

THE HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF CHINESE- LANGUAGE FILMS IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT:

This study uses textual analysis of the relevant Chinese and English literature to examine Chinese-language films in Malaysia. Malaysian Chinese-language films have developed over the last 100 years thanks to imports, Chinese investment, the Malaysian Chinese-language film movement, the Malaysian Independent Filmmaking Movement, commercial films, the Chinese film association and film festivals. Moreover, Chinese Malaysians' cultural identity became a national identity. Chinese-language films also turned from being independent projects to commercial ventures. Although the government has recognised Chinese-language films, the industry still lacks governmental support. Furthermore, filmmakers focus on the multicultural background of Malaysia, hoping that films can resonate among the country's three ethnic groups. The Malaysian Chinese-language film industry needs to face the challenges of brain drain and limited audiences. From the perspective of communication strategy, filmmakers should cooperate with film companies from Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan for co-production, in addition to pushing Malaysian Chinese-language films into the international market.

Keywords

Chinese-language films, history, development, Malaysia, Singapore

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INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is an emerging and diverse country undergoing rapid social and economic development. Since ancient times, Malaysia has maintained close business ties and cultural exchanges with China and is home to one of the largest overseas Chinese populations in the world. According to the Current Population Estimates of Malaysia (Department of Statistics Malaysia [DOSM], 2020), Chinese Malaysians account for 22.6 per cent of Malaysia's total population. There have been three large-scale migrations in the history of Chinese Malaysians. In the Ming Dynasty of China, Zheng He stayed in Melaka

during the Ming Treasure Voyages. This period saw Chinese and locals intermarrying and settling in the state. With the integration of the local culture, they gradually formed the Baba Nyonya ethnic group (Zheng & Zheng, 2005). After the Second Opium War in 1860, China signed the Beijing Treaty with Britain, France and Russia. With the British colonists requiring numerous human resources to develop the Malayan Peninsula, a large number of labourers came from China to become miners and plantation workers. In the early 20th century, wars continued in China. While Southeast Asia had support from the colonial sovereign, new industries, such as the railway,

shipping, finance and manufacture, achieved unprecedented development. Due to the shortage of labour, many people in coastal areas of China went to Southeast Asia to make a living (Zhu, 2008). The three large-scale migrations of Chinese Malaysians brought cultural fusion and separation. The overseas Chinese enjoyed displays of Chinese culture, with films acting as a suitable medium. Malaysia once had a thriving film industry and two major film companies, Shaw and Cathay, were controlled by a transnational Chinese fund. Many of these film projects were adapted from Chinese and Indian stories, as well as Hollywood films (Fu, 2008). Film scholars believed that the early Malaysian film industry was founded upon Chinese funds, Indian imagination and Malay labour (Heide, 2002). Chinese-language films represent an essential aspect of the Malaysian film industry. The cross-cultural characteristics of the Chinese diaspora in films showed Malaysia's multi-ethnic background. Hence, it is important to review the history and development of Chinese-language films in Malaysia.

METHODS

This study focuses on Chinese-language films in Malaysia. The study uses content analysis under the qualitative research method to examine the history and development of Chinese-language films based on the relevant Chinese and English literature. First, keywords such as 'Chinese, language, film, movie, cinema, Malaysia, Malaya, Singapore' will be searched for in the Scopus, Google Scholar and CNKI databases. Then, the utilisation of cluster analysis will classify literature according to different themes. Ultimately, a narrative analysis of the literature will be formed with the same theme to obtain the results. For review papers, scholars tend to analyse film history

in chronological order. However, this paper reviews the history and development of Chinese-language films through assessing significant events in Malaysia. In this way, readers can determine the current problems of Chinese-language films in Malaysia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Chinese Films in Nanyang

In the early history of Chinese film development, Nanyang was not only a geographical concept but also a cultural and marketing one. In the 1920s, the region comprising the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam and other places was termed Nanyang, and it became one of the earliest and most important overseas markets for the Chinese film industry. Businessmen engaged in the film trade between Nanyang and Shanghai were primarily cultural merchants. They were aware of the cultural psychology of the overseas Chinese population in Nanyang, and they also had experience in market operations (Xu, 2018). In 1923, a series of Chinese feature films, such as *A Lotus Rhyme*, was introduced into Nanyang by cultural merchants. Subsequently, titles such as *An Orphan Rescues His Grandpa* prompted a rise in the medium's popularity in Nanyang. The Chinese traditional cultural spirit in the film promoted the ethics of Chinese families, which satisfied their collective cultural psychology and traditional aesthetic needs. After the film premiered in Shanghai in 1925, it garnered wide acclaim. Kwei Wah Shan, an overseas Chinese in the Philippines, purchased the screening rights of *An Orphan Rescues His Grandpa* in Nanyang. The film was screened in Singapore, Malaya and Indonesia, with its screening time extended, showing that Chinese films were popular in Nanyang (Xu & Tang, 2015).

