

Free advantages and disadvantages of films with local asian themes and hollywood-...

[Parts of the World, Asia](#)



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Introduction

In contemporary times, films with local Asian themes have become highly popular in Western media formats, especially those produced in Hollywood. A crucial factor to think about when it comes to the popularity of local Asian themes is the constant lookout of Hollywood producers for new themes that they deem as “exotic” or outside the typical Western contexts they have produced for so long a time already. Such is understood within the idea that Western media is much more popular compared to East Asian media, mainly because of the fact that English has since served as the universal second language of the non-English-speaking world. At the same time, it is important to understand that Western media has taken a long time to develop – at the beginning of the 20th century alone, films from Hollywood – from silent films towards the introduction of voice films, has started to take over the world by storm and has since become a popular tool for culturally influencing people around the world, hence creating the impression that Western nations, most notably the United States (US) are highly superior and generally favored. It is from that context where one could actually infer how Western culture has since formed part of the normative cultural aspects of people around the world, most especially in East Asian nations – Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and China (Mainland) (Yue, 2010, pp. 33-48).

Yet, when East Asian nations started to rise in terms of their economic growth, their sphere of influence in global media began to grow as well.

Soon, there have been East Asian directors educated in nations where there

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are institutions specializing in filmmaking. In turn, local Asian themes soon began featuring in all productions of East Asian media, with their appeal growing over time and soon catching the attention of Hollywood, the largest and most prominent area for film production in perhaps the nation with the most influential media worldwide - the US (Yue, 2010, pp. 33-48).

Before, it is understood that East Asian media would always look up to Western media in terms of filmmaking, given the prominence of the latter in producing culturally pervasive content that appeals to people of different cultures worldwide. Now, it is East Asian media that appeals to producers of Western media, particularly Hollywood where there are several renditions of original East Asian films featuring local Asian themes such as *The Ring* series and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Boyd-Barrett, 2012, pp. 245-251; Holm, 2011, pp. 183-192). Therefore, it is noteworthy to ask - how did such a shift commence, and why has the trend reversed? While this study may pass on answers to such questions, it regards the phenomenon at hand more in the normative sense, which in turn posits the question - what are the advantages and disadvantages of films with local Asian themes and Hollywood-style production values? One may generally view perspectives to the foregoing in the following wise: the advantages revolve around increase in human capital on the part of East Asian actors production staff (including the director) exposure to several technologies introduced by the presumably-advanced Hollywood production houses and the presentation of local Asian themes to a wider audience, given the leverage of Western media on exposure; disadvantages circle around the dilution of the value of local Asian themes, chances that the local Asian themes presented may not be

palatable to a global audience and the adaptation from East Asian rendition to Western ones may not be driven by quality, in that the original essence may be gone. Using *The Ring* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* as illustrative examples, this study seeks to shed light on the aforementioned controversies.

Advantages

Given that transnational filmmaking serves as a prominent example of globalization and the expansion of domestic economies to that of global scales - the East Asian region being one that is deemed as among the most economically-superior and industrialized, perhaps at par with most nations in the Western world, such as the US, it is crucial to understand that the advantages therein stems from the sharing of skills and knowledge in filmmaking. Understandably, Hollywood production houses are among the recognized pioneers in the global filmmaking industry, most especially because of the fact that those have been in the industry for a long time already. Hollywood production houses have overseen some of the most significant developments in the global filmmaking industry - the silent films of the 1920s have since seen the revolutionary transition to sound films through the development of sound technologies useful inside studios - an undisputed Hollywood innovation that continues to be useful and innovated to this day. Even now, visual effects are a proud product of Hollywood production houses, which in turn are attractive workplaces for talented people in the media industry - graphic artists, videographers, and the like. Given the vast pool of talent that can be found in Hollywood, it is therefore

