

# Visions of Cinema: Thoughts on Developing a Film Industry in Guam

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## Introduction

In 2008, two Chamoru filmmakers completed what was to become Guam's first feature length film (Kuipers, 2008). The film, *Shiro's Head* (Muña, Castro and Davis, 2008), was accepted and won awards in various international film festivals and achieved \$90,000 locally at the box office with a roughly \$6,000 budget (Cruz, 2018). The filmmakers, who are also brothers, Kel and Don Muña, went on to form the Guam International Film Festival in 2011 and have encouraged local interest and appreciation for films and filmmaking (Muña Bros., n.d.).

This interest in the potential of local production is not new and neither are attempts at filmmaking on Guam. Worth noting is *Max Havoc: Curse of the Dragon* (Ciampa and Laing, 2004), that utilized off island actors and crew with a supposed \$0.8 million investment from the Guam Economic Development Authority (GEDA), a failed direct-to-video B film (Christensen, 2007). A Hollywood producer, John F.S Laing, and director Albert Pyun approached the Government of Guam to have this action film set on the island and, as part of the deal, GEDA would put up the \$0.8 million to guarantee a bank loan for the production. The film did not achieve theatrical distribution, and the producer defaulted on the loan, leading to suits and countersuits (Christensen, 2007). According to Fojas (2014) "*Max Havoc* failed to boost the island's fledgling film-production scene . . . but it did renew local interest in creating the conditions for consolidating a new industry around film making . . ." (p. 187). More recently, Guam senator Tina Muña-Barnes has introduced legislation meant to prioritize a Guam Film Office with the expectation that it could jump start domestic and international film making on Guam. In terms of foreign production companies, "Guam generates between \$9 million and \$13.5 million every year from filming activity, according to the Guam International Media Coordinators Association (GIMCA)" (Santos, 2019). Santos (2019) notes that though the Film Office has existed for 8 years it was unfunded and dormant under the Calvo Administration. What has also been lacking is expertise and leadership, and to achieve this, Muna-Barnes has recommended the Film Office be moved to the local Public Broadcasting Station where there is more experience (KUAM news, n.d.).

Given the growing interest in developing a film industry on Guam, this essay explores ideas and presents recommendations on a way forward that could lead to a sustainable future. As part of this, a theoretical framework is utilized that includes a look outwards at what other countries/nations have done to achieve such an endeavor. It is suggested that Guam's filmmaking future can benefit from taking a transnational approach to its efforts of attracting outside, as well as creating its own productions. The essay takes into consideration the cultural and economic challenges that face Guam and will focus on narrative *vis a vis* documentary films, as the former are the backbone of sustainable industries elsewhere in the world. It is felt this holistic approach will bring some insight into how to create a thriving film industry.

At the core of the cultural challenge is the political ambiguity of Guam, since as an unincorporated territory of the USA, it is not clearly its own country/nation. Residents are considered US citizens, afforded local representation, and since 1972, a non-voting delegate to the

US House of Representatives, but they have no representative in the Senate and cannot vote for President (Quimby, 2011, p. 362). So, it is part of the US but not completely. Compounding this is a tendency towards a nationalistic, anti-colonial narrative that foregrounds the CHamoru, who are the indigenous population of Guam, (Anderson, 2019). Emerging popular culture, like the Muña brother's *Shiro's Head*, presents CHamoru characters and their experiences as central to the story. The CHamoru, while the most dominant ethnicity, make up 37% of the island's population, followed by 26% Filipino, 7% white and 7% Chuukese (US Census, 2010). So, although Guam is not a nation/country, there are notions of such, with representations that potentially restrict storytelling to the CHamoru experience at the expense of a broader, local multicultural view.

