Grey Power 老人权益中心

Ching Siu-tung 程小东

Jimmy Choi 蔡甘铨

- Choi Ian-Sin 徐欣羨
 Choi Yuen Support Group 菜园村支援组
Chou Chou 丑丑
Chow Keung 周强
Chow Yun Fat 周润发
Chu Hsien-Jer 朱贤哲
Chu Ka-Yat 朱嘉逸
 Vincent Chui 崔允信
Chung Mong-hong 锺孟宏
 Simon Chung 锺德胜
Cong Feng 丛峰
 Consumers Acting for People and the Environment 消費者力量
Cui Weiping 崔卫平
Cui Zi'en 崔子恩
Deng Xiaoping 邓小平
Diao Yanan 刁亦男
Dong Bingfeng 董冰峰
Du Haibin 杜海滨
Fan Lixin 范立欣
Fang Lijun 方力钧
Feng Yan 冯艳
 Eddie Fong 方令正
Gao Luli 郜璐莉
Gao Tian 高天
Gao Xiaosong 高晓松
Ge Yaping 葛亚平
Geng Jun 耿军
Gong Li 巩俐
 Grass Media Action 草根媒体行动
Guo Jing 郭静
 Lenny Guo 郭达年
 H15 Concern Group H15关注组
Han Jie 韩杰
 Happy LoSheng Youth Union 青年乐生乐盟
Ho Chao-Ti 贺照缵
 Ivy Ho 何韵明
Ho Yu-Hang 何宇恒
Hou Hsiao-Hsien 侯孝贤
Hou Wentao 侯文涛

Hsiao Chi-Hua 萧季桦
Hsu Ya-ting 许雅婷
Hu Jie 胡杰
Hu Jintao 胡锦涛
Hu Mei 胡玫
Hu Xinyu 胡新宇
Huang Jianxin 黄建新
Huang Mei-Wen 黄美文
Huang Mingming 黄明明
 Sammy Huang 黄雨晴
Huang Shiu-Yi 黄琇怡
Huang Sun-Quan 黄孙权
 Ann Hui 许鞍华
Hung Chun-Hsiu 洪淳修
Huo Jianqi 霍建起
Jia Zhangke 贾樟柯
Jia Zhitan 贾之坦
Jiang Jin-lin 江金霖
Jiang Wen 姜文
Jin Huaqing 金华青
 Cres Juang 庄益增
Ke Chin-Yuan 柯金源
Ke Yi-zheng 柯一正
Kong King-Chu 江琼珠
 William Kong 江志强
Kuo Li-hsin 郭力昕
Kuo Shiao-Yun 郭笑芸
 Stanley Kwan 关锦鹏
 Aaron Kwok 郭富城
Kwok Wai-Lun 郭伟伦
Kwok Zune 郭臻
Lam Sum 林森
Lan Cheng-Lung 蓝正龙
Lau Kar-Leung 刘家良
 Clara Law 罗卓瑶
 Ang Lee 李安
Lee Ching-Hui 李靖惠
Lee Daw-ming 李道明
 Joe Lee 李运杰

- Lee Kang-Sheng 李康生
Lee Kung-Lok 李嗣乐
Lee Wai-Yi 李维怡
 Ang Lee 李安
Li Cheuk-to 李焯桃
Li Dan 李丹
Li Jun 李俊
Li Junhu 李军虎
Li Keqiang 李克强
Li Xianting 栗宪庭
Li Yinhe 李银河
Li Yu 李玉
 Brigitte Lin 林青霞
Lin Chi-Wen 林其奴
Lin Wan-yu 林婉玉
Lin Wen-chi 林文淇
Lin Yu-Hsien 林育賢
 Kansas Liu 廖洁雯
Lo Chun Yip 卢镇业
 Local Action 本土行动
Lou Ye 娄烨
 Cyrus Luan 李绍毅
Lun Pui-Ki 伦贝琪
Luo Bing 罗兵
 Gary Mak 麥圣希
 Saipulla Mutallip 赛普拉.木塔里甫
 Kal Ng 吴家龙
 Sandra Ng 吴君如
Ning Hao 宁浩
 Doze Niu 钮承泽
 not my channel + Billy + loudspeaker Hong Kong 众融频道+Billy仔+
 大声喇香港
Ou Ning 欧宁
Ouyang Bin 欧阳斌
Pema Tseden 万玛才旦
Quan Ling 权聆
Qiu Ju 秋菊
Shen Ko-shang 沈可尚
Shen Xiaoping 沈晓平

