

香港劇場年鑑 2016

舞蹈 · 戲曲 · 戲劇

HONG
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一個香港三個戲劇獎項，是太多？還是太少？

Pianda

二〇一六至二〇一七年度，之於香港戲劇歷史，應是一個重要年份。這個年度，「IATC (HK) 劇評人獎」正式運作，而歷史最悠久的戲劇獎項「香港舞台劇獎」宣佈修改評審章則，從此，連同有約十年歷史的「香港小劇場獎」，香港的戲劇評論和專業鑑賞將進入一個新時代。本文先了解三獎誕生的來龍去脈，再分析各獎項的發起人或資深持份者的意見。

(一) 三獎簡史

• 香港舞台劇獎

香港舞台劇獎，由香港戲劇協會（下稱「戲協」）創辦，第一屆於一九九二年舉行，頒發十多個獎項，至第二十一屆（二〇一二年），香港舞台劇獎的常設獎項大抵確立，涵蓋了戲劇製作台前幕後不同的範疇。

香港舞台劇獎屬「同業選舉」，以業內評審標準總結每年香港戲劇界的成績，表揚在各個範疇有出色表現的戲劇工作者，推動香港戲劇發展。¹

• 香港小劇場獎

傳媒人曲飛，深感媒體和業界對小劇場的注視不足，二〇〇六年毅然自資創辦「香港小劇場獎」，並於二〇〇九年舉行第一屆頒獎禮，頒發最佳劇本、最佳導演、最佳女主

角、最佳男主角等合共八個獎項，旨在「推動香港戲劇運動，支持香港藝術團體在本地小劇場裡發表戲劇作品」。²

• IATC (HK) 劇評人獎

國際演藝評論家協會（香港分會），下稱IATC (HK)，於二〇一六年三月公佈「IATC (HK) 劇評人獎」正式創立，旨在「表揚年度本地優秀作品，促進劇評人之間的交流，同時透過劇評人視野，為香港劇場書寫更具前瞻性的定義」，首屆頒獎禮於二〇一七年舉行，頒發獎項包括：年度演出獎、年度劇本／編劇獎、年度導演獎等合共五個獎項。³

(二) 參選準則

• 香港舞台劇獎

每年一月一日至十二月三十一日，在香港公演三場或以上的中文足本劇作。演出單位須為本地註冊團體，而三場演出必須公開售票，每場觀眾席不少於二百人。符合上述資格的劇目，如欲參選，須公演前向香港戲劇協會報名，並為評審提供一定數量的免費正場門票。⁴

• 香港小劇場獎

每年四月一日至翌年三月三十一日，在香港小劇場公演的中、英文足本劇作，均自動納

入候選劇目。沒有硬性規定，但歡迎演出單位為評審提供免費正場門票。小劇場獎指定演出場地：康樂及文化事務署管轄的所有文娛廳、展覽廳和黑盒劇場、牛棚藝術村小劇場（前進進牛棚劇場）、藝穗會劇場、藝術中心麥高利小劇場、香港演藝學院實驗劇場、香港話劇團黑盒劇場、賽馬會創意藝術中心黑盒劇場、各藝團排練場地等。⁵

• IATC (HK) 劇評人獎

每年一月一日至十二月三十一日期間，在香港發表的本地戲劇作品 / 計劃，作品 / 計劃只要具備足夠戲劇元素，即被納入為評選對象。因此，音樂劇、音樂劇場、多媒體劇場、互動劇場、博物館劇場，於非正規劇場、戶外場地、社區的演出，無論是免費演出、戲劇計劃、戲劇活動、研究，都屬於評選範疇。而評審觀劇門票開支可向IATC (HK) 實報實銷。⁶

(三) 評審機制

• 香港舞台劇獎

至少六十人的評審團，全部為三十五歲以上、從事與戲劇相關有薪工作不少於十五年的劇協會員，或團體會員之會員或僱員，報名後經遴選成為委員。評審每年須最少觀看三十六齣參選劇目，方可參與提名工作，連續兩年沒有提名會失去評審資格。每個獎項設三個提名名額，每個參選劇作必須有五票或以上提名票才能角逐提名。提名公佈後，由評審團投票選出各個獎項、執業會計師點票，在頒獎禮即場揭曉。⁷

• 香港小劇場獎

評審由獎項創辦人邀請。以二〇一六至二〇一七年度一屆評審為例，評審團包括召集人一共十三人，大部分是資深劇評人。評審機制沒有規限評審的觀劇數量，兩年沒提名便

1. 「香港舞台劇獎評審章則」（最後修訂日期2017年1月9日）：

<http://www.hongkongdrama.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/HK-Drama-Awards-Regulation-2017.pdf>

2. 「香港小劇場獎資料庫」：<http://www.101arts.net/viewArticleList.php?type=hktl>

3. 〈國際演藝評論家協會（香港分會）主辦「IATC(HK)劇評人獎」2016〉：http://www.iatc.com.hk/?a=group&id=news&doc_id=79124

