

## **Vietnamese Cinema: The Desire and Its Challenge for the Road to Achievement in the International Market**

In many countries around the world, culture is the spiritual foundation of society. Particularly, cinema is a driving force in the human's modern age's cultural, economic, and political conversation by providing and promoting an artistic and humanistic aspect to the world. These elements make cinema beyond simple entertainment as a modern art form or a visual medium. Due to the significance of cultural and artistic expression, Vietnamese cinema shows its desire to be on the road to the international market, as demonstrated through the numerous potential Vietnamese films released in recent years. However, it is still challenging for Vietnamese cinema to reach the global market for several reasons, including objective and subjective aspects. In addition, Vietnamese cinema can also learn some cinematic narration and production elements from South Korea, a country recently known as "The dragon of Asian cinema" that can compete with Hollywood cinema.

Historically, cinema was introduced to Vietnam by the French around the 1890s by Auguste and Louis Lumière (Sharman, Russell, 2020.). April 28, 1895, was the start of Vietnamese cinema, having its first screening in Hanoi that Gabriel Veyre celebrates, which was well-known in the newspapers back then (Nguyen, Trang Thi, 2022). Because Auguste and Louis Lumière introduced cinema to Vietnam, it indicates that the earliest film in Vietnam mainly focuses on a documentary that exploits the Vietnamese landscape, festivals, or contemporary figures (Sharman, Russell, 2020.). During the 1920s to 1930s, the French

established the Indochina Film and Screening Company (IFEC) and Indochina Cinema Company (Société des cinéthéâtre d'Indochines) to expand the right to exploit the cinema network in Vietnam (Nguyen, Trang Thi, 2022). This new change allowed Vietnamese film studios to start collaborating with foreign countries during this time. For instance, there were 33 cinemas in urban areas, such as 4 in Hanoi, 2 in Hai Phong, 2 in Hue, 4 in Cho Lon, and 4 in Saigon (Brocheux & Hémerly, 2011). This growth of cinema provided an interest in this new business field.

Due to the growth of cinema in Vietnam, Paul Thierry collaborated with the Indochina Film and Screening Company to direct *Kim Vân Kiều* in 1924, adapted from Nguyen Du's Tale of Kieu (Letterbox). This film is the first feature film produced in Vietnam and the work that gave birth to Vietnamese cinema (TCĐN, 2021). However, *Kim Vân Kiều's* screening led to a controversy among the majority of the "limited audience" due to the miscommunication between modern and traditional art; its content and acting part are nothing more than the traditional Vietnamese stage acting (Quân, Châu, 2021). Moreover, the general audiences also claimed that the film targets Western audiences more than Vietnamese audiences. Hence, *Kim Vân Kiều* is a failed film in terms of art and revenue and caused IFEC to suffer heavy losses (Lê, Quốc Minh, 2019).

After the failure of *Kim Vân Kiều*, *Một đồng kềm tậu được ngựa* is the first film made by Vietnamese people, specifically by Nguyễn Lan Hương. In 1924, Nguyễn Lan Hương, who was an owner of a photography shop in Hanoi, invited a French filmmaker to teach him, and then he individually did the script writing, filmed, and edited the film *Một đồng kềm tậu được ngựa* (Lê, Quốc Minh, 2019). This film is adapted from *La laitière et le pot au lait* (The milkmaid and her pail), a fable by La Fontaine (Chevalier-Karfis, Camille, 2021). His film is welcome, but because

there is no market, it is not enough to recover the capital spent on making the film. His movie was shown in Hanoi for 27 days, earning about 5,000 Indochina Dong, while the production cost was nearly 30,000 Indochina Dong (Lê, Quốc Minh). Due to the unsuccess, Nguyễn Lan Hương discontinued making films but returned to his photography profession; hence Huong Ky film studio disappeared after a few years of existence (Lê, Quốc Minh). Since then, film production activities of Vietnamese cinema slowly developed and did not have any highlight achievements from the 1930s to 1940s.

