

Final report

Report on the project “Cultivating filmmaking and screening collaboration in Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar”

1. Project overview

From December 2016 to January 2017, I traveled for 6 weeks through 7 cities, focusing on capital cities in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) to survey the state of production and exhibition of especially independent films, and to learn about the lifestyles of people involved in the field. My primary activities during this trip included interviews and meals with relevant parties, inspections of film production and screening sites, and visits to relevant organizations.

Circumstances differ slightly by country between Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia, but I noticed the following characteristics: (More details follow in Section 3)



- ① Absence of film professionals in their 40s and 50s
- ② Spread of smartphones, internet access, and multiplex movie theaters
- ③ Active film festival scene
- ④ Emergence of a generation making short films as a step to full-length feature filmmaking
- ⑤ Documentaries rely heavily on foreign countries for funding and exhibition, due to limited opportunities for domestic screening
- ⑥ Governments are getting involved in the movie industry

At several of the locations I visited, I hosted free screenings of the 1964 Japanese documentary ON THE ROAD: A DOCUMENT (with English subtitles; directed by Noriaki Tsuchimoto) with my commentary, and sessions promoting debate and discussion about the state of Tokyo in the run-up to the 1964 Tokyo Olympics and the dilemma faced by independent film directors about sponsored films then.



Further to what I saw, heard, and experienced during my trip, I am starting to envision projects in collaboration with local organizers, to further filming, screening, preservation, and distribution of local documentary.

2. Record of activities

Fellowship period: Dec. 1, 2016 – Jan. 15, 2017

12/1	Tokyo – Hanoi – Vientiane (NH857, QV312)	
12/2	- Observed a film production site by a film crew from Brunei (Regal Blue Productions)	Vientiane
12/3	Vientiane – Sainyabuli (Shared van) - Visited and interacted with overseas cooperation volunteers	
12/4	- Accompanied filming of the cotton indigo-dyeing and weaving process in the village of Viengkaew. Welcoming party for interchange with villagers.	Sayabouly
12/5	- Accompanied filming in the village of Viengkaew Sainyabuli – Luang Prabang (Shared bus)	
12/6	- Luang Prabang Film Festival: Symposiums, Thai and Singaporean documentaries (<i>The Scala</i> , etc.), Vietnamese film <i>Sweet 20</i> , Japan-Laos collaborative film <i>Say Nam Lai - The River Flows</i> premiere, socializing with staff.	Luan Prabang
12/7	Classic documentary <i>Chang</i> (1925)	
12/9	Luang Prabang – Vientiane (QV53) - Visit to the Japan Foundation Vientiane Liaison Office: Lunch with Hiroshi Uchida - Tour of movie theaters and DVD shops (guidance by JF staff and	Vientiane

	Mr. Oland)	
12/10	- Visit with Mr. Hans Kaufman, who makes short films in the local area	
12/11	- Lunch meeting with Hélène Ouvrard of the Vientiane International Film Festival and documentary filmmaker Kham Induangchanthy - <i>Twenty Again</i> at a multiplex movie theater (Thai movie, English/Lao subtitles)	
12/12	- Visit to the Baan Ton Mali café, which screens films on an irregular basis. - Visit to the National Institute of Fine Arts with Souliya Phoumivong, who makes stop-motion puppet animation, and a visit to Mr. Phoumivong's home studio	
12/13	- Visit to a confectionery store operated by film director Som Ock Suthipong - Meeting with JICA's Kanako Maeno - Meeting with National University of Laos, Faculty of Letters, Dept. of Lao Language and Mass Communication student and filmmaker Nirankoon Singprasouth, and Lao New Wave Cinema's Vannaphone (Kino) Sitthirath	
12/14	Vientiane – Bangkok – Yangon (TG571, TG305)	
12/15	- Viewed a Myanmar comedy film at Thamada Cinema - Dinner with Keiko Sei; visited a DVD shop	
12/16	- Visit to Yangon Film School	Yangon

