

# From Netflix to Local Streaming Platforms: Taiwanese Filmmakers' Views of Original Series Creations

Wan-Shin Chen

*Independent Researcher*

## ABSTRACT

Since 2014, Taiwan's streaming market has expanded rapidly, especially after Netflix and iQiyi entered the market in 2016 and began producing original content. Influenced by Netflix's localization strategy across Southeast Asia, with occasional co-productions involving Taiwan, this study adopts qualitative methods, including the analysis of media reports on production and filmmakers' experiences. It also draws on semi-structured interviews conducted in summer 2023 with Taiwanese filmmakers to examine how collaborations with streaming platforms reshape creative and production practices. While Netflix offers larger budgets and broader visibility, filmmakers face greater production pressure and platform constraints. They influence genre and casting, often favoring thrillers, while local platforms provide more creative freedom but fewer resources. Taiwanese filmmakers continue collaborating with long-term partners while navigating tensions between artistic identity and platform expectations. Overall, the emergence of streaming for cultural production brings new opportunities and challenges, requiring filmmakers to balance cinematic traditions with global platform demands.

**Keywords:** audio-visual industry, digital platform, Netflix, streaming series, Taiwanese cinema

## INTRODUCTION

The industrial structure of over-the-top (OTT) media services in Taiwan includes four categories: television channels, telecommunications operators, start-up companies, and OTT box providers (National Communications Commission 2022, 127). Since 2014, national digital platforms have emerged, but competition intensified in 2016 with the arrival of Netflix, iQIYI, and Dailymotion (Qiu and Tsai 2022). Although iQIYI withdrew from the market in 2020 due to regulatory reasons, five major international platforms remain active in Taiwan, including Netflix, Disney+, Line TV, HBO GO, and Dailymotion. By 2023, nineteen domestic platforms serve Taiwanese audiences, creating a competitive and dynamic market. To attract subscribers, most streaming platforms, especially Netflix, have invested in original series and local collaborations. Some Taiwanese filmmakers have begun producing streaming series within this evolving audiovisual landscape (National Communications Commission 2022, 127; 2023, 112).

Western academia has recently seen an increasing amount of research that focuses on the impact of changing production platforms, such as American streaming platforms' (Netflix, Amazon, and Disney+) productions and creation processes. These studies have highlighted how streaming companies, especially Netflix, produce original content to attract subscribers and offer compelling audiovisual experiences. In Taiwan, research mainly addresses the business models, policies, and cooperation within the media industry (Liu 2014; 2017; Qiu and Tsai 2022), while others have explored the emergence of streaming platforms in Taiwan's television industry as well as its business cooperation and competition models combined with various media industries (Huang et al. 2023). However, studies on the effects of streaming platforms on film production remain limited and often rely on media coverage discussing Netflix's role in promoting Taiwanese series internationally.

This article examines how Taiwanese filmmakers respond to industrial, cultural, and socioeconomic changes brought by streaming platforms, focusing on Netflix and local services. Netflix holds about 21 percent of the market share and has influenced Taiwan's audiovisual sector through investment, promotion, and international distribution. Local platforms offer a complementary perspective, highlighting how filmmakers navigate both global and domestic market pressures. This study, therefore, investigates two interconnected sets of questions: 1. How do platform investments and international online distribution influence the production process and creative adjustments of Taiwanese streaming series? For example, do creators consider international subscribers when shaping their stories? Do investors provide input on productions? How do these factors affect aesthetics, narrative, and filming decisions? 2. How do filmmakers' experiences with producing and distributing streaming series impact on their future creative strategies and distribution approaches for films and series? In particular, how do these experiences influence decisions regarding the transition between films and series and considerations of platform investments?

The research uses document analysis of government reports, academic literature, and press articles related to production and filmmaker experiences. It also draws on semi-structured interviews conducted in summer 2023 with Taiwanese filmmakers involved in streaming series. The interviewees' roles and backgrounds are summarized in Table 1:

Interviewee	Position	Work Experience	Location and Date
A	Director	Directed a popular 2021 streaming series. Active since mid-2000s in screenwriting, producing, and assistant directing across film, TV, and digital media.	Taipei, August 15, 2023
B	Producer	Produced a popular 2021 streaming series. Experienced in multi-genre films and international co-productions since mid-2000s.	Taipei, August 15, 2023
C	Director	Directed a Netflix-invested streaming series. Independent creator; experienced as vice director and editor with noted TV film and series.	Taipei, August 23, 2023
D	Distributor	Co-founder and marketing director of a film marketing company.	Taipei, June 19, 2023
E	Senior Executive	Long-term employee of a Taiwanese streaming platform, CATCHPLAY+.	Taipei, August 10, 2023

**Table 1: Interviewees: Directors, Producers, Distributors, Platform Representatives. Source: author.**

Interviews reveal that although streaming series involve faster shooting schedules, many filmmakers continue collaborating with long-term film colleagues. Platforms like Netflix provide larger budgets and marketing support but also influence creative choices by favoring certain genres such as thrillers. Filmmakers must balance artistic vision with the distinct demands of both film and series formats under platform constraints. This article first explores the expansion of Taiwan's streaming platforms and the cinematic style emerging in series production. It then examines Netflix's localization in Southeast Asia and its connection to Taiwan, as well as changes in Taiwan's film industry following the arrival of international platforms, with a comparison between Netflix and domestic services. The article concludes with filmmakers' reflections on future industry developments.

### **CINEMATIC SHIFTS AND TAIWANESE FILMMAKERS IN THE STREAMING ERA**

According to a 2020 Kantar/LifePoints survey, 96 percent of Taiwanese aged 15 to 49 watch content on OTT platforms (Kantar Insights Division/LifePoints, 2020). While most access free services, 26 percent subscribe to an average of 1.7 platforms. In 2023, digital platform subscriptions reached 5.8 million, with Netflix (21%) and Disney+ (17%) leading the market. National platforms each accounted for less than 10 percent (PWC 2023, 13). The national digital platforms are, myVideo (9%), FriDay (9%), Hami Video (7%), and others (13%) (Frater 2023).

