

The Roles of Filmmaking as a Tool for Youth Learning and Cultural Exchange: Two Nations One Mind Film Contest Project

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Abstract

The Two Nations One Mind film contest was launched by the collaboration between Pukyong National University (PKNU) in Busan, The Republic of Korea (South Korea) and the University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce (UTCC) in Bangkok, Thailand. The project was funded mainly by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, South Korea. The intention of the project was to increase the recognition of Korea in Thailand through co-production filmmaking between university students from the two countries. This paper aims to look at the feedback from the project participants from both nations as to how international co-productions resulted in cultural exchange and international youth cooperation. The paper also examines the films produced from the project, *Blossom*, *Different (Yet) the Same*, *Two Taste*, *Two Nations* and *When I Was There*, for how they reflect the elements of transnational cinema. The comments from the films' audience were also taken as part of the data.

Keywords: transnational cinema, cultural exchange, Two Nations One Mind film contest project

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Background

International co-production of filmmaking or transnational cinema started early at the onset of the sound film era, 1920s-1930s. Uhde and Udhe (2010) state that the development of transnational cinema had increased by the end of the WWII, during the migration of European film casts and crews to the US, which has continued ever since. Nowadays, the impacts of globalization and advanced technologies have enhanced the trend of international co-productions all over the world. The work of film casts and crews from different nations has, to some extent, created unique aspects to film production. This paper argues that international co-production could also promote cultural values of the coproduction countries and create relationships between film crews from different nationalities.

The Two Nations One Mind film contest project gave an opportunity to promote cultural values via film co-production. The project was launched by the collaboration between Thailand and the Republic of Korea (South Korea), aimed at increasing cultural recognition of Korea in Thailand through the mutual exchanges between university students from the two nations via filmmaking. The project was conducted through the collaboration between Pukyong National University (PKNU) in Busan, South Korea and the University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce (UTCC) in Bangkok, Thailand. The project was mainly funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Republic of Korea.

Through joining the project, the students from both countries had a chance to work with their counterpart filmmakers from the pre-production to the post-production process. The applicants were required to make a film that was related to Korean and Thai cultural values, both historical and contemporary. The project was launched via the Facebook group Two Nations One Mind < <https://www.facebook.com/groups/679009575470234/?ref=ts&fref=ts>>. All kinds of communication were carried out through the social media networks such as email, Facebook, facetime, Line applications and the like.

In the first round, 10 pairs of students from Thailand and 10 pairs from Korean were selected. Then the pairs from each country were paired up to work in groups of four. There were two main activities under this project. First, each group was required to organize online meetings in order to develop the proposal for their movies.

The subject matters of the movies, like many other co-production films, had to be related to Korean and Thai cultural values to some degree. The themes of the movies had to involve history, culture, or contemporary issues. The aim of the movie was to make the audience not only enjoy the movies but learn about Korea and Thailand. The organizers hoped that the movies could work as a medium to enhance the relationship between the two nations.

Secondly, the last 4 groups were selected and they were required to produce short films of 3-5 minutes duration in Busan, Korea. The trip was mainly funded by South Korea, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA). Since the film was supposed to represent the two nations, before traveling to Korea, the Thai teams were required to shoot some parts of their films in Thailand. Two of the successful stories were documentaries and the other two were fictional romantic comedies.

During the preproduction period the students communicated via all kinds of the new media. They exchanged ideas in many forms including conversation, URL links, images, and moving images. Globalization and new technologies are not only allowing the filmmakers to internationally exchange their aesthetics, technology, cast, and crew but also doing it cheaper and faster to create more cultural exchange than ever before. The students' distance interactions signify that cultural assimilation in the contemporary active culture is flourishing.

Today, the networking society allows its users to exchange files of entertainment media in different forms such as mobile and camera phones, TV sets, iPhones, iPads, and tablets, to name a few. The emergence of new media practices has increased the possibilities, not only of transnational media, but transnational receptions. Information in

conjunction with the Internet still continues to merge people's knowledge, values, and tastes. It is inevitable that social structures today are constructed around new media and information networks (Oradol, 2015).

