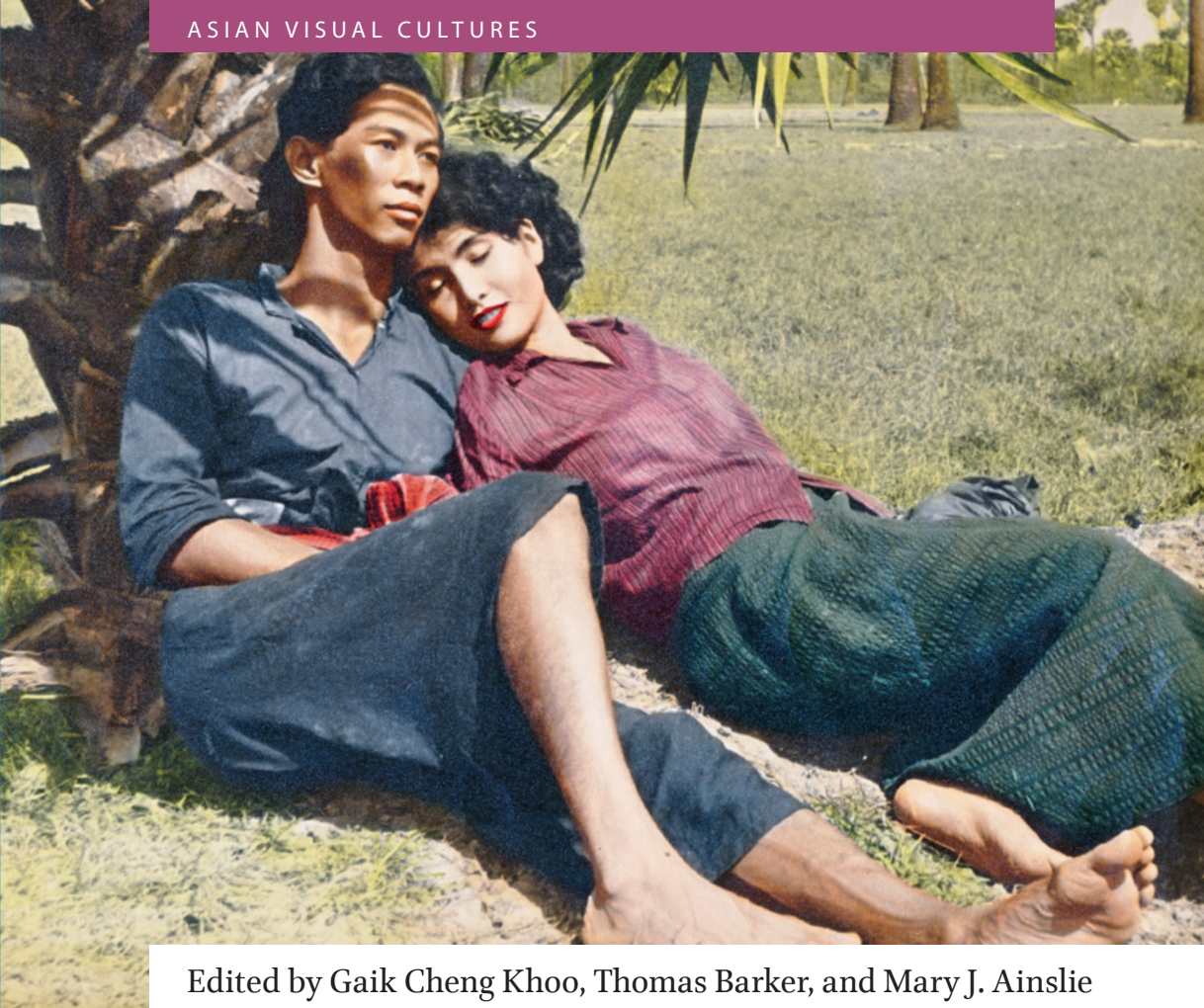


ASIAN VISUAL CULTURES



Edited by Gaik Cheng Khoo, Thomas Barker, and Mary J. Ainslie

Southeast Asia on Screen

From Independence to
Financial Crisis (1945-1998)

Amsterdam
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Southeast Asia on Screen



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Asian Visual Cultures

This series focuses on visual cultures that are produced, distributed and consumed in Asia and by Asian communities worldwide. Visual cultures have been implicated in creative policies of the state and in global cultural networks (such as the art world, film festivals and the Internet), particularly since the emergence of digital technologies. Asia is home to some of the major film, television and video industries in the world, while Asian contemporary artists are selling their works for record prices at the international art markets. Visual communication and innovation is also thriving in transnational networks and communities at the grass-roots level. Asian Visual Cultures seeks to explore how the texts and contexts of Asian visual cultures shape, express and negotiate new forms of creativity, subjectivity and cultural politics. It specifically aims to probe into the political, commercial and digital contexts in which visual cultures emerge and circulate, and to trace the potential of these cultures for political or social critique. It welcomes scholarly monographs and edited volumes in English by both established and early-career researchers.

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Cover illustration: Still from SANTI VINA (Thavi Na Bangchang, 1954), the first Thai feature film shot in colour 35mm

Image courtesy of the Thai Film Archive (Public Organization), Thailand

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Introduction

Southeast Asia on Screen: From Independence to Financial Crisis (1945-1998)

Gaik Cheng Khoo

Throughout the last two decades, there has been a substantial increase in scholarly publications addressing Southeast Asian films and filmmaking (Ciecko 2006; Khoo 2007; Khoo and Harvey 2007; Lim and Yamamoto 2011; Ingawanij and McKay 2011; Baumgärtel 2012; Gimenez 2012; Chee and Lim 2015). Much of this is due to the phenomenal resurgence or revival of film production in the 1990s, beginning with art house films by Eric Khoo and Garin Nugroho, to be followed by younger filmmakers post-1998. The resurgence was the result of a combination of economic, sociopolitical and technological developments. First, the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997 affected economies in the region, with Thailand and Indonesia being hit the hardest with the devaluation of their currencies. Recession affected the region in varying degrees. Short of advertising work, Thai directors of commercials such as Pen-ek Ratanaruang and Nonzee Nimitbutr turned their hand to making feature films, many after returning from studying filmmaking abroad, so sparking the beginning of New Thai Cinema. In Indonesia, the financial crisis triggered sociopolitical unrest leading to President Suharto stepping down after 32 years in power. The end of the New Order era saw the end of restrictions and controls including the dismantling of a film apprenticeship hierarchy that had previously made it difficult for anyone in their 20s to be a director. Similar calls for '*Reformasi*' and mass demonstrations not seen since the 1970s resounded in Malaysia in 1998 with the arrest and detention without trial of Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim. The ending of authoritarianism in Indonesia and the radical spirit of reform infected young filmmakers in Malaysia and Indonesia who, with the added help of new technology (digital cameras), a 'do-it-yourself' sensibility and

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willing friends, began to make films cheaply and with fewer mental, infrastructural and bureaucratic restrictions.

