2020 ASIAN FILM ARCHIVE

ANNUAL REPORT
The Asian Film Archive (AFA) was established in January 2005 as a non-profit organisation to preserve the rich Asian film heritage. In 2014, it became a subsidiary of the National Library Board Singapore.

AFA’s mission is to Save, Explore and Share the art of Asian cinema. Its work is to encourage scholarly research and its programmes are designed to promote a wider critical appreciation of film, while functioning as vibrant hubs of activity.
The Year in Focus

**2020** by all counts will be remembered and ranked as one of the most tumultuous times, affecting every facet of the archive’s operations. The arrival of COVID-19 necessitated quick decisions and action. It forced management and staff to be creative in responses in the face of ever-changing situations beyond its control.

For the first time in its history, the archive closed for four months between April to July 2020. The big screen at Oldham Theatre where AFA held its regular screenings went dark and all activities involving large crowds were cancelled from March to July 2020. Staff made the then unprecedented transition to working completely from home. Everyone had to quickly adapt to utilising applications and platforms to facilitate work processes.

It was only in August 2020 that 30% of staff returned to work physically in the office. To keep with the government’s safety guidelines, the archive implemented social distancing, preventing its small staff numbers from inter-mingling, while volunteers and interns worked remotely. Without the regular hands that could physically be in the office, preservation work like cleaning, scanning, and sorting of analogue items ground to a halt for many months.

Taking advantage of some of the downtime that came with the nationwide lockdown, the archive staff reviewed digital preservation workflows, selection policies, researched on collection management systems, and prepared the tedious but necessary documentation for the impending upgrades of servers. AFA’s staff also attended free online webinars and training to upgrade themselves in their respective areas of work.

Reduced seating and safe-distancing measures that have become a common sight at the Oldham Theatre.
To continue and maintain engagement with audiences, AFA created a variety of programmes under its brand-new online banner, Rewired. These included:

- Video on Demand screening programmes
- A monthly *Asian Cinema Digest* bringing together news and online resources specifically on Asian cinema, including film streaming initiatives, writings, international happenings and offerings
- A podcast titled ‘Coming Attractions’ with the Singapore Community Radio (SGCR) to introduce AFA’s current and upcoming programmes

By the close of 2020, the continuing pandemic situation meant that working from home was a default while online talks and workshops were the norm. However, the resumption of physical screenings albeit in see-sawing limited capacity, offered grateful and eager audiences much needed respite. Activities in hybrid forms provided space for creative expression and opportunities to allow the magic of cinema to soothe tired minds and bodies.
Collection

DEVELOPING AND PRESERVING THE COLLECTION IS THE CORE BUSINESS OF THE AFA

ACQUISITIONS

The pandemic on acquisitions was inevitably impacted as filmmakers and content holders stayed home. Deposits of digital born materials slowed down but staff continued to receive and process whatever materials that were deposited.

As of 31 March 2021, the AFA collection comprised 2,566 film titles. Among new acquisitions were feature length works by award-winning Asian filmmakers:

- Cities of Last Things (2018, Taiwan) by Ho Wi Ding
- Ho Yuk (2002, Hong Kong) by Yau Ching
- Men Who Save The World (2014, Malaysia) by Liew Seng Tat
- Number 1 (2020, Singapore) by Ong Kuo Sin
- Selamat Pagi, Malam (2014, Indonesia) by Lucky Kuswandhi
- Sick (2019, Myanmar) by Zaw Bo Bo Hein
- Wet Season (2019, Singapore) by Anthony Chen

Notable Asian short films by Ismail Basbeth (Indonesia), Ivan Tan, Kris Ong and Michael Kam (Singapore), Xin Fang (China/USA) were also added to the collection.
Preservation work was sustained albeit in smaller quantities. Digitisation of obsolete video formats like digibeta, HDCam, mini DV, was carried out to make the films accessible. The surviving 35mm film elements of two films, *Old Soldier* and *Ponmani* by the late Sri Lankan filmmaker, Dharmasena Pathiraja, were also digitised.

As part of its preservation efforts, the AFA restores films within its collection that are in varying stages of deteriorating conditions. In 2020, two titles with sole surviving elements in the AFA collection were restored. All restorations have newly created English subtitles with DCP and file formats for screening. Where possible, new 35mm negatives and prints of the restored films were generated for long term preservation.

