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privilege and disarticulation**

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# Taipei Golden Horse Film Awards and Singapore Cinema: Prestige, Privilege and Disarticulation

## Abstract:

Drawing from the idea of national revival, which is closely associated with the term ‘new wave,’ this paper examines the implications of how winning international film awards, with a focus on how the Taipei Golden Horse Awards (GHA) is variously understood by Singapore filmmakers. If film festivals and awards are crucial to constituting the ‘Singapore new wave’, how does GHA perceivably shape filmmaking and the way filmmakers understand issues of identity, language, prestige and cultural sensibilities? Based on interviews with ten Singapore directors and a producer-film festival director, media reports, film reviews and social media posts, I demonstrate that the supposed prestige of GHA is fraught with conflicting understandings of ‘Chineseness’, impartiality, inclusivity and credibility. For a sovereign country with a high ethnic Chinese population like Singapore which claims a national identity that is multilingual and multi-ethnic, at stake are the problematics of Chinese geopolitics and the linguistic-cultural practices of exclusion when it comes to GHA nominations and wins.

## Keywords:

Golden Horse Awards; Singapore cinema; Chinese cinemas; film festivals; Chineseness; the Sinophone

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The term ‘new wave cinema’ is often associated with new styles and themes which may not have been explored hitherto in the cinema of a nation, and is closely related to the idea of *revival*, which could mean increased annual output and growing international attention in terms of media coverage, awards and exhibition. However, when cross-border co-productions, transnational funding and artistic collaboration are now commonplace, it becomes increasingly difficult to speak of the “national” identity of a film. A recourse to ‘critical transnationalism’ enables an interrogation of how filmmaking activities negotiate with the national on all levels – from cultural policy to financial sources, the multiculturalism of difference to how it reconfigures the nation’s image of itself (Higbee and Lim 2010). Additionally, I would argue that the exhibition of films, nomination applications to international festivals and winning of awards, should also be considered as part of filmmaking. Such practices are constitutive of the dialogic relationship and tensions between the national and transnational through shaping how directors represent the ‘national’ to

international audiences and have implications on the pitching and marketing of films to funding sponsors, commercial distributors, festival curators and awards jury. A case could be drawn from the disqualification of Eric Khoo's *Be With Me* (2005) from nomination for the Best Foreign Language Film category in the 78<sup>th</sup> Academy Awards due to its main dialogue in English. This case highlights the incommensurability between representing the quotidian reality of English usage in Singapore and the arbitrariness of awarding criteria (Chan 2008).<sup>1</sup>

These considerations underpin the premise of this essay, which is not so much concerned with analysing the aesthetics of the Singapore new wave, but rather, the idea of 'national revival' as examined through the discourse on the winning of international film awards for Singapore. If analysing audience reception is also crucial in critical transnationalism (Higbee and Lim 2010), it is equally vital to make sense of how filmmakers and media in Singapore variously make sense of film awards, and what it means to their own cinematic practice, especially when the 'Singapore new wave' in the last two decades has been closely related to its exhibition of films and winning of awards at international festivals such as Cannes, Locarno and Busan. In Chris Berry and Luke Robinson's timely edited volume on small and independent Chinese film festivals and awards in different parts of the world, they ask, "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?" (2017: 4) This question invites further inquiry into the implications of winning Chinese film awards for a multi-ethnic and multilingual country like Singapore. It also raises the issue of whether the most well-known of them all, the Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival (TGHFF), has been overlooked. One of the aims of this paper is to address this gap. It is almost impossible to discuss Chinese film festivals and awards without examining the former. Whilst TGHFF comprises the Golden Horse Award competition (GHA), Film Festival, Film Project Promotion and Film Academy, the principal focus of this paper examines the implications of GHA for Singapore cinema. Such an approach might seem odd, since the presence of Singapore cinema in this major film event is relatively insignificant, compared to that of Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. However, in the last fifteen years or so, Singapore films have made inroads into the GHA, as evinced by the success of Anthony Chen's debut, *Ilo Ilo*. During the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Taipei Golden Horse Awards in 2013, the film earned six nominations, including Best Film, Best New Director, Best Supporting Actress, Best Original Screenplay, Best Supporting Actor, and Best New Performer. It emerged as winner of the first four categories, and most notable was its clinching of the Best Film award from renowned directors: Johnnie To's *Drug War*, Wong Kar Wai's *The Grandmaster*, Jia Zhangke's *A Touch of Sin* and Tsai Ming-liang's *Stray Dogs*. Featuring a Singaporean Chinese middle-class family struggling with the Asian financial crisis in 1997, *Ilo Ilo* examines the relationship between the ten-year-old son and their Filipina domestic helper. Chen described his win as 'turning a *real* [emphasis mine] new chapter for Singapore cinema,' hoping it will 'encourage more young filmmakers to pursue their dreams', eventually creating a 'wonderful new wave of Singapore cinema' (Yip 2013a). Earlier in March 2013 after winning the Caméra d'Or award at the Cannes Film Festival, Chen made a similar comment on how *Ilo Ilo* signified 'a new chapter in Singapore cinema.' (Brzeski 2013) To add, the Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong Lee congratulated *Ilo Ilo* on his Facebook, celebrating Chen's Cannes and GHA wins for Singapore. Be it a state leader's praise for a filmmaker's success or the latter's assertion that awards have the power to inspire a 'new wave' in national cinema, both imply winning international film awards represents prestige for the nation and revival of its cinema. Interestingly, Chen's suggestion that the film's Golden Horse success represents a '*real* new chapter' whereas his comment after winning at Cannes excluded the word '*real*.' His implication that GHA carries more

value than the latter, and how directors variously understand the significance of film awards is key to filling a gap in making sense of filmmaking practices in Singapore. In no way are Chen's comments representative of all Singapore filmmakers, but they highlight interesting ethnic and transnational connotations associated with the relatively underexplored GHA.

Focusing on GHA, the Chinese equivalent of the Oscars, I attempt to make sense of the problematics of this highly regarded Sinophone institution for multi-ethnic and multilingual Singapore. Such a focus raises questions on how the cinema of a small nation can be situated more broadly in relation to film festivals and awards and roles they play. With a high Chinese population, Singapore is often included in discourse on the Sinophone world. However, do Singapore Chinese filmmakers feel excluded from the rest of the Chinese-speaking world, and how is this related to how they perceive themselves?

