

CURE3033: Film & Cultural Politics in Southeast Asia

The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK)

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Lecture: Wednesdays, 2:30-4:15 pm
Venue: Lee Shau Kee Building (LSK) 302
Medium of instruction: English

Tutorials: Wednesdays, 4:30-5:15 pm
Venues: Lee Shau Kee Building (LSK) 302 & Tsang Shui Tim Building (UCA) 111

This course is a survey of Southeast Asian cinema read against the backdrop of its distinct historical, political, ecological, and cultural conditions. Initially a Cold War construct comprising Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Cambodia, Brunei, Laos, and Timor-Leste, the term 'Southeast Asia' has come to refer to a highly complex and pluralistic region of over 660 million people, 25,000 islands, and 150 ethnolinguistic communities.

Traces of the presence of Southeast Asia's diverse cultures can be found throughout Hong Kong's cosmopolitan landscape. Situated in close proximity to Southeast Asia from across the disputed South China Sea, Hong Kong is one-and-a-half hours by plane from major capitals Hanoi and Manila. The growing number of Thai and Vietnamese restaurants have added the flavors of fish sauce, lime, basil, mint, tamarind, lemongrass, and coconut milk to its culinary palette. Amid the dominion of imperialism in the early 20th century, Hong Kong acted as a hub for the transpacific itineraries of Southeast Asian revolutionaries José Rizal, Artemio Ricarte, Tan Malaka, and Hồ Chí Minh. In the background of its rapid rise as a Tiger economy in the late 20th century, underpaid Filipino and Indonesian domestic workers helped assume responsibility for rearing future generations of working families.

With its national identities formed from the encounter with and struggle against American, British, French, Dutch, Hispanic, Indian, Japanese, and Chinese influence, Southeast Asia's movies have served as venues for propaganda and resistance. This course looks at how the remediations of different genres such as noir, melodrama, western, and sci-fi tackle controversial issues of gender, race, religion, poverty, migration, and the environment. Instead of smoothing the continuity of official historical narratives, it uncovers how documentaries, epics, and horror reexamine the trauma of past colonization, authoritarianism, and violence.

Week 1: Visualizing Southeast Asia (Jan 10)

How do scholars, filmmakers, and artists imagine Southeast Asia?

Required:

- Gaik Cheng Khoo, Introduction to *Southeast Asia on Screen: From Independence to Financial Crisis (1945-1998)*, edited by Gaik Cheng Khoo, Thomas Barker, and Mary Ainslie (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), pp. 9-31

Recommended:

- Milton Osborne, "What is Southeast Asia?," in *Southeast Asia: An Introductory History*, 12th ed. (Allen & Unwin, 2016), pp. 1-25
- Anthony Reid, "The Military, Monarchy, and Marx: The Authoritarian Turn, 1950-1998," in *A History of Southeast Asia: Critical Crossroads* (Chichester, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), pp. 347-372
- Nora A. Taylor, "Who Speaks for Southeast Asian Art?," in *Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian: An Anthology*, edited by Nora A. Taylor and Boreth Ly (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2012), pp. 1-13

Week 2: Inter-Orientalism (Jan 17)

How have commercial movies, television shows, and tourism campaigns visualized the landscapes and populations of Southeast Asia with an orientalist gaze?

Required:

- Adam Knee, "Thailand in the Hong Kong Cinematic Imagination," in *Hong Kong, Hollywood, and New Global Cinema*, edited by Gina Marchetti and Tan See Kam (Routledge, 2006), pp. 77-90

Recommended:

- Tim Bunnell, "Re-viewing the *Entrapment* Controversy: Megaprojection, (Mis)representation, and Postcolonial Performance," *GeoJournal* 59 (2004): 297-305
- Rachel Harrison, "'Somewhere Over the Rainbow': Global Projections/Local Allusions in *Tears of the Black Tiger/Fa Thalai Jone*," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 8, no. 2 (2007): 194-210

Week 3: Guest speaker (Jan 24)

Week 4: Remediating Genres (Jan 31)

How does Southeast Asian cinema reinvent the generic conventions of popular Western, horror, and martial arts movies?

