Department of Comparative Literature

COLT 379-Section 22038R
Nationalism and Postcolonialism in Contemporary Southeast Asian Cinema
Fall 2019
THH 106
2 PM-3:20 PM

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Course Description

One of the aims of this course, Nationalism and Postcolonialism in Contemporary Southeast Asian Cinema, is to introduce students to the lesser known “national cinema” of such nations as Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam, which will enable us to test the relevance and accuracy of the concept of “national cinema” given the challenges created by international co-production and transnational and diasporic filmmaking practices. These cinemas’ multiple inscription in a global economy, a regional context—the nations are members of the Association of Southeast Asian nations (ASEAN)—and a local culture, further complicates our understanding of their emergence as a “national” cultural expression. The films selected both assert and undermine their cultural and national affiliation by making manifest the countervailing, dispersive forces of class, gender, sexual preferences, ethnicity, religion, and so on, rendering also more difficult our adherence to the homogenizing discourse of national cinema. We will discuss and analyze these complex articulations, without neglecting the material and historical conditions that allowed the development of such a cinema: colonialism, decolonization, independence, and postcoloniality. We will focus on the aesthetic dimension of filmmaking, foreign influences such as the French New Wave, Hollywood and Bollywood as well as East Asian cinemas. Topics covered also include: mapping the postcolonial city; the trauma and memory of the Khmer rouge genocide; the influence of the state in the promotion of an autochthonous cinema; the role of censorship; the privileged place accorded to art film and independent cinema by film critics; the taste-brokering function of international film festivals and their importance in canon formation and the constitution of a national cinema; the neglected significance of commercial popular cinema, video filmmaking, etc… The exposure to a much wider range of Southeast Asian film texts—documentary, art film, commercial cinema, videos, experimental film—the relevant readings, and your sustained analysis of these texts will help us redefine the contours of Southeast Asian cinema and contribute to a better understanding of emerging film traditions that are an integral part of global film culture.

Bibliography
Readings
Course Reader accessible on Blackboard

Screenings
All films will be screened outside the classroom, prior to class discussion. They will be made available in advance or held on reserve at Leavey Library.

Course Requirements

Because the course will be run as a seminar, students are expected to contribute frequently and imaginatively to the classroom discussion. Students are expected to keep up with the assigned readings. You will write 5 short response-papers to films on the program. 2 of these response-papers could be on more recent movies screened in town or made by directors that you find compelling and worthy of being included in our study of Southeast Asian cinema. There will be an in-class mid-term examination that will incorporate short answers/definitions and short essays on movies, directors, or topics that have been addressed in the readings and discussed in class. You are also expected to give a formal presentation, 10-15 minute-long, about a particular issue, a director, a film technique, etc…In lieu of a final exam, you will be asked to submit a final paper of 12-15 pages, on a topic of your choice (but after having conferred with me), due Thursday, December 12, by 2 PM.

Grading

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
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<td>Oral Presentation</td>
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<td>5 response papers (1-2 pages)</td>
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<td>Midterm exam</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Paper (12-15 pages)</td>
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Late & Unfinished Work – Students must complete all assignments in order to earn a grade in the course. Any material turned in late will be reduced one letter grade per calendar day late. Each presentation must be given on the day assigned.

Special Assistance - Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure that the letter is delivered as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday and can be reached at (213) 740-0776.

Academic Conduct-Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” https://policy.usc.edu/student/scampus/part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

Discrimination, sexual assault, intimate partner violence, stalking, and harassment are prohibited by the university. You are encouraged to report all incidents to the Office of Equity and Diversity/Title IX Office http://equity.usc.edu and/or to the Department of Public Safety http://dps.usc.edu. This is important for the health and safety of the whole USC community. Faculty and staff must report any information regarding an incident to the Title IX Coordinator who will provide outreach and information to the affected party. The sexual assault resource center webpage http://sarc.usc.edu fully describes reporting options. Relationship and Sexual Violence Services https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp provides 24/7 confidential support.