- **Eyes (1967, Singapore)** by Rajendra Gour  
  2K restoration using surviving 16mm release print from AFA Collection  
  Restoration performed by Fixafilm

- **Penchuri (Thief, 1955, Singapore)** by K.M. Basker  
  2K restoration using surviving 16mm print from AFA Collection  
  Restoration performed by L’Immagine Ritrovata
To encourage an appreciation of Asian films, the AFA’s reference collection is available at the library@esplanade and the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library at the National Library Building for public viewing and research. Over 50 film titles were catalogued and added to this reference collection. As with all public spaces, the libraries were similarly closed to researchers, cutting access to physical collections. To meet some of these viewing demands and needs, AFA featured selected films from its collection on its Youtube and Vimeo channels, such as *Sunshine Singapore* (1968, Rajendra Gour), *Ring of Fury* (1973, Tony Yeow & James Sebastian), *Sonata Kampung Bata* (1994, Riri Riza), *Black Cherry* (2005, Lucky Kuswandi), *Juan Gapang* (1986, Roxlee) and *Scene 38* (2015, Nawapol Thamrongrattanarit).

The AFA also loaned its materials to external organisations for local and overseas screenings.
Outreach & Education

Another core arm in AFA’s mission is to outreach and educate about Asian cinema and on the importance of film preservation.

In 2020, AFA organised a host of physical events and generated online programmes that reached out to and garnered a total of 990,110 audience members and views. A wide demographic of participants from film scholars and enthusiasts, seniors, students, educators, and public members attended these physical and virtual events.

Education

Students are an important group of audience given that they are the future content producers, contributors, and consumers of the arts and the film industry. Educators who influence and shape the minds of their young chargers, form the other vital sub-group in the education circle. Teachers and academics are also a key user of the archive, providing essential information on collections and feedback on how to improve services to reach more people.

Due to the pandemic, many of AFA’s planned in person events at schools were cancelled. In-person teaching was carried out when social distancing and small group sizes were put in place, but many talks were moved online as a precautionary measure. AFA’s archive staff conducted film preservation talks to Ngee Ann Polytechnic film students, shared archiving and exhibition methodologies to student interns from NUS Museum while AFA’s programmers engaged with Singapore International Film Festival’s youth jury participants about film programming.

AFA has been supporting the Ministry of Education English Language Elective Scholarship programme for several years. This year, AFA hosted a hybrid internship that allowed the student to have hands-on experience combined with remote work.

To connect and engage with educators, AFA accepted invitations to participate in different initiatives. AFA Executive Director is part of the Nanyang Technological University’s Asian Cinema Research Lab, a platform for scholars, programmers, curators, and archivists to discuss issues related to Asian cinema. She was also invited to advise the Chinese Independent Film Archive, a project by scholars from King’s College London and Newcastle University.
PUBLIC EXHIBITIONS

Exhibitions give AFA a chance to showcase the film memorabilia and other related materials in its collection and to collaborate with creatives in other art genres who are inspired by the film genre.

STATE OF MOTION (SoM), AFA’s film and art event that explores the intersections between cinema, art and filmic research, returned with its 6th edition SoM21 [Alternate/Opt] Realities, presented as part of Singapore Art Week. The exhibition showcased 11 artists such as Tulapop Saenjaroen (Thailand), Bani Haykal (Singapore), and Natasha Tontey (Indonesia). Inspired by the science-fiction film genre, the commissioned works employed audio-visual technologies and were set amidst the futuristic and expansive architecture of Marina One. Artists’ performances were recorded and uploaded on the SoM website for online viewers. A film programme featuring a range of familiar and rare Southeast Asian science-fiction titles over 30 years were screened at Marina One and Oldham Theatre. Selected titles were placed on AFA’s Vimeo-on-Demand platform to allow audiences an option to view the titles at their own time.
For one of its largest shows involving the restored works of the famed auteur Wong Kar Wai, AFA collaborated with local publishing and print studio Knuckles & Notch to commission four young Asian artists—Nao Tokunaga, Tan Szeyan, Ella Zheng of The Workbench and Ng Yin Shian—to create new artworks inspired by Wong Kar Wai’s iconic films. The series of illustrative works were exhibited alongside the film screenings at Oldham Theatre. Knuckles & Notch also designed limited edition merchandise related to the films that were sold both at Oldham Theatre’s box office during the film screenings and on AFA’s online shop.
The films that AFA restored travelled to various international film festivals and events in 2020.

