
Commercialisation as a Tool: The Commercial Transformation of the Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film Festival

By Heshen Xie

The Gay and Lesbian Films Season, now known as the Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film Festival (HKLGF), was founded in January 1989 by Edward Lam, a well-known Hong Kong film director and gay activist. It was the first time that Hong Kong held a LGBT-themed film event, and it was also the first time for such an event to take place in Asia. Before the new millennium, the Hong Kong Art Centre (HKAC)[\[1\]](#) organised the HKLGF and Lam was the festival director who programmed the film festival. Lacking the experience of organising similar events, Lam made great efforts to adjust the programming style and enrich the forms of activities for the purpose of increasing the attendees as well as receiving the support from the local queer communities. The early HKLGF has contributed to the prosperity of Hong Kong queer culture.[\[2\]](#) However, the failure of the box office impeded the development of the HKLGF.[\[3\]](#) Due to the financial pressure and the disappointment from the Hong Kong queer communities, Lam decided to leave the HKLGF in 1999.[\[4\]](#) Also, the HKAC suspended the festival in the same year. In 2000, Raymond Yeung, a film director, and Wouter Barendrecht, the founder of Fortissimo Films[\[5\]](#), brought the HKLGF back to the public. Under the operation by Yeung and Barendrecht, and the HKLGF gradually got rid of the previous style formed by the HKAC and Lam, and commenced the commercial transformation. Through the tough process for years, the HKLGF has succeeded in transforming to the independent and commercial queer film festival recently.

Regarding the commercial transformation of the HKLGF, Pang Ka Wai points out that the commercially transformed HKLGF is male oriented, which means that the festival is operated based on the logic of the middle-class gay consumption, and argues that this commercially oriented logic weakens the political function of the HKLGF.[\[6\]](#) The criticism of the HKLGF will be analysed in detail. Nevertheless, the aim of this article is to critically rethink the commercialised phenomenon of queer film festivals and address the positive aspects that the commercialisation can lead to queer film festival by using the HKLGF, particularly the period from 2000 till now as the example. I argue that the commercial transformation of the Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film Festival can be a tool for pursuing queer political goals and realising social value through increasing the visibility of both HKLGF and the local queer communities

as well as diversifying the audience in the long run. In order to review the commercial transformation of the HKLGFF, this article firstly explores why and how the HKLGFF has gone through the commercial transformation, and then it illustrates what significance of the commercial transformation is to the film festival.

Before expanding the research topic in depth, the term commercialisation, or commercial transformation, needs clarification here. Rebecca Finkel proposes three aspects from which commercialisation acts on arts festivals,

“It is suggested that arts festivals are affected by commercialisation processes in three different key ways: (1) when they are organised principally for financial gain and when revenue generation becomes the principal aim, (2) when they are sponsored by a for-profit enterprise and (3) when they become vehicles for executing economic agendas.”[\[7\]](#)

Simply speaking, her claim demonstrates that funding of the commercialised arts festivals mainly involves box office and commercial sponsorships, and the festivals regard making profits as a significant agenda. Hence, combining the key words addressed by Finkel, in the context of queer film festivals, the commercialisation of queer film festivals means that the funding of the queer film festivals is primarily made up by the box office and/or the commercial sponsorships, while the festivals perform the commercial agenda as one of the priorities for the financial sustainability. While the commercial transformation of queer film festivals can be interpreted in two ways. One is the process of altering funding pattern to the commercialised one, and another one is that the festivals execute the self-adjustment from various aspects, including programming, events, screening venues, and promotion, in order to accommodate the commercialised funding. Specifically, this article will investigate the commercial transformation of the HKLGFF from three aspects, including programming, screening venues and funding pattern, while these three aspects are closely connected and interactive.

