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The Satanic Mill Institutional Obstacles of Thailand's Movie Industry

My apologies for mentioning his name again, Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* is one of the most influential films in the history of cinema, and it's also the most controversial film in the time in 1971. Imagine it was released in Thailand, even now, the director would have been cursed from every direction and the movie, surely, will be banned or censored. My example may be a little bit far from reality, but there's already plenty of similar cases happening in Thailand. For example, *Arbat* (อาบัท), a film about an immoral monk and his lover. The film has been censored and the name has been changed. In my opinion, this kind of limitation is an obstacle to the industry in creating a new and unique product. As we know, most of Thai films will be the romance/comedy genre that we all can predict the entire plot. Some studios can use that same structure and produce the good one, but some don't, they just borrow that same structure and change the name of everything and then shoot. Why are they keep doing this? Why are there so many limitations in creative work? Why are there only the same type of movies being produced in Thailand? Is they being eaten by capitalism? The following paragraph will be discussing the reason and the consequences of satanic mill and institutional obstacles of Thailand's film industry.

Not all controversial films are bad and not all uncontroversial films are good. It's all about trying new things and taking risks. Aside from budget, which is impossible for us to reach the standard of Hollywood, there is still a factor that we can control: the content of the film. Recently, there is a Thai animation film, *The Legend of Muay Thai: 9 Satra*, which surprised the industry with its beautifully created CGI. However, even the image is wonderful, but if the content isn't right, the film won't reach its full potential. Many critics said that the film's theme and purpose is too cliché. All of the films just talk about the nation and loyalty. From my perspective, that kind of theme shouldn't be used anymore, because we can see it in nearly every corner of Thai films, since *Karn Kluy*. Moreover, aside from the cliché theme of the story, Thai industry also has a lot of limitations in producing a great movie, even if it's controversial. For

example, *Arbat*, a story about an immoral monk, has been cut and renamed due to its controversy story. They believe that the film will be a bad influence to the audiences and it'll be bad for the religion's reputation. Surprisingly, those things that they were afraid of didn't only exist in the fictitious media, there are a huge number of them in our reality. We see immoral monks on television, social media, and the internet so often. So what's the problem with creating them into the movie and using it as a bad example? By folding people's eyes, not only they're limiting the freedom of people, but also the ability in development of the industry. Similar to the case of the market failure when the government chose an inferior choice instead of the one which may benefit the society due to self-interest. However, in this case, the main factor is institutions. People know what an immoral monk is like and they are not going to be one just watching the story about it.

In the past, in the time when there were no subtitles, watching foreign films would be a lot harder than now. However, technology has developed and allows us to understand even the language that we never heard before. The little translation text at the bottom of the screen is the great evidence that supports that we don't have to make an english-language film to sell it to Europe or America. For example, *Bad Genius*, *Parasite*, and many more. It tells us that, jumping out of sometimes is better than staying in the safe zone and waiting to be rotted. Nowadays, people in the industry just keep making the same Thai movie with the same structure in it: some comedy, a little horror, and a romance couple. Thai film industry is being path independent, because producing the same type of movie would be a lot safer and cheaper, when taking risk cost into account. From my point of view, giving an interesting project a chance is like a critical juncture to the movie industry, whether they catch it, or maybe not, but at least they try. Imagine if GDH decided not to make *Bad Genius*? It is a clear example of catching a critical juncture.

On the other hand, as I mentioned earlier, there will be demonizing here, if we take ourselves into the film industry investor, maybe we will understand them more than we do now. Economically, if the investment may not bring you the profit or benefit, there is no incentive in investing. Similar to the film industry, in making a movie, a huge amount of movie is required, in order to finish one film. What if they find the industry isn't attractive in investing? Filmmakers can not blame the executive producer just because they don't give you money to satisfy your

passionate project, except you're Quentin Tarantino. Therefore, there is a little amount of new directors entering the market, because most of the one who direct a huge feature film will be famous one. The reason is because the investors want to be sure in their investment, because they believe in those filmmakers due to the previous work. As we know, some new directors, maybe they just wanted to create their passionate project and be great filmmakers, but reality doesn't work like that. Loss is scarier than gaining, especially in this kind of situation where you place the money with them and believe in their creativity. If they're offered everybody a chance, there is no difference between being an executive producer and a gambler. In the world of capitalism, profit must be taken into account.

While watching Michael Moore's Fahrenheit 11/9, at one point in the film, it surprises me a lot when the right hook of the film was targeted at the audiences instead of Donald Trump. At first, I thought it was going to be the documentary about how bad the president and the government is. However, it is all back to us, we, as a people of the country, are we going to stand still and watch the tyrant exploiting us like that? The film encourages people to do something and gives some morals to the story that we need to start changing ourselves first, before we try to change others. When I first discussed 'institutions' in the second paragraph, I was meaning the institutions and culture of the authority and the investor, but what about us? What are we consuming? I'm not blaming that we, as a people of Thailand, not consume Thai movies, because it's true. Comparing between Tenet and Nakee, surely we would go for the Nolan one. Therefore, there's no need to blame others for not producing a different kind of film to the industry, because those investors will ask you back, "If I invest in the project, would you watch it?". Many of the people in Thailand are also path dependency, because they just stick with the same choice because it's cheaper to stay static than to be dynamic. Simply concluding, if we want to see something new in the market, just consume the product instead of pirating it.

Now, we already know that there are arguments from two different points of view that originated from different reasons. On one hand, they will blame the investor for not giving filmmakers a chance to create something new. On the other side, profit and benefit must be taken into account, or else, there is no incentive in putting the money into the project. In this case, the first thing that both sides should be doing is to try to understand each other and find the way to

fix the problem. For example, in the case of investment in the industry that I've mentioned earlier. If both parties try to understand each other, maybe they will be able to negotiate for the positive-sum trade. For investors, they should try to be more open in considering the project. By doing this, more opportunities will be generated and there will be more possibilities in catching the critical juncture in the market, which will lead to the chance of development. For filmmakers, they should also take economic factors into consideration. The thing they have to do is to prove that they are able to use the investor's fund the most efficiently as possible. However, there is still something that needs to be fixed: the limitation in creative freedom. The government should intervene less in the content of the movie. From my perspective, people in the country know what is right or wrong. Limitation will not make any difference except the lessen in freedom. Therefore, reducing the limitation will increase the chance in discovering the new piece of project that can lead to the development in the industry.

In conclusion, by using the knowledge from the political economy of development course, I can apply it into many more contexts and industries, like this one. For instance, path dependency in the executive producer, satanic mill in creating new movies (concerning only profit), institutional obstacles, and market failure that leads to inferior choice in decision-making. The film industry is similar to society. Yes, leaders, in this case, investors, should be good in allowing the product to grow differently. However, people of the society must take responsibility for this too. Thai people are the foundation consumer of the industry. Therefore, if Thai audiences don't consume Thai movies, then who will?