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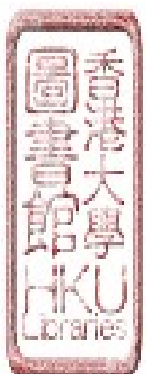
Repositioning a Literary Magazine to an Art Group: Challenges and Strategies

by

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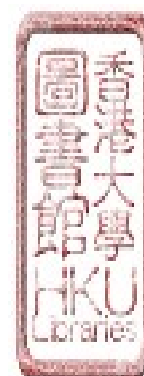
1. Abstract

Hong Kong has long been accused of being a “cultural desert”, an image that found resonance largely due to the lack of support and recognition from the government for the cultural industry. In recent years, with the debate on the government’s proposal of setting up a Cultural Bureau, the cultural industry has received unremitting attention and it has pushed the government to invest more in order to support the development of Hong Kong’s arts and culture. Yet, Hong Kong Arts Development Council (HKADC), the statutory funding body, tends to provide funding support to established arts institutions; smaller arts groups received little money and attention, and thus their survival is indeed at risk.

With the lion’s share of the government support goes to established groups, the literary groups, like others small arts groups, have faced severe challenges. In this connection, some literary practitioners have taken measures to reinvent themselves conceptually to adapt to the cultural reality. The purpose of this study is to examine the feasibility of repositioning a literary magazine to an art group with sustainable income under the current Hong Kong’s cultural environment. By focusing on the recent transformation of *Fleurs des Lettres* (字花), a Chinese bi-monthly literary magazine which is supported by HKADC, from a purely literary magazine to an art group; it attempts to explore the crisis it faced and the measures it has taken to respond to the cultural reality of Hong Kong. The paper considers the part played by *Fleurs des Lettres* in sustaining a healthy future for literature, with particular attention given to audience demands and expectations.

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Capstone Project Supervisor: Dr. Gary Pui Fung WONG



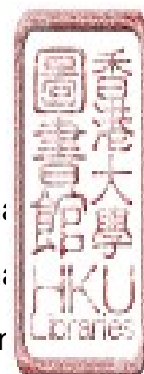
2. Introduction

While the government is making claims that it is continuously providing support to arts and culture, it is also true that small local arts groups do not enjoy the same attention from the official funding bodies. International-standard arts fairs, festivals and performances have made Hong Kong the third largest arts market after New York and London, which have placed our city on the global arts map (InvestHK, 2012). The local arts groups especially the smaller and independent ones, however, might not be convinced. The sustainability of these arts groups underlines the exceedingly unpleasant part of the story. Lacking of financial resources to support its development, they are destined to face the future from a particular disadvantaged position. In this regard, the glamorous arts festivals in the eyes of small local arts groups are actually held all for the sake of the established groups and budding groups of the government without considering their survival.

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With the lion's share of the government support goes to established groups, the literary groups, like others small arts groups, have entered a period of stagnation. According to Hong Kong Arts Development Council (HKADC), in the year 2014, the Council received the annual funding of more than HK\$90 million from the Home Affairs Bureau but there was just less than 3.3% of the appropriation allocated to literary arts, with approximately HK\$3 million shared by 7 grant recipients in this field (HKADC, 2014). Moreover, Hong Kong lacks a tradition to encourage individuals and private corporations to support the city's arts and culture. A few donors who are willing to give to the arts and culture tend to choose established groups or arts institutions that also have the ability and resources to woo donations. In this connection, literary groups have to endeavor to resolve problem that their resource is doomed to be limited.

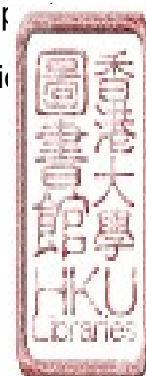
Given the challenges of having unsustainable budget position, literary groups have declined to such an extent that they have reached the crisis point. The challenges have even multiplied as a result of the gradually diversified taste and consumption patterns of readers. To tackle the above challenges, some literary practitioners have taken



measures to carry out transformation to adapt to the cultural reality. In recent years, *Fleurs des Lettres* has transformed itself from a purely literary magazine to an art group by organizing cross-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary works, writing workshops and other literary promotion events to connect literature with graphic arts, performances and social cultures. All these measures are implemented with the aims to develop more audiences for literary art and raise capital for the magazine to survive.

From the perspective of *Fleurs des Lettres*, the existing government's funding system does not much respond to its concerns. Regeneration increasingly relies on its own effort and creativity but not just the opportunities for growth provided by the government. In this aspect, *Fleurs des Lettres* is continuously confronted with and drained its effort to combat to the questions concerning the effectiveness of measures, direction of reinvention, and demands of readers.

The purpose of this study is to examine the feasibility of repositioning a literary magazine to an art group with sustainable income under the current Hong Kong's cultural environment. As *Fleurs des Lettres* is a literary art group that is situated under the umbrella of cultural industries, so there is a need to study this area by drawing upon sociological observations and other related notions in order to provide insights into the functioning of the contemporary Hong Kong literary art groups in the first part of this paper. The second part emphasizes the role played by *Fleurs des Lettres* in sustaining a healthy future for its development. It focuses on the recent transformation of *Fleurs des Lettres* from a purely literary magazine to an art group, in which it attempts to explore the crisis *Fleurs des Lettres* faced and the measures it has taken to respond to the cultural reality of Hong Kong. The final section, on audience demands, considers the consumption pattern by investigating *Fleurs des Lettres* readers' consumption behaviors and their expectations on the group.



