



## Fresh Perspectives on New Wave

by Pat Gao  
Taiwan Review

Taiwan is best known among film aficionados for the New Wave Cinema, or Taiwan New Cinema, movement of the 1980s—a tide of socially conscious movies characterized by their slow pace, frequent use of distant camera positions, and realistic depictions of contemporary life. Several of the films produced during this innovative period in domestic moviemaking captured the attention of international film scholars and influenced budding art-house directors around the world.

In March 2015, a new documentary examining this movement was released in Taiwan. Through interviews with foreign critics and filmmakers, *Flowers of Taipei: Taiwan New Cinema* explores the emergence of New Wave movies and how they shaped foreign perspectives on Taiwan's national cinema. "I'd often wondered why these films had such a big impact overseas," explained Wang Ken-yu, the movie's producer, in an interview with the Taipei Film Commission. "I wanted to discover how foreigners perceived these works."

*Flowers of Taipei* was released along with three digitally restored movies from the period – *The Time to Live and the Time to Die* (1985), *Dust in the Wind* (1986) and *The Terrorizers* (1986). The former two films, which address themes such as dislocation and the changing nature of rural life in Taiwan, were directed by Hou Hsiao-hsien, while the latter, a bleak depiction of urban

existence, was directed by Edward Yang (1947–2007). Hou and Yang are widely regarded as the most influential filmmakers to emerge from the movement.

The Mandarin title of *Flowers of Taipei* is identical to that of *In Our Time*, a 1982 release considered by many to be the initiator of New Wave Cinema. An anthology film, *In Our Time* consists of four short stories, one of which was directed by Yang, about the rapid development of Taiwanese society. Featuring sparse narration and numerous long shots, the movie differed both aesthetically and thematically from mainstream Taiwanese productions of the period, which were typically martial arts epics or sentimental romance films.

Local moviegoers found the naturalistic depictions of ordinary life in New Wave works to be a refreshing change of pace, says Chen Ru-shou, a professor of cinema and cultural studies at National Chengchi



*A photograph taken during the 1980s of five of the New Wave movement's most celebrated filmmakers, from left, Wu Nien-jen, Hou Hsiao-hsien, Edward Yang, Chen Kuo-fu and Chan Hung-chih*

University (NCCU) in Taipei. “At a time when Taiwan was changing rapidly from an agricultural to an industrialized society, these filmmakers offered an unflinching look at the loss and pain brought about by this transformation.”

A number of the filmmakers who emerged during the New Wave period would go on to garner global recognition. Hou won the Golden Lion prize for best picture at the Venice International Film Festival in 1989 for *A City of Sadness*, a family drama about the 228 Incident – the February 28, 1947 anti-government uprising that was violently suppressed. Yang received the Best Director Award at the Cannes International Film Festival in 2000 for his last completed film, *Yi Yi: A One and a Two*, which tells the story of a middle-class family in Taipei. Meanwhile, Tsai Ming-liang, a Malaysia-born, Taiwan-based filmmaker who is a leading figure in the post-New Wave generation of directors that emerged in the 1990s, won the Golden Lion in 1994 for his movie *Vive L'Amour*.

Hou and Tsai are the only two locally based interviewees in *Flowers of Taipei* with the exception of *Cloud Gate Dance*

Theatre founder Lin Hwai-min, who opens the documentary with a monologue contextualizing the Taiwan New Cinema movement. Although more than 50 actors, critics and filmmakers were interviewed for the project, only around half of them appear in the movie.

Wang noted in her interview with the Taipei Film Commission that a 2002 documentary *Our Time, Our Story: 20 Years' New Taiwan Cinema* had already adequately covered local perspectives on the movement. “*Our Time, Our Story* presents interviews with many people in Taiwan’s film industry, leaving few new domestic viewpoints to explore,” she explained. “However, in recent years I’ve met quite a few painters, musicians and writers in Beijing who are deeply passionate about our New Wave films.”

After deciding to focus on overseas perspectives, Wang recruited French cinematographer Olivier Marcenay and director Hsieh Chin-lin, a native of Taiwan living in France. Like Wang, Hsieh had worked on New Wave films in the 1980s, including some of Hou’s movies. For around 18 months, the team went to nations including



Argentina, France, Italy, Japan and Thailand to conduct interviews. In comparison to *Our Time, Our Story* and another earlier documentary on New Wave films released in 1998 called *The Taiwan New Cinema*,



*French director Olivier Assayas, left, and critic Jean-Michel Frodon note in the documentary that the New Wave movement helped shape foreign perspectives on Taiwan's national cinema*

the result “casts a broader look at the movement and focuses on its influence and status in global film history,” says film critic Ryan Cheng “This new documentary’s romantic, exotic touch forms a pleasant complement to the previous two movies on the subject.”

