

Taiwan Film Festival Edinburgh digitally features 20 carefully selected films from the island

20, carefully selected, films from a variety of genres have been chosen to be 'shown' digitally at 2020's Taiwan Film Festival Edinburgh.

Taiwanese Hokkien-Language Cinema



Husband's Secret

Taiwanese Hokkien-Language cinema, also called Taiwanese cinema from the literal translation of Taiyupian, refers to Hoklo-speaking films produced in Taiwan between 1955 and 1981. The term is used to differentiate these Taiwanese films from

the Mandarin-speaking cinema in Taiwan, Amoy-dialect cinema in Hong Kong, and Hokkien cinema in other South-eastern Asian countries.

Thanks to the huge success of the first Taiwanese Hokkien-Language film shot in 1955, numerous film studios were soon established and produced more than 100 films a year during the prosperous period between 1965 and 1969. Relying mostly on private investment, the studios thrived and exported large number of titles overseas.

Taiwanese Hokkien-Language cinema includes a wide range of genres: detective, thriller, opera, musicals, romance, comedy, fantasy, wuxia, and literary adaptations. As part of this strand, the Festival presents:

The Husband's Secret (1960), dir. Lin Tuan-Chiu

Adapted from a Japanese novel and film, The Husband's Secret dissects social relations through tear-jerking, love triangle melodrama. Differing from other titles from this period, Lin's work gave greater voice to female characters and invited audiences to reconsider established family structures. [More information here.](#)

Six Suspects (1965), dir. Lin Tuan-Chiu

A gripping detective thriller of love, greed and murder. A private detective digs into the past of his ex-partner who is associated with some dangerous people..

Not satisfied with the final product, Lin barred the film from ever being released in cinemas but with its riveting plot twists, character portrayal and beautiful soundscape featuring the iconic Taipei's 60s jazz scene, Six Suspects still resonates with audiences all over the world. [More information here.](#)

The Bride Who Has Returned From Hell (1965), dir. Hsin Chi

Adaptation of a Gothic novel *Mistress of Mellyn, The Bride Who Has Returned From Hell* is an expressive and gripping story of Bei Sui-Mi who moves in with her brother-in-law and niece in a secret bid to investigate her sister's death. A fascinating portrayal of modern women and the patriarchal society haunting them. [More information here.](#)

A Borrowed Hong Kong, the Imagined China in Taiwan, and Trans-regional Cinema



A City Called Dragon

After it lost the Communist War in 1949, the KMT (Kuomintang, often referred to in English as the Nationalist Party or Chinese Nationalist Party) government failed to attract film studios when it retreated to Taiwan, while Hong Kong, then a British colony, served as a haven for many filmmakers from Mainland China.

In the late 50s, KMT started to work with the Mandarin-speaking studios of Hong Kong while many filmmakers and actors in Hong Kong, most of whom were originally from Mainland China, adopted Taiwan as their motherland in order to get into the Taiwanese market. For these filmmakers, including King Hu and Li Han-Hsiang, Taiwan offered a work environment which Hong Kong could not provide.

While the Shaw Brothers, the largest film studio in Hong Kong, was more concerned with mass-market taste and box office success, the KMT government, with its substantial financial support and considerable creative freedom, gave Hu and Li the opportunity to pursue their artistic ambition. These Mandarin-speaking directors presented an imagined Chinese world which looked distinctively different from that created by Mainland China and their works in the Taiwanese period, with more philosophical reflection and intellectual ambition, stylistically and aesthetically surpass those made by the Shaw Brothers studio. King Hu in particular created his signature

style of wuxia while he was working in Taiwan. As part of this strand, the Festival presents:

A City Called Dragon (1970), dir. Tu Chun-Hsun | UK premiere

Drawing on historical themes largely favoured by the KMT regime during the Cold War, a City Called Dragon is full of suspense and beautiful cinematography. Nowadays, the film stands out for its well-considered and powerful depiction of transition from rivalry to comradeship. Hsu Feng, then an emerging actress, received great praise for her role in A City Called Dragon. This alongside her performance in King Hu's A Touch of Zen made in the same year, paved her way to a successful career in Taiwanese wuxia genre and historical drama in the following decade. [More information here.](#)

Four Moods (1970), dir. Li Han-Hsiang, Pai Ching-Jui, Li Hsing, King Hu | UK premiere

Originally a collaborative project to help finance Li Han-Hsiang's film company in Taiwan, Four Moods includes the most well-known Sinophone filmmakers outside Mainland China in that period. Inspired by early modern literature and Peking Opera, this film creates a world in which humans live alongside the deceased. With its detailed and well-considered portrayals of men and ghosts, it reveals the greed and desire of a human nature. [More information here.](#)