Required:

- Pattana Kittiarasa, "Muay Thai Cinema and the Burden of Thai Men," *South East Asia Research* 15, no. 3 (2007): 407-424

Recommended:

- José B. Capino, "Terror is a Man: Exploiting the Horrors of Empire," in *Dream Factories of a Former Colony: American Fantasies, Philippine Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), pp. 3-32
- Sophia Siddique, "Mapping Regional Ambivalence and Anxieties in *They Call Her ... Cleopatra Wong*," in *Southeast Asia on Screen: From Independence to Financial Crisis (1945-1998)* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021), pp. 255-270

Film extracts:

- *Tears of the Black Tiger* (Dir. Wisit Sasanatieng, 2000)
- *The Search for Weng Weng* (Dir. Andrew Leavold, 2013)
- *Vengeance is Mine, All Others Pay Cash* (Dir. Edwin, 2021)

Week 5: Crime Noir and Poverty Porn (Feb 7)

How do film noir, crime thrillers, and poverty porn characterize the settings of Southeast Asian megalopolises with destitution, squalor, and violence?

Required readings:

- Katrina Macapagal, "Men on the Move: Chronotropes of Mobility in the Noir Imaginaries of *Kinatay*, *Metro Manila*, and *On the Job*," in *Slum Imaginaries and Spatial Justice in Philippine Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021)

Recommended readings:

- Tony Day, "Wasted! Power versus Civilization in a Martial Arts Action Movie, Viewed with Indonesian/Western Eyes," in *Surveillance in Asian Cinema: Under Eastern Eyes*, edited by Karen Fang (New York: Routledge), pp. 226-240
- Kim Dovey and Ross King, "Informal Urbanism and the Taste for Slums," *Tourism Geographies* 14, no. 2 (2012): 275-293

Film extracts:

- *The Raid* (Dir. Gareth Evans, 2011)
- *Bunohan* (Dir. Dan Said, 2012)
- *BuyBust* (Dir. Erik Matti, 2018)

Week 6: LUNAR NEW YEAR HOLIDAY (Feb 9-15)

Week 7: Racial Border-Crossings (Feb 21)

How does Southeast Asian cinema ruminate on issues of migration, race, and multiculturalism?

Required:

- Gaik Cheng Khoo, "Reading the Films of Independent Filmmaker Yasmin Ahmad: Cosmopolitanism, Sufi Islam, and Malay Subjectivity," in *Race and Multiculturalism in Malaysia and Singapore*, edited by Daniel P.S. Goh, Matilda

Gabrielpillai, Philip Holden, and Gaik Cheng Khoo (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 107-123

Recommended:

- Caroline S. Hau, "Conditions of Visibility: Resignifying the 'Chinese'/ 'Filipino' in *Mano Po* and *Crying Ladies*," *Philippine Studies* 53, no. 4 (2005): 491-531
- Brain Bernards, "Sinophone meets Siamophone: audio-visual intersubjectivity and pirated ethnicity in *Midi Z's Poor Folk* and *The Road to Mandalay*," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 22, no. 3 (2021): 352-372

Film extracts:

- *Sepet* (Dir. Yasmin Ahmad, 2005)
- *The Road to Mandalay* (Dir. Midi Z, 2016)
- *A Yellow Bird* (Dir. K. Rajagopal, 2016)

Week 8: Ghosts, Monsters, and Spiritualities (Feb 28)

How do ghost, monster, and horror movies explore the link between spirituality and development?

Required:

- Alicia Izharuddin, "The Laughter of the *Pontianak*: Darkness and Feminism in Malay Folk Horror," *Feminist Media Studies* 20, no. 7 (2020): 999-1012

Recommended:

- Bliss Cua Lim, "Spectral Times: The Ghost Film as Historical Allegory," *positions: east asia cultures critique* 9, no. 2 (2001): 287-329
- Andrew Alan Johnson, "Progress and its Ruins: Ghosts, Migrants, and the Uncanny in Thailand," *Cultural Anthropology* 28, no. 2 (2013): 299-319

Film extracts:

- *The Maid* (Dir. Kelvin Tong, 2005)
- *4bia* (Dir. Youngyooth Thongkonthun, Paween Purikitpanya, Banjong Pisanthanakun, and Parkpoom Wongpoom, 2008)
- *Impetigore* (Dir. Joko Anwar, 2019)

Week 9: READING WEEK (Mar 4-9)

Week 10: Film screening (Mar 13)

- *Marlina the Murderer in Four Acts* (Dir. Mouly Surya, 2017)

Submission of midterm paper (Mar 17)

Week 11: Historical Memory (Mar 20)

How do period epics and experimental films construct and reexamine dominant historical representations?