*Flowers of Taipei* regularly features two filmmakers on screen together discussing New Wave’s impact. For Cheng, two conversations stand out in the documentary – the debate between French director Olivier Assayas and his compatriot, film critic Jean-Michel Frodon, and the conversation between two mainland Chinese filmmakers, Wang Bing and Yang Chao. The French duo discusses how New Wave films disclosed the emergence of a distinct cultural identity in Taiwan to international audiences. Meanwhile, the latter pair draws attention to the individualism displayed by the characters in Hou’s films, which contrasted sharply with the collectivism commonly featured in mainland Chinese works.

Cheng also highlights the comments of Japanese director Hirokazu Koreeda, whose father was born and grew up in the Kaohsiung area in southern Taiwan during the period of Japanese colonial rule (1895–1945).

In the documentary, Koreeda notes that *The Time to Live and the Time to Die*, which is based on Hou’s childhood and adolescent years in today’s Fengshan District of Kaohsiung City, called to mind his father’s tales about life in Taiwan and inspired him to pursue a career in film.

While *Flowers of Taipei* has been criticized in some quarters for having too few Taiwanese interviewees and for focusing too much on Hou and Yang, Cheng believes these criticisms are unfair. “I don’t think Hsieh set out to make a factual record. Rather, she’s divided the documentary into small segments, each of which resembles a three to five-minute modern art piece and contributes to building a global perspective on Taiwanese movies,” he says. “Such a decentralized examination [of New Wave films] deserves praise and prevents the documentary from ending up as a cheap piece of self-important, sentimental reverie.”

NCCU professor Chen points out that in the broader international context, Taiwan New Cinema was a fresh continuation, following those in France, Germany and the United States, of the Italian neorealist movement of the 1940s, which was characterized by movies set among the working class and shot on location using amateur actors. “During the 120 years or so of film history, most nations have had their own movement in which a group of emerging directors presented their views on social issues such as the effects of modernization,” he says. Chen notes that in Taiwan’s case, New Wave – which according to strict definitions lasted from 1982 to 1986 – was largely about the nation’s rapid economic development and the resulting social upheaval.

Although they earned considerable praise from local and international critics, the works that came out of the Taiwan New Cinema movement were ultimately unsuccessful in boosting the commercial fortunes of the domestic filmmaking industry.



However, the innovation and vitality they brought to Taiwan's cinematic landscape influenced and inspired a generation of young directors such as Wei Te-sheng, who worked on a few of Yang's



*A scene from Hou's 1986 film Dust in the Wind*

movies and later directed *Cape No. 7* (2008), a film about the formation of a rock band that became the second-highest grossing movie in the nation's history when it was released.

According to Chen, directors such as Wei are carrying on the cultural exploration of the Taiwan New Cinema movement, while adopting filmmaking techniques

that appeal to wider audiences. "Locally produced films are now striking an effective balance between artistic and commercial considerations," the professor says. Given the movement's

strong influence on modern Taiwanese productions, he believes that regular re-examinations of the Taiwan New Cinema tradition such as *Flowers of Taipei* are of great value, particularly as they help introduce internationally celebrated domestic movies to younger audiences. "The high quality of New Wave works often astounds my students," Chen says.

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## Taiwan, NASA collaborate to develop lunar lander

**Several Taiwanese research institutions have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to jointly develop an unmanned lunar lander.**

The lunar landing module is scheduled to be delivered to the United States for testing in October 2018 and sent to the moon in 2020, according to the National Chung-Shan Institute of Science and Technology (NCSIST).

Believing that there is a lot of water on the moon, NASA scientists who want to learn how to exploit it are developing a mission concept to assess and learn how to make use of water ice on the moon and other lunar resources, according to the institute.

The project, Resource Prospector, aims to have a rover land on the moon, it said, adding that the institute is responsible for developing the lander's sensing system, while NASA is tasked with developing the propulsion system.

Noting that the mission is the first of its kind in which Taiwan has taken part, the institute said the biggest challenge for its research team is how to keep the equipment functioning in a space environment.



Taiwan was selected by NASA as a partner in the lunar lander development program

mainly because of NCSIST's performance in several international space projects, including Alpha Magnetic Spectrometer (AMS), an international collaboration to detect and distinguish high-energy charged particles in the universe, which has earned widespread recognition, according to the institute.

The MOU was signed in early July by NASA and Taiwan's National Space Organization, NCSIST and Academia Sinica.

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## Taiwan biotechnology industry's output to reach US\$15.6 b. in 2020

The government has set a production target for the nation's biotechnology industry at NT\$500 billion (US\$15.6 billion) for 2020 with several flagship enterprises of the sector getting annual revenues of more than NT\$10 billion, said the Ministry of Economic Affairs (MOEA) on July 23.

