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SEAPAVAA vs. ACE

A comparison between two regional associations of archives

“Recognizing that film is essentially trans-national in character and that its problems of survival cannot be solved at national level alone, the founder-members of ACE came together in the late 80s to seek co-operative ways of saving and restoring the European film heritage.”¹

“(…) geographical proximity, language and common concerns lead them in this direction.”²

These statements present the importance and the necessity of regional cooperation among moving image archives. Moving image archives do cooperate with each other from their very birth as you may see through FIAF, which was created almost simultaneously with the beginning of the world’s first archives. With relatively low amount of available funding for film preservation and archiving, many film archives rely on government support. For doing to, to unite or to cooperate with each other is a efficient strategy. However, one might still attempt to ask why regional? What kind of advantages and efficiency can regional associations guarantee archives? This paper will address the necessity and potentiality of regional association through comparing and contrasting two cases, followed by suggestions on several things to be done additionally and/or respectively.

¹ <http://www.acefilm.de/13.html> Goals and Achievements, ACE website

² Francis. David "Second Century Forum – Stockholm" *Journal of Film Preservation* 68.1 (2004): 2-9. p5

As a preparatory work for this comparison, research on previously existing regional associations was conducted. Surprisingly, historical exemplars or simple samples of regional associations were hardly detected. This contrasts the many cases of economic/politic communities and association upon geographical proximity among nations. By referencing former publications and a brief interview of David Francis—the former curator of the British National Film Archive, and the former chief of the Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division of the Library of Congress—a few cases were able to be found and are mentioned below.

Firstly, it may sound odd but **International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF)** can be addressed as the first case of both an archival association as well as a regional association of archives. Even though FIAF is now the biggest international organization with the highest authority, when it began in 1938 FIAF was almost exclusively a European regional association. The first year members were aware of the importance of association. In November 1947 Langlois wrote to Lindgren: “(...) without international cooperation and an international understanding of the problems we will not be able to make progress, or to overcome the inevitable crises.”³ They were forced to unite and share the information, the equipment, and loosely share both the database and regular discussions regarding the proper way of film preservation. However, their somewhat Euro-centered elitism had led FIAF to stay a regional federation among mostly European film archives and a few North American film archives until the 1970s when they finally started become less of a closed circle and more open to archives in the third world.

As an example of a briefly existing project-based association, there is **The Union des Cinémathèques de la Communauté Européenne (UCE)**. It was the first incarnation of the organization now representing European archives, established in the mid-1980s, but not as a

3 Houston, Penelope. *Keepers of the Frame : The Film Archives*. Ed. British Film Institute. London: London : British Film Institute, 1994. p.61.

permanent organization—more like a film preservation project under the umbrella of EU’s “Media” project. **The Council of North American Film Archives (CNAFA)** can also be mentioned as another case of a not-quite-working-these-days organization. It was established in 1998 because the larger film archives in the States, Canada and Central American were finding little opportunity to discuss issues of interest to them either in FIAF, which is too broad and general of a federation, or in the Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA), which is multi-faceted professional organization based upon individual membership. At present CNAFA is a very informal group with a minimally organizational structure.

Lastly, a mysterious and legendary **alignment of Latin American archives** should be presented. According to the personal recollection of David Francis there was a meaningful attempt to establish a regional association among Latin American film archives in the 1970s. These archives struggled against the FIAF’s notoriously high standards and the prevailing language barrier to non-Europeans in joining FIAF, and desired their own association concerned with the problems that they faced. Even though this seemingly prominent trial failed for some reason, they might have been a good pair example with SEAPAVAA with many similarities and interesting differences if only there was any more information and/or historical records. Even the title of this attempted association could not be found. These brief case studies show that the two associations this paper will discuss, the Association des Cinémathèques Européennes (ACE) in Europe and Southeast Asia Pacific Audiovisual Archive Association (SEAPAVAA) in Southeast Asian Pacific, may be rare and valuable cases of functioning regional associations.

Introduction of ACE and SEAPAVAA-Common Features

As regional associations of moving image archives, the overviews of the given two associations have a lot in common. **Association des Cinémathèques Européennes (ACE)** was

established in 1996 as the later self of the Association of Filmarchives of the European Community (ACCE), which started in 1991 with project LUMIERE.⁴ With 39 members, all of whom are obviously from the EU, ACE aims to protect the European film heritage. In doing so, it takes survey on Orphan works; makes comments and writes about EU politics, legislation and related funding; and runs inter-archival exchange programs.