Method and Data Collection Procedures

Surveys were conducted with the project participants to evaluate the project using online questionnaires; the first survey was conducted with Thai students after the online meetings (after the first round of the competition). The second survey was with the Thai and Korean students after they had finished making the films. Films produced from the project were also analyzed using a content analysis method. The last survey was conducted with the film audiences using questionnaires.

Data Analysis

This research project followed quantitative and qualitative paradigms, a consequence of using data collected from questionnaires and film analysis. This paper describes the analysis of data followed by a discussion of the research findings and the contents of the films. The findings relate to the research questions that guide this study. Data were analyzed to describe the feedback from the project participants from both nations as to how international co-productions resulted in cultural exchange and international youth cooperation. The film analysis looked at how the films made for the project reflect the elements of transnational cinema. The comments from the films' audiences were also taken as part of the data.

Results

Survey Results

The satisfaction survey of the Thai students after their online meetings found that, for overall satisfaction, 3 students (20%) of the students chose Neutral/Not sure, 10 students (67%) were satisfied, and 2 students (13%) of the students were very satisfied.

Regarding satisfaction with the quality of discussion, the survey found that 4 students (27%) chose Neutral/Not sure, 6 students (40%) were satisfied, and 5 students (33%) were very satisfied.

Regarding satisfaction with the opportunity of their discussion, the survey found that 2 students (13%) chose Neutral/Not sure, 9 students (60%) were satisfied and 4 students (27%) of the students were very satisfied.

In discussions with the students after the online meetings, the students expressed that there were communication problems due to the language differences and time constraints due to the students' part-time work and studies. The time constraints had caused a communication breakdown for one group, and that group had to drop out of the competition. Beside his/her appreciation, one successful candidate commented on the project overall that the participants had to focus on the project for a long period of time. "It was not easily done without active instructors," one of the participants stated. According to Kaewta Krungwong (2013), working in a group is not just dividing tasks, but the participants also need to rely on, discuss with, and learn about each other. Working in a team also enhances social skills and, in this circumstance, international social skills, which is really important for the students' future careers.

Regarding the question about the students' idea of Korea before joining the project, the students mostly knew about the country via Korean popular media and culture, such as movies, fashions, TV series, and art works. Some of them had been to Korea but did not know much about Korean culture and lifestyles. The students perceived the Korean people as serious, meticulous, prompt, and intelligent. They also saw the country as successful economically and highly technological.

Regarding the question about students' impression of Korea after joining the project, one student replied that his/her impression was the same as it was before the project. Most of the students were content with the project. Given that the Korean students were acting as line producers in Busan, the Thai students had learned about the beautiful

scenery and culture via their online discussions. The Thai students discovered that Korean people are kind, responsible, and serious. They perceived that these elements have helped Koreans make an efficient and developed country. One student admitted that there are a number of differences in the natures of Thai and Korean people but he/she believed that the two cultures can compromise. Interestingly, one group looked at cultures through food, then after the discussions, in their film, they decided to represent their countries via national cuisines. In the survey the students stated that the language difference was the major problem for their communication.

After the students had worked together to create their co-production film proposal, the committee then selected four pairs (eight Thai students and eight Korean students) to work on their projects in Busan, South Korea. A second survey was conducted at the end of the project. The survey was conducted separately on Thai students and part two with the Korean students.

The satisfaction survey of the Thai students after the co-production filmmaking found that for overall satisfaction 1 student (13%) chose Neutral/Not sure, 4 students (50%) were satisfied, and 3 students (38%) were very satisfied.

Regarding satisfaction with the quality of discussion, the survey found that 1 student (13%) chose Neutral/Not sure, 4 students (50%) were satisfied, and 3 students (38%) were very satisfied.

Regarding satisfaction with the opportunity for discussion, the survey found that 1 student (13%) was dissatisfied, 4 students (50%) were satisfied, and 3 students (38%) were very satisfied.