- **Bambaru Avith** (1978, Sri Lanka) by Dharmasena Pathiraja was selected for Cannes Classics at the 73rd Cannes Film Festival and 2020 Festival des 3 Continents.

- **Mee Pok Man** (1995, Singapore) by Eric Khoo and *The Teenage Textbook Movie* (1998, Singapore) by Phillip Lim were picked up by Netflix (Singapore).

- **Letter to An Angel** (1994, Indonesia) by Garin Nugroho was presented online at the 2020 San Diego Asian Film Festival.

- **Batch 81** (1982, Philippines) by Mike de Leon was presented online at the 4th Pista ng Pelikulang Pilipino, an annual film festival spearheaded by the Film Development Council of the Philippines.

- **Forever Fever** (1998, Singapore) by Glen Goei and *The Teenage Textbook Movie* (1998, Singapore) by Phillip Lim were selected for Singapore Airlines’ inflight entertainment.
Under AFA’s banner of “Explore Asian Cinema”, a host of screenings were held at Oldham Theatre and accompanying online events were organised.

- AFA’s first Vimeo on Demand programme Whose House is This?: New Cinema of Central Asia, brought together contemporary award-winning films from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

- For The Record, a special programme that featured documentaries examining bold Asian musical acts from South Korea, China, Indonesia, amongst others.

- REFRAI ME, AFA’s salon series presented The (In) Hospitable World, a timely topic considering the current global pandemic. The theme explored the power of cinema to represent, reflect, and envision lives in “an unpredictable and increasingly inhospitable world”. Guest-curated by Assistant Professor Kiwai Chu from the Nanyang Technological University, films from India, Taiwan, Czech Republic, and Hong Kong part of the line-up.

- RELEASES is AFA’s regular series dedicated to screening the best and most promising of contemporary Asian cinema. Audiences were treated to films as diverse as Gully Boy, one of Bollywood’s greatest hits in 2019, Japanese-Uzbekistan production To The Ends of the Earth by Kiyoshi Kurosawa, There Is No Evil, a Golden Bear winner for Best Film, Damp Season, Grand Prize winner at the Jeonju Film Festival by Liu Gaoming, Hong Sang-soo’s Berlin International Film Festival Silver Bear (Best Director) win The Woman Who Ran, and Arun Karthick’s Nasir, 2020 winner of the NETPAC Award at the International Film Festival Rotterdam.


- RETROSPECTIVE, another new regular series showcasing bodies of work from an extended period of activity by filmmakers of different eras was launched. AFA held its first retrospective programme with eight restored films by Hong Kong auteur Wong Kar Wai. Over 30 showings were sold out. An online talk and panel discussion with film scholars Dr Stephen Teo and Dr Lai Chee Kien offered insights on the director’s filmography and dissected the charismatic and wistful world of a deeply influential artist.
Working with partners enabled AFA to organise an array of film programmes and events to reach different and wider audiences.


- Partnering the 31st Singapore International Film Festival where 24 films were presented at Oldham Theatre, AFA staff moderated public talks and post-screening discussions throughout the festival.
Development & Engagement

A THIRD ARM OF AFA’S MISSION IS TO RESEARCH AND SHARE INFORMATION ON ASIAN CINEMA AND FILM PRESERVATION MATTERS

Over the past 15 years, AFA has gradually built its reputation within the Asian film industry while becoming an active member of the regional and international film and audiovisual archiving networks. As they learnt from experts and peers of more established institutions, AFA staff have also developed their areas of expertise and are contributing towards the growth of the community and industry.

RESEARCH AND CONFERENCES

Conferences are some of the most important learning avenues for archive staff to exchange knowledge and skills while establishing essential networks. As in-person events shifted online, AFA staff have been able to attend and participate in many local and international discussions.

- To commemorate the UNESCO World Day for Audiovisual Heritage, AFA organised its first online symposium involving local and international speakers to address the topical issues affecting our ecology, environment, and public health. The symposium was streamed online on AFA’s Youtube and Facebook platforms.

- AFA Executive Director was part of the Cinema Heritage of Central Asia: Conservation and Promotion panel, organised by the UNESCO Cluster Office in Almaty, Kazakhstan, to discuss the state of cinema heritage in Central Asia.

- AFA Archivist participated in a number of online events:
  - 100% Manusia (a movement that promotes awareness on human rights issues, diversity, and inclusivity) about the role of film archives.
  - Presented at the conference “Film Preservation and Cultural Memory in Southeast Asia” organised by University of Melbourne
  - Spoke at “Archiving Film: Collecting the Future” organised by the Makassar SEAScreen Academy.