Since entering Taiwan in 2016, Netflix has co-produced series with local professionals, while most domestic platforms have also developed original content. Moreover, national platforms producing streaming series before 2020 included Vidol, PTS+, KKTv, Coture, and CHOCO TV with the latter two ceasing in 2020 (Kim 2020, 5-9). Fieldwork in 2023 also identified newer players like Hami Video, FriDay, myVideo, and CATCHPLAY+. In response to both platform investment and rising public-sector support, Taiwanese filmmakers increasingly produce high-budget series. With

audiences now accustomed to high-quality global content from the United States, Korea, and Japan, local productions have adopted more cinematic aesthetics. This shift has blurred the boundary between films and series, enhancing the international appeal of Taiwanese dramas (Suei 2021).

The combined investment from global platforms and local institutions has not only raised production quality but also reshaped professional practices in Taiwan's film industry. In the 1980s, the Taiwan New Cinema movement brought a new era of filmmaking that emphasized long-take aesthetics and narratives centered on Taiwan's national identity (Kolatte 2019). However, the industry declined in the 1990s due to reduced local production, the dominance of Hong Kong cinema, and the rise of cable TV (Lu 1998). The situation worsened in 2001, with only 10 Taiwanese films released that year (Government Information Office 2002, 40; Hsiao 2016, 172 and 411). Following Taiwan's World Trade Organization (WTO) entry, the government lifted restrictions on foreign film imports in 2002, exposing local productions to heavy U.S. competition (Hsiao 2016, 172 and 175). In this difficult environment, Taiwanese filmmakers turned to television, commercials, and music videos to sustain their careers while awaiting opportunities to return to cinema (W.-S. Chen 2022, 219–220; Hsiao 2016, 254–255).

While the rise of streaming platforms has expanded work opportunities, many Taiwanese filmmakers still operate as freelancers without strong labor protections. Interviewee A (2023) noted the lack of dedicated unions for directors and cinematographers, unlike in other countries. In this fragmented system, the platform economy offers both increased exposure and precarious conditions, further complicating how filmmakers navigate professional identities and creative autonomy. Despite these challenges, teamwork remains a defining feature of audiovisual production. Interviewed directors and producers highlighted that the main difference between film and series production lies in the shooting pace and episode structure. Tsai Yin-Chuan, director of *Tears on Fire* (2021), also described how the series—funded by Taiwan Public Television (PTS) and Telecom Taiwan Mobile (myVideo)—had an average shooting time of 10 days per episode, compared to 30 to 45 days for a feature film (Cari 2021a). Other platforms, such as Netflix and Hami Video, also purchased rights to the series after its broadcast.

Interviewees A (2023) and C (2023), also described the compressed shooting schedules and heightened intensity compared to film production. However, they, along with interviewee B (2023), noted that their production teams remained largely unchanged, continuing to work with the same film professionals. As interviewee A (2023) explained, their workflow also remained largely unchanged, as the boundaries between film and series productions have gradually vanished:

The workflow is quite similar. This situation did not only occur in the shooting of my streaming series production in 2021. In recent years, a significant portion of the series in Taiwan has been produced by film crews. Maybe in the era of digital streaming, the frontiers between the productions of series and movies are not as distinguished as before. Filmmakers now frequently work across both films and series. Most people in the crew of my series productions are my previous partners for the film productions, and we continued to work together for this series. (Interviewee A 2023)

Interviewee B (2023) also noted that international streaming platforms in Taiwan obscured the distinction between film and television production, as many professionals who now create series originally came from the film industry. The drama series, *Heaven on the 4th Floor* (2021) was directed by documentary and feature filmmaker Chen Singing, who worked with her regular film collaborators on the series (Haoni 2021). Many Taiwanese filmmakers, due to their varied shooting experiences across different audiovisual fields, have developed the flexibility and capability to adapt their skills to streaming series. For example, Interviewee C (2023) explained that over a year before working on her Netflix-invested series, they served as an assistant director on a 2020 series adapted from a novel, which provided familiarity with the adaptation process and valuable elements to refer to, even though the previous project was quite different.

From these interview excerpts, working with colleagues from previous productions as well as with different kinds of audiovisual productions enable filmmakers to adapt their work patterns to streaming series without significant difficulties. The precarious and freelance nature of artistic labor compels filmmakers to accept diverse jobs across audiovisual fields, such as television, advertising, and music video production, to balance their passion for the craft with financial necessity. Concurrently, these professional experiences are essential elements that offer references in various production conditions and enable filmmakers to adapt their talents to other audiovisual fields.

### NETFLIX'S LOCALIZATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND ITS CONNECTION TO TAIWAN

Leading North American platforms like Netflix, have expanded globally by investing in local content, followed by others like Amazon, Disney+, and HBO Max (Thuillas and Wiart 2023, 102). The success of Netflix's *House of Cards* (2013) launched the Subscription Video on Demand (SVoD), binge-watching era and blurred the line between television and cinema through high-quality productions by film directors (Cousin 2023, 41–42 and 53). Netflix has since become known for collaborating with local companies to access local markets worldwide (Lobato 2019). In 2021, Netflix invested 500 million USD in South Korea's *Squid Game*, which became globally profitable thanks to its international distribution. It then applied the model to India, Brazil, France, the UK, and Nigeria (Bouquillion and Ithurbide 2022; Jedlowski 2022; Thuillas and Wiart 2023, 104–105). To appeal globally, Netflix employs a 'writer's room' model, in which a team of scriptwriters collaborates in developing the same plot and script. This collective creation model has gained importance in the creative process since Netflix's arrival (Bouquillion and Ithurbide 2021, 81). Netflix emphasizes clarity and global comprehensibility, demanding that its series be "easy to follow" and "easy to understand" (Kauffmann 2022, 18).