12/17	- Meeting with Myat Noe	
12/18	- Meeting with Aungmin, Aung Khine Myo, and Keiko Sei - Visit to the Watthan Film Festival offices; meeting with Thaidii and Thuthu Shein	
12/19	- Visit to the Japan Foundation's Japan Culture House - Sightseeing on 35 Street, an area full of film studios, and to areas with movie theaters - Meeting with young documentarian Waimar Nyunt; watch a sample of her works	
12/20	- Visit to the Myanmar Motion Picture Organization and Film Archive, with Aungmin and Okkar Maung as guides - Mini-lectures for young documentarians at the Watthan Film Festival offices on the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival and film festivals around the world	
12/21	Yangon – Bangkok – Chiang Mai (TG302, TG120)	
12/22	- Preliminary meeting with Som Supaparinya	
12/23	- <i>On the Road: A Document</i> screening and mini-lecture at the Asian Culture Station; interchange with local artists	Chiang Mai
12/24	- Outdoor film screening on the Chiang Mai University campus - Dinner with Apichatpong Weerasethakul and others	
12/25	Chiang Mai – Bangkok (TG103) - <i>On the Road: A Document</i> screening and mini-lecture at the	Salaya

	Tearoom cafe	
12/26	- Participated in a year-end party for Thai independent filmmakers	Bangkok
12/27	- Meeting with Thida Plitpholkarnpim of the Documentary Club, a documentary film distribution company - Viewed <i>By the Time It Gets Dark</i> at the arthouse cinema HOUSE - Visit to I Hate Pigeons, a café-bar that periodically screens documentary films	
12/28	- Lunch with English-language newspaper <i>The Nation</i> editorial committee member Kong Rithdee and documentary filmmaker Panu Aree. Dinner with director Pimpaka Towira.	
12/29	- Participated in film screening and night festival at the Film Archive	Salaya
12/30	- Meeting with 8mm filmmaker Mont Tesprateep. <i>On the Road: A Document</i> screening and mini-lecture for Film Archive staff - Participated in Thai film screening and night festival	
12/31	- Annual outdoor New Year's film screening at the Film Archive	
1/4	Bangkok - Phnom Penh (TG584)	Phnom Penh
1/5	- Visit to the Bophana Center's Kazumi Arai. Lunch with Park Sungho, Neang Kavich, So Chandara, and Chan Lida. Sightseeing at the White Building, a filming site of a Kavich film. Viewed a documentary about Cambodia at the Meta House.	
1/6		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Viewed screening of and talks on films by young filmmakers at the National Short Film Festival - Attended a screening at Paññāsāstra University of Cambodia of <i>Don't Think I've Forgotten</i>, a documentary about Cambodian rock music 	
1/7	Animation film at Institut Francais. Lunch meeting with former Cambodia Film Commission staff Chandara So. Award ceremony at the National Short Film Festival.	
1/10	Visit to the Japan Foundation Asia Center Phnom Penh Liaison Office and the Cambodia Film Commission. Meeting with Sithen Sum of a film distribution company and director Huy Yaleng.	
1/11	Meeting with Kazumi Arai of the Bophana Audiovisual Resource Center. Premiere event and screening of new Cambodian film <i>Love 2 the Power of 4</i> .	
1/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accompanied the Bophana film crew; filmed the ceremony preceding a creative dance concert dealing with the Khmer Rouge era - Screening of and mini-lecture on <i>the Road: A Document</i> at the Bophana Center 	
1/13	Interview with the director of the Department of Cinema and Cultural Diffusion. Visited the Cine Lux movie theater; viewed the Cambodian comedy-horror film <i>The Mummy</i> at Regent. Special premiere of the Apichatpong film <i>Cemetery of Splendour</i> at the Institut Francais. Visit to filming site Diamond Island with relevant parties.	
1/14	Master class by Apichatpong; CFC-sponsored lunch meeting; short films by young Cambodian filmmakers at the Bophana Center	

1/15	<p>- Visit to post-production studio Filmkhmer; meeting with Satoshi Sugano.</p> <p>Phnom Penh – Tokyo (NH818)</p>	
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3. Collaborations with host institutions

【Laos】 Lao New Wave Cinema (film production company):

I interviewed documentary filmmakers Kham Induangchanthy and Vannaphone (Kino) Sittirath, discussed their experiences with co-producing with Japan and what possibilities exist for collaboration with Japan in the future.