4. 同註1。

5. 同註2。

6. 同註3。

7. 同註1。

不再留任。每個劇作得到兩票提名票即可角逐提名。提名公佈後，由評審團投票選出各個獎項，由執業會計師點票後，至頒獎禮即場揭曉。⁸

• IATC (HK) 劇評人獎

十二人評審團，大部分是IATC (HK) 會員。評審機制沒有規限評審的觀劇數量。評審團於每年年中，就上半年劇作進行內部首輪討論。翌年年初，再就全年劇作進第二輪討論，並投票選出得獎者及作品。討論過程會保留錄音和文字紀錄，並作公開發表。⁹

(四) 優勢和局限

• 香港舞台劇獎

同業選舉，反映業界標準。目前是三獎之中，唯一為評審設下觀劇數量指標的獎項，亦是三個獎項之中評審數目最多的。惟二〇一六年改制後，製作單位須報名才成為參選劇目，此舉令候選劇目大減。

• 香港小劇場獎

因獎項屬私人性質，認受性要靠時間建立。以場地決定參選資格，非指定場地的演出，無論是否小劇場演出，亦不納入候選劇目，

難免有漏網之魚。好處是針對小型製作，提供一個交流和推廣平台。

• IATC (HK) 劇評人獎

強調由劇評人的觀點而非業界標準出發，提供另一個評審角度，打破昔日大眾將二獎視為「大場獎」和「細場獎」的刻板觀念。此獎亦提醒各界人士戲劇不應被場地或類型所局限，就場地和劇目而言，IATC (HK) 劇評人獎的覆蓋範圍都比另外兩個獎項廣泛。然而，覆蓋範圍雖然廣泛，但評審數目卻是三獎之中最少的，只有十二位。

(五) 持份者意見

• 張可堅：立竿見影？言之尚早

香港戲劇協會副會長張可堅，九十年代中期開始參與香港舞台劇獎的籌劃工作。張可堅表示：「多些不同類型的戲劇獎項，百花齊放是好事，吸引更多人留意香港戲劇，獎項亦起到互相鞭策的作用。」談到二〇一六年改制的理由，他說劇協多年來一直有因應戲劇界的發展修訂章則，「今次改制，一是由於近年香港戲劇界有不少新劇團組成，演出的數目多了，二是有劇團反映他們的製作很少評審觀看。」改制的客觀效果是，評審需

8. 〈執業會計師公布「第九屆香港小劇場獎」候選名單〉：<http://www.101arts.net/viewArticle.php?type=artsnews&id=2348>

9. 同註 3。



三位受訪者：張可堅、曲飛、張秉權 (左至右)

照片由作者提供



「IATC (HK) 劇評人獎」2016頒獎暨討論會
攝影：Hong Yi-pok (Eric)

要看更多參選劇目，而參選劇目亦因報名機制而大幅下調，評審看過的參選劇目比例，和以往相比大幅提高。以改制第一年為例，參選劇目七十多齣，評審觀劇下限是三十六齣，這表示，評審理應看了最少一半參選劇目。

張可堅坦言：「改制在劇協內引起了少討論，戲劇有分旺淡季，秋冬時節是旺季，人人都在忙自己的製作，抽不到時間去看戲。又因為有旺淡季。旺季時可能同一個周末有五、六個戲上演，很難全部都看。結果，可能造成一個客觀現象，就是活躍的戲劇工作者不夠時間每年看夠三十六齣戲，而看夠的人可能是在戲劇界沒那麼活躍的。這有機會造成業內不那麼活躍的一群去評斷業內較活躍一群的偏頗現象。」

作為一個同業相互砥礪、切磋的獎項，劇協須處理會員的憂慮，「無完美的獎項，要怎樣走到平衡，之後我們再開會商討。改制頭一年，仍有很多方面有改善空間。」

• 曲飛：同行四分一世紀

香港小劇場獎創辦人暨召集人曲飛，談到香港戲劇獎項再添一員，他亦認為「百花齊放是好事」。他再次強調：「香港舞台劇獎和香港小劇場獎雖然客觀上起了分工的作用，但香港小劇場獎創立的本意，並非要和香港舞台劇場分工，而是要在香港推動具『小劇場精神』的創作。」

由於獎項是私人性質，無論在財政和行政上，曲飛都擁有相當大的自由度，「推動一種文化需要二十至二十五年的時間，小劇場獎剛過了十個年頭，還是在前期階段。辦這個獎的目的，是希望好的作品能讓更多人留意到。」曲飛說。

• 張秉權：推動戲劇和劇評發展

IATC (HK) 劇評人獎，是在國際演藝評論家協會（香港分會）名下創立的新戲劇獎項，大眾對此獎項有期望亦有好奇。香港舞台劇獎強調同業選舉的性質，劇評人獎創辦人之一張秉權表示：「劇評人獎著眼推動戲劇往更卓越的方向發展。而劇評人參與獎項的討論，認真思考說出的一番道理，亦令到劇評人更嚴肅處理自己的劇評，因此推動的發展是雙向的。」

