Title: Transnational Cinemas in Southeast Asia: Good Morning Luang Prabang (2008), Pleasure Factory (2007) and That Sounds Good (2010).

Abstract

This study examines the thematic and aesthetic elements of three films. The selected films are Good Morning Luang Prabang or Sabaidee Luang Prabang (2008), Pleasure Factory or Rong-Ngan Arom (2007) and That Sounds Good or Rao Song Sam Khon (2010). The films are studied via the lens of Transnational Cinemas in the various film genres, and yet the entire paper gives the reader a deeper understanding of the film text and socio-cultural context when and where the films were made and released.

The findings are as the following:
Good Morning Luang Prabang or Sabaidee Luang Prabang (2008) the first private funded Laos film in 33 years. The film is a co-production of Laos and Thai companies. The film is full of Transnational Cinemas elements include crossing border, the representation of cultural identities of the two nations. These cultural identities are represented through the film’s romantic comedy genre. The storyline is related through theme of memory, longing and nostalgia. Still the plot is simple and does not touch any sensitive subject matter due to the control from Laos Ministry of Information and Culture. The cultural and ideological expression of Laos and Thai are exchanged in the narrative and the film production.

Pleasure Factory (2007) is a co-production of Singapore and Hong Kong-Netherlands companies. Unlike the Thai-Laos co-production, Pleasure Factory depicts subjects that traditionally hidden in Asian Society, such as prostitutions, same-sex relationships and female’s sexual pleasure. The film manifests its transnational elements by employing the actors from different nationalities along with the Diasporic characteristic of the film casts and crews. The film portrays sexual representation with Art Cinema elements that attract festival film goers. Even though the Singapore authority allow the film to be made and released, some parts of same sex intimate relationship scenes were cut. The strictness of censorship in Singapore is lessened than before but still there to a certain level.
*That Sounds Good* or *Rao Song Sam Khon* (2010) was made by a sole Thai company. The film contains Transnational Cinemas elements via the characters’ journey from Thailand to Laos and Vietnam. Most of the film casts are Thai and the characters do not socialize with the locals. One of the local female characters is exploited by the male gazes who, while writing this paper, will never happen to Loas transnational films. The disabled characters are projected in the film. The film represents the characters’ point of views in specific audio-visual ways. With the film’s romantic comedy genre, the disabled characters are represented in a comical way.

**Keywords:** Transnational Cinemas; Southeast Asian Film; Thai Film; Laos Film; Vietnamese Film
Introduction

In Europe, Transnational Cinema has started early since the sound film era, 1920s - 1930s. The development of Transnational Cinema had been increased at the end of WWII, during the migration of European film casts and crews to the US and has continued ever since. Today, the impact of globalization and advanced technologies has enhanced the trend of international co-productions all over the world. The works of film casts and crews from different nations have more or less created unique aspects to the films. The academic discussions on Transnational Cinema, are, however revolved around Hollywood, Bollywood, European, Latin American and Pan-Asian Cinemas. This paper aims at analyzing South East Asian Transnational Cinema focusing on three films: Sabaidee Luang Prabang or Good Morning Luang Prabang (2008), Kuaile Gongchang or Rong-ngan Arom or Pleasure Factory (2007) and Rao Song Sam Khon or That Sounds Good (2010).

First, the first section aims at looking at Sabaidee Luang Prabang or Good Morning Luang Prabang (2008) the first private funded Lao film in 33 years. The film is a co-production of Lao and Thai companies. Sabaidee is full of Transnational Cinema elements which include border crossing and cinematic connection representing cultural identities of the two nations. These cultural identities are represented through the film’s mise-en-scène, narrative and style. The storyline is related through themes of memory, longing and nostalgia. Still, the plot is simple and does not touch up on any serious political subject matters. The cultural and ideological expression of Lao and Thai are exchanged in the narrative. The part will examine the representations of cultural identities of the two nations through filmic elements such as the film’s Mise-

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3 Part of this part was presented as “Good Morning Luang Prabang (2008) and its world cinema elements,” at ICAS 6, Chungnam National University (CNU), the Center for Asian Regional Studies (CARS) and Daejeon Metropolitan City, the Daejeon Convention, Daejeon, Korea, 6-9 August 2009.
en-scène, storyline, and the narrative. Additionally, *Sabaidee Luang Prabang* is discussed as a case study of how world cinema elements are constructed in the film. The cultural representations of the film that aim at catching the attention of international filmgoers are also examined.