【Myanmar】 Yangon Film School:

I visited the school with local director Aleksandra Minkiewicz as our guide. I observed a workshop on documentary animation and a screenplay workshop. I spoke to workshop lecturers and students about their accomplishments and their ideal vision for the future of filmmaking.

【Thailand】 Thai Film Foundation:

I jointly planned an *On the Road: A Document* screening and talk event with Chalida Uabumrungjit. I spoke with programming staff and regular guests, comparing the state of society and documentary filmmakers in modern Southeast Asia with that of Japan in the 1960s. I spent the New Year's period with the staff and discussed what businesses/projects are needed in Asia today.

【Cambodia】 Bophana Audiovisual Resource Center:

I met Executive Director Sopheap Chea, and received a tour of the Bophana Center and an explanation of its activities from Kazumi Arai. I jointly planned an *On the Road: A Document*

screening and talk event. I began considering the possibility of joint projects in the future between the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival and the Bophana Center.



4. Information collected in Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia

① Historical divisions and the absence of film professionals in their 40s and 50s

■ The individuals who are most active in independent film production and screening in Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia are in their 20s and 30s. The generation older than that are in their 60s and 70s, and I encountered several such individuals at the heads of government film bureaus and filmmakers' federations. What happened to everyone aged in their 40s and 50s? While I was unable to adequately inquire into this phenomenon, it is conceivable that the film industry was depressed due to the civil wars, tyrannical rulers, and economic troubles of the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, but was suddenly revitalized in recent years due to international support and the arrival of the digital age. In Myanmar, I heard about young generation filmmakers criticizing veterans of the film industry for having been “domesticated” by the former military regime. This generational conflict has apparently played out on Facebook recently.

■ In 1995, Som Ock Suthipong (1954 -) brought the film *Lenetene's Spinning Tops* to the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival. He had previously directed the film *Red Lotus* (1988), which was the first Laotian film to be screened at Cannes Film Festival. Today, he runs a Lao Airlines-catering cake shop and avoids the film world, almost never appearing publicly and spending his free time fishing and with his dogs and birds at home. It has been speculated that he shut himself away due to his dislike of political intervention in films.

■ Due to the generational divide in the film history in the region, young people trying to learn filmmaking must teach themselves, study abroad, and/or learn by attending workshops conducted by visiting foreigners. The film history is also in crisis as it is not being passed down, but in Myanmar there are young people who have begun appealing to the government and the film industry to rescue older films in the country's neglected film archive. In Cambodia, Rithy Panh's Bophana Audiovisual Center has been working on the collection and restoration of pre-Khmer Rouge films for a decade. Bophana is also active in showing films and providing access to archives through viewing monitors in their facilities.

■ The MEMORY! International Film Heritage Festival (November) began in Phnom Penh in 2013 and is currently based out of Yangon. Drawing on abundant French capital, this film festival continues to recover and screen classic Asian films. It also conducts screening tours across the Myanmar countryside in addition to visiting other Asian cities.

■ Many young members of the film industry of Laos have studied abroad in Australia, many in Myanmar have studied abroad in the Czech Republic, and many in Cambodia have studied abroad in France. These individuals are making excellent use of the knowledge they have collected and the networks they have built overseas to be active at the center of film production and screening in their home countries.

② Smartphones, internet, multiplex movie theaters

■ Every city and town is inundated with mobile communications company advertisements, revealing the strong presence of smartphones and the internet in urban life. Clerks tending shops in Yangon markets and groups of young people gathered along the Mekong River promenades in Vientiane were observed to be watching videos on their smartphones, which were placed down on the ground and used like televisions. Image and video content is increasingly ubiquitous in their lives (at least in the capital cities), just as it is in developed countries.



■ To filmmakers and programmers, SNS and video websites are miraculous tools that enable them access to the world's film classics, to the newest technical information, and to the unedited voices of well-known people involved in the film industry (master classes, recorded lectures, etc.). The young film industry people I met were active in accessing and sharing the treasure troves of knowledge available on the internet with far more enthusiasm than their Japanese counterparts.