Guam is not alone as a US unincorporated territory interested in the possibilities of a film industry. Puerto Rico, as another US unincorporated territory, has a noted history of filmmaking that spans over 100 years (García-Crespo, 2019 and Rodriquez, 2015). However, unlike Guam, Puerto Rico has two advantages. First, Puerto Rico has been able to attract top Hollywood films because of proximity to the US mainland, presence of experienced English-speaking crew, and a safe filming environment in a tropical setting compared to industry rival Mexico (Hecht, 2012). As a US territory, they are an easily accessed extension of the US, and, in fact, they have recently developed a Film District with a \$70 million investment to provide sound studios and post production facilities among other filmmaking needs (Caribbean Business, 2018). Second, at roughly 3.2 million residents, Puerto Rico has a significantly larger population than Guam that can help to support the exhibition of local films (US Census Bureau, 2018). The need for exhibition is one of the key ingredients for a film industry if it is to be sustainable. This is the essence of the economic challenge that faces Guam. How can Guam, as a small island far from the US mainland, attract large filmmaking projects and/or find an exhibition audience big enough to provide sustainability?

Though Guam has these cultural and economic challenges, it also has strengths on the basis of its own location in being so close to, and arguably being part of, East Asia. The guiding theoretical approaches that will be explored in this essay are the concepts of transnationalism in filmmaking and the use of a cultural economy approach. It will first be necessary to define and clarify these terms as they relate to cinema and then we will need to consider what has become known as East Asian Cinema.

In particular, I will focus on two national cinemas, South Korea and the Philippines. The choice of South Korea is because it boasts the second highest cinema attendance ratio in the world and is now considered among the leading film producers in the region (Saluveer, 2014, p.1). The Philippines also has a vibrant national film industry, and though not considered as big a player as many other East Asian industries, it is the closest in terms of culture to Guam (Lim, 2019). I will then address the infrastructure needs on Guam and posit ideas given this frame of the transnational with the economy and culture in mind. I will attempt to show that for Guam to realistically move forward, it does not have to look to Hollywood, at least not yet, but instead use its place in the East to piggy back into a future with cinema.

### **Transnational Cinema and a Cultural Economy Approach**

To understand the concept of transnational cinema, it is first useful to consider national cinema. In writing about British cinema, Higson (1995) notes that the concept of a national cinema is fluid but occupies four areas of use (pp. 4 - 5). First is economy focused, concerning the existence and sustainability of a film industry in a specific nation state. Second is distribution and

exhibition, where “[o]ften what is at stake. . . is an anxiety about the nation’s cultural standing, and about the assumed effects of foreign cultural intervention – especially the effects of ‘Americanization’” (Higson, 1995, p. 5). A third use involves a highly evaluative approach that privileges specific films as belonging to and are thus marketed as part of that nation-state’s perceived “brand.” Last, is a focus on representation, especially within the *mise-én-scène* and narrative, that must include examples of the nation’s character, culture and identity (Higson, 1995, p.5). *Mise-en-scène* refers to what gets chosen to be included in the frame of the shots that make up a film and includes: setting, choice of actors, their costumes, props, performance and movement, and lighting (Bordwell and Thompson, 2013, pp. 112 and 115). Narrative on the other hand is the choice of story and how the various cause and effects of specific events are arranged (Bordwell and Thompson, 2013, p.73). So, for this fourth use, nation is present in the characters, setting, and stories that are presented.

Common to all four of these perspectives on national cinema is the notion of nationhood: a sense of constructed community that separates the “us” from “others” for the nation-state (Higson, 1995, p.6). Though usually focused on independent nations, national cinema can include part of a whole if the distinction is perceived significant. Thus, García-Crespo (2019) talks about scholarly and filmmaker ideas of a national cinema for Puerto Rico, though it is a territory of the US and similar discussions would not occur for individual US states. Tied to this view of national cinema for Puerto Rico is a nationalist narrative that assumes political consciousness of Spanish/US colonialism and/or assumptions of who or what is Puerto Rican. Similarly, as mentioned before, visions of Guam filmmaking exist in a narrative environment that is usually nationalistic, with an emphasis on CHamoru heritage and US militarism (Anderson, 2019, Clement, 2011). Concerns of imperialism and colonialism are evident in scholarly works (for example Na’puti and Bevacqua, 2015) as well as in literature (Perez, 2008). We will return to this later but for now it is important to establish this sense of the national for comparison purposes with transnational.

