

ASAN 491S: Contemporary Thai Cinema

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Office Hours: TBA

Saunders Hall Room: Saunders 637

Course Outline

A good film with its close-ups reveals the most hidden parts in our polyphonous life, and teaches us to see the intricate visual details of life. (Bela Balász 1952)

Now do you have any other stories to tell us? It can be real or fiction. *Mysterious Object at Noon* (Apichatpong Weerasethakul 2000)

Thai Cinema is fast becoming a significant arena of contemporary cultural inquiry (as in issues of censorship, the representation of collective political positions, or as a projection of social change) but also a visual mode of moving through everyday Thai life. Thai cinema is, in other words, a *way-of-seeing*. It is also one of the most significant venues for what can be said or imagined about a particular place called 'Thailand'. In Thailand, the growing corpus of visual culture studies, the growth of high-rise living and elevated transportation that change the field of view, and the dominating role of the camera (video or otherwise) in documenting everyday life each exemplify that moving pictures are no longer relegated to downtown theaters. Films are a part of how real people live and think through a variety of 'serious' situations (call this 'realism', or simply film's role as a visual record). For this reason, many situations in recent Thai films have drawn the ire of censorship boards and diplomatic officials in Southeast Asia, while spawning new movements and artistic freedoms.

This course poses three primary objectives: first, to approach several *cultural movements* visualized through the *motifs* of Thai cinema (generational politics since the mid 1970s, the Asian financial crisis of 1997, new forms of independent cinema production, the force of national disasters, violent clashes in the Southern region, northeastern-urban migration, etc.); second, a *comparison* of how these films are *put together* (for example, content, shot sequences, montage, cinematography, etc.); and third, to evaluate film as a *register of society* (e.g., what is a stereotype versus what is realistic, is the film accessible, should it be?). To address these questions, we will hold numerous film viewings followed by lively class discussions in which we engage theoretical concepts that link class readings to film viewings. Our class texts will include a range of cutting edge materials that include films, youtube clips, rare English translations of recent 'cinematic' writings from Thailand, in-class film stills, and both Thai and global views on the growing academic discussion surrounding Thai cinema.

Readings (Distributed through Laulima):

Sukwong, D and D. Suwannapak. 2001. *A Century of Thai Cinema*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Albritton, Robert B. 2005. Thailand in 2004: Crisis in the South. *Asian Survey* 45(1): 166-173.

- Baker, Chris and Pasuk Phongphaichit. 2005. Bangkok in the Early Twentieth Century. In *A History of Thailand*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 99-104.
- Baker, Chris and Pasuk Phongphaichit. 2005. Creating a Public Sphere. In *A History of Thailand*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 107-109.
- Bordwell, David. "The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice." Braudy and Cohen. Eds. *Film Theory and Criticism*. Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Chulphongsathorn, Graiwoot. 2006. A Conversation with Sasithorn Ariyavicha pt.1. (October) *Critizine*. { HYPERLINK "http://www.criticine.com/interview_article.php?id=28" }.
- Ganjanakhundee, Supalak. 2007. "Love-hate relationship between neighbours rises again." *The Nation* (Thailand). National section. { HYPERLINK "http://www.nationmultimedia.com/2006/05/16/national/national_30004104.php" }.
- Ingawani, May Adadol. 2006. Un-Thai sakon: the scandal of teen cinema. *South East Asia Research* 14(2): 147-177.
- Kaewkan, Siriworn. A Navigator on the Roof of the Baiyoke Tower. In *The Stories Of A Chronicler That One Narrator Narrated To Him* (Tales From Bangkok). Bangkok: Kaewkan.
- Kaewkan, Siriworn. "Our Resemblances." In *The Story of Lost Araya and Other Stories*. Bangkok: Kaewkan.
- Louiyapong, Kamjohn. A Cultural Studies of Haunted Ghosts in Thai Celluloids: From Kabot Phu Mee Boon to Phi Pop: an anti-centralization from Isan and Laos in reality and fantasy. Conference Paper delivered at Southeast Asian Cinemas at the Borders. Thammasat University Bangkok, Thailand (August 15. 2005).
- Montlake, Simon. 2007. Will Thai Reforms Make Censorship Worse? *Time Magazine*. 11 October. <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1670261,00.html>
- Morris, Rosalind C. Modernity's Media and the End of Mediumship? On the Aesthetic Economy of Transparency in Thailand. *Public Culture* 12(2): 457-475.
- Neupert, Richard. 2002. "Cultural Contexts: Where did the Wave Begin." In *A History of the French New Wave Cinema*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Pansittivorakul, Thunskaa. "A Conversation With Apichatpong Weerasethakul." *Criticine*. http://www.criticine.com/interview_article.php?id=24. Posted 29 April 2006.
- Harrison, Rachel. 2005. Amazing Thai film: The rise and rise of contemporary Thai cinema on the international screen*. *Asian Affairs* 36/3: 321-338.
- Harrison, Rachel. 2007. 'Somewhere over the rainbow': global projections/local allusions in Tears of the Black Tiger/Fa thalai jone. *Inter-Asia cultural studies* 8/2.
- Knee, Adam. 2008. "Suriyothai Becomes Legend: National Identity as Global Currency." In Hunt, Leon and Leung Wing-Fai (Eds.). *East Asian Cinemas: Exploring Transnational Connections on Film*. London & New York: I.B. Tauris.
- Musikawong, Sudarat. 2006. Thai Democracy and the October (1973-1976) Events. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 7(4): 713-716.
- Musikawong, Sudarat. 2007. Working Practices in Thai Independent Film Production and Distribution. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 8(2): 248-261.
- Ranciere, Jacques. 2003. *The Politics of Aesthetics*. New York: Continuum. (Selections)
- Rithdee, Kong. 2002/ Kong Rithdee on Cinematic Renewal in Thailand. *Film comment*. 38:5.