Based on personal interviews with ten Singapore directors and a producer-film festival director,<sup>2</sup> media reports, film reviews and social media posts, this essay demonstrates that GHA appears to be held in higher regard than Cannes by the Singapore media and several of my informants. In no way does this essay claim to illustrate how GHA actually functions as an institution, but instead attempts to produce an 'oral history' concerned with outlining the nature and limits of Singaporean film culture or the imagination of its film community, with specific regards to GHA. There is a case for considering the views of filmmakers, especially if many of them have been pivotal to the shaping of Singapore cinema into what may be now considered a 'new wave' in the last two decades. They include Eric Khoo, Jack Neo, Royston Tan, Tan Pin Pin, Jasmine Ng, K Rajagopal, Boo Junfeng and Anthony Chen. The evidence is based on the analysis of how they view GHA alongside the examining of discourse generated from news reports (including how Taiwan film professionals and critics view Singapore cinema in relation to GHA) and social media (including posts by the Prime Minister and film critics). Their views raise questions about GHA in relation to issues of identity, language, prestige and cultural sensibilities.

The first section, 'Screening the Nation: Cultural Sensibilities, Class and National Representation', examines the unique geopolitics of GHA and the implications for Singapore entries winning of awards in this film event, and the supposed impact this might have on the local box office and the standing of national cinema. Issues of class and cultural sensibilities suggest how Singapore Chinese filmmakers variously understand their cultural affinity with GHA and the state's neoliberal anxiety of refining audience 'taste'. The second section, 'Articulating Prestige: Inclusivity and Impartiality,' explores how the GHA organising committee attributes ideas such as impartiality and inclusivity to the notion of prestige based on the statements of Singapore and Taiwan film professionals and critics. The key question is not whether GHA is indeed inclusive and impartial, but rather: who thinks what GHA is about, including the 'prestige' which it is thought to symbolise, under what circumstances and for what purposes? The last section 'Privilege and Disarticulation: What and Who is Excluded?' demonstrates how eligibility for GHA nomination is a linguistic-cultural practice of exclusion, and what this might mean for Singapore filmmakers and cultural critics. In a multi-ethnic society, the question of who gets to participate in GHA is an issue of privilege, closely intertwined with one's language, class and ethnicity. In using the term 'disarticulation,' I ask, who are being excluded from the discourse on privilege associated with GHA in Singapore, if winning awards is understood as crucial to reviving its cinema.

### **Screening the Nation: Cultural Sensibilities, Class and National Representation**

Unlike international film festivals like Cannes, Berlin, Venice and Busan which accept entries of all languages, GHA only accepts Chinese-language films. When Singapore films are represented nationally in this Sinophone institution, the issues of access to GHA and cultural sensibilities raise questions about how different film festivals and awards allow Singapore films to participate in a particular or larger community, and why directors may choose to participate in certain communities, and awards perceivably linked to box office performance, the class of audiences and national representation.

The GHA today is a highly regarded award for Chinese-language films from all around the world. Wen Tien-hsiang (2016), Chief Executive Officer of the TGHFF Committee asserts

When GHA was initially established, qualification for competition was not limited to Taiwanese films and as the [socio-political] trends became increasingly open, any entry that was Chinese-language or any participants who were ethnic Chinese would stand an opportunity to win so long as they performed well (Wen 2016).

Scholars have noted the time period of the revival of Singapore cinema since the mid-1990s when directors like Eric Khoo's films drew international attention and won awards (Uhde and Udhe 2011; Millet 2015; Liew and Teo 2017). Riding on this wave, Singapore films made its first forays in GHA in 2003 when Jack Neo's *Homerun* (2003) received two nominations at the GHA for Best Theme Song and Best New Performer (won) in 2003. However, these achievements did not stir up as much attention and public debate as *Ilo Ilo*.

However, tracing the roots of GHA would demonstrate it excluded entries from the People's Republic of China (PRC). In fact, the name 'Golden Horse (*Jinma*)', can be ironically traced to the Cold War and to the long-standing hostilities between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and Kuomintang (KMT). The naming bears no relation to gold or horses, but is actually a portmanteau of Jinmen (Kinmen) and Matsu (Mazu) Islands - two KMT island outposts - the battlefront of the PRC and the Republic of China (ROC) since the 1950s.<sup>3</sup> In ROC, policies were implemented to make Mandarin the national language (*guoyu*) and to promote Mandarin-language films (*guopian*) since 1959. In other words, GHA was a KMT cultural-political project dedicated to promoting, exhibiting and rewarding films produced in Mandarin. Wen was right about the 'inclusivity' of the earlier stage of GHA when Hong Kong films were entitled to compete provided they were dubbed from Cantonese to Mandarin for qualification as *guopian*. Only in 1996 did PRC films qualify for nomination when the GHA committee modified the rules (Mai 2016; Edwards 2014). Widening the scope beyond Mandarin films, regulations were established to reposition GHA as a 'Chinese-language film competition worldwide' (Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival Executive Committee 2016b).

For a long time when PRC was isolated from the capitalist world during the Cold War before it went through media commercialisation in the 1980s and the developing of its cultural industries in the 1990s (Bai 2005), Chinese popular culture was globally dominated by Taiwan and Hong Kong. As a long-time member of the capitalist camp, Taiwan's export of popular culture, such as media programmes, cinema and GHA found circulation primarily in capitalist territories with Chinese-speaking communities around the world, including Singapore. Additionally, two major Chinese film awards, Hong Kong Film Awards (HKFA) was founded in 1982 while Golden Rooster Awards (GRA) in 1981.<sup>4</sup> Only Hong Kong

residents were eligible for the former while the latter was principally catered towards Mainland Chinese cinema. With no-known event of a similar scale that accepted Chinese film entries from all over the world, GHA gradually became the most important global Chinese film event.

Before analysing how Singapore Chinese directors view these different awards, an understanding of Singapore's sociocultural context is necessary. In 2013, there were about 3.3 million citizens out of a total of 5.4 million people in Singapore (National Population and Talent Division 2013: 5). 76.2 per cent are Chinese, 15 per cent Malay and 7.4 per cent Indian and 1.4 Others. According to the 2010 census data on languages spoken at home, about 32.2% of the citizen population spoke English, 35.6% spoke Mandarin, 12.2% spoke Malay and 3.2% spoke Tamil (Singapore Department of Statistics 2014). However, these figures do not indicate the percentage of people who speak two or more languages, Chinese 'dialects' and other Indian languages.<sup>5</sup> Nor do they reveal the less-than-straightforward relationship between one's ethnicity and language spoken. In addition, there is diversity in how ethnic identity is understood by Chinese Singaporeans, 'both with regards to historical specificities and in the context of a multicultural Singapore' (Quah 2009). Education background, age, family upbringing and other factors also shape one's articulation of cultural sensibilities. This is evident in the different ways which Singapore directors view different film festivals and awards in relation to their family background and cultural sensibilities.

