

COMPLETION REPORT

Ateneo de Manila University

Maria Ysabel A. Tangco

‘Reeling in Soft Power with Film Festival Diplomacy: Exploring Japanese Identity Construction through Japanese Film Festival Programming in Southeast Asia’ is a research project funded by the Sumitomo Foundation that explores soft power through the identity construction of Japan, the Philippines, and Southeast Asia through film festivals and film festival programs organized by the Japan Foundation (JF), namely, the Japanese Film Festival in the Philippines or JFF in the Philippines between 2017-2019 (referred to as “Eiga Sai” between 1997-2019) and the Crosscut Asia program in Tokyo International Film Festival (TIFF) between 2014-2019.

The first case study of this research project is JFF in the Philippines, a film festival organized by the Japan Foundation, Manila (JFM) and Japan Foundation Headquarters (JFHQ) between 1997-2019 (until right before the global COVID-19 pandemic). Since the 1990s, even more so presently, Japan utilized cultural diplomacy film festivals overseas through the Japan Foundation, which has transitioned from a government agency under MOFA to an independently run cultural organization that operates on a government budget (Goh 2021, 1,4). The festival has transformed from a primarily localized interpretation in the Philippines to a Tokyo-developed globalized brand (the JFF Network) and has since grown to represent Japan consistently in several localities in the Philippines across the three major islands (Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao) and more than 10 different cities during its operation. Cultural developments manifested in several film festival aspects such as its design (name, promotional designs), setting (venue and dates), and content (programmed films and time-events). Likewise, these film festival aspects have enshrined different values and representations of Japan to the Philippines, such as inclusivity, youth, uniformity, collaboration, bilateral history, ASEAN regionalism, prestige, pop culture, diversity, and diplomatic culture.

Concurrent to JF’s film festival diplomacy in the Philippines, the second case study of this research project, ‘Crosscut Asia’ was operating in Japan. During the Japan Foundation Asia Center’s (JFAC) operation between 2014-2022, JF featured different Southeast Asian cinemas in the Crosscut Asia program of Tokyo International Film Festival (TIFF) between 2014-2019, and again in the ‘Tokyo Premiere’ and ‘World Focus’ sections of TIFF in 2020. JF’s efforts to conduct diplomacy within Japan demonstrated efforts to direct cultural flow from the Philippines and Southeast Asian region back to Japan and carried out the function of the Japan Foundation Asia Center, which was to carry out the new Asian cultural exchange policy between 2014-2022 by promoting cross-cultural exchange within Asia through collaborations (Japan Foundation Asia Center 2022). Additionally, this case alongside the JFF Asia-Pacific Gateway Initiative initiated in 2014 (which was also a JFAC initiative) demonstrated that Japan’s cultural diplomacy strategy through JF would follow the general foreign policy shift of Japan towards regionalism, particularly through focusing on relations with Southeast Asian countries and the regional bloc, ASEAN, in the early 2010s (Goh 2021, 10-12). Japan’s diplomatic pivot to Southeast Asia is understood by many scholars to be motivated by security reasons in military, maritime, and economic areas to balance against a rapidly rising China (Fatton 2018)

Publication of the Results of Research Project:

<p>Verbal Presentation (Date, Venue, Name of Conference, Title of Presentation, Presenter, etc.)</p> <p>(1) 2 September 2021, The Japan Foundation Japanese Language-Institute, Kansai (online) research presentation for Japan Foundation Kansai Center's Japanese Language Program for Specialists in Academic and Cultural Fields, <i>Eigasai no gaikouteiki na yakuwari: Kokusai Kouryuu Kikin no JFF kousou</i> ('The diplomatic role of film festivals: Japan Foundation's JFF Initiative'), Presented by Maria Ysabel A. Tangco</p> <p>(2) 12 January 2021, The Second East Asian Pop Culture Association Conference in Fukuoka, Japan (online presentation), 'Curating Japanese Identity through Film Festival Diplomacy: A Case Study on Eiga Sai, the Japanese Film Festival in the Philippines', Presented by Maria Ysabel A. Tangco as a part of the panel, "Japan in the Absence of Japan: After Cool Japan" headed by Karl Ian U. Cheng Chua, PhD</p>
<p>Thesis (Name of Journal and its Date, Title and Author of Thesis, etc.)</p> <p>Master's Thesis for completion of Master of Arts degree in Japanese Studies at Ateneo de Manila University, 'FRAMING JAPANESE FILM FESTIVAL DIPLOMACY: A CASE STUDY ON THE JAPANESE FILM FESTIVAL IN THE PHILIPPINES', submitted by Maria Ysabel A. Tangco</p> <p>Pending further journal submission between 2024-2025</p>
<p>Book (Publisher and Date of the Book, Title and Author of the Book, etc.)</p> <p>Not Applicable</p>