

**When Strangers Met:
How the East-West Center Library
Introduced International Film to Hawaii**

by
**Janel Quirante
Josephine Tam**

**LIS 612 Wertheimer
Dec. 13, 2005**

Introduction

On a November evening in 1981, Honolulu moviegoers were transported to southern Brazil and learned what it meant to be “gaijin,” or foreigners. They entered the lives of a Japanese family working as virtual slaves on a Brazilian coffee plantation in 1909 and experienced their tragedy, humor, love and pathos (Hawaii International Film Festival [HIFF] 1981 Program Guide). Besides viewing the Hawaii premiere of the film “Gaijin: A Brazilian Odyssey,” the audience also experienced something else on opening night of the first Hawaii International Film Festival. They witnessed the birth of a truly unique film festival, whose inaugural theme “When Strangers Meet” spotlighted Asian and Pacific Islander films that reflected their culture and served as catalysts for community and scholarly discussion.

Today, HIFF still seeks to promote Asian and Pacific Islander films but most HIFF audiences associate it with major financial sponsors like Louis Vuitton and with A-list Hollywood movie stars like Samuel L. Jackson. Few people realize that 25 years ago, this festival emphasized the arts and humanities, rather than stars or box-office receipts. It was the brainchild of the East-West Center (EWC), a nonprofit educational institute adjacent to the University of Hawaii at Manoa campus and was created as a way to further its mission of promoting “better relations and understanding between the United States and the people of Asia and the Pacific” (Institute of Culture and Communication 1985, *Evolution*).

This paper will explore the relationship between the East-West Center (EWC) and the Hawaii International Film Festival (HIFF) between the years 1981-1994. It will detail the factors that influenced the creation of HIFF: the early history and evolution of the EWC's research activities; the EWC library's mission, public relations initiatives, and collection strategies; and the acceptance by the academic community of using popular culture like film as serious research resources.

East-West Center and Its Library History Prior to HIFF

In February of 1959 Murray Turnbull, the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Hawaii, proposed the formation of an international college of cultural affairs. He envisioned a program through which international scholars could come to the University of Hawaii to study with local students and exchange language and arts knowledge (Turnbull 1990, 5). But because Turnbull's proposal occurred shortly before Hawaii's entry into the United States as the 50th state, it received little attention from University administrators busy with statehood preparations.

Yet unbeknownst to Turnbull, a similar sentiment would soon be expressed in Washington D.C. by then-Senator Lyndon B. Johnson. During a speech to the National Women's Press Club on April 16, 1959, Johnson outlined his vision for a place where a scholarly exchange of ideas between people of the East and West could take place. He asked, "Why do we not establish in Hawaii an international university as a meeting place for the intellectuals of the East and the West?" (Whitten) This was exactly the endorsement Turnbull needed to convince University administrators and regional leaders

that his proposal was an ideal way to prove to the country that the new state of Hawaii could contribute unique human and location resources.

Within eight days of Johnson's speech, a University of Hawaii committee chaired by Turnbull airmailed a revised proposal to Johnson who pushed it through Congress. And a little over a year later on May 14, 1960, President Eisenhower signed the Mutual Security Act creating the East-West Center under the State Department to promote foreign relations and to train Americans for service overseas (Turnbull 1990, 9). The Center for Cultural and Technical Interchange Between East and West, or the East-West Center as it is more commonly known, aimed to promote "better relations and understanding among the nations of Asia, the Pacific and the United States through cooperative study, training and research" (Whitten). Initial Federal funding of \$743,000 paid for the construction of six new buildings on the edge of the University of Hawaii's Manoa campus, where the East-West Center is still today. (Turnbull 2003, 161)

In its early years, the EWC operated three programs. The Scholarship Program awarded graduate students who had leadership potential and allowed them to pursue advanced degrees at the University of Hawaii. The Advanced Institute provided specialists with research and laboratory facilities. And the Technical Training program contained vocational training courses for a range of fields from dress making and farming to medicine and librarianship (Cousins). Students and researchers at the EWC came from a variety of academic disciplines and from many Asian and Pacific countries. Recruitment

practices at this time were based on the formula of “two Asian or Pacific nationals for every person from the U.S” (Freeman).