Required:

- Kenneth Paul Tan, "Alternative Vision in Neoliberal Singapore: Memories, Places, and Voices in the Films of Tan Pin Pin," in *Film in Contemporary Southeast Asia: Cultural Interpretation and Social Intervention*, edited by David C.L. Lim and Hiroyuki Yamamoto (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 147-167

Recommended:

- Renato Loriga, "Filling the Void: The Anarchive as Postcolonial Resource in the Cinema of Raya Martin and John Torres," *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Southeast Asia* 3, no. 2 (2018): 91-111
- Doreen Lee, "Images of Youth: On the Iconography of History and Protest in Indonesia," *History and Anthropology* 22, no. 3 (2011): 307-336

Film extracts:

- *Gie* (Dir. Riri Riza, 2005)
- *Independencia* (Dir. Raya Martin, 2009)
- *By the Time It Gets Dark* (Dir. Anocha Suwichakornpong, 2016)

Week 12: Documentary Trauma (Mar 27)

How do reflexive documentaries explore the trauma of political violence in Southeast Asia?

Required:

- Raya Morag, "Post-Khmer Rouge Cinema and the Big Perpetrators: Reconciliation or Resentment?," in *Perpetrator Cinema: Confronting Genocide in Cambodian Documentary* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2020), pp. 46-74

Recommended:

- Ariel Heryanto, "Screening the 1965 Violence," in *Killer Images: Documentary Film, Memory, and the Performance of Violence*, edited by Joram Ten Brink and Joshua Oppenheimer (New York: Wallflower Press, 2012), pp. 224-242
- Intan Paramaditha, "Tracing Frictions in *The Act of Killing*," *Film Quarterly* 67, no. 2 (2013): 44-49
- Thongchai Winichakul, "Epilogue: Haunting," in *Moments of Silence: The Unforgetting of the October 6, 1976, Massacre in Bangkok* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2020), pp. 231-242

Film extracts:

- *The Act of Killing* (Dir. Joshua Oppenheimer, 2012)
- *The Missing Picture* (Dir. Rithy Panh, 2013)
- *To Singapore, with Love* (Dir. Tan Pin Pin, 2014)

Week 13: Speculating about the Climate Crisis (Apr 3)

How do film and news media visualize environmental degradation and catastrophe?

Required:

- May Adadol Ingawanij, "Animism and the Performative Realist Cinema of Apichatpong Weerasethakul," in *Screening Nature: Cinema beyond the*

Human, edited by Anat Pick and Gueniviere Narraway (Oxford UK, Berghahn Books, 2022), pp. 91-109

Recommended:

- Joanne Leow, "'This Land Was the Sea,' The Intimacies and Ruins of Transnational Sand in Singapore," *Verge: Studies in Global Studies* 6, no. 2 (2020): 167-189
- Jerome Whittington, "Hydropower's Circle of Influence," in *Anthropogenic Rivers: The Production of Uncertainty in Lao Hydropower* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), pp. 34-65

Film extracts:

- *Tropical Malady* (Dir. Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 2004)
- *Nước 2030* (Dir. Nguyễn Võ Nghiêm Minh, 2014)
- *Taklub* (Dir. Brillante Mendoza, 2015)

Week 14: Consultations on final paper (Apr 10)

Week 15: Presentation of paper (Apr 17)

Submission of final paper (Apr 28)

ASSESSMENT

Class participation = 15%

Students will be expected to participate actively during lectures, presentations, and discussions by posing questions and sharing insights.

Midterm paper (600-800 words) = 25%

The paper will apply ideas from the assigned readings to analyze a Southeast Asian film not covered in the readings or lectures.

Individual presentation (8-10 mins.) = 15%

Each student will give a 8-10 minute sharing during tutorial about the film they plan to write about for their midterm paper.

Another student will be assigned to respond to the presentation with relevant comments or questions.