IATC (HK) 劇評人獎，以劇評人的信譽、IATC (HK) 頭銜為信心基礎，然而始終是新設獎項，大眾雖然對獎項有期望，亦有不少疑問，例如，如何界定誰是劇評人？不為評審設看戲下限，十二位評審興趣各異，會不會出現有些戲大多數評審都沒看過而難以討論的情況問題？

關於這一連串疑問，張秉權說：「劇評人之所以為劇評人，一定要看相當數量的演出才能稱之為劇評人。但看戲數量不是重點，重



第二十五屆香港舞台劇獎
照片提供：香港戲劇協會



第九屆香港小劇場獎
照片提供：101arts.net 藝術新聞網

點是劇評人的識見去提名去選擇去討論。」

至於如何定義劇評人，張秉權續說：「不少劇評人都有其他身分，例如教師、劇場工作者、行政人員。但無論他們擁有甚麼身分都好，都擁有戲劇知識。我們要求劇評人有前瞻性，一是時間維度的前瞻性，二是要有廣闊視野，對世界對華人社會對香港之間的戲劇怎樣呼應、怎樣定位。」

(六) 香港需要幾多個戲劇獎項？

無論香港有幾個戲劇獎項都好，我相信業界和大眾需要的都是有認受性的獎項。至於，怎樣才算有認受性，首先評審的資格絕對是關鍵考慮。

關於對評審資格的要求，香港舞台劇獎最清晰。有志參與者，經由社會聲望及業界公信力的持份者組成的評審甄選委員會選出，任期四年。香港舞台劇獎評審的代表性或公信力，與另外兩個獎項相比，是最容易理解的。

香港小劇場獎的十二人評審團，全部由獎項創辦人暨召集人曲飛邀請，規章上無清楚列明評審篩選標準。二〇一六至二〇一七年度的評審為丁家湘、佛琳、張振中、張秉權、小西、余振球、肥力、葉運強、陳國慧、陳桂芬、陳瑋鑫、陳麗芬，連同召集人組成十三人的評審

團。名單當中，絕大部分都是資深劇評人和劇場工作者，觀劇經驗豐富。然而，有一點需要留意的，到底這些評審有沒有根據曲飛追求的、源於十八世紀法國的「小劇場精神」評審作品，作為觀眾難以得悉。不過，最能代表香港主流戲劇的「香港話劇團」作品也是香港小劇場獎的提名及得獎常客，其中一個極端例子是，《最後晚餐》在第四屆（二〇一一至二〇一二）便獲頒最佳劇本、最佳男主角、最佳女主角、最佳整體演出四個獎項，而同屆的優秀男演員亦由邱廷輝憑香港話劇團的《盛勢》奪得。而該年只頒發八個獎項，亦沒有獎項由兩個作品或演員瓜分，表示該屆大團橫掃獎項的嚴重程度。

• 主流大團立足小劇場

要如何理解香港話劇團這主流大團和「小劇場精神」的關係？可以有幾個推測：一、抗衡主流的本地小劇場作品數量非常不足，以致因為用場地劃分的評審機制令大量主流作品獲得提名；二、是香港話劇團自身致力出品一些非主流、抗衡主流價值的作品；三、因獎項設計是場地決定入選劇目，而評審只要合乎資格者，便無拘是否主流團體、作品是否有對抗主流的精神，只是以戲論戲，劇本是否優秀、演員演出是否上乘。

• 雙料評審的局限

今年初才舉行第一屆頒獎禮的IATC（HK）劇評

人獎，其十二人的評審名單是小西、佛琳、盧偉力、曲飛、江藍、張秉權、陳國慧、肥力、陳瑋鑫、梁偉詩、鄧正健、家書，絕大部分是資深藝評人，不時於媒體發表評論文章。

對照一下香港小劇場獎的評審名單，二獎的評審當中有七人是雙料評審，重複比率逾百分之五十。張秉權、陳國慧、江藍、曲飛更是再身兼香港舞台劇獎評審的三料評審。

為此分別請教了張秉權和曲飛，二人都覺得雙料評審或三料評審並不是問題，因為評審會根據每個獎項的要求作出客觀的評審。話雖如此，從獎項和評審之間的關係觀之，客觀上並不構成問題。然而，從個人的生活觀之，一個人的品味是一種修養，不會因應獎項條件亦轉變，喜歡傳統敍事手法的，不會因為獎項變了而變為喜歡解構式敍事，因此相同的評審會推崇相同品味的作品，無論他是多麼按獎項規章辦事。不過，香港舞台劇獎因評審多達六十人，雙料或三料評審只佔一成左右，可視之為教育或評論界的聲音，較能消化相同評審相同品味的偏頗。

• 時間的繁縝兜

另一方面，每一位評審能撥出來觀劇的時間是有限度的，尤其香港並沒有全職劇評人或評審的工作，而IATC (HK) 劇評人獎和香港小劇場獎，都是不設報名機制，所有在香港公演的

