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<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Suwunpukdee, Pattama.</td>
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The Status Of Thai Film Industry

By

Pattama Suwunpukdee
Asian Films: Survival or Revival

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Pattama Suwunpukdee

Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication,
Thammasat University,
Thailand
Asian Films : Survival or Revival

The status of Thai film industry

During the last 5 years (1983 - 1987) there were 626 films produced and presented which divide yearly as:

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<td>1983</td>
<td>124</td>
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For number of audience, the data is from the latest record about the number of theatre (1986). This record relates to the audience's trend and growth towards film. It shows that there are 1,014 theatres nationwide. There are 577,179 seats per the number of population which is 49,515,074, that means 1 seat per 86 people.

This data shows that theatre business should be survival but in reality it is not. In these years film business has become quite critical which caused from two important problems. The first one is about the economic and the second problem is from the other media; video. Some theatres wind up, some adapt the place to a new kind of business such as cocktail lounge or skate training, and many of them are adjusted to be a mini theatre to save cost. This critical situation stimulates every person in film business to solve the situation seriously.
The problem about economic is helpless since it is out of our capability. But as for the second problem, it is our huge concern which needs our cooperation to make the status of film industry and business to be more secure.

We do realize that the quality of more than half of Thai films is not so satisfied which impacts directly to whole film industry. There have been many brain-storm meetings and finally we can conclude the improvement. The factors which impact the quality of Thai film are;

1. **The status of a producer and a director**

   In the present 80% of them finish high school and vocational school. Only 20% graduate from university.

   43% of them have knowledge in film from work.

   30% know from reading books and study by themselves.

   17% know from inquiring and consulting with other persons

   and only 2% who study film as major from film school.

   Although most of them love and interest in film deeply, work hard and never give up. But since they don't really have even the details of the main basic for making film, not speaking to the theory of film, styles and many important subjects in film studies. And since the duty of producer and director is supposed to relate to every step of the production. Start from selecting story, script, directing, editing—etc. Each step needs to be neat, appropriate and harmonious to each other. Therefore, in the real situation it's not quite an easy job at all. The way to solve this problem is to persuade them...
to study in technical term by reading from textbooks, magazines and the researches. This knowledge will help them to be more expert and the quality will be better also.

2. The budget and investment

Film is an expensive investment, the more meticulous the higher cost is. This is such a big problem for Thai producer because Thailand is only a developing country, we can’t get the loan easily. Even already have the money, each production tries to save cost as much as possible.

In the present there are 3 levels of the investment;

1. The budget more than 100,000 US. dollars (3 million baht) 40%
2. The budget between 37,000 - 1000,000 US dollar (1-3 million baht) 30%
3. The budget less than 37,000 US. dollar (1 million baht) 30%

However, the final budget is always more than we assume. The main causes are

1. The rent of equipment and cost of miscellaneous which can not define since the beginning, for example; the rent of place, sets, journey, food, hotel, film—etc.
2. The accident during the production.
3. The bad weather and the flood in rainy season.

Not only an investment problem that the producers face to, they also have to prepare money to pay for tax and fee. All producers have the same opinion that the payment system is too complicated and the rate is too high. In each film, they are supposed to pay for tax and fee as the rate defines, no matter the income is.
The type of tax and fee

1. Customs duty and purchase tax. Because we need to import
film and equipments so it's unavoidable to pay extra for customs
duty. Between 1983 - 1985 the government earned 3 millions US. dollars
(27 millions baht) for film and 1,500,000 million US. dollar
(15 millions baht) for equipments and earned purchase tax from film
business 1,400,000 US. dollars (12 millions baht)

2. Another tax. Each person is supposed to pay income tax.
Some have to also pay municipality tax, rent tax for renting equipments.

If the government gives the loan for investment with a low
interest and reduce the rate of tax and fee, this problem will be
solved.

3. Work problems. Because film production relates to art,
new technology, and people so many problems often happen.

1. The actor and actress. They often have problems about
   - Do not have enough time to study script and rehearsal,
     especially super stars
   - Can not come in time which makes all staffs lose
time and cost
   - Low capability

2. The production team. Most of them are expert and
hardly make a mistake. Only few of them have problems about
   - No responsibility
   - No attention
   - No experience
3. The equipments. There are 42% of producers who have their own equipments, 22% of them own some and rent from others and 56% who rent all equipments for the Production. In the present, many of producers import new equipments which high quality but since it's very expensive so they can not order a lot. Therefore, the quantity is not enough for the need. The equipments are deteriorated from overused which impacts to the quality of picture.

4. The film laboratory. 70% of the producers are satisfied the work of film laboratory. However, it would be much better if each laboratory can expand the service, hire more expert staff to serve customers on time.

4. The encouragement of the government
Producers need help from the government such as;
- To reduce tax and fee
- To rent some equipments and the official place for production
- To promote Thai film to another countries, especially in Asian countries
- To promote the investment with a low rate of interest
- To promote film studies
- To restrict the import of foreign films
- To legislate about controlling videotape and protect the copyright.

The impact of other mass media

Video The video tape has been popular in Thailand since 1980. It effects to Thai film enormously. People just only rent videotape for 75 cents (10 baht) and they are able to see either Hollywood Film, Chinese Film, and also Thai film at home. Most of videotape is illegal.
They rent the film from subagent and record from a telescene or use videocamera with telephoto lens and record directly from the screen.

This critical situation has created damage to film industry. In 1985 60% of producers stopped their business all year. They claimed the government to solve this problem.

Television

There are four main television stations which broadcast to all nation. Each station competes each other in different ways to get more audiences. They use satellite and new kinds of technology to broadcast effectively, import foreign film series and popular films. Produce many new programs and improve the quality of some programs. They're quite successful because they select variety programs for all ages and set to broadcast on a right time.

