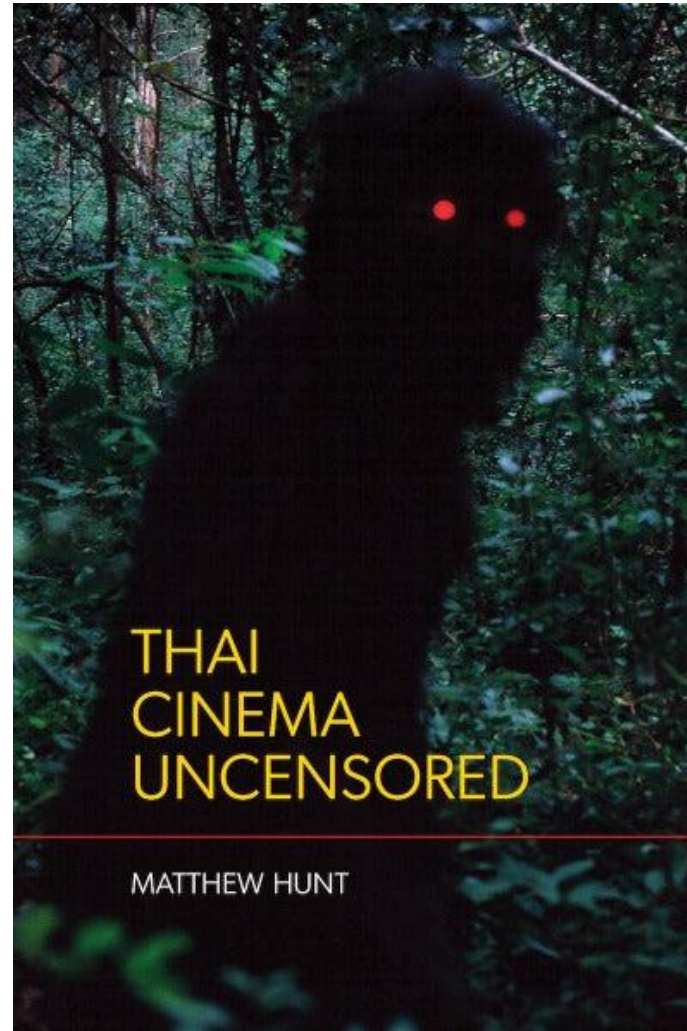


Researching Film Censorship in Thailand

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Thai Cinema Uncensored

Silkworm Books (2020) / University of Washington Press (2021)

Objectives:

- Write the first complete history of Thai film censorship.
- Interview all 10 directors whose films had been banned since the Film and Video Act (2008).

Challenges:

- Obtaining interviews with directors (on-the-record) and other sources (off-the-record).
- Researching film legislation and censorship policy.
- Writing about sensitive topics, related to Ministry of Culture and Dept. of Cultural Monitoring.
- Access to unreleased films, and films with very limited distribution.

Unexpected outcomes:

- Documenting a collective sense of political awakening among the directors.
- Highlighting a consistent set of grievances about the censorship system.