understandable that Hollywood production houses have a high premium when it comes to producing films (Holm, 2011, pp. 183-192). Yet the emergent powers of East Asia, which has seen a mesmerizing form of growth and development throughout the second half of the 20th century, began producing individuals eager to learn more about the art of filmmaking as well (Lim, 2011, pp. 15-32). Hideo Nakata, the Japanese director of the original Ringu series that became the basis for The Ring series produced in Hollywood, and Zhang Yimou, the Chinese director famous for directing the original Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, are among the most prominent directors that have come out of East Asia (Boyd-Barrett, 2012, pp. 245-251). Both Nakata and Zhang have worked in Hollywood after their films gained a notable following in the Western market. It is notable to emphasize that Nakata also worked with the Hollywood producers of The Ring series, perhaps to ensure that his version remains as immaculately similar as possible when presented in its rather Westernized format, while the same went for Zhang, who in turn has witnessed a surge in the popularity of Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon in Hollywood (Lim, 2011, pp. 15-32). The popularity of The Ring series and Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon has enabled Nakata, Zhang and other East Asian directors in gaining a foothold in the Western market, in turn opening East Asian filmmaking to greater interest abroad. At the same time, East Asian filmmakers have since gained greater access to the rather sophisticated techniques of Hollywood production houses, given that they have since sought ways to improve their craft following their rise to prosperity throughout the second half of the 20th century (Boyd-Barrett, 2012, pp. 245-251; Holm, 2011, pp. 183-192; Lim,

2011, pp. 15-32).

The developments in East Asian filmmaking as stated in the foregoing only goes to show that exposure to Hollywood production techniques have given East Asian filmmakers a greater chance to be recognized worldwide. Such comes with the presumed recognition that Hollywood production houses are the most prominent in the world, given their longer history in the industry of filmmaking and their consequently vast experience in said field. Such, in turn, has led the likes of Nakata and Zhang to learn more about the so-called “secrets” to the success of Hollywood production houses. Of course, such an exposure has led East Asian filmmakers to become more knowledgeable on the advanced techniques of filmmaking, and it presumably follows that such would lead them to greater room for innovation. In other words, the likes of Nakata and Zhang can now innovate more on what Hollywood has taught them, perhaps as part of their objective to give East Asian filmmaking a more distinctive branding to a worldwide audience. Given that the rest of the world are now more aware of how Japanese, Chinese, South Korean and Taiwanese films may look like - thanks to the benevolence of Hollywood, it would be easier now to make local East Asian films, even those with local Asian themes that have qualities of intertextuality exclusive within the East Asian region and without Western themes, marketable to the rest of the world, especially to the Western world (Hanlon, 2013, pp. 109-127). In turn, such would make local Asian themes a part of what people would usually call their subgenres, in turn creating viable markets where East Asian filmmakers can have more room for innovation (Stuckey, 2014, pp. 17-36). Western media exposure, in that sense, would soon be a platform in which local Asian

themes found in East Asian films can ride on. Without such a platform, it would be really difficult to think of how East Asian films could become marketable on their own and without the help of Hollywood, except perhaps in terms of their innate exoticness (Hanlon, 2013, pp. 109-127; Ogawa, 2014).

Disadvantages

Although there is an understanding that the likes of Nakata and Zhang have emphasized how East Asian filmmaking could become successful worldwide with the help of Hollywood, it is also important to present the reality that there are also deleterious effects to that account. Local Asian themes, for instance, would not be fully encapsulated in its true essence when translated or Westernized in any form, if such are done to satisfy Western audiences. For instance, while the success of The Ring series is undisputable, it is difficult to see from said Western rendition the kind of concept Nakata had in his brand of horror ensconced within the original Ringu series. For the Japanese, factors that are considered frightening may not be present, or may not be the same in The Ring series compared to what they have seen in the original Ringu series. In that case, it is important to think that some of the qualities the original Ringu series may have had, considering its local Asian themes, may have been lost in the creation of The Ring series, regardless of the fact that Nakata was among those who supervised in making the Western rendition. By the same token, it is difficult to imagine how Chinese audiences would view the authenticity of the Western rendition of Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, particularly in terms of the way some of its aspects,

including the use of the English language, were changed to appeal to Western audiences (Berry, 2014, pp. 305-307). Given that, it is true that films from East Asian filmmakers with Hollywood production tutelage may have been diluted in their Westernized forms, although such is not really perilous, for such only serves as perhaps a marketing strategy to propagate local Asian themes across the globe. Yet, a more realistic danger to such an account is the possibility that Western renditions of East Asian films, particularly those whose local Asian themes have fared well in the original renditions, would not do well in their intended markets (Joo, 2012, pp. 153-162).