Melodrama Divas



Cheerful Wind

Chiung Yao (born in Taiwan in 1938) is a romance novelist, possibly the most influential writer of this genre in the Chinese-speaking world. After 1965, her works were adapted into films by studios in Hong Kong and Taiwan and the Chiung Yao fever soon swept over Sinophonic communities in Southeastern Asia, including Mainland China. Her works, rich in melodramatic plotlines, often explore relationships regarded as socially unacceptable. With stories taking place in living rooms, cafes, and discos, films based on her novels have been compared with white telephone cinema, a film genre popular in Italy during the fascist period. As of recently, film researchers started to appreciate the feminine voice and the theme of intergenerational conflicts in her works, especially protagonists disregarding social norms and traditions in pursuit of love.

While Hong Kong filmmakers post 70s focused on kung fu, gambling, softcore erotica, and mafia, with disproportionate interest in the depiction of violent brotherhood, Chiung Yao-inspired films undeniably stand out in the Sinophone cinema of that era. Her novels, songs and films based on her works have also helped establish Taiwan as the new cultural centre for Mandarin culture. Films presented in this strand include:

Where the Seagull Flies (1974), dir. Li Hsing | UK premiere

A charming Taiwanese journalist Muhuai meets three mysterious, identical girls. Soon after he falls for them, one by one, they all disappear. In Hong Kong, the girl is a woman who attempts to commit suicide after killing her husband. In Singapore, she is a singer from Manilla working in a nightclub. Back in Taipei, she is his younger sister's university friend. After Muhuai discovers the mysterious girl's identity and learns she likes to play tricks on men, he plans his revenge.... [More information here.](#)

Cheerful Wind (1981), dir. Hou Hsiao-Hsien | UK premiere

Hsing-Hui, a young photographer assistant, is split between her forcefully affectionate boss and a newly-met doctor she immediately falls for.

Although Cheerful Wind, like other films based on Chiung Yao novels, was produced by the author, this title, unlike the rest, subverts gender stereotypes of the time by portraying Hsing-Hui as an independent and self-assertive woman. [More information here.](#)

Taiwan New Cinema and Its Legacy



Kuei-Mei, a Woman

Taiwanese New Wave, also called Taiwan New Cinema, started in 1982. Inspired by Italian neorealism and French New Wave, filmmakers of this movement denounced the state-approved, patriotic films as well as the escapist films of Chiung Yao. They were interested in realistic depiction of contemporary life, employing slow narrative pace and distant camera. They have successfully introduced Taiwanese cinema to the rest of the world, not without the help of European immigrants settling in Taiwan.

After a relatively quiet time in the 90s, Taiwanese cinema bravely enters 21st century thanks to a group of new filmmakers whose works, like their predecessors in the New Wave generation, retain a strong interest in realism. Although sometimes criticized for not producing works rivalling Chinese commercial films in production scale and market profits, this new generations of filmmakers continues to engage in contemporary issues and focus on stories of ordinary people in the ever-changing society.

The films presented as part of Taiwan Film Festival Edinburgh won awards at the prestigious Golden Horse Film Festival which has now become one of the most important events for Sinophone filmmakers all over the world, especially Chinese filmmakers who cannot get screening permissions in their home country. As part of this strand, the Festival presents:

The Sandwich Man (1983), dir. Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Tseng Chuang-Hsiang, Wan Jen

Adapted from novelist Huang Chun-Ming's short stories, The Sandwich Man consists of three short films. This anthology presents downbeat characters struggling to cope with the dramatic change in Taiwanese society in the Cold War period, and offers a sharp critique of imperialism and capitalism booming at the time.

In the first story, The Sandwich Man, after a long period of unemployment Qun-Shu takes a job that requires him to wear a clown costume. When he finally gets a promotion and frees himself from his clown persona, his new born baby doesn't seem to recognise him...

The second, Vicki's Hat, sees two trainee salesmen travelling to a coastal village to sell a symbol of innovation – pressure cookers – a product that means little to the locals. Facing their own challenges, two men soon discover the village's secret, hidden under the titular hat.