The EWC established a library in 1962 as research support for its programs. The new Research Collections of the Institute of Advanced Projects served as a special library for East-West Center participants as well as the Asia collection for the University of Hawaii’s Sinclair Library, with the bulk of its material having been transferred from its Oriental collection. The dual purpose of the library collection was made even more apparent by its dual location. English language materials were housed in the East-West Center’s Lincoln Hall, while materials in Asian languages remained in the basement of Sinclair Library (Kagehiro, 37-39).

By the end of the 1960s, major societal changes both domestically and overseas forced the EWC to reevaluate and reform their programs. As education and university facilities improved in Asia, the laboratories and research facilities at the University of Hawaii offered through the EWC’s programs were less needed (*Sunday Advertiser* [Honolulu], 17 May 1970). There was an increased emphasis on the technical research programs while cultural exchange was relegated to dorm living arrangements and paternalistic “International Nights” where students dressed in national costume and performed or cooked for administrators and guests. Participants began to question the involvement of the State Department in East-West Center programs and policies. Many believed that as long as the funding came from the U.S. government, there could never be truly apolitical research programs, only non-controversial ones. There were accusations of “spies” in the

dorms who reported on students' treasonous research to their national governments or to the CIA (Witeck, 10-14). The EWC could no longer live up to Turnbull's idealistic image of "mutual interactions...aimed at building a world of people united in an overriding common cause directed toward the survival and nourishment of the species" (Turnbull 1991, 22d).

To help address these various issues and to redress the imbalance between the technical and cultural programs, East-West Center Chancellor Everett Kleinjans launched a major reorganization in 1970. Kleinjans applied a systems approach and classified programs into five research areas or institutes: the Population Institute; the Technology and Development Institute; the Communications Institute; the Culture Learning Institute; and the Food Institute (*Sunday Advertiser* [Honolulu], 17 May 1970). The East-West Center further refined these institutes in 1977 when it merged the Food Institute and Technology and Development Institute into the Resource Systems Institute and added the Environment and Policy Institute. (Kagehiro, 44)

The reorganization of East-West Center programs prompted a major reorganization of its library as well. In 1970 the library transferred from Lincoln Hall to Sinclair Library over 65,000 volumes, which became the core of the university's new Asia Collection. The collection that remained at the East-West Center was divided based on the newly formed institutions and were clustered into Resource Materials Collections or RMCs (Kagehiro, 40-41).

While the research programs gained refinement and focus, the EWC's administrative structure grew increasingly chaotic as it had several supervising organizations, often with conflicting interests. The EWC was run by the State Department, which channeled the budget and placed restrictions on spending; the Congress, which approved the yearly budget; the Governor of Hawaii; and the University of Hawaii (*Sunday Advertiser* [Honolulu], 17 May 1970). Conspicuously absent from the roster of administrators were any officials from Asian or Pacific countries. In response, the EWC underwent a second major reorganization in 1975: it incorporated as a nonprofit educational institution governed by its own board of directors, headed by a President instead of a Chancellor, and became a separate entity from the University of Hawaii. Although the EWC still received Federal funding, its nonprofit status meant that it could now accept funds from other private sources, and its independence from the University of Hawaii allowed it to internationalize its administrative staff by opening up its hiring practices to include non-U.S. citizens (Evinger).

The Resource Materials Collections (RMCs) also became separate entities from the University of Hawaii's library, although they retained a partnership that entitled East-West Center participants access to the University's collection. The RMCs moved to their respective institute's administrative offices, in the new John A. Burns Hall on the corner of Dole Street and East-West Road where they still remain today (Kagehiro, 44).

In 1980, Victor Hao Li became the new President of the East-West Center. Although the restructuring of the 1970s was supposed to create a more equitable balance between the

technical research programs and the cultural programs, the Resource Systems and the Environment and Policy Institute still produced the majority of the research. One of Li's first mandates as President was to "emphasize cultural concerns as a core issue" (Glauberman). To do this, he merged the Communications Institute and the Culture Learning Institute into the Institute of Culture and Communication, which provided efficiency and focus to the East-West Center's cultural research (Kagehiro, 44-45).

The Creation of the Hawaii International Film Festival

Community Outreach

Li's efforts to revitalize the East-West Center's cultural research set the stage for the creation of an innovative program of scholarly discussion and exchange centered around Asian film. Yet this new organizational focus was just one of several catalysts that led to the creation of the Hawaii International Film Festival. Also instrumental in HIFF's founding were the EWC's desire to increase public awareness of its activities; the academic trend of using popular culture as a source for serious research; and the EWC's library's willingness to explore alternative collection strategies.

