

Higher Education Film Festivals as Industry Nodes in Brunei Darussalam

YONG LIU

Universiti Brunei Darussalam

ALEXANDER FISCHER

Mahakarya Institute of the Arts Asia, Brunei

ABSTRACT

Brunei Film Blitz and PRISM UBD Short Film Festival are two institution-based higher education film festivals in Brunei. Their initial purpose was to showcase film production-centric media studies students' coursework in an effort to help recent graduates gain employment in the local film industry. Over time, this purpose expanded and both events transformed into "an industry node" (Iordanova, 2015). As industry nodes, these events provide guidance to the burgeoning Bruneian content creation sector and often influence a range of issues from localized distribution to governmental policy and initiatives. The main discussions unfold around four signposts: 1. Addressing the recognized gaps of a screen-based media education; 2. a summary of key isomorphic indicators; 3. higher education film festivals as industry nodes in the Brunei context; and 4. potential influence of future governmental policies regarding a future Bruneian film and screen industry. Drawing on the discussion above, this paper suggests that the higher education film festivals may be utilized as a catalyst, or industry node, for Media Study and Screen Production faculties in higher education institutions to build up close connectivity with the local screen and media industry, promoting student enrollment in related programs and graduate employment in creative sectors. For a long-term perspective, with their potential influence on governmental policymaking and incentive steering, such higher education film festivals may grow into and form diverse and effective mechanisms that facilitate to galvanize and inform the incipient film and screen industry in Brunei Darussalam.

Keywords: Brunei Film Blitz, PRISM UBD Short Film Festival, higher education film festivals

INTRODUCTION

There are nine Brunei higher education institutions which offer media studies or a related discipline, such as communication, advertising, and broadcast or multimedia design. Roughly a third of these institutions facilitate an annual public exhibition of student-produced screen-based content. These exhibitions often coincide with the conclusion of a semester or term and function as a showcase/film festival.

This paper examines how two of these festivals, PRISM UBD Short Film Festival organized by Universiti Brunei Darussalam and the Mahakarya Institute of the Arts Asia co-facilitated Brunei Film Blitz, utilize these exhibition events to increase the likelihood of collaboration with and employment for students and recent graduates in the Bruneian screen industry (Wasil 2019). This topic is particularly intriguing given that Brunei has a developing film industry (Fischer & Liu 2021; Liu 2021), which means traditional, established career pathways for media students into the sector do not exist. It is understood that this situation is unique to Brunei as the majority of its Southeast Asian neighbors have well-established film industries. For example, in 2018, local Indonesian productions accounted for 30% of the theatrical market share in the country, while the Philippines celebrated 100 years of national cinema in 2019.

It can be argued that these national film industries, and others found in Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, and Vietnam provide internships, mentorship and entry-level jobs to new graduates as a means of entry. By contrast, Brunei is primarily dominated by small private-sector production companies composed of three or fewer permanent employees and "gig-lancers" – individuals who have full-time jobs outside of the film industry but offer content creation services as a side-income or hobby.

The two higher education film festivals discussed in this paper are strategic and correspond to the immediate, job-related demands of those media studies graduates who have a specialization in screen-based content creation. This specialization includes, but is not limited to, video production and filmmaking and sub-specialized positions such as directing, cinematography, sound design, and post-production. It is important to note that these film festivals are not part of the core teaching curriculum. Rather, they began as what Iordanova terms "clusters of creativity" (2015, 7), i.e., events completely dependent upon the final productions of individual screen media courses. Over the years, these clusters of creativity have transformed into authoritative nodes, transforming their role as an aggregate of assignments and assessment projects and becoming annual events that inform and influence the direction of the Bruneian film industry.

The paper is structured in a traditional, linear fashion so as to avoid alienating media studies educators

unfamiliar with the production of screen-based content. Similarly, jargon is purposely minimized so that situations and concepts may be more broadly understood.

Four main points are featured as discussion signposts: 1. Addressing the recognized gaps of a screen-based media education; 2. a summary of key isomorphic indicators; 3. higher education film festivals as industry nodes; and 4. potential influence of future governmental policies regarding a future Bruneian film and screen industry. Each of these discussion points contains examples from Brunei Film Blitz and PRISM UBD Short Film Festival, both of which are current to the 2022 film festival editions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Considering a “film festival as an industry node,” Iordanova (2015) stressed: “Some festivals have created their own distribution labels, while others have teamed up with TV channels or with specific streaming platforms.” According to Iordanova, these developments have turned film festivals from mainly exhibition operations into key players in the film industry and society at large with multiple functions such as production financing, networking, and distribution (8). This paper uses the plural form of Iordanova’s term – industry nodes – to specify the unique status of higher education film festivals in Brunei that connects not only the differing sectors inside the screen industry but also those beyond it, such as educational organizations, other related economic sectors, and governmental agencies.

Stevens (2018) also noted the complexity of film festivals and emphasized the interdisciplinary principle of film festival studies: “The complex nature of film festivals as events that move across and between established conceptual frameworks – of nation, texts, industry – conditions in their study a commitment to interdisciplinarity. Film festival studies routinely borrow from a range of other disciplines” (55). Likewise, Iordanova (2016) noted that “it is the dominance of textual analysis, national frameworks, and industry studies that has significantly delayed a turning of attention to the film festival as a phenomenon that best reveals film culture’s transnational essence” (xii). In addition to such a transnational infrastructure, Stevens (2018) contested the “transmedia experiences” updated in film festivals: “What the critical conception of film festivals as transmedia experiences offers, then, is a way to understand the inter-relation of the social and cultural as inherent and important qualities in the encounter with films that festivals provide” (55). Their transmedia experiences bring film festivals into the foreground as a primary sociocultural platform. It is noticeable that the value of a film festival should not be limited to financial gains, since “simply stating that a film festival is not a success because it is unable to generate a net profit may mean that the successful function of the event as a cultural platform has been overlooked ... In fact, the majority of film festivals do not make money and the idea that a film festival is a profit-making venture is fundamentally flawed” (Fischer 2013, 40). While both Brunei Film Blitz and PRISM UBD Short Film Festival are academic undertakings, their ability

to influence and shape cultural and educational discussions due to their position as industry nodes within the Bruneian film industry is worth investigating.