In comments about the overall project, participants stated that they were happy with the relationship with each other and the level of discussion. Regarding the students' perception of Korea after the project, a participant wrote that he/she had learned more about Korean people during the 6 days of the project. They had learned about the Koreans'

dreams, lifestyles, history, tradition, and culture. He/she also found that Korea is a unique and interesting country. During the filmmaking, the students had learned about social problems, politics, environment, and the future of the nation. One participant stated that the Koreans have a high quality of life. Regarding the perception of the Korean people, after the project, the Thai students perceived that the Koreans are fun and hardworking. One student stated that he/she wanted to go back to Korea.

The satisfaction survey of the Korean students after the film co-production found that for overall satisfaction 1 student (10%) was very dissatisfied and 2 (20%) the students were very satisfied.

Regarding satisfaction with the quality of discussion, the survey found that 1 student (10%) was dissatisfied, 3 students (30%) chose Neutral/Not sure, 4 students (40%) were satisfied, and 2 students (20%) were very satisfied.

Regarding satisfaction with opportunity for discussion, the survey found that 1 student (10%), was dissatisfied, 2 students (20%) chose Neutral/Not sure, 6 students (60%) were satisfied, and 1 student (10%) was very satisfied.

From the survey with the Thai students, the level of satisfaction had increased after the project's completion. This shows evidence that, even though today's technology allows the users to communicate across distances and exchange idea in many forms, face-to-face meeting in-person is still very important.

The Korean students stated that their Thai counterparts had high quality film equipment. They appreciated the relationships and the experience they had during the film making process. Prior the project, like their Thai counterparts, they knew Thailand via TV shows and tourism and thought positively about Thailand. After the project one said she/he loved Thailand and would seek a chance to visit the country. They perceived the Thai people as passionate, nice, and kind.

Before the commencement of the project, both the Thai and the Korean students stated that they had learned about the other countries via media and traveling, the students expressed that they had learned more about each other through hands-on film co-production than learning from the media or tourism. Today, even though people are exposed to different cultures from media and tourism, meeting person to person in a collaborative environment creates more real exchanges and learning opportunities.

Film Analysis

At the end of the project, the four successful groups had created four films, which were: *Blossom*, *Different (Yet) the Same*, *When I Was There*, and *Two Tastes, Two Nations*. The first two films are documentaries and the other two are romantic comedies with simple plots. Due to the limitations of time and budget, the production (shooting, editing, and subtitling) of the film were designed to be finished within 5 days. The plots were simple with a small cast. As Uhde and Uhde state, there are disadvantages in transnational film; one of them is the limitation in terms of the production scale (2010).

Blossom uses an in-depth interview style with Koreans discussing their culture and tradition intercut with attractive, birds-eye-view, long take of Busan scenery with Lee Seul-Gi's song "Blossom" as the soundtrack. The selection of the characters is accidental, which creates reality and freshness to the documentary, while *Different (Yet) the Same* depicts the talking head interviews of three generations of Koreans and Thais.

When I Was There and *Two Taste, Two Nations* are romantic comedy films. Both plots are boy-meets-girl-and-they-fall-in-love. *When I Was There* depicts the story of a Thai boy who goes to Korea and falls in love with a Korean girl. This is done with a sense of humor and appealing computer graphics. *Two Taste, Two Nations's* storyline is about a Thai girl who goes to Korea and falls in love with a Korean boy. The film uses food to depict and characterize the two nations.

At the film contest closing ceremony in Busan, *When I Was There* was awarded first place by the judges, who were from the South Korean Ministry of foreign affairs and Pukyong University. When the films were screened at UTCC for more than 800 high school students, *Two Taste, Two Nations* received the most votes for the popular vote award.

Different (Yet) the Same received the fewest votes 4.6% (37/802) of the students. The comments from the audience included “the filmmakers should put more aspects into the film rather to just the talking head interviews.” However the audience did state that the film essentially represented the Korean culture.