Born in 1976, Royston Tan is conversant in English, Mandarin and Hokkien. He benefited from the Film Project Promotion funding for his film *3688* – a tribute to the late Taiwanese singer Fong Fei-fei. He values the opportunities for exhibition and nomination in GHA greatly. He understands GHA and Taiwanese cinema as enabling him to 'connect with his sense of Chinese identity' because it a process of 'root-seeking,' and this has much to do with his identity as a Hokkien person and his fondness for Taiwanese popular culture:

There are some Hokkien words which are no longer used in Singapore, but they are still current and preserved in Taiwan cinema. When I hear and see them in Taiwanese songs and entertainment and GHA, there is a strange intimate feeling – it reminds me of home yet it's not exactly it (personal communication, 22 December 2015).

His claims to Hokkien identity as definitive of his Chinese identity reveal tensions in the Singapore official language policy, which has long favoured Mandarin over Chinese 'dialects' as the legitimate medium for accessing Chinese culture. Tan's representation of his 'roots' in Taiwanese Hoklo culture also raises doubts about Chineseness as 'traditionally shaped by the authority of a [s]inocentric core' (Chun 1996: 125). Several directors also addressed the relationship between Taiwan and Hong Kong cinema and its close association with GHA, and how these played a part in their childhood in their encounters with Chinese popular culture. For example, film director Jow Zhi Wei born in 1983 was an alumnus of the Golden Horse Film Academy in 2010. He mentions that 'as a young boy, 'GHA was always something to look forward as it meant a gathering of what was considered to be the best of Chinese cinema that year' (personal communication, 23 December 2015)'. For Anthony Chen born in 1984, his memory of GHA as a child is closely linked to the broadcast of the awards ceremony on the Singapore Mandarin television channel during the Chinese New Year period every year (personal communication, 9 January 2016). Interestingly, he also mentions how GHA enabled him to know Hong Kong directors like Ann Hui, suggesting that the film event plays an important role in promoting Chinese cinema. While these directors see Taiwan cinema as

crucial to shaping their cultural sensibilities, Royston Tan also points out that Chinese people across China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore ‘have some common sensibilities.’

Yet other ethnic Chinese film directors do not concur. Born in 1969, Tan Pin Pin is English-speaking and focuses on multilingual documentaries featuring historical issues in Singapore. Although she sees GHA as having ‘a long tradition of honouring Chinese films’ and is ‘an important platform for Singapore directors who want to be noticed in China,’ and she does ‘not normally associate GHA with accepting documentaries though it does’ (personal communication, 24 July 2017). Three of her films, *Singapore GaGa* (2005) *Invisible City* (2007) and *To Singapore with Love* (2015) were submitted to Taiwan International Documentary Festival for screening as ‘GHA has not been on her radar’. For veteran director English-speaking Eric Khoo born in 1965 who has not made any films entirely in Mandarin,<sup>6</sup> he claims that GHA ‘would be seen as a big award for Singaporeans due to its long history.’ While Khoo has been producing Mandarin films, for example, Royston Tan’s *15* (2003),<sup>7</sup> the former is focused on showcasing his works in European and American film festivals.

Likewise, Boo Junfeng, born in 1983, is dedicated towards exhibiting his works in festivals outside Chinese film festival circuits although his debut feature, *Sandcastle* (2010) is largely in Mandarin. While he was raised in a Chinese-speaking family and educated in Chung Cheng High School (Main), a Singapore institution known for strong traditions in Chinese language, culture and a history of leftist student movements, he understands his own cultural and artistic sensibilities as largely shaped by Euro-American cinema. He attributes this to his film studies at Ngee Ann Polytechnic in Singapore. When asked how he compares GHA, HKFA and GRA, he feels that he is ‘more familiar’ with GHA and notes that

If I win a GHA, my parents will be crazy proud, probably prouder than if I won a Cannes award, despite its higher prestige’ (personal communication, 21 December 2015).

He also adds that he regards the awards of Cannes, Berlin and Venice film festivals more highly, because they are ‘mainly international, and you are competing on a global stage, as opposed to an ethnocentric stage.’ Producer Tan Fong Cheng who works in Khoo’s company, Zhao Wei Films, suggests that GHA is catered to ‘the markets of China, Hong Kong and Taiwan’ and their own company is more focused on ‘the international market (personal communication, 21 December 2015)’. Though she is mainly Mandarin-speaking and professes a liking for Hong Kong and Taiwan films, she wonders ‘whether GHA might be able to understand the themes that come out from this part Southeast Asia.’ In fact, she states, ‘Although we may be Mandarin-speakers, we are Chinese, we are very different people.’ When asked to elaborate what this difference might be, Khoo who was also present with her, intercepts to say that some Taiwanese film critics see Singapore Hokkien as ‘crass’ (personal communication, 21 December 2015). He recalls an episode when he was the producer for *15*, a film featuring disenfranchised youths who speak Mandarin, Hokkien and Singlish:

Remember I was trying to release [it] in Taiwan, then one well-known Taiwan critic goes, how on earth can we release this? The Hokkien is bad and vulgar! To them is like, who are these dogs, my goodness, they’re spoiling our dialect! It’s like seriously, we are very *tsou lou* [Cantonese term for uncouth].

Though the Hoklo spoken by Taiwanese and Singapore Hokkien are mutually intelligible to a large degree, Khoo's statement implies the issue of hierarchy in Sinitic languages. Notably, respected film critics of Chinese cinema often serve as jurors for GHA, including the abovementioned. Whether one has access to the film market or festival in another Chinese society, which in turn offers opportunities for acquiring prestige in the likes of GHA, this is dependent on the arbitration of what might be considered appropriate language and personal taste.