The film revival coincided with developments in technology and the changing mediascapes (Khoo 2007; Lewis 2009; Hernandez 2012). Shooting on digital cameras and being able to edit on a laptop would herald the salvation of the moribund film industry in the Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia and a decade and a half later, the nascent inklings of film production activities in Laos (e.g. Mattie Do's *CHANTALAY*, 2012), Myanmar and even Brunei, where two feature films have been produced and a film school, Mahakarya Institute of the Arts Asia, recently established (Brent 2019). At the same time, the digital revolution enabled the rise of independent filmmakers to make low-budget, art house, experimental and personal films. These are predominantly the films that attracted international art house attention and circulated at international film festivals.

The international success and prominence of contemporary Southeast Asian filmmakers and auteurs such as Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Lav Diaz, Rithy Panh, Anthony Chen and Garin Nugroho, many of whom have won prestigious awards in film festivals in Europe, Asia and elsewhere, also spawned local and international interest, sparking scholarly curiosity. Filipino independent filmmaker Lav Diaz's films screened at top tier festivals while awards include the Golden Leopard at the Locarno International Film Festival in 2014 for *FROM WHAT IS BEFORE*, the Alfred Bauer Prize at the 66th Berlin International Film Festival in 2016 for *A LULLABY TO THE SORROWFUL MYSTERY*, and the Golden Lion at the 73rd Venice International Film Festival for *THE WOMAN WHO LEFT* in 2016. Thai art cinema auteur Apichatpong Weeresethakul and Singaporean filmmaker Anthony Chen have both won top prizes at the Cannes Film Festival. Apichatpong has taken home several awards over the years, beginning with the Prix Un Certain Regard that recognizes young talent and encourages innovative and daring works for *BLISSFULLY YOURS* (2002), then the Jury Prize for *TROPICAL MALADY* in 2004, before landing the prestigious Palme d'Or in 2010 for *UNCLE BOONMEE WHO CAN RECALL HIS PAST LIVES*. Anthony Chen received the Camera d'Or for his debut feature, *ILO ILO* (2013), likewise French Cambodian documentary filmmaker Rithy Panh was awarded the Prix Un Certain Regard for *THE MISSING PICTURE* in 2013. Popular among art cinema circles, the films of Apichatpong, Panh and Diaz have been the subject of retrospectives, academic theses and dissertations (Quandt 2009; Viernes 2012; Mai 2015).



The State of the Discipline

The millennial revival of film industries in the region has therefore, unsurprisingly and rightly, generated much academic attention. However, until very recently, existing research addressing Southeast Asian cinema specifically was still sparse. Roy Armes's book *Third World Film Making and the West* (1987) is perhaps the earliest film book to touch on Southeast Asian cinema, though the relevant chapter lumps East with Southeast Asia, and only briefly covers Burma,¹ Thailand, Malaysia, Philippines and Indonesia. John A. Lent's *The Asian Film Industry* (1990) includes a historical and contemporary account of national industries from Southeast Asia, namely the Philippines, Malaysia and Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand and Burma. A decade later, a slew of publications appeared: notably volumes edited by Jose Lacaba (2000) and David Hanan (2001) while the broader anthology on Asian cinema edited by Vasudev, Padgaonkar and Doraiswamy (2002) provided up-to-date coverage of Southeast Asian national cinemas. Such early publications circulating in English were often the effort of programmers, critics and archivists and were sponsored by regional cultural associations rather than universities and academics.

Similarly, most studies of cinema culture and filmmaking produced within Southeast Asia prior to the late 1990s were contained within the framework of national cinemas, as nation-building and modernity were and continue to be major themes. Even more are produced for domestic audiences in their own languages or, in the case of English publications in the Philippines, are poorly circulated outside of the country. This perhaps reflects the insular nature of these national film industries where, although films were occasionally sent to festivals abroad, producers largely focused upon domestic audiences (Rafael 1995, p. 119). Yet although these films generated discussions and writings among artists and film critics such as J.B. Kristanto (from the 1970s onwards) and Marselli Sumarno (1980s onwards) in the local press, little of this was ultimately translated into English (see Kristanto 2004). Memoirs by film insiders like writer-director turned Indonesian film archivist Misbach Yusa Biran (2008) and Singaporean-born Malay scriptwriter Hamzah Hussin (1997) and Malay director Jamil Sulong (1990), to cite a few, contributed much to fill in the gaps of film history of this period, but again have not travelled widely outside this context. However, there were a few Australian academic studies of serious films by 'idealistic' Indonesian filmmakers who immersed

1 As the government officially changed the country's international name to Myanmar in 1989, we will use 'Burma' prior to that year and 'Myanmar' after. The name use does not reflect a political stance.

themselves not only in the film industry but also in journalism, poetry and theatre – such as Asrul Sani (Allen 2000), Usmar Ismail (Hanan 1992), Teguh Karya and Sjumana Djaya (Sen 1988). In Thailand, much of the hard work conserving and documenting Thai cinema history can be attributed to the diligence of the individual historians and cinephiles working at the Thai film archive, yet again only a small fraction of this information is available in the English language. Likewise in Myanmar, Myanmarese publications of its film history are inaccessible to the English-reading public.