Cultural merchants introduced other films, such as *The Death of Yuli* and *Tea Picking Girl*, to Nanyang, and the audiences responded enthusiastically. In foreign countries, the overseas Chinese were particularly eager to enjoy films which promoted the traditional culture of filial piety and self-sacrifice, because it relieved their nostalgia and expressed cultural identity. Furthermore, such titles could resonate with overseas Chinese who attached importance to the traditional Chinese cultural spirit (Tan & He, 2018). According to the report of *Lat Pau*, a Chinese daily newspaper in Singapore, when the film *The Death of Yuli* arrived in Nanyang, many companies competed to buy the screening rights. The film *Tea Picking Girl* also gained popularity with audiences in Singapore and Malaya, leading to three additional screenings in Singapore.

With the popularity of Chinese films in Nanyang, cultural merchants set up offices to catch market opportunities in Shanghai. At that time, the merchants started to directly participate in the production of Chinese films. In 1926, Shanghai Shadow Play Company decided to invest in *The Cave of the Silken Web* (Ye & Zhu, 2012). Nanyang Film Company estimated the film's market potential and pre-ordered Nanyang screening rights during the production process. In 1927, the film premiered during the Chinese New Year in Singapore and won praise from audiences. The film was initially scheduled to be screened for a week at Marlborough Theatre in Singapore, but due to the enthusiastic response, the theatre extended the screening time by a week (Xu, 2018).

In 1926, the Great China-Lily Pictures Company produced the costume film *Mai Jen Chi* (Ye & Zhu, 2012). The organisation invited Nanyang Film Company to participate in the investment and sold the distribution rights of the

film in advance. The large-scale rise of costume films directly resulted from the cooperation between Chinese film companies and cultural merchants. These kinds of films expressed the spirit of traditional Chinese culture and incorporated visual spectacles, thereby satisfying the viewing needs of audiences in Nanyang. In this boom of costume films, Unique Youth Film Company became the backbone of the market. In 1927, the organisation successively produced *Legend of the White Snake*, *A Crushing Blow*, *Mulan Joins the Army*, *Emperor Visits the Hell*, *Princess Iron Fan* and other films (Xu & Tang, 2015). Cultural merchants cooperated with Chinese film companies through investment, co-production and customisation. The two sides jointly produced films that were suitable for Nanyang audiences. Although the overseas Chinese population were far away from their homeland, the cohesion unique to Chinese culture allowed them to remember their cultural roots.

B. Three Prominent Families in Nanyang's Film Market

There were three prominent families in the Nanyang film market. The first was the Shaw family. In 1925, Runme Shaw and his brothers established Unique Film Productions in Shanghai (Fu, 2008). The films produced by Unique were fashionable among Nanyang audiences. However, the brothers soon found themselves pushed out of Mainland China's screening market by Liuhe Film Company (Morris, Li & Chan, 2006). Since their films could not be screened, the brothers began to set their sights on Nanyang. In 1925, Runme travelled to Singapore to establish a film distribution business (Fu, 2008). In 1927, Runme founded Hai Seng Company. They not only imported the films produced by Unique but also

bought films from other studios and showed them in Tanjong Pagar (Liao & Zhuo, 2003). They then expanded their business in Malaya and opened four theatres, before Run Run Shaw moved from Shanghai to Singapore to assist Runme. In 1930, Runme Shaw and Run Run Shaw established Shaw Brothers Pte Ltd in Singapore where they operated theatres and distributed films. By the mid-1930s, the Shaw Brothers had approximately 70 theatres in Nanyang, which ensured the screening channels produced by Unique.