Addressing the successful collaboration between universities and industries, Edmondson et al. (in Awasthy et al., 2020) observed: "Individuals with an understanding of both academic and business worlds are considered the driving force behind successful partnerships" (51). Universities must involve people with networking and managerial skills to attract industry partners. At the same time, academics with an industry background are an additional advantage as they tend to be more willing to cross boundaries to work with people in other areas of expertise. Therefore, according to Edmondson et al. (in Awasthy et al., 2020), universities need to redefine their mission, including collaboration with the industry as an important diagram for research universities. Grincheva (2021) also affirmed that "industry engagement has long been recognized in higher education as an effective tool to facilitate learning while leading to a successful post-graduation employment" (3). Furthermore, work-integrated learning delivered through course design better prepares students to enter the workforce and meet demands of employers (Ferns et al. 2016, 3). The important collaboration between higher education and related industry prompts us to carry out this empirical investigation of how the two higher education film festivals in Brunei benefit from the interactive cooperation with the Bruneian screen industry and other stakeholders such as government agencies and related economic sectors.

Film festival studies have rarely reached their connection to higher education so far; however, Seery's (2015) comprehensive discussion about the trend of implementing flipped learning approaches in higher education chemistry as a specific reference to the sciences may analogize a similarly rightful rationale for implementing film festivals into higher education film studies and curricula. In addition, NMC Horizon Report (Becker et al., 2017) summarized 18 topical trends and technology developments that will very likely drive educational change in higher education institutions. Among the 18 topics, the six key trends, in particular Blended Learning Design, Collaborative Learning, Growing Focus on Measuring Learning, Redesigning Learning Spaces, Advancing Cultures of Innovation, and Deeper Learning Approaches, provide a forward-looking and innovative overview for integrating film festivals into higher education pedagogy and research.

Seaman (1999) suggested a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods for empirical studies of software engineering because of the "blend of technical and human behavioral aspects" (557) in such studies. She also emphasized the importance of qualitative data collection as an essential means to gather useful information in software engineering studies. Such a blended methodology should also be applicable to the present empirical study on higher education film festivals, which are quite distinctive in nature from most other types of film festivals. The emphasis on university-industry collaboration in higher education film festivals requires even more vigorous interdisciplinary commitment to look into both the technical side of operating film festivals by comparison of numbers

with infographics and the complexities of human behaviors (e.g., motivation, communication, and understanding) during the operational process. Liu et al. (2023) made an initial attempt to conduct a comprehensive study about higher-institution-based film festivals and their function of forming university-industry connections with a focus on the PRISM UBD Short Film Festival.

THE ACKNOWLEDGED GAPS OF A SCREEN-BASED MEDIA EDUCATION

There is a certain mystique about film schools regarding their overall effectiveness in preparing students for careers in the film industry. Traditionally, those skeptical of the value of a film education have referred to successful Hollywood A-list filmmakers such as Quentin Tarantino, Steven Spielberg, James Cameron, Ava DuVernay, and Miranda July as argumentative evidence. Similarly, anti-film school digital sources such as Nofilmschool.com (web) and @filmschoolsucks (Instagram) offer their own pedagogical approaches to establishing a lucrative career. For example, the founder of Filmskills.com announced that “[f]ilm professors do not teach the real world,” instead offering his own alternative film industry-based education that enabled him to advance from “a film school dropout to a Hollywood director and cinematographer earning a \$10,000 [USD] day rate” (Tomaric 2022).

The existence of the anti-film school ideology is, naturally, potentially problematic for film schools. Unlike regulated industries such as accounting, medicine or law, those working in film and television are not necessarily required to have official academic qualifications to be recognized as professionals. Rather, mentorships, practical experience, and membership in guilds, union associations or societies are often a prerequisite for a career.

Methods used by film schools to align themselves closer to the industry include the employment of working professionals to teach classes and the establishment of an oversight committee of established film practitioners who provide input regarding curricula, internships, or graduate job opportunities. Such involvement raises the credibility of the educational institution and can be seen as a ‘seal of approval’ from the film industry.

This paper argues that the implementation of film festivals by higher education institutions also serves as evidence of an effective film education when it involves the participation of film industry professionals. This participation generally manifests itself as audience attendance, membership on a judging panel, or guest of honor. However, participation is not as simple as an ‘if-you-build-it-they-will-come’ scenario. Rather, the higher education film festival organizers must communicate the validity of their event through industry isomorphism; that is, the film festival must display some degree of being an industry-styled event. If such isomorphism does not exist, the organizers risk having their event seen as amateurish, unprofessional, or academic, and therefore not worth attending.

KEY ISOMORPHIC INDICATORS

Isomorphic indicators commonly exist among fundamentally similar organizations. These indicators are typically the result of two possible factors: first, that organizations become “matched with their environments by technical and exchange interdependencies” (Meyer & Rowan 1983, 28). Thus, the majority of film festivals have the same basic needs for operation – a projector, a venue, a film acquisition system – means that will be very similar in form. Second and alternatively, organizations are observed to “structurally reflect socially constructed reality” (8).

The isomorphic indicators evident in Brunei Film Blitz and PRISM UBD Short Film Festival are both physically observable and socially manufactured. They are essential for the ensured participation of the local film industry and much care is taken to clearly communicate these indicators to necessary stakeholders. The following discussion examines three key isomorphic indicators: programming, industry involvement, and professional proficiency.

