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The closing highlight of the recent 4 th Asian Film Symposium, held 14-18 September 2004, was the Singapore-Malaysia Film Exchange Project.

A unique cross-country film exchange between Singapore and Malaysia, this project involved three Singaporean filmmakers (Victric Thng, Sookoon Ang and Lynn Loo) and three Malaysian filmmakers (Aaron Chung, Haanim Bamadhaj and Khoo Eng Yow) going across the causeway to make a 5-minute short film about the other country.

This project is collaboration between The Substation's Moving Images programme and Malaysian filmmaker James Lee, and it came about from the desire to use film as a bridge to bring together the film communities of the two countries.

The final six films premiered at the closing night of the 4 th Asian Film Symposium and for the six filmmakers involved, it was also the first time they have seen each other's films.

We speak to two of the filmmakers involved in this project, Sookoon Ang from Singapore who made “Do I Ever Linger There?”, a personal and whimsical travelogue and Aaron Chung from Malaysia, who made the hilarious satire “Shoot the Malaysian” about their experiences making their films.

**What was your initial impression when you were approached to do this project?**

*Sookoon:*

Intrigue. And with the slight apprehension, which is the quite the standard reaction to new things, experiences and experiments.

*Aaron:*

I was surprised, excited and glad to be part of the project. I like making movies and I like Singapore. This project provided me the funding and the opportunity to make a movie and screen it in Singapore.

**How did you come up with the idea of your film?**

*Aaron:*

I was joking and casually brainstorming with my brother one evening and we came up with the idea to do a “lame” David Letterman-style comic video clip.

*Sookoon:*

I didn't plan to have the idea but rather the images gradually fell together as while I was working on some other idea involving fruits, mainly Rambutan eroticism and fruit flies.

**Tell me more about the process of shooting your film.**

*Sookoon:*

There is no formal process since nothing was premeditated except the country to film, of course. There were myself filming and Mum, who is really the unaccredited producer. She has many friends in Malaysia who drove us around and let us stay in their homes. I filmed whatever that took my interest and also filmed out of politeness whatever stuff my mum and her friends directed me to film.

*Aaron:*

I gradually developed the idea until I ultimately visualized somewhat of a finished product in my mind. I went down to Singapore the following weekend with my friend and collaborator Malik for a day of location scouting. After that, I came back to Kuala Lumpur to think things through and returned the weekend after that with my camera for the actual shoot.

**What is the most interesting thing that happened during the making of your film?**

*Aaron:*

I wanted to shoot and move as quickly as I can. For the final church scene, I did the fall over and over again because the phone a friend of mine was throwing at me just will not hit or land the way I had wanted it to. There was mass going on at the time so there were a lot of people in the background. (I saw that when I was reviewing the shots). Many of them were shocked and were 'coming to my aid' until they saw me get up and walk over to a cameraman. Also, the archbishop of Singapore was watching from his chair inside.

*Sookoon:*

Kampong hospitality. My gosh... I was quite bowled over by many villagers' lack of skepticism by allowing strangers—my mum and I and the small entourage of Malaysian friends trespass their front and back yards. I thought how different and good.

**What are the biggest challenges to making your film?**

*Aaron:*

Just fitting it into my schedule was very difficult because I was very busy at the time - new school semester just started and I was in the process of moving into a new apartment. Apart from that, the usual difficulties of going down to Singapore and back for two weekends in a

row, shooting as quickly as possible and getting as much usable footage as possible in my short time.

*Sookoon:*

The biggest challenge for me would be to make a common and designated theme personal and idiosyncratic.

**What was your reaction when you saw the final six films on the closing night of Asian Film Symposium?**

*Aaron:*

The pressure of being commissioned to do a film, trying to work in a genre that I'm totally new to and reading the synopsis of the other works made me worried that my work will not measure up with the rest of the films.

But the audience's response during the screening, applause after the film and interest during the question and answer session made me feel so relieved and happy.

*Sookoon:*

Each filmmaker has a different take on their subject matter and has different concern, which is how I feel about all the six films. But all the films worked on the idea of going places. Haanim with Arabs' migration, Aaron's about a stranger in a foreign land, Eng Yow offered the experience of travelling in search for livelihood, Victric's protagonists were on a journey of love and of memory, Lynn took a train ride and I took a dreamtime travel. Like sharks, we must move constantly and forward. Like sharks, we die if we are inert.

This exchange only proved that there should be more platforms for exchanges regionally because the outcome for both the filmmakers and audience, is invaluable.

*by Zhang Wenjie*

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