The MOEA organized a Taiwan Biotech Industry Pavilion at BioTaiwan 2016, the largest biotechnology exposition in Asia, which was held July 20-24 at Taipei World Trade Center Nangang Exhibition Hall.

The MOEA explained at the pavilion that the government has set forth six main strategies for future development of the biotechnology industry in Taiwan, including the establishment of an industrial chains for new drug research and development, and internationalization of local pharmaceutical manufacturers that obtain certificates of good manufacturing practice PIC/S (pharmaceutical inspection cooperation scheme), an official of the Industry Development Bureau under the MOEA said.

The other strategies are establishing clusters of manufacturing industries of high-level medical equipment and materials, promoting smart systems of niche medical materials, developing health and welfare industries and amending outdated rules

and regulations on new drug development, he added.

Citing official data, the official said that Taiwan's biotechnology industry has enjoyed a rapid development in recent years, with the industry's annual revenue increased to NT\$298.6 billion last year from NT\$160 billion registered in 2005.

In 2015, a total of 1,871 biotechnological enterprises were operating in Taiwan with more than 76,000 employees, he said. Meanwhile, BioTaiwan 2016, celebrating its 15th edition this year, has attracted 90,000 visitors, with more than 600 domestic and foreign biotech companies participating.

Among the various innovations displayed at BioTaiwan 2016 is the drug Onivyde engineered for the treatment of metastasis pancreatic patients. Produced by Taipei-based PharmaEngine, Inc., the drug was approved by the Ministry of Health and Welfare and the US Food and Drug Administration in October last year.



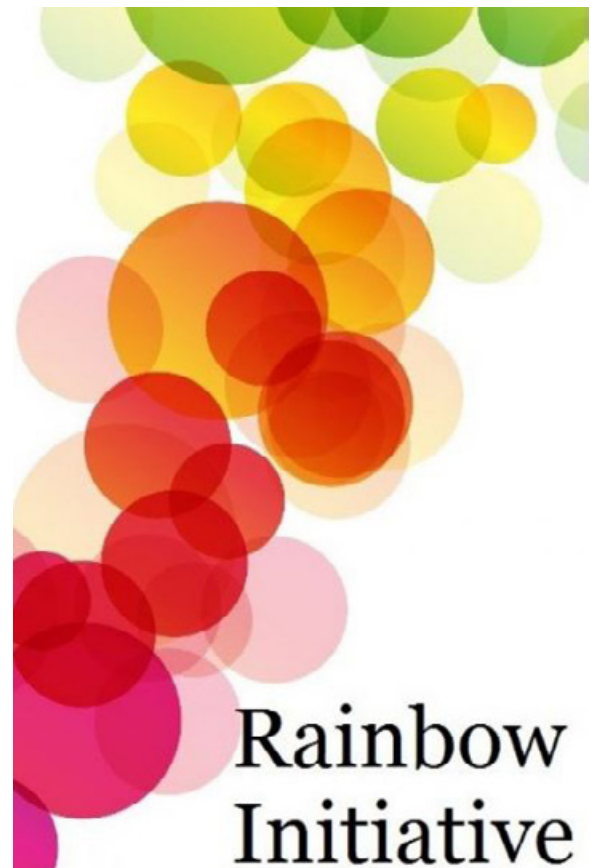
## 2017 Open Call: Rainbow Initiative for Multi-disciplinary collaboration

The ROC Ministry of Culture (MOC) has established the Rainbow Initiative to encourage local and foreign organizations to combine their professional expertise from a wide range of cultural fields and join forces on transnational and multi-disciplinary cultural projects that will promote creativity and diversity; strengthen international and regional networking; showcase the fruits of their collaboration; and demonstrate the benefits of resource-sharing and cross-cultural partnerships.

This program will subsidize plans for multinational and multi-disciplinary collaborative cultural projects. We welcome applications for proposals seeking funding in amounts between NT\$1 million and NT\$10 million.

Local applicants are required to find a foreign partner whose headquarters are located in another country or mainland China, Hong Kong, and Macau. Please note that over half of the planned project activities need to take place in Taiwan as well.

Submissions for 2017 will be accepted through September 30, 2016. Proposals must be new and projects can only begin after a contract with the MOC has been signed. Application forms may be downloaded from [here](#). Questions may be directed to the Department of Cultural Exchanges at (+886)-2-8512-6719, or by email to [rainbow@moc.gov.tw](mailto:rainbow@moc.gov.tw).



Source and Photo: Ministry of Culture

*Here are some projects that took place under the auspices of the Rainbow Initiative*

2016-05-21 [Taiwanese artists join Danish Click Festival](#)

2016-04-17 ["Ship of Seed" to sail for Japan's Art Triennale](#)

2015-10-14 [Taiwanese dancer-robot duo to trek across US campuses](#)

2015-05-23 [Midi Z secures French funds for new film project](#)

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