In the 1950s, the Geneva Agreement of 1954 plays an essential role in shaping Vietnamese cinema during this period and event to this modern and contemporary films. Specifically, Vietnam is divided into the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the North and the *Republic of Vietnam* in the South (Brittanica). In the North, Vietnamese cinema receives investment and funding from the government for producing documentaries and propaganda films (also known as revolutionary films). In 1959, the two directors, Nguyễn Hồng Nghi và Phạm Kỳ Nam, released film *Chung một dòng sông*. The film is known as the first of the first revolutionary feature film in Northern Vietnam (Nguyễn Ngát Thị Hồng, 2005). The film focuses on the couple, Hoài and Vận, who live on both sides of the North and South banks and are separated during the First Indochina War period. So, Hoài and Vận's romantic relationship in this film is a motif and symbol for the national destiny caused by the Geneva Agreement of 1954 and the war (Thu, Hà). Hence, *Chung một dòng sông* gains audiences' attention due to its relatable and ideological topics highlighting Vietnamese history. However, some critique was that the "film is rich in content, but it needs room to improve in terms of cinematic aesthetic" (Vũ, Dạ). After the success of *Chung một dòng sông*, there were many other films also follow the similar topic from 1959 to 1964 such as *Vợ chồng A Phủ* (1961), *Lửa trung tuyến* (1961), *Chim*

*vành khuyên* (1962), *Chị Tư Hậu* (1963), *Kim Đồng* (1964) (Nguyễn Ngát Thị Hồng, 2005).

Moreover, the topic revealing the new life of the North was also inferred through the films such as *Khói trắng* (1963), *Cô gái nông trường* (1960), *Vườn cam* (1960). However, *Chung một dòng sông* is the only film on the Vietnam War (Nguyễn Ngát Thị Hồng, 2005). In late 1964, The Vietnam War entered its fiercest period. Northern cinema with propaganda missions began to return to the topic of the ongoing war. At this stage, documentaries still play an essential role. Some films have won awards at international film festivals, such as *Lũy thép Vĩnh Linh* by director Ngọc Quỳnh won a gold medal at the Moscow Film Festival in 1971. *Những người dân quê tôi* directed by Trần Văn Thủy won the Silver Dove Award at the Leipzig International Film Festival in 1970 (Nguyễn Ngát Thị Hồng, 2005).

While North Vietnam's cinema became saturated with documentary, propaganda, and revolutionary film after the 1970s, the Geneva Agreement of 1954 provided the South Vietnam cinema with a more developed and diverse film market formed by several private studios. The South Vietnam cinema reached its peak in 1957 with many films being produced, including the first color film in Vietnam, called *Lục Vân Tiên* (Nguyễn Ngát Thị Hồng, 2005). During the 1950s, when the Americans officially entered the Vietnam War, along with the army, they brought American culture and new technology into Vietnam. This affects general culture, including cinema. Moreover, the growth of *Cải lương* (South Vietnamese folk opera) is also a factor influencing South Vietnam's cinema that generating a lot of *Cải lương* artists in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Admin, 2019). In 1959, the National Center for Cinema under the Information Department was established, with a team of filmmakers including 19 directors, 13 cinematographers, 5 recording specialists, and 2 editing specialists. Most of these people were taught locally by American advisors or went to practice abroad (Nguyễn Ngát Thị Hồng, 2005).

Between 1955 and 1958, many private film studios were established, focusing on producing psychosocial films, fairy tales, family themes, and legends heavy on entertainment. This is the flourishing period of the filmmaking movement of Cải Lương, myths, and legends, with many films evoking the pride of Vietnamese people in supporting Vietnamese-made films (Nguyễn Ngát Thị Hồng, 2005).

In the late 1960s, in the South, while Cải lương was at its peak and also started declining, cinema entered its golden age (Admin, 2019). From the end of 1969 to the early 1970s, production films began to be color films, often coated in foreign countries, especially in Japan. The government also exempts import tax on colored plastic films, creating favorable conditions for filmmakers. From 1971 to 1974, at regional film festivals, the Republic of Vietnam achieved awards honoring actors Kiều Chinh, Thanh Nga, Thẩm Thúy Hằng, and Kim Cương (Nguyễn Thị Hồng Ngát, 2005). During this period, filmmaking topics were also more diverse, serving the tastes of a large audience. Moving on to the 1980s and early 1990s, the subject of filmmaking was diverse. For example, Phạm Văn Khoa as a director had several films adaptations of literary works such as *Chị Dậu* (1980) (adapted from Ngô Tất Tố: *Tắt Đèn*), *Chí Phèo* and *Lão Hạc* (both are adapted from the short story with the same title that written by Nam Cao). The common thing about these 3 films is that they all focus on the life of 1980 society, where the lower class and laborers are treated as severely as social outcasts (*Sở Văn Hóa Thể Thao Và Du Lịch*). In this period, Lê Lam, the first overseas Vietnamese director, gained the attention of the audiences with his short film *Long Vân Khánh Hội* (1980), which was made in France. The film is about a train driver who has to perform work while his wife is dying at home. *Long Vân Khánh Hội* (1980) was introduced at the Cannes Film Festival (Phi, Hà.). Also, in the 1980s, the emergence of television video films in Vietnam increased rapidly, thus grabbing the audience's attraction,

