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"...and Action! Asia" Enriches the Cinematic Efforts in Malaysia and Beyond

Looking back to my participation in the previous "...and Action! Asia" programs in both 2017 and 2018, they are both sweet memories for me and my students. It was a blessing because I see my students went into a transformative process: an exposure that is rarely available to my students. Through the "...and Action! Asia" program, my students and I were given an opportunity to work with students and mentors from other universities in Southeast Asia and Japan. This was when we experienced film culture other than the one we were accustomed to.

From there, my students gained the confidence and skills to discuss and make films as well as present their films to a wider audience who questioned and appreciated their efforts. Soon after our return from the program, we conducted a sharing and screening session on my campus. This process encouraged other students to work harder with the hope to participate in the next "...and Action! Asia" program or some similar program in the future. This is certainly what we hunger for, especially seeing that my university is located in Borneo, relatively further away from the cultural and film industry which is commonly based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Meanwhile, I am blessed with a network that I developed further in collaboration with other mentors. Last year, for instance, my documentary student and I were invited to the Omura Amami International Student Film Festival. From there, with the assistance of Prof. Koguchi Utako, I managed to curate films shown in her festival in our biweekly film screening under the Mini Film Festival, which I managed. Many audiences expressed their gratitude for watching films they can hardly gain access to, unless they attend film festivals outside of Malaysia. This is particularly true for art and film appreciation, which are still growing at a rather slow pace compared with neighboring countries such as Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand.

From this program, I slowly developed the urge and passion in building film and art appreciation, both inside and outside of my campus. It was through exposure to this program that I realized that it all starts with us. Should I want change of the dire situation that I tend to complain about, I need to start with the change itself. For that, I have actively been working with students in organizing community screenings with the aim of creating a community that comes together to appreciate film and arts. In our bi-weekly screening (Duduk dan Tonton, literally translated as "Sit and Watch"), we have about 40 - 80 people for each screening. This is a collaborative effort made possible partially through the network I built during the "...and Action! Asia" program.

In addition, without the "...and Action! Asia" program, I would not have been able to curate the special screening event for the SeaShorts Film Festival 2018 in Georgetown, Penang, Malaysia. The same films made during "...and Action! Asia" were also screened on my campus to audiences of not less than 80 persons. This certainly helped in encouraging film appreciation among the general public in Malaysia.

Last but not least, in August 2018, I was invited to the Suan Sunandha International School of Arts (SiSA), Thailand, to conduct a documentary workshop to a group of 40 students. This workshop exposed students to documentary film-making and appreciation and was made possible through my connection with Mr. Teerapong Serisamran, whom I met in the "...and Action! Asia" program in March 2018.

In short, "...and Action! Asia" has brought so much impact to participants, and most importantly it has definitely enriched cinematic efforts in the region. I am grateful for the hard work of staff from the Japan Foundation Asia Center. Thank you!



Yow Chong Lee (#3, #4 instructor participant)

Yow Chong Lee is currently engaged with Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) in teaching courses on documentary film-making, film history, and film theory. He has been directing the Mini Film Festival, the longest existing student film festival in Malaysia since 2013. Starting in 2015, he has programmed film screenings and coordinated or contributed to many other film-related events such as talks, workshops, and film festivals.

The Japan Foundation Asia Center



The Japan Foundation is Japan's principal independent administrative institution dedicated to carrying out cultural exchange initiatives throughout the world. The Asia Center, established in April 2014, is a division within the Foundation that conducts and supports collaborative initiatives with its Asian—primarily ASEAN—counterparts. Through interacting and working together in Japanese-language education, arts and culture, sports, and grassroots and intellectual exchange, the Asia Center aspires to develop the sense of kinship and coexistence as neighboring inhabitants of Asia.

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