The Perception of Younger Generation About the Portrayal Of Malay Identity in Today's Malay Movies

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ABSTRACT

This paper is aimed to study about the perception of younger generation about the portrayal of Malay identity in today's Malay movies. It is understood that younger generation nowadays prone to understand that Malay identity must revolve around *kain batik, sarong, tanjak, keris* and etc. The acceptance of the idea of Malay identity seems to stop at black-and-white movies, making it hard for today's film makers to find out the way to make a Malay movie enriched with Malay flavor. Furthermore, fierce competition from the West which equipped with technologies and exceptional new concepts give an extra pressure for our local movies to be with the mainstream. Upon completing this research, researchers found out that younger generation does have their very own preferences with movies shown on the television and cinema. However, they also agreed to the fact that they are impressed at how 1950s and 1960s Malay classical movies especially the P.Ramlee's are still stay dearly to the hearts of audiences up until today. Though the findings reported young generation finds it is gratifying for them to watch Hollywood movies, the result indicates that they do somehow look forward to discover what the grandmothers and grandfathers have done back then in maintaining a sense of our real Malay identity to be portrayed in the movies for a remarkable quality Malay movie has proven to serve its society for a really long time.

Keyword: Malay, Malay identity, Malay movies, Media Roles, Communication

INTRODUCTION

Movies have long been identified as media which powerfully illustrated the impact that it could actually have on larger society. As the word 'media' suggest, there are particular medium used to deliver a message to a large, anonymous and diverse audience (Pearce, 2009). From the context of entertainment value, movies have been showing the audience, as close as it can get (Siti Zabedah, Ismail Sualman & AdiIrawan, 2013) to the real life, making it even more reliable as communication instrument. Since the advent of motion picture and audio system, audiences may find various changes have affected the way how movies were developed. Production, distribution, marketing strategy and almost each phase of movie production has been on constant changes just to keep the audiences stayed.

Looking back at how film was first made, Jack C.Ellis (1990) pointed that it was all happened in the 1890, by Thomas Alva Edison who is very much popular with the invention of lightbulb. Being involved with vaudevilles and circus acts, his entertaining quality was extended to first film production where he and his associates came together creating the *Dickson Greeting* in an experimental peep-hole kinetoscope. The world since has been witnessing the glorious era of Hollywood film industry taking the world with various creations which effortlessly made their way in every cinema around the globe. Thus, for ninety years Hollywood has each function; financing, production and theatrical distribution of motion pictures are concentrated mostly making Hollywood appears to be a global brand (Kit & Chuan, 2012). Massive budgeting makes potentially huge production to be created and it was nearly impossible for other nations to be at their par as the financial aid comes around for making the production even bigger and bolder. Additionally, overseas market also seem to have secured their basic resource of revenue.

As for Malay film industry, it has all started back where the industry began in Singapore. In 1933, with the appearance of first film, *Laila Majnun* (Siti Zabedah, Ismail Sualman & AdiIrawan, 2013), most of Malay film produced by Shaw Brothers' Studio during golden era until the 70s. The commercial film was first made used with the opera personalities (Siti Zabedah, Ismail Sualman & AdiIrawan, 2013) as they were already familiar with the film-making. Much resemblance to the theatre actors these days, early film production invested mostly on recording the movies first-hand to cater to audience entertainment' need thus having rows of actors who can actually perform their very best in their act were the filmmakers' first priority. During 1960s mainly when Singapore was separated from Malaysia, it was a lot like the situation when the Hollywood went to the West from New York City for a slight modification on the industry. Only that in the local movie scene, big changes came about which forced the Malay film industry to see attendances of moviegoers, profits and production quantities dropped miserably (Siti Zabedah, Ismail Sualman & AdiIrawan, 2013). Despite of having most prominent scriptwriter, comedian, dramatist, musician, as well as, director P. Ramlee (Syed Muhd Khairuddin Aljunied, 2005) the whole situation ultimately forced film workers to shift their focus onto Malay market in Kuala Lumpur (Khoo, 2006). In the following years, people could see several pattern of film production made where 1980s had shown to us film producers were struggling with content and economic recession (Jayasainan, Nurzihan Hassim, Nur Leila Khalid (2014). Soon after, it was Abu Hassan's study in 2012 who contributed the reason to the failure of Malay film industry in 1990s for trivial plots and the obsession of filmmaker those days to cast on the popular singer to be in their movies despite of their questionable acting talent. Nowadays, one could not help but noticing how the local film industry has becoming more engrossed with novel adaptation to be made as movies which was practiced in Hollywood long before us. Drama and movies seem to embrace this newfound technique and audiences can see how it invades the motion picture field as well as the novel publication scene. It is good to see how one media industry can affect the other successfully, yet all of these patterns have been predicted earlier and soon enough we can see the audiences get tired and seek to find another method to gratify their entertainment need through motion picture.

