

The development of local malay films media essay



Last month, president to the National Film Development Corporation, Ahmad Puad Onah, said that the association would propose that ticket prices for Hollywood-produced movies be increased to RM20!

This is supposed to help the local film producers become more competitive. However it is sad that these people really have they not learned anything from the Proton story yet. This suggestion is a really shallow idea and it will not help local films be more competitive against foreign movies. In fact, this will have an opposite effect.

Local film producers should become more competitive. These days.

So the question is, why aren't Malaysians watching local movies? Think about it. What are the demographics that show people who actually go and watch movies? Can a middle income family with 4-5 kids afford to watch movies priced at RM8-12 per ticket?

Four kids plus mom and dad will cost the family (RM10 x 6) RM60. Add the parking ticket, and snacks and it will cost at least RM100 just for an afternoon of movie-watching. So if these people want to watch a movie, what do they do? You guessed it. Buy an illegal DVD at RM7 per disc and the whole family can watch it over and over again.

So solution No. 1 is to enforce the law against illegal DVD sales. This although it would put a dent in the coffers of those authorities and VIPs who are taking bribes from this industry.

So, who then will go to the cine-plexes? I would have to say that it would be couples or young people out with their friends right?!? However these people

have a limited budget as well. If they have to choose between watching ‘ Spiderman’ and ‘ Cicakman’ which show do you think they will watch?

So what would attract the younger generation to watch local films? Can local films ever match Hollywood in terms of visual effects, ‘ star’ power or even in promotional marketing activities?

So how then can they compete against Hollywood movies? The answer is nearer than you think. Just look at our neighbors. Both Thailand and Singapore have managed to produce local-made films that are very successful, even on the international stage.

So why can’t Malaysian film producers do the same? The reason is simply because they are too afraid to offend the authorities. There is too much control, taboos, restrictions and censorship in the industry. It has come to a point where any movie that comes out from the local industry will almost sure to be ‘ too safe’ meaning dull and boring.

Also, the local movies that come out aren’t controversial, provocative and have little to offer progressive Malaysians as a whole. Just take a look at our local news.

We have an exciting by-election, the Jerit issue, the Hindraf issue, the ISA Issue, the hudud laws issue, many corruption scandals, a murder of a Mongolian gal and a conspiracy involving a top man, New Year sex parties with movie stars, the list goes on! Now why would I ever pay money to watch a local film when our local news in Malaysia is a whole lot more interesting?

Do you think any of our local film producers are brave enough to turn any of the issues above into a movie? If our local film industry produced a film related to any of those issues I mentioned above, I am sure it will get a whole lot of publicity and many people will watch it.

Why? Because all Malaysian can relate to it. It will be very provocative and this will generate curiosity and publicity among many Malaysians. And on top of this, it will not have to compete directly against any Hollywood movie (Blue Ocean strategy).

Also, when was the last time we saw a movie that appealed to Malaysian audience as a whole? Local movies are usually categorised as either Malay movies, Indian movies or Chinese movies. Where are the Malaysian movies? Let's be honest – how many Chinese will go watch a Malay movie?

Local producers must learn to make films that appeal to a broad spectrum of society and not segregate their movie's potential market by race! What's wrong with movies that have characters speaking Chinese, Malay, Tamil etc, in the same movie? We do that in our everyday life. So why not in our local films as well?

I know it is not easy to produce films that will appeal to the whole country. Thus, local film producers must be ready to face the challenges of making movies that would be very controversial politically and socially. We must no longer be afraid to make movies that are racially or religiously sensitive.

Now, I am not asking producers to make films that insult other races or religion. Neither am I asking producers to make politically-charged

propaganda films. But we can still make movies that reflect the true picture of our country and show that the human spirit can triumph over many adversities.

With regards to this, I have a list of ideas that I think will make great movies which most Malaysian will pay to watch.

Police corruption (tales of a young police officer facing huge peer pressure to compromise his principles and succumb to taking bribes and the persecution he faced by not giving in)

A Malaysian spoof movie on the local politicians (I bet you it will be very funny with actors and actresses imitating our local politicians)

Who really killed Altantuya? A mystery movie with an ' open-ended ending (allowing viewers to make their own decision)

Prostitution in Malaysia – Tale of a young local gal with little education being conned into prostitution

The Hindraf/Jerit issues (why, this could be a documentary movie)

May 13 (tale of three friends – a Malay, an Indian and a Chinese – whose relationship is strained to breaking point during that era but they managed to overcome this adversity and remain friends till this day)

I am sure a lot of people can think of many more ideas that will make great movies. I am sure many of these potential movies will make certain groups unhappy. But that is the whole point isn't it?

A safe and nice movie that does not raise any eyebrows will not interest the Malaysian public at all (considering they get so much more entertainment from the local news).