The last short film in the anthology, The Taste of Apples, focuses on a migrant worker A-Fa who, on his way to work, is severely injured in an accident involving an American military officer, Colonel Grey. Upon receiving the distressing news, A-Fa's family, living in an urban slum, rushes to the hospital while worrying about the financial implications of the accident only to be surprised by Colonel Grey's very generous compensation and hospitality. [More information here.](#)

Kuei-Mei, a Woman (1985), dir. Chang Yi

Adapted from Xiao-Sa's novella, House of Joffre, the film tells the story of Kuei-Mei, a young woman who flees from Mainland China to Taiwan to stay with her cousin. She is then married off to another Chinese immigrant who has three children from his last marriage, only to discover he has a severe gambling addiction. Forced to move to Japan to seek better income for her new family, Kuei-Mei's tenacity is tested at every step... [More information here.](#)

When Love Comes (2010), dir. Chang Tso-Chi

Coming-of-age story of Lai-Chun, a girl living with her two mothers, father, uncle and grandfather. When she gets pregnant and is abandoned by her boyfriend, Lai-Chun is finally forced to face her own demons and comes to understand the challenges her parents were facing. [More information here.](#)

God Man Dog (2007), dir. Chen Singing

Chin Chin throws herself into an extramarital relationship and religion to forget the premature death of her son. An indigenous couple who work selling peaches in the city, struggle with alcoholism and financial problems which they hope God will solve. A truck driver who collects abandoned deity statues prays to be blessed with a new prosthetic leg. After they are involved in a traffic accident caused by a stray dog, their lives are connected and changed forever. [More information here.](#)

Midi Z Selection



The Palace On The Sea

Since the Cold War, many Southeastern Asians with ethnic Chinese backgrounds have moved to Taiwan for education. Although their study visit was part of the KMT attempt to claim its governance over China, these overseas students from Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, Macau and Hong Kong, have immensely contributed not only to the economic prosperity of the island but also the formation of contemporary Taiwanese culture. In the field of cinema, the most notable names are Tsai Ming-liang from Kuching, Sarawak and Midi Z from Lashio, Myanmar.

With his long-term interest in Chinese diaspora and his own relocation experience, Midi Z depicts the realities of life struggles in the Sinophonic communities in Myanmar as he touches on such issues as drug-trafficking, illegal immigration, jade mining and desperate poverty. His production budget is usually low and he takes a guerilla approach in shooting in order to evade the censorship of the Burmese government but his works, full of fresh energy, reveal meticulous narrative structure and crafted camerawork. Seen as a unique voice in Taiwanese cinema, Midi Z has represented Taiwan in numerous international film festivals. As part of

this strand, the Festival presents:

Jade Miners (2015), dir. Midi Z

End of 2012, the Burmese government is still in the military conflict with the Kachin Independence Organization. The perennial conflict forced the jade mining business to come to a halt but waves of Burmese workers continued to flood in, disregarding the official prohibition and the potential danger.

Jade Miners is Midi Z's first documentary. Unlike his feature films shot in the guerilla style, this film was a long-term project that took him 14 months to shoot. After this documentary, Midi Z directed a companion piece, City of Jade (2016), a more personal film that explores his elder brother's struggles as a jade miner. [More information here.](#)

Ice Poison (2014), dir. Midi Z

With crop prices remaining too low to make ends meet, a Burmese farmer pawns his cow for an old motorcycle so that his son, A-Hong, can take passengers to town for extra income. The new business is hardly successful until A-Hong meets San-Mei. San-Mei, a young Burmese woman returns home for her grandfather's funeral after she was tricked into marriage in Sichuan. Compelled by the financial pressure and the wish to bring her child from China back to Myanmar, San-Mei enters the risky but lucrative business of drug trafficking and enlists A-Hong's help.

This film won the Best Film in 2014 at the Edinburgh International Film Festival and represented Taiwan in the 2015 Academy Awards for the Best Foreign Language Film. [More information here.](#)

The Palace on the Sea (2014), dir. Midi Z

Unlike Midi Z's previous realistic works, The Palace on the

Sea is an experimental short film with a Resnais-like theme of troubled memory and an imagined past.

In 1999, a luxurious floating restaurant from Hong Kong docked in Kaohsiung Port. Closing its doors only a year after the opening, the restaurant became an abandoned ship chained to the dock. Here, a ghost of a Burmese woman, San-Mei, is trapped in this foreign land with her lingering memories of the past. A Buddhist monk, once her lover, guides her home while chanting and reciting sutras in the empty ship. [More information here.](#)

Docs: Exploring Diversity in Pursuing the Taiwanese Identity



How Deep is the Ocean

While China reinforces the homogenous image of what's Chinese among its ethnic minorities and overseas Sinophonic communities, Taiwan uses ethnic diversity to assert its independence. In the process of identity exploration, the voice of indigenous people and so-called New Immigrants is extraordinarily important.

