

underrepresentation of Southeast Asia in Covid-19 scholarship so far and provides correctives to theory generated and centred in the 'global North'. This is especially clear in the chapters on overseas Filipino workers (chapters 7, 13 and 14), where the authors point to the importance of Filipino labour to the economies and health systems of countries outside Southeast Asia, including the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, and these workers' unique vulnerability to the pandemic. At the same time, several chapters' consideration of highly connected, wealthy Southeast Asian cities and societies like Singapore remind us that the line between global North and South runs through the heart of 'Southeast Asia' itself (chapters 11 and 12).

As is natural for 'first responder' studies involving rapidly developing crises, there remains room for further investigation and the gathering of higher quality and more detailed data. This will hopefully be increasingly possible as barriers hampering scholarly inquiry begin to lift with restrictions. The contributors also acknowledge the difficulty of making long-term assessments at this stage, for instance, regarding the sustainability of otherwise encouraging community-led initiatives and other forms of collective action. Whether these grassroots initiatives indeed constitute a basis for an '[alternative] urban development paradigm' (p. 214), as several essays are optimistic about, remains an open question that requires more sustained analysis to begin to answer. Nonetheless, this volume is an excellent foundation for thinking about the pandemic's effects on the complex, interconnected societies of Southeast Asia that should be of broad interest beyond the contributors' already wide disciplinary affiliations, including undergraduate students and members of the public looking to make sense of the strange world the pandemic has created (and revealed).

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Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia on screen: From Independence to Financial Crisis: 1945–1998

Edited by GAIK CHENG KHOO, THOMAS BARKER and MARY AINSLIE

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The recent uptick in English-language scholarship about Southeast Asian cinema tracks global film culture's post-1990s recognition of the region. The directors who led that rise to prominence with coveted honours at celebrated festivals have made it a touch embarrassing these days for graduate students in film studies to admit being unfamiliar with veritable auteurs like Rithy Panh, Lav Diaz, or Apichatpong Weerasethakul. (They might also refer to Weerasethakul as 'Joe' for added gravitas.) The interest in these filmmakers extends to their peers and respective national cinemas. That familiar narrative summarising Southeast Asian cinema's emergence tends to find its way in some form or other into essays, anthologies, and monographs, for

the benefit of uninitiated readers who require background or context. It is the case with the introductory chapter of *Southeast Asia on screen*, in which co-editor Gaik Cheng Khoo's iteration of those film and intellectual histories is particularly cogent and replete with handy references. The 13 chapters that follow signal something more important however: the requisite item may be—as a positive sign—on the verge of redundancy.

As long as such a preface is needed, the section on 'Key directors' is also inevitable, given the utility of authorship as a mode of analysis. Oeuvres offer irresistible frameworks and procedural convenience. Furthermore, heroic narratives pitting individual creative valour against institutional barriers or political hegemony are especially germane when the story so often turns to authoritarians like Suharto and Marcos, oppressive regimes, or Hollywood imperialism. But in regards to the state of the field, it is noteworthy *who* the subjects of these authorial chapters are. When Khoo declares the intention to highlight 'veteran filmmakers and directors from the region who are lesser known in the English-speaking world' (p. 131), those passages express enthusiasm in unveiling rich cultural histories, confidence in reader interest, and just a touch of defiance against the Bourdieu-an tastemakers who give out prizes with French names. This book looks past recognisable films and artists who come most easily to mind in a way that feels like pulling back linoleum and discovering artisanal tiling underneath.

Southeast Asia on screen does not simply turn towards lesser-known films and directors. It conscientiously chooses to celebrate the popular commercial stuff enjoyed by society's ostensible lessers. Examples include Joyce L. Arriola's transmedia exploration of Philippine *komiks*, Sasinee Khuankaew's careful analysis of popular Thai comedies, not to mention Chrishandra Sebastiampillai's star study of Nora Aunor's subversive performances, and considerations of exploitation films, represented by Thomas Barker and Ekky Imanjaya's co-written production history and Sophia Siddique's sharp and vibrant reading of *They call her... Cleopatra Wong* (1978). They make a persuasive case that films consumed by mass audiences provide both a better means to chart industrial shifts and a more accurate sense of the social imagination (p. 14). The popular is taken here to be an index of cultural authenticity. But it does not extend to forms of media-making from below, which would have anchored the focus in films of the last two decades. The 1997 Asian Financial Crisis brought technological disruption that put digital cameras into the hands of a new reform-minded generation of filmmakers (pp. 9, 214). That is to say, by using the Crisis as a bookend, the book steers our interest away from obvious places, very purposefully towards understudied gaps further in the past (p. 13).

Behind the popular traditions showcased in the volume were veritable film industries, populated throughout the region by prolific studios that were associated with specific genres. Chapters devote important time to documenting commercial heydays in the Philippines, Burma, Indonesia, Singapore, and Thailand. Postwar production outputs boomed and busted with the vicissitudes of the Cold War, postcolonial nation-building projects, authoritarian regimes, and modernity. Operating underneath and with American interests, Hollywood manoeuvred its way into local markets and into films themselves. The first five entries in the collection underline this inescapable geopolitical overhang in Southeast Asia.

Given the Cold War's role in constructing 'Southeast Asia', many have called the region's epistemological validity into question for some time. In that vein, questions abound regarding the soundness of national and territorial framings. Refer for instance to the generative discussions curated in the spring 2021 issue of the *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*. These debates force you to notice this volume's reliance on national cinema as a framing device, and as a result, to the space that Indonesian, Philippine, and Thai cinemas occupy on its pages. It is overdetermined by the disciplines and scholars that constitute the field, the influence of area studies, and the ebb in favour for totalising narratives. Those observations are made in context but certainly not in critique of this book. The frequent recourse that *Southeast Asia on screen* finds in national cinema turns out to be both useful and relevant. For that matter, how would we recognise what is transnational otherwise? As the field continues along that line of inquiry, the work that Barker and Imanjaya have started on international co-productions and the thought that Siddique gives to the spectre of ASEAN will prove crucial.

I conclude by returning to the idea that Southeast Asian film studies finds itself perched at an important juncture, between global and local, art cinema and popular film, new and old, national and transnational. The role that a book like *Southeast Asia on Screen* plays in the field's transition from where it is to where it wants to go is significant. This includes a future in which film and media studies scholars will add greater acuity to textual analysis. More than some film scholars would like, a number of chapters remain preoccupied with narrative structure at the expense of visual and aural form. In these moments, the knowledge I gained about how these texts came to be and what was happening around them still piqued my curiosity to find out how these films look, sound, and move. Successful books on cinema do that; they make us want to see, hear, and experience the films for ourselves.

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Southeast Asia

Cross-cultural exchange and the colonial imaginary: Global encounters via Southeast Asia

Edited by H. HAZEL HAHN

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In the contemporary scholarship of colonialism, culture serves as an important lens to understand the complex power dynamics between the coloniser and the colonised. On the one hand, scholars have documented the profound invasiveness of colonial cultural projects that violently dispossess indigenous cultures, and on the other hand, they have discussed resilient, quotidian, and hybrid cultural spaces of the colonised. The idea of cultural hybridity is especially significant for proponents of the