Support Systems

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the American Language Institute http://ali.usc.edu, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. The Office of Disability Services and Programs http://dsp.usc.edu provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, USC Emergency Information http://emergency.usc.edu will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.
CLASS SCHEDULE (tentative)

Week 1
August 27
INTRODUCTION

August 29
Thailand
Beyond Theories of Postcolonial Third Cinema and National allegories
Screen: *Bang Rajan: The Legend of the Village Warriors* (Dir. Thanit Jitnukul, 2000, 118 min)
Read:
Ernest Renan, “What is a Nation?”

Week 2
September 3
Thai Cinema
Performing Sexuality
Screen: *The Iron Ladies* (Dir. Yongyoot Thongkongtoon, 2000 104 min)
Read:
Anchalee Chaiworaporn, “Thai Cinema since 1970” in *Film in Southeast Asia*. 141-162

September 5
Independent Thai Cinema
Screen: *Blissfully Yours* (Dir. Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 2002; 126 min)
*Tropical Malady* (Dir. Dir. Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 2004 118 min)
Read: Purnama, Ari, "Syndromes of Indirect Communication: A Functional Analysis of the Static Long-Take Technique in Apichatpong Weerasethakul’s Feature Films.”

**Week 3**
**September 10**
Screen: *Uncle Boonmee Who Can’t Recall his Past Lives* (Dir. Apichatpong Weerasethakul 2010; 113 min)
Apichatpong Weerasethakul/ Cannes 2010

**September 12**
**Contemporary Thai Horror**
*Nang Nak* (Dir. Nonzee Nimibutr, 1999; 100 min)

**Week 4**
**September 17**
**The Philippines**
**Queer Cinema**
Screen: *Macho Dancer* (Dir. Lino Brocka, 1988; 136 min.)
Read:
Augustin Sotto, “Philippines / A Brief History of Philippine Cinema.” from *Film in Southeast Asia*

**September 19**
**Contemporary Philippine Cinema**
Week 5  
September 24  
Singapore  
Mapping Singapore  
Screen:  
*Mee Pok Man* (Dir. Eric Khoo, 1995. 105 min)  
*12 Stories* (Dir. Eric Khoo, 1997)  
Read:  
Anthony R. Guneratne, “The Urban and the Urbane: Modernization, Modernism and the Rebirth of Singaporean Cinema” from *Theorizing the Southeast Asian City as Text*. 159-190.

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September 26  
Singapore  
Sexuality and Nationalism  
Screen:  
*Yao jie huang hou [Bugis Street]* (Dir. Yon Fan, 1994, 101 min)  
Readings:  
Jon Quah, “Singapore: Meritocratic City-State” from *Government and Politics in Southeast Asia*  
Udhde, Jan and Yvonne Ng Uhde. “Singapore: Developments, Challenges, and Projections.” CAC. 71-82.

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Week 6  
October 1  
Indonesia  
Mapping Jakarta  
Screening:  
*Eliana Eliana* [also known as Pesawat pertama ] Dir. Riri Riza, 2002 105 min.)  
Readings:  
Misbach Yusa Biran, “The History of Indonesian Cinema at a Glance” from *Film in Southeast Asia*
James N. Rosenau and Diane Wildsmith, “Jakarta as a Site of Fragmegrative Tensions” from Postcolonial Urbanism: Southeast Asian Cities and Global Processes.

October 3
Screen: Arisan! [The Gathering] (Dir. Nia Dinata 2003 129 min)
Ca Bau-kan [A Courtesan] (Dir. Nia Dinata 2002 120 min)
Read: Interview with Nia Dinata: “I want the people of Indonesia to see a different point of view, whether they agree with it or not”

Week 7
October 8
Indonesia
Urban Space and Cinema
Screen:
Kuldesak (Dirs. Nan Triveni Achnas, Mira Lesmana, Rizal Mantovani, and Riri Riza, 1998 110 min)
Read:
Karl Heider, “National Cinema, National Culture: The Indonesian Case” in Colonialism and Nationalism in Asian Cinema.
Katinka van Heeren, “Revolution of Hope: Independent films are young, free and radical” from Inside Indonesia 70 (April-June 2002).