Until local film producers are brave enough to challenge the status quo of making ‘proper’ films, and make movies that are honest and relevant to all walks of life in Malaysia besides challenging the minds of our society, they will never be able to compete with Hollywood movies.

(<http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/99234>)

The FFF ‘ Guide to Writing a Winning Film Proposal’

So here it is! The FFF “ Guide to Writing a Winning Film Proposal”. We tapped into the brains of our most beloved KOMAS creative consultants and pulling from them their many years of experience to give you the following tips to help guarantee your proposal has what it takes .

ONE: Choosing your issue

Is it relevant – why is this issue important and why it is something that Malaysians need to know about, acknowledge and discuss openly?

Is it daring – is the issue seldom discussed and would researching it be difficult?

Does the issue fit in with the theme of “ Democratic Space” and “ Human Rights”?

First step: Choosing your issue

Find an interesting issue that people regularly discuss or those that matters a lot. We need to keep finding out the Malaysians needs, what they would love to see, discuss and acknowledge either fits with Democratic Space and Human Rights theme.

Second step: Content

Showing viewers something that are rarely seen and take notes on every important points.

TWO: Content

What new angles or different point of view are you showing your viewers?

What are the important points that this documentary will discuss?

How will you make those points i. e. give details of who you will profile/interview, what visuals or scenarios will you document in detail.

Provide story line or outline if possible, but not necessary. (If your proposal is chosen we will help you write the script). It's important to show that you have a clear idea of how the video will be executed and look like in the end.

Show that discussion of the issue is well researched and deep.

THREE: Treatment

Describe how you will treat the film using music, editing techniques, storyline – any creative approach – to make your documentary interesting and attractive to your audiences.

Trade Secrets

Do research about your topic first. Speak to some resource people or find interesting profiles that you can definitely include in your film. Understand your issue well before taking on the subject. You need to know more or have something more to say that your viewers do not already know about or understand well.

What is your stand on the issue? Think of one or two main points you want to make in the film. At the end of the film, this is the message you want your viewers to take home with them.

Something that may sound interesting to you initially might be difficult to execute in the end – be careful and plan well.

A film is nothing without good audio/interviews and visuals, so you always need to have in mind what audio/visuals you will need to make your point.

Know your own strengths and weakness. Have a team/crew that is technically proficient to help you in areas that you might be weak in.

Follow these three easy steps, while taking into account those tricks of the trade and voila! You're first documentary film proposal. Good luck!

(<http://freedomfilmfest.komas.org/?cat=53>)

Should Malay Films continue to be Malay Films?

One approach that should be continued is the furthering of Malay films as films made in Malaysia. This is because the Malay language is the national

language, one that does not exist outside of the Malay Archipelago. It is one that is easily acceptable as a language that reflects Malaysia from any point of view. The non-Malay language can always be used to reflect the position of the language i. e. spoken in the community among people of the same language culture, or in telling about some background information, so long as it can enhance the cinematic impact required by a film.

To this end, the effort to produce Malaysian films should do this two-pronged approach:

Increase the production of Malay films.

Building the foundation of distributing Malaysian film that deals with Malaysian issues from the perspective of other races.

The production of Malay films should be increased in quantity and quality. This is because Malaysia is the only country whereby Malay films can be produced. Without Malay films from Malaysia, it can be said that there will be no Malay films in the world. Another reason is that there is still a lot of other Malay and Malaysian issues from Malaysia, as well as from the Malay archipelago, that can be shown on film. Reducing the production of Malay film and producing Malaysian films on the excuse that Malaysian films have to be multi-racial and multi-lingual will marginalise a film source that is very cinematic and will also diminish the importance of Malay history and culture. It is a culture that may well disappear.

At the same time, the production of Malaysian films from the perspective of the non-Malays should also be encouraged. This will improve the standing of

film in society and film as a medium and source of culture that is important to the nation.

National Film Development Plan

An officially-organised approach to build the film industry in Malaysia began in 1980 when the government established the National Film Development Body (FINAS). Since then, activities like as film development, encouragement, control and protection has been taken towards three of the most important aspects of the industry; that is, the production, distribution and screening of films in Malaysia. From the aspect of control and protection, the specific activities to development such as training workshops and financial aid can be said to have achieved their objectives. The Production Aid Scheme and return of entertainment tax, for example, can be incredibly significant to local film producers.

This paper does not intend to provide further commentaries on the success or failure of such programmes run by FINAS. 25 years worth of opinions and debates can be found via other avenues. I will, however, say that the programmes have a long-term impact on the development of the film industry in the future. The subject at hand is film policy. FINAS, in an effort to advance the local film industry, has twice pushed this issue forward. The first was in the years of 1989 and 1990, led by Tun Ghazali Shafiee. The second time occurred in 2004, when the policies were reviewed and improved to become more aligned to the new objectives and concepts of Malaysian film development.