Hollywood industry on the other hand seem to get a grab at it. With large amount of funding at hands, the producers spend every dollar to various level of moviemaking steps and that includes not only on the production phase, it goes as far as marketing, publicity and even cross-promotion. Enormous gap can be identified upon inspection between Hollywood and local motion picture business. It is obviously not fair to be justified the big Hollywood scene seeing how Hollywood has been in the field longer than Malay film industry yet, the comparison made may contribute for a better and valuable insight to see how a film can affect the audience at large. Most importantly, it is

also significant to note that we may want to discover the reason behind what makes these Hollywood film seem more appealing especially to younger generation whom has been identified as the favourite generation the industry might look forward to please and at the same time, for us the locals to put our hope on to bring the sense of local film industry back to where it belongs. Besides, the idea lies upon may as well benefited us Malaysian in order to find out how we should utilize the component of movie to educate society about our local identity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several works has been dedicated at recognizing how a film can contribute for a better society as well as it serves economic interest for one whom actually put it on the scene. Like what Graeme Turner (2002) put it in his study, he found that producers see film as a commercial commodity to return profit as it both serves entertainment and social event. This situation cannot be unseen as it is obvious that film is one of the media which can make through the audiences whom at the same time guarantee purchasing power. Similar to print media or electronic media, motion picture came about after the kaleidoscope were made as audience were so amazed at the sight of people being captured in the screen. Seeing how easy it is to entertain these living creatures, the so-called tinkerers since have been struggling to serve the audience better quality of entertainment. In order to grab attention of the publics, the filmmaker understand that nothing can beat the impact it has for a story to be told exactly like the one whom may have experienced the situation themselves. The process made easy with the appearance and technology of motion picture industry. Across the globe, film has been seen as an efficient medium in presenting documentary, educational contents, news coverage of current happenings. (Siti Zabedah, Ismail Sualman & AdiIrawan, 2012). Even local government goes as far as hiring video production technique with hope in order to instil certain values to the people through movie production. This statement can be proven from a study conducted by Rosmawati et al (2012) which shown, audiences who watch Islamic-based films containing Islamic message is seen as contributing to positive actions. The representation of situation which contain more resemblances of the audiences who watch the film put larger potential of how it will affect the audiences. Turner (2012) who studied social practice through films too agreed that it is now accepted that film's function in a culture goes well beyond that of being simply an exhibited aesthetic object. Film in its narrative and meanings go as far as the idea can explore.

Nonetheless, when being put such a thought in current situation where our local movie scenes being on the fierce competition with Hollywood industry, by some means, it flickers the audiences' mind a little bit where it deliver unjust and thought-provoking questions. This at the same time intimidate our local movie scene which eventually without much knowing how such an ignorance too cannot level the damage it will have in the future. It is understood for the betterment of Malay film industry, we have come long way since the day everything is operated under one roof and recorded way earlier just to deliver the entertainment right to gratify the curiosity of every cinemagoers. But in some way, with all the technologies produced and utilized, the audiences are being brought into a production that sometime seem to deviate from the roots and mix-matched around with a multi-ethnic environment eventually would lead people to develop another new culture (Yusuf, 2009). This could lead to a simple action to risk root culture to be forgotten as movie production normally will adapt to the latest idea accepted for the sake of gaining audiences' attraction.

Besides, movies has always been centralizing their focus towards the younger generation. The generation in whom McCrindle (n.d) has referred to as no financial

commitment and those whom will never have second thought to spend their income for. They also being recognized as one whom get everyone in business to change their marketing technique. Their purchasing power is so high and literally every movie in the cinema seem to dedicate its strength, quality, story plot, or even actors selection all to be looked at tempting for the younger generation's interest. Though in accordance to a study conducted by Kit and Chuan (2012) stated that their respondents recorded high gratification with the fulfilments of entertainment needs, special effects, better pictures and action and interesting story lines with Hollywood film usage, it is essential to know that there are more to a movie production.

Through film, Graeme Turner (2012) found film is an expressive art as movies are imprinted with their own experience and points of view. Local Malay audiences especially the young ones will later find themselves changing their appreciation on local identity as movies production nowadays are totally not the same just like post-Independence era that we once had. Understanding identity need us to stretch back and take a very good look at Latin word "idem". It carries out the meaning of 'the same' (Hoffstaedter, 2011). Identity too become a significant matter when being faced towards conflict for those who come into its possession. Making sure identity to be balanced or unchanged are definitely a difficult process. Identity is extremely fragile as in many component, it can be bent by social, cultural, politics, economics influence and it can widely be seen through movie lenses for that matter. The process of assimilation from one identity into another seem to be apparent in today's movie production. The proliferation of Hollywood movies portraying what is not considered our Malay identity invades local movie scene at an alarming level. Academician, school, politicians and many people express concern towards the adaptation of any situation, object, symbols, value which we find very close to local Malay identity to be implanted in the young soul for a better Malay film industry with true local identity etched on it.