3. Theoretical Framework

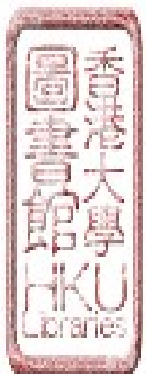
The study of “cultural industry” began with the work of Frankfurt School scholars, and the cultural studies related research in the past decades have widened the concept to include the creation, production, distribution and commercialization of goods and services that are cultural in nature (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1977; Hesmondhalgh, 2013). With the technological innovations and the increasing complexity of markets and products, sociological studies adopt the term “cultural industries” as a new approach to understand such a complex and diverse set of cultural activities (Hesmondhalgh, 2008). In the recent two decades, results of studies showed that cultural industries generate a high growth rate of a country’s employment; potentially it has the characteristics to become a leading sector that can generate growth of a country’s overall economy and power (UNESCO, 2009). As such, governments are eager to promote their cultural industries as vehicles for their creativity and their competitiveness in the world; the notion of “cultural industries” also became a subject of research interest that gradually has been studied from multiple perspectives.

As the notion of “cultural industries” continues to develop and, at present time, continues to be a vague and ambivalent term that connects to an increasing broader range of activities comprising the cultural industries plus all cultural and artistic production; this paper will narrow the broad realm of the cultural industries to focus on cultural production and its mode of consumption (Florida, 2002; Garnham, 2005). It is addressed in various studies that cultural production is different from the normal form of capitalist production, in which challenges and limitations surrounding sustainability issues are often identified (Miege, 1989; Hesmondhalgh, 2013). Cultural production nowadays indeed face a number of constraints, with the problem of capital accumulation being the most obvious (Garnham, 2005). Following the ideas from the work of Garnham (2005), the most distinctive risk of cultural production derives from the fact that cultural goods are seen as non-functional goods and consumers use them in highly volatile and unpredictable ways so as to express their class backgrounds, social status or tastes; thus, even substantial promotional and marketing budgets are available, returns is not guaranteed.



Hesmondhalgh further provides insights in explaining that cultural industries business involves risk to a greater extent in his work *The Cultural Industries* (2013). He draws upon industrial economics to argue that it is difficult to predict how consumers would react to a new product or imagine what kind of pleasures they might get from purchasing it; cultural industries are centered on the production of texts to be bought and sold which makes it doubly difficult to predict the market's reaction (Hesmondhalgh, 2013). Substantial cases of cultural productions in 1990s are discussed in his work to illustrate the problems of risk and the unpredictability nature of demand, which tells us a fact that it is difficult for cultural industries business to steadily accumulate capital (Hesmondhalgh, 2013).

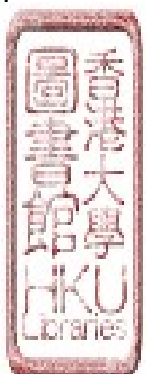
Modern mass production requires a series of processing steps with high fixed costs, so investing in a product requires a considerable amount of input that is supported with both time and resources; likewise, cultural industries also struggle with the problem of having high fixed cost in the production of cultural goods (Hesmondhalgh, 2013). Producing an album, for example. Hesmondhalgh (2013) says “a record can cost a lot to make because of all the time and effort that has to go into composition, recording, mixing and editing to get the right sound for its maker and their intended audience”. The issue for cultural production highlighted by Hesmondhalgh here can be viewed in two-fold: the first-fold is no doubt the high production costs to bear, and the second-fold is the ratio between production and reproduction costs. He further points out reproduction costs of cultural goods are usually low, and a much higher ratio of fixed (i.e. production) costs to variable (i.e. reproduction) costs in the cultural industries means that big hits can be extremely profitable because “beyond the break-even point, the profit made from the sale of every extra unit...[is able to] compensate the inevitably high number of misses that comes about as a result of the volatile and unpredictable nature of demand” (Granha 2005; Hesmondhalgh, 2013). Yet, such “blockbuster syndrome”, using Hesmondhalgh term, applies only to the larger companies who are resourceful enough to build up repertoire or produce a wide variety of products in order to negotiate with the risk from market. For smaller or independent arts groups in the cultural industries, they might be able to execute the measure to protect them against losses. That is to say, even



though cultural products can be extremely profitable if they make a big hit, an enormous amount of cultural products actually make a loss (Hesmondhalgh, 2013).

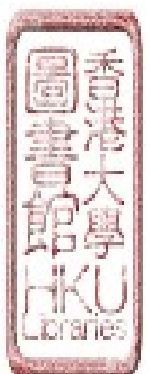
On the basis of Hesmondhalgh's arguments (2013) above, it seems that the theoretical discussion around cultural industries mainly focuses on the supply side, on cultural production and its social contexts; but it should also be highlighted that, the role and activity of audiences is never ignored. One of the reasons saying "cultural industries" is characterized by contradiction and complexity is that certain issues are derived from the ways of how audiences behave, in which their reactions is usually unpredictable (Garnham, 2005; Hesmondhalgh, 2013). The meaning structure within the cultural production indeed requires the action of the audience groups; thus, sociological researchers see the examination of audiences' behavior is also worth concerning (Hall, 1993; Hesmondhalgh, 2013). Hall (1993) emphasizes the power and possibility that audiences can negotiate or resist to a cultural product. It can be seen as the guiding light for audience analysis that discusses the relationship between the producer, the consumer and the product. The audience, in Hall's perspective, would have different reactions and level of acceptance in using the same product according to particular social and cultural circumstances; that is to say, cultural consumers do not passively receive meanings and consume without engagement or resistance (Hall, 1993). The focal point here is that Hall points out consumption requires the generation of meanings, so it is reasonable to say that there can be no consumption if audience has generated no meanings from the product. His analysis acknowledges that audiences are embedded in a social context to play an active role in co-constructing the meanings of a cultural product, and they should be considered in the production and transformation process of the cultural industries (Hall, 1993; Granham, 2005). This leads to a very strong orientation towards "audience maximization" in cultural production (Granham, 2005). In this regard, in the discussion of cultural industries of this paper should not limit only to investigation of cultural production, but the consumption side is also a matter of concern.