In 1980, the EWC hired Jeanette Paulson as its Community Relations Officer and immediately gave her a daunting task. They wanted her to solve this challenge: "How can a highly specialized scholarly organization capture the imagination of the surrounding community?" (Sinnex) Libraries face this very same question when planning community outreach programs. Often, libraries' level of interaction with the community is determined by one of three factors: an external need or request, an internal

mandate or mission, or in response to a specific problem (Schneider, 201). In the EWC's case, the desire for community outreach was an internally generated goal. The Institution heads and the Resource Materials Collection librarians wanted to forge a link with the wider community outside of the University and to raise public awareness of the East-West Center's research activities and resources.

Paulson thought that a film festival with academic seminars would be the perfect type of community event to increase the East-West Center's profile and advance its mission of promoting understanding between the people of the United States and the people of Asia and the Pacific. (Sinnex) To achieve this, the festival focused on films with cultural significance that examined such issues as "old ways meeting new ways, customs and traditions being tested by new technologies, and native peoples adjusting to invaders or newcomers" (Institute of Culture and Communication 1985, *Evolution*). In addition, the academic seminars were opportunities for community members to hear about current research taking place at the East-West Center, thereby helping to instill "a sense of community ownership" (Fabian et al., 41).

It was important to Paulson that the HIFF screenings and seminars be accessible to as many people as possible, so all the events were open to the public and free of charge. This meant that the EWC's outreach activities had to begin far in advance of the opening night screening. They partnered with local businesses like the Varsity Theatre, with local patrons of the arts like actor Jack Lord, and received a grant from the Hawaii Committee for the Humanities to help fund the festival. HIFF was an immediate success with over

3,500 attendees its first year, many of whom were visiting the East-West Center for the first time (HIFF 1995 Program Guide, 8-9).

The Study of Popular Culture

The Hawaii International Film Festival, besides being a tremendously successful public relations tool, was also a significant affirmation of a new trend in academic research. The study of popular culture had recently been gaining acceptance as a serious area of research. In the 1960s, academics using methodologies from the humanities and the social sciences began to investigate “expressive forms widely disseminated in society...such as television, film, print, and recording,” beginning with Albert Lord’s classic work “The Singer of Tales,” in which he studied the Eastern European popular tradition of oral narrative poetry. (Bowling Green State University, *Discipline Background for Popular Culture*) By 1973, the first U.S. university department and library dedicated to the acquisition and study of popular culture materials was founded at Bowling Green State University in Ohio (Bowling Green State University, *Department of Popular Culture*).

The study of popular culture in the United States, though centered in Ohio, did not fail to reach the shores of Oahu. Many scholars at the East-West Center, influenced by the work going on at Bowling Green and elsewhere, wanted to use popular culture materials of Asian countries, including film, to further their research (EWC Annual Reports 1977-1979). The East-West Institute of Culture and Communication recognized the importance of examining “the visual and performing arts, the humanities, [and] media”

(EWC Annual Report 1984) to “improve both the processes and the substance of significant cross-cultural and international interactions” (EWC Annual Report 1982, 161). In the late-1970s it sponsored several media research projects including: “Media and Society: An East/West Review of Unanswered Questions (EWC Annual Report, 1977, 1); “Long-Term Impact of Television in Rural Republic of China;” and “Institutional Analysis of Television Programming in Indonesia” (EWC Annual Report 1978, 23).

Likewise, the Institute of Culture and Communication’s Resource Materials Collection worked to support these research projects with its stated goal “to successfully transfer information [with] processes that enable the user to access the sources” (Konoshima, 5). However, it was impossible for the Resource Materials Collection to maintain an adequate film collection to fulfill users’ needs. Several factors limited their ability to do this. One major obstacle was lack of physical storage space. After the East-West Center’s incorporation as an independent nonprofit organization, it no longer had the storage space it had previously enjoyed in Sinclair Library. Another obstacle was lack of adequate funding. The RMC librarians foresaw that proper acquisition and maintenance of film materials would be cost prohibitive. Not only were the films themselves expensive, but the East-West Center would also have to purchase the equipment necessary to view them, and replace the equipment when it became obsolete. Library staff realized their lack of funds was not a problem unique to the East-West Center, “but because the Institute [was] located in the middle of the Pacific Ocean and work[ed]

primarily with Asian and Pacific countries, the costs to obtain and exchange information in a timely manner [were] even higher” (Konoshima, 11).