- Rithdee, Kong. 2007. "Those were the days." *Bangkok Post*. (Feb. 2) Realtime section. R5.
- "Schooled For Success." *The Nation (Thailand)*[Online Edition]. Entertainment section. 22 January 2007. { HYPERLINK "http://www.nationmultimedia.com/2007/01/22/entertainment/entertainment_30024750.php" }.
- Srikhao, Faroong. 2006. "Introduction." In Thai Film Foundation (Ed.). *Short Film*. Bangkok: Open Books.
- Stephens, Chuck. 2000. Liner-notes to *Mysterious Object at Noon*. New York: Plexifilm.
- Williamson, Robert. "The Moonhunter". (01 January 2004). Thai Film Foundation. { HYPERLINK "http://www.thaifilm.com/articleDetail_en.asp?id=36" }.
- Yoon, Prabda. *Unstill Pictures (Phaab mai ning)*. Bangkok: Typhoon Books, 2001. (Translated Selections).

Keep in mind, there are also a variety of Thai-language critical texts that I would be glad to distribute to those working simultaneously on Thai language projects.

Possible Viewings:

Rattana Pestonji	<i>Country Hotel</i> (1957)
Apichatpong Weerasethakul	<i>Mysterious Objects at Noon</i> (2007)
Apichatpong Weerasethakul	<i>Blissfully Yours</i> (2002)
Apichatpong Weerasethakul	<i>Tropical Malady</i> (2004)
Pen-ek Ratanaruang	<i>Last Life in the Universe</i> (2003)
Pen-ek Ratanaruang	<i>Sixty Nine</i> (1999)
Pen-ek Ratanaruang	<i>Monrak Transistor</i> (2000)
Pen-ek Ratanaruang	<i>Invisible Waves</i> (2006)
Pen-ek Ratanaruang	<i>Ploy</i> (2007)
Wisit Sasanatieng	<i>Tears of the Black Tiger</i> (2001)
Wisit Sasanatieng	<i>Citizen Dog</i> (2000)
Nonzee Nimbutr	<i>Jandara</i> (2001)
Chatrichalerm Yukol	<i>The Gunman</i> (1983)
Chatrichalerm Yukol	<i>Salween</i> (1993)
Chatrichalerm Yukol	<i>Suriyothai</i> (2001)
Yuthalert Sippapak	<i>February</i> (2003)
Pang Brothers	<i>Shutter</i> (2005)
Six Directors	<i>My Girl/Fan Chun</i> (2003)
Pimpaka Towira	<i>One Night Husband</i> (2003)
Pimpaka Towira	<i>The Case Against Supinya Klangnarong</i> (2006)
Santi Taepanic	<i>Crying tigers</i> (2005)
Santi Taepanic	<i>Bangkok Time</i> (2007)
Cherd Songsri	<i>Behind the Painting</i> (2001)
Jira Maligool	<i>The Tin Mine</i> (2005)
Chukiat Sakveerakul	<i>13 Beloved</i> (2006)
Chukiat Sakveerakul	<i>Love of Siam</i> (2007)
Pongpat Wachirabunjong	<i>Me...myself</i> (2007)
Soraya Nagasuwan	<i>Final Score</i> (2007)

Sasithorn Ariyavicha
Bhandit Rittakon
Kamol Srisawat
Rashane Limtrakul
Kittikorn Liasirikun

Birth of Seanema (2004)
The Moonhunter (2001)
Long June (1997)
Romantic Blue (1995)
Goal Club (2001)

Requirements and Expectations:

This course will be divided between lecture, discussion, and viewings. Students are expected to attend classes regularly, complete the readings assigned for each meeting, and attend all viewings, so as to contribute effectively to class discussions. During days when films are shown, notes will be collected following the film, and returned during the following class as a portion of your participation grade. The reasoning behind this exercise is not to ensure a particular reading of the film, but to explore the varieties of readings in order to galvanize discussion in the following classes. After three unexcused absences your final grade will be deducted one letter for each additional absence.

