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Hong Kong Filmart And Hong Kong International Film Festival Join Force In A Competitive Context For Film Events In Asia.

After years of hesitation and a cautious tentative in 2005, Hong Kong Filmart –the Film Market of the former British Colony - took place this year for four days in March at the same time as the Hong Kong International Film Festival (HKIFF). This new pairing stages from now on a series of events, which allow professionals to gather within the huge convention centre in Wanchai district. The convention centre is where the hand-over ceremony took place in 1997.

The Hong Kong International Film Festival, established in 1977 making it the oldest in the region, contributed to the international exposure of Chinese filmmakers (from Chen Kaige in 1985 to Jia Zhang-ke in 1997), and to that of filmmakers from the city through important retrospectives (Johnnie To in 1999 and Herman Yau this year). However, it has yielded some of its influence to the Pusan International Film Festival, now considered and proclaimed as the place of discovery for Asian cinema.

The latter having launched its own film market in 2006, the Asian Film Market (AFM), Hong Kong had to do something. Pusan AFM relies on the wave of popularity enjoyed by Korean films and cultural products throughout Asia, even if the Korean film industry has entered a serious recession of its exports with the brutal slowdown of the film sales to Japan.

Hong Kong Filmart tries to position itself as the access hub to the Chinese market. Along with numerous screenings (a selection of festival films was also screened under the banner of HAS – Hong Kong Asia Screenings) and a large movie fair, another important event was held: The 4th Hong Kong Asia Film Financing Forum (HAF) provided a good opportunity to production companies to show posters and excerpts of their releases to buyers from all over the world. The Forum gathers producers and filmmakers with projects in progress on the one hand, and financiers, sellers and co-production specialists on the other. Short meetings are organised to discuss the possibilities of financial backing.

This form of network making was created by the Rotterdam festival and its Cinemart, and are also employed in Pusan (Pusan Promotion Plan) and Cannes (l'Atelier du Festival, launched in 2005).



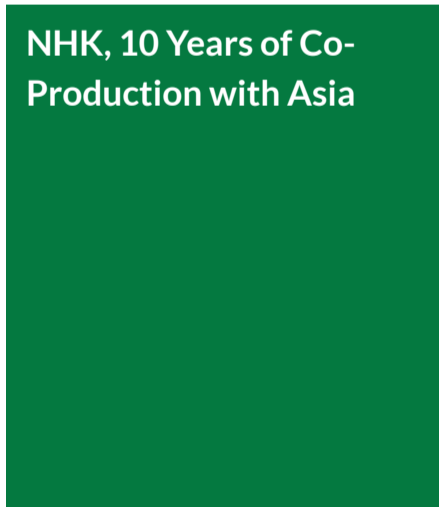

There exists a competition between different festivals in Asia, which is similar to the one in Europe between Berlin, Cannes and Venice. Likewise, these forums and project-markets compete with one another to show the largest number of world premieres. By helping to find financial partners, these events can win the loyalty of filmmakers and thereby be surer of

having their films in the programmes. This year, twenty-two projects participated in HAF—a mixture of rising stars (Ho Yu-hang from Malaysia and Ying Liang from China) and sure bets (Lou Ye and Kore-eda).

With the increasing number of co-productions and the growing appeal of Asian stars, one can easily imagine that the next battle between Asian festivals will be based on such stars. Their presence guarantees wider media coverage and a larger audience, often young and female. A good example can be seen in the invitation of the ‘oriental western’ *The Good, the Bad and the Weird* of Kim Jee-woon (*A Bittersweet Life*, *A Tale of Two Sisters*) to HAF although the project had already found its financing. The real objective of the invitation was to bring in town the cast of popular Korean actors. In the competition between Hong Kong and Pusan, the former scored some points this year by launching the Asian Film Awards (AFA), a kind of pan-Asian Oscar event. They were smart enough to have invited stars (thereby, offer the audience a real show) as well as major directors who had used to go to Pusan.

Bids are getting higher: Pusan has announced the launch of “Star Summit Asia” for its next edition, and the Shanghai International Film Festival recently hosted its own film market during its last edition in June.

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