



On location:
Liew (second from left) directing Rain and Gina Wong for a scene in 'Asli'.

Semai dialogue a first in local film

Language features in 50% of 'Asli'

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IPOH: A locally produced film is the first to feature dialogue in the Semai language.

Director David Liew said that about 50% of the dialogue in *Asli* is in the language.

"I respect the culture and wanted the film to be as realistic as possible," he said.

Apart from that language, he said, the film also has dialogue in Bahasa Malaysia and Mandarin.

Prior to writing the script, Liew said he interviewed various *tok batins* (village chiefs), telling them of his intention to showcase the orang asli and their culture.

"There was resistance initially because they were worried we would be dubbing them in Mandarin. I assured them that we would use the Semai language," he said, adding that he also consulted them on aspects of their lifestyle and culture for the film.

Getting the orang asli to write things down in their language for the film dialogue was a challenge, Liew said.

He said there is no standard Semai language because different villages have their own dialect, sometimes mixed with Bahasa Malaysia.

"We decided to use the language spoken by the orang asli at Batu 8 Village in Tapah," he said.

The film's main theme song *Semai* was

sung in the language and in Mandarin.

He said Asyik FM deejay Katie Bah, an orang asli, was roped in to help with the dialogue and script.

Liew hopes the film will inspire more orang asli to have and achieve their dreams.

He said he did not employ any big stars in his film, relying on local talent, such as Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman student Gina Wong, 22, Universiti Putra Malaysia student Rain Lee Yuen Yi, 21, and orang asli Amit Joyo Bah Chu Hong, 53.

"Wong is from Sabah and is of mixed-ethnicity while Lee is a Tapah boy. Amit Joyo is a real-life *tok batin* from Tapah," he said.

The film is a heart-warming tale about a mixed-ethnic Semai girl named Anggun, played by Wong, on a quest to discover her true identity.

She stumbles across Keong, played by Lee, who helps her throughout the journey and learns valuable lessons about herself.

Liew said *tok batins* from about 100 villages in Tapah and Tanjung Malim were invited to watch a preview of the film in Kampar last month.

"They did not complain about it so I guess it's okay," he said smiling.

"I'll be inviting more orang asli to watch it during the premiere at GSC Cinema Ipoh Parade on Oct 20," he said.

The film will be screened at selected cinemas nationwide and in Brunei from Oct 26.