The origin of **Southeast Asia Pacific Audiovisual Archive Association (SEAPAVAA)**, founded in 1996, can be traced back to ASEAN Audio/Video and Film Retrieval, Restoration and Archiving workshop in 1993. During its initial steps to foundation, members were settled as archives in ASEAN and neighboring countries such as Australia and New Zealand. As a result, SEAPAVAA has 30 full institutional members, 17 associate institutional members, and 21 associate individual members as of now. Under the main goal of addressing common issues and concerns related to the audiovisual heritage of member countries, SEAPAVAA has performed projects such as skill development, repatriation assistance, and technical assistance. They also run regular activities such as running committees, holding annual conferences, and providing publication. Through these activities SEAPAVAA is expected to strengthen national capabilities in audiovisual acquisition, management, preservation and provision of access. Along with establishing region wide standards, methods and procedures, SEAPAVAA hopes to encourage communication and mutual sharing of knowledge, skills and experiences among others.⁵

An important thing in common which should be noted first between these two organizations is the existence of umbrella association or project, which is also regional. The biggest umbrella of the ACE is the **European Union (EU)** and its sub-organizations. From

⁴ Progetto LUMIERE started in 1991, of which main goals are: the restoration of European films; a search for lost European films; and the compilation of a European filmography. Until 1996 when the project came to an end, more than 1000 films during the silent era were restored, approximately 700 films were identified, and all EC countries' national filmographies were compiled in a single database.

⁵ <http://www.seapavaa.org/>

LUMIERE to other collaborations of archive-centered projects, which ACE has been highly driven into, EU has been vastly supportive to many kinds of activities and projects to protect and/or create their cultural heritage. As for SEAPAVAA, the association has been under the umbrella of **the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)**, which is a geo-political economic organization of ten countries located in Southeast Asia, from its beginning. The discussion about the foundation of SEAPAVAA itself started from the idea of forming an ASEAN confederation of film archivists. This idea, followed by the attendance of other archives in Oceania region such as Australia and New Zealand along with a rather stable and high level of archival circumstances, drove them to create the groundwork of SEAPAVAA. Along with ASEAN, UNESCO is also one of the important father or brother organizations. As the specialized agency of UN of which main goal is promoting international collaboration through education, science, and culture, UNESCO's main concern and activity is almost overlapping with that of SEAPAVAA—safeguarding regional and cultural history, the promotion of cultural diversity, and international cooperation agreements to secure the world cultural and natural heritage. After several seminars and workshops co-held by SEAPAVAA and UNESCO, SEAPAVAA has been officially admitted into operational relations with UNESCO as an NGO to pursue common goals in the service of international cooperation and development in 2001.⁶

As a pair of regional associations of which members share geographic proximity, similar language, culture and archive-related concerns, several common features are easily observed. Their practical and actual activities, supported and funded from government-like public sector, resulted in holding the training programs (Archimedia by ACE, Summer school, and Travelling Workshop by SEAPAVAA); researches and publications on technical standards; establishing the

⁶ In addition, there was a SEAPAVAA project, Preservation and Access to the Southeast Asian Documentary Heritage, run under UNESCO's Memory of the World Program. It provided a forum for exchange of information on the problems and opportunities regarding preservation of and access to documentary heritage.

shared catalogs and/or compiled filmographies (ASEAN catalog of Film and TV Production by SEAPAVAA, Filmarchive online by ACE, both are focused on documentary or non-fiction films rather than feature films) Considering old traditions of secrecy of traditional archives and lacking enthusiasm for publishing complete lists of the holding, this attempt for building an associated database is an amazing progress.

Major Achievements

Seen from its beginning, most activities of **ACE**, an association of leading archives, of which relatively high standards have been already settled, seem to have appeared as a specific project with a very actual goal. To name some of major projects ACE led, Moving Image Database for Access and Re-use of European Film Collections (MIDAS) should be addressed first. From January 2006 to January 2009, MIDAS was propelled to launch the centralized process of European moving image search and retrieval. Multi-lingual web portal catalog for non-fiction material, Filmarchives online⁷ is its outcome. For Europe's digital cinematographic, the European Film Gateway (EFG) has been promoted since September 2008. By addressing IPR management issues and technical, semantic interoperability, the resulted network will provide an integrated access to more than 700,000 digitized materials. As little bit older projects than these, FIRST (Film Restoration and Conservation Strategies: 2002-2004), JEE (Joint European Filmography: 1993-1998), and Search for Lost Films (1997-1999) can be mentioned as well.

More important exemplary project which ACE performed in EU's broader picture is ACE Survey on Orphan Works in 2005. To encourage cultural use of orphan works, the

⁷ <http://www.filmarchives-online.eu/>

European Commission requested ACE to conduct a survey on updating the data regarding orphan works. In doing so, orphans, 21% of all films in the responding film archives, in European archives could have been somewhat grasped with the friendly participation from 24 archives. More recently, ACE succeeded in renewal of voluntary deposit agreement with FIAPF (International Federation of Film Producers Association) in this February. This shows that even closer relationship between the producer and the archivist, which has been rare in European circumstances, became available under the name of the association.