Programming

Film festivals are typically valued according to their programming. It is for this reason that premiere status is a commodity by which filmmakers must decide which event best benefits the acceptance and longevity of their film. Top-tier film festivals such as Cannes or Sundance routinely have international or world premieres simply because the filmmaker, distributor, or sales agent understands the positive outcomes that typically follow a screening. The same applies to higher education film festival organizers. Premieres are not as important due to the status of the filmmakers; instead, the quality of the film both creatively and technically is scrutinized by film industry professionals.

Higher education film festival organizers should ensure the very best films are screened for industry attendees. Exhibition materials that professionals might view as being of mediocre or poor quality could potentially diminish the industry approval for the event. Thus, the curation and sequence of films can impact how each film is received by the audience. As film critic Robert Koehler explains, the construction and selection of any section of films in a program immediately declares itself as, first of all, a critical statement, for the film festival programming is always and forever in its first phase an act of criticism (2009, 82). Therefore, higher education film festival organizers should always program to the strength of their films so as to signal to the industry the relevance of the student work and ultimately the film education offered by the institution.

Both PRISM UBD Short Film Festival and Brunei Film Blitz prepare stakeholder expectations through the use of genre categories. This method of programming enables both higher education institutions

the best possible opportunity to communicate the intentions of the student filmmakers without unnecessary prescreening of dialogue or exposition. Similarly, assignments that defy or overcomplicate genre classification might be placed into categories such as ‘works in progress’ or ‘final assessment projects.’

The outcome of genre categorization is twofold. First, it provides meaningful examples for qualitative assessment and comparative critical review. Second, there is educational value in that it informs less cinema-acquainted stakeholders of the necessary tropes and cliches required by specific genres for inclusion.

Industry Involvement

The positioning of film industry professionals in roles such as judge, patron, critic, or guest of honor also communicates that an event is industry standard – the inclusion of the industry in a more involved role than an attendee can ultimately serve to raise the perceived value of the film festival. Simply put, if a well-known professional is involved in a meaningful capacity, the industry is more likely to view it as a higher-value event.

The social theorists Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell discuss aspects of organizational prestige in their examination of institutional isomorphism and the collective rationality found in organizational fields. According to them, a “status competition” exists within certain organizational fields that results in a general pattern in which “organizational prestige and resources are key elements in attracting professionals” (1988, 87).

The professional attraction to an event ultimately leads to the legitimization it requires from the film industry for participation. So, through the involvement of select film professionals, a higher education film festival may prove its industry relevance. Furthermore, the inclusion of higher status participants can actually result in greater value and industry acknowledgement of the event.

In the case of Brunei Film Blitz, the festival purposely seeks the participation of industry professionals from other countries, especially from Southeast Asia. These professionals typically facilitate workshops and masterclasses indicative of their specialization and almost always engage in one-on-one discussions with students and local filmmakers. The rationale for this type of interaction may be attributed to the goal of Mahakarya Institute of the Arts Asia to have graduates work internationally so as to enhance their career opportunities and also avoid saturating the Bruneian film industry with a similarly skilled workforce.

Alternatively, PRISM UBD Short Film Festival focuses primarily on the local film industry's participation and actively invites a variety of industry representatives to be involved with the post-screening commenting session and jury judging process. These comment sessions are often critical of the students' work and provide valuable feedback. All the jury panels have been formed by local screen industry representatives, media policymakers, academic experts, etc. PRISM UBD Short Film Festival also partners with Progresif Media and Radio Television Brunei (RTB) – both are leading industry enterprises in Brunei – to utilize the online streaming platform of each respective company. In particular, two UBD short films, *Bunga* (2019) and *Suara* (2019), alongside three public service advertisement works, *Cyberchondria*, *Dispose Responsibly*, and *Texting*, after screening in the 3rd PRISM UBD Short Film Festival, were selected to air on RTBGo – RTB's OTT platform – in February 2021. Accompanying the five short films, a 10-minute documentary titled *Behind the Scene* featuring the 3rd PRISM UBD Short Film Festival was also produced and webcasted on RTBGo. One month later, Progresif Media – Brunei's largest online streaming platform that features Bruneian domestic content – also picked up six short films from those screened in the past three editions of the festival and published them on the Progresif Media app and website. Among the six selected short films, *Bunga* and *Suara* stood out, alongside *Laila* (2018), *Abang* (2019), *Voyager 2100* (2019), and *Anak Ayah* (2020). The partnership with RTB and Progresif Media confirmed and strengthened PRISM UBD Short Film Festival's functioning as one of the industry nodes that closely interacted with the domestic media industry in Brunei.

Professional Proficiency

Most film festivals offer elements of glamor and celebrity in addition to the exhibition of films. These elements are important in rarefying the events and promoting a sense of uniqueness that a traditional screening, which may be replicated multiple times in different locations, lacks. The degree in which higher education film festivals engage in these rarefied events may range from the presence of a red carpet to an exhibition of film posters, to the inclusion of an entertainment-filled gala evening.

While glamor and celebrity do not necessarily demonstrate industry proficiency, they are the sum of a great number of parts that must match professional expectations. These parts include attractive marketing material, correct on-screen titles and exhibition formats, appropriate screening sound levels, and access to the creative heads of department such as the writer, director, cinematographer, and, in some instances, notable cast members.

Professional proficiency indicates to the industry that the filmmaking students are educated and trained to a suitable level for employment. While much of the entertainment aspect of a film festival is typically handled by marketing companies, it is still imperative that the same duty of care is given to

spell-checked printed programs and confirmed correct screening dates and times. A misstep in the minutiae can have detrimental effects on industry perceptions of the event.

Although PRISM UBD Short Film Festival does not have a red carpet presence or entertainment-filled gala due to its small scale, each festival invites well-known Bruneian screen industry figures to appear in the opening ceremony and post-screening commenting session. These sessions are a rarefied event and reaffirm the function of the festival as a node for bringing together members of the Bruneian film industry physically together.

It is an entirely different situation for Brunei Film Blitz which focuses much of its attention on the glamor and celebrity of its participants. Red carpets as well as specialized events are used to generate local media coverage about the event and affirm its position as a top-tier national film industry event. Students of Mahakarya Institute of the Arts Asia volunteer at these events as ushers, greeters, and behind-the-scenes documentarians. These roles suitably place them in key positions for mingling and networking.