Second section examines *Rong-ngan Arom* or *Pleasure Factory* (2007). *Pleasure Factory* is a co-production of Singapore and Hong Kong-Netherlands companies. Unlike the Thai-Lao co-production films that do not touch upon any sensitive topics, *Pleasure Factory* depicts subjects that are traditionally concealed in Asian Society or society in general, such as prostitution, same-sex relationship and female sexual pleasure. Besides the international co-production, the film employs actors from different countries, namely China (PRC), Singapore, Taiwan and Thailand. Like *Sabaidee Luang Prabang*, *Pleasure Factory* employs the Laotian-Australian, Bangkok based actor, Ananda Everingham. New face actors were casted from Geylang, Singapore’s red light district and around Singapore to bring freshness and sense of realism to the film. In this part, the film will be analyzed as to how Transnational Cinema aspects allow the subject that Nana A. T. Rebhan of Germany’s Art and Culture Channel, Arte calls “a convincing portrait of a never-before-seen red-light district” to be made and screened in the authoritarian Singapore.\(^5\) The film was selected for the “Uncertain Regard” competition at the 2007 Cannes Film Festival and gained high acclaim from other international film festivals around the world. In addition, *Pleasure Factory* was celebrated by number of European critics. The elements of the film that pleased these international critics are also discussed in terms of transnational art cinema. Hence, the representation of sexuality in the film will also be explored.

\(^4\) Some part of second section of this paper was represented as “Transnational Cinema in Southeast Asia: case study *Pleasure Factory* (2007)” at the Conference on Film and Cinema in Singapore, jointly organized by the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore and Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information, Nanyang Technological University held on 6-7 October 2011.

Third section aims at studying *Rao Song Sam Khon* or *That Sounds Good* (2010). Even though *That Sounds Good* was made by a single Thai company, the film contains Transnational Cinema’s elements since the film protagonists have traveled through East-West Economic Corridor (EWEC): Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam. Combining a road movie and romantic comedy genre, the plot is simple but the scenery illustrates the attractiveness of the film locations in these countries. Like the film *Sabaidee*, *That Sounds Good* represents the countries through location, props and food. Most of the film casts are Thai but the leading actor, Jay Montonn Jira also has Diasporic background like Ananda Everingham. Additionally, a Vietnamese character is used in a small but important role. Moreover, the two female protagonists are disabled in certain ways. One has a severely short eye sight and the other is hearing-impaired. To my knowledge, the space for disabled characters in Asian films and any other entertainment media are limited. The representations of these two leading female characters will therefore be examined. The examination focuses on the use of visual and sound to represent their perceptions of the world.

The conclusion of this research aims at finding the elements of Transnational Cinema in South East Asian films focusing on these three chosen films, *Sabaidee Luang Prabang or Good Morning Luang Prabang* (2008), *Kuaile Gongchang or Rong-ngan Arom or Pleasure Factory* (2007) and *Rao Song Sam Khon or That Sounds Good* (2010). The elements of the films that attract international productions and perceptions are expected to be explained.

**Objectives**

1. To analyze the details of Transnational Cinema in the various film genres
2. To examine the thematic and cinematic elements of the chosen films.
3. To study film text and socio-cultural context when and where the films were made and released.

**Methodology**

The research will cover a thorough viewing and analysis of three films in relation to their genres and style, focusing on their texts and contexts of the shooting based countries. In terms of approach, this paper uses textual analysis by looking at multiple significant of discursive structure in the films, as such narrative formulae and technical
cinematic elements. Genre analysis is also used to examine the films, which range from romantic-comedy, road movies to art cinema.

Furthermore, in-depth interviews with the film producers and actors are also used to clarify cultural, political, and industrial determinants of the chosen films.

