

both of which heavily reflect on the nation's colonial tension over racial differences. References to Jean-Luc Nancy's engagement with listening as well as his concepts of "echo chamber" and "resonant subject" (pp. 149–50) mark a decisive move to not only destabilize the visual-centric field of cinema studies but also to complicate a hegemonic understanding of hybridity in postcolonial subjects.

For the closing case, Sim's interest in postcoloniality is stretched out to cover Indonesia's period of Americanization. Those who are familiar with Joshua Oppenheimer's film *The Act of Killing* (2012) will find Sim's reading of the film for its echo of the Indonesian condition of the post-Suharto era—"the need to work through a fraught but suppressed history of violent trauma" (p. 173)—illuminating. The overarching claim of this last chapter symptomatically connects the post-Suharto traumatic sentiments to *reformasi* cinema and to how genre cinema and generic training by Hollywood recite and resuscitate the psychological attachment to stability and order—legacies of Suharto's Americanist era of Indonesia.

### Palita Chunsangchan

Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, College of Liberal Arts, University of Minnesota, 220 Folwell Hall, 9 Pleasant St SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455, USA; email: palitac@umn.edu.

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*Thai Cinema Uncensored*. By Matthew Hunt. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2020, xi+300 pp.

Studies of Southeast Asian cinema have been in flux for two decades, as has cinema studies more generally. Thai cinema is unique in the field of Asian cultural production, and its problematic survival in recent years is marked not so much by competition from a greedy

international industry as from its location in a monarchical nation-state that is also an autocratic para-democracy. Noah Vernes (2021) explores many issues raised in this book in finer detail.

The present book is welcome as an extended study in its own right although its focus is mainly on the independent film sector where political events determine the relation between film-maker and audience. Thai independent cinema is well known in international circles, and auteur film-makers such as Apichatpong Weerasethakul are hailed as the vanguard of a new Thai cinema. He and others have persisted in working within the country in spite of the difficulties. Censorship has become increasingly invasive and film production now is circumscribed as never before. New generations of viewers are not allowed to watch new releases because cinemas are forbidden from showing them—even private viewings may be shut down by the censorship police.

The author has presented a wealth of valuable detail about films, directors, interventions, the mechanisms of everyday censorship and the decisions that must be made by individuals every time they want to make a movie. The role of the Ministry of Culture and its ideologically directed absurdities are well described.

The book is divided into several sections. Chapter 1 gives a comprehensive overview of the history of film censorship, with all its twists and turns and inexplicable contradictions. Royalist/nationalist period dramas—commonly referred to in Thai as ‘history films’ (*nang prawatisart*)—and their role in popular propaganda, especially in recent years, are well covered.

Chapter 2 takes the reader into the field of Thai erotic cinema and queer cinema. The question of unsimulated sex is briefly raised in relation to controversial films that offer glimpses of sex organs in experimental and autobiographical films. This discussion, however, feels almost like an afterthought and skates across many questions about the role of public eroticism in Thai underground culture and its intersection with Western fantasies and the promotion of tourism.

Chapter 3, on the other hand, is exemplary. This is a great read not just for those interested in film but for anyone trying to understand

the nexus between culture and politics in Thailand in recent times. It refers to issues around the military, the monarchy and the culture of militarism raised in the discussion of period dramas referred to above. It includes an excellent account of the way the complex and sometimes inconsistent censorship laws, taken together, result in fear and anxiety among film producers and directors, who, in turn, often remove much of their films' content in order to avoid uncertainty. This results in a robust level of self-censorship.

The section on monks in movies (Chapter 4) is a valuable discussion of an area of film censorship that seems truly bizarre to most non-Thai.

The main contribution of this book, however, is the section of interviews with recent Thai directors. This reader thoroughly enjoyed these glimpses into thoughts we would otherwise be unable to gain access to. A reader who is unfamiliar with these auteurs and their films, however, would be immediately lost. The first interview with Apichatpong Weerasethakul is a great example of how an interview transcript does not work well in explaining the issues and attitudes that have made up a director's career. Apichatpong knows how to answer and yet deflect questions at the same time, leaving the interviewer at a loss for a response on many occasions.

Where the interview directly concerns the fate of certain films—for example, Tanwarin Sukkhapisit's *Insects in the Backyard* (2010)—the reader learns much about the way censorship operates in practice, with its arbitrary and often incomprehensible actions. This film was shown to acclaim at the 2010 World Film Festival but was promptly banned in Thailand on the grounds that it was immoral and hazardous to national security. The main grounds given were that the film should have been made in a 'good' way. No scene was exempt; the whole film was 'immoral'. The director and production company took the case to court and, following the court's instruction, the censorship board successfully negotiated with the film-makers to have one scene of three seconds cut.

Without first-hand knowledge of the films under discussion, it is sometimes difficult to follow the links between the comments of

the directors and the discussions in the first part of the book. Most readers are unlikely to have access to more than a handful of them.

This book is a valuable addition to Thai cinema studies. It is well-written and instructive. But the fugitive nature of the subject matter may limit its appeal beyond a small corps of aficionados.

**Annette Hamilton**

School of the Arts and Media, University of New South Wales, Sydney 2052, Australia; email: a.hamilton@unsw.edu.au

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*Woman between Two Kingdoms: Dara Rasami and the Making of Modern Thailand*. By Leslie Castro-Woodhouse. Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University Press, 2020. 198 pp.

The political role of palace women has long been overlooked. Focused on Thailand, Leslie Castro-Woodhouse's book provides us with a pioneering account of one such palace woman's life—namely, a northern Thai princess named Chao Dara Rasami. To reconstruct palace women's lives, Castro-Woodhouse goes beyond traditional archival materials to include memoirs of palace women, works of historical fiction written by authors knowledgeable about palace life, cremation volumes, oral histories, museum collections, textiles and photographs.

In her fascinating biography, Castro-Woodhouse shows how Dara came to play important roles in consolidating links between Bangkok and the northern region. Dara was born in 1873, the daughter of the rulers of the northern kingdom of Chiang Mai. At age nine, Dara was betrothed to King Chulalongkorn (r. 1868–1910). Of