On the other hand, the case of Jasmine Ng born in 1972, demonstrates that one's spoken language is not directly linked to cultural sensibilities. She reminisces how she learnt about Taiwan and Hong Kong celebrities through the visuals in her aunt's Taiwan women's lifestyle magazine, *Sisters* (*Zimei* 姊妹) and through television broadcasts of GHA award ceremonies and films from these two territories. As part of the Singapore entourage during the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the GHA awards ceremony when *Ilo Ilo* won, she recalls her excitement:

That was the anniversary year and they invited all the stars, like Brigitte Lin and Chin Han.<sup>8</sup> You cannot help but think you're actually reliving your childhood. All these classic movie stars. For someone who used to just read the English subtitles to make sense of the films, it's still something that's very much part of your core (personal communication, 23 December 2015).

What is particularly interesting is that Ng is mainly English-speaking though she understands Mandarin. She attributes her association of her childhood memories with the 'glitz and glamour' of experiencing the GHA ceremony live to the 'diverse cultural vocabulary' she possesses. She also notes that being born in the 1970s offers a different reference point on the popular culture during that certain era – 'the golden age of Chinese cinema', the 'identity-explorations in movies from Taiwan and Hong Kong' in the 70s and 80s, at a time where there were no Singaporean films since the Malayan P Ramlee films of the 50s and 60s, and a very nascent local TV scene.' What she represents as her Chinese cultural sensibilities being mediated through English subtitles problematizes the notion of 'Chineseness', often presumed to be defined by coherent links between language and ethnicity. Evident in the views of my informants on how they see GHA is the diversity and cracks in the one-culture myth of the Chinese-speaking world.

Yet the implication of Chinese cultural sensibilities is also attributed to the GHA's prestige and perceivably has a direct impact on local box office. Several Singapore newspaper articles have attributed GHA nominations for *Ilo Ilo* to a boost in its box office and ticket sales were spiked further after the awards ceremony' (Li 2013; Yip 2013b). The film's producer Yuni suggests that 'after the film won the awards at GHA, it helped the film stay in the Singapore cinemas a little longer and gave it more attention with the Chinese media here, and the Chinese-speaking movie going audience' (personal communication, 24 April 2017). Royston Tan understands the prestige of GHA as 'local recognition, a good box office and sense of achievement' while Boo feels that *Ilo Ilo*'s box office success is because GHA's 'impact is a lot bigger in the mainstream consciousness in Singapore compared to Cannes.' Anthony Chen supports this view, and 'stresses that GHA is 'a very important event in the Chinese-speaking world and its awards are held in high regard by many':

A journalist asked me, '*Ilo Ilo* has won so many awards, including the Cannes Caméra d'Or – a huge milestone – and it stole the limelight in GHA. So which award is more important to you?' Many may feel that Cannes is



the most prestigious film festival in the world, but if I wasn't a filmmaker, my parents might not know what Cannes is. But my mum sure knows what GHA is, and even the auntie who sells vegetables in the market knows what it is. But perhaps after my film won in France, more ordinary masses like uncles and aunties know what the Cannes Film Festival is.<sup>9</sup>

Chen also adds that his parents are English-speaking, suggesting that even non-Chinese speaking Singaporeans, including Ng, are aware of GHA's perceived prestige in Singapore. This is further supported by Chen's use of a vegetable hawker as the class denominator to represent 'mass appreciation' for GHA. Incidentally, an editorial in the Singapore national Chinese newspaper *Lianhe Zaobao* observes that

[d]espite emerging as the black horse to win the Caméra d'Or at Cannes, *Ilo Ilo* did not perform well at the local box office, barely managing 900,000 [Singapore] dollars in eight weeks trailing far behind Jack Neo's *Ah Boys to Men 2* at 7.9 million dollars. This seems to prove the criticism leveraged on Singaporean audiences for their level of appreciation. Put more politely, it implies that the film-viewing habits of Singaporeans needs further nurturing (Anon 2013a).

The opinion piece also notes how the announcement of GHA nominations for *Ilo Ilo* have encouraged cinemas to rerun the film to a better performing box office, concluding that Singaporeans are more familiar with GHA than Cannes. However, using lacklustre ticket sales as a basis for comparison with Jack Neo's film to suggest the Singapore audience's *lack* of cultural sensibility for appreciating the prestige and significance of a Cannes award to a Singapore film, the editorial highlights the state's neoliberal ideal of the 'Renaissance Singaporean' who should strive to become a 'civic-minded person' 'underpinned by a fine sense of aesthetics' (Lee 2016: 180). Additionally, it suggests that the complexity of cultural, historical, linguistic and class issues behind festivals can be measured monetarily. Also worth noting is the article's optimism that *Ilo Ilo*'s GHA success 'will raise the awareness of Singaporeans and their support for local cinema.' Foo is explicitly lofty about the supposed benefits of GHA for Singapore cinema audiences in 'refining' their taste:

With the blessing and conferring (加持 *jiachi*) of GHA awards and intensive coverage, *Ilo Ilo* has encouraged some Singapore audiences who shun festival art films to change their mindset and watch the film out of curiosity. In this regard, it has enabled Singaporeans to learn that films are more than entertainment: they have the social function of enabling audiences to learn about their own culture. If Singaporeans are hence able to see local art films screened at festivals as another cinema-going option other than commercial genre films, this will undoubtedly be an elevation of the film-viewing culture in Singapore (Foo 2014: 13).

Corresponding to the implication that appreciation for Singapore cinema's GHA success would make up for Singaporeans' lack of aesthetic refinement is the aspiration of some filmmakers who see GHA as a platform of showcasing the nation. Yuni Hadi recognizes the prestige of GHA for *Ilo Ilo* and she stresses that 'we never know what really goes on behind the jury doors but can only be thankful and appreciative that people believed in our modest film from Singapore and it not only gave the film a chance to shine, but also with that win, we were able to wave the Singapore flag.' Her diplomatic tact is met up by Jack Neo's

somewhat suppliant rhetoric; the latter sees it crucial for a ‘small country like Singapore to have its cinema represented on the global stage’:

Now that GHA has attained a very important position in the world of the Chinese people, Singapore directors do yearn for their films to win GHA awards, even it is just nominations. This is its main significance, and it is very, very important to us (31 December 2015).

In fact, Neo even worries about how the rise of Mainland Chinese cinema and ‘its increasing success in GHA may cause the neglect of films from many countries’:

The key issue which GHA must face is to maintain a balance. We really need a platform where any country can have representation, and this balance should be achieved. Films from small territories and countries should be recognized even though they need not necessarily win, and there could be ways of doing this.