According to Skadi Loist, the majority of queer film festivals are registered as the non-profit organisations. Although “commercialisation of non-profits occurs when these organisations decide to produce goods and services with the explicit intent of making a profit”.[\[8\]](#) The commercialised process does not change the essence of the non-profit entity to the business company. Tuula Mittila defines the commercialisation of non-profit organisations as “a strategic process of developing an organisation’s mission into products and services, marketing and management of stakeholder relations and relationships, both internal and external.”[\[9\]](#) It means that commercialisation is a

method that facilitates organisations to accomplish the mission, the character of non-profit organisation remains the same. Hence, as long as profits are utilised to cover the routine operation expenditure and to invest on achieving social values as well, the commercialisation will not cause the alteration of being the non-profit entities in essence.

Before the Transformation: The HKLGFF in the HKAC Period

The analysis starts from exploring the background before the appearance of the HKLGFF, which builds up the whole picture for the analysis. The background information of establishing the HKLGFF reveals the situation of holding gay films screenings in the 1980s. Edward Lam himself had planned and organised different types of events related to lesbian and gay film screening before the establishment of the HKLGFF. In 1982, he founded Zuni Icosahedron, a Hong Kong-based international experimental theatre company adopting art and culture as a means of political intervention. From 1985 to 1987, Zuni Icosahedron constantly screened the queer films of Western directors, such as Rainer Werner Maria Fassbinder and Pier Paolo Pasolini. The audience of the gay films screenings were mainly local and foreign gay men who were interested in art and cultural events. Moreover, this type of audience also shares some characteristics of the main audience of the HKLGFF, which will be deeply analysed later in the third section of this article. All these gay cultural practices were the prelude of the HKLGFF. While, regarding the story of the HKLGFF's establishment, during a trip to Britain in 1987, Edward Lam was inspired by the local queer culture, and felt that the LGBT community in Hong Kong had no similar means or space to express itself. Lam then came up with the idea and the project plan of establishing a local queer film festival, which he proposed to the Hong Kong Arts Centre (HKAC), which is a non-profit arts organization, which aims to promote contemporary performing arts, visual arts, film and video arts and provide arts education, the following year. Two members of the film department of the HKAC at that time, Ain-ling Wong and Yau Ching, who were hugely interested in gender and sexual minorities, supported Lam's idea and decided to facilitate the holding of the HKLGFF.

As noted above, Hong Kong Art Centre took the responsibility of hosting the HKLGFF from 1989 to 2001 (a period I will refer to as the HKAC period). Although the HKAC claims itself as a non-government organisation, the HKAC has had an extremely close relationship with the Hong Kong government since the preparatory stage of HKAC. The Hong Kong government is one of the main sponsors of the HKAC; the government also appoints main governors of the HKAC and pays their salaries. The HKAC is a partially governmental organisation, as the Hong

Kong government does not interfere with the actual operation of the HKAC. Therefore, the HKLGFF is a partially government-funded festival. The HKAC fully supported the festival through providing funding and event venues. Except for several special events, almost all the screenings events took place in HKAC venues, including Lim Por Yen Film Theatre (now known as Agnès b. Cinema), McAulay Studio and Shouson Theatre. In addition, the HKAC took charge of the publicity as well as the administration of HKLGFF. The HKAC utilised its own resources as well as the experience of organising similar events to promote the HKLGFF.

Both the HKAC and Edward Lam had rich experiences of organising themed film screening events. However, the actual operation of the HKLGFF during the HKAC period was not smooth. Here are the three characteristics. Firstly, the HKLGFF was not constantly and annually organised. Two years after the first HKLGFF, the festival began to be held annually, but there were also discontinuations in 1996 and 1999, and in 1997, the festival was held twice. Thus, the intermittent operation indicates the difficulty and disorder of the HKLGFF organisation at the time. Secondly, the scale of the HKLGFF varied in every year in terms of the length of festival and the number of films selected. The first HKLGFF stretched across three months, but the fifth HKLGFF in 1995 lasted for 18 days. In addition, the HKLGFF held in 1992 selected only 22 films; while, the fourth HKLGFF, held in 1994, screened more than 100 films. Thirdly, the name of the festival changed repeatedly during the Lam period. First, it was called The Gay and Lesbian Films Season, then became The Gay and Lesbian Film Festival in 1992, but changed to the Lesbian and Gay Film Festival the next year. It was renamed again in 1998 as the Hong Kong Queer Film/Video Festival. The name change reflected the identity politics of programming and the theme of that year. Generally speaking, the HKLGFF was in effect held as an individual new event each time in the HKAC period.