The second group is the Loke family. In 1935, Loke Cheng Kim established Associated Theatres Ltd with the help of her three partners, her son Loke Wan Tho, her relative Khoo TeikEe and a British friend, Max Baker. In 1936, the company opened its first theatre, the Pavilion, with 1,200 seats in Kuala Lumpur. The Cathay Building was opened in 1939 by Loke Wan Tho and acted as the headquarters for the British Malaya Broadcasting Corporation. Cathay Cinema became well-known as the first air-conditioned theatre in Singapore. Moreover, Cathay Building was the first skyscraper in Singapore and the tallest building in Southeast Asia at that time (Chung, 2009). After the Second World War, Loke Wan Tho returned to Singapore. To expand the film market, he purchased theatres from Ong KengHuat in Penang. In 1948, Loke Wan Tho established International Theatre Ltd, and then, with a partnership, opened several new theatres in Singapore and Malaya in 1949. These theatres featured wide screens, new projectors, air conditioners and speakers. In a few years, there were more than 40 theatres under Cathay, and monthly audiences totalling more than one million people. Aside from the screening of Chinese films, Loke Wan Tho and Ho Ah Loke established Cathay-Keris Films in 1953 to produce other language titles (Wong, 2009). In 1959,

Associated Theatres Ltd underwent a name change and became Cathay Organisation Pte Ltd.

The third family is the Ho family. In 1937, Ho Khee Yong, Ho Khee Siang and their friends jointly funded the establishment of Kong Ngee Motion Picture Production (Guan & Lim, 2019). They were primarily engaged in the distribution of Shanghai films and arranged for their release at the Jubilee Theatre in Singapore (Wong, 2006). Due to the outbreak of the Second World War, Shanghai could not provide film supplies, thereby affecting the business of Kong Ngee. After the Second World War, Cheung Qing Huo and Wong Shou Ling established a relationship with Ho Khee Yong, who was well-known in the film distribution industry, to discuss the theatre business. The trio then formed Ho Wong Cheung Company. They renamed the Tin Yin Dance Stage as the Majestic Theatre and started screening films. Ho Khee Yong rushed to Shanghai to buy the film *The Battle of China*, which became the first film officially released by Ho Wong Cheung Company. The film's box office soared for two months, and the film distribution business of Ho brothers developed from this point. At that time, audiences in Singapore watched Mandarin and Cantonese films, while viewers in Malaya primarily focused on Cantonese titles. Kong Ngee predominantly distributed Shanghai films, such as *Spy Number One*, *Ideal Son-in-law*, *Fifth Intelligence Officer* and others (Wong, 2006). Alongside the Shanghai films, Kong Ngee also showed Hong Kong titles, such as *The Faithful Wife* and *Lascivious Woman* and *The Dedicated Lover*. The theatres of Kong Ngee were all over Southeast Asia, including the Majestic Theatre, the Metropole Theatre, the Marlborough Theatre, the Venus Theatre and the Capitol Theatre in Singapore, the Metropole Theatre in Kuala Lumpur and Johor Bahru and the

Majestic Theatre in Ipoh and Penang (Wong, 2006). By the 1950s, the three major Chinese theatre companies were Shaw of the Shaw family, Cathay of the Loke family and Kong Ngee of the Ho family (Wang, 2020). The investment of three prominent Chinese families opened up new channels for the screening of Chinese films in Nanyang.

C. Hong Kong Films in Singapore and Malaya

In 1947, Harry Truman of the United States proposed a foreign policy in Congress. Simultaneously, the Marshall Plan for foreign economic assistance was launched. The prelude to the Cold War between the East and the West thus established, the Cultural Cold War was also launched (Whitfield, 1990). Under the auspices of the British colonists, Singapore and Malaya gradually implemented national autonomy. Due to the influence of Malay privileges and the prevention of indigenous people in the Malayan Peninsula, the local identity of Chinese in Singapore and Malaya became a historical embarrassment. At that time, Run Run Shaw, Ho Khee Yong and Loke Wan Tho went to Hong Kong to develop the film business. In the early 1950s, various film companies gathered in Hong Kong, where they experienced fierce competition. Until 1955, Shaw had a Cantonese film section in Hong Kong. In the same year, Kong Ngee established a production company in Hong Kong to train film stars, such as Patrick Tse, Jia Ling, Nam Hung and others. The company also hired Kim Chun and Man Chan from Union Film Enterprise Ltd. In 1957, Shankun Zhang, the founder of Great Wall Movie Enterprises Ltd, died of a heart attack in Japan. The same year saw the establishment of the Motion Picture & General Investment Co Ltd (Jin, 2016). The primary influence of Hong Kong films