HIGHER EDUCATION FILM FESTIVALS AS INDUSTRY NODES

As elaborated above, film festivals are often identified as industry nodes and both Bruneian higher education film festivals adhere to isomorphic indicators to attract and retain screen industry participation. The next section will examine the role of the PRISM UBD Short Film Festival and Brunei Film Blitz as mechanisms that seek to galvanize and inform the incipient screen industry in Brunei (Fischer & Liu 2021; Liu 2021).

The official number of production houses in the sultanate is unknown. It has been speculated by the Bruneian-based Authority for Info-communications Technology Industry (AITI) that more than 60 production companies operate domestically, the majority of which focus solely on wedding and corporate videos. The small-scale nature of these production companies means limited opportunities for higher education media studies graduate employment.

Similarly, there exists a large number of 'gig-lancers.' This group of hobbyist content creators are known to severely undercut the screen industry market because media production is not their main source of income, and they can afford to take on projects for a fraction of the cost of a wholly dedicated professional media production business. This group presents limited opportunities for employment as the gig-lancer economic model generally dictates no budget allocations for free-lance or permanent crew. Rather, many of these projects are solo or 'friend crewed' productions and are not realistic in relation to the actual costs associated with industry-standard content creation.

Such an underdeveloped screen industry is highly problematic for the higher education screen and media providers in Brunei. Student enrollment in video specific media-related courses is often limited due to the perceived weak or non-existent job market. Many Bruneian parents are suspicious of ostensibly non-traditional sectors such as the creative industry and are more likely to pressure enrollment into perceived safer industries such as business or accounting.

These misgivings about a screen and media education are not unfounded as 53.8% of the Bruneian production houses surveyed in 2020 produced less than 20 productions a year. Equally concerning is the fact that 61.5% of production companies confirmed they were willing to produce content for free (Fischer & Liu, 2021). The rationale for much of this pro bono work is largely seen as strategic relationship building with clients that will hopefully result in full-paying production jobs in the future. In private conversations with the authors, many filmmakers new to the industry have shared that there is a preference to work for free as it lowers the expectations of the client and provides the filmmakers with some leniency from criticism.

It is no longer significant or special to make digital content. Media-specific technology has virtually removed all major physical restrictors and gatekeeping mechanisms that severely limited who made the content and how it was exhibited two decades ago. The situation is further complicated by AI software replacing highly specialized human-only skill sets such as editing or creating visual effects.

There are limited, designated means by which new local Bruneian content can be exhibited publicly, which is why the vast majority of professional filmmakers in Brunei utilize YouTube as a means to screen their work. In a study conducted in 2020, it was determined that 69.2% of production houses used social media or video-on-demand (VOD) platforms as audience access points (Fischer & Liu, 2021). VOD platforms are not gatekeepers that perform quality assurance before exhibition; most Bruneian content is viewed by niche audiences according to their technical and entertainment-driven expectations. Organizers of both PRISM UBD Short Film Festival and Brunei Film Blitz recognize the importance of exerting some authority over the situation through the delivery of continuous positive semesterly examples of what a Bruneian screen industry can achieve. Student productions are not screened to the public if they lack a set of standard-level technical quality or artistic merit.

Radio Television Brunei is the only national channel available in Brunei. The production costs associated with broadcast as well as strict censorship regulations limit who provides content and who watches it. To date, very few Bruneian feature films screen at local commercial movie theatres. This situation has recently been the point of public debate as an article titled "Where's [the] public support for local films" was published in the Borneo Bulletin. The anonymous author argues, "the film industry will remain small and insignificant for as long as there's no public support for it" and chides the Bruneian public for

referring to local films as “excessively low budget or not professional enough” (“Where’s Public Support,” 2023).

This situation has destructive future consequences. Without local support or demand for Bruneian content, the need for Media Studies graduates in Brunei diminishes. To address the current state of affairs, both PRISM UBD Short Film Festival and Brunei Film Blitz frame student screenings as alternative exhibition platforms. Tables 1 and 2 map the programming range of each event since inception:

