

CinemAsia Film Festival: 2022 Edition

Doris Yeung

I am Doris Yeung, founder and director of the board of CinemAsia film festival, the gateway to Asian films and filmmakers in the Netherlands for last 18 years. Since 2003, CinemAsia's has helped Asian voices and stories be heard and represented in the Netherlands and Europe through our annual film festival. We also pursue this mission through our educational programs such as FilmLAB, which creates and exhibits Asian diasporic films and trains filmmakers, media creators, and cultural workers to promote Asian visibility in Dutch and European film and media.



Fig. 1: CinemAsia group photo (Photo courtesy of CinemAsia, 2022).

As a lifelong member of the Asian diaspora – having moved from Hong Kong to America and then to the Netherlands – I started CinemAsia film festival in 2003 to address the lack of accurate and visible representation of Asians in the Netherlands and to challenge ingrained stereotypes of Asians through awareness in film and media. This passion for fair and equitable representation in media stems from being mentored as a student by the late Linad Mahbolot, the founder of Visual Communications and Los Angeles Asian Pacific film festival. Mahbolot was a Filipino-American filmmaker/activist whose lifelong work was to put Asian faces and voices in American media. Her mission has borne fruit after 40 years, with structural progress in putting Asian faces and stories in mainstream American films and media.

In the Netherlands and Europe, I still see the struggle for accurate portrayals of Asians in the media – if and when there are any portrayals at all. The film and television roles available to Asian actors in Europe have historically been limited to offensive Asian stereotypes such as the exotic temptress, sweet submissive geisha girl, geeky computer nerd, or Asian restaurant owner/take-out boy. But in 2022, times are changing, as diversity and inclusion are the topics on everyone's minds. Yet there is also backtracking, such as the rise of anti-Asian hate during Covid-19, with incidents of racial stereotyping, discrimination, and even violence against Asians worldwide. Film and media changes how we perceive each other in this world.

This is why organizations like CinemAsia are important. They enable us to tell our own stories of our communities to counter these stereotypes. They help us connect with others to increase understanding within greater society. If Asians do not speak up against these stereotypes and prejudice, then the oppressive power structures that created and perpetuated them risk being maintained.

CinemAsia is not only a festival showcasing the best of worldwide Asian cinema. It is also a platform to empower Asians to create and represent their own narrative and image. Since 2006, CinemAsia has made 35 short films about the Asian-Dutch diaspora through its FilmLAB program. These are voices and stories that are seldom heard or seen in mainstream Dutch society. In order to have a voice and place in the greater

community, Asians have to be seen on the small and big screen as much as possible. To do so, we create, exhibit, and distribute our own stories of the Asian diaspora, as no one else is going to do it as authentically as our own selves. Diaspora cinema is representative cinema.

After 18 years, CinemAsia is still one of the only platforms that connects the Asian diaspora with Dutch society. It is the longest-running cultural and community organization with this mission in the Netherlands. A representative and culturally aware community is the sign of a progressive and equitable society. It is our responsibility to educate and inform the new generation against outdated stereotypes and behaviors, especially if they are to be part of an increasingly heterogeneous and integrated world.

I am proud to have seen CinemAsia grow from an idea to a reality with help of the many colleagues, filmmakers, volunteers, and supporters, all of whom have helped us grow through the years. Please help us continue our work in creating and exhibiting Asian stories in film and media and in training storytellers and cultural workers to represent Asian voices in the Dutch and European media landscape. We are always looking for interesting partners and collaborators. Please visit our website or find us on social media.

Website: www.cinemasia.nl

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Fig. 2: Doris Yeung, founder of CinemAsia, speaking at the opening ceremony (Photo: Narutai Riangkruar, 2022).

Film Curation, Collaboration with Partners, and Panel Discussions

Jia Zhao

CinemAsia 2022 was a very special learning-by-doing experience for me as the festival's new artistic director. It also marked the return of festival after a brief Covid break, and now is a moment when we can look back upon what has been achieved and consider what else we would like to achieve together in the future.

This time, over 30 films were selected to form a balanced mixture of films by upcoming and established directors from East and Southeast Asia. Both the present time and the history of Asia are being represented in these works, and each reflects upon the shifting landscape of the world. The mission of CinemAsia is to present and discuss "Asian perspectives" through films and film collaboration, instead of merely offering an "Asian showcase." Thus, as important as the film selection was, our curation also included a panel discussion entitled "Placing Asia on the World Map" as well as extended Q&A sessions with the directors of the films *Mein Vietnam* and *So Long, My Son*. These activities facilitate and deepen the understanding of cultural contexts through interactions between audience and film professionals.

The panel "Placing Asia on the World Map" was a successful event divided into two parts. The first part featured the panelists



Fig. 1: Panel "Placing Asia on the World Map", held at CinemAsia with Anne Sokolsky, Chair of Taiwan Studies at IIAS and Leiden University (Photo: Narutai Riangkruar, 2022).

Bo Wang, Tushar Madhov, Meiske Taurisia, and Professor Anne Sokolsky. The discussion focused on changes and trends in the media landscape, against the backdrop of the economic rise of Asia in the last decades and streaming services as the game-changer for original content production and distribution worldwide. Panelists raised interesting points about colonialism in the Asian context, as well as how more collective initiatives for cultural collaboration could contribute to bypassing political borders between Asian countries. In the second part of the panel discussion, the experiences, achievements, and lessons of film collaborations between

Europe and Asia were shared between panelists Corinne van Egeraat, Lorna Tee, Liu Xuan, Daan Vermeulen, Meiske Taurisia, and Erik Glijnis, all of whom are film producers/distributors based in the Netherlands and Asia. It was interesting to acknowledge the difference in financing films in Asia versus Europe: European filmmaking mostly relies on and benefits from public funding systems, which can sometimes also be rigid and less flexible, whereas Asian film producing relies on a more fluid system of equity financing. The panelists also noted that the level of financing from Asia has increased to the

point that Asia is now an equal partner to Europe. In addition to financing, films with collaboration between Europe and Asia can also benefit from sharing and exchanging expertise and creativity from diverse cultural backgrounds.