There is an understanding that some segments of the Western markets may not yet be accepting of the true essence of local Asian themes, given that cultural barriers may take place (Joo, 2012, pp. 153-162). While Nakata and Zhang have somewhat succeeded, so far, in their respective productions of *The Ring/Ringu* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* in the Western markets, it is not possible that Hollywood production houses to fail in capturing the true essence of East Asian films in Western renditions in the closest manner that would appeal to Western audiences. Palatability, as a result, would be varying and may generate mixed responses (Berry, 2014, pp. 305-307).

Synthesis

Taking into consideration all the foregoing factors, it is important to note that films with local Asian themes and Hollywood-style production values have various advantages and disadvantages. One may think of such a development in East Asian cinema as one that adds value, considering that

there is a process of knowledge assimilation, with East Asian filmmakers being the main recipients. The likes of Nakata and Zhang are highly regarded as among those East Asian filmmakers that have learned the secrets of Hollywood successes. It is in that regard where one could determine the success of East Asian films in Western markets (Crane, 2014, pp. 365-382). For one, it is highly difficult, in an environment where Western media is the cultural hegemon, for East Asian culture to penetrate, unless it rides on the very same platforms they ride on. In that case, one may look at that aspect in this wise: that Western media has long been ingrained in the global cultural psyche, mainly because of the existence of its powerful machineries for cultural influence. The use of the English language alone speaks for the success of Western media - Hollywood productions, in particular (Burnett, 2013, pp. 3-24).

Given the possession of state-of-the-art practices Hollywood production houses have, it is important to keep in mind that those institutions are important platforms for any cultural facets to ride on that wish to become popular into a wider market. Specifically, East Asian media looks up at the models established by Western media, most especially in terms of its propagation in the global market. The fact that Western media continues to dominate speaks for its heralded success (Burnett, 2013, pp. 3-24). Yet, ever since Hollywood production houses, in particular, have searched for themes they deem as exotic, East Asian media has since been a mass revelation. In that case, it is very important to think about the success of the East Asian media as one that is attributable to the continuous appeal of Western media. This is not to say that East Asian media has no inherent appeal. Rather, it is

crucial to consider the fact that cultural barriers, most especially in terms of language, have a significant bearing to the potential of East Asian media to reach global success (Crane, 2014, pp. 365-382).

Conclusion

It is therefore highly plausible to conclude that films with local Asian themes and Hollywood-style production styles have their respective shares of advantages and disadvantages. The advantages available for East Asian films produced in Hollywood production houses involves their potential to propagate East Asian culture worldwide, presenting it as an exotic yet interesting product to Westernized audiences. At the same time, the learning paradigms of East Asian filmmakers, as seen in the case of Nakata and Zhang, would highly provide for the improvement of East Asian filmmaking, most importantly through the collection of knowledge on how Hollywood production houses make movies and the various techniques that they involve, all towards innovating for a new wave of East Asian films in the future. Such, therefore, paves the way for the introduction of a strong East Asian filmmaking culture, wherein the techniques introduced by Hollywood production houses would be improved in East Asian production houses. Given the economic power of East Asian nations, it is highly possible that the East Asian region would become an emerging powerhouse in filmmaking worldwide. Disadvantages, on the other hand, may relate, at most, only to the cultural bias Western filmmaking and rendering holds in favor of Western audiences. In short, it is important to recognize the cultural barriers involved in filmmaking that involves local Asian themes.

Future studies must call for the improvement of the production and marketability of transnational filmmaking beyond the sphere of emerging film markets, most especially in the already-burgeoning East Asian filmmaking industry. Domestic film industries in several other nations, given their cultural worth and aesthetic techniques, must also try to ride in the platform provided by Western media. In that case, it is important to think about how transnational filmmaking would challenge the almost-undaunted structures of Hollywood production houses one day, which stands out at this point as somewhat a parallel universe. In other words, it is highly important to think about the future of Hollywood in relation to rising competition in other film markets worldwide, given that it has since been unchallenged for a long period of time since the beginning of the 20th century.

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