Indeed, publications on cinema by local film academics (rather than film critics, archivists, programmers and journalists) were and still are rare in many Southeast Asian countries. This is because film studies as a discipline was often not offered as a degree programme and many regional governments did not display any interest in cultivating film culture. Governments such as Singapore only began to recognize film's merit as a viable cultural industry worth supporting in the late 1990s, and a full academic degree in film studies is relatively new and still uncommon.² Indeed, in the esteemed National University of Singapore, film studies is only available as a minor. In Thailand, film studies tended to be attached to area studies and was (and still is) part of Thai and Southeast Asian study programmes. The discipline is now embedded in digital and communication-orientated departments; however, a completely film-specific degree is still yet to be launched. As a result, academic scholarship on Southeast Asian cinema continues to be generated in diverse fields such as communications and media, anthropology, sociology, literature, history and even law.³ Even in the Philippines, where a vibrant film culture thrived during the 1970s-1980s (despite or perhaps because of the repressive Marcos regime) and the University of the Philippines Film Institute in Diliman began offering a BA film programme as early as 1984, those who wrote about cinema still tended to be scholars from literary studies and Philippines studies as well as established creative writers.

Instead, it was local scholars studying film abroad which spurred academic writing on film (see Mohamad Hatta Azad Khan 1994; Boonyakul Dunagin 1993). To be sure, according to the former director of the University of the Philippines Film Institute, Rolando Tolentino,⁴ it was only when faculty members returned from graduate studies in the United States in the 1990s

2 This excludes film production degrees. For example, the Institut Kesenian Jakarta (Jakarta Institute of the Arts, IKJ) was established in 1970 and the Department of Film and Television began the following year.

3 Specifically film censorship laws, see Saw (2013).

4 Email correspondence with Khoo, 15 November 2018.



that a clear discipline in Philippine film studies eventually developed. This is less true for Indonesia, where film production degrees were offered by the Jakarta Arts Institute (est. 1970). But again, despite this active film industry, it took another fifteen years for Salim Said's 1976 dissertation conducted at the Sociology Department at the University of Indonesia – one of the few academic studies addressing Southeast Asian (specifically Indonesian) film – to be published in English by the Lontar Foundation, thanks to John McGlynn, a leading translator of Indonesian literature into English (Said 1991).

This situation is also compounded by the general tendency to homogenize the Asia region, and specifically to amalgamate Southeast Asia with other more dominant parts of Asia. In the contemporary context, the dominant focus on cinemas in East Asia and South Asia means that there are few collections focusing solely on Southeast Asian cinema and films (Braunlein and Lauser 2016; Magnan-Park, Marchetti and Tan 2018). Most of the time, articles on cinema in this region are corralled under 'East Asia' or become token representations of cinema in the region (Eleftheriotis and Needham 2006; Choi and Wada-Marciano 2009).

Putting aside geography and the size of economies, however, perhaps the sheer diversity of the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), with their different colonial histories, traditions, ethnic groups, languages, regional powers and borders that have shifted many times throughout the last century, may also account for the difficulty of pulling together writings on cinema in an English (or French) language volume. The uneven and disrupted nature of cinema development and culture among the different nations which have undergone war and civil strife (Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Burma/Myanmar) or the small population size (Brunei) have also meant that more academic research has been conducted on the cinema of certain countries than others. This much is reflected in our anthology where the call for papers drew mostly essays on Indonesia and the Philippines, with none from Brunei, Laos or Cambodia, countries where nascent independent filmmaking activities are only now appearing (Hamilton 2006; Starrs 2016; Norindr 2018).

For all these reasons, and aside from tomes focusing specifically on national cinemas (Ainslie and Ancuta 2018; Lim 2018; Campos 2016; Barker 2019 among the most recent), research addressing Southeast Asian cinema tends to focus upon the contemporary period and there is very little addressing the historical period before 1997-1998. Thus, this book aims to fill a major and timely gap in extant research through revisiting Southeast Asian cinema following the end of World War II, a significant period after which many of such nations gained national independence, and up until the Asian



Financial Crisis of 1997-1998. A university course devoted to Southeast Asian cinema anywhere in the world would be considered a luxury at a time when arts programmes are shrinking and specialized film courses make way for broader ones like 'World Cinema' or 'Asian Cinema' in which the teaching of national cinemas from China, Japan, India and Korea would likely dominate. At the University of Nottingham, we are therefore very lucky to have been among the few academics and institutions to have been able to convene an undergraduate course on Southeast Asian cinema. It is through teaching this course that the idea for this volume first emerged, when specific trends, figures and themes became notable and parallel, eventually coalescing into a cultural narrative that reflects the complex history of this region.

That said, this anthology does not purport to be a textbook that provides distinct national film histories. There are already many existing works that cover more comprehensive national film histories and in much more depth (Ainslie and Ancuta 2018; Barker 2019; Campos 2016; David 1990; Deocampo 2003 and 2011; Deocampo and Yuson 1985; Hassan Muthalib 2013; Heider 1991; Khoo 2006; Lumbera 1997; Millet 2006; Ngo 2007; Sen 1994; Uhde and Uhde 2010; Van der Heide 2002). Instead, this volume aims to focus on specific periods, popular films and key figures that slice across post-World War II Southeast Asian national cinemas to ask how film industries re-generate against a backdrop of war, (post)colonialism and, ultimately, recovery. The chapters address counter-narratives told on screen and interrogate how 'the national popular' is both imagined and represented, highlighting obedient state-aligned depictions as well as subtle critical responses and the wider transnational trends impacting across the region (Barker and Imanjaya; Siddique). In some cases, films which capture the political socio-economic zeitgeist of the times act as cultural texts and ciphers for readers in understanding local anxieties (Siddique; Yngvesson and Alarilla), or the hopes and dreams that modernity or independence and revolution promised for the poor and for women (Khuankaew; Sebastampillai; Nguyen). Bringing together scholars across the region addressing this subject, chapters explore the conditions that have given rise to today's burgeoning Southeast Asian cinemas as well as the gaps that manifest as temporal belatedness and historical disjunctures in the more established regional industries.