which made audiences lose interest in cinema. Thus, with the speedy development of television video films, the 1980s is the period that created a new generation of actors, such as Lý Hùng, Diễm Hương, Việt Trinh, Công Hậu, and Giáng My ( VTC News).

From the mid-1990s to the early 2000s, Vietnamese cinema increased with the more diverse genres and improved with modern equipment. Moreover, foreign films flooded Vietnam with hit films from the US, Korea, and Hong Kong, making Vietnamese audiences regain the habit of going to the cinema (Vuong, Tâm, 2012). This is the turning point and the continuation that shows that Vietnamese cinema has developed, leading to today's contemporary South Vietnamese cinema.

In recent years, Vietnam cinema has made remarkable progress. Despite success or failure, Vietnamese cinema has reached a new achievement that was the first time anyone would have considered it in previous decades. By looking back over 20 years ago, Vietnamese people have the right to be proud of the increasing number of Vietnamese films released in theaters annually. The works are very diverse in genres and style. Starting from the practice of making the first action movies with *Bẫy Rồng (Clash, 2009)* and *Thiên Mệnh Anh Hùng (Blood Letter, 2012)*, recently Vietnamese cinema has *Hai Phượng (Furie, 2019)*, a film with advanced effects and techniques such as Hollywood standard and also released on Netflix (Saigoneer). With *Hai Phượng (Furie, 2019)*, Vietnamese audiences associated *Bẫy Rồng (Clash, 2009)* with *Hai Phượng (2019)* as the development point of Vietnamese cinema. Over the past 10 years, Vietnamese cinema action films can satisfy the Viet audience and can be compared to international cinematic works.

However, does *Hai Phượng (Furie, 2019)* represent the peak of Vietnamese cinema? Perhaps it is not enough. In the past years, from *Bẫy Rồng (Clash, 2009)* to *Hai Phượng (Furie,*

2019), have been a remarkable development of cinema. It must be admitted that *Hai Phượng* (*Furie*, 2019) is still not a great work, and Vietnamese cinema has yet to reach new development and expectation. However, considering the quality of Vietnamese contemporary cinematic works in the past ten years (the early 2000s), even the films that gained attention from audiences, Vietnamese cinema still has not yet reached its pinnacle of cinematic value. Honestly, it is challenging for Vietnamese cinema to achieve cinematic phenomena such as *Parasite* and *Squid Game*, like South Korean cinema, these works carry high social and cinematic values in filmmaking. This Korean cinema phenomenon indicates that Vietnamese cinema needs to have potential films that strongly highlight Vietnamese culture with good skill cinematography application.

According to Lê Hồng Lâm, an influential Vietnamese Film Critic, “Vietnamese cinema is still around like that, like an ant crawling around the mouth of a cup.” This statement suggests from the mid-2000s to now, Vietnamese cinema and filmmakers have struggled to find the best technique and genre to satisfy the mass audiences’ tastes and experiences (Mo, Lo. 2022 ). Specifically, Vietnamese cinema tended to utilize comedy elements in their film, leading to comedians participating in Vietnamese cinema. So, films that gain high attention will make the general audience laugh. This factor explains the national popularity of comedians such as Hoài Linh, Trường Giang, and Trấn Thành, especially Thái Hoà, who is known as the “box office king” with the role chị Hội from the film *Để Mai Tính* (*Fool for Love*, 2010). This film, as a phenomenon, shows that films with a comedy element and simple plot structure were the trend. Thus, bringing laughter, a little novelty, and a slight mention of topics such as gender expression like *Để Mai Tính* (*Fool for Love*, 2010), the following films such as *Gái Già Lắm Chiêu* (2016) became easy to succeed. The fact that films such as *Gái Già Lắm Chiêu 3* (2019) and *Cua Lại Vợ*

Bầu (Win My Baby Back, 2019), and Siêu Sao Siêu Ngổ (Super Star Super Silly, 2018), which are the films with the highest support from the Vietnamese mass audiences, this explain that the formula of reaching to the Vietnamese audiences through comedy is still valid (Hoàng, Thu. 2021). However, this trend seems to decline when compared to 3 or 4 years ago when the audience did not set too high a demand for Vietnamese films like today.