Since 2020, Netflix has expanded its operations in Southeast Asia by opening offices in Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines, and by actively seeking entry into the Vietnamese market (Tan 2023). Recognizing the vast potential of the region's rapidly growing online population, which now exceeds 686 million, Netflix has acquired numerous local titles and commissioned original productions across the region (Ramachandran 2025b; Tan 2023). However, the platform has also faced various censorship issues, particularly concerning its original international content. Between 2016 and 2021, several of its programs were banned in different Southeast Asian countries. In the Philippines,

two episodes of an Australian spy series were removed due to scenes showing maps of the South China Sea that officials claimed undermined Philippine sovereignty (Reuters 2021). Singapore, which has filed more takedown requests than any other country, removed content perceived as promoting drug use (Lee 2021; Teng 2020). In Indonesia, LGBTQ content is often censored (Alaidrus 2025; Marketing-Interactive 2021), and in Vietnam, a South Korean drama was taken down after authorities stated that a character portraying a war veteran made remarks about the American-Vietnamese War that were offensive to the nation and its heroes (Tan 2023).

However, as Netflix increasingly collaborates with local filmmakers to produce content for domestic audiences, its influence has become more visible in the storytelling approaches and production values of local film and television industries. For example, Netflix's transnational distribution network has facilitated the widespread circulation of Western, Japanese, and Korean contents across Southeast Asia (Ramachandran 2025a; Orsal 2024, 4). Even within the region, Netflix's multilingual subtitle system has enabled content such as Thai dramas to reach audiences in neighboring countries like Malaysia, thereby intensifying competition for local filmmakers who must now contend with the growing presence of foreign productions in their domestic markets (Orsal 2024, 4-5). Many locally produced series have begun to incorporate cross-cultural elements that resonate not only with domestic viewers but also with international audiences. One such example is the inclusion of Western cultural references in the Thai-language Netflix original series *The Stranded* (2019), which demonstrates how local productions are adapting to appeal to a broader global viewership (Chaichompu 2020, 8).

This type of collaboration in local production has helped Southeast Asian content, such as productions from the Philippines, reach international audiences (Orsal 2024, 15-16). However, the intention to appeal to a broader global subscriber base can sometimes compromise the authenticity of local cultural representation. For example, the Taiwan–Malaysia co-produced Netflix original series *The Ghost Bride* (2020) was produced in Mandarin in order to target a wider audience (Dalal and Neo 2023, 240). The series is an adaptation of Yangsze Choo's English-language novel *The Ghost Bride* (2013), which is rooted in Chinese folklore and set in a Chinese immigrant family in 19th-century Malacca during British colonial rule. Descendants of these immigrants are called *Peranakan*, meaning 'locally born' in Malay. They are communities of mixed ethnic ancestry, primarily formed through intermarriages between local women and foreign traders, such as Chinese (*Baba Nonya*), Arab (*Jawi Peranakan*), European (*Eurasians*), and Indian (*Chetti Melaka*) merchants, with Chinese Peranakans forming the largest group (Dalal and Neo 2023, 243).

However, Southern Peranakans have traditionally spoken the Baba Malay patois—an Austronesian-based contact language with a Sinitic substratum and a Malay dialect heavily influenced by Hokkien, a variety of Southern Min (Lee 2022, 1), while their northern counterparts use Hokkien. Mandarin was never a language used within Peranakan communities. As cosmopolitan anglophiles, Peranakans have generally felt more at ease speaking English. The choice to produce *The Ghost Bride* in Mandarin was thus a strategic move to position the series for global distribution, targeting audiences beyond Chinese-speaking viewers and the overseas Chinese diaspora. This decision reflects a broader trend of cultural commodification, where local specificity is repackaged to fit Netflix's brand of globally consumable "original" content. The creative

team behind the series embraced a deliberately “postmodern” aesthetic. As Malaysian filmmaker Ho Yuhang, one of the directors, explained in an interview: “So it was confirmed, we were not going to make a historical film. It should be youthful, fun and entertaining” (Dalal and Neo 2023, 240–241).

While Netflix’s localization strategies in Southeast Asia have enabled the transnational circulation of local content, they have also imposed certain commercial constraints and selective pressures on local creativity. In the Taiwan–Malaysia co-produced series *The Ghost Bride*, directed by Malaysian filmmaker Ho Yuhang, several Taiwanese actors were cast, and the use of Mandarin in the series appears to reflect Taiwanese linguistic norms. As a part of Asia, Taiwan has also been affected by Netflix’s entry into its domestic market. The impact of this development on Taiwanese filmmakers and their creative practices will be examined in the following section.

### NETFLIX’S LOCALIZATION STRATEGY IN TAIWAN: FINANCES, GENRES, AND CREATIONS

Although Netflix has been actively expanding into Southeast Asia, leading to Taiwan–Malaysia co-productions that predominantly feature Mandarin as the primary language, it has nonetheless refrained from significant investment in original series production in Taiwan, mainly due to the limitations of its relatively small domestic market (Kim 2020, 55). Taiwanese series produced with Netflix’s investments are *Nowhere Man* (2019), *Triad Princess* (2019), *The Ghost Bride* (2020), *The Victims’ Game* (2020) (Kim 2020, 9), and *Copycat Killer* (2023). Hence, to build its local content catalog, Netflix prefers to purchase distribution rights for films and series that are already produced (Kim 2020, 55; Liao 2025). The nature of audiovisual productions acquired and funded by Netflix demonstrates that the company prefers the thriller genre, which includes crime, detective stories, and supernatural horror. For example, Netflix purchased international exclusive distribution rights for the Taiwanese horror films *The Bridge Curse* (2020) and *Incantation* (2022), which were ranked in the top 10 in 24 countries (Suei 2021).

