Department of Comparative Literature

COLT 379-Section 22038R
Nationalism and Postcolonialism in
Contemporary Southeast Asian Cinema
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THH 211
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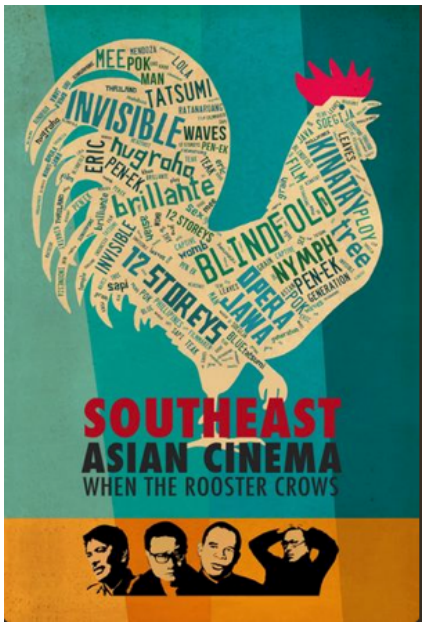
Panivong Norindr
THH 155K
tel: (213) 821-1167
email: norindr@usc.edu



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 --these 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 autochtonous 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.