In examining transnational films, this research uses a number of guidelines from Deborah Shaw and Armida De La Garza. Shaw and Garza provide thorough principle to study films through the lens of Transnational Cinema in their study. The topics from the guideline that are relevant to analyze the selected films are:

- Modes of production, distribution and exhibition
- Migration, journey and other forms of border-crossing
- Exilic and Diasporic filmmaking
- Film and Language
- Question of authorship and stardom
- Cultural Exchange
- Cultural and political policy

Regarding films’ contexts, this study uses the model constructed by Pam Cook and Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim to study the context of the selected film as the following:

- Nostalgia and Utopianism
- Recognizing the dynamic and fluid relationship between center and border
- Desire for a space of creative possibility outside the mainstream that will destabilize the field of cultural production and displace the hegemony of the center

_Sabaidee Luang Prabang or Good Morning Luang Prabang (2008)_

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*Good Morning Luang Prabang* is a co-production of Lao and Thai companies. The film is the first private funded Lao film in 33 years. The film was warmly welcomed by Thai and Lao audience. It was also screened at International Film Festivals in Rotterdam, New York Asian Film Festival, Pusan Film Festival and so on. In terms of text, the film is full of elements that are constructed to reach the international film audience’s desire. The elements include stunning scenery of Laos, appealing utopian lifestyle, and authentic beautiful Lao culture. The leading actor and actress have different nationalities to attract wide range of audiences, the Laotian then debut film actress, Khamly Philavong and the Australian-Laos Bangkok based famous actor, Ananda Everingham. The uniqueness of the Thai-Lao co-production is later discussed here.

As for international audiences *Good Morning Luang Prabang* employs many aspects of world cinema that would please filmgoers outside Laos. The uniqueness of locality and region become inspirations that obviously stand out in the film. Adding to that, Anousone Sirisakda of Laos Art Media, co-producer of the *Sabidee* film said that the film has its own strength. It does not have to imitate the other films. It fulfills what the world has missed out today such as unique cultures, gentle manners and beautiful landscapes.  

Luang Prabang, the world heritage site, is obviously the central motif of the film. It appears in the film title and the place is where the two protagonists move around in the film, allowing it to show the natural and historical sites of the town. The locations in the film play a crucial role in developing a fantasy regarding the nature of purity and a local mode of symbolic representation.

Discussing the film title the similarity of the languages between Thai and Laos should be examined. The film title *Sabidee Luanphrabang* in Laos means ‘Hello Luang Prabang,’ as the film translation in English, *Good Morning Luang Prabang*. When the film was shown in Thailand, the filmmakers still used the same title as in Laos, *Sabidee Luang Prabang*. *Sabidee Luang Prabang* is understood by Thais as ‘[I am]...

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8 Anousone Sirisakda, Personal Interview, 13 September 2010.
fine, Luang Prabang.’ or in interrogative sentence ‘How are you?’ Even though the literal translation of the film title into Thai and Lao languages is not exactly identical, the term ‘Sabaidee’ can be used as a greeting word for both nations. The title of the film thus evokes the similarity of the language and culture. The connection of language and culture between the two nations helps Thai Lao casts and crews understand each other to a great degree.

In terms of pre-production process, The Lao Ministry of Information and Culture had to read the film script very carefully since the former Thai film, a sport comedy, *Mak Tae Loke Talueng or Lucky Loser* (2006) depicts the Lao football team in the way that Lao people found offensive. The *Mak Tae* film later had to re-edit and reshoot some parts before released. Therefore, the script of *Sabaidee Luang Prabang* had to be revised with care. According to the Lao producer, Anousone Sirisakda, the sensitive issues had to be taken out. The Lao female protagonist has to be gentle and demure. The ways she talks and moves have to resemble a proper Lao lady (*Mae Ying Lao*). Anousone added that when the film respectfully represented Lao culture and landscape, it could be used as a great tool to strengthen good relationship between the two countries. According to him, media should deliver accurate knowledge without exploiting any women nor the cultures. Ananda asserts that the film is Lao first film in 33 years so he would like to respect the opinions from the Lao authority as well.9

In much the same way with the cultural representation, the sceneries of Laos are not there by coincidence or the film’s aspects of road movie and romantic comedy. One of the comments made by Ananda is that the authorities wanted the film to be more commercial so they wanted to add more scenery.10 In addition, every time the protagonists move from one town to another the caption will be shown to make sure the audience know exactly where the places are. In some scenes the maps of the places are shown on the screen to explain how to get there. Since Noi, the female

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10 Gershon.
protagonist is a tour guide her role is to explain about the significance of natural and historical places where the two protagonists travel to. Additionally the male protagonist, Sorn is a professional photographer on his job, therefore a number of still pictures of beautiful scenery are also illustrated on the screen. Adding to that, Lao Tourism Authority prefers that the term “Sabaidee” is used in the title to suggest the theme of their promotional strategy.