To explore the role of audience and audience building in cultural industries, this paper also takes reference to Thorsby's sociological perspective of arts education, which can be



seen as a kind of audience building strategy. Thorsby (2010) discusses the economic value of arts education, and he identifies its specific role in which arts education “generates significant and varied types of cultural values that are vitally important [*in*] determining demand for artistic goods and services”. In view of this, by understanding the relationships between cultural demand and consumption behavior as arising from education and audience building in the arts, a more complete picture in understanding *Fleurs des Lettres* can be gained (Thorsby, 2010). Thorsby’s analysis on audience building also provides a theoretical basis for exploring the challenges and strategies in repositioning *Fleurs des Lettres* from a literary group to an art group. I argue that investigating the demand of audience would be significant in understanding how the group should be transformed and what strategies should be initiated in order to raise audience engagement in literature with a view to developing more readers for the magazine.

All the above sociological discussions have important implications for the rest of this paper. They help to explain the recurring strategies of *Fleurs des Lettres* in terms of how it manage and transform the group and its productions, they indicate potential causes of change and help us to understand the constraints the group is facing (Hesmondhalgh, 2013). Further details of data collection are provided in the following section.



4. Data Collection

This research project has been done with the aim to provide *Fleurs des Lettres* with some implications for its development so as to find ways to sustain a healthy future for the magazine. The researcher collected and used primary and secondary data sources. The primary data were obtained using individual interview and focus group interview for collection of information on the recent transformation of *Fleurs des Lettres* and on audience demands. The secondary data sources comprised of journal articles, newspaper articles, annual reports of Hong Kong Arts Development Council and *Fleurs des Lettres* as well as their financial and research reports. Furthermore, the researcher stays in regular communication through emails, text messages and face-to-face meetings with Hung Wing-hei, the Executive Director of *Fleurs des Lettres*, to learn the updates and discuss the development of the group.

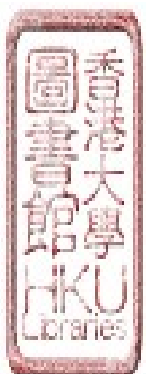
The data on *Fleurs des Lettres* and its readers, both actual and potential, for this paper was gathered between November 2014 and June 2015 in Hong Kong. In the data collection process, individual interviews and focus group interviews were conducted with 13 interviewees, in which 4 of them were introduced by *Fleurs des Lettres* who have joined its Facebook fan page or have participated in the literary programme(s) before. The researcher also invited participants through personal and social networks in work place and church. After that the sample built up in anticipation and data is gathered to be useful for this research project. The researcher made appointment through telephone with respondents to discuss the research in more detail and to ask some pre-interview questions. A mutually suitable time for interview was arranged for each focus group interview. In order to reduce potential issues around privacy and confidentiality of information of the respondents, the interviews with readers were conducted without the participation of *Fleurs des Lettres* so as to allow them to express their views freely. At the time of the interviews the respondents were between 19 to 30 years of age with most being in early thirties. The length of reading *Fleurs des Lettres* varied widely, spanning from eight months to nine years. For recording purposes,



researcher either used a voice recorder or transcribed fragmentary notes while interviewing the respondents.

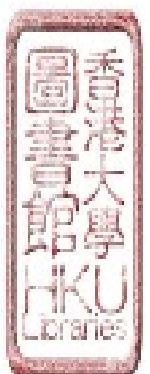
As one of the major parts of this research attempts to evaluate the measures that have been taken in repositioning *Fleurs des Lettres* to an art group in recent years, it stresses on exploring in depth the views and feelings that readers hold and to learn how these feelings shape their consumption behaviors. For this reason, the researcher employs qualitative methods to understand the feelings and beliefs of readers with a view to capturing the richness and depth in the readership experience, also obtaining different perspectives, as respondents are able to exchange and build on one another's views within limited time. Inspired by Clifford Geertz's anthropological term of "thick description", the researcher came to understand many underlying descriptions, conceptual structures and meanings with rich interpretation can further enrich the findings, so interviews should be "composed not only of facts but also commentary, interpretation and interpretations of those comments and interpretations" (1973). Moreover, it is advised that the researcher should have more open-ended questions that elicit the depth of information from respondents, and it can open up further questions to collect richer data concerning their reading and social experiences (Kvale, 1996). To integrate the stages and procedures suggested above into the interviews, most of the questions are designed to be open-ended, discovery-oriented that allows the researcher to further explore the readers' feelings and perspectives on their reading experiences and expectations on *Fleurs des Lettres*. The use of qualitative methods in social research is also advocated by Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006), who suggest that these techniques are useful in obtaining thick descriptions of social life so as to gather rich data for the study. Respondents participating in the interviews were asked various open-ended questions regarding what factors they consider in purchasing literary magazines and their reading experiences as well as questions regarding perceptions and motivations when it comes to purchasing *Fleurs des Lettres* and participating in its literary events. Examples of research questions posed during interviews are as follows:

- How regularly do you purchase literary magazines and why?
- When you decide to purchase literary magazines, what do you look for?