Neo’s implication that GHA should carve out a space for Singapore cinema then raises the question of whether a film award already dedicated to promoting global Chinese cinema from different countries should further establish categories based on nation and territory. Whilst Neo expresses the anxiety of not having Singapore films win at GHA (which is peculiar, since his own films had previously won and Chen had already bagged four awards in 2013), Lee Hsien Loong see Chen’s GHA success as bringing national pride: ‘Singapore celebrates your impressive achievements. I hope this success will spur you and our other local film-makers to continue telling great stories’ (Lee 2013). Neo and Lee’s views may seem different but underlying both of their concerns is how national glory can be attained through showcasing its cinema in GHA and winning awards. This position alludes to the notion of prestige which Taiwan and Singapore film professionals accord to GHA.

### **Articulating Prestige: Inclusivity and Impartiality**

The TGHFF Committee (2016a) represents GHA as ‘among the most prestigious and time-honoured film awards in the world of Chinese language cinema.’ Such a positioning is based on the assumption that what constitutes cinematic excellence is balanced and professional, therefore credible and authoritative:

The nominations and results of 24 awards are decided by a group of jurors consisting of film professionals; their deliberations take place after they view every single film.

Related to the notion of GHA’s credibility as an awarding body for global Chinese cinema is the idea of ‘inclusivity’, which is held by many of my informants.

During interviews with Eric Khoo and Jack Neo, they are quick to acknowledge the prestige which GHA carries. In particular, representing the event as ‘the Chinese equivalent of the Academy Awards’, Neo sees the former as ‘a highly important award’ that recognizes the excellence of ‘global Chinese cinema;’ this corresponds to with how the official GHA website describes itself (Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival Executive Committee 2016a). On the other hand, Singapore film nominations for GHA awards have been understood by Taiwan critics and film professionals as an example to support the argument of GHA’s ‘inclusivity’ and ‘impartiality.’ In particular many draw from the case of *Ilo Ilo*’s tremendous

GHA success for this purpose. Foo Tee Tuan defines the greatest significance of *Ilo Ilo*'s achievements to the awarding body as its 'embracing of a broader vision beyond the focus on films from Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan.' He claims that this indicates 'GHA has lived up to its name of being the most prestigious hall of fame for Chinese cinematic art' (Foo 2014, 12). Additionally, Ang Lee was lead juror in the panel on the Best Film category in 2013. When asked whether the panellists 'felt pressure during the deliberation process' which comprised 'two and a half hours and four rounds of voting':

This [is a decision] we are proud of, because although he [Anthony Chen] wasn't my top choice, but I'm still elated that it went to him eventually. It's just like what [Malaysian] Director Tsai [Ming-liang] said, in societies with Chinese-speaking communities, only something like that can happen in Taiwan.<sup>10</sup> It's all really because the people who like him [Chen] made up the majority, and because he won, I feel that GHA has moved one step forward, and its scope has become wider (Zhang 2013).

Concurring in a blog essay, Wen states that the jury verdict signifies, 'the territorial map of Chinese cinema is no longer restricted to China, Hong Kong and Taiwan' (2013). Singapore International Film Festival Director Yuni Hadi who was one of producers for *Ilo Ilo*, sees GHA's standing among Singapore filmmakers in terms of the intense competition the film was facing:

The kind of exposure we received from the GHA wins was heightened by the fact that it was as a special 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary so there were many big industry names attending, our lead juror was Ang Lee and we were competing against some of the most anticipated films of the year.

Her statement suggests that the presence of reputable directors like Ang Lee in the panel and the participation of established filmmakers in the competition have contributed to the prestige of GHA in that year. When other informants were asked to compare GHA, HKFA and GRA, several of them cited the GHA as the most 'inclusive' and 'impartial' that underscores its prestige. For example, Jack Neo sees GHA as an 'international award' while GRA is 'a domestic award.' He feels that GRA is restrictive because it does not allow films which are not produced in China to participate, and the organisers should consider opening up to overseas entries. Citing his own film, *Just Follow Law* (2007), which was nominated for GHA Best Actor, Best Actress and Best Original Script and Best Visual Effects, he asserts that GHA 'is more authoritative because it is open to everyone.' According to Jasmine Ng, she believes that

Currently, and at least for Singaporean filmmakers, the GHA still seems to carry the most weight, because it encompasses all Chinese cinemas, because of the awareness it gets, and its history and longevity accords a certain status. The HKFA focuses on the landscape of HK cinema. And as for GRA, its perspective is largely China-centric, and where one gets their dues and that doesn't allow for surprises. Obviously, everybody now aspires towards China for its filmmaking industry and its market, including people from Taiwan and Hong Kong. But the GHA with its history, the glitz and glam, it still carries that prestige, at least for many of us who are ethnic-Chinese filmmakers in Singapore and Malaysia.

For Royston Tan whose *881* was nominated for Best Makeup and Costume design at the 44<sup>th</sup> GHA in 2007, he sees GHA as ‘a platform that aims for impartiality’:

For a long time, I feel that GHA has been an impartial platform not dictated by political agenda. It boils down to awarding prizes based on the artistic quality of films. This shows that it is a holistic film event.

Anthony Chen talks about the ‘credibility’ of GHA which he attributes to a panel of about twenty jurors who judge the entries every year. He asserts that this is something which might be absent in other Chinese film awards:

It’s interesting to note how a rather niche film [*Ilo Ilo*] with a small budget can actually touch the jurors. If they are willing to appreciate the merit of the film for what it is, and the very fact that a highly regarded award like GHA can be awarded to a young director’s maiden film then illustrates its impartiality, far-sightedness and broad-mindedness (*gaodu* 高度).

When comparing with other Chinese film awards, Royston Tan feels that GRA may not be so ‘neutral’, as there is a ‘stringent censorship system in China and it is not as open as Taiwan’:

The Chinese environment is a lot more controlling and there are constraints and rules which have implications on how films are exhibited and judged. For GHA, there are at least 50 jurors in the preliminary round, and they spend months to deliberate carefully. And you will notice that in the last few years, GHA has been reaching out to Hong Kong, China, Singapore and Malaysia. They have been trying to secure their place as a credible major festival in Asia.