Since the democratization movement in the 80s, indigenous activists reflected on their sufferings in the urbanization, diaspora, labour rights, environmental protection, land justice, and most significantly the loss of their culture.

Due to globalization starting in the 90s, many immigrants from Southeastern Asian countries moved to Taiwan for marital and work reasons. As an invaluable workforce for long-term care, manufacturing, fishing industries and small businesses, they are now considered the New Immigrants as a recognition of their contribution to Taiwan.

When assessing their relationship with the Taiwanese society, these two ethnic groups turn to documentary, a filmmaking practice that has been used as an effective tool for social

activists and dissidents to raise public awareness and make social reforms for decades. In this strand, Taiwan Film Festival Edinburgh is pleased to present:

How Deep is the Ocean (2000), dir. Tang Hsiang-Chu | UK premiere

Shooting in 16mm, Tang Hsiang-Chu spent two years on Orchid Island with Mamuno, a Tao indigenous person, after he returned from Taiwan to his homeland. This film documents Mamuno's reintegration into the community he once left behind when he was pursuing a better life on the mainland. While listening to Mamuno's story full of ups and downs and experiencing the solidarity of the Tao people, the director starts to reflect upon his ethnic Han background and attempts to find the meaning in his own life. [More information here.](#)

Out/Marriage (2012), dir. Nguyen Kim-Hong | UK premiere

First ever Taiwanese documentary filmed by a female immigrant, Out/Marriage is an autobiographical story of Kim-Hong who moved from Vietnam to Taiwan for marriage. After years of domestic abuse, she was forced to divorce and became a single mother to her young daughter. Overcoming the cultural and language barrier, Kim-Hong becomes a filmmaker and documents stories of four other women with very similar experiences of immigration and failed marriage. Forging a close connection with the women, Kim-Hong presents a touching and powerful story offering a unique entry point to some of Taiwanese society's most pressing issues. [More information here.](#)

The Mountain (2015), dir. Su Hung-En | UK premiere

This 16mm film follows the life of Su's grandfather, Teymu Teylong, a famous hunter in Ciyakang village in Hualien, Taiwan. The film portrays his everyday life which has not changed despite the passing of time and passing of the various governments. Teymu spends his days farming and hunting in the mountains, chanting to the young fallen souls in the local

cemetery and offering sacrifices to ancestral spirits.

His daily routines are contrasted with footage of indigenous people in the past who were colonised by various occupiers. These images, accompanied by old tunes, are to remind us of the indigenous people's plight and struggles caused by the country's governments. [More information here.](#)

Shorts: The unusual usual



The Busy Young Psychic

Like for many in the industry, short film has been a stepping stone for emerging Taiwanese filmmakers. Both the central and local governments offer subsidies and administrative support and the PTS, the public TV channel funded by taxpayers, regularly showcases their works.

Many of those filmmakers engage in a wide range of contemporary issues, such as social disparity, political corruption and gender equality. When it comes to structural presentation and visual style, they often look to TV shows,

streaming videos, YouTubers and even closed-circuit television (CCTV) for inspiration.

Showing passion for their society, culture and politics, these emerging filmmakers often receive critics' praise for their keen examination of the 'normal' and fresh approach in dissecting contemporary issues.

Towards the Sun (2016), dir. Wang Yi-Ling | UK premiere

Jia-Ming, a fruit farmer whose property is confiscated by the authority, meets a Vietnamese woman, A-Anh, whose residence permit is about to expire after a divorce. Moved by her story, Jia-Ming offers her a ride to the airport but things take an unexpected turn... [More information here.](#)

The Busy Young Psychic (2013), dir. Chen He-Yu | UK premiere

This film is based on a true story. Xie Jun-ya is a high school girl who splits her time between the beloved baseball practices and her career as a psychic, helping people communicate with the dead. With the latter leaving her exhausted and indifferent, she struggles to find balance between her duties and desire to be a carefree teenager. [More information here.](#)

A Taxi Driver (2018), dir. Chen Yen-Hong | UK premiere

A short film produced by the PTS Originals, a project aiming to develop innovative genre films in Taiwan.

A-Cui is a middle-aged taxi driver whose meek personality subjects him to all forms of exploitation. He has a low social status, even his own son doesn't have any respect for him. One day, against his will, he gets entangled in a criminal act. He then discovers his estranged wife is cheating on him... Finally, A Cui decides to stand up for himself. [More information here.](#)