then shifted from Shanghai to Nanyang. During the Cold War, the three film companies chose to use Saam Hou Zi novels, newspaper serial novels and radio novels as the blueprint for film scripts. Saam Hou Zi novels were well-known titles published in Hong Kong in the 1950s and 1960s. Saam Hou Zi in Cantonese means three cents. Newspaper serial novels are a form of novel publishing, referring to titles divided into multiple parts and published consecutively in newspapers. Radio novels take radio as the carrier and focus on narration. It is a particular form of radio drama. Bloodshed in the Valley of Love was adapted from a comic book novel serialised in the Sing Tao Evening Paper in Hong Kong. Grass by the Lake was adapted from the Saam Hou Zi novel, Bastard. The story of The Fatherless Son came from the radio novel, Rediffusion. Meanwhile, My Intimate Partner was adapted from a Saam Hou Zi novel published in 1959 by Hong Kong Global Press Ltd.

Nanyang elements frequently appeared in Hong Kong films from the 1950s to 1960s. Such aspects referred to the place where people's Chinese ancestors made a living, such as Wang Gensheng, who worked in Singapore on Rainstorm in Chinatown. Different Nanyang titles represented the open attitude of the West, such as the cousin from Singapore in Rear Entrance. Moreover, Nanyang elements constituted tourist attractions in Southeast Asian countries, such as the whereabouts of Gu Lan and Ye Feng in Air Hostess. Other Nanyang elements included places where the protagonist escaped from reality, such as Li Yanming in A Lonely Heart. Alongside using such Nanyang elements as the theme and plot of the films, Hong Kong productions integrated numerous elements of Nanyang culture, landscapes, eating habits and the characteristics of ethnic groups into the films. The critic Xu Yongshun

referred to this type of movie as Singapore and Malaya-style films. This style referred to the characteristics representing natural environments, local conditions and customs. These intentionally implanted Nanyang elements attracted foreign audiences with exotic scenery and the freshness of defamiliarisation with the Southeast Asian market (Xu, 2015). *Nyonya* was the first film with the Nanyang theme. *Hsia Meng* was the first film star to wear a sarong, although the film was not shot in Singapore and Malaya. *Shadows of Love* was the first Mandarin title filmed in Singapore. *Belle in Penang* was the first Cantonese film shot in Singapore and Malaya. *Shrews from Afar* was the first Hokkien title filmed in Singapore and Malaya. The Nanyang Trilogy had three versions of the history of Hong Kong film. Shaw's version of the Nanyang Trilogy included *The Merdeka Bridge*, *Paper Marriage* and *Fragrance of Durians*. Kong Ngee's Nanyang Trilogy comprised *Bloodshed in the Valley of Love*, *China Wife* and *The Whispering Palm*. Eng Wah's version of the trilogy included *Love of Malaya*, *Wife Property* and *Belles of Melaka* (Guo, 2012). Due to the impact of the Cold War, Chinese businessmen in Nanyang turned to Hong Kong to expand their film trade. Films with Chinese culture and Nanyang elements were exported to Nanyang. In terms of characters and storylines, these films deliberately evaded taboos associated with the conflict.

D. Malayanised Chinese-language Film Movement

From the late 1950s to the early 1960s, during the period of the founding of Singapore and Malaya, the overseas Chinese in the Malayan Peninsula produced and distributed Malayanised Chinese-language films. These films quickly gained popularity on the peninsula. All the films

were shot locally, with the content originating from local Chinese customs and featuring local Chinese performers. The primary language was Mandarin, with elements of Cantonese, Hokkien and Malay vocabulary (Han, 2012). Following the Second World War, the British colonial government proposed a Malayanisation policy in 1948 to prevent infiltration from communism. The purpose of this policy was to weaken the rights and interests of local Chinese, foster the development of ethnic Malays and enhance Malayan awareness (Oong, 2000). With Singapore eager to merge into the Federation, the government actively promoted a Malayan culture in Singapore and changed the national language to Malay. The local filmmaker Yi Shui also took advantage of the official vision and used the core concept of Malayanisation to actively promote local film production. The local Chinese began to reject foreign films and started to support local production. With the independence of Malaya and the merger with Singapore, the Chinese population in both places experienced a significant change in political identity. The Chinese diaspora from China maintained their native identity even though they were in a foreign country, and this identity influenced the local Chinese population during the independence of Malaya (Han, 2012). In October 1956, the Chinese government issued a statement that Chinese people in Singapore and Malaya could abandon their identity and apply to become a citizen of Malaya. This conversion also meant that Chinese people in Singapore and Malaya gradually shifted their identity to Malayan.