合資格作品全部納入可提名範圍。假設一位評審一年只夠時間看五十齣作品，無論香港每年有二百個小劇場作品，或是五百個有戲劇元素的演出，評審都只能在他看到的五十個作品之中選擇，如此，假如一個人只做一個獎項的評審，理論上可以將全部觀賞劇目的時間傾注給單一個獎項的合資格作品，可以單一標準選取他認為當中最有實力的作品觀看。反過來說，對雙料或三料評審而言，選擇觀看合乎多於一個獎項候選資格的演出，是相對有效率的做法，尤其是香港舞台劇獎規定評審每年須觀賞不少於三十六齣的劇作，對評審而言是繁重的工作。

• 由三十六到無限

回到獎項認受性的討論上，既然三個獎項的評審都是受肯定的資深業界人士，要確立認受性的話，下一步要討論是評審團的覆蓋面，簡而言之就是觀劇種類和數量。

如果不跳出獎項的框架討論，三獎之中，香港舞台劇獎的覆蓋率應該是最高的。由於此獎有報名機制，評審可以選擇觀賞的劇目大幅減少，例如上年度報名劇本七十多齣，而評審按規定須觀看不少於三十六齣，比率約為百分之五十，加上評審團多達六十人，以人次計應是不少於2,160人次，數目相當可觀。而其餘兩獎均不設觀劇下限，而且評審人數分別只是香港舞台劇獎的五分一。並且兩個獎項都沒有公佈

評審的觀劇數字，難免令外界心生疑問。

• 範圍愈大責任愈大

在大眾心目中，評審應該比一般觀眾見多識廣，若然評審見多識廣卻觀劇不多，似乎難以服眾。香港小劇場獎始終屬私人性質，自主性較強，而且它是二十五年為周期的計劃。而IATC (HK) 劇評人獎，由國際演藝評論家協會（香港分會）創立，外界會以相對高的標準衡量。IATC (HK) 劇評人獎可納入的候選作品數量最多，涵蓋香港舞台劇獎和香港小劇場獎合資格的劇目，連二獎鞭長莫及的作品也包括其中，評審數目卻是三獎之中最少的。我絕對相信劇評人挑選入場劇目的眼光，但亦相信人手不足會導致漏網之魚。當漏網之魚出現，外界就會追問評審為何走漏眼，更進一步會推展出評審/劇評人是否合資格等連串的疑問。

我深信，無論評審有多專業，每位評審觀劇數目多寡，絕對會影響評審結果的認受性。當然可以看畢所有候選作品是最理想，不然看到一半或三分之二才算是可接受水平。當然，這又牽引出另一個問題，為何戲劇評審不能是一份受薪的工作？

• 門票由誰埋單？

據悉，有歷史悠久的本地劇團因無法負擔為香港舞台劇獎評審提供免費門票，而撤回參與二〇一七年度香港舞台劇獎的決定。連具知名度

的老牌劇團都無法負擔評審門票，何況寂寂無聞的小劇團？小劇團沒有周詳部署不會貿然報名，因為此舉需要財政和行政資源。這方面，IATC (HK) 劇評人獎的做法比較不會為劇團造成負擔，因為評審可向IATC (HK) 實報實銷評審門票。

目前三獎的評審工作都是義務性質，若連評審門票的錢也須自付，似乎是義務得過了頭。但舞台劇獎要劇團提供最多六十張評審免費門票，對許多小型劇團來說，財政負擔不輕。而最理想的做法是評審門票包括在各個獎項每年的經費預算之中，如IATC (HK) 劇評人獎般資助評審門票，但對香港舞台劇獎而言，每年支付最少2,160張門票絕對是龐大的經費壓力。

結語

就二〇一六至二〇一七年度而言，一個香港三個戲劇獎項並沒有覺得過多，而且三獎亦起互相補足的作用。三獎就如三面鏡子，相互對照，照出獎項之間的優勢和局限。誠如各位受訪者所言：百花齊放是好事。張可堅說得坦白：「劇場工作者都是普通人，得到他人肯定，總會覺得高興。」據「香港戲劇年鑑」和「香港劇場年鑑」資料，香港近年有逾五百個戲劇製作，認真評選的各個獎項，是一條又一條的基準線，鼓勵業界以此為座標，朝更好的戲劇世界進發。



Pianda

文化工作者。在世界待得愈久，愈確定最好看的風景就是人。文章散見於香港媒體。



One Hong Kong, Three Awards. Too many? Too few?

Pianda

Introduction

2016/2017 will go down in Hong Kong theatre history as an important year. In this year, the IATC (HK) Critics Award was inaugurated, whereas the oldest theatre award, the Hong Kong Drama Awards, announced that they had changed the criteria for competition. The two awards, together with the approximately decade old Hong Kong Theatre Libre, are propelling theatre criticism and professional appreciation in Hong Kong into a new era. This article describes the origins of these three awards, and analyses the opinions of the founders and experienced stakeholders of these awards.