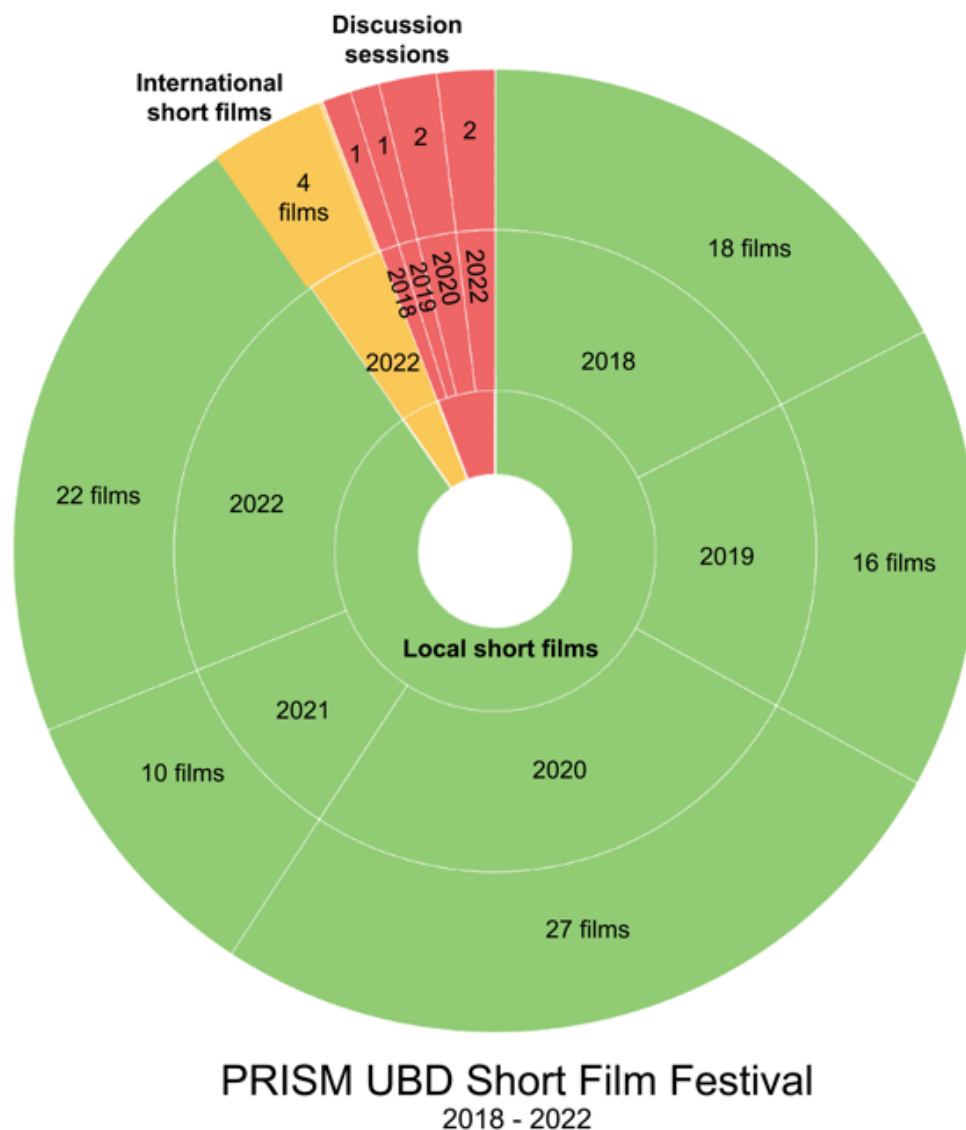
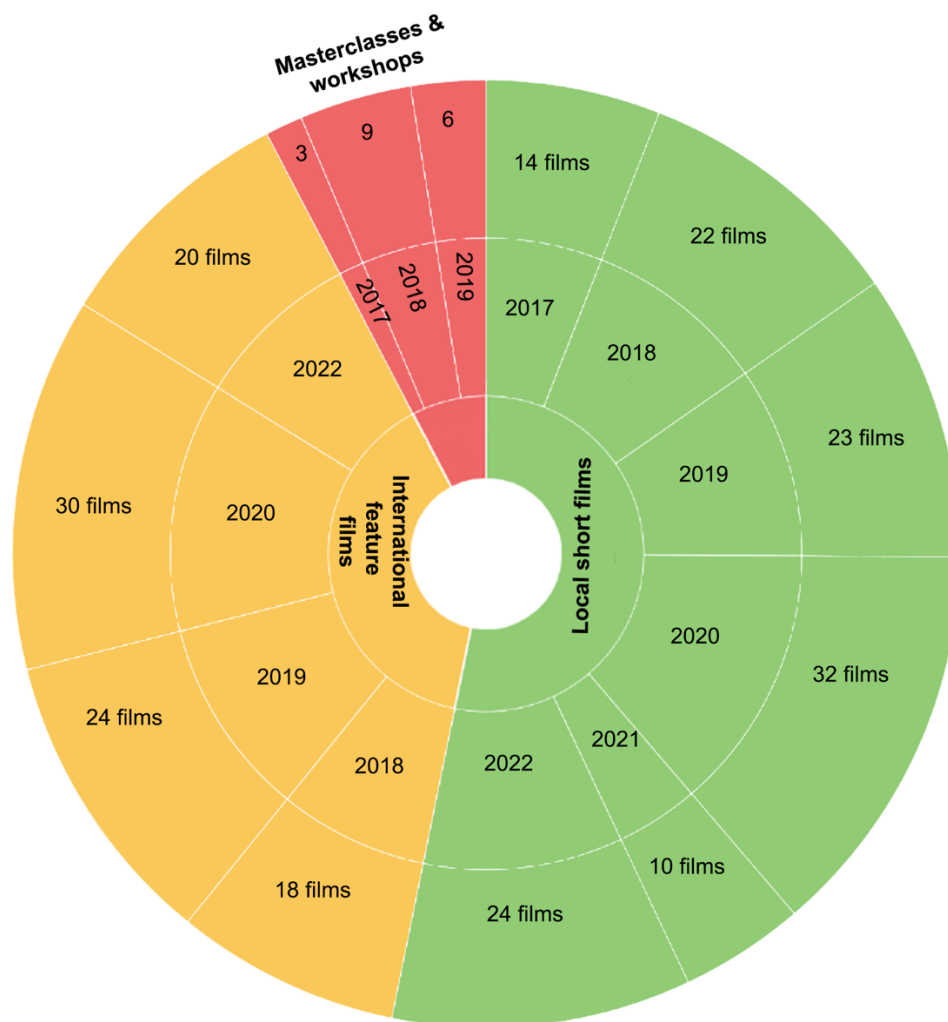


Table 1: Programming map of PRISM UBD Short Film Festival. Source: organizer.

A total of 97 titles of student short films screened over five editions by PRISM UBD Short Film Festival so far cover a variety of genres in fiction (comedy, family, thriller, and horror), documentary,

experimental, animation, smartphone-made shorts, music videos, and public service announcements. All these short films otherwise cannot receive any public distribution in domestic cinemas or on broadcasting TV or webcasting platforms outside PRISM UBD Short Film Festival except through the students' personal self-distribution YouTube channels.

Brunei Film Blitz has programmed 125 local short films, the majority of which are sourced from an annual 96-hour filmmaking challenge that requires filmmakers to produce a new film featuring a secret item announced at the start of the competition. The event has also screened 92 feature films specializing in national cinema from Southeast Asia and further afield. Filmmaking workshops with international screen industry professionals was a major component of the festival; however, it was removed due to logistical complications related to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Brunei Film Blitz
2017 - 2022

Table 2: Programming map of Brunei Film Blitz. Source: organizer.