Later, around 2015, the Vietnamese cinema released numerous remake films that took over the big screen. These films reflect the situation of the period that the Vietnamese cinema needs a creative plot to satisfy the mass audiences. So, the director's solution is to “borrow” or remake the series. *Em Là Bà Nội Của Anh (Sweet 20, 2015)*, a remake of *Miss Granny (2014)*, is known as the most popular movie in Vietnam, which also started the booming of remakes films in Vietnamese cinema. From 2017 to 2018, remake films made up a high percentage in the cinema, such as *Bạn Gái Tôi Là Sếp (Bạn Gái Tôi Là Sếp, 2017)*, *Sắc Đẹp Ngàn Cân (2017)*, *Tháng Năm Rực Rỡ (Go-Go Sisters, 2018)*, *Ông ngoại tuổi 30 (Scandal Makers, 2018)* (Nguyen, Sang Sang Phan, 2022). The common point among these films is that they all “remake” from South Korean movies. Firstly, the “remake” film already reaches a large audience from the original version since comedy and romantic elements in Korean movies are very familiar to Vietnamese youth mass audiences. Remaking those hit movies is a way to draw viewers to the cinema due to their curiosity about the Vietnamese version. Meanwhile, this trend also infers that Vietnamese cinema still needs to learn a lot about South Korean movies in terms of their narration and visual attraction. Secondly, these remakes also suggest the influence of Hallyu and Kpop on the Vietnamese youth. In 2014, the Association for Korean Studies in Vietnam carried out a research project on the phenomenon of Korean circulation in Vietnamese cultural life; 51% of respondents like Korean movies, precisely 48% like to watch Korean movies, and 46% often



watch Korean movies in the cinema (Nguyen , Mong Tuyen Ho, 2012) . Lastly, Korean film distribution is also dominant in Vietnam, typically CJ.CGV Group invested about 70 million USD in having the right to exploit Korean films in Vietnam (Admin, 2022). However, after *Tháng Năm Rực Rỡ* (*Go-Go Sisters*, 2018), the trend of remake movies was no longer famous, mainly because those movies are either too dull or too close to the original without having their specialty.

Later, similar to the 1980s and 1990s, contemporary Vietnamese cinema also went back to film adaptation, mainly from the Vietnamese literary and theatrical work throughout the Vietnamese histories such as *Tôi thấy Hoa vàng trên cỏ xanh* (*Yellow Flowers On Green Grass*, 2015), *Tám Cám: Chuyện Chưa Kể* (*Tam Cam: The Untold Story*, 2016), *Gái Đến Từ Hôm Qua* (*The Girl From Yesterday*, 2017), *Trạng Quỳnh* (2019), *Mắt biếc* (*Dreamy Eyes*, 2019), *Trạng Tí* (2020), *Cậu Vàng* (2021), and *Kiều* (2021) (Sea, Blue, 2022). This trend received a positive reaction from the audience because it introduced Vietnamese culture and history in a cinematic way. Moreover, contemporary Vietnamese cinema also finds the past nostalgic cultural value by releasing films like *Cô Ba Sài Gòn* (2017) and *Song Lang* (2018), which bring new features and unique spiritual work for audiences who never experience life in the past.

In addition, the emergence of overseas Vietnamese directors also brings a new breath to Vietnamese cinema. For example, 10 years after *Chuyện Tình Xa Xứ* (*Passport to Love*, 2009), Victor Vũ, as most famous director in Vietnamese cinema, continued with his highlight films such as *Cô dâu đại chiến 1 & 2* (*The Battle of Brides 1&2*, 2011-2014), *Scandal 1 & 2* (2012-2014), *Quả Tim máu* (*Vengeful Heart*, 2014), and *Người Bất Tử* (*The Immortal*, 2018) (Trần, Trang Thị Diệu, 2022). Recently, Victor Vũ's *Mắt biếc* (*Dreamy Eyes*, 2019) bombarded the box office and created a trend on social media (Vạn, Phát, 2019). Other American

Vietnamese like Charlie Nguyen, Ham Tran, and Kiet Le continue to release works with their imprints on filmmaking style and topical thinking (Monie, 2022 ). Their appearance in the past ten years has brought Vietnamese cinema a new breath and style. And their efforts in the past ten years have partly helped Vietnamese cinema to approach new values.