I. A brief history of the three awards

Hong Kong Drama Awards

The Hong Kong Drama Awards was inaugurated by the Hong Kong Federation of Drama Societies. The first ceremony took place in 1992, with over 10 award categories. By the 21st awards ceremony (2012), the regular award categories of the Hong Kong Drama Awards were mostly established, encompassing different areas of theatre production both front and back stage. The Hong Kong Drama Awards is a “peer election”, concluding each year with the industry consensus on the achievements of

Hong Kong theatre, to celebrate outstanding theatre workers in different areas, and to push forward the development of Hong Kong theatre.¹

Hong Kong Theatre Libre

Media personality Kuh Fei felt deeply that small theatres were being neglected by the media and the industry. Therefore, in 2006 he self-funded the Hong Kong Theatre Libre. The first ceremony took place in 2009, with awards in eight categories including best script, best director, best actress, best actor; etc. for the purpose of “propelling the theatre movement in Hong Kong, and supporting Hong Kong artistic groups to put on work in local small theatres”.²

IATC (HK) Critics Awards

The International Association of Theatre Critics (Hong Kong), which will be referred to as IATC (HK), announced the establishment of the IATC (HK) Critics Awards in March 2016, with the mission of “celebrating excellent local productions annually, fostering exchange between critics, and, through the eyes of the critics, create a more forward looking definition for writing about theatre in Hong Kong”. The initial awards ceremony took place in 2017. The five categories include performance of the year, script/playwright of the year, director of the year, etc.³

2. Eligibility criteria

Hong Kong Drama Awards

Productions with a run of three or more shows, with a Chinese script, which are publicly performed in Hong Kong between 1 January and 31 December, are eligible. The company must be a locally registered organisation, and the three performances must have public ticket sales, with a venue audience capacity of at least 200 people. Applications for eligible productions must be submitted to the Hong Kong Federation of Drama Societies before the opening, and must provide a certain number of free tickets for the adjudicators.⁴

Hong Kong Theatre Libre

Both Chinese and English language plays performed in Hong Kong's small theatres between 1 April and 31 March of the following year are automatically eligible for this award. There are no concrete rules, but the award organiser welcomes the producer to provide

free tickets to the adjudicators. The Hong Kong Theatre Libre specifies venues: all cultural activities halls, exhibition galleries and black box theatres operated by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, the Cattle Depot Artist Village's studio theatre (On & On Cattle Depot Theatre), the Fringe Club, the Hong Kong Art Centre's McAulay Studio, the studio theatre in The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, HKRep Black Box, the Jockey Club Creative Arts Centre's Black Box Theatre, rehearsal spaces of theatre companies, etc.⁵

IATC (HK) Critics Awards

Local theatre productions/programmes, works/programmes that take place in Hong Kong between 1 January and 31 December each year are eligible as long as they possess sufficient dramatic elements. Therefore, musicals, music theatres, multimedia theatres, interactive theatres, museum theatres, performances in informal theatres and outdoor venues and community performances, irrespective

1. The Hong Kong Drama Awards Regulations: (last updated 9 January 2017): <http://www.hongkongdrama.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/HK-Drama-Awards-Regulation-2017.pdf>

2. The Hong Kong Theatre Libre Database: <http://www.101arts.net/viewArticleList.php?type=hktl>

3. International Association of Theatre Critics (Hong Kong) hosts the "IATC(HK) Critics Awards 2016": http://www.iatc.com.hk/?a=group&id=news&doc_id=79124

4. Ibid. 1.

5. Ibid. 2.

of whether they are free, theatre schemes, activities or research, are all eligible. Expenses incurred while adjudicating shows can be claimed back from IATC (HK).⁶

3. The adjudicating mechanism

Hong Kong Drama Awards

At least 60 adjudicators, all of whom are age 35 or above, who must be members of the Hong Kong Federation of Drama Societies, or members or employees of member organisations, and who have engaged in theatre related paid work for not less than 15 years, are selected to become members after registration. The adjudicators must watch at least 36 entries each year before they can nominate productions. They will lose their eligibility if they go two years without a nomination. There should be three nominations for each award category, and each participating production must have five or more nominations to compete. After the nominations are announced, the adjudicators vote in each award category, the votes are counted by chartered accountants, and the results revealed at the awards ceremony.⁷

6. Ibid. 3.

7. Ibid. 1.

8. Chartered accountants announce 'The 9th Hong Kong Theatre Libre's shortlist': <http://www.101arts.net/viewArticle.php?type=artsnews&id=2348>

Hong Kong Theatre Libre

The adjudicators are appointed by the award founder. Taking 2016/2017 as an example, the adjudicators (including the founder) totalled 13, most of whom are senior theatre critics. There is no requirement as to the number of shows that are to be viewed. Those who have not made a nomination in two years are no longer retained. To be nominated, a production needs two votes. After the nomination is announced, the adjudicators will vote on all the awards, which will be announced by chartered accountants after the votes have been counted.⁸

IATC (HK) Critics Awards

There are 12 adjudicators, most of whom are IATC (HK) members. The adjudicating mechanism does not prescribe the number of productions to be evaluated. In the summer, the adjudicators hold internal first round discussions about the productions that have been on during the first half of the year. At the beginning of the following year, the second round of discussions take place which encompass the entire output of the previous year.