■ There are currently 22 movie screens in Phnom Penh, with 3 new malls scheduled to be built within the year which will add another 10 screens. Even in Vientiane (population around 200,000), there are 10 screens at multiplex movie theaters in both the Chinese-built mall and the Thai-built mall. The Korean CJ Group has established multiplex movie theaters in Myanmar, and there are 12 movie theaters in Yangon. Multiplex movie theaters typically have little to do with independent films, but Lao filmmakers



who have no other suitable space for screenings are prepared to self-fund if necessary to use such theaters. Meanwhile, a Cambodian distribution company was testing out new types of films for the cinema such as an action movie star's debut as a director.

- Independent films are screened at places such as cafes, galleries, restaurants, French and German cultural organizations, and the Bophana Center in Phnom Penh.
- Older single-standing movie houses were mostly abandoned and almost never in operation, with the exception of Yangon. Some are lent out on a limited basis (for film festivals, etc.).

③ Active film festival scene

■ Film festivals began to be held around the year 2010 in these countries and have played a major role in the development of film culture there, cultivating both audiences and filmmakers and thereby encouraging film production. Most of the festivals are launched by individual volunteers with the aid of foreign embassies and cultural organizations, and they see their audiences grow every year despite censorship and cumbersome paperwork by government film bureaus. These are especially important screening venues for short films and documentaries that have no opportunity to play in the cinemas.



■ In Laos, film festivals are held annually in Luang Prabang (since 2010; held in December; focuses on Southeast Asian films) and Vientiane (since 2009; held in March; gateway to success for new short films in Laos). Myanmar has the Watthan Film Festival (since 2011; held in September) for screening short films and documentaries, the Human Rights Human Dignity International Rights Film Festival (since 2013; held in June), the European Film Festival, and the LGBT Film Festival, among others. In Cambodia, the Cambodia International Film Festival (since 2009; held in March as of this year) grows in scale each year, with a massive program of nearly 100 films in 2017 and an attendance of 20,000 visitors.

■ This year, the Department of Cinema and Cultural Diffusion of the Cambodian government held the first film festival for Cambodian short films, with a festival for feature-length films scheduled to be held next year. Although the Department of Cinema and Cultural Diffusion was previously focused on “regulating” films, it has begun to transition to “promoting” films instead.

■ This fellowship involved only a brief stop by the Luang Prabang Film Festival that was not sufficient for a real experience of a local film festival. But the determination of programming and festival management, often conducted by Europeans, Americans, and Koreans living in the region, and high professionalism suggests the festivals are held to high international standards. I heard from several sources that the screening venue, technical equipment, and other aspects could be bettered. Certain people expressed concern that film festival attendance should not be free.

■ I was struck by the extensive interchange among film festivals in the Southeast Asian region. Laos-focused special programs were screened in Phnom Penh, and programs focusing on Southeast Asian films were presented in Luang Prabang. It is fairly common now for Southeast Asian countries to mutually screen each other's short films.

④ Generation aiming to create full-length feature films, beginning with short films

■ It is increasingly common to look to short film screenings at film festivals as a way of introducing oneself and making one's name, with the ultimate goal of making feature-length films. At Myanmar's short film festival and Cambodia's National Short Film Festival (launched this year), monetary prizes are given to award winners to promote the production of feature-length films (\$3000 for 1st place, \$2000 for 2nd place).

■ An increasing number of film festivals subsidize film production. The Luang Prabang Film Festival has provided a total of \$15,000 to several such feature-length projects (Lao Filmmakers Fund; begun in 2013), and the MEMORY! festival has begun working as an agency for Myanmar directors in an effort to put one or two feature-length films out on the international market (Myanmar Script Fund; begun in 2016). The capital for these projects is provided by foreign charities and investment funds.

■ Meanwhile, not a big group of young people are keen to join the "trend" for these kinds of arthouse films sought by the international film festival community. We see the same filmmakers again and again: the trend is limited to those with the equipment and economic flexibility to shoot short films and those with an international perspective and who already have international connections. Particularly in Laos, even civil servants have low salaries and it is difficult for them just to get by in their daily lives without bribes or some side business attained through special connections.