Transnationalism involves “the dissemination of products and ideas through local networks that transcend national borders” (García- Crespo, 2016, p.148). As it relates to film, it involves the use of co-productions as is evident in East Asian cinematic productions such as *Snowpiercer* (Jeong and Jeong, 2013), a science fiction film about a train that carries the remnants of humanity, circling the world every 360 days. In *Snowpiercer*, South Korean Bong Joon-ho directs a story that originates from a French comic book but is scripted by a South Korean, utilizes an international cast including American movie star Chris Evans and acclaimed British actress Tilda Swinton, is filmed in the Czech Republic, and is produced and distributed for theaters in the US by a division of the now defunct American Weinstein Company (Saluveer, 2014). The term transnational still accounts for the national/local but recognizes the possibilities of the international in terms of viewership and thus market potential by opening up to various players in partnership. To achieve the transnational, sometimes filmmakers transgress or violate what might be considered the “national,” appearing to give up what is perceived as authentic in order to achieve crossover and broader appeal (Hunt and Wing Fi, 2008).

After production, a film moves on to exhibition through the significant gatekeeping process of distribution (Lim, 2019). It is important to recognize that “[o]f all the stages in the film value chain, distribution is the most crucial because it connects production and exhibition. . .” (Lim, 2019, Film Distribution in Film Studies section, para. 3). One growing area of film studies is the importance of critically discussing the cultures of enterprise and film production and their explanatory abilities (*ibid*, Film Studies: An Industry Approach section, para. 1). In such an

endeavor a consideration of what is called cultural economy becomes a useful frame that looks not only at a film's production, but also the importance of distribution and ultimate exhibition, with the recognition that these related but distinct economic activities and practices are cultural phenomena with meaning (*ibid*, Distribution Studies: From Political Economy to Cultural Economy section, para. 10). In other words, when studying film one "look[s] at how the money-making aspect of the filmmaking process affects and impacts the meaning-making component of filmmaking and vice versa" (*ibid*, Distribution Studies: From Political Economy to Cultural Economy section, para. 11). Any consideration of Guam's ability to grow a film industry will need to consider distribution and exhibition, exploring what exists and what could work, and that in turn should have an impact on the cultural product that is created. On the other hand, adjustments need to be made to existing distribution and exhibition networks to facilitate establishing an industry with specific content.

One final consideration before we move on to the next section is locating Guam in what could be part of East Asian cinema or a potential hybrid of such. East Asian cinema can include northeast nations like Japan, all the way down to the southeast, and incorporate Indonesia (Hunt and Wing-Fi, 2008). Guam is geographically closest to this region, though it has political affinities with the US. This makes it unique not only for military purposes but as will be argued, for cinematic relationships. In other words, its political ambiguity could be its strength.

### **East Asian Cinema Standouts**

East Asia covers a wide cross section of nations and their related cinemas and a full discussion is beyond the ability of this essay. Thus in narrowing down a choice for focus, two cinemas are selected for brief discussion. First is the example of South Korea, as it has in the past two decades become a global sensation in terms of its popular culture, including its cinema (Jin, 2016). Second to be considered, and in more depth, will be the Philippines, not only because of their history with film production but also because, as mentioned earlier, Filipinos are the second largest ethnic group on Guam, with 26% of the population self identifying as such. Additionally, according to Kit Lanuza, Tango theater's General Manager, both local film theaters on Guam (Tango and Regal) show Filipino films on a regular basis, with Tango exhibiting a new Filipino film each month (personal communication, July 23, 2019). That means there is a pre-existing local audience for Filipino-oriented films, a fact that will become useful as we look at ideas to jumpstart a film industry on Guam.

### **South Korean Cinema**

As a country, Korea had a turbulent 20th century, including occupation by Japan (1910-1945), division into North and South by Western powers by 1948, and for the South, our focus here, decades of military rule from 1961 to 1993 (Paquet, 2009). South Korea's government, from 1961 through mid 1980s, saw the film industry as a way for communicating national and cultural identity. They banned Japanese cultural products, an important source of regional films, given Japan's harsh colonization practices in the early 20th century (Paquet, 2009). Additionally, the authoritarian government restricted Hollywood film imports, outlawed local independent filmmakers, and provided licenses to a limited number of large companies with the requirement that they had to produce as well as export a certain quota of South Korean films in order to have access to US imports (Paquet, 2009, pp. 45 -47). The end result was numerous, comparatively

poor-quality Korean films as there were no incentives to improve infrastructure and technical ability. Then in the mid/late 1980s, the government changed the law to allow Hollywood majors like Twentieth Century Fox and Disney to distribute their pictures in South Korea without a quota, while also allowing independent local companies to develop. The resulting competitive environment eventually led to a South Korean wave of cinema growth both locally and internationally (Paquet, 2009). Over the past decade, South Korean films have maintained over 50% of the Korean local box office (Kil and Frater, 2019), and as a film market, they currently tie with France at fifth, at \$1.6 billion, behind Japan (\$2 billion) and the very protected market of China (\$9 billion) in the East Asian region (Sun-young, 2019).