While *Blossom* received 115/802 votes from the students (14.34%), the comments were all positive. From the comments, it was clear that the audience could recognize Korean culture through elements that the filmmakers put into their film such as architecture, costume, food, music, and scenery. For the nonconcrete parts, the audience noticed the kindness of the Koreans’ and their sophisticated lifestyles. From the comments, the audience liked that the film provided both English and Korean subtitles.

The film *When I Was There*, received 158/802 votes (19.7%). Since the film has more abstract elements, like dreamy images and abstract computer graphics, with the limited time of the film’s length, some of the audience did not fully understand the storyline. In terms of cultural expressions, the audience expressed that the film is very interesting with beautiful cinematography and an interesting narrative. Still the audience could recognize the cultural value of Korea through the role of the actress (Miree Lin), food, costume, scenery, and love. From the comments, *When I Was There* represents the knowledge of the country along with the storyline. Since the film employs romantic comedy genre, the audience were moved by the film’s sense of humor. A number of the audience members interpreted the film’s message as “Love is borderless.”

Two Taste, Two Nations received 402/802 of the votes (50.3%). Most of the comments were positive. Several members of the audience enjoyed the storyline so much that they wish to see a second part to the film. Some of the comments show that the

audience so identified with the film's character that they gave suggestions to what the characters should do next. In addition to that, the audience liked the inclusion of the national cuisines of the two nations in the film's romantic narrative. Regarding the film's techniques, the audience was appreciative of the film editing and cinematography. Interestingly, although the film's storyline is similar to *When I Was There*, the audience of *Two taste, Two Nations* saw it as a representation of friendship in the film rather than love.

Overall, for all the four films, the students would have preferred there to have been Thai subtitles so they could understand the full content of the films. The requirement for the audience's native language proves that language is still an important barrier for transnational cinema, in this case, for both the filmmakers and the audiences, especially for the Thai students. Pornpan Boonpattanaporn compared TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) scores among ASEAN graduates and found that in 2005 the average score of Thai test-takers ranked 4th at 524 out of 990, lower than the Philippines (751), Singapore (628) and Cambodia (606). Pornpan further noted that the average score of the Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET) in 2010 of Thai students after finishing high school was not at a satisfactory level. In the AEC (ASEAN Economic Community) era, it is necessary to take Boonpattanaporn's suggestion into consideration; she suggested that English skills need to be improved among Thai students to increase their ability to compete in their future careers (Boonpattanaporn, 2012).

Conclusion

The feedback from the project participants from both nations shows that the international co-production film resulted in cultural exchange and international youth cooperation. The outcome of the survey clearly indicated that the perceptions of the students toward each other are more positive after joining the project. However, with advanced technology today, language difference is a major problem for their communication. After participating

in the project, the students had learned more about one another and later continued their relationships via the Internet and traveling.

The films from the Two Nations One Mind film contest project manifest their transnational position through their film elements, including cinematic connection representing cultural identities of the two nations. These cultural identities are represented throughout the film *mise-en-scène*, narrative, and style.

The plots are simple and do not touch on any serious political subject matter. The scenery illustrates the attractiveness of the film locations. The cultural and ideological expression of Korea and Thailand are exchanged in the film productions and the narrative. Since the students have learned so much during the project, it is hoped that there will be more projects similar to this film contest in the future.

Lastly, the obstacles to making transnational films are the funding, time, and most of all language differences. Even though the films mostly tell their stories through moving images, sound, and other techniques, language differences still had an effect on film productions and the audiences' reception of the films.

The comments from the films' audiences also show that the audience prefers feature films rather than documentaries. However, the audience perceived Korean culture in the documentary via architecture, costume, food, music, and the scenery. For the romantic comedies, the audience indicated that they learned about Korean culture via the film characters, life styles, food, costume, scenery, and love. Since film is a powerful media it is hoped that the easier and cheaper communication, transportation, and technology will bring more transnational cinema to the screen to create more understanding among the nations during production, screening, and discussion.

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