Besides the factors of the film's narration, visual attraction, and the crew, another element contributing to half of a film's success is social media marketing. Nowadays, humans live in the fourth industrial revolution (Industry 4.0), where technology “connects” people to machines leading to a “digital ecosystem” (Ind., CARMEL. ). Today, smartphones, social media, and Internet have become essential part of human life that allows everyone to connect and communicate with each other easily, especially Facebook has become popular in Vietnam. According to Statista, there were 80,878,700 million Facebook users in Viet Nam in January 2022, which accounted for 80.2% of its entire population (Nguyen, Minh-Ngoc, 2022). This emergence of technological uses indicates that the mass audiences' demand for information has increased dramatically. However, due to the widespread and massive information on the Internet, it becomes difficult to distinguish between real and fake news. This also makes the media campaigns for films become a double-edged sword. In Vietnam, actors' or filmmakers' private life usually becomes a topic to attract audiences' attention. Specifically, it also depends on the actors or filmmakers' popularity and the widespread news that makes the films gain more “attraction” and “attention” toward the audiences. Is this method successful or not? The answer is Yes, but only for a short-term period. For instance, the chemistry between Trường Giang (comedian and actor ) and Sam (actress) generates a sense of fauxmance. This couple's lead makes the film gain 55 billion VND after 5 days after its release (Ngát, Ngọc, 2018). However, using “fauxmance” as a marketing plan can also lead the audience to “boycott” the film, such as

in the case of the film *Chú Oi Đừng Lấy Mẹ Con* (2018) by using the drama of triangle- love between Kiều Minh Tuấn, Cát Phượng, and An Nguy. Specifically, Kiều Minh Tuấn (actor) suddenly announced that he was in “fauxmance” with An Nguy (actress) before *Chú Oi Đừng Lấy Mẹ Con* (2018) is about to release. This announcement obsessed many fans and audiences because Kieu Minh Tuan previously publicized his “real” romantic relationship with Cát Phượng (actress). Due to this news, the film did not attract the audience, and the audiences also decided to boycott the film; also Kiều Minh Tuấn and An Nguy the fans believed that An Nguy was the third wheel between Kiều Minh Tuấn and Cát Phượng (Anh, Khang, 2019). With these examples, it was evident that Vietnam cinema needs to expand its marketing campaign the films more positively by learning from South Korean cinema.

South Korean cinema has become a remarkable phenomenon in the world entertainment industry in recent years due to its rapid progression. It became known as the “dragon” of Asian cinema that can compete with Hollywood cinema (Jones, Emma, 2020). Korean films like "Parasite" and "Squid game" gained attention from local and international audiences. Specifically, Parasite won the “Best Picture” Oscar, while Golden Globe awarded Squid Game (Macabasco, Lisa Wong, 2020) (Thao, Phillipe, 2022).

On November 9th, 2022, Park Kiyong, a film director, university professor, and new head of The Korean Film Council (KOFIC), participated as a special guest at a round table “Country in Focus: Korean Cinema” that was celebrated by Hanoi International Film Festival VI ( HAIFF) in, Vietnam. The conference celebrates the 30th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations between Vietnam and Korea (December 22, 1992/22-23). December 2022), which gains attention because Vietnamese filmmakers and producers do not always have the opportunity to experience and learn from Korean filmmakers. Moreover, Mr. Tạ Quang Đông (Minister of Culture, Sports

and Tourism) and Mr. Vi Kiến Thành ( Director of the Cinema Department) also attend this conference (Ước, Minh, 20222022). At the conference, Park Kiyong shares several lessons and factors that have led to the success of Korean Cinema in recent years. According to Park Kyong, the success of Korean films is not due to their content but instead to their outstanding quality. Just like Korean citizens live in an intense and passionate society, Korean films truly reflect that society. Park Kiyong also expresses his unexpected for Korean cinema to develop as brilliantly as it is today with his over 30 years of experience in filmmaking. Park Kiyong states, "even though we succeeded, we did not stand still, standing on the aura" (Minh, Thanh). Thus, this belief allows Korean cinema to develop steadily. In addition, Park Kiyong also expresses that in the post-Covid 19 periods, a factor affecting the development of cinema is speed, such as making movies quickly and reflecting social reality fastest. Notably, this factor allows Korean cinema sets out tasks in the post-pandemic development period, which are to improve capacity and nurture the next generation of Korean film producers, strengthen globalization, encourage research and educational development and scholarly criticism, and promote the development of cinema (Minh, Thanh).