- Who and what influence your decision to purchase literary magazine and *Fleurs des Lettres*?
- Tell me about positive experiences you have had in reading *Fleurs des Lettres* / participating in their activities?
- Tell me about disappointments you have had in reading *Fleurs des Lettres* / participating in their activities?
- If you had to pick three factors that were most important to you in purchasing *Fleurs des Lettres*, what would they be?
- If you were inviting a friend to read and purchase *Fleurs des Lettres*, what would you say?
- Think back over the past years of reading *Fleurs des Lettres*. What went particularly well? What needs improvement?

Additional and follow up questions were certainly raised to encourage readers to share their experiences during the interviews. Further details of data analysis and interpretation pinpointing on “challenges” and “strategies” are provided in the following section.



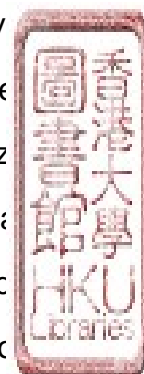
5. Observation Outcomes

Launched in April 2006, *Fleurs des Lettres* is now one of the most widely appealing literary magazines in Hong Kong, which sells more than 1,100 copies every issue in average. According to the discussion with Hung, the mission of the magazine was set at the beginning as “Rooting the Local, Exploring the World” (立足本地，放眼世界). It aimed to cast away from the rigid form of local literary magazines to show how youthful, vivid and diversified a literary magazine could be. To achieve this goal, it requires not only the continuous effort by the group but also the support from the government. Yet, the operation situation is not optimistic although good achievements in terms of circulation and readership were made in the past years (Cheng, 2010). Funding sources from the government remains limited and underdeveloped, which is a never-ending struggle that *Fleurs des Lettres* faces. Before describing and evaluating the recent attempts of *Fleurs des Lettres* to cope with the crisis, the researcher hopes to provide some evidence of the negative impact of inadequate government support, which serves as a force influencing its mode of production. Here are the observations regarding the main operating challenges based on the analysis on secondary sources and the discussions with Hung of *Fleurs des Lettres*:

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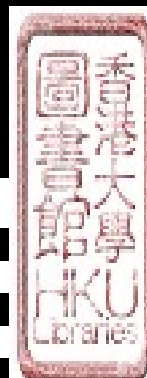
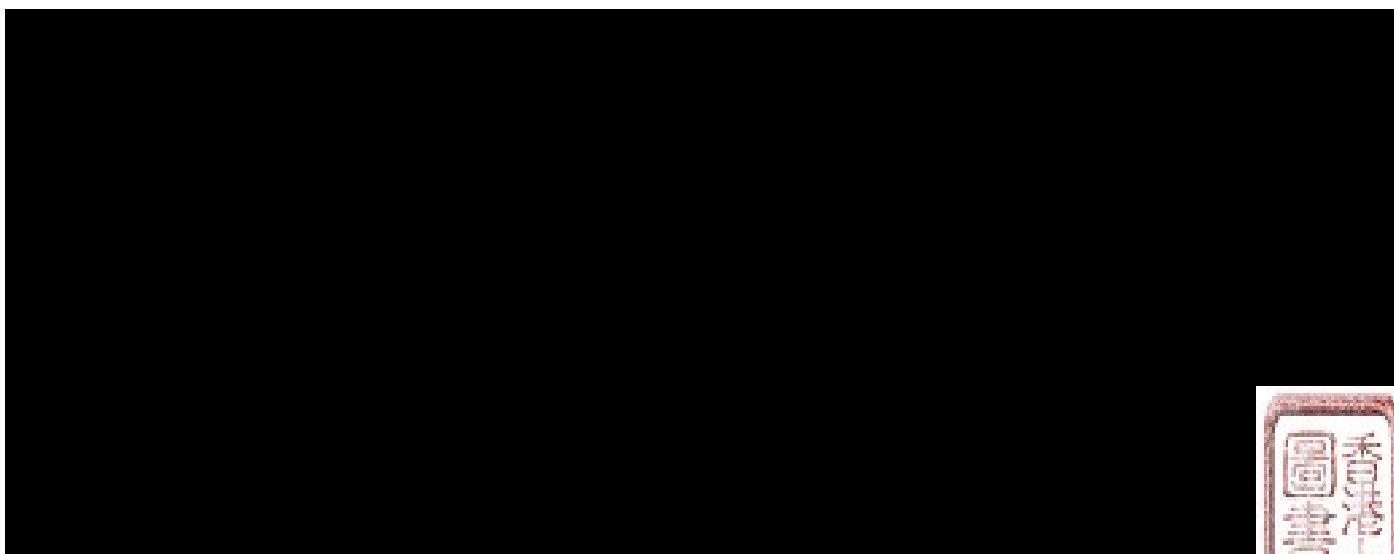
5.1 Small business is indeed a huge problem to be solved