According to interviewee D (2023), Netflix acquired the exclusive international distribution rights for *Incantation* (2022) at a substantial price, and the film quickly entered the top 10 rankings in multiple countries. They explained that, since Netflix’s entrance into the Taiwanese market, films have followed two main routes for international sales: traditional negotiations with country-specific distributors, or direct deals with streaming platforms offering high prices for exclusivity. While romance films historically dominated Taiwan’s exports, the rise of global streaming platforms has increased the international visibility of horror and crime genres. Previous acquisitions, including *The Bridge Curse* (2020) and *Hospital* (2020), helped pave the way for *Incantation*’s (2022) success.

Interviewees revealed that Netflix also tended toward the thriller genre in original series, especially programs with crime and detective elements. According to interviewee A (2023), their team had a discussion with Netflix regarding the investment in this production. At the time, Netflix did not invest in the production, but it suggested that interviewee A’s team strengthen the genre elements to facilitate international sales. Additionally, interviewee A adjusted the narration styles for both films and series audiences, as previous experience showed that series require more interaction with the audience. While films allow for more authorial expression, the series demand

a stronger focus on narration, with images and performances serving the storyline.

Interviewee A's series was not financed by Netflix but received substantial local investment, including about 7.7 million USD from a national production company and a Ministry of Culture subsidy. This was unusually high, given that typical Taiwanese series budgets then averaged 460,000–620,000 USD. During the interview, interviewee A expressed that shortly after the discussion with Netflix, this streaming platform purchased the distribution rights for the Taiwanese series *The Victims' Game* (2020). By following Netflix's suggestions, the genre elements (i.e., suspense and chasing the murderer) were strengthened in the production. Ultimately, Netflix acquired the series' exclusive international distribution rights for a substantial amount. Interviewee C's (2023) streaming series production was also invested in by Netflix. For this production, Netflix provided a clear genre orientation—crime and detective—and certain production decisions. Interviewee C, the director, explained Netflix's local strategy in Taiwan and its market evaluation process:

When adapting the novel, the production house and Netflix clarified that the series would fall under the crime and detective genre. Netflix believed this genre could be developed in Taiwan, which influenced the direction of the series. In the early stages, Netflix provided ideas for each episode of the script, which the production team would either accept, modify, or negotiate based on market considerations. (Interviewee C 2023)

Netflix understands that global success requires both high-quality content and cultural adaptation (Lobato 2019, 114). Since the late 2010s, it has produced local series in countries like Germany, Spain, Brazil, Korea, France, and Norway, which have achieved worldwide success. This localization strategy supports cultural diversity and global circulation (Thuillas and Wiart 2023, 102–103), helping Netflix secure a dominant market position. For example, Taiwanese streaming series, such as the one by interviewee A, reflect local culture yet reach global audiences through Netflix's distribution system.

Similarly, interviewee C's production was adapted from a foreign novel from the early 2000s, recontextualized within the social and media dynamics of Taiwan in the 1990s, as well as its temple culture. Regarding Netflix's choice of a local context, interviewee C shared her team's approach to the adaptation. The Thai-language Netflix original series *The Stranded* (2019), which adapted Western cultural elements and narrative techniques—for example, drawing on motifs and structures similar to William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies* (1954)—to create a successful transnational culturally hybrid production (Chaichompu 2020). On the other hand, interviewee C emphasized that, given Netflix's focus on the international market, the series needed to retain a strong local identity. According to interviewee C, the more rooted a production is in local culture, the more likely it is to resonate internationally. Reflecting on the success of Korean productions, she questioned why Netflix did not give the project to a Korean team or create a Korean version. Interviewee C argued that the Taiwanese setting was crucial to the story, and they envisioned the series set in Taiwan in the 1990s, carefully adapting the characters to suit the local context, rather



than simply transplanting foreign elements:

I think it's more like the opposite way of thinking. Because of their [Netflix's] concern for the international market, the creations needed to be more local. [...] Maybe we can think about it. Since the Korean team produced a good series, why did Netflix not give this project to the Korean team? Or can my production have a Korean version? I believe that they could make a Korean version. Since this is a Taiwanese production, there is a reason that this series must be shot in Taiwan, and we considered this point. In my opinion, during the adaptation, since this story is set in Taiwan, we needed to find appropriate settings for the Taiwanese characters that would correspond to these characters in Japan, not just implanting these Japanese characters' settings into Taiwan's context. (Interviewee C 2023)

In the article "Black Ships? Locating Netflix in Taiwan and Japan," Yu-Kei Tse discusses the impact of Netflix's localization strategy in Taiwan and Japan, noting that the company's international distribution allowed Taiwan's cultural content to be seen worldwide (Tse 2020). In these two examples, the directors interviewed during the fieldwork undertaken for this study demonstrated their originality in their creations. Before the emergence of streaming platforms, the method for exporting Taiwanese cultural content in Taiwanese films' traditional marketing was through film festivals (Interviewee D 2023). With the rise of digital platforms, Netflix applied commercial strategies, such as shaping thriller genres—including crime, detective, and supernatural—to help Taiwanese series appeal to global markets and increase profitability.