According to the Thai director Sakchai Deena’s interview with *The Independent* that the reason why the plot has to be as simple as ‘a boy meets a girl and they fall in love’ is that “we wanted a soft storyline so it would not be too hard to get approval from the Lao government.” *The Independent*, further states that “a member of the government was on the set at the time of the shooting to ensure that Lao culture was portrayed appropriately and the film editor removed a number of scenes they believed might be controversial.”

Obviously, the globalization does not affect only the culture but an individual as well. As mentioned above, Ananda is an interracial of Australian and Laos. He grew up in Australia and Bangkok and has made his career as a famous actor in Thailand and Asian region. His identity is, as Sorn states many times in the film, ‘ambiguous.’ With globalization effects, the nationalities of films become ambiguous just like other kinds of art forms, culture, sports or a person like Ananda and many others. The lead female character, Khamly Philavong, also has international complexity. She is an interracial between Laos and Chinese. She grew up in Laos but studied International Trading at a university in China.

In the film Sorn played by Ananda, is seen to be talking from time to time to his parents in English, Laos and Thai on his mobile phone. The conversations of the characters in the films are mostly in Laos and Thai but occasionally English is used.

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12 Some football teams in England have their players from all over the world together with non-English coach.
The use of different languages is another aspect that represents the transnational characteristics of the film.

Internationally, the co-production will help the film casts and crews to gain access to a variety of cultures worldwide and provide an opportunity for Southeast Asian transnational films to reach global targets. Next the analysis moves on to *Pleasure Factory* (2007)

**Rong-ngan Arom or Pleasure Factory (Kuaile Gongchang) (2007)**

This part aims at analyzing an international co-production film *Rong-ngan Arom or Pleasure Factory (Kuaile Gongchang)* (2007). The film depicts subjects that are traditionally hidden in Asian Society, such as prostitution, female sexual pleasure and same sex relationship. *Pleasure Factory* was selected for the “Uncertain Regard” competition at the 2007 Cannes Film Festival, and was the second film from Singapore that entered the category. The film was later shown at international film festivals around the world and later released in the United States. *Pleasure Factory* is also acclaimed by a number of critics.

To examine *Pleasure Factory* as a transnational film, this study uses a number of guidelines from Deborah Shaw and Armida Ed La Garza who provide a thorough list of principles on which to base a study of films through the lens of Transnational Cinema. The topics from the list that are applicable for analysis of such films are: Modes of production, Exilic and Diasporic film making, Question of authorship and stardom and the language.

In analyzing the film texts, this study uses guideline designed by Pam Cook, Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim to study the following notions:

- Nostalgia and Utopianism

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14 Shaw and Ed La Garza, 5-6.
Desire for a space of creative possibility outside the mainstream that will destabilize the field of cultural production and displace the hegemony of the center.

In terms of the mode of production, *Pleasure Factory* is a co-production of Singapore based Spicy Apple Films, The Hong Kong - Netherlands company, *Fortissimo* Films and Singapore’s InnoForm Media. Being an international co-production, this small project creates a unique statement to the ASEAN filmmaking industry. The co-production between small transnational companies gives hope to the alternative film industries.

Besides the international co-production, *Pleasure Factory* employs actors from different countries, such as the Taiwanese actress Yang Kuei-mei. Yang has worked with a number of internationally acclaimed directors, such as Ang Lee’s and Tsai Ming-liang. Like the *Sabaidee* film, leading male character of *Pleasure Factory* is the Laotian-Australian, Bangkok based actor, Ananda Everingham. In Asia, Ananda has worked on a number of international co-productions, among them *Ploy* (2007), *Good Morning Luang Prabang* (2008), *The Leap Year* (2008) and Ekachai Uekrongtham’s *The Coffin* (2008). Adding to the cast list, a mainland Chinese actress, Xue Er, also plays one of the main characters in the film. New face actors were recruited from Geylang, Singapore’s Red Light District, and elsewhere in Singapore to bring freshness and a sense of realism to the film. Ekachai Uekrongtham, the director, is a Thai who has lived his professional life in Singapore. Even though he was born and raised in Thailand, he lived and worked more than half of his life in this island state.