The Long History of Film in Southeast Asia

While an overview of Southeast Asian film history is a necessary part of introducing this volume, it is difficult to characterize an overall narrative



associated with film in this region. The decades of boom and bust in each country do not tend to coincide: some film industries modernized much faster than others, while some were held back by war and poverty, or had governments that supported and/or restricted the film industry in various ways. It is certainly true, however, that the development of cinema, film production and cinema culture were all impacted by similar global technological developments as well as the military and ideological wars waged across the region. The impacts of changing demographics and global pop culture are also common themes, with the creation of the middle classes, youth culture and counterculture all manifesting at various times in various ways. For Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos, however, their millennial film renaissance is only now currently in its nascent stages, abetted by film festivals and filmmaking workshops and crowdfunding, all of which are producing new and exciting developments which promise to further the rich history of filmmaking in this region.

Going back to the early beginnings of cinema, Southeast Asia was never far behind the rest of the world technologically; as a region historically known for its strategic location on the monsoon trade route, film arrived relatively quickly after its invention. In 1897, less than two years after the Lumière brothers screened their short films to audiences in Paris, foreign travelling exhibitors brought film as an entertainment novelty and screenings were organized in cosmopolitan cities such as Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Manila, Bangkok and also throughout Java (Tofighian 2013, p. 13). While initially targeted at the elites and colonials, the medium was also popular with local audiences. At first, exhibitors screened silent, black-and-white European or American short films, newsreels and documentaries, but the desire to see images of one's own culture up on the silver screen spawned the first locally made silent film in 1919 (the Filipino *DALAGANG BUKID* [Country Maiden], José Nepomuceno). This was followed by more in the 1920s, including the Burmese-made *MYITTA NE THUYA* (Love and Liquor, Ohn Maung, 1920), *NANG SAO SUWAN* (Miss Suwanna of Siam, Henry MacRae, 1923) from Thailand, the French-made *KIM VAN KIEU* (A.E. Famechon, 1924), *LOETOENG KASAROENG* (L. Heuveldorp and G. Krugers, 1926) from the Dutch East Indies, and from Singapore *XIN KE* (The New Immigrant, Guo Chaowen, 1927).

Early cinema history in the region was not so different from other parts of the world, with both local entrepreneurs, diasporic populations and foreigners setting up cinema halls and film production companies and studios by the 1930s in British Burma and Malaya, the Dutch East Indies, Vietnam and Thailand, while the Filipino film industry thrived from its close colonial connections with America and Hollywood. Screenings not only occurred indoors within



built theatres but were also included as outdoor entertainment in fair grounds, circuses, funerals and travelling shows, taking place alongside a range of other activities, such as musical or dance performances, shadow puppetry, boxing matches (in Thailand) and games in night fairs (Tofighian 2013; Ainslie 2017). Films toured the countryside, too, visiting rural towns, villages and rubber plantations where again they were screened outdoors (Teh 2019), sometimes accompanied by live dubbers, as was the case in Thailand (Ainslie 2017).

However, the outbreak of World War II and the subsequent Japanese Occupation halted many film activities in the region. Japanese film companies took over the exhibition halls that had begun to spring up, and screened Japanese films instead of the now established diet of imported Hollywood movies. Many existing local production companies were shut down and film equipment confiscated to make Japanese propaganda films. These mostly took the form of educational films and newsreels but one or two feature-length films were commissioned in collaboration with local directors: two in the Philippines, *DAWN OF FREEDOM* (Abe Yutaka and Gerardo de León, 1944) and *TATLONG MARIA* (Gerardo de León, 1944); and the films directed by Indonesian Rustam Sutan Palindih, *BERDJOANG* (To Fight, 1943) and *DI DESA* (At the Village, 1944). The Thai Prime Minister, Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram (1938-1943 and 1948-1957) formed an alliance with Japan and produced nationalist films through the Thai Film Company, a studio bought by the Royal Thai Air Force in 1942 (Chaiworaporn 2002, p. 446). These propaganda films made under the aegis of the Greater Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere were intended to awaken anti-colonial sentiments towards the European colonizers, sentiments that were expressed, when the war ended, through outright declarations of independence and the local production of nationalist films.

One by one nationalist leaders declared independence from their former colonizers: Vietnam and Indonesia in 1945, the Philippines in 1946, and Burma in 1948, though not without the French and Dutch putting up some resistance. Other Southeast Asian countries gained independence in the 1950s, the French giving up Cambodia in 1953 and then Laos in 1954. Only in Malaya and Singapore where British rule was considerably less oppressive compared to the more recent ruthless rule of the Japanese did independence eventuate in 1957 and much later for Brunei in 1984. Films that emerged from the Singapore studios notably did not generally challenge the British regime or display political consciousness, largely because they were owned by Chinese businessmen who did not want to jeopardize their position. At this time, the chairman of the Censorship Board was an Englishman and the British did not tolerate criticism of their policies, so it is no surprise that

there were hardly any expressions of anti-colonial sentiment in Malay films during the 1950s (Hassan Muthalib 2013, p. 47).

That said, the film medium was recognized by political leaders in other parts of the region as an effective medium of communication for nationalist goals and was thus harnessed to that end. Indonesia's first nationalist film, *DARAH DAN DOA* (*THE LONG MARCH*, Usmar Ismail, 1950), centred on the trials and tribulations of the captain of the Siliwangi division; Burma produced a black-and-white documentary, *OUR UNION* (Public Relations Film Service, 1948), and attempts were made to start a fully fledged industry with newly formed governments investing in film production, especially in socialist nations like Burma and Vietnam (see Ferguson, this volume, Chapter 3; Ngo 2002, p. 485). The Vietnam Revolutionary Government set up a Section of Cinema and Photography in the Ministry of Information and Propaganda soon after Ho Chi Minh proclaimed the birth of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in September 1945. In 1953, Ho signed Decree No. 147/SL to establish the Vietnam Movie and Photography Enterprise and five film studios were established (four in the north and one in the south centred in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, respectively), mostly producing documentaries and revolutionary films concentrating on the war.

