The Perforation in Philippine Animation Industry: Original Content Full Length Animated Films

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Abstract: Philippine animation or *Pinoy animation* was recognized as an industry in the 1980s is now ranked among the five topmost on annual revenue in the business outsourcing industry. Since its recognition, the industry has been able to produce only four original content full-length animated films and none of which made it to the box office. In contrast, the number of students enrolling and graduating from animation and other related courses are progressive, but local animation industry is waning specifically in the production of profitable original content animated films. This resulted the loss in interest of animation investors and the discontinuance of some local animation studios. Hence, creates an imbalance between the scarcity of local animation production and the extent of skilled animators that may result in an unstable local employment for animators.

This paper depicts what transpires of the four original content, full length animated Films in the Philippines. I argue that looking through the past will gain better understanding of the current situation and help us improve the future of original content full-length animated films.

Key Words: Philippine Animation; History; Animated Films; Success & Failure, Past and Present

1. INTRODUCTION

Pinoy animation has been around since the 1950s; however, it was only recognized as an industry during its "Golden Years" in the 1980s. Local production of original content animated films had a kick-start in the late 1990s, and was able to produce four theatrically released animations such as *Ibong Adarna* in 1997, *Urduja* in 2008, *Dayo- Sa Mundo ng Elementalia* in 2008 and *RPG- Metanoia* in 2010. As of this writing, it has been six years since the last animated film was shown, yet no one has attempted to produce another. In addition, it is an alarming fact that all four animated films did not profit or break even with its production cost. This then resulted in a loss of interest in animation investors and the closure of local studios.

In contrast, the advent of different technological developments popularized animation, creating a demand for formal education. Since then, there has been a steady growth of skilled animation graduates, but an unstable number of animation studios.

My students often question the future of their career in animation. As an educator and an animation practitioner, I myself also repeatedly question the local industry's ability in producing profitable original content animated film. What have we been doing wrong?

However, there is not much writing on the considered young, yet waning industry of Philippine animation. Due to lack of resources often time the liability is pointed to the deficiency in marketing, skilled animators, production management, distribution, budget, government support, technology and support from the target market. This research led me to look from the past to the present status of the animation industry, in hope that this writing will contribute in the development of original content full-length animated films in the Philippines.

2. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative and historical type of research was used in this paper. Since animation in general is a young industry, the methodology of gathering information on primary resources was used. Interviews such as; personal, social media, group discussion and/or mails were done during the research.

Secondary resource of gathering data will also be used to collect information on aspects that affect the local animated films such as economic, financial, education and the history of animation. Data gathering to consist of existing research, newspaper, books, records, data archives, biographies and web sites.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Local Animation Education

Analogous to other Asian countries *Pinoy* animation education started as peer teaching, on the job training and foreign schooling. The eminent industry of animation in the 1980s slowly started offering education for practitioners, newbies and enthusiast. In the late 1990s, different training centers of Information Technology started offering education on animation related software. By 2000s, under graduate degree courses such as fine arts and multimedia arts immolated animation in their curriculum. Towards 2010s, universities, colleges and some high school included animation in their course offering.

TESDA, Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, a government organization has included animation in their training and certification programs. According to their website, TESDA was established through the enactment of *Republic Act No. 7796* in 1994, signed by President Fidel V. Ramos. This act aims to encourage the full participation and mobilization of the industry, labor, local government unit and technical-vocational institutions in the skills development of the country's human resources. TESDA is currently offering different vocational courses of multimedia, animation, graphic arts, game development and others, which includes 2d and 3d animation courses. Training programs for animation are coordinated with ACPI or Animation Council of the Philippines with an objective of promoting technical skills for both beginners and practitioner of animation. The cost of training course ranges from 7,000 to 35,000 depending on the course to be taken, with the duration of 5 days to 6 months, and sometimes accompanied by scholarship vouchers from the government.