Shen Yang 沈旻
Shi Tou 石头
Shu Kei 舒琪
 Subo Shum 岑卓熹
 Strike Production Team 罢工摄制队
Sun Mingjing 孙明经
Sun Yat-Sen 孙中山
 Stanley Tam 谭国明
Tang Lijun 唐丽君
 Mathew Tang 邓汉强
Tao Hong 陶虹
Tian Zhuangzhuang 田壮壮
Tsai Ming-Liang 蔡明亮
Tseng Wen-Chen 曾文珍
Tsui Hark 徐克
Tsui Su-Hsin 崔愷欣
 V-artist 影行者
 Video Power 绿影力量
Wan Ren 万仁
Wang Baoqiang 王宝强
Wang Bing 王兵
Wang Dezhi 王德志
Wang Fei 王飞
Wang Haowei 王好为
Wang Hongwei 王宏伟
Wang Jianlin 王健林
Wang Ju-jin 王菊金
Wang Leehom 王力宏
Wang Libo 王利波
Wang Quan'an 王全安
Wang Shao-hua 王少华
Wang Shu 王姝
Wang Tong 王童
Wang Xiaolu 王小鲁
Wang Xiaoshuai 王小帅
 Wayne Wang 王颖
Wang Wenming 王文明
Wang Zhongrong 王中荣
Wang Zizhao 王子昭

Wangta 汪扎
Wei Te-sheng 魏德圣
Wen Jiabao 温家宝
Wong Ain-Ling 黄爱玲
Wong Hei-Man 黄希文
 Jacob Wong 王庆锵
Wong Kar-wai 王家卫
 Adam Wong Sau-Ping 黄修平
 Venus Wong 黄晓文
Wu Fan 吴凡
 Daniel Wu 吴彦祖
 Jenny Man Wu 吴漫
Wu Nian-Jen 吴念真
Wu Wenguang 吴文光
Wu Ziniu 吴子牛
Xi Jinping 习近平
Xie Jingjing 谢晶晶
Xie Yihui 谢贻卉
Xu Tong 徐童
Xu Xin 徐辛
Yan Fei 闫非
 Adler Yang 杨逸帆
Yang Cheng 杨城
 Edward Yang 杨德昌
Yang Jin 杨瑾
 Ruby Yang 杨紫焯
 Weidong Yang 杨伟东
Yang Yang 杨洋
Yau Ching 游静
Yee Chih-yen 易智言
Yen Lan-Chun 颜兰权
Ying Liang 应亮
 Yonfan 杨凡
Yu Lik-Wai 余力为
Yung Chi Man 翁志文
 Danny Yung 荣念曾
Zeng Fangzhi 曾梵志
 Sylvia Zhan Xuhua 战旭华
Zhang Junzhao 张军钊

Zhang Liangying 张靓颖

Zhang Meng 張猛

Zhang Qi 张琪

Zhang Xianmin 张献民

Zhang Yang 张扬

Zhang Yaxuan 张亚璇

Zhang Yimou 张艺谋

Zhang Yuan 张元

Zhang Ziyi 章子怡

Zhao Dayong 赵大勇

Zhao Liang 赵亮

Zhao Wei 赵薇

Zheng Kuo 郑阔

Zhou Hao 周浩

Zhu Chunguang 朱春光

Zhu Dake 朱大可

Zhu Rikun 朱日坤

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