The funding of the HKLGFF was not abundant. Travis Kong points out the “tight funding constraint” cannot meet the requirement of bounteously organising the festival.^[10] Hence, the HKLGFF started to seek commercial sponsorship in the mid-stage of the HKAC period (from 1995). The prominent Hong Kong gay disco Propaganda^[11] started to support the HKLGFF from 1995, and its sponsorship lasted more than two decades, until Propaganda was closed in 2016. Furthermore, several commercialised companies began to support the HKLGFF since 1998. In particular, the fashion brand Agnès b. built a close relationship with the HKLGFF. As a result, the sponsorships of HKLGFF have changed from the LGBT-related non-profit organisations to the commercial companies of different types, which included non-LGBT commercial ones. Increasing commercial sponsorship indicates that it was harder for the HKAC to provide sustained funding to the HKLGFF. Meanwhile, this also marked

the prelude to the commercial transformation of HKLGFF.

As to the reason why HKLGFF had to change its operational mode, one of the prime reasons was that the HKAC found it hard to support the festival as before, as the HKAC was suffering from financial hardship. According to Fung ManYee, the economic crisis in 1997 seriously affected the source of finance, which almost reduced by half the rental income of the HKAC in the following three years.[\[12\]](#) The income mainly comes from the rental of office and venues, while the financial crisis caused a severe house price drop. In addition, Hong Kong residents had less income for discretionary spending on arts and cultural activities during the economic crisis. The ticket sales and the tuition fees were significant revenue sources of the HKAC as well. The HKAC thus had insufficient funding to organise large-scale activities; the HKAC itself had difficulty maintaining its own internal operations.

Two Main Stakeholders: Fortissimo Films and Ekdo Film Ltd.

In March 2000, Raymond Yeung and Wouter Barendrecht renewed the film festival and officially changed the name of the festival to the Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film Festival with the help of several Hong Kong filmmakers and film critics, such as Shu Kei. The HKAC did not entirely cut its relationship with the HKLGFF from the beginning of the transformation. It still hosted the festival in 2000 and then turned the relationship from one of fully hosting the HKLGFF to merely providing venues. In 2001, Wouter Barendrech and Raymond Yeung founded the Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film Festival Society (HKLGFFS), a non-profit organisation that aims to promote equal opportunities and eliminate discrimination against sexual minority groups in Hong Kong through screening cinematic works and fostering a regular and stable audience base.[\[13\]](#) Since 2002, the HKLGFFS has been the official organiser of the HKLGFF. 2002 was the last year for HKAC to provide venues.

Since the break-up with the HKAC, the HKLGFF has relied on box office. With regard to state grants for film-related events in Hong Kong, the situation is tough, which means that the festivals in Hong Kong are hard to get the amount of public funding. The HKAC has not hosted or supported large-scale events such as film festivals since almost before the new millennium; neither is the Hong Kong government a significant financial source for local film festivals. Throughout the last decade, the Hong Kong Arts Development Council (HKADC)[\[14\]](#) has not granted funds to large-scale events like film festivals[\[15\]](#), so the HKLGFF cannot rely on funding from the HKAC or the government. The HKLGFF has to

become an independently run queer film festival. Nevertheless, the commercial transformation of the HKLGFF has progressed slowly, especially at the early stage of the transformation. According to Pang, the HKLGFF was struggling with a severe commercial failure at the early 2000s; Yeung and Barendrecht underwrote a large part of the operating costs.[\[16\]](#) Only the two directors or the HKLGFFS cannot sustain the HKLGFF, it is necessary to cooperate with other stakeholders.