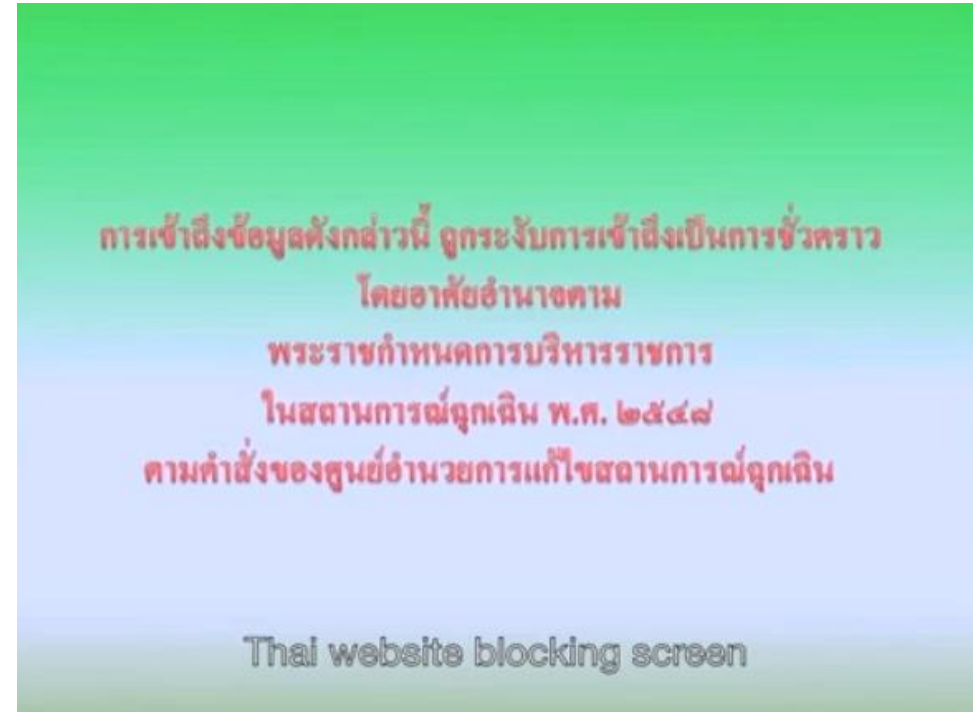
Filling in the Gaps



“Press SILENCE... to select ‘Self-Censorship’ mode to avoid 3–15 years of disconnection”

Your Ash and My Bone (Sina Wittayawiroj, 2025)

Filling in the Gaps



The Six Principles (Abhichon Rattanabhayon, 2010)

Abhichon: "The Six Principles which were in the first declaration of People's Party in 1932 revolution... people don't know the existence of the Six Principles anymore."

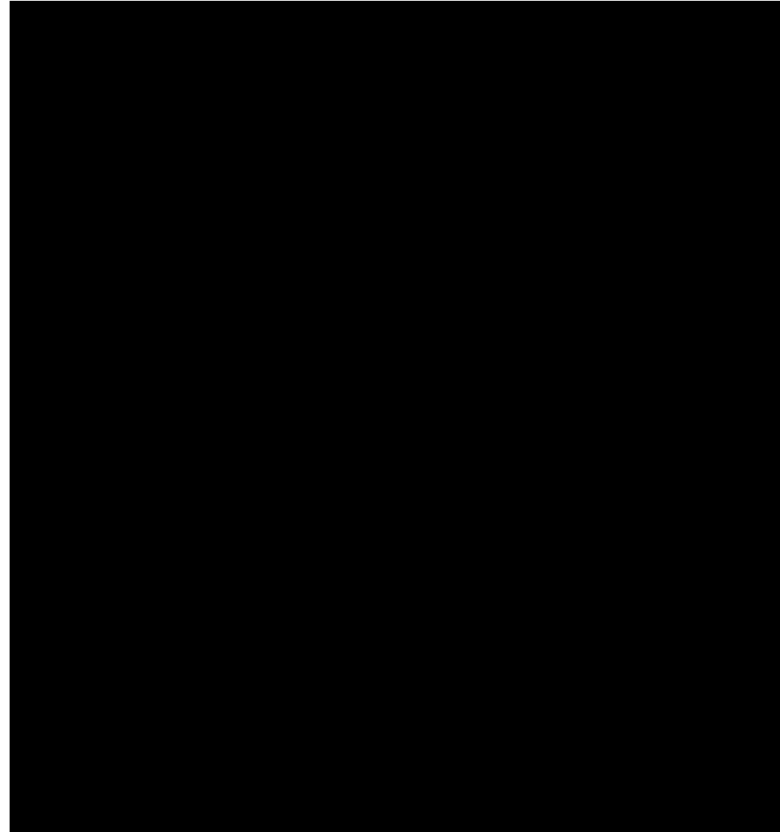
Filling in the Gaps



Paradoxocracy (Pen-ek Ratanaruang, 2013)

Pen-ek: "I was as calm as a Buddhist monk when I talked to them. So, they felt that they had to accommodate me a little bit."
"You see the scars on the face... This guy has a story."
"They started laughing. And people knew right away what the deleted sound was about."

Filling in the Gaps



Syndromes and a Century (Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 2007)

Syndromes and a Century: Thailand's Edition (Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 2008)

Filling in the Gaps

- 1923:** *Suvarna of Siam* — the first film to be censored in Thailand.
- 2007:** *Syndromes and a Century* — the film that sparked an anti-censorship campaign.
- 2008:** Film and Video Act introduces a rating system, but censorship continues.

Filling in the Gaps

- 1923:** *Suvarna of Siam* — the first film to be censored in Thailand.
- 1930:** Film Act.
- 1936:** Itemised list of prohibitions added to the Film Act.
- 1962:** Film censorship appeals committee established.
- 1970:** Film Act revised to include recommendations from the Ministry of Education.
- 1971:** Coup by Thanom Kittikachorn.
Film Act revised to prohibit films promoting “contempt for government or nation”.
Film censorship placed under the jurisdiction of the chief of police.
- 1973:** [Return to civilian government: social conscience films permitted.](#)
- 1976:** 6th October coup.
Film Act revised to prohibit films about “political issues”.
- 1991:** Coup by Suchinda Kraprayoon.
Film Act revised to prohibit “insults to the state”.
- 2007:** *Syndromes and a Century* — the film that sparked an anti-censorship campaign.
- 2008:** Film and Video Act introduces a rating system, but censorship continues.