Jin (2016) notes the sudden rise of South Korean popular culture in East Asia, a phenomenon known as *Hallyu* that took place in 1997, which included not only film but also other South Korean cultural products like online games and TV dramas (pp. 4 -5). This phenomenon extended into 2007 and morphed into another similar wave (*Hallyu 2.0*) from 2008 – present, with K-pop and animation. For film, much of this growth has been due to the government's emphasis on globalization while initially requiring a local film quota for exhibitors that allowed the local industry to survive Hollywood distributors in Korean markets, and opening up to independent filmmaking which brought in new styles and approaches (Paquet, 2009), but also by offering financial and regulatory support, and allowing a unique oligopoly of vertically integrated film investors/distributors/exhibitionists to thrive in the form of three majors: CJ Entertainment, Showbox-Megabox, and Lotte-Entertainment Cinema (Howard, 2008). The oligopolistic structure has led to record breaking films such as Bong Joon-ho's *The Host* (Choi and Joh, 2006), where the distributor/exhibitor facilitates blanket coverage in theaters as well as marketing of the film.

In addition to efforts at co-production (Saluveer, 2014), there are attempts at creating hybridized film products that blend Korean sensibilities and mise-en-scene with Hollywood type genres in an effort to grow audiences beyond South Korea's borders (Jin, 2016). Jin (2016) and suggests these hybrid films, like *The Thieves* (Ahn, Jung and Kim, 2012), are part of the success of the new South Korean wave of filmmaking. Also, Paquet (2009) identifies that the importance and diversification of style of the South Korean wave was facilitated by the creation and spread of film schools from the late 1980s and early 1990s, resulting in important alumni film directors with more expertise, like Bong Joon-ho (pp. 66 -67). Finally, Saluveer (2014) notes the importance of the presence of South Korean films in international film festival circuits as well having their own international festivals like the Busan International Film Festival and the Puchon International Fantastic Film Festival, where critical acclaim and possible distribution deals are achieved.

Inherent in these observations, though brief, is that for a national cinema like Korea's to survive and grow within and beyond its own borders, there are important elements that were needed. First is a strong network of investment that is linked to local exhibition as was evident in their vertically integrated system. Second is government support and regulations that allow local filmmakers to grow. Third is education, in terms of citizenry having access to film schools and training in filmmaking craft. The presence of their own film festival circuit also serves educational, as well as market, purposes. Last is the potential of hybridity, and I include co-production as part of this concept, which implies a letting go of adherence to cultural rigidity with an eye to a broader market. With this in mind, let us now turn to the Philippines.

## **Filipino Film Culture**

Though it does not fall anywhere among the top film markets and is usually not included in discussions of East Asian cinema, the Philippines film industry is very much alive. Yeater (2007) notes that “. . . [t]he Philippines has always had a very robust film industry, which had for many years . . . been one of the most active in the world” (pp. 3-4). It has gone through booms and busts but is currently achieving a renaissance at international festivals while growing box office successes with a mash-up of independent style and mainstream focused movies locally called “maindies” (Lim, 2019). Unlike South Korea’s 50+% local market share, the Philippines have only 29%, which, while lower, is still noteworthy (Shackleton, 2018). Their highest grossing movie *The Hows of Us* (Censon and Raymundo, 2018) was exhibited last year with a local box office of over US \$12 million. This film was produced and distributed by one of the mainstream studio /distributor companies, Star Cinema, that is owned by a local multi-media conglomerate ABS-CBN (Lim, 2019). On the other hand, the most successful independent film in terms of box office, *Kita Kita or I See You* (Blanco and Bernal, 2017) was made by one of several newer independent studios, Spring Film, but had to rely on a mainstream distributor (Lim, 2019).