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3.2 Animation Studios

The implementation of Foreign Investment Act (FIA) Republic Act No. 7042 amended as RA No. 98179 (1991) liberalized the entry of foreign investments into the Philippines. This marks the end of protectionism for local businesses and paves way to subcontract and outsource projects that made a huge impact on pinoy animation industry. Since then, the trend in animation is that foreign investors set-up studios for local artists to work and train for international animation projects. Among the first foreign studio in the country is Burbank Animation, Inc., then Asian Animation, Fil-Cartoons and TOIE Animation Philippines (EEI-TOEI), Imagineasia, Inc. (IA), and Digital Eye Candy Inc. (DEC). The increasing demand on animation works coming from the United States and European countries was influential to the booming industry of outsourcing within Asian countries including the Philippines. However, to infiltrate the competitive international market major factors are to deliberate in terms of low labor cost, skills and technology.

At the time of this writing, there are over 50 smalls to medium animation studios around Metro Manila and some in the provinces. Animation for advertising, film and visual presentation or commonly known as computer graphics became a venue for small to medium size companies as an alternative for full animation. However, the birth of viral marketing on internet weakens animation for advertising due to its competitive production cost.

At present, local animation is taking advantage of the assets making for the growing industry of game development. Nowadays, smaller animation studios are set up with just skeletal people and then hire freelancers depending on the need of the project. Mostly caters the outsourcing, sub-contract, advertising, visual effects and asset making. With this, the hiring possibility of local animators whether it is for a project based freelances or full time work is getting slimmer. This makes the production of original content animation vital for the industry growth.

3.3 The Four Original Content Animated Films of the Philippines

Original content animation for film had few attempts before it was even recognized as an industry. In an article written by Joseph Insect, he states that the first original content animated film of the Philippines was Nonoy Marcelo's *Tadhana*. Marcelo did a 60 minute animated film based on a series of volumes of unofficial Philippine history written by former President Ferdinand Marcos in line with his dream of *Bagong Lipunan* after his declaration of Martial Law in 1972. Marcelo was commissioned by the president's daughter Imee Marcos to create the film and it was broadcast on September 1978, during the 6th anniversary of the declaration of Martial Law. *Tadhana*'s destiny as first full-length animated film was adverse, it was supposed to replay and scheduled for a commercial theater release, but for some reasons unclear it was never seen again (Insect, 2010). *Tadhana* was not credited as first animated film by the industry for two reasons; first, it is because animation was only recognized as an industry in the 1980s, while Marcelo's Tadhana was released in the 1970s. Second, the said film was not released commercially on theaters for public viewing.

There are other attempts on animation in films but most of which is used as film style. Animation is either added on top of a live shoot scene, or inserted in between live shoot scenes to convey certain effect of the story. This type of animation is called computer graphics and/or visual effects for film.

Original content television series on the other hand had few attempts as well but local audiences demonstrated a desolate acceptance. In spite, full-length animation still took its chance again and so *Ibong Adarna* had a claim as the first in 1997.

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3.3.1 IbongAdarna (Mythical Bird)

Ibong Adarna was released on December of 1997 as an entry to the 23rd Metro Manila Film Festival (MMFF). A book adaptation about a sick king and the only cure he can get is from a singing Adarna Bird. His three sons, the princes have to find and capture the Adarna bird without falling asleep. Its magical voice can make anyone fall into deep sleep and turn into stone. The animated movie was directed and created by Gary Garcia, along with Guiding Light Production and FLT film.

Ibong Adarna received a special award during MMFF. It was honored at the 7th Hiroshima Animation Festival as "Asian Collection" in 1998 (Sketchpride, 2009). In spite of these recognitions, the sad fact is that many Filipinos are unaware of its existence. I myself was not able to get a chance to see the full-animated movie and archive is nowhere to find. Philippines have no claim on the film archive and rumored to be in Hong Kong where the final film conversion was done. In addition, during its time, the local film industry lacks the facility for archiving.