Thus, this study is considered important to address the reflection of idea by younger generation on how our local Malay movies are portraying Malay identity in the wake of cultural imperialism done by the Hollywood industry.

METHODOLOGY

Researchers have employed in-depth interview as the design of this study is in a form of qualitative research. It is expected through real-time communication, the answers would snowball into another follow-up questions. The purposive sampling technique is engaged as 12 informants were selected as samples to answer researchers' questions. There are several variables were considered upon completing the study such as gender, background, and location. Informants were chosen from various background Malays whom can comprehend the idea what 'Malay identity' generally means. Defining the word identity brought about the "the labelling theory" by Becker (1963) as he believed labelling will enhance ones identity. Besides, it is equally important for the informants to understand what is meant by the word identity and to compare it as opposed to what has been shown by Malay films. In addition, the mentioned matter is shown significant for informants may need to some comparison between the past and the present movies. The informants answered 15 open ended questions related to the issues of Malay identity shown in local movies. The questions revolved around their perception upon watching Malay movies and how the experience educate themselves about the idea of being a Malay through the identity shown by the characters of the movies selected.. The informants are expected to answer the questions comprehensively as the reactions and perceptions they have made during the session were all recorded in digital video cameras. The informants were told about the recording in advance to guarantee a sense of comfort between researchers and

informants. From time to time, the informants too were also asked to provide some of the titles which they think educate them most about identity. Data then was collected and then analysed to ensure informants perceptions were not influenced by their members' response.

FINDINGS

There were 12 young adults to represent the younger generation involved in the interviews which the informants are younger generation with seven male young adult and five female participants. The researchers found these sample based several questions prepared in advance to identify real informants whom can answer researchers' questions accordingly. It is important to state that these 12 informants are well-aware about the local movie industry nowadays and not to mention from the previous era. They were all understood the elements which can deliver the word identity mainly Malay identity. The informants in general admitted that they have been watching Malay movies quite several time and that they could tell the differences between what has been shown by Malay movies compared to the Hollywood films. Though some of the informants were not really much into Malay movies, their ideas were valuable as they may lead the findings towards new insight about local movie industry which can be used deliberately for the betterment of our industry. In relation to the perceptions of these younger generations in identifying how does Malay identity were shown through our local movies, it has been found that most of the young Malay audiences can relate to the movies shown especially when the majority of characters involved are Malays. Though it may seems simplistic, majority of the informants does deliver the sense of understanding towards their own Malay identity upon scrutinizing the content of the movie in larger context.

Hollywood movies and Malay movies

Majority of the respondents agree that they are having their preferences inclined to Hollywood movies as it has been shown that Hollywood movies deliver their content almost exactly like true stories. Like one of the respondents put it, "*Try to watch Finding Nemo. I never get tired of watching the whole underwater scene and simply amazed of how the animators in the production team able to make everything seem so surreal*". When being compared to Malay movies, ten respondents with mostly men agreed that most of the Malay movies which they can remember of watching were action movies like *Ádnan Sempit*, *Abang Long Fadil* and etc. As opposed to the female respondents, they were more likely to remember Malay movies entitled after the novels such as *Ombak Rindu, Nur Kasih, Karipap Cinta* or movies produced by the late Yasmin Ahmad like *Sepet, Gubra,* or *Mualaf.* Though the response indirectly shown the informants' preference towards their watching pattern, with the male informants were showing interest towards movies with action-packed scenes, whilst the female favour on the love story plot, nonetheless, these informants are well aware that the questions posed mostly revolved around what has been identified with Malay identity attached to each movies asked. Youth respondents believed that no matter what kind the movies are, the idea of value and culture lies onto the message attached to it and it does not have to be the origin of the movie to portray certain justification. When being posed questions on what does the Hollywood movies teach respondents on the matter of values and identity, one of the respondents responds *"There are times some movies which actually have different origin and background reminds me of my very own being in my society".* Others put in the manner of "*A movie will always going to educate you in their very own unique plots and storylines. Thus, you can actually learn about your identity through others' movies*".