Hong Kong Arts Development Council (HKADC), the statutory funding body, plays a leading role in the promotion and support of arts development in Hong Kong. It is responsible to provide funding support for various arts groups and nurtures their professional development. Similar to other small arts groups, HKADC is the primary funding source for *Fleurs des Lettres*. However, the group is worried about its survival because the funding from HKADC is usually limited, and is varied from year to year. Currently, the Council offers a sponsorship programme, namely Literary Arts Magazine Scheme, for literary groups who qualify after evaluation. After filling out forms and writing up reports, literary groups have to wait for several months to get the funding, so as to maintain and support the daily operation. Yet, the case of *Fleurs des Lettres* shows that the funding remains erratic and inadequate. As stated in the annual reports of



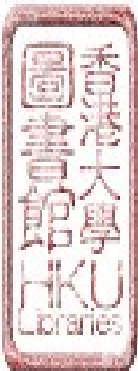
HKADC, the Council received the annual funding of more than HK\$90 million from the Home Affairs Bureau per year but there was just less than 3.3% of the appropriation allocated to literary arts, with less than HK\$3 million shared by a number of grant recipients (HKADC, 2011; 2012; 2013; 2014). *Fleurs des Lettres*, as one of the grant recipients, has received range from HK\$0.35-0.7 million annual funding per year, in which the resources available to plan for long term sustainability have been severely limited (Fleurs des Lettres, 2010). According to Hung, the fixed costs were over HK\$0.7 million in the past three years so the funding provided by HKADC under the Literary Arts Magazine Scheme can just barely cover the fixed costs that involve rent, salary of employees, author's remuneration, and other editing and publishing related expenses. Thus, the group is financially depending and cannot operate without the support of HKADC; meanwhile, it has to search for other sources of income to finance their work.

Indeed, other funding supports under different schemes offered by HKADC were also granted for *Fleurs des Lettres* as shown in Table 1. These schemes, however, either consider funding support on a case by case basis, or provide relatively small amount of funding, which could not offer long running support of production and distribution of literary groups to acquire sustainability.



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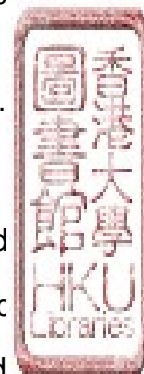


5.2 Business planning becomes a core part of literary magazine publishing

Discussions with Hung who is responsible to develop strategies to build more audiences for the magazine tend to acknowledge the importance of creativity and the need for a business plan. In contrast, most of the literary magazines in Hong Kong are unable to develop audiences or profit from the market because they are being obstructed by their inheritance of the traditional concept of literary magazine publishing, in which they focus on elite literature with boring design that was totally unsuited to survival in the current market place. From the perspective of *Fleurs des Lettres*, the inadequate government support is an external factor that is totally beyond the group's control. To avoid being dragged down, the group has to partially rely on its own effort to adapt quickly to the challenges. With the limited ability to compete on price, the group focuses on the product/service diversification to get more exposure to achieve competitive advantage (Hoskins et al., 2004; Hesmondhalgh, 2013). Since the year 2010, *Fleurs des Lettres* has adopted various strategies to develop audiences and improve its subscription base to cope with the reduction of funding from HKADC. The changes, especially the multi-disciplinary works to connect literature with performance, social culture and other art forms, and the adoption of a new format and design since July 2013, have undoubtedly made the magazine more reader-friendly and given it a valuable niche in the cultural market. Listed below are some of the programmes organized by *Fleurs des Lettres* in recent years:

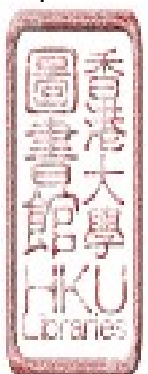
- Literature in the Dark 文學寫生：盲遊校園 (2015)
- Literature Theatre 文學劇場 (2015)
- Running Man in Literature 文學 Running Man (2015)
- In-Situ Art Project 生活現場藝術計劃展覽 (2014)
- Arts Education & Promotion - School Performances 在雲上播種-寫作教育培訓工作坊 (2012)
- Literary camp - Writing in Nature 字在山水「筆可能」文學營 (2011)
- Get It Write! Education Programme “筆可能”寫作坊, co-organized with the Robert H. N. Family Foundation (2011)

The programmes listed above have one thing in common: they are organized collaboration with other arts groups and various local institutes. Although this kind collaboration between *Fleurs des Lettres* and its partners began as a piecemeal and

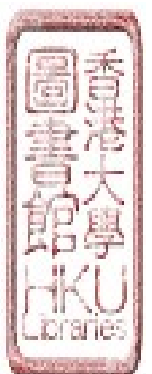


occasional practice, as admitted by Hung that in the initial stage these collaborations have an inconsistent appearance with a pilot nature, it gradually became much more regular and such collaboration also became a strategy for surviving and thriving in the face of cultural market place adversity. When looking at the recent transformation of *Fleurs des Lettres*, producing a variety of programmes in collaboration with partners is indeed a major strategy for development, which is described by Hesmondhalgh as a way to negotiate with the risk from the market. The group is attempting to pay extra effort in converting its creative ideas into literary writing programmes and other promotional events in order to gain more readers and subscribers.