Another weakness of the animation industry evident in this movie is the delay in technology. In the late 1990's were the peak of Digital Age and many technological developments such as 3D animation, the movie was created using a first generation animation process called cell animation. The theatrical release was considered a dream come true to Pinoy animation, but some critique says that animations are loose and still needs a lot of improvement. It took years to finish the said movie with roughly 300 animators and a multimillion-production cost. It earned a box office returns worth 11.2 million, but did not make it to its production cost.

3.3.2 Urduja

The lost memory of Ibong Adarna brought a claim as the first animated film to Urduja, an APT entertainment, Seventoon and Imaginary Friends' production under Antonio Tuviera and Michael Tuviera's direction. Urduja is a film adaptation of a legendary warrior Princess Urduja. She is a courageous princess of Tawilisi who has the ability of defending and fighting for their tribe. She fell in love with the Chinese pirate Limhang, who escaped and later surrendered with greedy Wang in assurance that Tawilisi will not be involve (Sketchpride, 2008).

Urduja has its own claim of being first, this time as a full-length animated film to produce using *tradigital* animation or the process of combining the technique of traditional animation that is the cel or celluloid animation and digital or computer generated animation. This process of animation starts with the traditional drawing of elements on celluloid or a transparency, then scanned for digital ink and paint using a 2D animation software and finally computer generated 3D elements are combined together into one scene. Majority of its 3D assets was used for backgrounds and animation with complex camera perspective. I was able to work with some of the teaser shots of the film doing 3D assets to compositing and I was overwhelmed to know how long it has been ongoing.

The Tuveria's took 11 years of conceptualization or pre-production and roughly 2 years of actual production with an approximately 500 animators and 3 different animation studio situated within Luzon and Visayan area.

Unlike the other four animated films, this was not released for Metro Manila Film Festival. Urduja gained a box office hit of roughly 31 million over unstated production cost, which is said to be enough to make 4 movies. The movie earned P20M more than the box office of Ibong Adarna, but still unsuccessful in getting the audience interest which resulted in loss of profit.

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3.3.3 Dayo – Sa Mundo ng Elemetalia

Dayo was released a few months after Urduja as one of the Metro Manila Film Festival entry. The animated movie claimed as first *trad-digital* full-length animated film. The term trad-digital implies as a paperless animation. Cutting Edge Production principals the local animated film production with a procedure of ink and paint using an electronic pen specifically for the use of different related software, and a computer screen or tablet that acts as an animation paper. This process follows the traditional frame-by-frame animation only this time with the use of a computer.

Dayo is about a little boy named Buboy, who lives with his grandparents namely Lolo Miong and Lola Nita. The abduction of his grandparents led him to acquaint with an elemental creature named Anna. To save them, Anna brought him to *Elementalia*, an enchanted and mystical world of different Philippine mythical creatures. It is in the Elementalia that Buboy was able to prove his ability to defend himself and his loved ones.

The film was done by roughly 500 animators and staff with 3 animation studios for 2 years production. It gained a total of P5.6M box office for a production worth P58M. The expensive production cost of the tradigital animation was sustained through bank finance and sponsorship from different advertising clients of Cutting Edge Production. The said advertisers were shown in most of the scenes in the movie.

Dayo got four MMFF awards as best sound, best visual-effects, best musical score and best theme song. However, Dayo lost its way for the box office with local motion picture distributed by Star Cinema's *Ang Tanging Ina Nyong Lahat* by Weng Deramas. Tanging Ina topped the box office hitting P171M. Unfortunately, Dayo hits the lowest box office among the four animated films.

During the same year, another full-length animated film was cooking under the production studio named Ambient Media and Thaumatrope. The teaser trailer was shown at Level Up's Ragnarok Online event at the World Trade Center in 2008. Ambient Media and Thaumatrope collaborated with Star Cinema for the distribution and decided to have the final release on the 36th Metro Manila Film Festival.