In a nutshell, many of these filmmakers and critics, constitutive of GHA’s prestige is its inclusivity in reaching out to entries outside China, Hong Kong and Taiwan; its credibility is attributed to its long history, reputability of participants and jurors, and its impartiality defined by the rigorous deliberation process. However, the implications for a sovereign country like Singapore to be represented nationally in a Chinese-language film event where Hong Kong and Taiwan are considered by the PRC as indispensable to Chinese sovereignty. Renowned Taiwanese film critic Mai Jo-yu claims that political pressure from China was one of the factors that prevented Jia Zhangke from winning the Best Film during the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of GHA in 2013. He opines that among the five entries competing, *A Touch of Sin* had the strongest take on contemporary social issues:

But one month before the prize was announced, *A Touch of Sin* suddenly became a sensitive topic, and [Chinese] official media were prohibited from reporting on it. Jia Zhangke therefore was unable to come to Taiwan [for the GHA ceremony], there was even a rumour about the Mainland authorities warning GHA not to give the film any award. On the surface, it might seem that the GHA panel is independent and has autonomy, but the jurors, whether it’s Chinese or Taiwanese film professionals working in the Mainland, who would want to harm their relations with the Mainland? Therefore, *A Touch of Sin* is destined not to clinch the big prize (Mai 2013).

Earlier in October 2013 when the film was screening in North America, the Shanghai Municipal Party Committee Propaganda Department Press and Publication Office issued a notice warning the Chinese mass media not to report and review it (Wang 2013).

Corroborating Mai's view was a Singapore informant working in the film industry who requested for anonymity:

Just a few weeks before the ceremony, some of my friends in Taiwan were already speculating that if *A Touch of Sin* wins, it would mean that Taiwan did not surrender to China. But an opposite outcome regardless of who the winner emerges as winner of Best Film, actually raises the question whether GHA is struggling with a credibility crisis, or at least it could be interpreted that way, considering what was at stake (personal communication, 27 December 2015).

However, it is important to note that GHA is not new to controversy in its history. Its credibility was debated during the 1970s and 1980s when Hong Kong films outshined Taiwan entries to bag a large proportion of the awards (Mai 2016). Many Taiwan critics and filmmakers have also expressed doubts whether the increasing presence and wins of Mainland Chinese films in GHA have threatened the domestic development of Taiwanese cinema (Wei 2014). More recently, the Taiwanese director Fu Yue drew controversy and outrage from the PRC when she expressed hope for Taiwan to be recognised as an 'independent country' during her acceptance speech for the Best Documentary Award at the 55th GHA (Sui 2018). The anxieties surrounding the sovereignty and geopolitics of Taiwan, Hong Kong and PRC in GHA certainly merits another essay. The other question of whether Singapore's participation and winning of GHA awards bolsters the credibility and prestige of GHA too deserves further research as Chinese geopolitics are increasingly driven by the rise of China's political and economic power. However, the extent to which GHA's acclaimed prestige may be considered representative of the aspirations of multi-ethnic and multilingual Singapore is no less problematic.

### **Privilege and Disarticulation: Who and What is Excluded?**

At the heart of curatorship, exhibition, competition and judging in a film festival are issues of representation and categorisation. Suppose we accept the claim that the GHA is highly regarded as a benchmark par excellence for Chinese cinemas,<sup>11</sup> we may then ask, according to GHA's standards what films may best represent the Chinese-speaking world? At the time of writing, two key markers underwrite this concept on the GHA official website:

#### *Language and Crew*

All submission [sic] are required to meet either of the following conditions to be eligible:

01. Chinese languages (including official and vernacular languages used in the Chinese-speaking territories of the world; dubbing not included) should be used as dialogue in no less than half of the film. Films with no dialogue MUST meet condition 02 as below.
02. The director AND at least five members of the main creative crew must be of Chinese origin. The main creative crew shall be from either one of the following categories: leading actor, leading actress, supporting actor,

supporting actress, original/adapted screenplay, cinematography, art direction, film editing, original film score, and sound effects. The eligible main creative crew must comprise at least five of the above categories. (Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival Executive Committee 2016c).

In other words, qualification for GHA nomination is based on the quantification of the extent of Chinese language usage and the proportion of Chinese ethnic representation. On 23 November 2013 when *Ilo Ilo*'s GHA wins were announced, Alfian Sa'at eminent Singapore English and Malay writer posted a congratulatory message on his Facebook to Anthony Chen for winning GHA and making 'the Chinese diaspora in Singapore very proud!' (2013a) With 21,324 Facebook followers at the time of writing, he followed up with another post which expressed reservations about the Golden Horse that it

has a specific agenda of 'promoting Chinese cinema', which \*can\* have an unintended effect of influencing what kinds of 'national cinemas' are produced and desired. I know that Anthony Chen wasn't going all out to make a 'Chinese' film, and that these kinds of frames are \*imposed\* on his film by something like the Golden Horse Awards. But this act of giving prominence to the Golden Horse (and assuming it has the same prestige as say, the Oscars or a film festival like Cannes) while forgetting that it has barriers of entry to non-Chinese participation, can possibly affect what 'Singaporean' films are made in the future. It's not entire inconceivable that a future Singaporean filmmaker whose dream is to follow Anthony's lead and nab another Golden Horse for Singapore would create a film specifically 'Sinicized' for eligibility [asterisks are author's]. (2013b)

The implication of winning GHA might be seen as 'national glory' for some, but for minority directors and writers, this suggests that non-Chinese Singaporeans may not be able to access the Chinese films due to their language background. In fact, Jasmine Ng observes that 'prior to *Ilo Ilo*, getting nominated and eventually winning several awards at GHA, nobody actually thought of GHA as a target, apart from perhaps, Jack Neo':

Because your more immediate goal, as a filmmaker making features with more arthouse appeal and hopefully, some cross-over potential, is still to get audiences to fill the seats in [film festivals of] different cities and attract the attention of international sales agents and distributors. But it is not surprising that, since *Ilo Ilo*, a lot more filmmakers in Singapore now may be asked by the investors to make their main cast Chinese and have some Chinese dialogue, first, in order to get that possibility of qualifying for a GHA nomination, and second, is that prestige of being selected to be your country's submission for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. Because to be eligible for that, your film cannot be pre-dominantly in English language, though in Singapore, that is the main common working language. And where does that leave Malay and Indian Singaporean filmmakers seeking private financing for their films? How do we then meet the needs to have cinematic representations of other minorities as key protagonists on screen too? This is an important dialogue we need to have.

