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Title:  
Toward a 'Chinese Cinema' in New Zealand: soft power, agency and cinema across borders

### **Abstract**

NZ filmgoers' exposure to Chinese cinema used to be entirely dependent on the programming at the annual New Zealand International Film Festival, which in turn, had been conditioned by the fortunes of Chinese filmmakers in the international festival circuit. In more recent years, however, more channels of viewing Chinese films have become available to the NZ public and more genres and varieties of Chinese films are brought to the big screen in cinemas across New Zealand. I will compare NZIFF's Chinese film programming with those of the Confucius Institute, the New Zealand Chinese Film Festival as well as community and university-initiated festivals, and examine whether these different cultural agencies are in competition or in collaboration with one another in the construction of an audience-based 'Chinese cinema' in New Zealand. In the context of this discussion, I envisage a global co-production of a 'Chinese cinema' where terms such as 'national cinema', 'independent cinema', 'mainstream cinema' or 'commercial cinema' became untenable or permeable when films cross cultural and national borders.

This way of looking at cinema will inevitably challenge and complicate certain notions of 'soft power', which has been predominantly defined and thought of along nationalistic lines. Examining how issues of ideology, cultural politics, multiculturalism, audience and reception come into play in the presentation of Chinese cultures, in this case cinema, to the world, I argue that 'soft power' is a process of participation and negotiation, and that local stakeholders need to be aware of their own agency in the shaping of Chinese soft power as well as their complicity in the global production of new Chinese cultural imaginaries.