### **NATIONAL STREAMING PLATFORMS AND FUNDING SOURCES**

In Taiwan, series productions from domestic streaming platforms have diverse origins, such as TV channels, telecommunications operators, and start-up companies. Accordingly, their series production plans also differ. Some platforms have purchased Korean and Japanese series, while others, such as TV channels, have broadcast their own series on these platforms. For example, Vidol, a local OTT service platform owned by Sanlih Entertainment Television, produces only 10 percent of the series it airs (two or three productions per year), while Sanlih Entertainment Television produces the other 90 percent (Huang 2024). Conversely, platforms owned by telecoms and public broadcasters, such as Hami Video, myVideo, FriDay, CATCHPLAY+, and PTS+, invest more heavily in original films and series. From 2019 to 2021, myVideo invested in around 30 productions and also participated in private equity funds, Tomorrow Together Capital, which aims to raise NTD 500 million over three years to support 10–15 Taiwanese audiovisual projects and to promote Taiwanese content internationally (Yeh 2022).

Interviewee E (2023), a senior executive of the Taiwanese streaming platform CATCHPLAY+, explained that their company, with extensive experience in coproducing Taiwanese series, aims to leverage international expertise to promote local content globally. For instance, they sold a Taiwanese series to their Southeast Asian branch to reach Indonesian audiences. With platforms in different territories (Taiwan and Southeast Asia), the company connects Taiwanese audiovisual

works to the international market, enhancing recognition of Taiwan's originality and brand. As Interviewee E explained, they aimed to promote Taiwanese productions through their overseas branches:

Our main objective is to leverage the experience we have accumulated in international markets and bring Taiwan's original content to the world. For example, (with one series) [...], we sold it back to Indonesia, allowing Indonesian audiences to discover Taiwanese dramas. [...] Since our company operates platforms in three territories—Taiwan, Indonesia, and Singapore—and has solid experience in international sales, we are able to promote these streaming series to international guests and help more people recognize the creativity and value of Taiwanese content. (Interviewee E 2023)

Unlike Netflix, which operates at a global scale and focuses on acquiring exclusive international rights or producing original content, national platforms in Taiwan adopt different strategies. Instead of frequently purchasing distribution rights for completed films, they often prioritize investing in original productions. This approach is usually implemented in collaboration with other domestic platforms, particularly Taiwan Public Television, which is publicly funded. Interviewee E (2023) noted that since around 2013 or 2014, their company has pursued a strategy of investing in audiovisual productions and coproductions during the production stage. This enables them to secure distribution rights in advance, reducing the financial risks of post-completion acquisitions. Investment decisions are based on assessments of a project's profitability and involve shared financial responsibility with other platforms, especially Taiwan Public Television (PTS).

As one of the major public investors in local productions, PTS, established in 1998 and funded by the government and the Broadcasting Development Foundation, produced one or two series annually before the arrival of global streaming platforms (Wang et al. 2022). To adapt to changing consumption habits, it launched the PTS+ streaming platform in 2017, focusing on public service rather than profit (Huang 2024; Pai 2018). That same year, the Ministry of Culture initiated the "Forward-Looking Plan to Promote Ultra-High-Definition TV Content Upgrades" (2017–2020), with a budget of NTD 1.5 billion (46 million USD), allowing PTS to produce 58 audiovisual works, including 22 series and 36 films. Several of these series were directed by acclaimed Taiwanese filmmakers, such as Lin Chun-Yang (*The World Between Us*, 2019), Tsai Yin-Chuan (*Tears on Fire*, 2021), Yang Ya-Che (*The Magician on the Skywalk*, 2021), and Chen Singing (*Heaven on the 4th Floor*, 2021). Some, like *The Magician on the Skywalk* and *Tears on Fire*, also received funding from private platforms like myVideo (PTS+ 2018; 2021). In contrast to Netflix's genre-focused investments, Taiwan's public funding supports high-definition production and emphasizes cultural value, originality, and local IP development—including adaptations from novels, games, and films—to showcase Taiwanese creativity globally (PTS+ 2018, 1). Thus, these series genres have varied widely and have featured history, culture, and society.

Filmmakers' aesthetic skills are also reflected in these series. For example, in *Heaven on the 4th Floor*, the director drew on her documentary experience and rarely interrupted the actors' performances. Long takes captured the actors' realistic movements, which were inspired by their

personal experiences (Cari 2021b). *Tears on Fire* depicts the life-and-death moments and emotional dilemmas faced by Taiwanese firefighters. Director Tsai sought authenticity by combining real fire, constructed sets (due to safety and space constraints), and special smoke effects, which are both costly and uncommon in Taiwanese productions. Despite a higher-than-usual budget, it remained limited for the scale of the project (Cari 2021a). These cases show that even relatively well-funded Taiwanese series often rely on public funding to give filmmakers creative autonomy. As Interviewee C (2023) noted, public television productions tend to be more creatively driven. In contrast, Netflix projects may involve compromises in originality due to various production considerations. For example, her public television series was shot over 75 days with one camera for 13 episodes. In comparison, a Netflix series was filmed over 100 days for 10 episodes using two cameras, and for about 50 days, two units filmed separate storylines in parallel. This setup effectively generated the output of 150 days of footage.

This comparison underscores the differences in script orientation and budget between national and international platforms. Netflix prioritizes commercial viability, offering more funding and equipment, while national platforms emphasize cultural value and grant greater creative freedom. Yet, to ensure quality, filmmakers still depend on public support. These series were released on platforms such as PTS+ and myVideo, and Taiwan Public Television also partnered with Netflix for international distribution, as seen with the parenting-based drama *On Children* (PTS+, 2018: 128–138). The contrast lies in scale and control: Netflix offers bigger budgets with genre constraints, while national platforms allow more creative freedom but operate with limited resources.