In countries where commercial filmmaking was already in existence prior to the war, like the Philippines, the studios quickly returned to business, churning out populist genres like melodramas, costume epics, fantasies and *komik* adaptations (see Arriola, this volume, Chapter 2). Immediate post-World War II films focused on the impact of the war and characters trying to rebuild their lives from among the ruins. Themes about war veterans shot in a neorealist style emerged, notable among them being Lamberto Avellana's classic *ANAK DALITA* (*The Ruins*, 1956) and the Indonesian *LEWAT DJAM MALAM* (*AFTER THE CURFEW*, 1954), helmed by a freedom fighter, Usmar Ismail, and scripted by Asrul Sani, both pioneers of Indonesian cinema.

If there was anything positive to be gained from the Japanese Occupation from the perspective of cinema, it was the film training native Southeast Asians received as well as the impact of screenings of the Japanese masters such as Ozu, Kurosawa and Mizoguchi on fledgling local directors like P. Ramlee in Malaya and Singapore, who continued to watch their films after the war. Film critics have observed how Kurosawa's tracking shot in *RASHOMON* (1951) is replicated in *SEMERAH PADI* (1956); how Ramlee paid homage to SANSHIRO SUGATA (1943) in *PENDEKAR BUJANG LAPOK* (*The Three Bachelor Warriors*, 1959) and *KANCHAN TIRANA* (1968); or placed the camera close to the floor (Ozu's *tatami* shot) for scenes necessitated culturally when characters are sitting on the floor (*BUJANG LAPOK*, *Worn Out Bachelors*,

1957); and the '*mambang pulut*' (spirit of the sticky rice) scene in *NASIB DO RE MI* (The Fate of Do Re Mi, 1966). In Thai film history, the influence of the Japanese *benshi* on live dubbing can be traced back to 1928 when it was adapted for silent films to compete with the coming of sound films. Silent films were accompanied by live dubbers (one male, one female) who, as in traditional forms of Thai theatre, narrated the film and often improvised dialogue for characters (Chaiworaporn 2002, p. 444). A uniquely Thai case, live dubbing was to continue in the post-war decades when the shortage of 35mm film stock forced filmmakers to shoot on surplus wartime 16mm black-and-white newsreel stock. Live dubbing, an art unto itself that made stars of dubbers, lasted into the 1970s so that a filmmaker like Ratana Pestonji who made strictly 35mm films in the 1950s-1960s stood out (see Ainslie, this volume, Chapter 8).

Without a doubt Cold War politics played a significant role over local film production and consumption through the ideological war for hearts and minds, and via the distribution of Hollywood films. In Thailand, despite the military coup that brought strongman Phibunsongkhram back to power in 1948 after being acquitted for war crimes and colluding with the Axis powers, Hollywood was happy to do business, setting up representative distribution offices in Bangkok (Sukwong 2013, p. 105). The United States Information Service (USIS), a development and aid agency established in Thailand, also had a film division arm that distributed newsreels and made anti-communist, pro-American propaganda films. The United States saw Thailand as a military ally after the formation of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO, established in 1954 and based in Bangkok), formed to block further communist gains in the region, of which the Philippines was the only other Southeast Asian member. Both countries used their military and economic ties with the United States not only to stem the tide of communism in neighbouring countries but also domestically, blocking insurrection from the Hukbalahap in the Philippines and Thai farmers in the north. Film was a useful ideological tool in the fight against communism and Philippine national filmmaker Lamberto Avellana directed films produced by LVN that supported the government propaganda against the communists: *KOREA* (1951), *KONTRABANDO* (Contraband, 1952), and some LVN-produced films that were jointly produced with USIS in 1953: *YAMAN NG DUKHA* (Wealth of the Poor), *NOT BY BREAD ALONE*, *MAGINOONG MAMAMAYAN* (Noble/Honourable Citizen), *SA HIRAP NG GINHAWA* (In the Difficulty/Poverty of Prosperity), and *HUK SA BAGONG PAMUMUHAY* (Huk in the New Life/Livelihood) (Benitez 2010, p. 29 n. 28). One of the effects of Cold War politics in Indonesia was the reduction of local film production from 65 films

in 1955 to a mere 14 in 1965, caused by high import taxes on film stock, an exorbitant 200 per cent increase – and the Sukarno government allowing each province to import films that strangled local filmmaking, the latter considered ideological vehicles for non-communist parties (Sumarno and Achmas 2002, p. 155). With the deterioration of the economy and rising inflation, few could afford to go to the cinemas let alone make films.

Over the span of half a century, film industries in Southeast Asia underwent booms and busts shaped by unique domestic conditions as well as global influences. The golden era of films mostly referred to the time when film industries were dominated by studios and produced both quantity and within that, some quality films: in the 1950s in Burma, Singapore – considered the heart of Malay films, Philippines (350 films a year), Thailand and to a more limited extent, Indonesia (averaging 37 films a year during the 1950s). The Philippines had four large studios that dominated the industry: LVN Pictures, Sampaguita Pictures, Premiere Productions and Lebran International, which produced socially relevant films as well as specialized in various types: action, rural comedies, musicals and super productions. The 1950s was also a time of great Filipino directors like Manuel Conde whose film *GENGHIS KHAN* screened at Venice Film Festival in 1952 and was cited for technical achievement; and Gerardo de León (no relation to Mike de Leon) whose serious films from this era – *SISA* (1951), *SANDA WONG*, *IFUGAO* (both 1955), *PEDRO PENDUKO* (1956), and the literary *NOLI ME TANGERE* (*Touch Me Not*, 1961) and *EL FILIBUSTERISMO* (1962), the latter two adaptations from national hero José Rizal's anti-colonial novels, were later overshadowed in the West by the co-directed cheap cult horror movies he made with Eddie Romero for the American market: *TERROR IS A MAN* (1959), *THE BLOOD DRINKERS* aka *BLOOD IS THE COLOR OF NIGHT* (1964), *CURSE OF THE VAMPIRES* aka *WHISPER TO THE WIND* (1966), *BRIDES OF BLOOD* (1968) and *MAD DOCTOR OF BLOOD ISLAND* (1969) (Holcomb 2005) (more in Barker and Imanjaya, this volume, Chapter 11). Compared to the 1950s, Francia was to characterize Philippine cinema of the 1960s as 'generally unremarkable' (2002, p. 348), driven mainly by commercialism in the form of imitation secret agent films (see Siddique, this volume, Chapter 12), Westerns, teenage jukebox musicals which propelled Nora Aunor to stardom (see Sebastiampillai, this volume, Chapter 10) and 'sex films' (*bomba* in the Philippines).