- AFA Outreach Officer and AFA Programmer were involved in various conversations:
  - Shared about AFA’s film programmes and challenges faced during the pandemic on Kinosaurus, an Indonesian microcinema network.
  - Spoke about pandemic film culture at a talk on the future of cinephilia organised by the Academy of Film of Hong Kong Baptist University.
  - Part of The Substations’ “Coming Home: A Reel Roundtable”.
  - A speaker at National Library’s Archive Invites on “Memories and Screens”, an international film programme curated by AFA that traced the historical development of and sentiments to the Fall of Singapore and the Pacific Theatre of World War II as part of the exhibition Witness to War: Remembering 1942 organised by the National Museum of Singapore.
A side benefit of the pandemic situation was that it allowed AFA staff to receive preservation training and attend conferences that would usually have been difficult for AFA to attend largely due to the high cost of travel and accommodation.

- One of AFA’s Archive Officers was amongst a select few in ASEAN to attend an e-workshop on “Save the Collection from Disaster” organised by the Thai Film Archive and conducted by Mick Newnham from the National Film and Sound Archive in Australia.

- AFA Executive Director was able to attend the first virtual International Federation of Film Archives’ 76th annual conference hosted by the Filmoteca de la UNAM, Mexico City, even if it meant staying up till 3am for sessions.

AFA supported local agencies in different focus groups where the views of arts practitioners were sought.

- AFA Executive Director participated in the National Heritage Board’s e-focus group regarding the Singapore Night Festival.

- AFA Programmer participated in the National Arts Council’s roundtable focus group regarding Art After Dark.

PUBLICATIONS

Publications allow AFA to work with curators, writers, academics, designers and other creatives while documenting important projects and content. Writing for various journals and periodicals is one way AFA shares information about its work and collection to a wider audience.

- AFA launched the State of Motion: Rushes of Time exhibition catalogue, streaming on AFA’s Facebook page a recorded conversation with some book contributors.
- University of St Andrew’s peer reviewed Frame Cinema Journal dedicated a dossier to the restoration and preservation of Asian films and the work done by Asian archives. Contributions by AFA’s Executive Director, Thai Film Archive and Filipino film historian Professor Nick Deocampo, among others were featured.

- AFA Archivist contributed an article on the preservation and the history behind the making of Singaporean film Medium Rare for NANG magazine’s issue entitled Loud Mess, edited by Oliver Husain and Shai Heredia.

- AFA participated for the first time at the Singapore Art Book Fair, an independent multi-day festival specialising in design, contemporary art books & zines. AFA’s non-book designed products such as its DVD/Blu-ray collections and film merchandise were equally well received.

**ENGAGEMENT**

Media coverage and taking on leadership positions allows the AFA to engage with different groups of people and for more audiences to learn about AFA’s work.

- Members of the South East Asia Pacific Audiovisual Archive Association (SEAPAVAA) nominated and elected AFA Executive Director as President of SEAPAVAA for a 3-year term (2020-2023).

- AFA Executive Director was featured in a RICE Media series spotlighting individuals who contributed significantly to the local and regional film scene.

- UK based Rep Cinema International’s Herb Shellenberger interviewed AFA, featuring its history, its work in Singapore and across international borders on Asian and Asian diaspora cinema with regards to collections, exhibition, research, and preservation.
Volunteers are vital to the realisation of the AFA’s mission, providing much-needed extra manpower and expertise to help carry out the variety of work within the AFA. Apart from assisting with front-of-house events, volunteers perform a host of preservation related work such as scanning related materials, cataloguing films, cleaning and re-canning film reels, and migrating formats.

In 2020, an online volunteers’ appreciation event was organised to thank volunteers who helped AFA in various areas of work. A total of 238 hours was put in by volunteers over the year.

We thank these individuals for their time and support.

- Allysa Krystal De Silva
- Ana Ramli
- Anita Malhotra
- Benedicta Foo
- Chris Driver
- Eli Stewart
- Eric Lee
- Evangeline Fam
- Gloria Sun
- Grace Leong
- Helen Ong
- Hou Yuan Chen (Leslie)
- Kristy Lim
- Li Yinan
- Low Koon Yen
- Madeleine Chau
- Maggie Yin
- Michelle Lee
- Michelle Lee Yan Yee
- Miranda Cardenas
- Regina Chee
- Sherafina Alyani
- Teo Wei Chuan
- Yang Yang
- Zoe Tauro
Corporate Governance

The archive is governed by a board of directors who ensures that the archive is effective in pursuing its mission and is accountable to the public.