### **BETWEEN ART AND FINANCING: FILMMAKERS' DILEMMAS**

In Taiwan, filmmakers must constantly navigate between artistic vision and financial constraints, particularly in a limited domestic market. Although government support programs such as the 2017–2020 Forward-looking Infrastructure Development Program differ from Netflix's commercial strategies, they similarly emphasize commercial objectives in the development of audiovisual content. Whether the funding comes from public subsidies or private investments, financing remains a crucial factor in determining whether a project can be realized. After examining the streaming series' productions, this article highlights local filmmakers' experiences with streaming series production and distribution and the impact on filmmakers' future films or series. This includes their strategies for acquiring streaming platforms' investments in films or series and alternative options for adapting a film script into a series.

Interviewees A, B, and C (2023) emphasized that the originality of projects and its suitability as either a film or a series are their primary creative considerations. Moreover, Interviewee B noted that the structure and narrative of a work determine whether it is better suited for a film or a series. However, when a production company initiates a project, commercial factors may take precedence in defining its format. Another example comes from *Heaven on the 4th Floor* (2021). This series was co-written with scriptwriter Lou Yi-An, also a director, and was originally conceived as a film script. However, producers decided to adapt it into a series, allowing for varying narratives and character development across episodes. According to the director Chen Singing, the 10-episode format would enable the exploration of more cases and delve deeper into the relationship between body and

heart (Punch 2021). For *Tears on Fire* (2021), director Tsai, whose initial projects were mainly films, opted to write the script as a series to ensure each issue was handled with more depth (Cari 2021a). Due to financial constraints, the number of episodes was reduced from 13 to 10 (Luo 2021).

Interviewee C (2023) described the experience working first on lower-budget streaming projects funded by PTS and later on a Netflix production, highlighting clear differences in budget, promotion, and creative conditions. PTS operates with a fixed budget allocated by the government, which makes production challenging and offers little promotional support for directors' projects. While it provides greater creative freedom, the limited resources can hinder visibility. By contrast, Netflix invests heavily in promotion, which Interviewee C considered essential, since insufficient visibility would render the work largely unnoticed. However, Netflix also imposes certain conditions, such as control over casting. Ultimately, they framed the situation as a matter of trade-offs: working with PTS means accepting limited resources but more autonomy, whereas Netflix provides stronger financial support at the cost of some creative constraints.

Interviewees were asked whether working on streaming series had encouraged them to view platforms as potential investors for future films. Most did not believe this to be feasible. Although platforms, especially Netflix, have increased their visibility, they tend to invest in series or purchase completed works, rather than fund films in development. Interviewee B (2023) noted that while the success of their series boosted the company's credibility, and they hoped future projects would attract investment from international platforms, most productions must still be completed before being sold. Financial constraints persist during the production phase, and long-term partnerships with Netflix are rare. Each new project requires a proposal, with no guarantee of presale or investment.

Like interviewee B (2023), interviewee A (2023) did not see platform investment as a main factor in his future film projects, since platforms are primarily interested in series and require a clearly defined genre from the outset. Nevertheless, the rise of international platforms such as Netflix has given him greater creative freedom in producing series. Because these platforms target a global audience rather than the Chinese market specifically, his work is less likely to be constrained by Chinese censorship:

I think, in some ways, the atmosphere for filming series in Taiwan is freer than for making movies. One reason is that when Netflix is the main investor in a series, we don't have to constantly worry about making a profit in the Chinese market. That gives us more freedom in all aspects of creation. However, there is one condition: the genre orientation must be very clear. For movies, the Chinese market is almost always what investors are aiming for. Unless it is clearly stated from the beginning that a film won't enter the Chinese market, most people will still hope it can. And once there's even a slight possibility of gaining profit from that market, the creative process is influenced—because people start hoping the film won't cross any red lines. That's when problems begin. (Interviewee A 2023)

Regarding film distribution, whether in theaters or on streaming platforms, Interviewee A (2023)

shared that he does not insist on having his films shown in theaters, primarily because not all theaters in Taiwan are equipped to present his films in the high-quality 4K and Dolby Surround 7.1 sound used during production. He acknowledged that streaming platforms could showcase his films with the intended quality, as long as the viewer has a modern television. Additionally, after moving away from Taipei, he noted that watching films outside the city can be more difficult due to fewer theaters and inconvenient transportation. As a result, he finds it more convenient and flexible to watch films on streaming platforms at home. Thus, in current creative industries, the issues that creators face and address are complicated. In addition to the considerations between originality and financing, authentic presentations of their creations are factors. However, one can see that creators aim to prioritize their creations and to be flexible with the resources that they acquire.

## CONCLUSION

With the emergence of new media and the evolution of cultural industries, filmmakers must adapt to the ever-changing media environment. In Taiwan, with its limited domestic market, filmmakers must work across different audiovisual fields (e.g., films, series, advertisements, and music videos) and different markets, such as the Chinese market.

In the context of contemporary cultural industries, the cultural representation of innovation, the economy, and the flexibility of services and symbolic goods have made the media environment more dynamic. Modern filmmakers' labor situation remains mobile across audiovisual fields. With the arrival of streaming platforms, filmmakers have more choices to prioritize the originality of different forms of audiovisual creations. Concurrently, these different professional experiences make filmmakers more flexible and agile in adapting their talents to various forms of production.

However, financing remains essential to finalize these productions. Regardless of whether the budget is sufficient and comes from international platforms or public support in national sectors, each form of financing has advantages and constraints. The examples presented in this article illustrate that, based on maintaining their creations' originality, filmmakers make different choices and trade-offs regarding their productions' financing. There are no determined methods for accomplishing a production; rather, it is a dynamic process of balancing choices to present their originality.