- The commercial film industry in Myanmar and Cambodia continues to mass produce low-budget horror comedies, romantic comedies, and other formulaic genre films for the domestic market. The Thai film industry is eagerly entering this commercial film field, and it is co-production films from Myanmar and Laos that are succeeding as they incorporate the gorgeous look of Thai films with high-quality visuals and sound. Such films seem likely to continue to expand on their success in the future.
- Although I was not able to deeply explore the DVD market, it did seem as though there was a big market in Myanmar, Cambodia, and other countries for DVDs of films that never saw a theatrical release.
- Recently the Lao New Wave Cinema film drama *At the Horizon* was purchased by “Red by HBO”, an Asian film channel owned by the American television network HBO. This sale was conducted through the intermediation of the Luang Prabang Film Festival.
- Personnel with video/image production skills work as local coordinators for international projects and/or visiting foreign filming staff (on films, television dramas, news reporting, etc.). There is much to learn by working collaboratively with international filming crews, and it is also an important source of income.

⑤ Cultivation, screening, and production of documentaries

- In Myanmar, there is a wide-ranging, exceptionally numerous group of young people entering documentary production due to years-long education program on documentary films represented by international NPO The Yangon Film School, the Watthan Film Festival, the Human Rights Human Dignity International Film Festival, and other groups. You could say that in fact it was thanks to Myanmar’s military regime that an ongoing training program was established with the support of the world’s documentary community. The Yangon Film School focuses on basic education, and aims to achieve financial stability, by working increasingly with foreign sponsors interested in development aid. Filmmakers who choose to depart from these conventions have left the school to make films independently.
- Until recent years, there were many excellent documentaries produced in Bophana Center’s workshops (supported by French lecturers and technicians) in Cambodia. Some of these pioneering filmmakers have shifted their interests to fiction. A shift toward fiction can also be seen in Laos and Myanmar.

- In the region, there is a large number of forums for documentary project proposals and documentary workshops hosted by Japanese, Korean, European, and American cultural organizations throughout the year. This gives the small handful of applicants from Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia easy opportunities to travel overseas. Access to personal connections, production funding, coaching, and other resources are concentrated among the same group of people, and thus there seems to be limited increase in the pool of documentary filmmakers. Of course, there are also the hurdles of language ability and communication skills.



- Documentary filmmakers aspire to screen their documentaries at venues such as international film festivals in foreign countries, and to have them broadcast on channels such as NHK and Al Jazeera. It is completely inconceivable that domestic public broadcasters would purchase and broadcast their documentaries. (Though it might be possible if one were to pay for a broadcast slot.)
- Problems for documentary in this region lie in production funding and the absence of a domestic audience for documentaries. Moreover, out of censorship concerns, filmmakers would not attempt to screen films that contain politically sensitive or socially critical elements.
- In pre-democracy Myanmar, there were underground screenings of a variety of international films hosted by brave volunteers. This provokes deep thought: “What film screening is worth the risk of a 15-year jail sentence?”

⑥ Governments are getting involved

- After its military government came to an end in 2011, Myanmar elected its first civilian president in 54 years in 2016. Although this likely means that previous restrictions on free speech have been softened to some extent, the government remains strict regarding speech that could be considered to denigrate Buddhism. When *The Road to Mandalay* directed by Midi Z was screened at a film festival, organizers were directed to censor a shot in which a Buddhist painting was splashed with blood. Meanwhile, after Aung San Suu Kyi’s NLD party became the ruling party of the new government, they invited Thuthu Shein and other young people in their 30s and involved in film contribute to drafting a new “film law.” The commission is currently studying film law in countries such as France and South Korea as reference.
- In Laos and Cambodia, government ministries continue to regulate filmmaking and screenings through censorship (of screenplay / production) and various licensing and approval procedures.

However, there seems to be a shift in the winds, with increased attention from the international community. There has been a marked increase in foreign film productions and international co-productions, including an Angelina Jolie film in Cambodia. Film commissions are booming: in addition to the existing CFC (the CEO of which is French), the government and two other entities have announced formations of film servicing institutions. There is an idea for Laos and Cambodia to collaborate in establishing a “one-stop film commission for the peninsular” that will offer an even more diverse collection of filming locations, with the hope that this will attract more filming from foreign countries.

■ In an effort to expand the image, film, and television industries, Cambodia’s Department of Cinema and Cultural Diffusion has begun implementing bold policies to limit prime-time television hours to domestic content. (For more details, refer to the interview in Section 5 below.)