To Lim (2019) it is the power of distribution and exhibition that controls the success of films in general and any opportunities for independent filmmaking in the Philippines. Unlike South Korea that is vertically integrated to control production, distribution and exhibition, the Philippines is similar to the USA, where the exhibition is controlled by separate entities than the production and distribution. Star Cinema controls 85% of the market as it relates to production/distribution whereas three other mainstream studios Viva Films, OctoArts and Regal Films share the rest (Lim, 2019, Next Attraction section, para. 5). Their control of the distribution side of the operation works in conjunction with a Central Booking Committee to decide what films get shown, at what theaters and when (Lim, 2019, The Rise of the Mall section, para.10). Just as powerful, if not more so, are the companies that own the exhibition side, with SM Cinema owning 36% or 344 theaters, followed closely by Robinsons (19%), Cinema 2000 (13%), and Ayala (10%) with a total of 967 theaters nationwide (*ibid*, para. 13). As an example of the power exhibitionists have over the industry, Lim shares the anecdote of SM Cinema, who actually have more than half the country’s market share, imposed a policy of not screening R-18 movies (restricted for 18 years old and above), which led to producers focusing on movies below the R-18 classification (*ibid*, para. 13). Independent companies like Spring Cinema rely on the major distributors to have their films shown. So having a close relationship to the mainstream studios/ distributors and exhibition companies is imperative.

Also important in the Philippines is the notion of what is a safe investment for movie production that leads to better results at the box office (Lim, 2019). From its inception in the early 20th century, the industry has always had a star system of recognized performers who are eligible for awards from the Filipino Academy of Movie Arts and Sciences (Yeater, 2007). As a result, in the Philippines, the presence of a star performer is important to a movie’s success. Second is a consideration of genre, with romantic comedies dominating the last two decades (Lim, 2019, Risky Business section, para. 4-5). A third ingredient is a happy ending as Filipinos do not want to pay for an expensive movie ticket to be reminded of hardships they likely have already (*ibid*).

As with South Korean cinema, government input plays an important role, as does the presence of several film festivals (Lim, 2019). Shackleton (2018) notes that the Philippines has film festivals running throughout the year and highlights the efforts of a government agency, the Film Development Council of the Philippines (FDCP), that has created a weeklong celebration of

Philippines cinema, where commercial theaters can only play local movies. During this celebration, the FDCP hosts a Film Industry Conference that brings together sales agents, producers, and other important players from around the world to advise local filmmakers what can be done to expand the industry (*ibid*). Education institutions were pivotal in driving the independent sector of the 1980s, which ultimately fed into mainstream film production and continued independent presence of later years (Lim, 2019, Organizational section, para. 4).

What stands out in the Filipino industry is the similarity to the South Korean experience, with one major difference. Both have government involvement and support as well as accessibility to local film festivals that give opportunity for independent filmmakers to develop. Also important is a network of agreement between producers/distributors and exhibitionists that allow for local productions to gain a screen presence on the over 900 screens in the country. Though the market share is less, it is nonetheless a strong presence, albeit faced with increasing competition from Hollywood. There is also evidence of educational institutions that support the industry and allow for workforce development and diversity of ideas. What is missing is the focus on transnationalism and co-production, at least as a concerted effort as it is in South Korea. Though there is evidence of Netflix investing in Philippine-sourced content and the FDCP Film Industry Conference may facilitate such efforts, it is apparent that Filipino cinema is less sophisticated and has room to grow.

### **Guam's Potential and Needs**

With a clearer understanding of the key players in East Asian Cinema, we can now turn to Guam and discuss how it may fit into the region as a potential filmmaking partner/player. As part of exploring answers to Guam's potential and needs as it relates to film, two key individuals were interviewed. First Don Muña, co-founder and Executive Director of the Guam International Film Festival (GIFF) and currently an Executive Producer at the Guam Public Broadcasting Station. Through GIFF, Don has been instrumental in encouraging the development of film on island. Second is Bobby Bonifacio Jr., a Creative Manager at Docomo Pacific and an independent filmmaker who is networked into the Filipino film industry with two features completed in the Philippines, *Numbalikdiwa* (2006) and *Hospicio* (2018), and he is currently working as director on a third feature with a US \$200,000 budget (Bobby Bonifacio, personal communication, July 28, 2019). His knowledge of the potential for co-production is useful. Their comments and ideas will be noted together under relevant sections below. However, before delving into this, it is important to consider what exists already on Guam.