In addition, 76% respondents agreed that Hollywood movies in general have vital influence on how to be part of the society as opposed to Malay movies which brought upon a quite direct approach on how to function on the society. Upon seeing at how Hollywood movies tend to illustrate the idea on how one should solve and communicate their problems, Malay movies otherwise through their fictional plot have been showing a pattern which requires the characters to get engrossed with the conflict addressed without much of a value or let alone identity to be inserted in such a scene. This come to realization as respondent address "*I could not help but screaming internally when I watched this one particular Malay drama with my family and the whole plot revolves around on this one particular character tries to take over others' property. Along the way, audiences were being brought into every scene which shows how he failed miserably at executing his strategy away at getting others' wealth to be made their own.*" Some respondents express their concern as these kind of contemporary Malay movies with such predictable storyline might as well misled the real meaning of what movies are supposed to be made for especially for Malay movies.

Malay identity in Malay movies

Findings revealed that nearly 64% of the respondents felt that Malay movies were not portraying much of what has been called as Malay identity when being asked how the Malay movies these days were doing at portraying our local identity. On the other hand, the other respondents stated the other way around as indicated through this following outstanding statements; "*Malay identity does not necessarily follow what has been shown in previous movies during P. Ramlee era. Wearing batik, sarong or headgear or staying at kampong house. I believe a Malay movie is called a Malay movie when the characters involved are Malays and they are all doing the typical stuffs Malay people do in daily life*". This testimonials are supported by another informant's response who seek to inform "*I still have the idea that Malay movie nowadays are still showing some of the Malay identity through the scenes even though there are not much of Malay identity is involved into the plot. Surely, the main characters now are inserting some 'rojak' language to their acting, yet some of the characters; female and male roles, follow accordingly what has been found in Malay identity traditionally. Our Malay male guy is expected to be aggressive and masculine whilst the female role are expected to be a bit more nurturing and patient. We still can see that in our Malay movies. In fact, we still can see most of the characters when such ideas were inserted into their main characters, audience mostly will fall for the characters. Just take a good look for movies with a Malay male guy as the main lead*". In general, the informants agreed that by having Malay movies to be in the line of Hollywood film industry, those can be considered as a good start for Malay movies to be competing fairly with the rest of the world on seeing how the Malay movies are doing in terms of ratings and collection. Nevertheless, when taking the idea of culture and value into consideration, majority of the respondents shown a great deal of concern Malay movies not to be jeopardized with the plot demonstrated by the Hollywood products. One of the respondents expressed, "… *maybe to establish our culture and values, yes, why not? We may want to consider letting these Malay movies to be at any international festival film and contest...*" Some added, *"Certainly the Hollywood industry serves us with great plot and storyline, yet when it comes to values and true ideas to educate enhanced society, no one knows our society better than ourselves… in some way, we still rely on our local movies to show this to the world of what and how we are doing as Malays society".*

Additionally, 76% of the respondents agreed that most of Malay movies are being shown as having Malay identity when it involves the component of official religion of Malaysia; Islam. This could be identified through a statement by one of the

respondents who seek to justify, "*Islam has been shaping human race since the day it came to Tanah Melayu and brought to us Malays, the light to guide our life. Hence, I do believe, as long as Malay movies are still implementing what has been taught by our religion in dealing the conflict or issues portrayed in the movies, the movie still are in the right track of what we call as Malay movies".* However, respondent who felt differently fondly prompted that "*We may want to consider that Malays are not necessarily Muslims. It is not fair to say that Malay movies are Islamic movies. I do consider one thing though, as I believe religion could in some way mould us in a way that make us feel more civilized and understanding towards others. So, if the movie is showing righteous behaviour of their characters involved as they are following what has been communicated in the religion and at the same time, those were the attitudes promoted in the society, we may want to agree the fact that yes, in some way, we sometimes mistook certain Islamic movies as showing "true" Malay identity, whilst the truth, those are the principles which have been addressed way before the Malays practice them".*

CONCLUSION

This study yielded certain findings which shown respondents were significantly able to identify how Malay identity could be delivered through any Malaysian movies or maybe in some other not necessarily Malay movie for that matter. This is because Malay identity is an identity which may be shared by majority of Malay people throughout the globe. Taking the identity of Malay into account, half of the respondents actually shown their agreement that some of the Malay movies from Indonesia still managed to portray Malay identity and it does not have to be Malaysian movie scene to portray the whole Malay identity code. It can be identified too that the experience of watching films regardless of where they are coming from, creates significant ideals and standards among younger generations. Thus, these generation has been fairly reported their comprehension and understanding of how identity should be perceived does not liaised directly with what has been shown on screen whilst they too are not against to the fact that movies are one of the fastest communication tools for them to nurture internal appreciation towards values, ideas, culture, symbols or knowledge for Malay identity for example just like one of the respondents reacts, "*Believe it or not, we have learned a lot through pictures or audios or videos rather than lectures".*

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