In Singapore, Ekachai has run successful Action Theatre Company. In his theatrical works, Ekachai occasionally produces plays that represent transnational ideas. Ekachai has directed and produced more than 100 plays and musicals in America, China, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. 15 Ekachai has established the transnational quality through his play characters, for example, *Mail Order Bride and Other Oriental Takeaway*.

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The variety of actors’ nationalities and the mixed characteristics of Ananda and Ekachai are evidence of the interaction and increasing globalization of trade, business, migration, education, communication, and so on. Given that globalization has increased interaction among people in the world, this cultural assimilation continues constantly in these active cultures. With AEC just round the corner, it is quite impossible to draw clear lines between ASEAN countries in terms of cultures and values.

In *Pleasure Factory*, Ekachai uses the ‘art cinema’ style, with reference to the area of narrative structure and cinematic style, which is obviously against the classical cinema convention. Pam Cook, Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim describe that Transnational Cinema as “desire for a space of creative possibility outside the mainstream that will destabilize the field of cultural production and displace the hegemony center.” *Pleasure Factory* seems to embrace the idea; the characteristic of art cinema include the unset location, purposeless characters and discontinued storyline.

Similar to De Wallen’s fish tank in Amsterdam, and Patpong in Bangkok, Geylang is a Red Light District in Singapore. According to the well-know travellers’ guide book *The Lonely Planet Singapore City Guide*, Geylang is “synonymous with Singapore flesh trade, there’s more to this neighbourhood than meets the eye.” The guide book further gives details that “… this district behind the open-air market is filled with a Dante-esque assortment of brothels, girlie bars, cheap hotel and alley after alley lined with prostitutes from all over Southeast Asia in all times.” The film represents the bustling place from a distance in a documentary-like style. According to the director’s interview with *The New York Times*, Ekachai expressed, “I don’t do the film to expose the dirty side of Singapore, rather, it was Geylang’s very incongruity that drew me back to the district to document the life of its denizens. *Pleasure Factory* is about human connections.” In a number of scenes the camera honestly moves past the area without concentrating on any object. The use of real location and available lighting

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represents a realistic range of space and time continuum. The long shots are often used with handheld camera which corresponds to documentary realism.\footnote{Arnold, 2007.}

At Geylang, the film illustrates the lives of sexual pleasure providers and pleasure seekers along with other kinds of seekers and providers. In the film, Geylang could be somewhere or elsewhere in Southeast Asian countries that characterizes the vibrant of cultural exchange. In one scene a man is offered a service of women from different countries, leaving the question of national specificity. Since sexual pleasure is universal, the globalized commercial culture has created new identities that are no longer connected to a specific notion or place of origin.

It is along a roll of restaurants that the film projects a character of a street musician providing pleasure for the customers. The musician is later shifted from his position to be a provider of another kind. The role of the server and those being served in the film are not fixed but fluidly shifted around. A number of characters like the camera, move aimlessly around the area, adding vagueness to the film.

The fact that the film lack causality in the narrative and goal-oriented characters marks its position of counter-cinema. Unlike Hollywood or mainstream films with goal-oriented characters, most of the characters in \textit{Pleasure Factory} move around seemingly pointlessly. Three interweaving stories of pleasure seekers and providers during the same night in Geylang are added in a vague narrative and discontinued editing. Furthermore, the story unfolds at a very slow pace.

We have seen that \textit{Pleasure Factory} intertwines three stories in one night at one location. One of the trios is about a young soldier, Jonathan.\footnote{Played by the then actor and filmmaker, Loo Zihan} The film focuses on his \textit{rites de passage} into manhood. The young soldier seems to be the only character that has a clear purpose in the film. Later, Jonathan finally finds his sex mate, a girl from Mainland China named Xue Er (played by the actress with the same name, Xue Er). Here, the director uses the actress’s real name as the name of the character she
plays in the film to emphasize the readily realism. During the two young characters’ intimate relationships, the camera lingers on the male and female bodies equally, without partiality. In so doing, the absence of gender prejudice between male and female characters is illustrated. Moreover, Xue Er is represented as having more sexual experience than Jonathan. The representation of Xue Er’s experience advancement is contrary to the masculinity of Asian male as a leader, if not males in general. We have seen that eroticism is part of reality, an essential element of art cinema, since eroticism violates the code of the classical norm. The erotic scenes between Jonathan and Xue Er thus add realism to the film.