Three interviewees: Dominic Cheung, Kuh Fei and Cheung Ping-kuen (from left to right)
Photo courtesy: Pianda



IATC(HK) Critics Awards 2016 awards ceremony and discussion
Photo: Hong Yi-pok (Eric)

They then vote on the winners. The discussions are recorded, transcribed and made public.⁹

4. Strengths and limitations

Hong Kong Drama Awards

It is an election by the industry, reflecting industry standards. Currently, among the three awards, it is the only one which sets a minimum target for the number of productions viewed, and it is also the one with the highest number of adjudicators. However, after the restructuring in 2016, producers must apply to be considered for the award, drastically reducing the number of potential candidates.

Hong Kong Theatre Libre

Due to the private nature of the award, credibility can only be established through time. The use of venue to determine eligibility inevitably means that those productions which take place in non-eligible venues, even if performed by small theatre companies, are not considered, which means that many fish slip the net. The advantage is that this targets small scale productions, and provides a platform for exchange and promotion.

IATC (HK) Critics Awards

It emphasises that the starting point is the critic's view and not industry standards. This provides another

lens through which to judge theatre, smashing the old and widely held stereotypes of the two awards as "big theatre awards" and "small theatre awards" respectively. This award also serves as a reminder to the wider public that theatre is not limited by venue or genre. In terms of venue and repertory, the Critics Awards ranges far wider than the other two. However, although coverage is broad, they have fewer adjudicators (12) than the other two awards.

5. Stakeholder comments

Dominic Cheung: Immediate efficacy? Still too early to say

Dominic Cheung, Vice President of the Hong Kong Federation of Drama Societies, took part in the initial planning of the Hong Kong Drama Awards in the mid-1990s. Cheung says, "The flourishing of different types of theatre awards is a good thing, since this attracts more attention to Hong Kong theatre. Moreover, the awards also play a role in spurring on one another." Turning to the reasons for the overhaul in 2016, he explains that the Federation has always sought to tweak the regulations in response to developments in the theatre industry. "This most recent overhaul is due to the fact that a considerable number of new theatre companies have sprung up in recent years, resulting in more performances, and secondly, there are theatre companies whose productions are rarely

reviewed." The objective results of the overhaul are that the adjudicators need to watch more of the shows under consideration, whereas the number of applicants has been drastically reduced. As a result, the proportion of shows evaluated has risen dramatically compared with the past. Take the first year after the overhaul: more than 70 productions were in the running for the award. Since each adjudicator must watch at least 36 shows, this means that all of them would have watched at least half of the productions.

Dominic Cheung admits that "this restructuring caused much debate within the Federation. Theatres have high and low seasons. Autumn and winter are high seasons, everyone is preoccupied with their own productions, and do not have time to watch shows. Moreover, during high seasons, five or six shows could be playing on the same weekend, which makes it difficult to watch all of them. This could result in the phenomenon of active theatre workers not having enough time to watch 36 productions per year, whereas those who have fulfilled their quota may not be as active in the theatre, giving rise to the skewed situation of the less active judging the more active." As an award which is a forum for the industry to mutually challenge and learn from each other, the Federation must respond to the concerns of members, "There is no perfect award. We will discuss later how to strike a balance. This is the first

year after the overhaul. There is still much room for improvement."

Kuh Fei: Travelling together for a quarter century

Hong Kong Theatre Libre founder and convenor Kuh Fei also believes that "letting a hundred flowers bloom is a good thing" in the context of adding another theatre award. He reiterates, "Although objectively there is a division of labour between the Hong Kong Drama Awards and Hong Kong Theatre Libre, that was not my intention. I wish to promote creative works that reflect 'the spirit of small theatres' in Hong Kong."

Since Hong Kong Theatre Libre is private, Kuh Fei has considerable freedom in both fiscal and administrative terms. "It takes between 20 and 25 years to promote a culture. Hong Kong Theatre Libre is just over a decade old. We are still in the early stages. The purpose of holding this award is to make people aware of good productions."

Cheung Ping-kuen: Furthering the development of theatre and theatre criticism

The IATC (HK) Critics Awards is the new award established under the aegis of IATC (HK). People were hopeful as well as curious about this award. The Hong Kong Drama Awards emphasises the element of being judged by one's industry peers. Co-founder

Cheung Ping-kuen states, "We hope that the Critics Awards pushes the development of theatre in Hong Kong. And for theatre critics to participate in the discussion around awards, to speak out after sincere reflection, will lead to greater rigour in their reviews. The spur to development is two-fold."

