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Brave New World by AZMI SHAROM

Hard to teach history via movies

Calling for a ban is ill-advised as any artistic work should be judged on its merits.

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If you want to learn about history, read a book. In fact, read more than one because opinions and analyses will differ.

What you don't do to learn about history is watch a movie.

This is because movies have a primary desire to entertain and in so doing will rarely, if ever, be an accurate depiction of what happened.

Sometimes, the inaccuracies can be pretty harmless, done to add a bit of drama and excitement to the otherwise dull reality.

Take *Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story* for example. I really enjoyed the movie although by and large, the fighting scenes had more in common with Jackie Chan's acrobatics than Bruce Lee's own devastatingly bare bones Jeet Kune Do.

But the one scene that struck me was about how Bruce was almost crippled by a back injury.

In the movie, he got the injury fighting a muscle bound Kung Fu master with long flowing locks who cheated by executing a flying kick into Bruce's back after he had been soundly defeated by the Little Dragon and Bruce was walking away.

Much more exciting than the truth which was that Lee crooked his back by doing good morning exercise with an overloaded barbell.

There are some movies, though, which distort the truth until it becomes offensive.

U 571 is a World War II movie about how a group of American navy types bravely and heroically managed to obtain the Enigma code



machine from the evil Nazis and by doing so, turned the tides of war.

All very thrilling; except that the ones who actually did get the Enigma machine was the Royal Navy and they did it before the Americans even joined the war.

An "affront" to British sailors was how then Prime Minister Tony Blair described it.

I suppose that is what the "Based on a true story" disclaimer is for.

Which brings us to *Tanda Putera*. Now, I admit that I have not seen the film and I have no desire to see it.

This is not for any ideological reasons. I am not going to watch it because my time is precious and if I am going to make a trip to the cinema I will make darned sure I am going to watch movies that I will enjoy.

I had watched Shuhaimi Baba's last movie, *Hati Malaya: 1957*, and it was an excruciatingly turgid bore.

So, I am not going to waste my hard earned RM10 on any of her films, no matter how much hype is generated.

This being the case, I am in no position to make any comment on the content of this movie.

Is it crude propaganda aimed at demonising the Chinese? I don't know.

What I do know is that in no way should it be banned.

I think what the Penang state government did was ill advised.

Sure they did not ban the movie, merely "suggested" that cinemas not screen it, but even so, they are a government and their words carry weight.

I am uncomfortable with the banning of any artistic work.

Let it be judged on its merits. By all means

criticise a movie, condemn it if it is dreck, but don't ban it.

Eventually, it will be exposed for what it is. Take *Birth of a Nation*, a 1915 American film that was hailed as a wonderful work of art in its time but is now exposed as the disgusting racist propaganda that it really is.

And this applies to all forms of artistic expression.

I find it hilarious beyond measure that the Minister for Culture suddenly became a paragon for artistic freedom by telling off the Penang state government and yet within a week of his statement, police officers had torn the pictures by J Anu from an exhibition wall under the misguided idea that they "insulted Islam" and another Minister was calling for the banning of a heavy metal concert by Lamb of God.

The words "pot", "kettle" and "black" come to mind.

You can't have your cake and eat it too.

Those in power should not be allowed to dictate what we watch and listen to, especially if they are going to practise selective prosecution banning what they don't like and supporting what they do like.

To do so would be behaving like the title character in Charlie Chaplin's *Great Dictator* and we know what a joke he turned out to be.

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