October 10
Malaysia
Mapping Kuala Lumpur
Screen:
Snipers (Dir. James Lee, 2001)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHa0cFFLPA
The Big Durian (Dir. Amir Muhammad, 2003; 73 min) [First Malaysian movie to screen at Sundance] [on Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uT-kSfYuvEw
Read:
Goh Beng Lan, “Rethinking Modernity: State, Ethnicity, and Class in the Forging of a Modern Urban Malaysia” from Local Cultures and the ‘New Asia’: The State, Culture, and Capitalism in Southeast Asia (CR)
Baharudin Latif, “Malaysia / A Brief History of Malaysian Film” from Film in South East Asia. 163-193.

**Week 8**
**October 15**
**Dreamed Communities**
Screen: *Mukhsin* (Dir. Yasmin Ahmad 2006 xxx min)
*Sepet* (Dir. Yasmin Ahmad 2004 xxx min).

**FALL RECESS October 17-18**

**Week 9**
**October 22**
**Midterm Exam**

**October 24**
**Vietnam**
**The Country (vs the City)**
Screen:
Read:
Pham, Ngoc Truong, “Vietnam / A Brief History of Vietnamese Films” from Film in Southeast Asia

**Week 10**
**October 29**
**Diasporic Vietnamese Directors**
The Scent of Green Papaya (Dir. Tran, Anh Hung, 1993)
Cyclo (Dir. Tran, Anh Hung (Dir. Tran, Anh Hung, 1995) or The Vertical Ray of the Sun (Dir. Tran, Anh Hung, 2000)
October 31  
**Fighting French Colonialism**  
**Screen:**  
Poussière d’empire (Dir. Lam Le, 1983.)  
**Read:**  

**Week 11  
November 5**  
**Screen:** *Three Seasons* (Dir. Tony Bui, 1999)  
**Read:** Lam, Mariam B. “Circumventing Channels: Indie Filmmaking in Post-Socialist Vietnam and Beyond.” [GF]. Pp. 87-105.

November 7  
**Cambodia**  
**Technology, Memory and Trauma**  
**Screen:** *The Land of Wandering Souls* (Dir. Rithy Panh, 2000, 100min.)  
**Read:**  
Michael Renov, “Towards a Poetics of Documentary” from *Theorizing Documentary* (CR)  
Ingrid Muan and Ly Daravuth “Cambodia: A Survey of Film in Cambodia” [FSEA]. 93-106.  

**Week 12  
November 12**  
**On Testimonial and Witnessing the Khmer Rouge Genocide**  
**Screen:** S21: The Khmer Rouge Death Machine (Dir. Rithy Panh, 2002 101 min.)  
**Read:** Susan J. Brison, “Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of the Self” from *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present.*  
David Chandler, “Choosing the Enemies” and “Forcing the Answers” from *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot’s Secret Prison.*  
Rithy Panh, “Cambodia, a wound that will not heal”  
See Website: Yale University’s Cambodian Genocide Program (www.yale.edu/cgp/)

**November 14**  
**Khmer Artistic Expression**  
**Screen:**  
Les artistes du théâtre brûlé. (Dir. Rithy Panh, 2005 82 min.)  
**Readings:**

Week 13
November 19
Laos
A Fledging “National Cinema” ?/ The Lao New Wave
Screen: Chanthaly (Dir. Mattie Do (2012) 109 min)
At the Horizon (Dir. Anysay Keola (2012) 101 min)

November 21
Student Presentation

Week 14
November 26
Student Presentation
Thanksgiving Holyday
November 27-December 1

Week 15
December 3
Student Presentation

December 5
Conclusion