

Conference Abstract

Abstract Title: The Rise of Independent Filmmaking in Malaysia Resulting from Innovative Fundraising Avenues Ultimate Beneficiaries of

Authors:

- **Jasmine H. Low**, Founder, EQn Activation Film Studios c/o Go International Group Dotcom Pty Ltd. and Student, AFTRS MASB Cohort 2024
- **Amir Muhammad**, Founder of Kuman Pictures
- **Dina Zaman**, Co founder, Iman Research / Author, Malayness, I Am Muslim
- **Amanda Nell Eu**, Director, Ghost Grrl Productions, the 2024 Women In Motion Emerging Talent Award, Winner of the 2023 Cannes Film Festival Critics' Week Grand Prize for a body-horror feature film, Tiger Stripes
- **Datin Orked Ahmad**, Chief Marketing Director of Maybank Foundation and Founder of Yasmin Ahmad Society, sister to the prolific filmmaker, Yasmin Ahmad
- **Dr. Ann Lee**, Researcher, Playwright and former news broadcaster
- **Stephen Jenner**, Motion Picture Association Asia Pacific

A cohort of independent filmmakers from Malaysia are winning over international film festival juries and the media with their bold narratives. The films are genre-surfing and exploring cultural-isms like never before. What is their secret and who is funding them? This tripartite colloquium features experts from government, industry and institutions.

Coming off the successes of independently made films like *Do the Right Thing* (Dir. Spike Lee, 1989), *Blair Witch Project* (Dir. Daniel Myrick/Eduardo Sánchez, 1999) and *Slumdog Millionaire* (Dir. Danny Boyle, 2008) which won the Best Picture award at the Oscars, Malaysia's filmmakers are finding their voices globally heard and appreciated before returning to their homeland to deal with critics.

This is due to the fact that their films circulate in the international '-scape' of global film culture rather than in the cinemas of their home countries, whether by choice or lack of opportunity (Baumgärtel 2012, 25)

Delivered in a live-recorded format with inter-city crossovers, Malaysia's flourishing independent filmmakers come together and within the hour, the Colloquium seeks to unravel **their drive** or 'the why', 'the how' and "the who" behind funding of independent, or indie filmmaking, the heart of filmmaking at its grassroots in Malaysia.

Who are the ultimate beneficiaries of such films? And are these innovative funding avenues proof-of-concept as a pathway for a new wave of independent filmmakers in Australia to fund their projects? Who's funding the boom? The funding landscape for Southeast Asian independent cinema is multifaceted:

- **Local Film Funds:** National film institutions like the National Film Development Corporation Malaysia (FINAS) and the Singapore Film Commission play a significant role in supporting local talent.
- **International Grant Programs:** Organizations like the Hubert Bals Fund and the Busan International Film Festival offer crucial financial support to filmmakers in the region.
- **Private Investors:** Recognising the potential of Southeast Asian cinema, private investors are increasingly contributing to film projects, so cultural stories be told.

Conference FAQs

Why & Who Should Attend? The Colloquium is planned to be a subset of the International Screen Media Policy Conference by AFTRS, held alongside an international screen event like SXSW SYDNEY in October 2024. The event will benefit emerging filmmakers, students, AFTRS students and screen industry professionals from every level.

What Outcomes Can I Expect from Attending?

- An in-depth overview into the latest in independent filmmaking in Malaysia
- Academic analyses on the ultimate beneficiaries of such films
- Insights into the pathways of success taken by Malaysian independent filmmakers who have achieved significant global success.

Is the Post-Conference Activity optional? International Networking Opportunity towards Co-productions is an additional networking secret supper dinner. While dining, the networking session held in collaboration with the Australian Malaysian Business Council and a local restaurant in both cities Kuala Lumpur and Sydney innovatively pairs an independent Malaysian filmmaker to an Australian screen industry professional and vice versa.

Why should I attend the Post-Conference Secret Supper? The supper pairing brings together screen industry creatives and production houses, working in collaboration with the AFTRS Alumni, National Film Development Corporation Malaysia (FINAS) and Screen Australia. FIMI (Film in Malaysia Incentive) can provide financial incentive for the production of creative content in Malaysia to encourage support for the Malaysian production industry and welcome foreign filmmakers to film in Malaysia while working closely with independent filmmakers. FIMI offers a 30% cash rebate on all Qualifying Malaysian Production Expenditure (QMPE) of MYR 5 million (US\$1.2M) for production and post-production.

What are the key metrics driving this rise of independent filmmaking? Several key factors contribute to this exciting development:

- **Pool of Local Talent:** A new wave of passionate filmmakers with a fiery and 'independent' spirit is pushing to have their authentic stories told.
- **Local and Regional Funding:** There is a stronger network of individuals who weave together a web of soft and hard film funds, government grants, and private investors provide financial support, allowing filmmakers to bring their visions to life.
- **Festival Recognition:** International film festivals are increasingly showcasing Malaysian and Southeast Asian films, placing them on the global stage and attracting wider attention.
- **Streaming Platforms:** Streaming services like Viu, Netflix and IQIYI are providing new avenues for distribution, making these films accessible to wider audiences.

Accessibility The event is accessible to all abilities with sign-language interpretation BIM and AUSLAN, closed captions in both English and Bahasa Malaysia.

Thank you.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: Jasmine Low declares her personal interest in fostering Malaysia-Australia co-productions and has expressed business interests.