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Is the Film Censorship Board Relevant?

By Yow Chong Lee

It is always a pleasure for me to visit cultural premises, be it the theatre or cinema, as to feel and observe with my own eyes on how cultural productions are being treasured in the countries I have had the opportunity to visit.

I recently travelled to our neighbours Thailand for a short vacation. For the reason stated above, I checked at their local cinema for any film that I cannot possibly miss and to my delight, "American Sniper" was being screened in their cinemas.

Knowing that it was not shown in Malaysian cinemas, although its posters were already up in many cineplexes, I found no reason for not watching the movie while in Thailand.

Just before entering the cinema hall, I was mesmerised by the poster of "Fifty Shades of Grey" tentatively to be screened worldwide, including Thailand, in conjunction with Valentine's Day.

Like many other films with explicit sexual content, it has been banned from public screening in Malaysia. Let alone stoking verboten on "Fifty", the chairman of Malaysian Film Censorship Board (LPF), was notoriously quoted in the international media, such as the Los Angeles Times and Variety, as equating the film with pornography, a lurid spotlight which is most likely to stay adamant in years to come.

Throughout the years, LPF has relentlessly been working in an institutionalised prudent way to ensure only socially and politically acceptable films be sold and shown in this territory.

In recent years, films such as "Noah" and "The Wolf of Wall Street" were scratched from their nationwide screening. Notwithstanding the fact that it is not difficult to obtain these movies from the "illegal" DVD dealers as well the all-you-can-download World Wide Web.

A Swedish operating file-sharing website, The Pirate Bay, for instance, accounts for 50 million downloads in a single day during its peak operation. Albeit constantly threatened by laws, it has repeatedly bounced back with ever changing strategy in encountering their lawful convictions.

It is always an irony that the more you restrict the people, the more curious they are about the restriction. In a random check with people I know, they had then downloaded and watched "Noah" and "The Wolf of Wall Street" out of their own curiosity on why the films were not permitted for screening.

What I find amusing after I talked to those who had watched these films, was the congruous sentiment that these films bear no necessity to be banned nor restrained from local audiences.

This shared consensus is not only indicating how ready our audiences are for films which are commonly labelled as unacceptable, but it also poses a question on how relevant is our censorship board in a globalised society.