The annual film festival and seminar series proposed by Jeanette Paulson as a community outreach project also served as an innovative solution to the East-West Center’s collection problem. The Resource Materials Collection librarians entered into an *international consortium*, a collaborative effort with outside institutions, which is a recommended practice in library literature to provide “access to research materials in support of the training of students and the creation of new scholarship.” (Jakubs and Magier, 182) The East-West Center secured film prints and publicity stills from organizations like the Japan Film Library Council (HIFF 1981 Program Guide), and in early festivals solicited the help of the East-West scholars themselves who traveled to Asia searching for films appropriate for the festival. (Institute of Culture and Communication, “Scholars Involved in the Film Festival”) These collaborations continued in the subsequent years and allowed the East-West Center to have a virtual rotating film collection without the cost and responsibility of permanently housing it. Each year it would screen new films from Asia and the Pacific, providing their scholars access to the latest popular culture materials relevant to their research.

The End of the East-West Center and HIFF Connection

Each year after its 1981 debut, the Hawaii International Film Festival continued to grow. By 1993 tens of thousands of people attended the films and seminars, which now included screenings on the neighbor islands. The number of films shown increased from

13 in the first year to over 200. The festival became more prestigious, garnering support from respected film critics like Roger Ebert, spawning an educational CD-ROM, and going on an 11-city mainland tour to promote Hawaii- and Asia-made films (HIFF 1994 Program Guide). Yet at the height of HIFF's success in 1994, the EWC cut its cash contribution to zero, thereby severing all remaining ties it had to the festival it founded.

But the split between the EWC and the HIFF was not as abrupt as this seems. It actually began in 1990 when the EWC slowly began phasing out its support of HIFF. That year, HIFF became an independent nonprofit institution with its own board of directors. The EWC no longer organized and presented the festival but it still offered support. It staffed the Film Selection Committee, scholars wrote essays in the festival program, it hosted the Film Symposium, and provided facilities for the festival offices (HIFF 1990, 1992 Program Guides). As HIFF received less funding from the EWC, it began to get substantial financial support from the State of Hawaii and corporate sponsors, a pattern of funding that continues to this day.

The year 1990 also witnessed the resignation of East-West Center President Victor Hao Li. Criticized for his poor management, Li was blamed for an institution that "lack[ed] clear strategies, ha[d] scattered its resources, ha[d] lost its initial and successful vision" (Kaser, 1990). Li was a strong advocate of the cultural research programs at the East-West Center and his departure was a blow to those programs, especially the Hawaii International Film Festival.

Over the next four years, as HIFF became more self-sufficient, the EWC continued its administrative support of the festival. However in 1994, the Federal government cut the EWC's operating budget by 40%, a move that forced the EWC to re-examine its expenditures (*Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, 27 January 1995). Ultimately the East-West Center decided it could no longer afford to provide any financial support to HIFF and the two organizations officially separated.

Conclusion

The East-West Center established the Hawaii International Film Festival as an innovative and creative way to address two issues common to all libraries: how to create meaningful community events as a form of outreach, and how to provide access to special media collections materials relevant to their patrons. It was a culminating response to the evolution of research programs at the EWC —from an initial emphasis on technical training courses, to a shift to cultural research, to actively studying popular culture. During the years that the EWC was the principal sponsor of HIFF, the festival was not only a venue for entertaining films, but it was also an academic experience with symposiums and seminars where the public could discuss the films with East-West Center scholars.

The Hawaii International Film Festival today is tremendously different than it was at its inception 25 years ago. If audiences from 1981 traveled forward in time, they might very well be baffled by the Louis Vuitton logo on the posters, the catered gala after-parties, the fleeting glimpses of Hollywood stars, and even by the \$9.00 price of admission! Both

present and past incarnations of HIFF demonstrate a deep respect and love for film and a determination to spotlight Asian and Pacific Island cinema. However, there is something missing from the festival today, something that the East-West Center and its library was uniquely qualified to provide: an emphasis on scholarly discussion and reflection about socially and culturally significant films.