## REFERENCES

- Alaidrus, Fadiyah. 2025. *Indonesia Moves to Expand Censorship of LGBT Content*. Accessed 10 December 2025. <https://globalpressjournal.com/asia/indonesia/indonesia-moves-to-expand-censorship-of-lgbt-content/>
- Bouquillion, Philippe, and Christine Ithurbide. 2021. "La globalisation culturelle et les nouveaux enjeux d'hégémonie à l'heure des plateformes. Le cas indien." *Réseaux* 226–227, no. 2–3: 71–98.
- Bouquillion, Philippe, and Christine Ithurbide. 2022. "Audio-Visual Industry and Digital Platforms in India: A Contribution from Political Economy of Communication." *Global Media and Communication* 18, no. 3: 345–364.
- Cari. 2021a. *Not Playing the Music for Heroes, but Weeping for the Mortals: Exclusive Interview with*

- Director Tsai Yin-Chuan and Producer Li Jhih-Ciang of "Tears on Fire." Accessed 26 April 2025. <https://funscreen.tfai.org.tw/article/6476>
- Cari. 2021b. *Searching for the Existence of Ambiguity and Reality: Exclusive Interview with Chen Singing, Director of "Heaven on the 4th Floor."* Accessed 26 April 2025. <https://filmaholic.tw/people/617b995bfd897800011b108e/>
- Chaichompu, Thanarath. 2020. "Cultural Hybridity in Netflix's Thai-Language Original Series, the Stranded." Master's thesis, Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University.
- Chen, Wan-Shin. 2022. "Produire Des Films à Taïwan. Les Politiques Des Collectivités Territoriales (2003–2021)." PhD diss., Paris: Université Sorbonne Nouvelle-Paris 3.
- Cousin, Capucine. 2023. *Netflix, Amazon, Disney and Cie: la bataille des nouveaux titans de l'audiovisuel*. Malakoff: Dunod.
- Dalal, Sanghamitra, and David H. J. Neo. 2023. "Fetishizing Localism and Adapting Yangsze Choo's The Ghost Bride." In *The Routledge Companion to Global Literary Adaptation in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Brandon Chua and Elizabeth Ho. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Frater, Patrick. 2023. "Netflix and Disney+ Lead as Taiwan Adds SVOD Subscribers in Third Quarter – Study." Accessed 11 October 2025. <https://variety.com/2023/tv/news/netflix-disney-taiwan-svod-lead-1235776941/>
- Government Information Office. 2002. *2002 Taiwan Cinema Yearbook*. Taipei: Government Information Office.
- Haoni, Er. 2021. *Exclusive Interview: Replenishing the Worn-out Body with Sincerity: Interview with Chen Singing, Director of "Heaven on the 4th Floor."* Accessed 26 April 2025. <https://www.openbook.org.tw/article/p-65099>
- Hsiao, Chu-Chen. 2016. *This Is How We Make Movies*. Taipei: Locus Publishing.
- Huang, J. Sonia, Man-Siou Syu, and Jia-Ying Lai. 2023. "The Future of Taiwanese Television? Business Models and Competition Strategies for Television, Telecommunications, and Native OTT." In *60 Years of Taiwanese TV Programs*, edited by Bonnie Peng and Shun-Chih Ke. Taipei: Hanlu.
- Huang, J. Sonia. 2024. *Taiwan's Local OTT Video Business Model and Competition Strategies*. Taiwan National Science and Technology Council' Project MOST 110-2410-H-A49-043-MY2. Taipei: Taiwan National Science and Technology Council.
- Jedlowski, Alessandro. 2022. "Toward the Platformization of African Film Distribution? Netflix in Nigeria." *Studies in World Cinema* 2, no. 1–2: 98–127.
- Kantar Insights Division/LifePoints. 2020. *Analysis of the Latest On-Demand OTT Video Market Competition in Taiwan (Part 1)*. Accessed 10 December 2025. [https://kantar.com.tw/News\\_detail.php?nid=61](https://kantar.com.tw/News_detail.php?nid=61)
- Kauffmann, Alexandre. 2022. "La Chasse Aux Bonnes Histoires." *REVUE XXI* 58: 6–29.
- Kim, Bit-Na. 2020. "A Preliminary Study of the 'More Diversified' Original OTT Dramas: Online Streaming Platform and Production of Taiwanese Drama Contents." Master's thesis, Taipei: National Taiwan Normal University.
- Kolatte, Matthieu. 2019. *Le Cinéma Taïwanais. Son Histoire, Ses Réaliateurs et Leurs Films*. Lille: Presses universitaires du Septentrion.