In the history of Malaysian films, *Lion City*, produced by Yi Shui, was not the first title reflecting the local life of the Chinese population in Singapore and Malaya. From the 1950s to the 1960s, filmmakers produced numerous

Chinese-language titles in Singapore and Malaya. However, the directors of these films were primarily from Hong Kong or Fujian, and they often focused on Nanyang from the perspective of Hong Kong or Mainland China. Although this kind of Hong Kong title with Nanyang aspects took Singapore and Malaya as the narrative background, the story did not reflect the life of the Chinese population there. Local filmmakers criticised this mode of production as a Nanyang-themed Hong Kong film rather than an actual Chinese-language film in Malaya (Hee, 2017). The country's move to independence saw boycotts of Hong Kong films continue to rise. Yi Shui led many of these boycotts and was repeatedly critical of such films flooding into cinemas in Singapore and Malaya (Yi, 1959). During the Malayanised Chinese-language film movement, Yi Shui produced *Lion City* and *Black Gold*, both of which featured a local identity. However, the movement ended in 1965 with the secession of Singapore. Hee (2011) argues that the Malayanised Chinese-language film movement could not continue for two reasons. Following the disruption, the education policy in Singapore focused on English, while Malaysia's language policy focused on Malay. Such decisions disillusioned Yi Shui's ideal of Malayanised Chinese-language films. Moreover, Yi Shui had to contend with health problems. He worked overtime as he pursued his film career and died.

After the ethnic conflict in 1969, the government implemented the New Economic Policy to improve the economic status of Malays. At one time, Malay business organisations pressured the government to tackle the problems related to the Malaysian film industry's production, distribution and screenings, in addition to the establishment of the National Film Development Corporation Malaysia (FINAS). Therefore, the

film industry operated by Shaw and Cathay lost competitiveness. Shaw moved Singapore film production to Merdeka Studio in Kuala Lumpur in 1966, where they attempted to continue fighting for the Malay film market. Nevertheless, they failed. In 1967, Shaw closed the Malay Film Production in Singapore. Cathay also ended Singapore production operations in 1972. Shaw sold Merdeka Studio to FINAS in 1985, and Cathay sold the majority of the film distribution business to Malay companies (Lent, 1990). Chinese companies gradually moved away from the Malaysian film industry, with the withdrawal of these companies constituting a heavy blow to the Chinese-language film market in Malaysia.

E. Malaysian Independent Filmmaking Movement

In 1991, the former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad formulated Vision 2020 and launched the Multimedia Super Corridor. The goal was to build Malaysia into a developed industrialised country through a vigorous development of the information and communication industry. The introduction of digital technology affected the filmmaking environment in Malaysia, as seen with the advent of cheap, portable, easy-to-use digital cameras, as well as non-linear editing systems making filmmaking accessible to civilians. The majority of them used Chinese as a medium to describe local social phenomena. This unique and fresh film style appeared in international film festivals and won numerous awards, in addition to bringing a revolutionary change to the long-dormant Chinese-language film industry in Malaysia. The media and filmmakers came to regard this period as the Malaysian Independent Filmmaking Movement (Kuan, 2015).

The technology offered Chinese Malaysians the opportunity to express their culture through film. Concurrently, it disturbed the national film industry constructed around the Malay language and Islamic culture in Malaysia. These films were labelled as independent because the source of their production funding differed from national films in Malaysia. For instance, films were either self-funded or had investments from smaller studios (Raju, 2008), such as Da Huang Pictures, which was founded by Tan Chui Mui, James Lee, Liew Seng Tat and Amir Muhammad in 2004. The original intention of this company was to provide a group of directors with a formal product house to handle the financial applications, shooting licenses and distribution of film projects. Da Huang used a cross-ethnic, cross-company and cross-human operation model as a platform to maintain film production at low costs. The income relied on film rights sales and bonuses from film festivals to maintain company operations, especially in the European market (Hee, 2014). Although independent films lacked government financial support, the makers attempted to maintain independent film production. Furthermore, independent films with distinct personal consciousness faced a challenge in occupying the market alongside commercial films (Hee, 2010).

