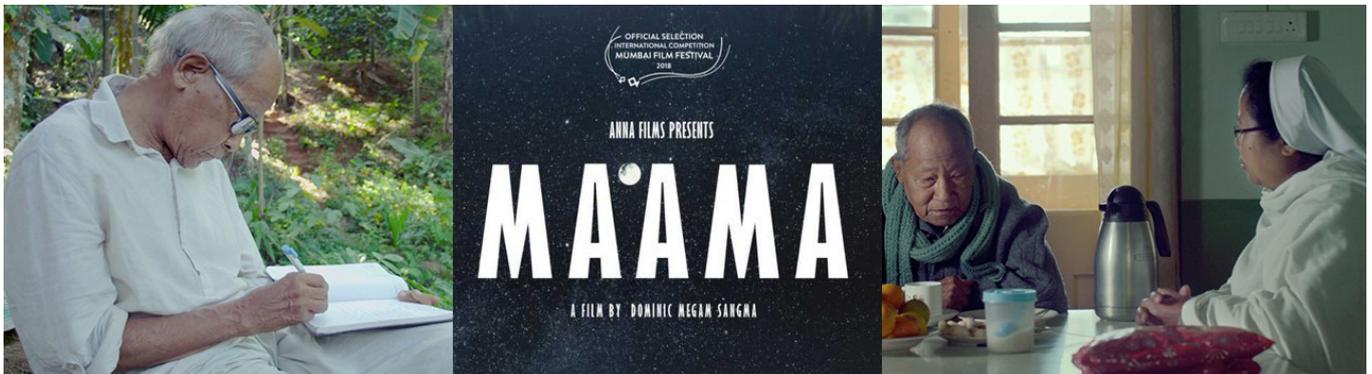


## Regional Cinema or Minority Culture Film: A Small Leap Forward

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Last year at the 27th Golden Rooster Film Festival in Foshan, I noticed a programme of Minority Culture films. In the last few years of the Shanghai International Film Festival, I have also noticed a greater inclusion of films from Tibet and other outlying areas such as Mongolia.

In 2008, the first Cinema Rehiyon (Regional Cinema) Film Festival was started in Philippines. Philippines is made up of over 7,000 islands and before the centre of filmmaking was established in the capital city of Manila, there was a rival regional filmmaking concentration in Cebu island. Both centers were rivals and both had their peak periods in the 1950s. There were as many as eight film studios in Cebu at the time but film production declined gradually as Tagalog became the main language of the Philippines and Manila was where Tagalog cinema was based in. From the late 1960s till the 70s, only 17 features were produced in Cebu.

Going further back, in 2006, the Jogja-NET-PAC Asian Film Festival was started in the former capital of Indonesia. Jogjakarta remains as the country's cultural capital where most of the major tertiary art institutions are

based, with a high student population from across the nation of over 17,000 islands, the largest island country in the world. The festival was co-founded by senior filmmaker Garin Nugroho, who made his career in Jakarta but whose hometown is in Jogjakarta. Nugroho's key influence was the legendary director D. Djajakusuma who in the 1950s shot many films across the regions of Indonesia. When Nugroho's career began in the 90s, he followed Djajakusuma's trail by locating all his films in various islands and regions of Indonesia – from Sumba island to West Papua. It was only natural that he would want to resist the Jakarta capital city by locating the film festival in his hometown. In time, many Jogjakarta-based directors who were originally born in Jogjakarta started to return to re-establish their filmmaking within the region. This includes high-profile directors such as Hanung Bramantyo and Faozan Rizal. Meanwhile, other regional filmmakers such as Riri Riza who started his career as Nugroho's assistant went home to Makassar (the former Celebes islands) to found the SEAScreen Film Academy to develop his hometown's young talents.

With the increase of Asian film festivals, it has become clearer that for large countries, there

are markedly local and native representations of culture in film. Some countries such as India, Philippines and Indonesia call this Regional Cinema. Other countries such as China term it as Minority Culture Films but what is the value of this trend for National Cinemas?

This question is familiar to many modern societies. As rich economies are established, a certain standardisation seeps in. Small economies of scale or family-run stores are driven out of business. Big brands, chains and franchises become the norm in shopping malls. Soon, the service standard and product variety become similar from one big city to another. In cinema terms, we call this the mainstream. And the mainstream is normally the sign of a dead-end. For example, the height of the mainstream in Hollywood led to the death of the studio system by the end of the 60s, because the new audience cohort refused to see such films anymore (Finian's Rainbow, 1968), leading to the popularity of Easy Rider (1969) and the rise of independent cinema.

So this is the first impact of Regional Cinema:

1. Regional cinema offers a way out of the mainstream dead end. It does this by giving new ways of telling stories and more importantly, new stories to tell. When Teng Mangsakan's *The Bridal Quarter* came out in 2010, it offered the first tale and glimpse of a Muslim wedding preparation. The culture of southern Philippines is mainly Islamic and contrasts against the mainstream Christian culture of Manila.

2. Cultural diversity. Most of us who encounter Indonesia realise that across the 17,000 islands, we are shifting from one language to another, from one food/music/fashion to another, whenever we travel from city to city.

But prior to regional filmmaking, we could never see this other face. When Garin Nugroho made *Bird Man Tale* (2002), he deliberately cast only two persons from the capital city of Jakarta in the film. Instantly, the majority face became the minority in this film. Suddenly, Christianity became the dominant faith, in the largest Muslim country in the world.

3. New talent pool: It is NOT accidental that the regional trend is occurring at the beginning of the 21st century. The reason is that it is rising in tandem with the introduction of digital filmmaking at the end of the 20th century. The cheapness of digital filmmaking has virtually placed cameras into the hands of nearly everyone dreaming of being a filmmaker.

4. New territory and locations. Indian cinema has recognised the impact of regional filmmaking for decades. To this end, Indian national awards are given to first films made in a different dialect of language. For example, Dominic Sangma's *Moan* (2019, winner at Shanghai IFF) won the National Award for First Film in Garo – a Sino-Tibetan language spoken by 900,000 people in Meghalaya in North-east India. The film was therefore an India-China co-production.

5. New Audience Pool. There is now such an interest in regional cinema in the Philippines that in the southern island of Mindanao, there are nine film festivals. Don't forget that during the 50s, there existed five film studios in Davao city in Mindanao.

In short, regional cinema or minority culture cinema may not seem commercially viable today but they hold the keys to the evolution of mainstream cinema.

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