

HK distributor pulls Taiwanese film from MIFF

Written by Taipei Times
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The Taipei Economic and Cultural Office (TECO) in Australia said in a statement that it was “surprised and regretful” that Fortissimo, the Hong Kong-based distribution company of the movie Miao Miao by Taiwanese director Cheng Hsiao-tse and with mostly Taiwanese actors had pulled the movie from the Melbourne International Film Festival (MIFF).

“The withdrawal is the result of the recent boycott by the authorities of the People’s Republic of China ... against the Melbourne International Film Festival,” the statement said. “This has nothing to do with Taiwan, which supports the presentation of the film, freedom of expression and human rights.”

The office said that “the arts are a special medium that should be above politics and political dictates.”

“TECO firmly believes that it is wrong to boycott this international cultural event because of political differences,” it said. “TECO feels very disappointed that the Australian public will be unable to see Miao Miao.”

Meanwhile, TECO confirmed that two Taiwanese short films, Joyce Agape and The Pursuit of What Was, would still participate at the film festival.

Democratic Progressive Party Legislator Chen Ting-fei said the film industry — as well as other industries — could learn a lesson from the incident.

“What we can learn from this is that being ruled by an authoritarian regime, China is an unreliable source of funding. Whether it’s the film industry or any other industry, we should never depend on it for funding,” Chen said.

Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Legislator Lu Hsueh-chang said it would be difficult for the film industry to avoid working with production companies from any specific country because cultural industries transcend boundaries and cross-strait cooperation is in vogue.

“If it’s a production by a Hong Kong-based company, it’s up to the company to decide what to do and it should try to rid itself of political intervention,” Lu said. “After all, it’s the Hong Kong-based company that has to shoulder the losses from withdrawing from the film festival.”

The reactions came after the organizers of the film festival announced on Friday that they were left without any Chinese-language movies after a boycott by directors in a row over exiled Uighur leader Rebiya Kadeer.

Mounting tensions about the visit of Kadeer, of the World Uighur Congress, have now led seven directors to pull their work from the festival in a dispute that has also seen Hong Kong withdraw its sponsorship.

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Six films were originally scheduled — all sold out — but now the director of a seventh title that was to have plugged a hole created by the boycott has also pulled his work.

“[The directors] are against Rebiya Kadeer coming out and the film [about her life] screening at the festival,” festival spokeswoman Louise Heseltine said.

Heseltine said the withdrawal of the films, the most recent of which occurred on Tuesday, was a “major inconvenience” for the festival, forcing ticket refunds and massive rescheduling.

She said the organizers had never considered bowing to pressure from Beijing to pull Ten Conditions of Love, a documentary about Kadeer’s life, from the festival program.

Nor had they entertained not hosting her as a guest on Wednesday at a screening of the film, Heseltine said.

“There’s no way the festival would not screen the film,” she said, adding: “She’s definitely coming out.”

The Hong Kong and Taipei trade offices have “been partnering with the festival for a number of years and I believe that they’re disappointed, but it’s just circumstances that are really beyond our control and beyond their control as well,” she said.

China has labeled the US-based Muslim minority leader a “criminal” and accuses her of inciting recent violence in the restive Xinjiang region, which left at least 197 dead.

Canberra has rebuffed Chinese objections to the visit by Kadeer, saying she is not a “terrorist” and there is no reason to exclude her.

Australian Foreign Minister Stephen Smith said Kadeer had been given a visa for this week’s visit.

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