With the assistance of Barendrecht, the Fortissimo became one of the official sponsors of the HKLGFF, and this thoroughly changed its mode of operation. With the help of Fortissimo, the HKLGFF was able to “obtain internationally renowned films”[\[17\]](#) and in addition, acquire certain films with no rental cost.[\[18\]](#) To be more specific, the HKLGFF has screened more Asian gay films since Fortissimo joined the festival, because Fortissimo focuses on the Asian Market and it creates connections between Asian films and worldwide audiences. The Fortissimo also contributed to the operation of the HKLGFF in other regards. For example, as Denise Tang states, Barendrecht’s own social network secured support from local businesses, especially to promote “festival parties at [the] gay bar Propaganda with little cost.”[\[19\]](#) The opening and closing parties were held in the Propaganda and the bar also sponsored the events by providing the venues and parts of the drinks. As Raghan Rhyne observes, “Barendrecht’s own commercial success translated into a solid foundation of private funding for [the] HKLGFF.”[\[20\]](#) However, the relationship between the HKLGFF and Fortissimo is far more complex. As already noted, Yeung and Barendrecht founded the HKLGFFS in 2001, but the operations of the HKLGFF strongly relied on Fortissimo Films during the transition period. According to Tang, “Not only does the festival [use] Fortissimo Films’ address as the festival address, the festival’s bank account is also managed by the company’s administrative staff.”[\[21\]](#) An important lesson we can learn from the process is the significance of certain stakeholders. In the stakeholder configuration, not all the stakeholders plan an equally important role. Some are more influential during certain historical junctures.

Faced with the situation of the HKAC fading out of the operation of the HKLGFF, one of the top priorities of the HKLGFF was to find suitable screening venues. Broadway Cinematheque, a local multi-screen specialty venue in Kowloon’s Yau Ma Tei district, came to the rescue. In addition, more and more cinemas, situated in high-end shopping malls, gradually became main screening venues. The high-end shopping malls in Hong Kong normally are the multi-functional commercial space that provides western luxury brands of clothing and cosmetics, cinemas and chain restaurants. In 2003, Palace IFC started to screen some of the festival films, and by 2004 it had become one of the main screening venues, showing almost the same number of festival films as Broadway

Cinematheque. Likewise, AMC Festival Walk has supported the HKLGFF since 2005. Situated in a large, high-end shopping mall, AMC Festival Walk drew audiences quite similar to those of Palace IFC as well. In 2006 and 2007, the number of films shown in these three cinemas was almost equal. Moreover, the festival has added two more screening venues, Broadway The One (the brand-new upscale cinema in The One in Kowloon District) and AMC Pacific Place (one of Hong Kong's leading stadium-seating cinema in Pacific Place in Hong Kong Island) since 2008. In fact, these five cinemas, Broadway Cinematheque, IFC Palace, AMC Festival Walk, AMC Palace, and Broadway The One, all belong to the same Hong Kong film company, Edko Films Ltd. Founded in 1950, Edko Films Ltd. is one of the main Hong Kong based film companies, which dedicates itself to film production, film distribution and cinema running.

As commercial transformation and the actual operation cannot only rely on Fortissimo Films and Edko Films Ltd., there are various kinds of commercial sponsorships collaborating with the HKLGFF, including non-LGBT international commercial companies and LGBT media outlets. For one thing, the non-LGBT sponsorships are provided entirely by international companies. The types of the companies vary, from fashion brands to hotels and restaurants. Dim Sum, which is one of the most successful local gay lifestyle magazines in Hong Kong, and Fridae, which is the leading gay online media in Asia, collaborate with the festival as its online media platforms. Particularly, due to Joe Lam, who is the current Festival Director and also the founder of Dim Sum, Dim Sum has become the official media sponsor of the HKLGFF since early in the new millennium.