Attendance and participation: 20%

Students will write 2 short film reviews of their choice. Each review will be comprised of your recollections and reflections that include a) a brief summary, b) a context for writing about this film and c) your critical evaluation. These reviews should range between four to eight paragraphs (around two pages each). The reviews are expected to assist you in opening each class discussion. You will submit them at the end of the class you decide to present them. *Reviews: 20%*

A brief 2-3 page description of the topic you wish to address in your final paper will be due any time before the 11th week of class. These proposals need not be overly stylized nor well-polished, but they must clearly articulate the specifics you plan to address in the final paper, the methods of your approach, as well as an attached outline. *Paper*

Proposal: 20%

A final-paper between 8 to 10 pages is due on the last day of class. *Final paper: 40%*

Please let me know if you have special requirements due to a diagnosed learning or physical disability. We can accommodate your needs better if they are made explicit from the outset of the course. All discussions will remain confidential. You may also want to consider conferring with the KOKUA program through the University disability services office. Their phone number is: (808) 956-7511 or HYPERLINK

"<http://www.hawaii.edu/kokua>" { HYPERLINK "<http://www.hawaii.edu/kokua>" }

Schedule

WEEK 1 (January 12th) Interpreting Modern Thai Film

Monday: Introductions; the relationship between film and culture;

Viewing: Country Hotel (1957)

Readings: Articles from Anchalee Chaiworaporn on Thai Cinema. They can be downloaded at HYPERLINK "<http://www.thaicinema.org/Essays.asp>"
<http://www.thaicinema.org/Essays.asp>

“Politics in Thai Film”
“The Man Who Died for his Art”
“The Birth of Film Screening in Thailand”

(Optional Reading): Singer, Ben. 2001. Meanings of Modernity. In *Melodrama & Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and its Contents*. New York: Columbia University Press.

WEEK 2 (January 19th): The Thai Nation as Narrative and Narration

Monday: Martin Luther King Day (NO CLASS, viewing to be scheduled another day)

Readings: Chaiworaporn, Anchalee and Adam Knee. 2006. Thailand: Revival in an Age of Globalization. In Ciecko, Anne Tereska (Ed.). *Contemporary Asian Cinema: Popular Culture in a Global Frame*. New York: Berg Publishers.

Knee, Adam. 2008. “Suriyothai Becomes Legend: National Identity as Global Currency.” In Hunt, Leon and Leung Wing-Fai (Eds.). *East Asian Cinemas: Exploring Transnational Connections on Film*. London & New York: I.B. Tauris.

Viewing: **Suriyothai** (2001)

WEEK 3 (January 26th): The National Studio System

Monday: The categories of film production; studio vs. non-studio; economics vs. creativity.

Readings: Baker, Chris and Pasuk Phongphaichit. 2005. Bangkok in the Early Twentieth Century. In *A History of Thailand*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 99-104.

Viewing: *The Gunman* (1983)

WEEK 4 (February 2nd): Teen Flicks and The Thai ‘Young Wave’

Monday: The categories of film production; studio vs. non-studio; economics vs. creativity; role of the Producer (in this case (Uncle) Adirek Watleela); marketing the teen celeb; young love versus family loyalty; the individualization of (post)modernity; construction of the city;

Readings: Ingawanij, May Adadol. 2006. Un-Thai sakon: the scandal of teen cinema. *South East Asia Research* 14(2): 147-177.

Viewing: **Long June** (1996) or **Goal Club** (2001)

WEEK 5 (February 16th): Literary Adaptation in Thai Cinema

Monday: President's Day (NO CLASSES)

History and context of Thai novel's relation to Thai cinema; Reader-response theory versus film mimesis.

Readings: Louiyapong, Kamjorn. 2005. Survey of Student Reactions to Jandara. SEA Film Studies Conference. Thammasart University, Bangkok, Thailand.

Viewing: **Jandara** (2001)

WEEK 6 (February 23rd) The Regional Story enters Thai Film

Monday: The Thai Politics of Burma; border issues on film; ethnic minorities; urban police sent to positions of authority in rural outposts; local knowledge; cinematic affect; **Clips from Blissfully Yours** (2002)

Readings: Ganjanakhundee, Supalak. 2007. "Love-hate relationship between neighbours rises again." *The Nation* (Thailand). National section. { HYPERLINK "http://www.nationmultimedia.com/2006/05/16/national/national_30004104.php" }

Viewing: **Salween** (1993) (sometimes referred to as The Gunman II)

WEEK 7 (March 2nd) Economic Decline and the Birth of 'Indie'

Monday: Asian financial crisis and the birth of alternative economic practices in Thai cinema; the culture industry; Capturing the time of everyday life on film (1997-2000); Urban versus periphery in Thailand; **Clips from Mysterious Object at Noon** (2000)

Readings: Musikawong, Sudarat. 2007. Working Practices in Thai Independent Film Production and Distribution. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 8(2): 248-261.