⑦ Thoughts of filmmakers and programmers: their wish list

- **Overall:** English skills that enable international access (communication skills, knowledge/information from the internet)
- **Producers:** Technicians (cameramen, lighting engineers, etc.)
- **Film festival organizers:** Opportunities to travel to foreign countries; screening equipment
- **Claymation creators:** Equipment (adapters that import filming data); teaching materials
- **Filmmakers:** Producing skills to creatively develop original content, taking advantage of foreign funding. (Because servicing foreign content provide good sources of income, but themes and methods of filmmaking are limited.)
- The understanding and cooperation of government film bureaus is required, as well as efficient action from such bureaus.

5. Interviews

Souliya Phoumivong (Laos)

【Clay Animator, National Institute of Fine Arts】



A mid-level filmmaker who turned a overseas connection into opportunity for business and creative progress

= Born 1982 (34 years old)

= As a painter enrolled in the National Institute of Fine Arts, he participated for three months in 2009 in a short film workshop conducted by a foreign instructor. Because that instructor left behind a MacBook (equipment), he was further enabled to create short films. Six years ago, he spent three months in Japan through the Japanese artist residency program “Yukobo,” where he first encountered stop-motion animation.

= When he first began to create animated films using clay figures, he was contracted through a 2012 UNICEF program to create “My Village,” an educational program for young children for Laos public television. Each episode was five minutes long and broadcast on both television and YouTube. Now in its fourth season, the Claymation show focuses on basic education and literacy.

= He felt rewarded, on a visit to the Laos countryside, when he was informed that even children of ethnic minority in the area were familiar with the characters of “My Village”. He is thankful for the public nature and national scope of television, and realizes that only certain classes of society in Laos have access to internet.

= He is currently very busy, having received a job contract similar to “My Village” from a fund connected with the Australian government, and is heading to Singapore in February for a residency that allows him to pursue creative work freely.

= Although the incoming funds from overseas is useful, he has no time. In order to have students inherit the knowledge of how to make the Claymation series, he established a studio next to his house where students live and work together like family. At present, of his 60 students per year, 35% participate in workshops.

= The work is mostly in-house -- molding the figures, shooting them, and recording their voices on their own (inside cars, etc.). The music is scored by professional Lao musicians.

= After his animation work gained attention, a group named DK Art, an older group whose members are 50-plus, came out and claimed that they were the first in Laos to create stop-motion animation. There is a historic gap in artistic succession in this country.

= With opportunity to travel to foreign countries, he learned how to move beyond day-to-day existence and to invest in himself, creating his own future. He did not want to become “a barber who cannot cut his own hair,” or “a carpenter whose own house is shoddy and crude.” He wanted his next work to be art for himself. Having an income was helpful to that end.

= Civil servants’ salaries are so low that they cannot even buy cars. They can hardly support themselves, much less families. His wife worked continuously for 30 years before finally receiving a paid holiday. The “My Village” contract was a big source of income for himself, and he was able to build a new house and studio in his hometown in addition to his house downtown. He enabled his relatives to run a restaurant, bought farming land, and rented that land out to others. He also loans out his western-style house and garden for wedding photographs and filming commercials.

Although his childhood was poor, his own son lives in comfort. He wants to enable him to do what he likes.

= He says, although younger people may choose experimental styles or otherwise imitate international trends, what is important to people like him in their mid-30s is making a living. Artists in previous eras had no work besides painting Buddhist images inside temples, but today photography and animation (videos) are income-earning work. School departments have even been started where artists in these fields can teach. The future is brighter now for young people graduating from art academies.



U Chit Swe (Myanmar)

【Secretary General, Myanmar Motion

Picture Organization】

Administrator of a historic association of producers of commercial films.

- 6,000 members (actors, directors, etc.), 29 staff members.

- Funding for activities: Censor registration fees, calendar sales, proceeds from soccer tournament,

member's fees (\$5).

- Hosts Myanmar's Academy Awards.

- The Secretary General has been staff since 1966 (his first position was sorting and delivering mail) and has worked his way up. In his youth, he watched as many as four films per day.

- He prefers films from the period 1974 – 1986 due to their storytelling technique and artistic perspectives.

- Modern movies are made with a profit-focused mindset.

- The organization's old offices are scheduled to be turned into a museum soon.