### **Guam's Extant Film Infrastructure**

The presence of GIFF on Guam is useful and serves as a regional venue for films as well as an opportunity for local productions to be shown. GIFF, which peaked in attendance during 2017, continues to capture a local audience and shows 60 films over one month during October of each year and currently utilizes the Guam Museum for exhibition (Don Muña, personal communication, July 22, 2019). The festival operates as a non-profit entity and has been able to break even on a consistent basis despite not receiving a promised \$50,000 of annual support from the Government of Guam (*ibid*). GIFF has also started to run a High School film club during the spring semester and helped start University of Guam's own film festival in 2015, though they are no longer involved in the latter.

At the University of Guam, there is an active Communication program with a Media and Journalism track that is attempting to incorporate film with a newly proposed Digital Cinema, Multimedia, and Journalism track. The university already offers classes in film and television criticism, script writing, and independent filmmaking as well as some intermediate level postproduction and motion graphics. With the new track's perspective, including cinema specifically, these classes will be given more visibility, and some will become required classes for those in the major. As mentioned, UOG has an annual film festival that has become student run with awards for student work and, as of 2019, includes a high school competition as part of the event. Worth noting is that the university has invested over \$50,000 in the past four years to upgrade equipment, and they manage an industry grade digital cinema camera that is capable of shooting films for competitive theatrical exhibition.

The Guam Community College also offers a number of classes in video production and graphic arts as part of their Visual Communication program. They also have community teachers that are assigned to particular high schools with extension classes that support the high schools in media productions. Several local filmmakers have been involved with this local extension and have inspired a number of students.

There are two main theater companies on Guam, Regal Cinemas, which is part of the national brand of Regal, and Tango Inc. that belongs to a mid-sized regional holdings corporation, Tan Holdings (Tan holdings, 2019). There are also two separate theaters on the military bases here on Guam (Navy and Air Force), but these are small and limited to military personnel and will not be part of our consideration.

According to Kit Lanuza, general manager of Tango Inc., the company has 12 screens at a multiplex in the Micronesia Mall and 5 screens in the Hagåtña Mall with a total seat occupancy potential of over 2,600 (personal communication, July 23, 2019). Regal Cinemas has less screens overall at 14 but was the first of the multiplexes to appear in the late 1990s and was originally owned and operated as Wallace Theaters (*ibid*). Lanuza also notes that Tango leads in market share by approximately 5 -10%. Tango also has an exclusive deal with the Filipino distributor of Star Cinema, and they average 4-5,000 audience members per month for these films, for which they keep approximately 50% of the box office. At \$10.20 for general admission, that means the Filipino film industry potentially receives roughly \$300,000 every year from Guam.

It is evident that there exists some infrastructure potential on Guam but not enough of an audience to maintain major sustainability beyond a cottage industry. If we assumed a local film garnering at best twice what a Filipino film achieved, so say 10,000 audience members at \$10.20 and use the 50% box office figure as a guide, a local film might achieve \$51,000. This is probably just enough to break even on a relatively low budget. Sustainability and profit are two different things, and the former is about covering production costs but having enough to invest in the next production (Lim, 2019, Framing Philippine Independent Film Distribution section, para. 10). Thus, breaking even is too minimalistic of a vision.

### **Thoughts on Developing a Guam Film Industry**

Both Muña and Bonifacio have similar ideas but they also diverge in various perspectives. The following discussion will follow the categories of infrastructure and organizational needs then potential target audience. To avoid heavy referencing, I will note here that when mentioning Muña, this interview took place on July 22, 2019, and Bonifacio's occurred July 28, 2019.