It is important to keep in mind that Brunei Film Blitz is the first large-scale film festival in the sultanate's history. Thus, its inception in 2017 marked a significant maturation of the film industry. Similarly, the PRISM UBD Short Film Festival is the only big-screen exhibition point for student films. The films programmed are certainly important; however, the strict censorship laws as well as the lack of any significant promotional opportunities do not encourage the same programming liberties as film festivals outside of Brunei. Consequently, the authors hold that the existence of these two events and the new opportunities they represent in terms of alternative exhibition are the focus of this paper.

Film festivals occupy a favorable position with regards to exhibition in that they share many similarities with art house cinemas in terms of screening alternatives for what is commercially available. Thus, the fact that higher education film festivals feature student work generally means that they are less likely to be held to the same critical standard as commercial enterprises. That is, aspects related to low budget productions, non-professional screen performers, or use of basic camera techniques are largely overlooked if the work demonstrates competence. Both PRISM UBD Short Film Festival and Brunei Film Festival invite selected audience members to attend screenings. These specific constituents are critical but aware of the aforementioned limitations of the student work and therefore view productions for their potential contributions to the Bruneian creative sector. Tables 3 and 4 identify eight key stakeholders annually invited to the two events.

The data represents the first approach to determining the function of higher education Institutions in Brunei related to media sector growth. It is intended as a simplified means to communicate what is otherwise a highly complex and contrived social system. The transition from clusters of creativity to authoritative nodes is a gradual, opportunity-based process and worthy of a deeper future examination. However, for the purpose of discussing the current trends in Southeast Asian Media Studies, the authors recognize this is a suitable point of departure.

The organizers of the events understand the constituencies identified are not as all-encompassing as those in fully-budgeted film festivals, but they do serve a valuable purpose by informing future sector sustainability. It is important to note that PRISM UBD Short Film Festival and Brunei Film Blitz also implement placeholder constituencies. These constituencies represent vital but missing components of the Bruneian film industry. For example, Brunei currently has no film critics who can help inform the value of a film or provide context regarding the artistic, historical, social, cultural, or technological importance of a production. Thus, both festivals have taken proactive steps to reproduce this role within the event itself. In the case of PRISM UBD Short Film Festival, besides the post-screening media professionals commenting session, students are also given critics' sheets and asked to assess the films screened at the festival, while Brunei Film Blitz offers so-called meet-the-critic sessions in which established film critics from the Philippines provide face-to-face feedback to local filmmakers on their work.

PRISM UBD Short Film Festival

2018 - 2022

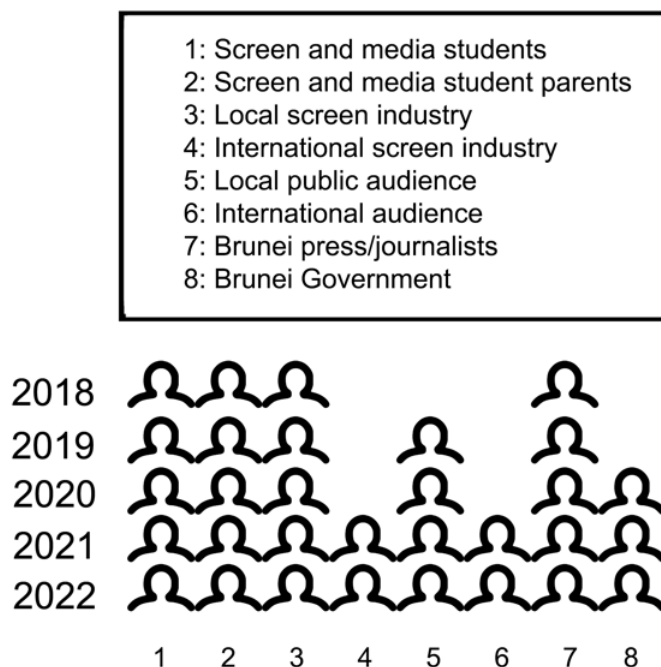


Table 3: Constituency participation of PRISM UBD Short Film Festival. Source: organizer.

Brunei Film Blitz

2017 - 2022

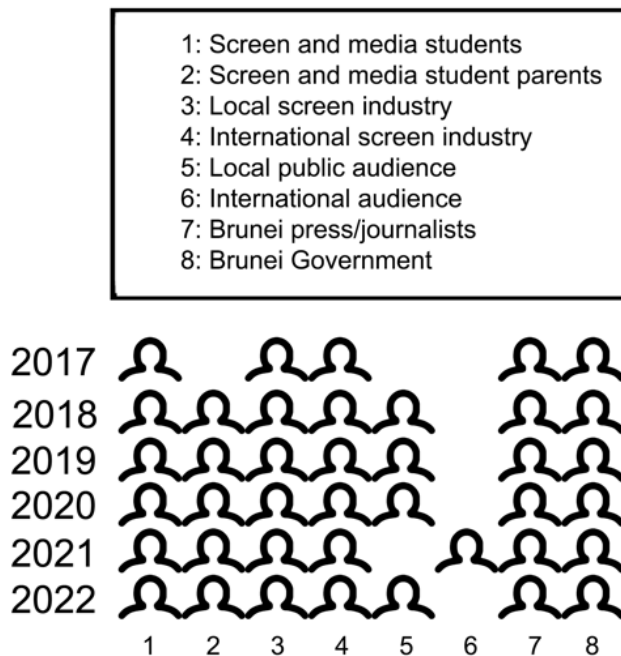


Table 4: Constituency participation of Brunei Film Blitz. Source: organizer.