When some of his Facebook followers criticized Alfian for being myopic and racialized in his views, Alfian responds by asking if he should be proud of Singaporeans like Kit Chan, Tanya

Chua, Stefanie Sun, JJ Lin and Ah Do who win awards at Chinese music awards shows like Taiwan's Golden Melody Award or the Global Chinese Music Award:<sup>12</sup>

The argument is that as a Singaporean, I should be, right? Especially if the newspapers – not just the Chinese ones, but the English ones as well – give these wins extensive coverage. But at the same time, I'm aware that these kinds of awards, with their selective criteria, do not embrace the entirety of all possible cultural products coming out of Singapore. I feel proud for these winners, but it is mixed with a sense of exclusion—an exclusion that perhaps can only be remedied by learning Chinese and being able to access the cultural products of the Sinosphere. And that is the uncomfortable subtext--a subtext of assimilation.

In other words, in representing GHA as 'national glory' and the state's claim that it will spur 'other local film-makers,' the voices of ethnic minorities are disarticulated, sidestepping the ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity in Singapore cinema, arts and literature. Notably, Boo asks 'what usually justifies a cultural programme [like GHA] that is ethnocentric':

In most parts of the world, the Chinese would be a minority, carving such a space makes sense in a place that is white-dominated or Hollywood-dominated. But in Singapore, the space is mostly Chinese. Therefore when a qualifying criterion is that there are enough members who are of the descent of the majority race, it just did not sound right in the Singapore context. Therefore, it felt very awkward trying to sieve out who's non-Chinese in order to try and qualify for the awards. Because it [GHA] is framed in a Chinese-centric way, and in Singapore's terms, it makes it majority-centric. Maybe I'm overthinking it. It felt a bit uncomfortable going through who is Chinese and who's not.

[...]

Can you imagine if Hollywood [Oscars eligibility] criteria required at least five white people in the creative team in order to qualify? That sounds extremely racist and problematic and it is privileging a privileged group of people.

When I asked him whether he had considered submitting *Apprentice* (2016), a film largely in Malay for GHA nomination,<sup>13</sup> he admitted he did ponder the prospect. Citing the conditions requiring five of its key creative members, apart from the director to be ethnic Chinese, or of Chinese descent, his production team decided against it because they 'did not meet the criteria after doing the calculations':

[W]e were considering whether *Apprentice* will be considered for GHA. Just like any film would consider the kinds of film festivals and awards that are available. [...] As a co-production, we had personnel of different nationalities for *Apprentice*. Therefore it did not qualify because we were just short of one ethnic-Chinese person in the creative team.

But Boo is self-reflexive about such a nomination practice:

As a Singaporean Chinese, with the Chinese being the majority in a multi-racial society, we are already enjoying the privilege of being the ethnic majority. Where racial politics is concerned here, we try to consider

minority representation for fairness, so what about Malays? What about Indians? If you are progressive-minded, privilege guilt often comes into play when you are making decisions, and you'd consider how ethnic minorities should be represented in your workplace, or in the organisation that you lead.

Singapore Indian director K. Rajagopal is dedicated to representing minority voices, especially those of the Singapore Indian community, premiered his feature, *A Yellow Bird* (2016) in the International Critics' Week section at the 2016 Cannes Film Festival. This is a film examining Singapore's underbelly, focusing on the relationship between a Singapore Indian ex-convict and a female PRC migrant coerced into prostitution. While Rajagopal agrees that it might be better for GHA to be more inclusive towards non-Chinese entries, though with reservations:

[e]very organisation and academy like the GHA may have its own prerogative and I can understand that. It is set up in a country that is more homogenous as well say compared to Singapore. Then we may have to fault many other academies that promote say just Indian culture in India. Racial equations in a country and perhaps an arts academy cannot really be compared in this case (personal communication, 21 April 2017).

However, the issue with film awards, particularly in the case of GHA, is not just about the nomination exercise on qualifying 'Chineseness', but also the cultural assumptions imposed on its winners, especially when the awardee receives the prize. In other words, the institution of GHA is defined by how competently one performs the Chinese identity, right from the nomination process to accepting the prestige. When the team of *Ilo Ilo* received their Best Film trophy on stage, producer Yuni Hadi made her thank-you speech in English and this allegedly drew the indignation of many Taiwanese and Singaporeans (Anon 2013b). Royston Tan who was in attendance at the ceremony recalls:

Some Taiwanese around me asked why she deliberately speaks in English even though she is Chinese – this was the GHA ceremony after all! 'She is so haughty.' Many Singaporeans and Taiwanese criticized Yuni for this online and even felt that she didn't have the right to represent Singapore for receiving the award. I explained to my Taiwanese friends that Yuni is of Indonesian Chinese origin and had learnt Malay and English from young, even though she looks Chinese. Therefore, she can't speak Mandarin. Only then they understood.

The issue at stake, it appears, is unrelated to whether Yuni was sufficiently 'Chinese' but more to do with the perceived arrogance associated with speaking English at the award ceremony. Does this imply a disregard for etiquette, or is it to do with the expectation that one's spoken language must necessarily correspond to her ethnic appearance? When I sought Yuni for clarification, she said that 'at the time of the win, you can imagine that the first instinct is to speak in the language most comfortable with [sic] – no ill intent was meant.' In an earlier newspaper interview, Yuni said that she was so nervous going on stage and at that time that

I was so wishing that I could speak Mandarin and allow everyone in the audience to understand what I was trying to say and hear my infinite



gratitude (Anon 2013b).

She admits being surprised by the criticism, because she ‘grew up in such a multi-cultural environment’:

But I was heartened that so many people online wrote in defence that my name indicated that I am not Chinese.

The relief which Yuni represents as a clarification of her mistaken identity and not having to bear the burden of speaking Mandarin at the ceremony alludes to a position of shame. This is closely linked to Ien Ang’s discussion of the perils of imposing Chineseness on the Other. She describes the symbolic notion of ‘China’ as the ‘cultural/geographical core in relation to which the westernized overseas Chinese is forced to take up a humble position, even a position of shame and inadequacy over her own “impurity”’ (Ang 2001: 32). Incidentally, when Alfian was expressing concern regarding how the GHA’s ‘eligibility criteria performs boundary maintenance for how ‘Chineseness’ is to be defined,’ he suggested that many Indonesian directors of Chinese origin whose films would not qualify because they are in Indonesian:14

Implicit in my remark about the ‘Chinese diaspora in Singapore’ being proud is the idea that the ‘Chineseness’ of Singaporeans is being validated over other overseas Chinese who have presumably lost their (linguistic) roots.