With the inadequate funding support from HKADC, *Fleurs des Lettres* is being forced to transform itself into a cultural enterprise working to enhance the ability of self-sufficiency. In view of the increased challenges in the past years, collaborative programmes between *Fleurs des Lettres* and its partners have become a means to help the group to alleviate the problems of funding shortage while opening up new opportunities for audience building and literary programme experiment. By not just focusing on publishing, as we can see its attempt in organizing the above programmes, the group makes use of their own cultural background and connections to provide and diversify their cultural services to client groups in order to make the group stronger to suit the new condition. A more professional and sophisticated approach in running a literary group can be identified, in which *Fleurs des Lettres* routinized the collaboration with its partners to develop more audiences for the magazine with a view to planning for a relatively long term development. According to Hung, with the increased emphasis on collaborative works, the operating scale of the group is slightly increased, but arguably not as significant a funding source as the revenue gained remains limited, and the group is still financially depending to : cannot operate without HKADC. Achieving good results in terms of readership through collaborative works is actually a prerequisite to bargain with HKADC for a more stable : sufficient financial support in the coming years. Clearly, *Fleurs des Lettres* is still unable to swim in the sea of open business without government support. How effective will creative ideas and strategies be in sustaining *Fleurs des Lettres* in the cultural market place and in saving it from extinction? What influence readers' decision in purchasing



Fleurs des Lettres? Much seems to depend on readers' perceptions of the magazine and its programmes. The following section will discuss the views of readers of *Fleurs des Lettres* and their demands.



6. Interviews and Data Analysis

Fleurs des Lettres operates in a challenging environment where literary magazines readers form a very difficult “moving target” – limited readership, difficult to define and characterize, less and even no loyalty towards the magazine, and often wanting latest and diversified things from their product consumption. Following the analysis of Hall (1993) and Thorsby (2010) on audience and audience building, it is expected to gain some insights in understanding how the group should be transformed by investigating the demand of audience. To delineate audience perception towards *Fleurs des Lettres* as well as understanding their demands, focus group interviews were used to collect readers’ data. The result of interviews underline the wide range of reasons that readers have for reading and buying *Fleurs des Lettres* which differ from person to person within each of the individual point of view and cultural pursuit. The main drivers that are most important to readers in reading and buying *Fleurs des Lettres* are summarized from the interviews as follows:

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Thinking about your purchases on <i>Fleurs des Lettres</i> , please look at the following statements and indicate how much you agree / disagree with them (Please use the scale where 5=strongly agree and 1=strongly disagree)	Average rating
I buy <i>Fleurs des Lettres</i> because of the price	1.46
I buy <i>Fleurs des Lettres</i> because of its reputation	3.38
I buy <i>Fleurs des Lettres</i> because of its content	4.38
I buy <i>Fleurs des Lettres</i> because of its aesthetic appeal	4.30
I buy <i>Fleurs des Lettres</i> because it can keep me up to date with HK literature and writers	2.61

Base: All participants of focus group interviews

In the focus groups, participants spoke more often in support of the content of *Fleurs des Lettres* saying that it is usually creative and is always the guarantee of high quality, which is a major motivating force influencing them to pay attention to and thus drive them to consumption. Readers in the focus groups gave explanations of their reasons for purchasing the magazine:

“I think Fleurs des Lettres is trying to capture a certain kind of energy, liveliness, fun and worry of Hong Kong. I can see a close relationship between its content and the city...it becomes an important factor pushing me to buy the magazine” (Appendix 3, p.xii-xiii)



"I am a loyal reader of Hong Kong literature, I buy every issue of every literary magazine...[when compared to others] the content of Fleurs des Lettres must be the most youthful and lively" (Appendix 1, p.iii)

"I started to read Fleurs des Lettres after the Umbrella Movement last year...there was an issue mainly focusing on the movement, and since then, I pay more attention to the magazine...I appreciate their effort in connecting literature to not only cultural issues, but also social affairs and political issues" (Appendix 1, p.iii)

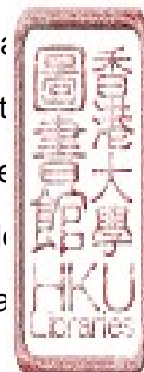
Certainly the content of the magazine is a significant influence on the purchasing behavior and participants were in agreement that the content of *Fleurs des Lettres* is in good quality. A number of readers in the focus groups also mentioned about the surprise nature of reading *Fleurs des Lettres* as a literary magazine, in which the design of the magazine is generally considered appealing among them:

"Fleurs des Lettres did not pay much effort in layout design in the past...but for now, if you look at the cover page of the magazine, you would be able to tell the difference...Fleurs des Lettres is definitely the best designed literary magazine in Hong Kong currently" (Appendix 2, p.ix)

"Even if I don't have time to read through all the pages of an issue, I will still buy Fleurs des Lettres for collection purpose [because of the aesthetic appeal of the magazine]" (Appendix 1, p.iv)

"I am not loyal to Fleurs des Lettres, I won't buy every issue of it...[but] because of my occupation, I buy and read a lot of cultural magazines of Taiwan, Hong Kong and Mainland, I would buy a magazine based on what's on the cover, and how the cover is designed...I think Fleurs des Lettres always does well" (Appendix 1, p.i)

It is clear from the interviews that a significant proportion of readers purchase *Fleurs des Lettres* because of its content and aesthetic appeal. When asked about the role of price in influencing their purchases, all of the respondents agree that price is not a matter of concern as many see *"buying Fleurs des Lettres is a kind of ethical consumption"*, helping it to overcome the situation of having limited resources. One respondent said that he would still buy *Fleurs des Lettres* if the price is raised to HK\$100 per issue, it is because a higher selling price implies that the magazine is in serious financial difficulties, so he would show a higher degree of support to prevent it from extinction. When this respondent made such comment, other participants in that group nodded in agreement. To further understand the readers' consumption behaviors in a more in depth manner, the interview also zoom in specifically on the pattern of buying *Fleurs des Lettres* and readers' perceptions of the magazine based on their past reading experiences. The below table



gives us some overall shape as to how readers purchase *Fleurs des Lettres*, with there being a significant hard core of occasional purchasers:

Which of the following statements most accurately describe your purchasing habit on <i>Fleurs des Lettres</i> ?	%
I buy every issue of <i>Fleurs des Lettres</i>	8%
I always buy <i>Fleurs des Lettres</i> , but I won't buy every issue	16%
I sometimes buy <i>Fleurs des Lettres</i> dependent on what grabs my attention	46%
I seldom buy <i>Fleurs des Lettres</i> , I tend to read it dependent on what grabs my attention	30%

Base: All participants of focus group interviews

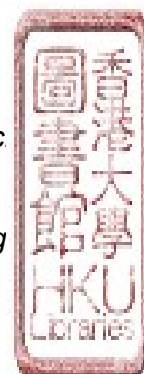
The focus group interviews show that a majority of respondents are occasional purchasers of *Fleurs des Lettres*. Many of them said they are not loyal readers but are interested in reading famous writers' works that published in the magazine, and the feature articles that addresses the various aspects of Hong Kong especially the "societal related content". The researcher probed for more description and concrete example of "societal related content" in the interviews, many of the respondents could not provide a concrete example, and the most common answer the researcher got was "Umbrella Movement". In this aspect, the researcher argues that readers' purchases depend heavily on their personal tastes and preferences, and with due consideration to the emerging issues of the society. Indeed, readers did not show a concrete desire to the magazine's content, which is described as an uncertain demand by Hesmondhalgh (2013). To further investigate readers' perceptions towards the magazine, participants were asked to describe *Fleurs des Lettres* and its strong points based on their reading experiences. Respondents describe their thoughts on the strong points of the magazine as "the magazine is creative so reading it is always inspiring" (Appendix 3, p.xiii), followed by "the magazine has changed my perception towards Hong Kong literature" (Appendix 2, p.ix).

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Other common strong points mentioned by respondents were:

"Fleurs des Lettres has turned highbrow literary art into something new and different...which always easy to be read and understood" (Appendix 3, p.xiii)

"It is extremely difficult to make local literary art become interesting...with the beautifully design pages, Fleurs des Lettres has demonstrated the best combination of literary art and visual" (Appendix 1, p.iv)



“Fleurs des Lettres is a youthful magazine: in layout, content and spirit...with a repositioned target audience of young adults and new generations...it can still uphold the spirit of literary art promotion and not going with the trend that promotes lifestyle and consumption” (Appendix 1, p.iii)

“Fleurs des Lettres is the only local literary magazine that attracts my attention...I think it is an embracing magazine welcoming different perspectives and targeting various groups of readers...it is indispensable in the promotion of local literature” (Appendix 1, p.iii)

It can be summarized that a significant proportion of readers in the interviews hold a positive view about the content and the motive of the magazine as well as their design of each issue. The fact that these strong points of the magazine are appealing to readers, and are repeatedly stated in the interviews as important driving forces in motivating them to read and purchase the magazine. Yet, as mentioned in the previous section, the group is currently engaging in transformation efforts to develop more audiences for the magazine and for literary art. For this reason, there is a need to explore readers' perceptions on these transformation efforts, i.e. cross-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary works, writing workshops as well as other literary promotion events. The analysis below provides some more detailed insights into the perceptions as well as their willingness to participate in these programmes of *Fleurs des Lettres*:

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Cross-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary works are organized in collaboration of *Fleurs des Lettres* and its partners in the past few years, which become one of the transformation strategies that the group is currently engaging in. The researcher picked two programmes of this category as examples to ask for respondents' preferences and willingness to participate in, namely Literature Theatre and Literary Exhibition. These programmes are commonly considered to be conducive in expanding reader base by the respondents. However, most of the respondents indicated that their participation action to take would depend on time and place:

“Time is the most important thing to consider...I will drop in if work and time allows” (Appendix p.vi)

“There are just a few exhibitions related to local literary art, I am interested in it” (Appendix p.xiv)

“Although I prefer reading literature than watching dramas, I still think literature theatre is a sr way to promote literary art... if people are looking for a relaxing break in Hong Kong, I would most will choose watching dramas rather than reading books [because of the time pressed na of Hongkongers]” (Appendix 1, p.vii)



“Performance will definitely make literary art more interesting, and they can help to promote literature because audiences can better understand a text [by visualizing it] through a performance...it must be a promotion strategy of literature” (Appendix 1, p.vii)

Writing workshops remain more of a student-orientated nature. Respondents generally showed a lower level of motivation in participating in the workshops, saying that they are designed for teachers and students. The researcher sees the educational purposes have limited the range of participants that need clarification and diversification, and therefore help to build more audiences from different age groups with various backgrounds. A comment was provided by a respondent saying *“writing workshops are extra-curricular activities that organized for students who want to advance their writing skills to the next level” (Appendix 2, p.x)*. Other comments raised by respondents were:

“I don’t need to write perfect Chinese in my daily life...I just enjoy reading and I’m not interested in any kinds of writing workshops” (Appendix 2, p.x)

“Writing is a personal activity, and my personal writing is not a homework that I don’t need to emphasize on rhetoric or mode of thinking...I think I am not interested in it unless the facilitator is a very famous writer” (Appendix 1, p.vi)