REFERENCES

- Bowling Green State University. *Discipline Background for Popular Culture*. [Home page on-line]; available from <http://www.bgsu.edu/departments/popc/bkgrnd.html>; Internet; accessed 1 December 2005.
- _____. *Department of Popular Culture*. [Home page on-line]; available from <http://www.bgsu.edu/departments/popc/>; Internet; accessed 1 December 2005.
- Cousins, Norman. "Educational Miracle." *Saturday Review*, 21 March 1994, 20.
- East-West Center. Annual Report. 1977.
- _____. Annual Report. 1978.
- _____. Annual Report. 1979.
- _____. Annual Report. 1982.
- _____. Annual Report. 1984.
- Evinger, Jane. "EWC Incorporation Plan Backed by Review Board." *Honolulu Advertiser*, 11 December 1974.
- Fabian, Carole Ann, Charles D' Aniello, Cynthia Tysick, and Michael Morin. "Multiple Models for Library Outreach Initiatives." *Reference Librarian* 82 (2003): 39-55.
- Freeman, Lynne. "The East-West Center." *Pacific Information and Library Services Newsletter* vol. 6 no. 1 (July 1982).
- Glauberman, Stu. "E-W Center President Is Critical of Evaluation by 2 Consultants." *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* 26 September 1984.
- Hawaii International Film Festival. Program Guide. 1981.
- _____. Program Guide. 1990.
- _____. Program Guide. 1992.
- _____. Program Guide. 1994.
- _____. Program Guide. 1995.
- "Hawaii Must Try to Save the East-West Center." *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, 27 January 1995.

Institute of Culture and Communication. "Evolution of the Hawai'i International Film Festival." Press Release, October (?) 1985.

_____. "The Scholar Involved in the Film Festival." *Hawaii International Film Festival Newsletter*, Fall 1988.

Jakubs, Deborah, and David Magier. "Library Collections and Access: Supporting Global Expertise." In *International Education in the New Global Era: Proceedings of a National Policy Conference Held in Los Angeles 23-25 January 1997*; Available from <http://www.arl.org/collect/dlj.html>; Internet; accessed 25 November 2005.

Kagehiro, Phyllis. "Libraries at the East-West Center." *Hawaii Library Association Journal* 40 (1983): 37-46.

Kaser, Thomas. "Report: East-West Center Has Lost Its Vision, Goals: Low Morale, Poor Leadership." *Sunday Star-Bulletin & Advertiser* (Honolulu), 11 November 1990.

Konoshima, Sumiye. "The Resource Materials Collection and Information Services of the Institute of Culture and Communication East-West Center." In *Support Structures for Communication Scholarship and Research*, May 23-27, 1985, Honolulu: Communication Resource Centers, 1985.

Schneider, Tina. "Outreach: Why, How and Who? Academic Libraries and Their Involvement in the Community." *Reference Librarian* 82 (2003): 199-213.

Sinnex, Ceil. "The Great International Film Festival Is Ready to Roll Again." *Aloha* September/October 1985.

Trumbull, Robert. "An East-West 'Catalyst' Campus." *New York Times*, 18 August 1985.

Turnbull, Murray. "A Summary History of the Origin, Conception, Birth, and Early Development of the Center for Cultural and Technical Interchange between East and West." *Papers Related to the Founding of the East-West Center*. Research Information Services Archives, East-West Center, Honolulu, Hawaii, 19 October 1990.

_____. "Chronology of Events from February 16, 1959 to January 1962." *Papers Related to the Founding of the East-West Center*. Research Information Services Archives, East-West Center, Honolulu, Hawaii, 10 December 2003.

_____. "Postscript" *Papers Related to the Founding of the East-West Center*. Research Information Services Archives, East-West Center, Honolulu, Hawaii, 14 March 1991.

“Whither East-West Center after 10 years?” *Sunday Advertiser* (Honolulu), 17 May 1970.

Whitten, Harry. “East-West Center Celebrates Its 25th Anniversary Today.” *Star-Bulletin* (Honolulu), 14 May 1985.

Witeck, John. “The East-West Center: An Intercult of Colonialism.” *Hawaii Pono Journal*, Special Issue (November 1970): 3-40.