For instance, *Squid Game (2021)* is the best example that proves Park Kiyong's perspective that the catastrophe of Covid 19 greatly inspires Korean cinema in its narration. For the majority of audiences, we all know that Squid Game is a dystopian survival film directed by Hwang Dong-hyuk that revolves around 456 people desperate for debt, participating in "adult versions" of Korean traditional children's games, where people use their "life" or "death" to exchange for the prize of a massive amount of money. According to The Guardian, Hwang Dong-hyuk said that "Squid Game's script was started in 2008 and finished in 2009", inspired by the Japanese survival manga Battle Royale và Liar Game (Jeffries, Stuart, 2021).

However, domestic studios rejected Squid Game because the fantasy story was too distorted and unrealistic, although the genre of survival games is very popular in Japan (Kim, Brendan, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic makes the story of Squid Game “reasonable” by getting the audience interested during the dystopia of the pandemic (Squid Game: Mark Strong). In 2021, many people were struggling with financial issues, which is very relatable to the film’s characters. The inequality, the gap between rich and poor, was almost the same as the reality, “even vaccine deployment varies greatly, depending on whether a country is rich or not,” according to Hwang’s said in Wall Street Journal (Yoon, Dasl, and Timothy W. Martin, 2021). Also, in The Guardian, Hwang states, "We are living in a world of Squid Game" because human life is evil, brutal, and short, social norms are torn, and the players are trapped in a war against all (Jeffries, Stuart, 2021).

Besides the relatable narration, another factor that leads to the success of Squid Game is its marketing campaign. The Director of CJ HK, who also attended the Round table “Country in Focus: Korean Cinema” in Hanoi, states that Vietnam should focus on training cinema human resources. Specifically, filmmaking must focus on “script; acting; filming, and editing.” He also said that “ In Vietnam, the script is still limited, the lack of acting, and the director has not been invited actors are famous worldwide for cooperation”(Minh, Thanh). Squid Game achieves most of these points as part of its marketing campaign by using pandemic and financial issues as real-life inference topics, dystopian survival as a genre, strong marketing branding, popular casts, and utilizing social media. Firstly, Squid Game creates memorable branding due to its innovative use of design colors and symbolism. For colors, the colorful and bright playground sets create a memorable, while the dark bedroom reminds the participant's reality of life and the competitive survival games. For symbolism, the image of "Square, Circle, and Triangle" appears throughout

the film, like on the game card, the mask of the red man, and even the dalgona candy (Agency, LiftOff Design.). Moreover, Squid Game also recreates iconic games in the movie at a crowded location in Korea, like Itaewon Station, which all generate a memorable association about the films for the mass audiences (Yu, Kyle, 2022). Mentioning the cast, Squid Games possesses outstanding actors such as Lee Jungjae, Park Hae-soo, Wi Hajoong, and O Yeongsu, proven by the film's winning more than one award at The 28th SAG (MacDonald, Joan, 2022) .

Moreover, Jung Hyeon is an except case that she becomes more popular as an actress after Squid Game, as proven by her Instagram gain of “14.6 million followers” (Tassi, Paul, 2022). Previously, Jung Hyeon was a freelance model before participating in this film. In addition, the success of Squid Game comes from the platform of Tiktok and Youtube; a lot of content is about taking on different challenges for entertainment, mostly the Red-light Greenlight and the dalgona candy challenges (Wehniainen, Grace, 2021) (Lee, Sung-ae, 2022).

Furthermore, the idea of censorship in South Korea also plays a part in Squid Game's success. According to Netflix, Squid Game is Rated TV-MA (Mature Audience Only) due to its violent, bloody, and moderate amount of sex and nudity imagery (Netflix, 2021). In addition, the films function as a satire of material inequality capitalism in today's South Korea. In particular, all of the participants in Squid Game come from diverse social classes, but they are all classified as outside of society ( Bennett, Matt 2022 ). In episode 2, they once gave up playing the games, but after feeling the suffocating pressure of real life, they return to the game to gamble for their life change.

