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BY **KERRINE GOH**
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Asian & European Independents want to strengthen cooperation

In August 2002, Cinemania International Film Festival with the support of **Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)** took the initiative to gather Asian and European professionals to take stock of their common problems and of future collaborations that could help them overcome these problems. In the presence of new participants, they met again in Göteborg in Sweden to measure the pitfalls they encountered and the progress they accomplished.

The pitfalls? The themes of the workshops already outline the subject: "The issues/obstacles to the distribution of Asian films in Europe."

Participants noted that for the past 5-10 years, there have been more Asian films selected and awarded through European film festivals (for now, mostly from Japan, China, Korea and Thailand). Those film festivals are important for film distributors for the selection and choice of their films. Nevertheless, there are factors, which undermine a wider Asian film distribution in Europe: there are niches for very commercial movies or very artistic ones but not so much for "in-between" categories.

There are still numerous problems that European independents know well: translation cost of Asian films; time needed to build the audience in Europe, to introduce new types of films from Asia. Special film weeks (like

the Chinese film week in Sweden in Spring 2003) shall be encouraged along film festivals, as a marketing tool to promote Asian films and also as a way to educate the audience.

Europeans have to suffer from the consequences of another subject tackled in Göteborg: "The situation of European distribution: the stories of a fragmented market". This workshop raised the question on how the distribution of Asian films could benefit from European aids. as long as European films can also benefit from similar aids in Asia!

But we must face the facts: Independent cinema is a rather recent phenomenon in Asia. Many countries lack a good system of film studies and film techniques. Except for Korea, independent cinema is not really supported by strong, structured and financial governmental policies. The success stories of some independent Asian films in Europe (particularly through festivals awards and selections) don't seem to help to improve the independent cinema situation in Asia (problems of governmental support, distribution strategies, etc). Some Asian Film Festivals, when focused on independent cinema, have more difficulties to get financial support from the government despite the network they develop with overseas cinema professionals.

Some recommendations and one realization:

These discussions between professionals from 9 Asian countries and 6 European countries (paradoxically less numerous due to a busy schedule, e.g. Sundance, Rotterdam and Berlin) led to several recommendations:

1. To continue to create the market for independent cinema and to educate the audience in Asia (with film festivals and screenings of independent movies) and in Europe (through increasing opportunities to watch Asian films).
2. To encourage film criticisms to support film for their distribution and promotion.

3. To further develop film distribution through other channels like TV and DVD (DVD representing a big potential market for more artistic films).
4. To find ways to encourage governments and national film commissions to support independent local cinema and also "selected" film makers to attend festivals in Europe, which provide them with unique places to find contacts and production opportunities for future films. Eventually encourage regional coordination between film festivals to attract more film distributors.
5. To consider more specifically the MEDIA programme and the system of training for film producers in Europe, for potential applications for Asia. In this respect, the experience of FIT-Film Industry Training is certainly of interest.

In fact, Göteborg reflected a certain number of remarks and suggestions that had already been made in Manila. The source of these repetitions (apart from the permanent existence of certain situations) may come from the fact that a) some new participants, who weren't present during the first meeting, attended these workshops in Sweden and b) no permanent secretary is in place, while it is a necessity in order to ensure a follow-up to the initiatives.

The appointment of a permanent secretary had been one of the wishes voiced during the meeting in the Philippines: Tikoy Aguiluz, Cinemania's director, decided to put the constitution of a permanent structure on the agenda.

However, the [SEA-Images \(Synergy Europe-Asia\) Network](#), created in Manila, has achieved one of its goals: The Göteborg meeting was the occasion for the launch of the [SEA-Images website](#), which aims at becoming an information tool for cinema professionals in Asia and Europe (organizations related to cinema in each ASEM country, festivals, news updates, publications, articles with a focus on independent cinema etc).

by Henri Roanne-Rosenblatt, [Film Industry Training Coordinator](#)

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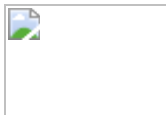
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