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Film fests charting new course for Asian talents

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

Film festivals in Asia are proving to be a boom for local filmmakers who not only find a platform to screen their works but, on most occasions, the much-needed funding for their projects.

There is also the growing trend of collaborations that ensure a wider global audience. â??White Sun,â?• a Nepalese feature film funded by the US, Qatar and the Netherlands, is a good example. It won the Best Asian Feature Film award at the recent Singapore International Film Festival (SGIFF).



The movie "7 Letters," released in 2015 to mark the 50th anniversary of Singapore's independence, consists of seven short films. [Photo/ Shanghai Daily courtesy of "7 Letters"]

The festival attracted 161 films from 52 countries and regions, among which more than one-fifth were international collaborative works.

Film festivals in Asia allow â??talents to meet each other on a more social basis,â?• says Yuni Hadi, executive director of SGIFF. â??Some great ideas emerge from these festivals.â?•

With more focus on Asian films, film festivals tend to hold diverse programs, workshops and forums to promote local films, facilitate cooperation, encourage mutual communication and contribute to the funding of independent films.

For many filmmakers in Asia, itâ??s the platform that film festivals provide, such as project market and film forum, where they can learn about the latest industrial trends and technologies like VR and AR used in films, meet up with like-minded people (producers, actors, musicians), and reach out to investors to get funding for their upcoming projects.

Singapore Media Festival has hosted the Southeast Asian Film Financing Project Market since last year to nurture the young generation of filmmakers. This year, there were 15 spots available for feature film projects to pitch for funding, either fiction or non-fiction, up from 10 in 2015.

In fact, with more film festivals setting up specific sections for short films, Asian short films have started to attract public attention for its unique stories. Daren Aronofsky, director of 2010 thriller â??Black Swan,â?• encouraged Asian filmmakers â??to be passionate of telling your own stories.â?•

India has many dedicated short film festivals such as Filmsaaz and Beta Movement: International Students Short Film Festival. This year, India initiated two new festivals, namely, Golden Frames International Short Film Festival and Sign In Media Short Film Festival.

Support from the local community is more accessible to independent filmmakers in Asia. A range of local, cultural and art venues serve as a dedicated partner for independent filmmakers. In Singapore, two main venues, Objectifs and the Projector, have screenings dedicated to promote independent, short and artistic films. More studios and venues have started to follow the path, not only in Singapore but also in other Asian countries.

Technologies matter

From 3D, 4K to frame rate, we have witnessed changes taking place in the film industry in an effort to wow a wider global audience. Many critics have argued that technologies deployed in films should not be a selling point. Nevertheless, the technological development actually â??helps to bring the story alive,â?• according to Hadi. â??Technology is important as it supports the story â?¦ but it (film) is about stories, which is always the priority.â?•

To some extent, technology makes it possible for filmmakers to present an imaginary world in front of the audience. Sometimes, technologies benefit many independent filmmakers as well for its affordability.

The wide introduction of handy cams in the early 2000s allowed many Southeast Asian filmmakers to make their own films with very limited budget. Today, the young generation, or actually anybody on earth, shoot and make their own videos or micro-films and share online. As long as you have a story to tell or an idea to share, you can make your film.

Professional video production facilities and visual effects software have become more accessible to people in the region as well.

For example, PIXEL, a newly launched government-back organization in Singapore, provides comprehensive yet free services to literally anyone in the country to use its facilities as long as the story or idea is favored by the management panel. The facilities range from filming, editing, production equipment to game developing.

In China, special industrial parks have been built to encourage more creative projects, such as Shanghai Cangcheng Film and Television Cultural Industrial Park which features two major filming sets.

Diversified film distribution

As technology develops, filmmakers have more options regarding film distribution. â??Previously, the only film distributor was cinema. But when television arrived, it has so many hours to fill,â?• says Angeline Poh, assistant CEO of Content & Innovation Group with Infocomm Media Development Authority.

Now itâ??s a normal practice for independent and short films to be premiered online. However, â??itâ??s a decision of the filmmaker if it is an art film and has been fully commissioned. If itâ??s a commercial film, it is down to the business model,â?• says Poh.

In the future, the audience may be able to see some more films that will be premiered online. Such portals allow people to access different types of films, which give Asian films an opportunity to reach and nurture a global audience. But â??it is limited by the quality,â?• Hadi says. For instance, streaming video providers like Netflix feature top titles as recommended on homepage. To Asian filmmakers, it really matters how to make high-quality films that tell their own stories.

There are other barriers for Asian filmmakers. â??The challenge to these online platforms is subtitling. The Asian market has so many different languages as translation seems very costly in the sector, generally. The business side needs to catch up,â?• according to Hadi.



Fostering the next generation

Across Asia, not only film schools but also production studios and film festivals have organized a series of programs and workshops to nurture the next generation of filmmakers. mm2 Asia, Singapore-based film production studio, offers short-film competitions, screenwriting labs and even apprentice programs to local students.

SGIFF holds youth jury and critics program that provides a series of workshops to a batch of college students. Its Southeast Asian Film Lab is similar to a mentorship program on story development for first-time feature filmmakers.

With focus on providing inspiring mentorship programs and workshops, the young generation is expected to present better quality Asian films and reach a wider global audience, who are more aware of Asian films and filmmakers.

(Source: http://china.org.cn)

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