Another placeholder constituency actively introduced by the two higher education film festivals is that of a distributor. In 2019, PRISM UBD Short Film Festival entered five student-produced films in the Australian-based Flickerfest 2020, of which *Bunga* was selected as a shortlisted finalist for the ASEAN competition section ("Student Short Film *Bunga*" 2019). The short film tells a touching story of a schoolgirl and a stray kitten named Bunga. Following its Flickerfest screening, *Bunga* went on to be screened in more regional and international film festivals, including the inaugural Asia Rising 2021, a showcase of short films from universities in ASEAN in an online screening organized by the Centre for the Arts, National University of Singapore in April 2021, and the Crosslight Film Festival organized by ASEAN University Network on Culture and the Arts in July 2021.

It also competed for the best children's film in the *Future: Kids* section in the 50th Sehsüchte International Student Film Festival in Germany in July 2021. Sehsüchte [transl.: longings] is acclaimed as one of the most prestigious student film festivals in Europe (UBD-FASS 2021). Similarly, Brunei Film Blitz organized the exhibition of seven locally-produced films in the 2019 ASEAN-India Film Festival held in Mumbai, India and more recently submitted six films on behalf of the filmmakers to the 2023 Muslim International Film Festival in Toronto, Canada. Such placeholder constituencies are necessary for the long-term viability of the Bruneian screen industry. Not only do they provide a valuable service that encourages quality and thoughtful productions, but they also represent future career opportunities for graduates who may not know such job diversity exists in the screen and media sector.

CONCLUSION

It was previously mentioned that government employees with ties to the screen industry are actively sought out to attend both PRISM UBD Short Film Festival and Brunei Film Blitz. The motivation behind this interaction is rooted in the likely formation of a future Bruneian film commission. In lieu of an official organizational film body, there exists a small, informal group of veteran Bruneian filmmakers who have formally raised their concerns regarding issues related to current codes of practice, especially that of the gig-lancers, and the need for standardized rate cards. Such discussions are welcome developments for media graduates as there are no unions or guilds to set wage rates or any regulations that determine suitable working hours.

As Brunei continues to diversify its economy, there has been a great deal of emphasis placed on growing new sectors. In 2022, His Majesty the Sultan of Brunei encouraged the younger generations to be "more visionary and daring to explore" careers in the creative industries (Bakar 2022). This is a promising directional change and a possible explanation for an increase in student enrollments in the screen and media courses. For example, in 2019, Mahakarya Institute of the Arts Asia's first cohort consisted of five students. Two years later the student body quadrupled in size. Likewise, the numbers

of B.A. graduates from the Design and Creative Industries program (DCI) at Universiti Brunei Darussalam in the recent two years have also tripled in comparison to the first batch of graduates in 2021. Such a high increase in their respective student enrollment in both institutions has undoubtedly benefited from the years of Bruneian media attention via the two higher education film festivals (Progresif 2021; Azahari 2022; "Local" 2022; Liu et al. 2023).

Optimism about the future is not without merit as 84.6% of the production companies recently surveyed specified that they spent at least 30% of their budgets in other local business sectors. Similarly, 69.2% of local production houses had an increase in the number of jobs compared to previous years (Fischer & Liu 2021). So it is possible a burgeoning Bruneian film industry could be actualized in the near future, especially if the government identifies it as a meaningful contributor to local economic growth.

It is also possible that both Brunei Film Blitz and PRISM UBD Short Film Festival have influenced how the Bruneian government views the film industry. In 2022, the Authority for Info-communications Technology Industry introduced the Brunei Content Festival. The purposes of this event are, 1. to raise awareness and promote local television and broadcasting content; 2. to generate more high-quality local content with commercial potential; and 3. to open up opportunities for local production companies and new media content producers to collaborate with international content developers. The authors of this paper were invited to join the judging panel for this inaugural event and asked to give feedback regarding its future operation. It is important to note that such an event does not represent competition but rather a legitimizing influence that will ultimately help establish the Bruneian screen industry.

The two higher education film festivals examined have been using strategic institutional isomorphic-based techniques to promote their media graduates as valuable, future contributors to the Bruneian screen industry. This paper has discussed how both Brunei Film Blitz and PRISM UBD Short Film Festival have transitioned from clusters of creativity to industry nodes and demonstrated that higher education-led events can impact a career sector.

A limitation of this paper might be that both authors were actively involved in the two higher education film festivals under discussion. The analyses and discussions articulated in previous sections are mainly based on the two authors' previous data-based studies on Brunei's emerging screen industry and their empirical approaches to operating the two institution-based film festivals over several years; however, it is important to acknowledge that the constraints of the two writers also being the main organizers heavily involved with the respective two film festivals might lead some discussions about the holistic functionality of higher education film festivals in this study being less representative or objective because of the somewhat limited database.

Thus, for future studies in the same field, a larger number of higher education film festivals from the ASEAN region and beyond could be included in the research pool and a more data-centric methodology could be developed and implemented to reach more elaborate research results. Areas of future study include a more robust examination of the transition from clusters of creativity to authoritative nodes of individual higher education events. Similarly, it would be beneficial if greater research was undertaken regarding the participation of key constituents and more industrial isomorphic indicators in promoting student enrollment in screen and media studies programs as well as the likelihood of future graduate employment.