The 1960s was marked by major geopolitical changes: General Ne Win staged a coup in Burma in 1962; Malaysia was formed in 1963 and then split with Singapore two years later; the Gulf of Tonkin Incident occurred in 1964, triggering the Vietnam War; the 1965 coup in Indonesia disempowered the communist-friendly Sukarno and heralded the rise of strongman Suharto;

and in the same year, pro-American politician Ferdinand Marcos became president of the Philippines. All these had implications on the film industries. For Burma, the Ne Win coup heralded an era of censorship that impeded the freedom of expression on screen due to control over film scripts. Likewise, economic instability, ideological agendas and inflation from the Sukarno period coupled with the 1965 abortive coup and the mass killings of communists (and those deemed communists) affected production, shrinking the annual output to between sixteen and seventeen films a year. The separation of Singapore and Malaysia in 1965 saw many actors moving to Kuala Lumpur and the loss of the Indonesian market due to the Indonesia-Malaysia confrontation (1963-1966) (Hassan Muthalib 2013). Combined with labour-management conflicts, the coming of television, competition from higher quality imported films (not only from Hollywood but also from Hong Kong and India), the end of the Malay Golden Studio years was nigh as both of the main studios, the Shaw Brothers (Malay Film Productions, 1937-1967) and Cathay-Keris (1953-1973), closed.

If the 1960s spelled a period of nascent dictatorial regimes in the making, the 1970s saw the slow fruition of their policies and ambitions. Dictatorships were sometimes conducive to film production, if only to keep the masses sedated with harmless entertainment. In Indonesia, the authoritarian but economic stability of the New Order period saw two ensuing decades of a boom in the local film industry, averaging over 70 films a year from the 1970s to early 1990s (thanks to a stimulus package introduced in the late 1960s). This was accompanied by more systematic control over the film industry through censorship, regulation and political interference. The films mostly spanned commercial themes and genres – horror, drama, legendary folklore, mysticism, with sex triumphing at the box office and in quantity. Urban settings for romances and family dysfunction were common themes for this era of increasing migration to the city to find work in the industries and service sector, and what migration and induction into the workforce for women meant to families. This is also true of films from Thailand (as manifested in the BOONCHU series explored in Khuankaew, this volume, Chapter 13), Malaysia and the Philippines and reflected the governments' economic and social shifts from agriculture to industrialization (manufacturing, services) and with it, massive urbanization and development, though at varying states across the region and archipelago.

The cumulative effects of development (especially its uneven nature) under authoritarian and/or military regimes also led to social unrest and revolution in the 1970s in Thailand and the Philippines. Exposure to ideas about liberal democracy in school, concerns about Thailand's close relationship with



the United States and its involvement in the Vietnam War coupled with the encroaching Westernization (youth counterculture) that came with socio-economic development all undermined notions of traditional Thai obeisance to monarchical and hierarchical order. Students, workers, farmers and some of the middle class took to the streets and ultimately forced the regime out in 1973, moving Thailand towards a moderate civilian government. The uprising 'shook the whole [film] industry. Afterwards it was as if an epidemic, not of disease but of freedom, had broken out,' explains Dome Sukwong, director of the Thai Film Archive (Chaiworaporn 1996). The period from 1973 to 1976 was one of experimental democracy in Thailand which abruptly ended when students protested the return of former Prime Minister Thanom (forced to flee in 1973) and when the military and right-wing forces stormed Thammasat University on 6 October 1976, shot unarmed students, lynched them and even burnt them alive for supposed treachery (Wyatt 2003, p. 292). Most notable from this period is the black-and-white 16mm docudrama made by the Isan Film Group, *TONGPAN* (1976) that captured some of that experimentation with democracy that occurred as university students went to rural Thailand to meet farmers and to discuss the impact of a dam being built in a seminar. The film was banned from cinemas for its socialist message and was only released on VCD in 2006.

The tumultuous events of this period led to the emergence of political films even as liberalization also simultaneously saw the rise of sex and violence in local films. According to Chaiworaporn (1996), 'many socially aware movies' were conceived in these three short years but 'few saw the light of day' due to the crackdown in 1976 where 46 official deaths went uninvestigated (no one was ever charged). Notable was the emergence of a younger generation of filmmakers: among them Euthana Mukdasanit, a student activist who was one of the directors of *TONGPAN* and who is best known for his acclaimed drama *PHISUEA LAE DOKMAI* (*BUTTERFLY AND FLOWERS*, 1985), set in the Muslim south of Thailand; and the more prolific Prince Chatrichalerm Yukol, whose second film *HIS NAME IS KARN* (*Khao Chue Karn*, 1973) about corruption in the civil service kicked off the issue-oriented films he made throughout the 1970s into the 1990s. However, with regards to technological changes, the 1970s in Thai film history also kicked off with two films whose commercial success (the musical *MONRAK LUKTHUNG*, Rangsee Tassanapayak, 1970) and critical acclaim (*TONE*, Piak Poster, 1970) signalled the end of 16mm dubbed films and the movement to (now financially viable) 35mm synchronized-sound filmmaking.