The first collaboration with IIAS was a rewarding experience for me. It is a partnership where storytelling and anthropology, the film industry and the academic world, form an organic and meaningful synergy that contributes to the impact of the event. CinemAsia would definitely like to broaden and deepen the spectrum of such events in the coming editions, by including, for example, retrospectives of selected master directors and more cross-disciplinary panel discussions.

In addition, FilmLAB is also an important part at CinemAsia. This time we had seven selected film projects that were pitched to a professional panel – consisting of Gwyneth Sleutel, Claire Zhou, and myself – for feedback. I was impressed by the brave and personal stories the young filmmakers brought forward. For next year, we would like to extend this initiative and collaborate with equivalent European and Asian platforms. We hope to make it a go-to place for young filmmakers of diverse cultural backgrounds related to Asia. Through CinemAsia, they can network and connect to professional resources in Europe and Asia, and they can learn from established international filmmakers and producers. Moving forward, we also hope to collaborate with academic entities like IIAS for, among other things, script research and script development.

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Fleeting Intimacy: A Reflection on the Social Functions of Film Festivals

Darunee Terdtoontaveedej

One of the founding principles of CinemAsia is to give a platform to express and celebrate the Asian LGBTQ+ experience. The festival does this through a diverse selection of films and complementary programmes, highlighting the different aspects of the queer Asian experience. CinemAsia was founded in 2003 as an Asian LGBTQ+ film festival in Amsterdam, and over the years it has grown into a full-fledged pan-Asian film festival.

Through a spontaneous decision and the need to reconnect with my own roots as a queer person who has grown up in the West, I have served as the LGBTQ+ programmer within the festival since 2018. In this role, I have experimented with organising several community-led events, and I have learned a lot along the way. Each event opened up new challenges that came with our ever-changing society, especially in its current state – that is, with the pandemic still in place, the atrocities in Ukraine and elsewhere, and the looming recession. This fleeting state of our world gives rise to different needs for our communities, but also raises questions regarding how a film festival such as CinemAsia can better serve our community and stay relevant while remaining true to ourselves.

This year, the festival is back under new leadership and with a new vision, after two years of absence due to the pandemic and funding cuts. The film selection included five LGBTQ+ films (out of 33 total feature films), exploring different aspects of our sexuality. Some of these films also challenged the often problematic representations in Asian cinema, where much of the industry is still dominated by cisgender, heterosexual men.

The LGBTQ+ film selection included: (1) the politically charged *Secrets of 1979* (Taiwan) by Zero Chou, with an in-depth introduction



Fig. 1: "Reading My Panties Workshop" with Lu Lin, co-hosted with Dona Daria (Photo courtesy of Sen Yang, 2022).

by Taiwanese film expert I-hsuan Hsieh; (2) *Dear Tenant* (Taiwan) by Yu-chieh Cheng, which opened up discussion about prejudices in Taiwanese society that persist despite marriage equality; (3) the bittersweet *Wheel of Fortune and Fantasy* (Japan) by Academy Award winner Ryusuke Hamaguchi; (4) the 20-year anniversary 4K remastered version of the gay classic *Lan Yu* (Hong Kong/China) by Stanley Kwan, followed by a reflection on the state of queer lives in China in the past 20 years; and (5) the transgender film *Midnight Swan* (Japan) by Netflix series director Eiji Uchida, including a programme organised together with TranScreen (a transgender film festival)¹ and Studio/K (our venue partner)² to discuss the stir caused by the film within the queer community, to critique the problematics of transgender representation in media, and to highlight the need for inclusive and collaborative production in film industries across the globe.

Aside from showcasing Asian films, CinemAsia aims to foster and support the Asian queer community. This is evident in the LGBTQ+ Community Programme, which focused on opening up safe spaces for connection and healing. This was

especially important in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, which caused two years of blatant discrimination, isolation, and, for some, being far from home due to border closures. For these reasons, three activities were organised: (1) the *Queer Mental Health and Self-Care Workshop*, co-hosted by Chinese diasporic LGBTQ+ organisation OUT&ABROAD³; (2) *Reading My Panties Workshop* with artistic researcher Lu Lin, co-hosted by the organization Dona Daria⁴; and *Queer Asian Tea and Tai-Chi: Community Gathering*. The two workshops created a safe environment to discuss taboo subjects, especially within the Asian cultural context. Meanwhile, the gathering was aimed at creating a free space for those who might be searching for an offline community, simply to gather and connect. It also sought to identify the community's needs and opened with a public group tai-chi exercise.

Over the years of building spaces within CinemAsia, I have come to realise the importance of collaboration and partnerships, especially during times in which financial resources are limited. After all, we are all striving to reach the same goal – a world in which we can all coexist freely

and equally – and there is still a long way to go. Within the intimacy of the setting of the community events, there was empathy and camaraderie. There was a drive to continue to strengthen the Asian LGBTQ+ community and to lead the future generations. There was a desire to come together and provide support for each other, also in solidarity with those who may not be able to do so.

We are only at the beginning of a greater change.

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Notes

- <https://www.transcreen.eu/en/>
- <https://studio-k.nu>
- <https://outandabroad.nl>
- <https://www.donadaria.nl>