REFERENCES

- Awasthy, Richa, Shayne Flint, Remesh Sankarnarayana, and Richard L. Jones. 2020. "A framework to improve university-industry collaboration." *Journal of Industry – University Collaboration* 2, no. 1: 49-62. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JIUC-09-2019-0016>
- Azahari, Izah. 2022. "Local short films wow international judges." *Borneo Bulletin*, December 30, 2022. <https://borneobulletin.com.bn/local-short-films-wow-international-judges-2/>
- Bakar, Rasidah Hj Abu. 2022. Sultan urges more youth to play role in economic development. *The Scoop*, August 10, 2022. <https://thescoop.co/2022/08/10/sultan-urges-more-youth-to-play-role-in-economic-development/>
- Becker, Adam S., Michele Cummins, A. Davis, A. Freeman, C. H. Giesinger, and V. Ananthanarayanan. 2017. *NMC Horizon Report: 2017 Higher Education Edition*. New Media Consortium. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED582134.pdf>
- DiMaggio, Paul, and Walter Powell. 1988. "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields." In *Community Organizations*, edited by Carl Milofsky, 77-99. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ferns, Sonia, Leonie Russel, and Judie Kay. 2016. "Enhancing industry engagement with work-integrated learning: Capacity building for industry partners." *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education* 17, no. 4: 349-375.
- Fischer, Alexander. 2013. "The Science of Success: Eight Strategies That Increase Film Festival Attractiveness." In *Sustainable Projections: Concepts in Film Festival Management*, St. Andrews Film Studies. St. Andrews, Scotland, UK: 39-85.
- Fischer, Alexander, and Yong Liu. 2021. "Screen industry snap-shot: A study of the Bruneian screen industry amid the COVID-19 pandemic." *South East Asia: A Multidisciplinary Journal* 21, no. 2: 30-49.
- Grincheva, Natalia. 2021. "'Connected intelligence' for gender equity: Enhancing teaching through research and industry engagements in the pandemic crisis." *Academia Letters*, article 2632. <https://doi.org/10.20935/al2632>.

- Iordanova, Dina. 2015. "The film festival as an industry node." *Media Industries Journal* 1, no. 3: 1-8. <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/p/pod/dod-idx/film-festival-as-an-industry-node.pdf?c=mij;idno=15031809.0001.302;format=pdf>
- Iordanova, Dina. 2016. "The film festival and film culture's transnational essence." In *Film Festivals: History, theory, method, practice* edited by Marijke De Valck, Brendan Kredell, and Skadi Loist, foreword. London and New York: Routledge.
- Koehler, Robert. 2009. "Cinephilia and Film Festivals." In *Dekalog 3: On Film Festivals*, edited by Richard Porton, 81-97. London: Wallflower Press.
- Liu, Yong. 2021. "A cultural enterprise: A study of contemporary Bruneian films." In *Engaging modern Brunei: Research on language, literature and culture*, edited by Hannah Ming Yit Ho & David Deterding, 215-237. Singapore: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-33-4721-2_13.
- Liu, Yong, Mayyer Ling, and Florin Nechita. 2023. "Higher-Institution-Based Film Festivals as a Vehicle to Improve Student Production Quality and Form University-Industry Connections." *Trends in Higher Education* 2, no. 2: 340-362. <https://doi.org/10.3390/higheredu2020020>.
- "Local productions 'Censorship', 'Teranah' top winners at Brunei Film Blitz Awards." 2022. *Borneo Bulletin*, January 1, 2022. <https://borneobulletin.com.bn/local-productions-censorship-teranah-top-winners-at-brunei-film-blitz-awards/>
- Meyer, John W., and Brian Rowan. 1983. "Institutionalized organizations: Formal structure as myth and ceremony." In *Organizational environments: Ritual and rationality*, edited by J. W. Meyer, B. Rowan, W. R. Scott, and T. E. Deal, 21-44. New York: SAGE.
- "Progresif Media Shines a Spotlight on Student Filmmakers from the 4th PRISM UBD Short Film Festival." 2021. *Progresif.com online*, November 22, 2021. <https://progresif.com/progresif-media-for-4th-prism-ubd-short-film-festival/>
- Seaman, Caroline B. 1999. "Qualitative methods in empirical studies of software engineering." *IEEE Transactions on Software Engineering* 25, no. 4: 557-572. <https://doi.org/10.1109/32.799955>.
- Seery, Michael K. 2015. "Flipped learning in higher education chemistry: emerging trends and potential directions." *Chemistry Education Research and Practice* 16, 758-768.
- Stevens, Kirsten. 2018. "Across and in-between: Transcending disciplinary borders in film festival studies." *Fusion Journal* 14: 46-59.
- "Student Short Film *Bunga*." 2019. *FASS 2019 News Stories*, December, 2019. <https://fass.ubd.edu.bn/news/Bunga.html>.
- Tomaric, Jason. 2022. "How I went from film school dropout to a Hollywood director with a \$10,000 day rate." <https://www.filmskills.com/earn-a-10000-day-rate/>
- "UBD-FASS Term Screening: 3rd Edition." 2021. *FASS 2021 News Stories*, May 4, 2021. <https://fass.ubd.edu.bn/news/ubdtermscreen3.html>.
- Wasil, Wardi. 2019. "Art graduates, how employable are you?" *The Scoop*, May 1, 2019. <https://thescoop.co/2019/05/01/art-graduates-how-employable-are-you/>

"Where's public support for local films?" 2023. *Borneo Bulletin*, July 19, 2023.

<https://borneobulletin.com.bn/wheres-public-support-for-local-films/>

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

YONG LIU is a Senior Assistant Professor in the Design and Creative Industries Program, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Universiti Brunei Darussalam. He holds a Master of Fine Arts Degree in Cinema from San Francisco State University, USA, and a PhD Degree in Media, Film, and Television Studies from The University of Auckland, New Zealand. His recent publications cover a wide range of areas from 3D cinematic storytelling to the Bruneian screen industry and contemporary filmmaking, as well as film-induced tourism in Southeast Asia and Romania. His monograph entitled *3D Cinematic Aesthetics and Storytelling* was published by Palgrave Macmillan (UK) in 2018.

ALEXANDER FISCHER is a founding member and Dean of the Mahakarya Institute of Arts Asia in Brunei Darussalam. He holds a PhD degree from Bond University, Australia. He has held academic posts in Australia, Scotland, and Malaysia, and published on a range of topics including film festival functionality, digital content disruptions and disruptors, the economics of film studios in Southeast Asia, and the connection between cinematic language and foreign policy with reference to the Qajar Dynasty in the early 1900s. His monograph, *Sustainable Projections: Concepts in Film Festival Management*, was published by St. Andrews Press in 2013.

✉: yong.liu@ubd.edu.bn

✉: af.mahakarya@gmail.com