The Debate: Queer vs Commercialisation

Skadi Loist and Ger Zielinski address the grass-roots characteristics of early queer film festivals by pointing out that the activist media practice and social movements, particularly women's and gay liberation movements, significantly contributed to the appearance of queer film festivals, and the festivals were usually funded by grassroots queer activists.[\[22\]](#) The relationship between queer film festivals and queer activism indicates that the priority of queer film festivals is to pursue the political agenda of gay rights and community empowerment. However, many queer film festivals also have commercial considerations: they select the films that can attract a larger audience, and with more commercial value. To be specific, queer film festivals prefer to screen romantic gay films played by handsome and fit white males, and as a result, lesbian and transgender representations are screened far less frequently. According to her research on the commodification of lesbians,

Danae Clark points out that the marketing of lesbian images is less accepted by mainstream audiences when compared to gay images.[\[23\]](#) In fact, the practice of screening more gay films than other types of queer films exists in numerous queer film festivals all over the world. Rosemary Hennessey argues that 'the increasing circulation of gay and lesbian images in consumer culture has the effect of consolidating an imaginary, class-specific gay subjectivity for both straight and gay audiences.'[\[24\]](#) The representation that focuses on middle-class gay men can only appeal to a part of the audience who are interested in a specific type of queer film. This also means that the festivals fail to attract other types of audience from the local queer communities.

Capital is the key factor of this issue, which limits the representations as well as the types of audience. Alan Sears addresses this:

In this context of commodification, a person becomes visible as 'queer' only through the deployment of particular market goods and services. Others are invisible, either because they are literally left outside the door (for example, because they cannot afford the cover charge) or because they cannot look 'gay' and 'lesbian' if they are old, fat, skinny, transgendered, racialised, stigmatised as disabled or ill or obviously poor.[\[25\]](#)

Through the logic of commercialisation, only certain queer communities can receive benefits, while the interests of others are more or less sacrificed. Members of the local queer communities can be visibly queer only when they can afford the tickets and attend queer film festivals. Simply, capital makes queer visible, meaning that the commercially orientated queer film festivals marginalise diverse types of local queer communities, as opposed to embracing them.

Due to the participation of Fortissimo Films, the HKLGFF programming has been transformed since 2000. Lam once stated that only naked masculine bodies can sell tickets,[\[26\]](#) whilst Renee Penney points out that romantic comedy is a 'popular audience draw' for queer film festivals.[\[27\]](#) Gary Mak, the festival co-organiser, claimed that Yeung and Barendrecht 'tried to bring in more accessible work than Edward's style',[\[28\]](#) meaning that they preferred to select films with comparative commercial value, including romantic gay films, comedy, gay films with graphic sex, and films with big stars. Several Hong Kong film scholars have criticised the programming of the HKLGFF mainly from two aspects. Firstly, Day Wong criticises the HKLGFF for its western programming style, pointing out that HKLGFF has shown quite a number of western queer films without Chinese subtitles.[\[29\]](#) The target audience of the films without Chinese subtitles is therefore restricted to people who have some knowledge of English, or to the foreigners working and living in Hong Kong. She

criticised HKLGFF for being too reliant on the western-queer culture, and for having 'failed to capture the Chinese experience of same-sex desire and relationships.'^[30] Furthermore, HKLGFF has also been criticised in terms of its gay-orientated programming. Pang notes that the number of lesbian films has always been much lower than gay films since 2000.^[31] This, she concludes, has been the case especially since 2000, where the number of gay films selected has been several times that of lesbian films.^[32] The western-orientated programming is closely related to gay-orientated programming, and through the interviews of several female festival directors of the HKLGFF, such as Denise Tang and Yau Ching, Pang admits that lesbian films fail to generate a similar amount in the box office as gay films do.^[33] Likewise, Joe Lam also indicates, '...we try to program lesbian films. The market is so small though and there aren't very many good lesbian films every year...of course the gay films are going to be [more] popular than lesbian films.'^[34] Therefore, in order for the film festival to remain sustainable, the majority of the films selected by the HKLGFF possess commercial value, which means that the programming fails entirely to consider the interests of the queer communities in Hong Kong. The representations of lesbian and transgender individuals are neglected by the HKLGFF, and the topics and genres of the films chosen by the programming committee are relatively monotonous, as many of the HKLGFF programmes are lacking in experimental films or documentaries with serious topics, such as HIV-AIDS.

