

Although styles and thematics are finally diversifying within the industry, money is lacking. And training is the first aspect of film making to disappear. In post-Doi Moi Vietnam, old structures and material become rapidly obsolete. All these arising problems have made the film production fall down to an all time low: only 10 films produced a year.

National identification is, of course, a main topic in a socialist country like Vietnam and finds its filmic translation through highly complex narratives about war heroism. It is the shared cultural identity of the Vietnamese people which is stressed. War is always present but rarely visible. These films emphasise the heroism of the individual and the solidarity of the masses, not the atrocities of war. The ideological message conveyed by the state through war films is solidarity and tolerance.

The controversial filmmaker Tran Van Thuy asserts that "the state only wants to take up political problems." For him, "everyday life concerns are different."

SOUNDS OF SILENCE

In Vietnam, documentary and feature films have important interlinkages because film thematics are always realistic or historical. "There are, in fact, no 'fiction' films made in Vietnam," says filmmaker Xuan Son.

Most Vietnamese films relate everyday life concerns. Everyday life coincides with moments of si-

lence, of inactivity, of human glances. Silences, or long musical breaks without words, is a characteristic feature of Vietnamese cinema. Sequences of silence are the trademark of an artistic, quality film. This is in sharp contrast with more recent commercial, mostly South-produced, cheap video films which contain an abundance of dialogue. It is almost a rule in Vietnamese cinema: the less dialogue, the better the film.

Famous film artists such as Dang Nhat Minh and Xuan Son use the typical lyrical approach of blending silences with a slow rhythm of filming. Not as a means of rejecting the strong oral culture of Vietnam but as a creative way of compensating for the poor sound quality both at production and projection level.

In Vietnam, no film has ever been made with synchronous direct sound recording and the sound quality of Vietnamese film screening venues is generally poor.

VIETNAMESE "NOUVELLE VAGUE"

Official Vietnamese cinema nowadays only has an elitist, artistic public. The rapid disappearance of film audiences both in the urban and rural context is due to five factors: poor sound quality, increased competition from the commercial sector, external influence, video piracy, and the lack of protection of authors' rights.

"Vietnamese cinema now has to rely on young film makers to create a new filmic language if it wants to survive on its own spe-

cific terms," says filmmaker Le Hong Choung.

The young generation does not acknowledge the socialist propaganda dictating cultural education through film. A new aesthetic and narrative framework will accordingly have to refute the themes of war heroism as well as the stylistic lyricism which is associated with official filmmaking.

The time has passed when a large audience frequented cinemas to see films made by Vietnamese filmmakers trained in famous film schools in Moscow, Poland, or Cuba, socialist brother countries.

Some Vietnamese filmmakers have experimented with new critical points of view. They, too, however, have to cope with the realities of a nonexistent audience on the one hand and the difficult cultural and ideological compromises they are still forced to make on the other.

This "nouvelle vague" of Vietnamese films, born in the nineties, has already proven its excellence by winning some awards in international film festivals around the world (not only in socialist countries).

These films are first and foremost the mirrors of a rich and fascinating culture. Filmmakers such as Tran Van Thuy, Viet Linh, Le Hoang, and Le Hong Choung express their personal perceptions of the contemporary realities in Vietnam, in which the aspirations of the "people" are still indistinguishable from those of the state.

Media in Vietnam

State of the Art—or Art of the State?

By Olivier In and Laurent Kugler