

**Thai Cinema as National Cinema:
An Evaluative History**

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary educational institution

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Abstract

This dissertation considers Thai cinema as a national text. It portrays and analyses Thai film from the introduction of cinema to Thailand during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910) up until the present day (2004).

At its core, this thesis adopts the ideas of Higson, O'Regan and Dissanayake in considering the cultural negotiation of cinema and the construction of nation. In this study of Thai National Cinema two principal methods are employed—economic and text-based. In terms of political economy Thai National Cinema is explored through the historical development of the local film industry, the impact of imported cinema, taxation, censorship and government policy, and the interplay between vertically and horizontally integrated media businesses. Special attention is paid to the evolving and dynamic role of the ruling class in the local film industry. The dissertation's text-based analyses concern the social and ideological contexts of these national productions in order to consider extant characteristics of Thai nationhood and how these are either reflected or problematised in Thai Cinema.

Of particular relevance is this dissertation's emphasis on three resilient and potent signifiers of Thai identity—nation, religion, and monarchy—and their interrelationship and influence in the development of Thai National Cinema. These three 'pillars' of Thai society form the basis for organising an understanding of the development of Thai cinematic tradition, now over a century old. This thesis argues that any discussion of the historical, or current, development of Thai National Cinema must accommodate the pervasive role that these three principal forms of national identity play in formulating

Thai society, culture, and politics. The recent challenges of globalisation and postmodernism, as well as the rise of an educated middle-class, provide opportunity for reconceptualizing the relevance of these three pillars. In this way Thai National Cinema can be considered a useful barometer in both reflecting and promoting the construction of Thai identity and thought.

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