- Lee, Jan. 2021. *Netflix Removes Two Drug-Related Titles at IMDA's Request*. Accessed 10 December 2025. <https://www.straitstimes.com/life/entertainment/netflix-removes-two-drug-related-titles-at-imdas-request>
- Lee, Nala H. 2022. *A Grammar of Modern Baba Malay*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Liao, Yu-Wan. 2025. *Taiwanese Dramas Losing Ground in the Netflix Wave: Small-Scale Markets Struggling Against the Capital Pressure of Global Platforms*. Accessed 10 December 2025. <https://d6star.tw/archives/6156>
- Liu, Yu-Li, ed. 2014. *Policy and Development Strategies for Digital TV and New Media Platform*. New Taipei: Yang Chih.
- Liu, Yu-Li, ed. 2017. *OTT TV's Innovative Services, Business Models, Policies, and Regulations*. Taipei: Wunan.
- Lobato, Ramon. 2019. *Netflix Nations: The Geography of Digital Distribution*. Critical Cultural Communication. New York University Press.
- Lu, Fei-I. 1998. *Taiwanese Cinema: Politics, Economics, Aesthetics (1949-1994)*. Taipei: Yuan-Liou.
- Luo, Ting-Ling. 2021. *Director TSAI Yin-Chuan Incubated the Script for Tears on Fire through Field Research in Fire Brigades*. Accessed 26 April 2025. <https://www.cw.com.tw/article/5118952?template=fashion>
- Marketing-Interactive. 2021. *Netflix Indonesia Called Out for 'Inappropriate Content' Again Following Ban Lift*. Accessed 10 December 2025. <https://www.marketing-interactive.com/netflix-indonesia-called-out-for-inappropriate-content-again-following-ban-lift>
- National Communications Commission. 2022. *Report of the Communication Market 2021*. National Communications Commission.
- National Communications Commission. 2023. *Report of the Communication Market 2023*. Taipei: National Communications Commission.
- Orsal, Aileen Ambion. 2024. "Netflix as A Transverse Transnational Media in Southeast Asia: Exploring the Philippine Context." Master's thesis, DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University.
- Pai, Christy. 2018. *2018 Annual Taiwan OTT Platform Industry Strategic Cooperation Research Final Report*. Taipei: Taiwan Institute of Economic Research.
- Penamatsa, Varun. 2018. *Netflix Inc A Strategic Analysis*. Boston: Northern University.
- PTS+. 2018. *Official Closing Reports from the First Phase of "the Forward-Looking Plan to Promote Ultra-High-Definition TV Content Upgrades"*. Accessed 28 July 2025 <https://reurl.cc/6vYNqb>
- PTS+. 2021. *Official Closing Reports from the Second Phase of "the Forward-Looking Plan to Promote Ultra-High-Definition TV Content Upgrades"*. Accessed 28 July 2025. <https://reurl.cc/6vYNqb>
- Punch. 2021. *Exclusive Interview with Director Chen Singing and Screenwriter Lou Yi-An of "Heaven on the 4th Floor:" Creation Is like Dialectics; It Allows the Audience to Find Themselves and Heal Their Bodies and Minds*. Accessed 26 April 2025. <https://punchline.asia/archives/59723>
- Putri, Atiqah Rana Fergus, and Arie Kusuma Paksi. 2021. "The Strategy of Netflix to Dominate the Entertainment Media Market in Indonesia 2016-2021." *Jurnal Ilmiah Dinamika Sosial* 5, no. 1: 110-34.
- PWC. 2023. *Perspectives from the Global Entertainment and Media Outlook 2023-2027 (Chinese*

- Version). Accessed 27 July 2025. <https://www.pwc.tw/zh/publications/topic-report/taiwan-enm-outlook.html>
- Qiu, Hui-Xian, and Niann-Chung Tsai. 2022. *Audiovisual Industry Research in the Era of the Digital and Data Economy*. Taipei: Wunan.
- Ramachandran, Naman. 2025a. *Korean Dramas Drive Southeast Asia Streaming Boom as Netflix Holds Lead With 12.8 Million Subscribers, Report Finds*. Accessed 10 December 2025. <https://variety.com/2025/tv/news/korean-dramas-southeast-asia-streaming-netflix-lead-1236475194/>
- Ramachandran, Naman. 2025b. *Netflix Leads Southeast Asia Streaming Revenues to \$1.8 Billion as Regional VOD Viewership Surges*. Accessed 10 December 2025. <https://variety.com/2025/tv/news/netflix-southeast-asia-streaming-revenues-1236313072/>
- Reuters. 2021. *Netflix Removes Spy Drama Episodes after Philippines' Complaint over China Map*. Accessed 10 December 2025. <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/11/01/media/netflix-philippines-pine-gap-intl-hnk>
- Rosenberg, Eric. 2021. *Why Netflix Content Is Different Abroad*. Accessed 25 July 2025. <https://www.investopedia.com/articles/investing/050515/why-netflix-content-different-other-countries.asp>
- Suei, Yu-Chan. 2021. *Netflix and Other Platforms Have Significantly Invested in Taiwanese Series, Which Has Resulted in These Series Being Sold Overseas! However, Why Is It Called "Sugar-Coated Poison?"* Accessed 26 April 2025. <https://www.bnext.com.tw/article/66138/drama-ott-ip>
- Tan, Rebecca. 2023. *Streaming into Southeast Asia, Netflix Faces Repeated Censorship Demands*. Accessed 25 July 2025. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/04/08/netflix-streaming-censorship-southeast-asia/>
- Teng, Yong Ping. 2020. *Netflix Removed 9 Shows in Total at Request of Governments; 5 Were in Singapore*. Accessed 10 December 2025. <https://sg.news.yahoo.com/netflix-removed-9-shows-in-total-at-the-request-of-governments-5-were-in-singapore-060257649.html>
- Thuillas, Oliver, and Louis Wiart. 2023. *Les Plateformes à La Conquête Des Industries Culturelles*. Grenoble: Presse Universitaires de Grenoble.
- Tse, Yu-Kei. 2020. "Black Ships? Locating Netflix in Taiwan and Japan." *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* 59, no. 3: 143–48.
- Wang, Bao-Er, Guan-Yin Yeh, and Jing-Yu Jhao. 2022. *Building a National Audiovisual Team, the Forward-Looking Plans Pour the First Pot of Gold, and the Ministry of Culture Plays the Role of Locomotive*. Accessed 26 April 2025. <https://www.cna.com.tw/culture/article/20220102w001>
- Yeh, Guan-Yin. 2022. *Tomorrow Together Capital Private Equity Fund Was Launched and Raised NT\$500 Million for Taiwanese Audiovisual Productions*. Accessed 26 April 2025. <https://www.cna.com.tw/news/amov/202203310411.aspx>



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Wan-Shin Chen** is an independent researcher who hold a master's degree from Fu Jen Catholic University and a PhD in Information and Communication Sciences from Sorbonne Nouvelle University-Paris 3. She served as a full-time research assistant at National Chengchi University (2011–2013) and as a postdoctoral researcher at Sorbonne Paris North University-Paris 13, LabEx ICCA – Cultural industries and artistic creation (2023–2024).

**Email:** [ccyndy2002@yahoo.com.tw](mailto:ccyndy2002@yahoo.com.tw)