## **Infrastructure and Organizational Needs**

Muña mentions, “I constantly think about [a sustainable Guam film industry], but what I haven’t done is write anything down.” This speaks to the lack of coordination and potential policy that is part of what this essay hopes to achieve. For Muña, he agrees there is a need to see Guam as existing in that Asian market and being a potential bridge between the US and the region. For him, the most important need is that of the Guam Film Office to be funded and managed as a way to capture what activities are occurring on island and to offer promotion for Guam as a location for filming and support for local filmmakers. He notes the recent use of the island for a Netflix film *Operation Christmas Drop* where, according to discussions he had with their production manager, they spent roughly \$1 million. He argues with a film office, there could have been stronger coordination of local services offered and certainly capturing of important metrics that could be used to identify funds that feed back into the local film making community. He foresees a future that GIFF becomes the promotional arm of the Film Office and a meeting place not only for filmmakers but distributors.

Both Muña and Bonifacio see the need for producers (the business side of film making) both in terms of training for industry standard efficient scheduling, and also individuals willing and able to network to find funding. Tied to this is the need for some type of investment network that would be supportive of film. Bonifacio points out that for the industry to grow, it will need to develop a market that is deemed profitable to more experienced international producers, and he believes his link to existing Filipino producers could be helpful if there were some joint ventures.

Whereas Muña believes there are adequate technicians, scriptwriters, editors, and cinematographers, Bonifacio points out the lack of acting experience and audience awareness of or connection to talent. Given his Philippines exposure, Bonifacio is cognizant of the importance of a star system, where actors have a fan base. Though it could be developed on Guam, he notes it is possible, for a cost, to bring in more experienced and known Filipino star talent. Part of that cost will be room and board as well as arranging visas in a timely manner. He has done this before for shorter projects and believes it achievable on a consistent basis. In addition to acting skills, he also believes scriptwriting has to be developed as the on-island experience is for shorter pieces. There needs to be some form of coordination of potential and more experienced writers to develop projects.

Muña has in the past had discussions with local media companies and government agencies like GEDA, but he says for many the notion of an industry is “so far fetched” that potential players are unwilling to invest. That said, he sees the possibilities of a film fund being developed to help local films that share authentic cultural identity. Muña believes “one of our driving forces . . . is our cultural identity, I think that is going to be our edge in the market place.” When asked how realistic it would be to have a continued stream of Guam oriented stories, Muña provides this analogy: “I always tell my brother ‘dude hand me a camera and I will shoot a film on ants,’ there are levels and levels of uniqueness.” So too he believes there are many stories to tell on Guam and the region. For Muña, there are opportunities to explore “who and what is Guam?” He is not focused solely here on CHamoru culture but Guam as a site of cultural conflicts, including military presence, tourism, and environmental impacts. Captured in his outlook is the challenge of a ‘national’ cinema, desiring cultural authenticity.

Bonifacio on the other hand, who is Filipino, believes given the connection of Guam to the Philippines, there are shared stories that could attract not only the Guam audience but also do well in the Philippines. He notes that in 2017, he and a local filmmaker had a romantic comedy project

that would feature a CHamoru and Filipino, but with other concrete project demands and lagging potential for meeting a \$30,000 budget, the project was shelved. In his perspective, there is a leaning towards a transnational effort, with a focus on exploring the two cultures simultaneously.

It is worth noting that these two visions, one that seeks to focus only on Guam's cultural identity, albeit a multi-cultural identity, and the other that seeks Guam-Filipino stories, are not mutually exclusive. Part of Guam's cultural fabric is Filipino and the tensions and conflicts of blending with CHamoru and other island traditions. This only adds to the pool of potential storytelling.

### **Target Audience Needs**

Both Muña and Bonifacio acknowledge the challenge of distribution and exhibition on Guam and the need to find a larger audience. One idea Muña suggests is developing a relationship with Regal Cinemas that targets their theater chains in US regions with significant populations of CHamoru and Asian American populations. However, this effort would likely need an experienced distributor with a track record of international deals.

Bonifacio points to efforts in the Philippines to grow their market internationally with a move towards coproduction. He believes the time is right for exploring a joint venture that is focused on developing script ideas. Scripts after all have no initial cost and may be an option for "green lighting" by established studios that are hungry for potential ideas. For example, ABS-CBN, the owner of the Filipino major Star Cinema also owns Black Sheep, an independent oriented arm that seeks stories that do not fit the formulaic representations of mainstream productions (Jaucian, 2019).