3.3.4 RPG - Metanoia

RPG-Metanoia has its own claim on being the first to release an original content full-length 3D animated film with stereoscopic 3D viewing. The age of digital and 3rd dimension technology has finally kicked in Pinoy animation since Western animation's first ever-3D animated full-length film release in the late 1990's.

The RPG Metanioa story is about a little boy named Nico, an avid online gamer. He is a regular boy depicting the current children of this age that are into Massively Multi-players Online Role Playing Game (MMORPG) or simply RPG, with the game called Metanoia. Through this game, his low self-esteem in real life turned into heroic and powerful boy in Metanoia. When an internet virus infected the Metanoia and controlled the mind of each player, Nico and his friends took the bravery to save the world of both reality and Metanoia, which unleashed the real hero in him.

It took a total of five years to complete the movie with less than a hundred animators. In return, they took four awards as 3rd best picture, best sound recording and best original theme song, as well as the Quezon City Special Citation as a Gender Sensitive Movie.

The animation was done in full digital technology using 3D software for animation and 2D software for motion graphics and compositing. Roadrunner Network, Inc. did the stereoscope of the film. The animated film was able to earn a total of P33M for four-week release, a little higher than Urduja's P31M, but a lot lower than its production cost of more than P50M.

Despite the fact that all four locally produced original content animated films unsuccessful box office, Pinoy animation top the outsourcing industry and continue to contribute in the country's annual revenue. Western companies are setting up a local animation studio for the purpose of sub-contractors and or outsourced animated movies and series.

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3.5 Local Animation Organization and Employment

As per Animation Council of the Philippines, Inc. (ACPI), there are currently estimated 6,000 local animators in the Philippines and most of which caters to outsourcing projects, advertising, visual effects for film and television, and currently on asset making and title sequence animation for gaming. ACPI is a nonprofit, non-stock organization for 2D and 3D animation in the Philippines. It was established only after 20 years of industry recognition. ACPI and Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) are both working together in promoting animation outsourcing, original content creation, training and skill development. Although the current employment states that animation for full-length features is very slim due to limited animation studios, there is a steady increase in employment servicing other industries. The increase of demand may be attributed to the continued production of animation in the entertainment sector, which accounts 74% of total revenues in the global animation industry.

While local salaries range from as low as 10,000 for entry level, up to 60,000 pesos per month for senior to supervisory level compared to roughly US$4, 000 to US$7, 000 for overseas. An animator's salary is said to be above minimum compensation income. This is due to multinational companies that operate both here and abroad are offering the best compensation, but requires highly skilled and trained artist ready for production. Entry level requires a minimum high school graduate with artistic and sketching capability, while senior positions require at least 2-3 years of work experience with proper training and advance course, supervisory and management capability.

4. CONCLUSIONS

It has been six years since yet none has followed the last production of the four original content full-length animated films. It is said to be that all four animated films was well received by Filipinos, but none has made profits or coped with its production cost.

The question as to what went wrong to the four original content animated films is hard to single out. Often the notion of the unsuccessful animated films are; lack of animators skill set, shortage of technical support, mismanagement, insufficient funding and marketing, lack of support from government, distributor and audience, very westernized design or *disneyfied*, and lastly the absence of the post mortem. I do not think I will be able to discuss all of these notions in one paper, but I will give my thoughts on each of the four full-length animated films.

Ibong Adarna, being the first attempt came in late for the local industry. Pinoy animation since start became a support system and recognized for sub contract work and outsourcing. The release of the first animated film could have been earlier and hook to the frustration and strength of first but unrecognized animated film, Tadhana. The birth of 3D animation during the time of Ibong Adarna's release weakens its marketability due to technology deferment, production process and film archiving. In my opinion, at least for the scenes I have reviewed the animation for both films are a little choppy, but forgivable, given limited education, experience and resources during its time of production. Animation is an intricate, intensive and expensive production, and so Tadhana and Ibong Adarna taught us the importance of honing the skills of local animators as well as the improvement on technology in animation.