Interviews

Thunskā Pansittivorakul

- *This Area Is Under Quarantine* (2008) blocked from film festival
Thunskā vowed **not to release any of his future films in Thailand**

Apichatpong Weerasethakul

- *Syndromes and a Century* (2007) cut by the censor board
cut again by the appeals committee
Apichatpong **released a Thai version with a blank screen**

Tanwarin Sukkhapisit

- *Insects in the Backyard* (2010) banned after festival screening
ban overturned by the Administrative Court after 5 years

Chulayarnnon Siriphol

- *Birth of Golden Snail* (2018) banned from Thailand Biennale

Nontawat Numbenchapol

- *Boundary* (2013) banned, then passed after a token cut

Yuthlert Sippapak

- *Fatherland* (2013) blocked by military producers

Pen-ek Ratanaruang

- *Paradoxocracy* (2013) has **muted sound and censored subtitles**

Ing K.

- *Shakespeare Must Die* (2012) banned
ban overturned by the Supreme Court after 14 years

Kanittha Kwunyoo

- *Karma* (2015) banned, then released in cut version

Surasak Pongson

- *Thibaan: The Series 2.2* banned, then released in cut version

Interviews

Connections: Thunskā Pansittivorakul
Apichatpong Weerasethakul
Tanwarin Sukkhapsit
Chulayarnnon Siriphol
Nontawat Numbenchapol
Yuthlert Sippapak
Pen-ek Ratanaruang
Ing K.
Kaniththa Kwunyoo
Surasak Pongson

Cooperation: Apichatpong Weerasethakul
Pen-ek Ratanaruang
Nontawat Numbenchapol
Thunskā Pansittivorakul
Yuthlert Sippapak
Chulayarnnon Siriphol
Surasak Pongson
Kaniththa Kwunyoo
Tanwarin Sukkhapsit
Ing K.

- First two director interviews conducted on 11th February 2014.
- Coup by Prayut Chan-o-cha on 22nd May 2014.

“Maybe they wanted some money under the table.”

– Apichatpong Weerasethakul

Ministry of Culture censors are like ex-girlfriends: they never pick up the phone.

– Kong Rithdee, 25th November 2020

“For the avoidance of doubt, a notice proclaiming a ‘BRIBE-FREE ZONE’ greets visitors to the censors’ office, as shown in... *Censor Must Die* (2013).”



Q&A: Apichatpong Weerasethakul

Q: Thunskā [Pansittivorakul] decided not to release any future films in Thailand.

A: That's what he said?

Q: That's his plan. He's not interested in any Thai releases in the future.

A: Because it makes you tired and discouraged from making more films.

I think filmmakers need to get in touch.

[...]

Q: The Ministry of Culture... seems a very conservative institution, very traditional.

A: Yes, but *you've been here many years* [laughs]. It's very normal. It's a theatrical society, a façade, all for the nation, religion, and king.

[...]

A: [*Glances at tape recorder.*] Maybe this should be off the record.

Q&A: Pen-ek Ratanaruang

2014: 'Shutdown Bangkok' campaign calls for compensation for rice farmers

A: So, these middle class now cling to the farmers: "Oh, Pen-ek, I feel so bad for these farmers." "When have you seen farmers in your life? Have you seen a farmer?" And these are my friends. Mostly, they're my friends, because I'm middle class. These are my friends, but I want to puke in their face.

Q: Sometimes I try to explain it to friends back in the UK, but how can you explain what's happening because it's so ridiculous? You couldn't make it up.

A: Right. I tried to explain to some German people, about a month ago. Halfway through, I just had to give up, because I got confused myself.

[...]

Anyway, [let's get back to our censorship thing](#) [laughs].

Q&A: Thunskā Pansittivorakul

A: I decided not to show any of my films in Thailand. But because [Harit \[Srikhao\] is my close friend \[laughs\]](#), and he has a new photography exhibit at Gallery VER, I'll show *Homogeneous, Empty Time* [2017], that I made with Harit.

[...]

For underground films, there's more freedom, because you can do anything and no censorship, because just a few people watch them...

At that time, [I was quite low-profile. Until now.](#)

[...]

She gave me *Fah Diew Kan* [*Same Sky*].

Q: They had the VCD of Tak Bai.

A: Yes. Actually, the Tak Bai clip is from that.

Q: From that VCD? [I have that, too.](#)

A: It's the same clip.

2004: Protesters from Tak Bai suffocate after being packed into trucks.

Q&A: Chulayarnnon Siriphol

A: The first film that I made is *Karaoke: Think Kindly* [2009]. It's not only my work.

