

ON THE RECORD

KOBUN SHIZUNO
FILM DIRECTOR

**COMPENSATING YOUNG
TALENTS PROPERLY**

ONE day during the 'Indonesia Creative Week' which took place a fortnight ago, about 100 youths gathered to meet their favorite manga film director, Kobun Shizuno, famous for his *Detective Conan* animation series. Excitement filled the hall at the Epicentrum shopping complex, clear proof that the young generation is really into the 'creative' industry.

This new creative economy, combined with the tourism portfolio under one ministry, was created to absorb all the talent and creativity inside the growing young generation. "I'm very optimistic about the potential of this creative economy in terms of the Indonesian economic development," said Mari Elka Pangestu, the minister of tourism and creative economy. Hence the invitation to director Shizuno from Japan, to attend Indonesia Creative Week and share his experience on animation with young Indonesians.

Is Japan really a haven for animation enthusiasts? To develop and support creativity, what should be the government's role? *Tempo* contributing reporter Seulki Lee spoke with Kobun Shizuno, well-known for his hit movie, *Detective Conan 15: Quarter of Silence*, which garnered US\$38 million in box office receipts.

The Indonesian government is putting a lot of emphasis on the new creative industry. What is your comment on such a development?

I'm very jealous, because when I compare it to Japan, even if Japanese government would say, 'let's make something about Japanese sub-culture', the actual level is still low. And we see the investment in the industry by the government is very good in other countries. When I went to China and South Korea to take part in conventions, I saw more being invested, compared to Japan. So when I visited those countries, I can feel the boom. That's what I hope the Japanese government will soon do.

Are you able to share your experiences in the animation industry in other nations?

When I was in China, I saw the Chinese government providing land, buildings and computer equipment for studios and the students. This is a new relationship between Japan and China in the animation field. But I was thinking that with this support, the Chinese animation industry, compared to Japan, will be very good. In America, anybody who has talent can learn and can basically get a salary according to their talent and production quality. But in Japan it is more difficult, the situation is not good. People have to work with very low salaries. Only people who have tremendous passion survive and remain involved in animation. Most of the young people just enter the industry without any proper salary at all. So it is very tough. I don't know why it's like this, but if the situation can be the same, the whole Japanese animation industry might be going downhill.

If that's the case, how can Japan keep producing such many animation products

despite of unfavorable situation?

Japan provides quite a decent social security and safety net for its citizens. So even if you find yourself out of work, you are not going to die or starve on the streets. Perhaps even with those conditions, there are still those who are out on the street at least one time in their career. But it's easy for them to get in and out. If we compare it to China, if you enter the field and if it doesn't work out well, then you're out on the street and have problems. That's the big difference. China has many talents, but people seem scared to get into this kind of industry without a social security net. In this case, Japan is much better.

How do you succeed in the Japanese animation industry?

In Japan, there are two types of animation; hand-written and computer graphic DVD. The tendency of handwritten animation is kept going towards cute girls. It's going in very specific *otaku* kind of direction. Hand-written animation market is very narrow. Then it's important for the 3D computer graphic animation part to become popular in the mainstream. In the computer graphic industry, the money will trickle down, and everyone will get something. So there needs to be growth in that industry. In Japan, for something to be considered a hit is 10,000 DVDs. If you can sell 10,000 DVDs then you are sort of a success.

Your *Detective Conan 15* was a big hit in Korea, Japan and in other Asian countries. What do you think was the main factor behind such a success?

Detective Conan has always been popular in Asia. But the fans from Japan and the company are concerned about pirated copies of DVD in the country. So the company didn't think it was a very lucrative market. We thought we couldn't get any mon-

ey from this market. But when we showed *Conan* in China last year, it was a massive hit. *Conan* became best Japanese film ever shown in China. And the company started thinking, okay we can actually make money doing the cinema, not only DVD. So they started to get more serious about promoting and marketing the cinema in Asia. But then what happened was the conflict between China and Japan over some land. Initially, we were meant to show *Detective Conan 16* in China, but two weeks before the opening, we had to cancel it. In South Korea, *Conan* has always been popular. And my expertise is computer graphics, so I introduced it to the *Conan* series, starting with *No. 15*. So the camera work has become much more three-dimensional, and made it much more dynamic.

Many hopes and expectations are for the 3D industry market to boom. What do you think about this?

It is definitely a booming market. I think it's very promising. I'm currently directing four other animation films, and two of them are full 3D. Based on discussions I attended in Japan and Abu Dhabi, there were a lot of companies setting up shop in Malaysia and India. What they also do is teach young computer graphic students to study more.

What are your challenges and difficulties when you direct a 3D computer graphic animation?

There are so many new technologies in the field. Every month there are lots of new technology, new styles and expression. For instance, something that might have been brand new in Hollywood, in half a year's time, the technology will already be out of style or already copied by people. So challenges are kept up with new technology incorporation. It should also reflect your own style. So I should continuously stay tight to my own style and expression while keeping up this new technology, adding on to what Hollywood and the others have been doing. This is sort of secret as well, what is needed to become successful in the industry.

What do you think is the main criteria in developing the creative industry?

What you need to do is compensate and pay the young creators. Pay them a proper salary so that they can make a living. That is a very important part of sustaining the creative industry. But producers also need to take into count the target audience. In Japan what's happening is that production targeting has become a very niche market and that's part of problem. ●