The IATC (HK) Critics Awards is backed by the reputation of the critics and the IATC (HK) brand. However, it is a new award, and although there are many hopes pinned on this award, it also faces many questions from the general public, such as how to define a theatre critic? If there is no minimum number of productions to be evaluated, and the 12 adjudicators have different interests, will this give rise to a situation where certain productions get ignored, and therefore not discussed?

With regard to these questions, Cheung Ping-kuen says, "By definition theatre critics must watch a considerable number of shows before they can call themselves critics. But the number of shows watched is not the critical point; the critical point is that the knowledge of theatre critics is leveraged to nominate, to select, to discuss." As to how to define a theatre critic, Cheung notes, "Quite a few theatre critics have other identities, for example, teacher, theatre worker, administrator. Irrespective of their identities, they all have knowledge of theatre. We urge critics to have a

forward looking perspective, firstly, in the dimension of time, secondly, to have a broad vision of how the world, Chinese society, and Hong Kong theatre interact, and how they position themselves in relation to each other."

6. How many theatre awards does Hong Kong need?

Irrespective of the number of theatre awards in Hong Kong, I believe that the industry and the general public require awards with broad credibility. How to achieve broad credibility? Firstly, the qualifications of the adjudicators are critical.

The Hong Kong Drama Awards is the most well defined as to the qualifications for being an adjudicator. Those who wish to participate are selected by a panel of reviewers appointed by members of repute in society and by recognised industry experts, for a term of four years. The representativeness or credibility of the Hong Kong Drama Awards is far more transparent than the other two awards.

The 12 adjudicators of Hong Kong Theatre Libre are all selected by founder and convener Kuh Fei. There are no clear rules as to how adjudicators are selected. The adjudicators for 2016/2017 are Ben Ting, Ting Yu, Cheung Chun-chung, Cheung Ping-



The 25th Hong Kong Drama Awards
Photo courtesy: Hong Kong Federation of Drama Societies



The 9th Hong Kong Theatre Libre
Photo courtesy: 101arts.net

kuen, Damian Cheng, Jacob Yu, Felix Chan, Jason Yip, Bernice Chan, Brenda Chan, William Chan and Ada Chan together with the convener. The vast majority are experienced theatre critics and theatre workers who have watched much theatre. That said, it is worth paying attention to whether these critics follow Kuh Fei's pursuit of the 18th century French "small theatre spirit". This is difficult for the audience to judge. However, the Hong Kong Repertory Theatre, which best represents mainstream theatre in Hong Kong, is also a nominee and frequent winner of Hong Kong Theatre Libre. An extreme example is the company's production of *The Last Supper*. In the fourth Hong Kong Theatre Libre (2011/2012), *The Last Supper* garnered Best Script, Best Actor, Best Actress, and Best Overall Performance. Moreover, the same year's Outstanding Actor award was won by Yau Ting-fai for his performance in the Hong Kong Repertory Theatre's *The Heydays*. In the same year, only eight awards were given out, and all to single winners, which goes to show how the big players made a clean sweep of the awards.

Mainstream large theatre companies establishing themselves in small theatres

How should we understand the relationship between a large mainstream theatre like the Hong Kong Repertory Theatre, and "the spirit of small theatres"? There are several conjectures: one, local small theatres working against the mainstream are so few in numbers that many nominations for mainstream works have resulted through the venue based eligibility criteria; two, the Hong Kong Repertory Theatre is committed to producing some non-mainstream works which challenge mainstream values; three, because the venues determine eligibility for the awards, and as long as the venues are eligible the adjudicators are free to make their nominations irrespective of whether the theatre company is mainstream, or whether the works go against the spirit of the mainstream. Instead they judge drama as drama, on the excellence of script and performance.

The limitations of overlapping adjudicators

Earlier this year, the IATC (HK) Critics Awards was held for the first time. The list of 12 adjudicators included Damian Cheng, Ting Yu, Lo Wai-luk, Kuh Fei, Daisy Chu, Damian Cheung, Bernice Chan, Cheung Ping-Kuen, Felix Chan, Jass Leung, Tang Ching-kin, and Howard Choy, the vast majority of whom are senior art critics who publish reviews and articles frequently in the media.

When comparing this list with that of the adjudicators for Hong Kong Theatre Libre, there is an overlap of seven adjudicators — i.e. the overlap is more than 50%. Moreover, Cheung Ping-kuen, Bernice Chan, Daisy Chu and Kuh Fei wear triple hats as adjudicators for the Hong Kong Drama Awards as well.

I consulted Cheung Ping-kuen and Kuh Fei on this issue. Both feel that double or triple duty as adjudicators is not a problem, because the judging would go according to the criteria of the different awards and result in objective assessment. Arguably, from the perspective of the relationship between awards and evaluation, objectively this does not pose a problem. However, from the personal perspective, a person's taste is the result of self-cultivation, which does not change according to the conditions of the awards. Someone who likes traditional naturalistic techniques will not suddenly like deconstructed narratives just because he/she is judging for a different award. Therefore, the same adjudicator will nominate works that reflect his/her tastes, irrespective of how much he/she adheres to the rules and regulations of the different awards. However, since the Hong Kong Drama Awards employs 60 adjudicators, those adjudicators wearing double or triple hats only make up around 10% of the judging panel. They can be regarded as the voice of the educated or the critics. This panel can more easily compensate for the bias of having overlapping

adjudicators promoting the same works.