Although it took the industry another decade to follow up the subsequent animation, there was a great aesthetic and technical improvement in the film Urduja. It was a second higher box office among the four full-length animated film, and the only one bold enough to release in the middle of the year. In my opinion, Urduja is a strong proof of our western influence. The character design and use *anthropomorphism* or personification of human attributes through animals as sidekick is very much Pocahontas and Mulan, or as we call it *disneyfied*.

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It might be accidental, but since our knowledge in animation originated from the Western country, it is of no surprise that Pinoy animation is greatly influenced. However, the lack of government support to control the screening of foreign movies has bombarded local audiences with international films, which then became the basis of good and bad animation. This generates a perception of the animation industry that the success of original content relies on copying the tried and tested formula of Disney. Thus demeans the preference of local audiences as well as the skills of local animation production.

Dayo as another attempt to combine 2D animation with 3D animation, and the first for paperless and high definition resolution of an animated film, was a good attempt. Although I worked for the film, the sponsorship was obvious to a point that additional scenes are needed to show advertisement. Dayo is a reflection of the industry's lack of funding and support. This commercialism leads the audiences to perceive that the industry is incapable of creating our own identity in animation due to evident short production cost. If animation were well funded, then at least for this movie Bubuy would not have taken the burden of carrying a bag full of unnecessary shots just to sustain the production cost of the film. In addition, the expensive animation production often sacrifices the budget for marketing resulting a non-familiarization of the target market.

RPG Metanoia is the industry's greatest improvement after the first 3 animated films. It was able to survive the expensive and intensive full 3d animation production but unfortunately loss from the two-time bagger of animated films in MMFF history, *Tanging Ina*, a comedy drama by the same distributor, Star Cinema.

The perforation of animation industry in the Philippines is the competence to develop original content animated films. There is so much to talk about the problems of unsuccessful animated films. This can even lead us into different topics such are education, support, economy, finance, technology and resources. Each problem is linked to the other. I personally think that there is not one solution to solve the problem but there should be a thorough rethinking of the entire industry. I want to leave this research as open ended for the reader to think and research different factors that failed the animated movies.

However, I do not want to end my paper without answering the question that inspires me to do this research, "What is my future in animation?". The industry's future relies on both new generation of animators as well as the educators. The former being the future developer of new forms, technique, medium and genre, while latter as a guide in bridging the transition from traditional to new forms of animation.

In addition, the dying industry as mentioned earlier does not pertain to the entire industry of animation but only to the creation of original content animated films in the Philippines. Animation industry in general is still growing and contributing in the country's total revenue in terms of advertising, outsourcing and asset making for games and simulation.

My four-point recommendations for animation industry are; first is on education, the lack of production base training and output should be address. The increasing number of courses in animation does not guarantee full production ready animators. The curriculum has to improve and hone the student skills in animation production of original content. This should strengthen the content, design, media and technology for animation. The implementation of K-12 can be a venue to carry out undergraduate general courses to high school curriculum and a good venue to provide a better foundation for animation courses. The basics of animation should be taught in senior high school while undergrad courses should gear towards advanced and ready for production animators and career based education.

Second, our government agencies should also be educated in the industry needs, and support the development of original content animation in the country.

Third, we need to address the delay in technological development in the Philippines in terms of adopting new technology, software and hardware availability and faster online communication because it took some time for the industry to use and adopt digital animation. Another factor is the limited and excessively expensive supplier of software and hardware for animation in the country. Lastly, the slow communication through internet connection is disadvantageous for both local and international exchange of data and file transfer.

Finally, the educational institution should also consider that the development of animation curriculum has to be lateral with the progress of the technology. The innovation in technology reflects changes in the process of animation, therefore, should be considered in improving the curriculum.

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The development of original content animation is important in promoting the local animation for global market, which will bring the industry greater competitiveness. Otherwise, we will continue to rely on outsourcing, sub contractual and animation as support system for different industries, which at current situation we cannot fully depend on.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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