- In 1974, there was a period in which over 100 films were being created.

- Mobile phones appeared around 2005 and originally cost \$4000 each. Politicians distributed them to officials and they became popular. They spread to the point that everyone in the audience for Aung San Suu Kyi's speech in front of her house in 2011 were taking photos with their smartphones.

Sin Chan Saya (Cambodia)

【Director, Department of Cinema and Cultural Diffusion, Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts】

An official who views film as a tool for achieving national development and aims for a new type of administration that is connected to the world at large.



- In 2016, the Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts discussed how to improve the quality of filmmaking in the country. They decided to have the prime-time television hours of 7-9 pm be devoted solely to Cambodian-made TV dramas. The government would guarantee the costs of production. This was a vast quantity of content: 2 hours per day for 17 channels.
- As a result, there is now a labor shortage. The quality of writers and producers is in question. There is a need for further training and cultivation of talent.
- Television stations generate revenues of \$100 million annually from commercials, but it is difficult to find commercials for Khmer language content (and thus subsidies are required).
- The largest budget for one television slot is \$3,000. Buying foreign content is cheaper than creating content domestically.
- Therefore, laws were established such that duties be imposed on imports and those tax revenues were used to support Cambodian art and culture.
- A film school and workshops were established to develop personnel jointly between the private sector and the Royal University of Fine Arts. Even if they could not study abroad, individuals with talent were empowered to learn within the country.
- Held the first ever Cambodia National Short Film Festival to support young people, promoting filmmaking among young people and encouraging them to gain experience and grow through assiduous cultivation of their skills. Monetary prizes were also established for this festival (\$3,000 for first prize, \$2,000 for runner-up).
- Next, he would like to establish a national film festival for feature-length films.
- About the Cambodian film box-office:
 - One in every five released films is a Cambodian film.
 - 41 feature-length films were produced in 2016. Over 200 films were imported from foreign countries.

- There are 5 movie theaters in Phnom Penh (22 screens, 6500 seats), and 2 in Siem Reap. The number of movie theaters is scheduled to increase this year (there will be at least 3 new malls and 10 more screens).
- Of the total movie theater attendance of 3 million (the population Cambodia is 15 million), 1 million viewed one of the 41 Khmer films, while 2 million viewed one of the 200 foreign films.
- Due to the small size of the domestic market, production costs do not increase. Average production costs total \$20,000 - \$30,000.
- Attendance grew by 10% in 2016 compared to the previous year.
- However, there is insufficient growth in film quality and the number of days each film is in theaters. Of the 41 Cambodian films, half were unprofitable.
- Cambodian audiences prefer films that mix genres (e.g. mixing comedy, action, and horror). There is a demand for films that anyone can enjoy.
- What is “film quality”? 1) Filming technology and technique; 2) Fitting portrayal of Cambodian culture
- Cambodian films of the past have copied films elsewhere. They always imitate foreign movies. We wish for our films to reflect the ancient Khmer identity.
- For example, lines spoken in the Khmer language are unnatural direct translations from English or Chinese.
- Documentaries are on the rise in recent years. Documentary filmmakers are still few in number due to the lack of screening locations. These films are only screened at foreign film festivals. TV stations will not pay for broadcast rights for documentaries.



6. After the fellowship

The moving image industry which had been strictly monitored and controlled under past socialist and military governments is entering a new era. This six-week fellowship left me with an eye-opening sense of optimism



for the countries I visited – for the young age of the players, their harnessing skills for the newest tools of communication, and their dexterity in collaborating with foreigners who provide a pipeline to the world.

In this era where smartphones bring the world’s cutting-edge film and image culture to one’s fingertips, I discovered a fertile ground and emerging market for new types of film content that is not limited to the conventional horror-comedy genre or regional ethnical language culture.

Meanwhile, the documentary genre is still small and narrow. But there are filmmakers who aspire for independent filmmaking that goes beyond “contracted work” for philanthropic or PR films. I wait eagerly for films free of the political demands of censorship and the economic demands of foreign funding agencies to produce the formulaic “developing country film”: free to create works with personality and originality.

Local film festivals are steadily showcasing such talent, and at the same time doing the important work of cultivating audiences.