However, compare to video, television is not so harmful. It has its own character which is different from film. About Thai film, each station broadcasts different Thai film weekly. They rent or buy films from subagent. They always participate in film festivals by broadcasting lively; invite Thai stars in their programs and produce interesting programs about Thai film. These activities encourage film business a lot.

The mechanics and economies of distribution

Start from the producer, he will distribute release prints to the distributing agent or to the theatre (only theatres located in Bangkok). Then, the distributing agent will distribute to the sub agent. Sub agent is the person who distributes film to all theatres except in Bangkok. In film business, they divide Thailand to be 6 parts; north, north-east, South, Middle, East and suburb.
Sub agents in each part will contact and distribute film to the theatres located in their area. Also have the right to rent film to anybody and to television station in their area. For making videotape, a producer only has the right to make and distribute. If there's any transgression, he can claim for the damage.

About financial system, they manage like this:

Producer- theatre in Bangkok

Each gets half of the income from ticket-sale.

Producer- Distributing agent

Distributing agent gets 5-7% of the final income.

Distributing agent - Sub agent

No steady rate, depends on each film

Sub agent - theatre

No steady rate

Development of talent and techniques

In the present, there are 7 universities which has a curriculum of film in film department, and two acting school. In these universities, 2 of them teach students to be the technician, have a skill in the equipments of film-production. Others teach about the process of film-production which includes pre-production, production and post-production. Also teach the different styles of film, history and international film. For acting schools, they teach and train students to be the actor especially. We do not have an especial film school, film-study in any university is one science of the communication.

However, the curriculum in each university is quite perfect. We gather many necessary and interesting courses which are useful for students. Most of them require at least 24-30 credits for film major, except for the technician which requires more. The course consists
of many subjects such as film techniques, Writing for film, Cinematography, Documentary film, Theatrical film, Animation, International film, Film editing, Experimental film, Film directing, Basic Film theories, for example.

Yet, the number of graduated students in this field is quite little. Because many universities just started teaching in this field recently and the status of film industry does not draw or make any attention from students to study as a major. Therefore, in each year there are about 150 film students graduated from all universities. Most of them work in film company, production house, television station and advertising company.

These "new wave" teams work effectively, the more experience they get the more skillful they are. Now, some of them are directors and many response other important duties.

About the equipment, as mentioned before in subject of the status of Thai film, we need the government to support about the loan and reduce tax and fee for importing equipments. If there's the possibility, the technic quality will be much better.

In the present we have a film library which belongs to the government. We keep and conserve different kinds of film such as news, documentary film and theatrical film as one of our cultural evidences.

The import and export of films

Before the war happened in the Republic of Laos and Cambodia, these countries were the main markets of Thai film. After that time till now we've never distributed the film out of country. Except for the Asean film festival to show and exchange each other
but not for business. However, it's a good sign because at least we are able to observe each other and improve our film.

About the import, During 1983-1985 we imported foreign films for 13 millions US. dollar (354 millions baht). The amount of foreign films were 779 which divided as: Chinese film = 366, American film = 349, Indian Film = 19, Japanese film = 6 and from other countries = 13.

The Distributing agent and sub agent select and import foreign films. There's an advantage and disadvantage of importing foreign films. The advantages are those films can stimulate Thai film to be improved as foreign film, we can observe the style and new technology used in each film. The disadvantages are, some impact Thai custom and culture, theatres prefer foreign film more than Thai, make Thai film be inferior when compare to foreign film.

The suggestions

Film is a media which impacts effectively and directly to the audience's attitude towards social problems. One of many ways to develop or solve social problems is to improve the quality of film. Because its character can draw the audience's mind quite easily, get along to all different levels of age, education and occupation. Therefore, if any audience is able to see good films he would have the good attitude in different ways also.

Film industry is a big business which needs lots of money to invest and effective staff to work. To improve the quality of Thai film needs the cooperation from the persons in film industry and from another groups, both government and private side. Thai film can encourage and conserve Thai culture, also bring more income to the country if it is supported seriously as other kinds of industry and service.
The factors of improvement which need the support are

1. The quality of Thai film.

It is the most important part in film industry because if the film is in a low quality or not so interesting, the chance to get a lot of audiences is quite impossible. Especially today there's a high competition from video and television. Therefore, it's time to improve the quality seriously by:

1.1 Study about film

Every person who is in film business, especially in production team, should have the film knowledge. They should study and get more knowledge such as new kinds of technology, equipment, film style or the movement in film industry of other countries. This can help and solve the problem about the lack of skill, the damage of work and restrictive staff.

The government should support about the budget for each film department to arrange the equipments for students to practice effectively. Also to arrange the scholarship for students to study at other famous film institutions.

Also give the chance to any person in film industry who does not have the opportunity to study directly to study in a special course or arrange the seminar for them.

1.2 Cooperate with the foreign film production

The advantage is to learn how they manage in the production for more experiences.

2. Budget for investment

2.1 The loan
The government should give the loan with low interest and set the film business as one kind of industry.

2.2 Tax and Fee

In the present the cost of investment is quite a lot, one of the causes is from tax and fee. The system of payment is complicated and too much. The government should reduce the rate of tax and fee. Also lend or rent some equipments and official place.

3. Markets of Thai film

3.1 Interior market

The government should support the theatres such as reduce tax and restrict the import of foreign films, legislate to protect the copyright of Thai film not to transfer into video illegally.

3.2 Foreign market

The government should arrange the special department to manage this duty since there was never had before. This department will distribute and contact to different countries, also exchange and restrict the import of foreign films. And support or arrange the film festival from time to time.
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