In the film, a young man Chris (played by Ananda Everingham) follows the pair of mother and daughter prostitutes around in a meaningless way. Chris is projected as an outsider English speaker who speaks English only. The trio is therefore having a problem with communications. Hence their conversations convey very little dialogue. The limitation of communication and the alienation of Chris are parts of art cinema narrative.19 Adding another language into the film is also resonant of transnationalism. Considering the world market, using English and Chinese languages in the film would exhibit the film to larger groups of audiences.

During the disoriented narrative of the three stories, the director adds documentary style like interviews Xue Er and other characters. In the interview footages these characters talk about themselves looking at the camera. As Bordwell explains, characters of art cinema always tell the story of themselves through an account of their childhood, fantasies and dreams. The interview footages appear inconsistently in the film. The use of documentary style like interview shots emphasizes the director’s intention to insert more reality to the film.

In a country where nudity and excessive profanity are removed from a number of films, the making and releasing of Pleasure Factory astonished many people.20 The

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release of *Pleasure Factory* revealed the modification of value and ideology toward films in Singapore. Even though the rigorous censorship in Singapore is less rigid than before, the country is not totally free from censorship. In *Pleasure Factory* some scenes are cut out. Interview with Loo Zihan, one of the film leading actors, reveals that there is a scene of intimate same sex relationship when making *Pleasure Factory* but in the VCD released in Singapore, the romance of the same sex relationship is nowhere to be seen.

*Rao Song Sam Khon or That Sounds Good (2010).*

Unlike the first two films analyzed in this paper, *That Sounds Good* (2010) was made by a solidly Thai production company, M 39. The film contains Transnational Cinema’s elements by using road movie genre. The film storyline is based on border crossing, leading the characters and the audience to Southeast Asian’s unseen locations. The film protagonists have traveled through East-West Economic Corridor (EWEC) from Thailand to Laos and Vietnam. The crossing border scenes manifest the film’s Transnational position. In the midst of the film’s road movie together with romantic comedy genre, the plot is simple but the scenery illustrates the attractiveness of the film locations. The film is therefore analyzed in this chapter in terms of its Transnational components, in relation to the use of the road movie genre to relocate the characters into the specific landscape.

Similar to the *Sabaidee* film, *That Sounds Good* represents these three countries through location, props, and food. Most of the film casts are Thai but the leading actor, Jay Montonn Jira has Diasporic background similar to Ananda Everingham’s. Jay was born in Hong Kong to a Thai father and a Thai-American mother. Throughout his life he had studied at international schools in Hong Kong, Thailand and The US. Additionally, a Vietnamese actress, Elly Tran is employed in a small but important role. Besides Elly, the film does not pay close attention to any other local characters.

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21 Loo Zihan, Personal Interview, 6 October 2011.
Adding to that, the two female protagonists are disabled in certain ways. One has a severely short eye sight and the other is hearing-impaired. To my knowledge, the space for disability characters in Asian films and other entertainment media is limited. The representations of these two leading female characters are then examined.

*That Sounds Good* is about a caravan of off road jeeps that venture on an Indochina road trip. Like other road movies, *That Sounds Good* uses its specific location to express national imaginary land, to reinforce the sense of “regional and local belonging; the disappearance of (some) customs and borders, . . .”22 Their trip through Laos and Vietnam is presented in the road movie style and carries the implications of the genre. As Sharon Willis suggests, in road movie convention the characters are different from the community where they travel. Distinctive from *Sabaidee Luang Prabang* and *Pleasure Factory*, the film characters of *That Sounds Good* are alienated to the locals and rarely show interest in the local cultures or people.