Even though policies for a clear, national film agenda have been formulated, along with the requisite targets and objectives, nevertheless it is difficult to see what shape or form the Malaysian film industry will achieve by the year 2020. In my opinion, there should be a clear and concise 2020 objective to aim for, giving it the same amount of attention and importance as other fields. The entire nation is gearing up to achieve their respective objectives in these fields. As a developed nation, what kind of film industry will we have by then? It would be wise to ensure that we do not lag behind, and set practical objectives (e. g. local films having a 30% share of the market). The main thing is the setting of a schedule, timetable, or master plan for national film development. If such an action plan ever came into existence, all sectors of the industry would have main 'idea' to refer to.

Until now, however, we have yet to see such a plan, whether it exists or otherwise.

Increasing Appreciation Programmes for Local Films in a Structured and Holistic Approach

Another step that could be taken by all relevant parties is to increase the number of appreciation programmes in a structured and scheduled manner, so that the attention paid towards local films could be increased. This is of critical importance, seeing how low the audience numbers for local films are. From a national population of 26 million people, we can count a mere 200, 000 to 300, 000 people who consistently watch local films. Compare this to the Czech Republic, who have around 10 million people, but can depend on around 1 million of them to watch their own films.

If we can increase the number of viewers even by 1 million people, it would certainly change the face of the local film industry. We could also look at other countries and consider how they develop their own films; South Korea, for example, imposes a quota system to protect their local filmmakers.

The current situation is a cause for concern, because the previous generation of film viewers are now at a different stage of their life. Thus, they no longer go to the cinemas regularly. The new generation of film audience members have a different perception and exposure compared to the previous group, and with this comes a different viewing trend. If there is no programme to encourage further appreciation towards our own local films, Malaysian films, Malay or otherwise, will not have a chance. Only through a permanent, holistic, and well-planned approach will the situation improve. We need not look to far for an example of what could be; the current state of newspapers written in Arabic, when it was once the norm, is a sore sight for eyes. Even more galling is the lack of emotions that such a state arouses at the present time.

Increasing and Expanding the Interest towards the National Language

Apart from film appreciation programmes, other approaches can also be taken. One such example is to increase appreciation towards the language and culture of Malaysia, especially in the schools. Ultimately, this can help to increase further interest and fluency in understanding the local films. This should also be carried out in a similar manner to the above suggestion, so that the seed for such an interest can be planted and be allowed to mature. This can also increase the interest within society towards the

traditional/Malay arts and stories which will also help along Malay and Malaysian films.

Training Programmes, Technology Networking and ‘ Fund’ for Young Artists

Other areas that can be looked at is further exposure and education about all aspects of filmmaking, including providing further training to those who currently active in the industry. We can also work to strengthen relations and networking, and providing practical encouragement for filmmakers to take Malaysian films beyond Malaysia. This networking will help to increase Malaysian film appreciation not just within the country, but also without.

Another important factor is to create a fund for young artists. This fund can be used for various activities, like script development, but with an especial focus on encouraging the number of young directors with quality. Through such efforts will we only find the diamonds in the rough.

Conclusion

This paper does not suggest any one single conclusion, but invites further discussion and dialogue on the matters that I have raised. The issues and problems of the film industry are constantly changing with the winds of time, and so long as there is an effort to improve the making and content of local films, then the sky will truly be the limit as to what we can achieve.

(<http://thoughtsonfilms.wordpress.com/2009/04/01/the-malay-and-malaysian-film-where-are-we-part-2/>)

Archive for the ‘ Malaysian Cinema’ Category

Global connections in three countries

In an earlier post on the film industry in Poland I looked at the range of countries to which the Polish film industry was connected through co-productions and incoming productions that did not involve a domestic partner (which I called autonomous productions). The data was taken from the Internet Movie Database, and while it cannot be said to provide a comprehensive overview of the globalisation of the film industry and its relation to Poland it does allow us to make some inferences about the range of countries a particular film industry is connected to in terms of a single type of interaction (i. e. feature film production). The aim behind this post, and today's follow-up, is to get a sense of the web of connections that link different film industries by simply enumerating the number of connections between them. Further work needs to be done on the economic value of these connections in order to understand how co-productions and autonomous productions contribute to a film industry, and so the depth of penetration (call this the density) needs to be considered alongside the range of connections in order to describe the extent to which a film industry is globalised. We could, for example, distinguish between film industries with a high range and high density, those with a high range but a low density, a low range but high density, and those with a low range and a low density. (This could be represented in similar terms to the relationship between the transnationality and territoriality of UK productions I used in Redfern 2007). This would enable us to distinguish between different types of national film industry in the global film industry, whilst also allowing us to identify areas of potential weakness. For example, an industry with a low range of

connections but a high density will be overly-dependent on production finance from a small number of countries coming into the industry, and should anything upset this balance (better incentives available elsewhere, changes in exchange rates, global economic meltdown) this will have a disproportionately large effect on the host industry that could (potentially) be wiped out.