Final paper (2000-3000 words) = 40%

Paper presentation (8-10 mins.) = 5%

As a synthesis of the class materials and discussions for the entire semester, the final paper will examine the film and media culture of Southeast Asia in Hong Kong. Students can opt to work on the final paper individually, in pairs, or in

groups. Possible topics include how Vietnamese boat people, Filipino and Indonesian domestic workers, Burmese Buddhist monks, or Kowloon City's Thai community are visualized in Hong Kong's cinema, news, advertising, and social media.

GRADING RUBRIC

A (Exceptional) – The paper or project greatly exceeds the expectations for this requirement. Fresh insights are presented not only about the chosen example but also about the concepts used. The paper or project displays a comprehensive understanding of the chosen example and the concepts used that goes beyond the scope of the class discussion. The language used to explain the concept and its application is complex yet lucid. The writing is grammatically correct and coherently organized. The chosen example is unique for the topic. The paper or project was submitted by the deadline.

A- (Outstanding) – The paper or project exceeds the expectations for this requirement. Fresh insights are presented about the chosen example. The paper or project displays a comprehensive understanding of either the chosen example or the theory used that goes beyond the scope of the class discussion. The language used to explain the theory and its application is complex yet lucid. The writing is grammatically correct and coherently organized. The chosen example is unique for the topic. The paper or project was submitted by the deadline.

B+ (Very Good) – The paper or project more than meets the expectations for this requirement. Fresh insights are presented about the chosen example. The paper or project displays a comprehensive understanding of the chosen example and the theory used. The language used to explain the theory and its application is lucid. The writing is coherently organized. The chosen example is suitable for the topic. The paper or project was submitted by the deadline.

B (Good) – The paper or project more than meets the expectations for this requirement. The insights presented about the chosen example could have been developed further. The paper or project displays a sufficient understanding of the chosen example and the theory used. The language used to explain the theory and its application is lucid. The writing is moderately coherent. The chosen example is suitable for the topic. The paper or project was submitted by the deadline.

B- (More than Satisfactory) – The paper or project meets the expectations for this requirement. The insights presented about the chosen example or theory used lack elaboration or development. The paper or project displays a sufficient understanding of either the chosen example or the theory used. The language used to explain the theory and its application is understandable. The writing is moderately coherent. The chosen example is suitable for the topic. The paper or project may have been submitted late.

C+ (Satisfactory) – The paper or project meets the expectations for this requirement. The insights presented about the chosen example or theory used lack elaboration or development. The paper or project displays a basic understanding of the chosen example and the theory used. The language used to explain the theory and its application is understandable. The writing is slightly coherent. The chosen

example may not be suitable for the topic. The paper or project may have been submitted late.

C, C- (Fair) – The paper or project barely meets the expectations for this requirement. The insights presented about the chosen example or theory used are vaguely elaborated. The paper or project fails to display a sufficient understanding of the chosen example and the theory used. The language used to explain the theory and its application is virtually understandable. The writing is incoherent. The chosen example may not be suitable for the topic. The paper or project may have been submitted late.

D+, D (Pass) – The paper or project does not meet the expectations for this requirement. No additional insights are presented about the chosen example or the theory used on top of what was discussed in class. The language used to explain the theory and its application are almost incomprehensible. The writing is incoherent. The chosen example is irrelevant. The paper or project may have been submitted late.

F (Fail) – The paper or project does not meet the expectations for this requirement. The language and writing are poor. The chosen example is irrelevant. The theory used was not covered in class. The paper or project may have been submitted long past the deadline.

ACADEMIC ETHICS

You are expected to abide by the university's principles and regulations on academic honesty. Please take some time to familiarize yourself with the information on the following webpage:

<http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/>.

Violations such as plagiarized papers or multiple submissions will not be tolerated in any form. These will be subject to disciplinary action. Remember that all words, phrases, or ideas taken from sources other than your own submitted assignment must be properly cited. When in doubt about an assignment with a possible violation, please feel free to consult me.

All written assignments must be accompanied by a VeriGuide receipt, a signed declaration acknowledging your awareness of and subscription to the university's policies and regulations on academic integrity. Written assignments submitted without a VeriGuide receipt will not be accepted and graded.