The western- and gay-orientated programming can shape and draw in a certain type of audience of the HKLGFF. According to Pang, local middle-class gay men who are around 30 and of white orientation are the targeted audience that the festival has sought since the commercial transformation.^[35] Similarly, as Denise Tang highlights, the core identity of the HKLGFF 'has often [been] perceived as a primarily upper middle-class gay male event.'^[36] It is necessary to clarify what type of the main audience actually is, and especially the term 'middle class'. According to Lui Tai Lok, a person who earns a salary from 20,000 HK dollars to 50,000 HK dollars (approximately £2,000 to £5,000) can be defined as the middle class, although only from the economic perspective.^[37] Meanwhile, lifestyle and educational background are also significant.^[38] More specifically, the main and targeted audience of the HKLGFF are 30-year-old, well-educated gay men who earn at least 20,000 HK dollars per month and who are familiar with western culture and lifestyle. I will elaborate further on two aspects of the festival and the targeted audience. Firstly, the screening venues indicate the main type of audience of the HKLGFF. Tang states that the cooperation of the commercial cinemas in the financial district of Hong Kong 'symbolises corporate wealth and global consumerist ideologies', and the screening venues have inevitably 'predetermined the target audience' for the

HKLGFF.[39] As previously mentioned, the HKLGFF organises screenings in commercial cinemas in high-end shopping malls, and the ticket prices are around 100 to 150 HK dollars, which is double and sometimes even triple the price of the tickets in HKAC’s screening venues. The price is not relative for the working-class audience. Additionally, the publicity is intentionally aimed at the middle-class gay audience. Dim Sum was published monthly and available free of charge at most gay venues in the city; however, it moved from print to online in January 2016. Due to its business success and popularity among Hong Kong’s middle-class gay community, Dim Sum contributes greatly to the promotion of the HKLGFF. The cooperation with Dim Sum is a reflection of the fact that the target audience of the HKLGFF are middle-class gay people interested in art and culture. Additionally, they are the potential customers of commercial sponsorships, and the commercial operation is therefore likely to marginalise lesbian, transgender, non-middle-class audiences.

Increasing the Visibility and Diversifying the Audience

The screening venues of the HKAC were almost all in the Wan Chai area, a major hub of foreign cultural institutions in Hong Kong. Except for the HKAC, the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts and the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre were also used for organising various kinds of art and cultural activities. Thus, in the HKAC period, the HKAC could be seen as a “closet”, which is a comparatively safe space for the HKLGFF. As the law decriminalising male homosexual conduct was passed in 1991, the queer communities in Hong Kong were still “in the closet” in the 1990s.[40] The main audience of the cinemas is intellectuals, which means that the audience is comparatively a minority group. The HKLGFF used the HKAC as a cover, which was branded as an art event, to offer the ambiguity to the queer communities, not definitely showing their intent as well as their sexual identity. This kind of public space also provides privacy to its audiences.

However, the commercial transformation has forced the HKLGFF to come out from the “closet” to go into the broader public space. Unlike the venues of the HKAC, both the Broadway Cinematheque and the commercial cinemas in the high-end shopping malls do not attract a specific kind of audience, instead, they reach wider audiences. Broadway Cinematheque is located in the Yau Ma Tei neighbourhood in Yau Tsim Mong district, with the consequent convenient transportation for audiences who live in Mong Kok, Tsim Sha Tsui, and Sham Shui Po. As Mak points out, that Broadway Cinematheque is “more for local”. [41] Also, due to the fact that rental prices in Yau Ma Tei are much lower than

in the Central area, the ticket prices at Broadway Cinematheque are slightly cheaper than those of other mainstream cinemas. Other four cinemas, including IFC Palace, AMC Festival Walk, AMC Palace, and Broadway The One, are all situated in high-end shopping malls. Furthermore, most of those shopping malls are in the Central and Tsim Sha Tsui area, the commercial golden zone. It is symbolically significant when the HKLGFF came to the public. Joe Lam sees cooperating with a number of commercial mainstream cinemas as a gradual process of “coming out.”[\[42\]](#) In other words, the newfound cooperation with mainstream cinemas, especially those in high-end shopping malls, represents the fact that the HKLGFF has left the comfort zone created by the HKAC and entered the broad public, in that various kinds of audiences comes to mainstream cinemas, unlike the culture-and-art lovers of the HKLGFF at the HKAC period. However, the commercial cinemas can also limit some types of audience, in the other way. Indeed, the article should address the fact that the screenings of the HKLGFF in the high-end shopping malls can relatively restrict the audience who are non-urban and not affluent, which also means the people at the bottom of Hong Kong society. Nevertheless, following the logic of commercialisation, the festival should pay more attention to the audience (middle-class) who are possible to provide comparatively more commercial value for the festival, as they can afford both tickets and various kinds of commercial events (such as opening and closing parties) held by the festival.