In an interview with Voice of America News, Kyung Hyun Kim (professor in the Department of East Asian Studies and Visual Studies at UC Irvine) said that Korea has been “economically prosperous in the past 20 to 30 years” and “it moves from extreme poverty to one

of the greatest economies of the world”(asiaexpertsforum, 2021). However, social problem co-occurs due to industrialization, such as the “high suicide rate” and “extremely low fertility rate” in Korea (asiaexpertsforum, 2021). Hence, this factor can provide for South Korean with a diverse way of expressing the film narration that illustrates the Korean citizen’s frustration, anger, and irritation that comes from social inequality. Hence, although Squid Game’s plot seems unrealistic, it provides the sense of helplessness of the Korean citizen who starts at the bottom of society with colossal debt or financial issues. According to statistics, Korea's household debt has increased significantly in recent years, last year total household debt accounted for 103% of GDP, the highest in Asia, and Korea is the only country with a high debt ratio household debt ratio exceeding 100%, leading Korea to become a “debt society” ( Yoon, L., 2022). Korean cinema can openly shows their nation's “dark side” mainly due to the high support from the government.

In the past, Korea Media Rating Board was the state film censorship agency responsible for censoring and classifying films and other media publications however, because the state film was condemned against the spirit of the law, it was disbanded in 1996. Lowering the power of MRB also strengthens the quality of this committee, having professors, directors, attorneys, and other individuals, whether or not associated with the motion picture industry, review and appraisal the films before release to the public. Hence, Korean filmmakers gain positive support from the government rather than being controlled and censored, thus allowing them to freely and openly expresses the reality of South Korean society through their cinema (Phê Phim). However, with Vietnamese cinema, the censorship agency is still very vague and strict, which makes a lot of films being censored, cut, or even banned in Vietnam. For example, the films such as *Vị* (*Taste*, 2021), *Ròm* (2019), *Vợ Ba* (*The Third Wife*, 2018), *Bụi đời chợ lớn* (2013), and many

other films are also being banned in Vietnamese despite these gain a high achievement in the international film festival such as Berlin International Film Festival 2021, Busan Film Fest 2019, Toronto Film Festival 2018 (Vân Anh, 2021). Most films are banned in Vietnam because they destroy Vietnamese traditions and are against the Vietnamese national government by showing Vietnam contains too many social evils, such as violent and sexual issues.

Remarkably, the Vietnamese censor agency tends to use the phrase “Thuần Phong Mỹ Tục,” which can be translated as the nation's traditional aesthetic. By breaking down this phrase, the word Mỹ means beauty and aesthetic, Tục means tradition or habit, and Thuần means natural and unmixed. However, it is challenging to have the most accurate meaning for the phrase “Thuần Phong Mỹ Tục” because everything changes over time, and Vietnam is also in developing and industrial country (Vũ Phượng, 2020). Hence, using the old tradition to judge the new creation or thinking is impossible. According to Vietnamese Cinema Law #11 (2006), any film that contains “behavior” or “action” against the government, spreading a national secret, social evil, sex, distorting history, or destroying “Thuần Phong Mỹ Tục” will be banned. Because this law is very vague due to the unclear definition of “Thuần Phong Mỹ Tục,” it leads the censorship becomes very unorganized and unclear in knowing which films to ban, thus affecting the quality of the “actual” good film on the international market and leading to the release of the low-quality film in term of narration, visual attraction, and its national value. Hence, this law suggests that Vietnamese filmmakers have a smaller room for creativity and expression or topic when compared to Korean filmmakers, which negatively impacts the film quality and leads the audience to seek to download and view pirated movies since they do not have a chance to watch the “authentic version” (Luật Điện Ảnh, 2006). Although the law is updated on June 15th, 2022,



the Vietnamese film critique still uses the old thinking from 2006 to judge the films (“Luật Điện Ảnh 2022”).

To conclude, the past ten years have also been quite a brilliant development of Vietnamese cinema in terms of quantity and quality. Although some issues need to be resolved, stories that take longer to be understood, Vietnamese cinema has continued to move forward with generations of filmmakers on that ten-year journey. The movie is getting more and more ambitious. The game with cinema seems to have only just begun, and the coming time is the expected time for further advancements in Vietnamese cinema.

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