While many activities of ACE were driven by major projects under the considerably generous support from EU, these of **SEAPAVAA** have been produced from its regular annual basis activity such as general assembly and conference. SEAPAVAA is rather ongoing broad goal-based association of members, sharing the similar extent of poor archival circumstances: limited budget, short history of archiving, lacking technology, unfavorable climate, and so on. Ready and eager to learn from precedents and superiors, SEAPAVAA have always welcomed chances to held joint congress with other association. 2000 annual conference with IASA and 2004 conference with FIAF⁸ illustrated that effort. In addition, five regular committees of SEAPAVAA present its main concerns and activities: Collection, Promotion and Access Committee, Technical Committee, Training and Scholarship Committee, Development Committee, and Awards and Prizes Committee.

As the significant results from their conscientious achievements, Magnetic Media Preservation Training Workshop and the publication project of SEAPAVA Manual for AV Archives can be noted. Magnetic media workshop, following on SEAPAVAA annual conference

⁸ 2004 FIAF congress was one of the notorious congresses for the small attendance from Europe along with 2002 FIAF congress in Seoul, South Korea. Those are the cases brought by the geographic remoteness from Europe, and more notoriously by the prevailing notion that there are not that many things to learn from the third world. Some people have indicated that these cases illustrate the elitism many of archives in the first world are sharing, which should be fixed in near future.

in 2005, presented that members were very aware of the circumstances they are managing and main material they should concern first at that given moment—video rather than film, magnetic rather than celluloid. On the other hand, with a clear and practical goal, designed manual for archives in which resources or skills are limited but which are in new or pioneering situations, SEAPAVAA Manual for AV Archives project demonstrates the common circumstances members are facing and common will members are maintaining to improve the general standards. This willingness to collaborate and communicate has ended up with several forthcoming cases: repatriation of 1300 cans of Lao film from the Vietnam Film Institute and restoration of *Giliw Ko*, the Philippine classic musical movie (1939). The repatriation was done under the collaboration between two countries with a cultural development agreement, while the restoration became available under the partnership between the Philippine Information Agency and the National Film and Sound Archive in Canberra (both members of SEAPAVAA).

Developed vs. Developing

Given that the similar mission statements between ACE and SEAPAVAA, the most notable difference is seen from the phrase of SEAPAVAA's, such as "Strengthen national capabilities" and "establish regional standards", which are not detected from ACE's. Referring 'nation' and implying their recognition to their apparent inferiority regarding lacking experiences and technology for managing AV archives, SEPAVAA's general attitude seems to have a lot in common with that of developing countries, whereas the position and the activity of ACE is somewhat reflecting that of the developed countries. In addition, ACE states that under their association, films are being preserved and restored to the highest professional standards, while SEAPAVAA is stating that one of their main goal is setting a regional standards. Their training programs also are differentiated in terms of curriculum and aim. Supported or co-hosted by

governmental agencies in many cases, many of their educational events, including SEAPAVAA Summer Schools, focus on addressing the regional urgent issues and/or learning the basic manuals, which might seem too obvious to certain archives in the first world.

Without the regular workshop/ conference, ACE has more focused on setting a technical standards and a specific project. ACE's projects are largely supported by the given politic/ economic umbrella but generally run with a certain extent of independency. Once their collaborated project completed, the results are shared by links or uploads on the official websites, enabling the member archives to perform individual projects upon those results. Their main concern is completing their already existing and preserved cultural heritage. In contrasts, as newcomers in AV archiving fields, with the limited, emergent condition, SEAPAVAA performs as a springboard for inevitable communication and collaboration, which should be tangible and realistic. Given the harsh condition that SEAPAVAA members are sharing in terms of economy, climate, and even not having a common alphabet, their accomplishment and sincere attitude is remarkable enough to be noted.

Conclusion

“The more ambitious plans for international cooperation mainly fell apart, for lack of resources of will. There was a good deal of talk, but never much more than talk, about setting up an international bureau of film historical research. There were plans for each archive to concentrate its attentions on some particular area of cinema.”⁹ This analysis about the situation till 1950s reminds that how much successful two regional associations have been so far. However,

⁹ Houston, Penelope. *Keepers of the Frame : The Film Archives*. Ed. British Film Institute. London: London : British Film Institute, 1994. p.63

there are still many tasks left especially with the advent of digital environment. Enabling more active and stable loan by a real uniformed database among members may be one of these tasks. Any collaboration between SEAPAVAA and ACE, by means of technology exchanges, digital preservation standards setting, is also recommended. Seen from two successful cases, more regional collaborations will be of benefit to safeguarding and reconstruction of cultural heritage in the given region. East Asian Film Archive association/ orphan project can be one of the suggestions. Their interconnectivity throughout the modern history may imply the existence of many orphan works to identify by their collaboration and the anticipated chance of repatriations to be conducted, needless to mention about sharing similar climate and archive-related issues. Considering the fact that copyright and IPR circumstances have been aggravated to archival world, regional solidarity—to raise the voice from members and to affect their government's policy—might be one of the realistic strategy.