In addition to Da Huang Pictures, the late Malaysian director Yasmin Ahmad was also a topical figure. Yasmin was proficient in Mandarin, Cantonese and Hokkien, and communicated with the film industry in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Chinese Malaysians favour her works, and the blend of different cultures in her films resonates with audiences. In 2003, she released her first feature film, *Rabun*. One of Yasmin's strengths was concise expressions, as shown through humorous dialogues where she exposed the social problems

of multi-ethnic and urban-rural wealth disparity in Malaysia (Wang, 2017). In 2005, the film *Sepet*, written and directed by Yasmin, showed the influence of different cultures on love as seen through a relationship between a Chinese boy and Malay girl. Yasmin also recruited actors of different races and provided dialogue in English, Malay, Cantonese, Hokkien and Mandarin to show the multi-ethnic characteristics of Malaysia. The film *Talentine*, released in 2009, was her last feature-length film. This title allowed audiences outside Malaysia to experience the diversity of ethnic cultures and moved the local audiences in Malaysia. Yasmin's films have an energy that attracts audiences from the three major ethnic groups in Malaysia and prompts viewers to reconsider various topics, such as religion and race (Wang, 2017).

F. Chinese-language Films in the Commercial Film Era

The year 2010 was a watershed in the Malaysian film industry. During the Chinese New Year, Keng Guan Chiu's first effort *Tiger Woohoo* and Tan Kheng Seong's self-directed and self-acted love film *Ice Kacang Puppy Love* earned RM4.2 million and RM3.5 million respectively. The Chinese community and media continually enthused about the films' performance in the box office, and they regarded it as a landmark of Chinese-language films performing well in Malaysia (Kuan, 2011). The screening and release of the film *Ice Kacang Puppy Love* caused controversy in the Chinese community because it failed to obtain entertainment tax rebates. After more than one year of appeals and public pressure, the film eventually obtained the Malaysian Film certificate issued by FINAS and an entertainment tax rebate. Heng SeaiKie, the former Deputy

Minister of Information Communication and Culture Malaysia, announced that the department established the Creative Content Fund and the Feature Film Loan Fund worth RM200 million and RM50 million respectively. There was no language restriction and all Malaysian filmmakers could apply. After 2011, FINAS adjusted regulations. Now, regardless of whether the film medium is Malay or not, as long as it features Malay subtitles, more than 50 per cent of the film is shot in the country and more than 51 per cent of the film copyright belongs to Malaysians, the production can be recognised as a Malaysian national film and is eligible for mandatory screening (Kuan, 2015). Moreover, the policy adjustment of the Malaysian government meant Chinese-language films were regarded as Malaysian national films. Chinese-language films could also apply for financial support through a fund established by the government. Additionally, commercial companies showed a willingness to invest in and produce Chinese-language films, which created a boom in Chinese-language filmmaking in Malaysia.

In 2011, *Great Day and Nasi Lemak 2.0* earned RM6.5 million and RM7 million respectively. In 2012, the film *Ah Beng The Movie: 3 Wishes*, starring Jack Lim, was released in the Chinese New Year and won the box office champion of that year with RM7.55 million. Two years later, Keng Guan Chiu's comedy *The Journey* became the best-selling film in Malaysian history. This film earned RM17.17 million and was the highest-grossing Chinese-language film in Malaysia. The majority of the 15 best-selling Malaysian films in history comprised horror, comedy and action titles. In the meantime, Astro Shaw and Skop Productions made approximately 90 per cent of the films with high box office takings (Liew, 2019). Golden Screen Cinemas

(GSC), Malaysia's first cinema chain, also invested in numerous Chinese-language films. After the film *Ola Bola*, GSC changed its policy and aimed to produce more films that could be watched by all ethnic groups. The new director Zahir Omar's first film, *Fly by Night*, had a script written in English. At the insistence of the director, it took four months to retranslate. Mandarin and Cantonese dialogue accounted for 70 per cent of the film, and Chinese and Malay actors played the leading roles. Compared with the art and experimental work of independent films, the storytelling of commercial films is comparatively easy to understand, and cinemas prefer this type of film. Furthermore, non-Malay films were included in the competition list of the Malaysia Film Festival in recent years, although more than 90 per cent of the award-winning titles were Malay-language productions. Chinese-language films were either placed in the non-Malay film competition unit or given the Special Jury Award. Malaysian Chinese-language films have been recognised by the government. However, compared with the support for Malay-language productions, Chinese-language titles still lack governmental assistance. Filmmakers also focus on the multicultural background of Malaysia, hoping that the medium of film can resonate among the three major ethnic groups in Malaysia.