Stephens, Chuck. 2000. Liner-notes to *Mysterious Object at Noon*. New York: Plexifilm.

Viewing: Pen-ek Ratanaruang's **Sixty Nine** (1999)

WEEK 8 (March 9th) What is a 'New Wave'?

Tuesday: So-called new waves arise through a configuration of conditions (political or economic, for the most part). What conditions lead to the development of the Thai New Wave (what some have chosen to call New Thai Cinema), and what does it share in common with other New Waves?

Readings: Harrison, Rachel. 2007. 'Somewhere over the rainbow': global projections/local allusions in Tears of the Black Tiger/Fa thalai jone. *Inter-Asia cultural studies* 8/2.

Viewing: Wisit Sasanatieng's **Tears of the Black Tiger** (2001)

WEEK 9 (March 16th) Politics and Realism

Monday: An introduction to the events of 1973, 1976, 1992, and 2006; the relationship between film and memory; the use of documentary footage in narrative films; generational politics;

Readings: Williamson, Robert. "The Moonhunter". (01 January 2004). Thai Film Foundation. { HYPERLINK "http://www.thaifilm.com/articleDetail_en.asp?id=36" }.

Musikawong, Sudarat. 2006. Thai Democracy and the October (1973-1976) Events. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 7(4): 713-716.

Viewing: Bhandit Rittakon's **The Moonhunter** (2001);

WEEK 10 (March 23rd) Realism Part II

Monday: Short films as a more manageable form of everyday politics; more on documentary film making in Thailand; **clips from 1999 Short Film Festival.**

Readings: Srikhao, Faroong. 2006. "Introduction." In Thai Film Foundation (Ed.). *Short Film*. Bangkok: Open Books.

Parinyaporn Pajee . January 27 2007. "Schooled for Success." *The Nation* { HYPERLINK "http://www.nationmultimedia.com/2007/01/22/entertainment/entertainment_30024750.php" } .Rithdee, Kong. June 27, 2007. "A Chronicle of Our Time." Bangkok Post. { HYPERLINK "<http://eisenhowerfellowships.org/news/fellownews/0807Supinya.php>" } }

Viewing: **Final Score** (2007); **The Case of Supinya Klangnarong** (2006)

WEEK 11 (March 30th) Fringe Geographies: Southern Thai Politics/Northeastern Politics

Monday: Muslim/Buddhist conflicts in Southern Thailand; film representation of 'the political'; the lead-up to the Tak Bai massacre; The common portrayal of Isaan geographies in relation to the city; urban migration; Lao identity, Thai citizenship; the cultural politics of dialect; Clips from new version of Charlie Chaplin's **Modern Times** dubbed in 'Isaan' dialect;

Readings: Albritton, Robert B. 2005. Thailand in 2004: Crisis in the South. *Asian Survey* 45(1): 166-173.

Viewing: **Ok Baytong** (2003)

PAPER PROPOSAL DUE

WEEK 12 (April 6th) Censorship: The Film Act of 1930

Monday: The politics of censorship; the political stakes of film; censoring form versus censoring content; the emergence of the Free Thai Cinema movement;

Readings: Montlake, Simon. 2007. Will Thai Reforms Make Censorship Worse? *Time Magazine*. 11 October. { HYPERLINK
"http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1670261,00.html" }

Viewing: **Syndromes and A Century** (2007)

WEEK 13 (April 13th) Sex and The City

Tuesday: The language of film shots; the importance of ‘time’ in film; masochism and Thai film

Readings: Kamjorn Luyiphong’s analysis of Sayew.

Viewing: **Sayew** (2003)

WEEK 14 (April 20th) Global Thai Films

Monday: subtitles; global film industry; multi-lingual ‘subtext’; transient labor; urban alienation; global cities; identity;

Readings: Ruh, Brian. 2008. Last Life in the Universe: Nationality, Technology, Authorship. In Hunt, Leon and Leung Wing-Fai (Eds.). *East Asian Cinemas: Exploring Transnational Connections on Film*. London & New York: I.B. Tauris. 138-152.

Viewing: **Last Life in the Universe** (2003)

WEEK 15 (April 27th) Global Thai Films Part II

Monday: Thai films with foreign settings; transnational film production; Thai identity outside of Thailand; diasporic narratives;

Readings: TBA

Viewing: **February** (2003)

WEEK 16 (May 4th) FILM REVIEW EXERCISE

Each class member will select one of their film reviews from the semester to read and discuss.

WEEK 17 (May 11TH)

Monday: Submit Final Papers; Evaluations;