At the French Cultural Center in Phnom Penh in January, there was a retrospective of films by Thai artist Apichatpong Weerasethakul, with his attendance. The theater was packed every day with feverish young audiences. In a Q & A session, Apichatpong responded to a question about free speech. “To the police state or military state, films are just propaganda tools that are meant to serve the interests of a ‘correct’ ideology. But a film that a filmmaker really wants to make is more powerful than anything meant as a message for authority.”

Following my fellowship, I plan to continue conversation with my new-found friends about future collaborative projects. Kicking off with a screening on the occasion of Cambodian documentary filmmaker Lida Chan’s visit to Japan at the end of April, I look forward to the many projects we will initiate to support the filming, screening, preservation, and distribution of documentaries from Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia.



7. Major sites visited and relevant URLs

Laos	Luang Prabang Film Festival	www.lpfilmfest.org/
	Vientiane Film Festival	www.vientiane.org/sabaidee/
	Japan Foundation	https://www.facebook.com/JfacVt/

Asia Center
 Vientiane Liaison
 Office
 Lao New Wave Cinema
<https://www.linkedin.com/company/lao-new-wave-cinema-productions>
 National University of Laos,
 Faculty of Letters,
 Dept. of Lao Language and
 Mass Communication
<http://fol.edu.la/department/1-lao-language-and.html>
 National Institute of Fine Arts
 Khoubulom Rd, Vientiane 0100, Laos
 JICA Laos Office
<https://www.jica.go.jp/laos/office/>
 Regal Blue Production
<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Regal-Blue-Production/241944799157688>
 Film: *Say Nam Lai - The River Flows*
<http://www.saynamlai.movie/>

Myanmar

Watthan Film Festival
<http://www.wathannfilmfestival.com/>
 Yangon Film School
<http://yangonfilmschool.org/>
 New Zero Art Space
<http://www.newzeroartspace.com.mm/>
<https://www.facebook.com/Myanmar-Motion-Picture-Organization-%E1%80%BB%E1%80%99%E1%80%94%E1%80%B9%E1%80%99%E1%80%AC%E1%82%8F%E1%80%AF%E1%80%AD%E1%80%84%E1%80%B9%E1%80%84%E1%80%B6%E1%82%90%E1%80%AF%E1%80%95%E1%80%B9%E1%80%9B%E1%80%BD%E1%80%84%E1%80%B9%E1%80%A1%E1%80%85%E1%80%8A%E1%80%B9%E1%80%B8%E1%80%A1%E1%82%90%E1%80%AF%E1%80%B6%E1%80%B8-496004583744860/>
 Myanmar Motion Picture Organization
<https://www.hrhdiff.org/>
 Human Rights Human Dignity

	International Film Festival	
	Japan Culture House	https://www.facebook.com/jch.yangon/
Thai-land	Film Archive (Public Organization)	http://www.fapot.org/en/home.php
	Asian Culture Station, Chiangmai	http://www.asianculturestation.cac-art.info/
	The Japan Foundation, Bangkok	http://www.jfbkk.or.th/
	Documentary Club	https://www.facebook.com/pg/DocumentaryClubTH/about/?ref=page_internal
	Rumpai Loft Habitat	https://www.facebook.com/rumpailofthabitat/
	I Hate Pigeons	https://www.facebook.com/ihatepigeonsbangkok/
Cam-bodia	Bophana Audiovisual Resource Center	http://bophana.org/
	Meta House	http://www.meta-house.com/
	Institut Francais Cambodge	http://institutfrancais-cambodge.com/en/presentationifc/
	Cambodia Film Commission	http://www.cambodia-cfc.org/site/index.php
	Department of Cinema and Cultural Diffusion, Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts	http://cambodiafilm.gov.kh/
	Japan Foundation Phnom Penh Liaison Office	https://www.facebook.com/asiacenter.phnompenh/
	Cambodian Living Arts	http://www.cambodianlivingarts.org/
	FiLKHMER Studio	http://www.filkhmer.com/

Puprum Entertainment	https://www.facebook.com/pg/PuPrumPage/about/
Kon Khmer Koun Khmer	https://konkhmerkounkhmer.wordpress.com/about/
Meatochak Film Production	https://www.facebook.com/meatochakfilm/?ref=nf