Along the way the caravan is shot in very long shots showing the beauty of diverse sceneries. The entire full length of songs would accompany the shots of attractive scenery making it music video like. Here the popular singers in the 1970s and 1980s are employed to produce the songs. Together with the leading male character who is a former teen pop singer and actor in the 1980s, these characteristics, like other transnational films, bring back the feeling of nostalgia and the lost time. Adding to that, later in the film, the film style mimics that of the silent era. The narration is delivered in white typography on the black screen. The silent film elements bring back the sense of nostalgia of the good old days.

Moving from place to place, activities of the caravan members that seem to be closest to the locals are eating and shopping in local markets, buying and bargaining for souvenirs. The relationship of the film characters and the local people are strictly to the economic exchange rather than the cultural one. As Uhde and Uhde state in their study, there is also a disadvantage in transnational film, i.e. with the limitation in terms

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of the production scale it could reduce or ignore the specific local culture, ethnic and characteristic of the local people.\textsuperscript{23}

Although the film characters and storyline do not have any profound interest in the locals’ cultures or histories, in one scene, a Vietnamese female actress, Elly Tran Ha is employed. Her image is shown with prominent breasts. With the compliments of the male characters in the scene, her breasts serve as the sexual desire and relate to fetishism. In the scene the entire concept of female identity is reduced to the breasts. She is seen standing and smiling with limited dialogue. Here, the male characters and audience are given the power of looking at her. The male characters also have power over her by their conversations about her in the language that she does not understand. The concept of reducing Elly into her breasts is also emphasized in the behind-the-scene clip. The clip is exhibited outside the cinema theatres, at the film’s promotional screenings and on YouTube. In the clip, the Thai female spokesperson even compares Elly to a cow. A numbers of online comments also refer to Elly in the same way.

Compared to the \textit{Sabidee} film, at the time of writing this research, Lao authority would not allow any Lao lady to be portrayed in such manner. As Anousone, the Lao co-producer, clearly stated: he would not trade Lao female sexual image for money.\textsuperscript{24}

Since the film also uses romantic comedy genre, the role of Vietnamese female character could be explained by Andrew Horton’s study. Andrew Horton states that the humiliation of the others with regard to their gender or ethnicity has long been exploited in comedy.\textsuperscript{25} The comedy functions to challenge customary social norms. The film’s exploitation of Elly’s image could be read as exploitation of female sexuality. However with the comedy genre, the seriousness of sexual exploitation is somewhat lessen.

\textsuperscript{23} Uhde and Uhde, p.5.
\textsuperscript{24} Anousone.

Additionally, Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik states that in comedy films, genders are rehearsed, explored, endorsed or undermined. In the film, the other female characters are also characterized as stereotypical female: nosy, bossy, emotional and irrational. Through their journey, none of the female characters is seen driving or navigating the trip. More than that, the film also demonstrates that the female characters do not have any knowledge about the car. At various points the female characters are projected as subordinates to the males.

Even though the plot is simple, the film uses two eccentric characters with disabilities, the severely short-sighted, Ter, and the hearing impaired girl, Suntree. In relation to Nicole Markotic’s study, he explains that a number of contemporary films represent disability in three ways: “a moral metaphor, extraordinary heroic, or a punch line of a gag.” Generally, Thai media seem to unapologetically represent the disable characters in the last manner. Looking at perception of disability in the media, Markotic adds that the satisfaction of the representations make the audience feel “apprehensible and hilarity.”

Later, the film shows the difficulties they face in everyday life in a light manner. In the film disability is not only her problem, it is also her personality. With able or disable characters, the miscommunication is the key elements of humor in comedy films.

In terms of film technique, the filmmakers use sound and images to represent perception of how the two girls see and hear the world. Here, their perceptions are represented through the art of film representations. The film shows blurry images to demonstrate how a short sighted person sees the world. Squeaking sounds are also used to demonstrate how a hearing impaired person hears music and conversations. The representations of the world through the disabled lens rarely exist in mainstream media or other kinds of art forms. The filmmakers make their best attempt to present


the two girls’ viewpoints in accurate manners. This is evident in the list of sign language trainers in the film’s end credits.

It is also interesting to see how the group reacts toward the girls with disability. At first, they do not know how to react to them but later get used to their personalities. Throughout the film, the others question the female protagonist’s disability, if they are able or less able, visible or invisible, handicapped or normal. The reactions include gazing, gossiping, helping but without any sympathy or empathy like the representation of the disabled people in other Thai media.