The social ferment of the 1970s was felt acutely in the Philippines when Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law in 1972. A younger generation of



filmmakers who were university educated, more intellectually inclined and conscious about the role that film as art could play in Philippines society began the New Wave of filmmaking that stretched into the early 1990s. Led by film activist Lino Brocka, they offered films that were far removed from the escapist fare of the 1960s and 1970s, films that portrayed issues faced by the working class, life in the slums (Brocka's *INSIANG*, 1976), the exploitation of workers, women, the naïve migrant from the provinces to the city (Brocka's *MANILA IN THE CLAWS OF LIGHT*, 1976), drug addiction (Bernal's *MANILA BY NIGHT* aka *CITY AFTER DARK*, 1980), politicized or radicalized anti-Marcos characters (Marilou Diaz-Abaya's *MORAL*, 1982; Brocka's *BAYAN KO* aka *BAYAN KO: MY OWN COUNTRY*, 1984; Mike de Leon's *SISTER STELLA L.*, 1984) and the hypocrisy of the elites. Combining elements of melodrama that centred around the middle-class family, Brocka was able to draw parallels between the corrupt patriarch of the family to the morally corrupt authoritarian national father, Marcos, in films like *YOU'VE BEEN JUDGED AND FOUND WANTING* (*TINIMBANG KA NGUNIT KULANG*, 1974). Other notable New Wave directors included Ishmael Bernal, Marilou Diaz-Abaya, and Mike de Leon (see Campos, this volume, Chapter 9). The issues faced by New Wave directors continued to pervade into the 1980s despite the ostensible lifting of martial law in 1981. This included censorship of films that were deemed subversive and that could undermine viewers' faith in the state rather than sex and violence. The Concerned Artists of the Philippines (CAP) charged that a host of sex films escaped the censors as if to divert the attention from the crisis facing the nation (Francia 2002, p. 352). Brocka, who made over 50 films, was successful in blurring the line between independent film and commercial films in his works at a time when sexploitation films were common.

In retrospect, while censorship is a perennial issue, only varying in degree over time and in the various nations, significant films of social and artistic merit have been made under conditions of martial law. In the Philippines, film became a pet project for Imelda Marcos, who created the Experimental Cinema of the Philippines and the Manila International Film Festival to showcase Philippine modernity to the world in the early 1980s (see Barker and Imanjaya, this volume, Chapter 11). This craving for global recognition on the part of developing nations allowed for certain films that were critical of their governments to appear at international film festivals and to even win prizes, though not without some interference from authorities: the title of Ishmael Bernal's *MANILA BY NIGHT* was changed to *CITY AFTER DARK* to avoid overtly naming the city that Bernal had portrayed so negatively. The film's ending was also altered before it was sent to the 1981 Berlin

Film Festival. Some of Brocka's most critical films were smuggled out of the country to avoid censorship: *MACHO DANCER* (1988), *ORAPRONOBIS* (*FIGHT FOR US*, 1989) and *GUMAPANG A SA LUSAK* (*Dirty Affair*, 1990). The significance of Brocka and his contemporaries to Philippine film history and culture is apparent through the work of digital independent filmmakers in the post-2000s (such as Lav Diaz), who make historical films that pay homage to Brocka, political films and the Marcos period.

In Indonesia, meanwhile, by the 1980s the censorship laws under Suharto's New Order government were likewise increasingly restrictive, and scripts had to be approved before shooting. Nevertheless, censorship also encouraged directors to be more creative, evident in Nya Abbas Akup's film *MATT DOWER* (1969), which functions as a political allegory of the struggle between Sukarno and Suharto in the interim years between the 1965 October coup and 1968, when Suharto assumed the presidency (Hanan 2009). Akup couched social and political satire under the guise of working-class comedies and the genre of the sex film in *INEM PELAYAN SEXY* (*INEM THE SEXY MAID*, 1976), which uncovers the systemic snobbery and sexism of the upper class towards the lower classes. According to film director and screen writer Imam Tantowi, filmmakers during this period had little means to express their creativity, so it was through exploitation films such as *JAKA SEMBUNG* (*THE WARRIOR*, Sisworo Gautama Putra, 1981) and *GOLOK SETAN* (*DEVIL'S SWORD*, Ratno Timoer, 1984) that they could quietly resist the repressive system (Imanjaya 2016). Villains in these films symbolized the New Order government and their defeat was roundly applauded by viewers.

If the 1980s were Indonesia's era of golden cinema, it was also partially due to the lack of competition from television. The state had a monopoly and there was only one station, TVRI 1, until 1989. Thereafter, the emergence and proliferation of private television stations, satellite and cable television in the 1990s spelled doom for film production, which went on a downward trend from 115 productions in 1989 to 25 in 1999. In Thailand, competition from television and VHS began a decade earlier, during the 1980s, as people stayed at home to watch rented videos and television instead of attending films in cinemas, which as a result of fewer audiences, began to close down. What sustained the film industry was the very lucrative (and often overlooked) development of an industry of teen-orientated productions which then quickly laid the foundation for a network of urban cinemas (cineplexes) beginning from 1996 that was to prove the eventual stepping stone towards the post-1990s internationally competent industry of today (Ainslie 2018).

Across Southeast Asia, a growing network of cineplexes then sprouted, targeting the consumer middle class by combining cinema viewing with

shopping and eating out. This began first with the Ali Mall in the Philippines in 1976, then in Indonesia, with Cinema 21 in 1987 and during the 1990s more sprouted up across Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia. With the proliferation of satellite and cable channels at this time, this was one way to draw audiences back to the big screen, though local films faced tough competition from imported products.

In the Philippines, meanwhile, the passing of film giants Lino Brocka in an accident in 1991 and Ishmael Bernal in 1996 created a void that could not really be filled by younger filmmakers in terms of defining a 'vision.' Other factors like formulaic filmmaking, the 30 per cent tax on gross revenues coupled by a 12 per cent value-added tax introduced in the 1990s (Dorsch 2018) eventually took a toll on the industry. Film production was down to between 30 and 50 films by the late 1990s. At this time, Regal Films produced *pito-pito* (seven-seven) films to supply to the cable channels: so cheap (7 million Philippine pesos, US\$137,120 today) that it would supposedly take only seven days to shoot and another seven days for post-production (Tolentino 2014, p. 8). Such brutal conditions culminated in a major slump before the digital independents arose.