The curse of limited time

On the other hand, there is a limit to the time each adjudicator has to watch theatre, especially because there is no full time theatre critic or adjudicator in Hong Kong. The IATC (HK) Critics Awards and Hong Kong Theatre Libre do not have an application process. All eligible works performed in Hong Kong can be nominated. Assuming that one adjudicator only has enough time to watch 50 productions a year, the fact that there are 200 small scale theatre productions each year; or 500 productions with dramatic elements in Hong Kong is irrelevant, since the adjudicator can only choose among the 50 productions he or she has watched. If one is only adjudicating for one award, one can theoretically devote all available time to the productions qualifying for this one award, and select what one thinks are the most promising pieces. Conversely, if adjudicating for two or more awards, it is more efficient to watch shows that qualify as candidates for more than one award. In particular, the Hong Kong Drama Awards's requirement to watch not less than 36 productions is a heavy burden for the adjudicators.

From 36 to infinity

Back to the discussion of the credibility of the awards, since adjudicators for all three awards are recognised

veteran industry professionals, the next step is to discuss coverage — in short, the types and numbers of productions viewed.

Within the framework of these three awards, the Hong Kong Drama Awards should have the widest coverage. As there is an application process for this award, there has been a drastic reduction in the number of productions to be evaluated. For example, more than 70 productions took part in the competition last year. The rules mandate that adjudicators must watch at least 36 productions, a ratio of about 50% of eligible shows. Since there are 60 judges, between them they can watch 2160 performances. The number is quite impressive. For the remaining two awards there is no minimum threshold. Moreover, the number of adjudicators are only one-fifth that of the Hong Kong Drama Awards. As neither of the two awards release the data on number of performances viewed, it is inevitable that the outside world will have some doubts.

The wider the coverage the greater the responsibility

The general public expects the theatre adjudicator to be more knowledgeable. It would be difficult to establish legitimacy if the adjudicators were well informed but without extensive theatre going experience. The Hong Kong Theatre Libre, because

of its private nature, has more autonomy. Moreover its time horizon is 25 years. The IATC (HK) Critics Awards, founded by the IATC (HK), will be measured by correspondingly high standards. The number of productions which are eligible to be considered for the IATC (HK) Critics Awards exceeds those eligible for the Hong Kong Drama Awards and Hong Kong Theatre Libre together, and includes even those productions which are not eligible for the other two awards. However, they have the least number of adjudicators. I absolutely have faith in the theatre critics' ability to choose which productions to consider, but I also believe that lack of manpower will lead to some fish slipping through the net. When the missing fish appears, the outside world will ask how this managed to slip past the adjudicators, and further start questioning whether the adjudicators/theatre critics are qualified.

I am convinced that no matter how professional the adjudicators, the number of theatre visits per adjudicator will definitely affect the credibility of the results. Of course, ideally one would watch all eligible productions. Otherwise, half or two thirds of the eligible productions is an acceptable level. Of course, this leads to another question — why are adjudicators not paid?

Who pays for the tickets?

I heard that a long-established local theatre company

has withdrawn from the 2017 Hong Kong Drama Awards because they could not afford to give the adjudicators free tickets. If even an established, reputable theatre company cannot afford to give free tickets to adjudicators, how would tiny unknown theatre companies do so? Small theatre companies cannot spontaneously participate without detailed arrangements because of the financial and administrative resources required. In this respect, the IATC (HK) Critics Awards places the least burden on theatres, because the adjudicators can get reimbursed by the IATC (HK).

At present adjudicators for all three awards work on a voluntary basis, so it really would be asking too much if one has to pay for one's own tickets. But for the Hong Kong Drama Awards, each theatre company may have to give up to 60 free tickets to the adjudicators, which is a huge financial burden on small theatre companies. Ideally the cost of adjudicator tickets would already be included in the annual budget of each award, just as the IATC (HK) invests in reimbursing critics for their tickets. For the Hong Kong Drama Awards, however, covering the cost of (at a minimum) 2160 tickets will be a huge financial burden.

Conclusion

On the basis of 2016/2017, I do not feel that three different theatre awards in Hong Kong was too many. Moreover, the three awards complement each other. The three awards are like three-way mirrors, mutually reflecting the strengths and limitations of each award. As all the interviewees say, it is good for a hundred flowers to bloom. Dominic Cheung contends, "Theatre workers are ordinary people. When they receive recognition from others, they are happy." According to the information in the Hong Kong Theatre Yearbook and Drama Yearbook, there have been more than 500 productions in Hong Kong in recent years. Serious awards are a series of baselines, to be used as benchmarks for the industry, to advance towards an even better future for the theatrical world.

(Translated by Amy Ng)

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