The female characters also question themselves if normal romantic relationship is too complicated for them. Later, when the male protagonist confesses to one of the girls that he does not know how to react to a person “like her,” whom he has never associated with before. His confession resonates the alienated characters of the disables in the media and everyday life. With the loss of two senses, hearing and seeing, towards the end of the film, the characters express their feelings through sign language and touching. The film does not look at disability in a sympathetic or empathetic way except that they are just different.
Conclusion

The transnational age has changed the economic structure of the film industry, including marketing and distribution, which consequently affects film texts and their production culture. Evidently the Hong Kong, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese and Thai film industries see the Asian market as a massive body of consumers with substantial income. There are increasing trends of transnational castings and co-productions. Numerous elements in films, such as international casts and attractive locations, evidently aim at attracting the international markets. The phenomenon of international co-production makes cinema develop into “a global cultural form, however different its local manifestation.”

In Sabaidee Luang Prabang, the elements of transnational cinema are used to present the unique cultures, easy lifestyles and beautiful landscapes of Laos to attract the international audiences especially cosmopolitans who do not have such lifestyles. Sabaidee Luang Prabang is commercially well received by Thai and Lao audiences and successful in the international film festival circuit.

The Thai-Lao production mode is an exception due to the similarity of the countries’ cultures and languages. This connection facilitates the communication between casts and crews of the two nations. The Diasporic background of the co-producer and actor, Ananda Everingham, also manifest that today nationality of a person is also blurred. As a son of a Lao mother, Ananda produced the first Lao film in a respectful way. Under the control of the Lao Ministry of Information and Culture, the film producers secure their position by producing the second and the third Sabaidee Films with the same plot, casts and locations. The audiences however do not appreciate the repetition of the plot. It is hopes that in the future the co-producers of Thai and Lao film will find the way to compromise their creativities with the Lao authority.

For Pleasure Factory, the film uses its Art Cinema genre to challenge its audience and Singaporean authority. The film employs a number of casts from different nationalities. The casts and crews themselves also represent their Diasporic

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characters. Transnational exchange has given a voice to Diasporic filmmaker in Southeast Asian countries, while transforming the national by framing the difference or accent within the discursive of Art Cinema. Producing film in Singapore, the country is rich of diverse cultures, languages and ethnic backgrounds; therefore national identity has become complex and multilayered all kind of mixture forms. The film unavoidably represents the diversity of the country surroundings. Bravely the film represents sexual subjects that are tabooed in Southeast Asian society such as, prostitution, female sexual desires and same sex relationship in an explicit art form. The release of the film in Singapore surprised many audiences. Even though the rigid censorship of Singapore seems to be less meticulous, the media there are not totally free.

Looking at That Sounds Good, the film uses road movie genre to gain the position of transnational cinema. Unlike Sabaidee Luang Prabang and Pleasure Factory, That Sounds Good interacts with the locals to the minimum and mostly in views of economic exchange. The film does not feature the cultural and historical backgrounds of the film locales. One of the local female characters is exploited by the male gazes that never happen in the Thai-Loa mainstream film. The different representations of females from these films signify that the film texts could be different when they are made in different countries. What make the film interesting are the disable characters in the film. The film represents their points of view with unclear sound and blurry visual. The disabled characters are not represented as a moral metaphor nor extraordinary heroic, but a comedian. The romantic comedy genre is also represented the difficulty of their everyday lives in a light approach.

In sum, with an economically optimistic and culturally vibrant scenario, the future of the Southeast Asian film industry is something to look forward to. Firstly, the mixture of backgrounds and experiences among filmmakers should allow audience the pleasure of a variety of outcomes. The flow of technologies and funding from more powerful sources could turn production companies in a small film industry to international companies. In terms of finance, international co-production expands financial found and reduce the risk of investment. The co-production between different countries with a strong marketing strategy for national and international markets should result in wider audience and increased capital for the business.
Filmography


*Pleasure Factory (Rongram Arom or Kuaile Gongchang)*. Dir. Ekachai Uekrongtham. Pref. Ananda Everingham and Lu Zihan. Spicy Apple Films, the Hong Kong-Netherlands company, Fortissimo Films and Singapore's InnoForm Media. VCD. (2007)

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