G. Chinese Film Association and Film Festival

The Chinese Film Association of Malaysia (CFAM) was established in April 2012 with the vision of leading and promoting the development of Malaysian Chinese film and TV to the global market. CFAM is the core network organisation of the Malaysian Chinese film and TV industry, with experienced corporations and professionals. The Golden Wau Awards focus on Malaysian Chinese

films and was established by CFAM to share film and TV knowledge with people from all walks of life. The ceremony features the Pioneer Award, which recognises those people who contributed to the Malaysian entertainment industry.

The Kuala Lumpur Chinese TV and Film Association (KLCTFA) was established in July 2012 to enhance the Chinese TV and film industry as well as international cooperation. The Kuala Lumpur International TV & Film Festival (KLITFF) is KLCTFA's most significant event, with support and endorsement by FINAS, the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia, Ministry of Communications and Multimedia Malaysia. KLITFF provides a platform for the convergence and interaction of all Asian TV and film producers. The highlight of the festival is the presentation of the Asia Golden Butterfly Award.

The Malaysia International Film Festival (MIFFest) is an annual film festival showcasing international films. Accompanying this event is the Malaysian Golden Global Awards, a ceremony promoting Malaysia and international film production by recognising and rewarding standout filmmakers. Simultaneously, MIFFest aims to introduce Malaysian films, art and culture to the world and develop the country's tourism industry. Both events were established in 2016 by a committee of film experts from Malaysia, China and Europe. The Malaysian Chinese-language film industry has gradually formed a chain of investment, production, distribution, screening and derivative industries. In addition to localised production and cinema companies, Chinese filmmakers formed a film association and founded an international film festival. Alongside inspiring local Chinese-language film production, the filmmakers want to help Malaysian

Chinese-language films gain an international foothold.

CONCLUSION

Malaysian Chinese-language films developed following the moves from importing Chinese films to adopting local production, cultural identity to national identity and independent film to commercial film. The brain drain of Chinese filmmakers created an embarrassing situation. Tsai Ming Liang is a well-known director in China, but his nationality is Malaysian. He graduated from the Drama Department of Chinese Culture University in Taiwan and stayed in the Taiwanese film industry to develop until he became familiar to audiences. The Chinese Malaysian director Sam Quah graduated from the Film Institute of Taipei National University of the Arts. In 2019, he was well-known by Chinese audiences after directing the film *Sheep Without a Shepherd*. In the same year, he and three other directors co-directed the TV drama *Detective Chinatown*, which garnered high praise. The majority of Chinese Malaysian directors have a background of studying abroad in Britain, America and China. Despite the relevant majors offered in local Chinese universities, including New Era University College, Han Chiang University College and Southern University College, the directors' professional levels required further improvement.

Limited audiences also hinder the development of Chinese-language films in Malaysia. The three major ethnic groups in the country have distinct languages and cultures, making it difficult to obtain universal support for one film. Malays are comparatively tolerant and aside from watching Malay films, they also watch Hollywood, Bollywood and Chinese titles. However, Chinese viewers tend to focus on Chinese and Hollywood

films, while Indian audiences prefer Bollywood and Hollywood movies. The diverse cultural background is a characteristic of Malaysia. Titles such as *Bloodshed in the Valley of Love*, *Sepet*, *Fly by Night* and others reveal the characteristics of Malaysian multi-ethnic diversity. Follow-up research should focus on how to promote traditional Malaysian culture through Chinese-language films. In 2020, the hit Chinese TV drama *The Little Nyonya* was a remake of a show from Singapore produced by MediaCorp in 2008. Many Chinese films have been shot in Malaysia, but never as part of a real co-production. From the perspective of communication strategy, Chinese Malaysian filmmakers should cooperate with film companies from Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Such an approach will expand film screening channels and push Malaysian Chinese-language films into the international market.

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