

# Asian Films in Singapore

By Pat Weisel

This new PASSAGE feature will present an overview of the many Asian films showing locally. We'll begin with some avenues of exploration for those interested in Asian film.

At any given time there are several Asian films being shown in commercial cinemas; many are quite entertaining. The films are mainly Chinese, with Japanese and Korean films also quite common, while those from other East Asian countries are more rarely seen. Good places to see them include the downtown Cathay Cinema and occasionally Vivo City. Indian films can be caught at the Rex in MacKenzie Road and the Shaw Tower Jade Theatres on Beach Road.

The premier, non-commercial Asian film event is the Singapore International Film Festival (SIFF). Begun in 1986 when only mainstream commercial films were available in local cinemas, the annual festival screens over 300 films of all genres, with the focus on ground-breaking Asian cinema. This year the festival runs from 14 to 25 September. A booklet will be available in early September.

In 1991, under the umbrella of the Silver Screen Awards, the Festival became competitive, recognising the Best Asian Feature and Best Singapore Short Film, thus becoming the first Asian film festival to offer a specifically Asian film competition. In 1994 SIFF dedicated itself to the cinema of Southeast Asia and has since featured retrospectives of a different Asian director each year. In 2005, Singapore film was spotlighted with the launch of a new festival section - Singapore Panorama. The following year the Singapore Film Awards were introduced as part of the Silver Screen Awards.

In April, the new Southeast Asian Film Festival sponsored by the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) was held at the Moving Image Gallery at 8Q. Seventeen works by both established and emerging directors were screened, often followed by post-film talks with the directors. As SAM Director Tan Boon Hui says, "Contemporary art as expressed in the moving image of cinema and video art has been one of the most important mirrors reflecting the recent social and cultural transformation of the city in Asia."

The National Museum of Singapore's Cinématèque programme showcases local and regional cinema and features retrospectives of both essential works and hidden gems in its World Cinema series. Their free screening in April of 21 films by Akira Kurosawa, including classics such as *Seven Samurai* and

newer films such as *One Wonderful Sunday*, was brought to the people of Singapore in gratitude for their support and generosity after this year's devastating earthquake and tsunami. The Japan Foundation, Embassy of Japan, Singapore Film Society and the Japanese Association of Singapore were responsible for this rare treat. In July the same groups, as well as the museum, hosted the Japanese Film Festival, with proceeds from some screenings donated to the Japanese Red Cross.

Every first Monday of the month, The Substation screens short films by Singaporean film-makers. Called *First Take*, the series also gives the audience a chance to speak to the filmmakers after the screening. In May, The Substation also hosted the second Experimental Film Forum, which showcased thought-provoking pieces and included informal discussions with directors.

Finally, Sinema Old School in Mount Sophia Road was founded in 2006 to showcase local work and inspire a local film-making movement.



Film still of *Oxhide*, 2005, directed by Liu Jiayin

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**Pat Weisel** has lived in the US states of NY, NJ, VA, Wash. D.C. and SC and been a social worker, realtor, civic leader and mother. She has been involved in community theatre and politics and loves FOM; she once did seven consecutive study groups.

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Care to learn more? Look out for the Asian Film Study Group for information and sign up at the FOM Open Morning on 12 September.

Film Still of *The Blue Generation*, 2009 directed by Garin Nugroho