While the censure of Yuni for not speaking Mandarin in her thank-you speech at the GHA ceremony might seem to be a matter of showing respect for the hosts in that cultural setting, we may also need to ask whether the same might be asked of a Caucasian or Black person who is suddenly called on stage for make a speech in the host’s language? After all, results are only announced at the ceremony on the night itself, and one is not supposed to be informed about the win beforehand, since we are to assume GHA is impartial and credible. The presupposition that one must speak Mandarin by virtue of one’s descent has been roundly critiqued by Allen Chun (1996), Ang (2001) and Song Hwee Lim (2007). Building on Ang’s notion of shame, Lim argues that ‘the lack of mastery of the Chinese language is or can be a source of shame precisely because it is held up as an ideal which not all overseas Chinese are able to meet, the result of which is a shattered self-fucked by societies that impose this ideal’ (2007: 83). In Yuni’s case, for one to live up to the expectations of receiving the prestige which GHA promises and confers, one must speak the language or risk being shamed.

## **Conclusion**

Beginning with an inquiry into how awards like GHA are assumed to have a positive impact of reviving Singapore cinema, I have moved on to analysing the various understandings of different Singapore filmmakers, Taiwanese filmmakers and film critics on what the award represents to them individually. Notably, the prestige of GHA is closely intertwined with contesting ideas of ‘Chineseness’, impartiality, inclusivity and credibility. Some filmmakers compare Chinese film awards such as HKFA and GRA and perceive GHA to be of higher standing, while others draw from their cultural sensibilities as key to shaping their growing up experience as audiences who acquired an appreciation for Taiwanese popular culture and the prestige of GHA. But this is closely linked to the individual’s language proficiency, and

how one represents cultural sensibilities individually. Notably, there are cases where GHA's supposed impact for English-speaking Chinese Singaporeans is shaped by the mediation of English subtitles and relations with their Chinese-speaking family members.

Corresponding to the argument of cultural sensibilities are the associations which the Singapore news media and filmmakers make between GHA success and local box office. But one's Chinese cultural sensibilities may not necessarily apply to another individual of a different ethnic and cultural background in Singapore. With criteria that serve to entrench and privilege ideas of Chineseness in a global context already dominated by Euro-American cinema, there is a danger of sidestepping the possibilities of showcasing Singapore's cultural diversity in an 'ethnocentric' platform like GHA. Similarly, whilst GHA wins for a predominantly Chinese country like Singapore may be considered 'national glory' by the state, media and some filmmakers, minority voices may become disarticulated. As a global project dedicated to promoting Chinese cinema, the incentive to shape one's film practices for fulfilling nomination and the politics of shame arising from one's failure to speak Mandarin during the award ceremony raises serious questions on who and what is excluded from accessing the supposed prestige of GHA. Through unpacking these articulations, I have also highlighted the impossibility of pinning down a problematic term like 'Chineseness', often associated with GHA, which is supposed to showcase, represent and recognise the 'best of Chinese cinema.'

Subsequently, additions of the International Federation of Film Critics (FIPRESCI) and Network for the Promotion of Asian Cinema (NETPAC) awards to TGHFF since 2007 may serve to widen the scope of GHA as a globally-accredited film event that goes beyond promoting cinema confined to Chinese-language productions. Boo's *Apprentice* won the NETPAC Award at TGHFF in 2016, the only award under the Golden Horse project where non-Chinese films may qualify though there were Chinese films in competition. To this effect, Boo quips that *Apprentice* 'has become a beneficiary of GH despite it not being a non-Chinese film' (personal communication, 24 July 2017).

If GHA is seen to have profound implications for the cinema of a small city-state like Singapore, how do Mainland Chinese and Hong Kong filmmakers variously understand its prestige, inclusivity and impartiality, especially when it is held in such high regard in the Sinophone world? This would of course be a topic for the future.

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## Notes

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- 1 In 2007, the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences rescinded the requirement that foreign-language films be made in the official language.
- 2 All informants were interviewed individually except for Eric Khoo and Tan Fong Cheng who were present at the same time. Unless indicated otherwise, all quotes are from personal interviews, whether in person or via email.
- 3 Hong Guo-Juin states that the naming of GHA sent an unequivocal political message, fully in keeping up with the cultural policy of militarism (2011, 71).
- 4 Originally, GRA were only available to mainland Chinese nominees, but openings in acting categories to actors from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and elsewhere since 2005 in order to compete with GHA (Wu 2005).
- 5 I cite 'dialects' in quotes to highlight the arbitrariness of the hegemonic power of ruling governments in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore, which established Mandarin as lingua franca for ethnic Chinese who may not necessarily identify with the language as their mother tongue, not least its unintelligibility with Cantonese and Hoklo.
- 6 Khoo's most notable multilingual works are *Mee Pok Man* (1995), *12 Storeys* (1997). He also made a Tamil film, *My Magic* (2008) and Japanese animation film, *Tatsumi* (2011).
- 7 Khoo's production company, Zhao Wei Films has produced Royston Tan's *4:30* (2006) and *881* (2007) and Boo Junfeng's *Sandcastle* (2010), all which are largely in Mandarin.
- 8 Lin and Chin are two very well-known film celebrities who have acted alongside each other as lovers in Taiwanese cinema during the 1970s and 1980s.
- 9 In Singapore, the terms 'uncles' and 'aunties' belong to a social category, often generalised as conservative, middle-aged and working-class. Anthony reiterates the position that GHA as compared to Cannes awards is better known in Asia again in a recent interview (Ramachandran 2019).
- 10 Tsai Ming-liang made this remark when he received the Best Director trophy during the GHA ceremony.
- 11 The well-known film critic Lan Zuwei (藍祖蔚) asserts that the GHA has firmly established its authority as a global Chinese film festival for a long time and it would be hard to dispute this position. However, he also notes that the GHA may have lost the ability to reward and inspire local Taiwan talent (Wei 2014).
- 12 These are well-known Mandopop singers who are well-recognized in Taiwan. The Golden Melody Awards are awarded by the Ministry of Culture of Taiwan to recognize achievements in the Mandarin, Taiwanese, Hakka, and Formosan-languages popular and traditional music industry. The Global Chinese Music Awards is established by seven Chinese radio stations across Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, China and Malaysia.
- 13 *Apprentice* examines the death penalty in Singapore, featuring a young Malay prison officer learning the ropes from an older colleague, later revealed to be the chief executioner of the former's father.
- 14 Alfian was referring to the late Teguh Karya and contemporary directors such as Edwin, Lucky Kuswandi and Ariani Darmawan.