Additionally, Bonifacio points to licensing deals with Netflix who already have a relationship in the Philippines with several of the mainstream films in their catalog. Though Lobato (2019) notes the disruptive nature of Netflix to national media markets, as part of their access to certain nations they have to incorporate local fare. This in turn can lead to audience development beyond the nation/region, which can lead to future opportunities. Either way, licensing fees are yet another source of revenue.

### **Transnationalism with the Philippines as First Step**

Based on these various thoughts and ideas, this section attempts to set forth a list of initial recommendations that could be used as a stepping stone, if not fruitful discussions of film industry development on Guam. It foregrounds the concept of transnational and co-production in seeking a working relationship with the existing Philippines industry with the recognition that there will be a need for hybrid stories in order to speak not only to Filipinos and Pacific Islanders but to indigenous groups and Asian Americans in general.

1. With the help of GIFF, UOG, GCC, and the newly revised Guam Film Office, come up with a steering committee for film industry development on Guam. The mandate of this committee should include the establishment of a policy that explores the possibilities of coproduction with the Filipino ABS-CBN multi-media organization and/or one of the more up and coming independent companies.

2. Through GIFF and/or the Film Office, there should be a concerted effort to gather local filmmakers as well as producer/s from the Philippines to discuss hybrid audience needs and suggest areas of interest with the possibility of developing three top script ideas from Guam.
3. With the Filipino/Guam initial network established, there should be a structured effort to develop potential scripts. As UOG has personnel with experience in feature length scriptwriting, they could lead the way in developing a writing club with a mix of the most willing and the most experienced writers. This could lead to initially a pitching session that results in a selection of the top three or five ideas to be completed for a final choice of three scripts by a certain time frame. This effort can include workshop meetings to build on and improve concepts. The ultimate aim would be to have story options that could lead to one film production per year for at least the next three years.
4. Concurrently, the Guam Film Office could work with local businesses for production cost support through “in kind” and or monetary donations. An example of “in kind” can be accommodations and food for Filipino talent and crew. Any money made from the film goes back into the next film where some of these “in kind” services start to be actually paid for in future projects.
5. Film productions can also be planned around a summer break where experienced UOG /GCC students can gain paid internship experience, especially in areas of Producer and the related Production Assistant roles.
6. Without incurring additional curriculum and in light of the stated perceived need of training Producers, UOG can focus the existing Independent Filmmaking class around lessons and practical aspects of the Producer. To some extent, this is already happening, but there is a need to improve and utilize industry standard software and approaches to this process.
7. Utilizing existing Filipino distributors and if one (if not all) of these film ventures achieve success locally and in the Philippines, Regal Cinemas can be approached with the potential of an exclusive deal in specific areas of the US.

These ideas, though preliminary, are actionable and should lead to ongoing discussions and research. This initial focus on the Philippines is not the end all, since with time and experience, other regional markets can be approached, including South Korea and Japan.

### **Conclusion**

In writing on the film industry in the Philippines, Yeatter (2007) says Filipinos have always been storytellers, and he believes for this reason the industry survives (p. 4). The same could be said about CHamoru and others in the region, and film is clearly an important medium to share those stories. It is hoped that this essay can be used to consider policy and generate discussions that could make a sustainable film industry on Guam a reality. At the very least, this effort captures

on paper ideas that have been mulled around but have never been written down and, as such, commences academic discovery into the possibilities. This endeavor also serves as a snapshot of where the island is presently and can be used as a benchmark for future endeavors.

By positioning Guam as a US extension of East Asian culture, there may be possibilities open to filmmaking through transnational partnerships, starting first with the Philippines. Benefits can be had both ways as hybrid stories under the rubric of Asian “American” and/or Pacific Islander which might provide Filipino majors like Star Cinema, and its independent sister company Black Sheep, another “genre” to explore for a different and possibly larger if not nuanced market.

At the same time by taking on a cultural economy view, we have placed side by side not simply the potential for cultural products but the economic requirements that will be needed to attain sustainability. As Lim notes, “there is a corresponding cultural issue for every economic issue and vice versa” (Lim, 2019, Conclusion section, para. 5). By delving into this framework, we have been able to capture what exists and what might be needed. Being aware is a first step, and then possibly we can move Guam beyond the sense of “far fetched” when speaking of a vision of cinema.

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