Quite how to measure the density of global connections to a film industry is a problem I have not yet solved. We could use the proportion of the total production investment in an industry accounted for by co-productions and autonomous productions, but there may be better methods.

A first step must be to simply understand the level of global interaction; and to add to the data on Poland, this post applies the same method to three other film industries in Malaysia, Chile, and Morocco. (A key difference here is that the data for Poland covered the period 2002 to 2007, while the data for these three countries covers the period 2003 to 2007).

Malaysia

A total of 37 films produced in Malaysia were identified from the Internet Movie Database, accounting for a total 47 connections to 17 countries, and country by country summary is presented in Table 1. Of the 37 films included here, only six are co-productions, so while Malaysia may be a filming location of choice for many producers this does not involve Malaysian production companies. The single largest number of connections is to India, but all of these are autonomous productions. After India, Singapore, with 5, has the second largest number of connections (again all autonomous); but in general

the number of connections is very low for each country across a 5 year time period. Connections to other Asian countries account for 66% of the total, while Europe accounts for 23% and North America just 11%. In simple numerical terms, connections to industries in the immediate vicinity are more important than those that stretch across the globe, although as noted above it is difficult to assess the meaning of these connections in the absence of detailed of some understanding of how deep they go into the Malaysian industry.

TABLE 1 Co-productions and autonomous productions to shoot in Malaysia, 2003-2007

Chile

24 films produced in Chile were identified, accounting for a total of 42 connections to 12 countries. This data is summarised in Table 2. Of these films, just over half were co-productions and so (unlike Malaysia) a substantial proportion of productions shooting in Chile will have some sort of relationship to producers and filmmakers based in that country. South American countries account for only 21% of connections and North America (i. e. the US and Mexico) account for 31%, while seven different European countries account for just under half (48%). Unlike Malaysia (and Poland) it is not local connections that are the most important to Chile, but the relationships that reach further across the globe.

TABLE 2 Co-productions and autonomous productions to shoot in Chile, 2003-2007

Morocco

For Morocco, a total of 69 films were identified accounting for 111 connections to 23 different countries. Of the three countries looked at here, Morocco has the greatest number of connections and the widest range of countries, but like Chile is dominated by North America and Europe. There are connections to only one African country (Algeria), one Asian country (Japan) and one South American country (Brazil); while 17 European countries account for 78% of connections and three North American countries account for 27%. Interestingly, only Morocco out of the three countries looked at in this post and Poland has connections to countries in all parts of the globe. However, only 15 of the films in this sample were co-productions, and so, like Malaysia, international production in Morocco is typically non-Moroccan production. Only France is a significant co-production partner. That so many links to France should be apparent is unsurprising, as the state was made of protectorate of France under the Treat of Fez (1912), and the European influence here is strong (as it is in Algeria and Tunisia). The country with the largest single number of connections is the US, and this is in large part due to the fact that Morocco can stand in for other parts of the Arab world without so many of the dangers. Numerous Hollywood movies have chosen to film in Morocco since 2003 for the desert locations, the architecture, the middle-eastern looking extras, and because Morocco can also pass for the ancient world. Thus *Alexander* (Oliver Stone, 2004), *Troy* (Wolfgang Petersen, 2004), and *Kingdom of Heaven* (Ridley Scott, 2005) have all been shot in Morocco (along with *Arn – Tempelriddaren* (Peter Flinth, 2007) and *Arn – Riket vid vägens slut* (Peter Flinth, 2008)). The Moroccan film industry appears to have benefited from the war in Iraq as the chosen

location for Rendition (Gavin Hood, 2007), In the Valley of Elah (Paul Haggis, 2007), United 93 (Paul Greengrass, 2006), and Home of the Brave (Irwin Winkler, 2006), along with Syriana (Stephen Gaghan, 2005), Charlie Wilson's War (Mike Nichols, 2007), and Body of Lies (Ridley Scott, 2007).

TABLE 3 Co-productions and autonomous productions to shoot in Morocco, 2003-2007

Summary

Although this post is only a brief survey of three countries using limited data, it is possible to see how the film industry in different countries can be connected to the rest of the world. It is possible to identify where local connections are important and where more the key relationships are over a longer distance. It is possible to compare where connections between countries result in co-productions or where relationships are not formed with local producers. As more data becomes available it will hopefully be possible to compare the number of connections between countries over time to gain an understanding of the dynamic relationship, rather than the simply static picture we have here. In simply enumerating the connections in the global film industry in this manner we can slowly build up a picture of a mosaic of film industries.