- All board members are volunteers and are not remunerated for their Board services. They are wholly independent from the paid executive management of the Archive. Board members hold various responsibilities to review and oversee areas in audit and finance, programmes and services, fundraising and partnership, and human resource.

- The Executive Director who leads the management team, reports regularly to the Board about the Archive’s management strategies, policies, operations, finance and business practices.

- Board members and paid staff are required to declare actual or potential conflicts of interest to the Board immediately. Board members with conflicts of interest do not vote or participate in decision making in that matter. Paid staff with conflicts of interest are required to obtain approval from the Board. Staff and Board make an annual declaration of having understood all policies, procedures, and potential conflicts of interest between staff and the Archive.

- Board meetings are held quarterly to review the Archive’s performance and approve strategic work plans. The Chair convenes optional meetings, when necessary, to discuss matters that require the Board’s deliberation.

- To promote transparency and to be publicly accountable, the Archive makes available an annual report on its website, with disclosure on its financial accounts.

- The Archive adopts a set of internal guidelines that lay out financial authorisation and approval limits for financial commitment. The Board ensures that the internal reviews on controls, procedures and key programmes are adhered to.
Future Plans and Commitments

The economic and social disruption caused by the global health crisis has dealt a blow to the arts, cultural, and heritage sectors and their practitioners. With transmission still at such high rates worldwide, AFA will continue to make its plans to enable a transition online or in a hybrid state when the situation calls for it.

The role as custodian to Asia’s rich film and cinematic heritage is one that AFA remains committed towards for the long term. The COVID-19 lockdowns and movement restrictions have led audiences to look for filmic content to provide inspiration and hope. Archives everywhere are providing material online as a substitution for the lack of physical screenings as cinemas close. To this end, AFA will strive to manage its collection responsibly and effectively, enabling accessibility and useability, even as it explores different access platforms for the collection and generates online content in the coming years.

Films that are at risk or are orphaned will be a priority as the team keeps an eye out for abandoned and materials that are not being archived by other heritage institutions. Where possible, funding will be set aside for restoration projects of older titles in deteriorated conditions to give once inaccessible films a new lease of life.

Purposeful partnerships and collaborations will be established and maintained to promote Asian cinema and to advance the archiving profession. AFA will keep current on preservation methodologies and technologies, while contributing towards research and best practices to help improve the field and industry of film preservation.

Even as Oldham Theatre will see reduced seating capacity, generating well curated physical and online screenings with a good mix of contemporary and classic films will be the aim. Similarly, education programmes will be developed with the needs of students and educators in mind, enriching their learning capacity and appreciation of Asian cinema in an interesting and dynamic manner.

With travel curbs in place for many countries, training opportunities such as international conferences and workshops can be attended by staff to gain experience and exposure so that they can run the Archive effectively.

Amidst the current circumstance, the AFA is keenly aware of how important it is to be nimble and flexible in responding to the ever-evolving situation. It will continue to engage with board members, staff, volunteers, partners, and donors, working toward the best for the institution.
Financial Information

In keeping with standard practices amongst archives, the Asian Film Archive does not capitalise its collections. It does not have an endowment fund and the only investment income is from interest.

The summaries presented below are the Archive’s financial position and performance as of 31 March 2021.

The financial statements were audited by Ernst & Young LLP, Public Accountants and Certified Public Accountant Singapore.

31 March 2021

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### Breakdown of Incoming Resources from Generated Funds

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<th>2020 (S$)</th>
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**Total receipts**: 1,985,699 (2021) 2,726,494 (2020)

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## Balance Sheet

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## Other Information

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<th>2021 (S$)</th>
<th>2020 (S$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building Fund</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endowment Fund</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Funds</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Funds</strong></td>
<td><strong>598,004</strong></td>
<td><strong>617,600</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2021 (S$)</th>
<th>2020 (S$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Donations/grants and sponsorship given to other charities</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Employees</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Employee Costs</td>
<td>768,442</td>
<td>673,372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Employees in total remuneration band above S$100,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of key management in total remuneration bands above S$100,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of paid staff who are close members of the family of the Executive Head or Board Member, who receives more than $50,000 during the year</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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