The high exposure of the HKLGFF in commercial space is able to attract different types of audience, in other words, it provides the possibility to diversify audience. Broadway Cinematheque is semi-art house commercial cinema; hence, it has already formed a batch of moviegoers who are easier to accept comparatively non-mainstream films. Joe Lam claims the HKLGFF can attract the “indie film lovers, [who] might be here to watch their favourite movie star.”[\[43\]](#) In addition, screening in high-end shopping malls can attract two types of audience. First, these locations attract a gay audience that is not a frequent movie-goer. For example, in terms of the audience of the Palace IFC, Mak states that “There is a gay crowd coming down from the gym to the cinema.”[\[44\]](#) He continues: they are “more affluent and more English speaking. They talk more about consumption, lifestyle, and parties, instead of sharing about the film.”[\[45\]](#) They are not regular festival-goers, but they have chosen to join the festival, when visiting queer film festival becomes a kind of trendy consumer lifestyle that reflects good cultural ‘tastes’ and middle class distinction. Second, the HKLGFF can also appeal to ordinary customers, as customer flow rate of malls is extremely high. Although the interests of the local queer communities cannot be comprehensively considered, the film festival, in fact, are diversifying the audience base. Moreover, Joe Lam states that queer films are no longer only for queer

communities[46]. In other words, from the viewpoint of festival committee, the HKLGFF should no longer only serve the queer community.

The HKLGFF has started to enter into university campuses since 2015. Aiming at achieving the social values, the HKLGFF has organised a campus tour during the festival period. Cooperating with the Red Ribbon Centre and different student groups, the HKLGFF presents short films of diverse topics related to queer life and culture. As a free event to college students, this campus tour carries out the educational function without distinct commercial considerations, which is also the way how the HKLGFF actively gets touch with younger generation. Nevertheless, from the perspective of business, getting touch with college students is able to cultivate the festival audiences of the next generation, and to have good publicity for the festival in the campus as well.

On the one hand, from the commercial perspective, diversifying audience contributes to box office success. As Richard Ohmann argues, “markets are shaped, not discovered.”[47] These newly formed audience can also secure the attendance of the festival. On the other hand, from the aspect of social value, attracting these audience can shape the audience basis for efficiently realising queer political goals. No matter how each queer film festival claims its social responsibilities and the political goals, the aim of most queer film festivals is to increase positive and diversified queer representations to the broader public. actually, these political goals are more for the general public, not aiming to the queer communities. It is difficult for queer film festivals to convey the messages of eliminating discrimination as well as increasing social acceptance from the broader. In addition, according to Nanna Heidenrieck, who was the curator for the Berlinale program Forum Expanded, “no festival passively responds to a pre-given audience;” instead, film festivals “shape audience.”[48] Although the engagement is not straightforwardly or efficiently effectual, queer film festivals can instil the idea of equal rights in the long run.

Conclusion

In conclusion, after surviving a difficult period that lasted over a decade, the HKLGFF has become successful from the commercial standpoint in recent years. According to Gary Mak, “For the immediate figures, it is the box office [that counts]. So far, the festival has been doing well, especially in the last three to five years (interviewed by Stuart Richards in 2014), [when] we have been nearly sustainable just from the box office [takings] we earn.”[49] This claim shows the success of box office in the recent years, but also illustrates that the HKLGFF will maintain this type

of operating model for the sustainability and the development of the festival. This article has highlighted the necessity of the commercialisation of small, local and independent queer film festivals, such as the HKLGFF. Nevertheless, both scholars and film festival curators have to think about the question of how this kind of queer film festivals can balance the commercial value and the social value with a limited budget.

