

China Film Archive : Its Development and Strategies

1. Development of the Cinematheque

Ten years ago, our cinematheque was only able to have 2 or 3 screenings each week. Today, we are fortunate enough to be able to have a dozen or so screenings a week. Our highest single-month screenings exceeded 140.

How we are able to do that and keep the audience numbers up is to have a theme in our screenings. For example, in November and December of last year, 2018, we had the screenings of 12 movies by Kurosawa. This was followed by Master Classes about Kurosawa in March of this year. One of those we invited for the Master Class was Tatsuya Nakadai, an actor who has close collaboration with Kurosawa. Then at this moment, there is a “Kurosawa Retrospective” screening in the cinemas in town – Beijing, that is. Apart from 8 films from Kurosawa himself, there are a further 7 films that are paying tribute to him. So, during a period of 6 months, there was the screening of 20 of his movies, as well as other activities associated with the work of the director.

Another example is that we are having the French “New Wave Cinema” in April. This coincides with the Beijing Film Festival. But in March and June this year, we also have screenings around the topic of “New Wave Cinema”. In March, we had “Rossellini Retrospective”. In June, we work with the Goethe Institute on a “Wim Wenders Retrospective”. Then, the director will also be coming to Beijing for the occasion.

So it is a package of activities. Through this sequential arrangement of a theme, we lead our audience onto a road where they can have a better understanding of the topic.

2. Cultural Exchange

The second thing we emphasized is to have as much cultural exchange as possible with other archives and institutions. In doing so, it allowed our audience to have the exposure to films from different countries. In the last 3 years, we had special screenings for films from a large number of European countries; including those from Scandinavia, the Balkan, the Baltic and Central Europe. We also had films from different parts of Asia, as well as the Middle East and Central Asia.

We have received help and support from many national and regional film archives. For example, we have cooperated with BFI on the “Shakespeare Film Festival” and borrowed a copy of the film from Director of Kurosawa from the Japan Film Archive. From Bologna we borrowed a copy of the film directed by Rossellini. These important films that had a huge impact on the world have also influenced the creation of Chinese filmmakers. Film audience in China is more susceptible to watching films in cinema.

In addition to the activities that take place inside the archive, we also extend our influence to other institutions where we can. Take for example, of the Beijing International Film Festival that will start this weekend, for which we have the honor to be on its committee for film selection, we will be providing them with 220 films from more than 50 countries for screening during the festival.

At the same time, we would also support archives or institutions abroad that have an interest in screening Chinese films, like we have supplied films to a number of archives, such as Jugoslovenska Kinoteka, Cinematheque Francaise, Cinemateca Portuguesa, National Film and Sound Archive in Canberra, Cinematheque Suisse, UCLA Film & Television Archive, NFAJ in Tokyo,

MoMa in New York, BAMPFA, Library of Congress, IU Cinema, Filmoteca Espagnola, Filmoteca de Catalunya, Asian Film Archive.

It can be seen that restoration of films is instrumental to play an important role in cultural exchange. We restore more than 400 titles to 2K. Last year, we completed the first 4K restorations of the "Yellow Earth" and "The Horse Thief" in China. "The Horse Thief" used 48- Frames Per Second high frame rate restoration technology. Friends in Paris helped us to retrieve a Tibetan audio material that we do not have in China. This valuable sound track and the restored image have been Re-synthesis. "The Horse Thief" 4K restoration Tibetan version will meet the audience in Cannes. In April 10th, 11th and 17th, Huo Jianqi's "The Man That Mountain Dog", Zhang Yimou's "Red Sorghum" and Li Shaohong's "Bloody Morning" will be on the big screen of the Beijing International Film Festival.

3. Nationwide Alliance of Art-house Cinemas

To ensure that the China Film Archive survives as an entity with vitality, we must ensure that a wider audience has an interest in the culture of art films. For that, we have created an alliance of cinemas nationwide. The aim is to cultivate a film culture beyond just the commercial blockbusters.

Before this alliance of cinemas, the only opportunity to watch an art film would be in the large cities, like Beijing and Shanghai. With the establishment of the alliance in 2016, we have managed to persuade about 100 cinemas in about 50 cities to participate in the project.

Today, we manage to have 3,135 cinemas in 245 cities participating, with a total of 3,700 screens. We have screened a total of 13 Chinese films, 6 foreign films and one film from Hong Kong. There were also a total of 8 sets of screening of set topic. These include 5 films on the Italian Renaissance, "Nise :

The Heart of Madness” from Brazil, “Days of Being Wild” from Hong Kong, “Bohemian Rhapsody” from the UK, “Manchester by the Sea” and “The Three Billboards” from the US, and then the film “Kedi”.

The following films are now programmed for future screening in the Alliance; “Maria by Callas”, “Dalida”, “Ryuichi Sakamoto: Coda”. In addition, we are also having films around “Sculpting in Time”, with the first one being “Rome”; as well as “Jusqu'à la garde”. Of course, we are also screening many films from young directors from China. These films have also received recognition from China. For example, “Girls Always Happy” received the Best First Feature Award from the 68th Berlin Film Festival. “Long Day’s Journey into Night” was screened in the “Un Certain Regard” section of the 2018 Cannes Film Festival. These films, with their special features, were able to bring to the audience a new spirituality.

Effectively, our role in the society might be changing all the time. By adapting to the needs or interests of the period, it allows us to continue our work in restoration, in research, in cultural exchange.