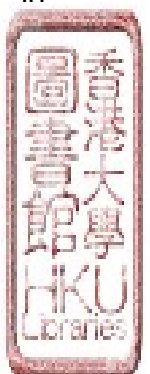
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“I would say I have some interests in joining these workshops, but it depends on a number of factors: who is the facilitator, what is the theme, would there be any interactions with people from the regional areas...I have to consider various factors [for joining], maybe I am not that interested” (Appendix 2, p.x)

Literary promotion events are difficult to be distinguished from the above categories because all kinds of activities are in fact organized with a view to promoting literary art and the magazine. To differentiate from the above, here in this category the researcher defines literary promotion events as activities without strong educational purposes that are also more entertaining and less informative in nature. The researcher aimed to facilitate respondents understanding to the creative efforts *Fleurs des Lettres* has paid to organize some innovative activities. Literature in the Dark and Running Man in Literature were used as examples to collect respondents’ views:

“They sound really innovative and interesting...I really look forward to participating in th programmes, and I am sure many people especially teenagers will be fascinated by th (Appendix 2, p.x)

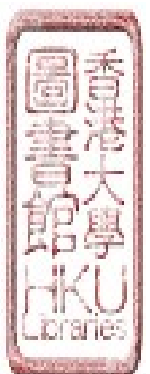
“Both are very interesting to me, I will participate in these programmes if time allows” (Appendix 2, p.vii)



“They are really special to me and I really want to know how these programmes work [though I am not interested in them]...I think the combination of literature and creativity can absolutely become an effective means in promoting the magazine to the public” (Appendix 3, p.xv)

All the above transformation efforts were clear signs of the evolution as an art group. *Fleurs des Lettres* has made contributions in forming a new and more embracing literary magazine market, in which creativity principle took precedence in organizing these programmes. Yet, to rely solely on its own effort, *Fleurs des Lettres* is definitely unable to sustain in the cultural market place. This is put down to two extremely important factors determining its survival – government support and audience participation. Like other government funded literary groups, the attractiveness of *Fleurs des Lettres* is limited given the small market size resulting in lower participation levels. However, by referring to the interviews conducted, we can see that the small market size does not mean readers are not interested in the literary programmes nor the strategies are ineffective in developing more audiences. Respondents generally have positively views on the group and its promotional programmes though time is repeated stated as an important factor influencing their participation. In the interviews, the same level of acceptance on literary programmes of *Fleurs des Lettres* can also be found among readers who have participated before and those who have not; readers generally welcome the transformation efforts.

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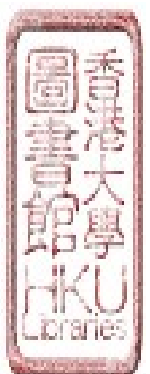
7. Conclusion: A Gear Wheel in the Development of Arts and Culture

Hong Kong's literary circle is filled with worries about the future. Yet, perhaps some of the views are too pessimistic, at least for *Fleurs des Lettres* that it is still bravely struggling to adapt to the ever-changing cultural environment. After its run-in with the government, and after rounds of efforts in repositioning the magazine and the group, *Fleurs des Lettres* has apparently found an acceptable path to promote literary art and develop more audiences so as to support its development. These efforts are reflected on the new format and design of the magazine, also on the various educational and promotional programmes. All the transformation strategies have made literature become more enjoyable, accessible and even more marketable that appeal to a broader readership. One might conclude, therefore, that an effective business model is adopted by *Fleurs des Lettres* which may help the group on its path to become financially independent. The thought may appear true to the government, but it is definitely a delusion in the eyes of literary groups. Worries about sustainability issues centered around a lack of financial resources, and the promotional programmes indeed cannot replace the funding of HKADC to support the development of literary groups. Relying on their own efforts, from the case of *Fleurs des Lettres*, tells us a fact that sufficient income is not guaranteed. Literary magazines are not money making in nature because the content cannot cater to mainstream readers who have commercial tastes. Thus, the prospects for sustainability, all the time, depend crucially on the support from the government. The route to running a literary magazine in Hong Kong is closely tied with the government's support unless a strong private sponsorship is established with a long term support.

In order to achieve sustainability, it is recommended to introduce more innovation to promote greater diversity and reach (Hesmondhalgh, 2013). This makes the whole process seem very businesslike, but achieving sustainability in Hong Kong requires proactive and diversified effort. With the growing numbers of innovative programmes and a more reader-friendly content, how to make the programmes increase readership of literary magazines of Hong Kong is an issue that warrants attention and discussion.

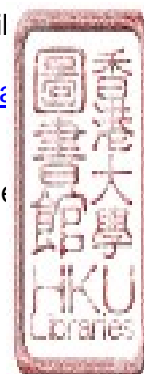


As is clear from this paper, *Fleurs des Lettres* continues to confront difficult situations due to the current funding system of HKADC, and it finds no easy solutions to the problems. The transformation efforts would only bring about a temporary solution instead of getting at the root. Yet, what literary groups shall be grateful for is that the results of interviews revealed that readers positively perceive the creative strategies implemented in repositioning a literary magazine. This shows that one possible direction of reinvention for literary groups is to organize more creative, cross-sector collaboration programmes appealing to the public to cultivate a greater interest towards literary art, so some of these audience members may be attracted to pay more attention to literary magazines. As such, literary groups are a gear wheel that can be used in arts development by engaging with other cultural sectors.



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