In contrast to the Philippines, Malaysia saw improvements to filmmaking quality at this time, with the emergence of a new generation of trained filmmakers. Cinema in the late 1960s and into the 1970s was dominated by Hong Kong and Indonesian films or those by the Malay studio veterans, which were famous for inane dialogue, weak plots and poor directing. Filmmaking attempts by independent Malay producers in the 1970s were short-lived as the films were of comparatively poorer quality compared to the Indonesian imports and thus lacked audiences, with many established production companies ultimately making only one film. Only Sabah Film Productions was savvy enough to attract local audiences with its comedies, *KELUARGA SI COMAT* (Comat's Family, Aziz Sattar, 1975) and the first of the *BADOL* (Hussein Abu Hassan, 1978) series. By the early 1980s, local television had become a viable training ground for young filmmakers as made-for-TV dramas were then shot on 16mm (Hassan Muthalib 2013, p. 102). The film industry was also starting to see frustration expressed by a new generation of educated filmmakers and critics towards the continuing formulaic nature of films, including from Nasir Jani, Rahim Razali, Mansor Puteh (who made the first modernist Malaysian film, *SEMAN*, in 1986), Anuar Nor Arai and Othman Hafsham (who conceived the first multi-ethnic Malaysian film *MEKANIK*, 1983). In the 1990s, another set of filmmakers emerged: Shuhaimi Baba, Aziz M. Osman, Adman Salleh, and the most international of them all, U-Wei Haji Saari, whose telemovie *KAKI BAKAR*

(*The Arsonist*, 1995) was screened under the *Un Certain Regard* category at Cannes. Similarly, Singaporean filmmaker Eric Khoo whose films *MEE POK MAN* (1995) and *12 STOREYS* (1997) would also set the international stage for younger Singaporean filmmakers (some of whose debut features he helped produce) to follow; and further down south, Indonesian Garin Nugroho, who also helped mentor an upcoming generation of digital independents in the post-millennium, stood out for his art cinema style and oblique storytelling.

If much has not been said about Vietnam, this is because its documentaries and fictional features travelled in a different festival circuit defined by Cold War ideology: to Eastern bloc festivals like Leipzig, Moscow and Karlovy Vary. However, the economic renovation (*Đổi Mới*) in 1986 – which meant reduction of state subsidies for local filmmaking – subsequently shifted focus from the ideological and formal properties of state-funded cinema towards commercial film production. As elsewhere in the region, film production also suffered due to competition from television and video: fewer than a dozen films a year were made as Vietnamese home viewers preferred to rent pirated American films (Mydans 1996). By the 1990s, cultural liberalization saw overseas Vietnamese, such as Tran Anh Hung (*THE SCENT OF GREEN PAPAYA*, 1993) and Tony Bui, returning especially to the south to make films that opened up the way for more returning Vietnamese American filmmakers to work in the Vietnam industry in the post-2000s. This also sparked wider curiosity and international interest in local Vietnamese films and filmmaking, sometimes in veteran filmmakers such as Viet Linh (Tarr 2014). Nevertheless, the gap between serious art filmmakers and the more commercial tastes of its urban young viewers – manifested most clearly when *LONG-LEGGED GIRLS* (Vu Ngoc Dang) beat the lavish *MEMORIES OF DIEN BIEN PHU* (Do Minh Tuan) at the box office in 2004 – would soon bring the issues of the Vietnamese film industry closer in line with the rest of the countries covered above (Duong 2012, p. 152).

Structure of the Volume

In an attempt to further interrogate this complex and diverse regional history, this collection picks up the threads of existing scholarship on cinema in Southeast Asia, addressing transnational film production, representations of gender, the pervasive effects of the Cold War, and serious engagement with modernity from a postcolonial and/or anti-colonial position. Such themes are split into three main sections, with each also roughly corresponding to a historical period. Section 1 begins by outlining the immediate context of



nation-building in the post-war era of Southeast Asian independence, when the power of film as a national tool could be harnessed in the midst of the studio boom or the 'golden eras' of film. These films and film styles highlight hybrid forms and present sites of counter-discourse while also addressing issues of nationalism and military rule, in particular how an increasingly restrictive climate around the Cold War impacted upon filmmaking in the region and shaped cinematic content and ideological depictions. Section 2 explores the importance of key individuals within Southeast Asian film history, mostly filmmakers often lauded as auteurs and associated with more serious filmmaking but of whom there is surprisingly little written in English. Reclaiming such figures in the contemporary era is also a means to form a more artistic historical trajectory of filmmaking in the region and to recognize the legacies of these filmmakers, which live on in those they had trained or mentored, and in the intertextual referencing of their films. The final section moves into the 1970s and 1980s to focus on 'popular pleasures,' addressing the transnational genre of exploitation cinema and the mass production of films that have often been denigrated as 'trashy' yet are an important part, contributors argue, of laying the foundations for contemporary cinematic development in this region.

Many of the authors in this collection are scholars who themselves have produced or are in the midst of producing forthcoming work on the region's cinema (Ainslie and Ancuta 2018; Barker 2019; Ferguson on Burmese cinema; Siddique on Singapore). In particular, the collection importantly highlights a younger group of academics who are casting new light upon Southeast Asian filmmaking from the 1950s to 1980s, framing such productions via fresh theoretical approaches and finally giving early filmmakers the critical attention they deserve (see Campos; Hanan and Soehadi). As a whole, the collection seeks to tap into the current global interest on millennial digital cinema from the region and to suggest earlier points of entry into cinema that have so far been neglected by scholars. This retrospective analysis of older films contextualizes today's post-1997 industries, suggesting that particular themes, styles and developments have a long and prevalent historical precedent. It also suggests that archival research can yield fascinating new information about film personalities caught between politics, art and entertainment. Lastly, we humbly acknowledge the limitations of this book, with regard to the lack of representation of female filmmakers generally, and any essays on Cambodia, Laos, and Brunei. In the spirit of critical film enquiry, we welcome future Southeast Asian film collections to continue to excavate this rich past.

For some Malay, Indonesian, Burmese and Thai names, the cultural custom is to refer to first or given names, since the second name is either



non-existent or not a surname but the father's name. Also, sometimes what seems like the first name is actually an honorific. The chapters will observe the appropriate cultural custom. Thus, the ordering of names in the bibliography will follow the name in the in-text citation.

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