Q: That's right. Scene 22.

A: [\[Looks shocked.\]](#) Scene 22. My friends from university.

[...]

Q: I heard that you filmed two different versions of the monk [in *Ten Years Thailand* (2018)], one with saffron robes and one with white robes. [Is that true?](#)

A: [It's true](#), but it's not my suggestion. It's my producers' suggestion, because they were scared of censorship against the monk's uniform.

- *Birth of Golden Snail* world premiere: Singapore International Film Festival (November 2019)
- *Birth of Golden Snail* Thai premiere: Short Film and Video Festival (December 2019)

Q&A: Yuthlert Sippapak

Q: You're filming something at the moment, aren't you?

A: Yeah, *Seven Boy Scouts*. It's a political satire [laughs]. Finding a way to fight back in a film in the mainstream. I put the names of the politicians, seven boys. The names are like the prime minister [Prayut Chan-o-cha] and all the bad people, [they] become scouts.



Nednary (Yuthlert Sippapak, 2023)

Off-the-Record

“In 2012, shortly after the *Shakespeare Must Die* ban, a committee met to consider Ing [K.]’s appeal against the decision. The meeting was attended by the culture minister herself, and its collective verdict, to uphold the ban, was reached via a confidential written ballot.”

“I had to vote no, because it was an instruction from my director. But if I could have voted freely, I would have voted yes.”

– “a reliable source”



'Ta Sawang' ('Political Awakening')

2010: Civilian government authorises military crackdown on 'red-shirt' protesters.



'Ta Sawang' ('Political Awakening')

"I didn't question about the soldiers. But I started to learn about politics."

– Thunskā Pansittivorakul

"I was old enough to understand things, but I didn't... I was politically naïve."

– Apichatpong Weerasethakul

"I was a teenager, a young man not interested in politics so much. But... I started to read lots of articles about that."

– Nontawat Numbenchapol

"I turned to be interested in the political situation."

– Chulayarnnon Siriphol

Film and Video Act (2008)

“They didn’t give any reason. They just said they cannot decide to show or not to show.”

– Thunskā Pansittivorakul

“They simply said that they thought every scene was immoral, and they didn’t give us any more details.”

– Tanwarin Sukkhapsit

“I asked her, ‘Which part is sensitive? Can I do something about it?’ She told me, ‘You cannot edit, because it’s the whole film.’”

– Nontawat Numbenchapol

“There is no consistency, and we don’t know what the rules are.”

– Kannitha Kwunyoo

“I don’t know what the standard is. It’s like playing the lottery.”

– Chulayarnnon Siriphol

Under the Radar

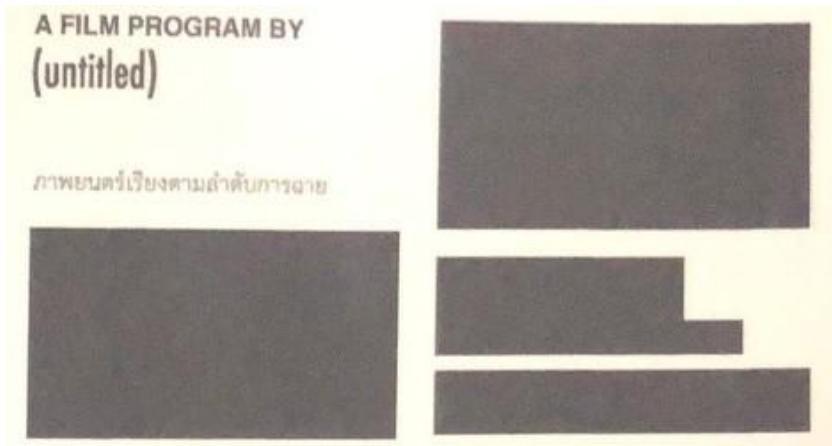
“I need to show my films to an audience, but who are they?
So, I just show in some events that I’m quite sure will not make problems for me.”

– Thunskā Pansittivorakul

The screening will take place at...

Please do not post any details about this event on social media.

– SMS re. *Homogeneous, Empty Time* (2017)



If Dad Were Looking Up, He Would Be Happy (5th December 2025)

The Visibility Dilemma

2020: 'Three-finger' protest movement inspires documentaries, music videos, and artworks.



อนาคตคือ ['the future is...'] (Milli & Youngohm, 2021)

Thai criminal code articles [113](#) (overthrowing the government) and [393](#) (public insults).

The End... of Censorship?

- 2024:** National Soft Power Strategy Committee recommends relaxation of film censorship.
- 2025:** Cabinet approves draft new film act replacing the censor board with self-regulation.

Thank you for listening.

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