The article has also illustrated that small local queer film festivals, such as the HKLGFF, are usually in cooperation with a few main stakeholders. The relationship between the festivals and the stakeholders is complex, while the impacts of the main stakeholders greatly influence the actual operation of the festivals. Furthermore, it is significant to consider the impacts of global networking of queer film festivals on the local queer film festivals when discussing the commercialised process and local specialities of the festivals.[\[50\]](#) This work open up the discussion of interpreting the commercialisation of local queer film festivals in the context of international and regional queer film festival circuit.

Notes

[\[1\]](#)

A group of artists have come up with the idea of establishing a non-profit organisation to promote local art activity, and then wrote to the government to request a piece of land to build an art centre. Going through many hardships for years, with the help of Hong Kong Governor, HKAC was finally established with the new building in 1977.

[\[2\]](#)

Ta-wei Chi 齊素, "Fanyide Gongguan: Aizi, Tongzhi, Kuer," 齊素: 齊, 齊, 齊 [Translation/Public: AIDS, 'Tongzhi,' and 'Ku'er'] *Bulletin of Taiwanese Literature* 26 (2015): 91-92.

[\[3\]](#)

Xiaofei Zhen 甄小非, "Shishi Feifei Tongxinglian Yingzhan," 甄小非 [Shishi Feifei: Queer Film Festival] 18 December 2007, *Southern Weekly*.

[\[4\]](#)

Ibid.

[5]

Funded in 1991 in Amsterdam, Fortissimo Films has been one of the world's leading international film sales organisations, specialising in the production, presentation, promotion and distribution of award-winning and innovative feature films and documentaries by independent filmmakers from around the globe. For more information: <http://www.fortissimofilms.com/about>.

[6]

Pang Ka Wei 彭家偉, "Tamen de Gushi: Xianggang Tongzhiyingzhan Yanjiu" 香港同志電影研究 [Herstories: The Research of Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film Festival], (Master's thesis, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2009), 111

[7]

Rebecca Finkel, "Re-imagining arts festivals through a corporate lens: a case study of business sponsorship at the Henley Festival," *Managing Leisure* 15, no. 4 (2010): 238.

[8]

Howard P. Tuckman, "Competition, commercialisation, and the evolution of non-profit organisational structures" in Weisbrod, Burton A., ed. *To profit or not to profit: The commercial transformation of the nonprofit sector*, (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 26.

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Tuula Mäntylä, "Commercialisation of Non-Profit Organisations," *Lugano: The 19th Annual IMP Conference*, 2003, 5.

[10]

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Propaganda (also known as PP) was the very first gay clubs in Hong Kong. Founded in 1991, PP was one of the most popular gay clubs, which was seen as part of Hong Kong queer culture. However, it was closed in February 2016. For more information: <https://www.thestandnews.com/lgbtq/propaganda-gay-bar-25-years>.

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Established in 1995, the Hong Kong Arts Development Council (HKADC) is a statutory body set up by the Government to support the broad development of the arts in Hong Kong. Its major roles include grant allocation, policy and planning, advocacy, promotion and development, and programme planning.

[15] For more information:
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[28] Richards, *The Queer Film Festival*, 82.

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[30] Ibid.

[31] Pang, "Herstories," 99-101.

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[33] Pang, "Herstories," 90.

[34] Richards, *The Queer Film Festival*, 202.

[35] Pang, "Herstories," 122.

[36] Tang, "Demand for Cultural Representation," 175.

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[38] Ibid.

[39] Tang, "Demand for Cultural Representation," 176.

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[41] Richards, *The Queer Film Festival*, 232.

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Notes on the Contributor

Heshen Xie is a PhD student of Film and Television Studies at the University of Nottingham, currently doing a research on the Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film Festival. His research attempts to explore the relationship between the Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film Festival and the global queer film festival circuit. Heshen completed the Master degree of Film Studies at King's College London in 2016.

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