

*Asian Educational Media Service and
The Center for East Asian and Pacific Studies Present:*

Asian Film Festival 2007:
Southeast Asian Popular Cinema

November 9 - 10, 2007



Indonesia

Love For Share

Thailand

Citizen Dog

USA/Cambodia

Out of the Poison Tree

Philippines

Milan

Malaysia

Sepet

Singapore

Singapore Dreaming

Boardman's Art Theatre

126 W. Church Street
Champaign, Illinois



ILLINOIS
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Welcome!

On behalf of the Center for East Asian and Pacific Studies (EAPS) and the Asian Educational Media Service (AEMS), welcome to our fifth annual Asian Film Festival.

In 2007 we feature Southeast Asian film for the first time, hoping to bring more attention to this fascinating region of the world. To reflect (at least on a small scale) the incredible diversity of Southeast Asia, films from several different countries have been selected by our Asian Film Festival Committee (see below)—feature films from Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand, and a documentary film on Cambodia—engaging many aspects of life in contemporary Southeast Asia.

Many of the international films that we have the opportunity to see here in the United States were created with the international film festival circuit heavily in mind. In this festival, we aim to bring you films that were created primarily for their home markets, where they have enjoyed popular success. These are films by and for Southeast Asians, which we hope will be equally appreciated in Central Illinois.

It so happens that all five feature films this year deal with issues of contemporary urban life in cosmopolitan Southeast Asia. Rapidly growing, modern cities are in fact a prominent feature of the region, crossroads for transnational, multiethnic, and rural-urban encounters, sites for negotiation of changing gender, class and national identities. It is also noteworthy that four of the five feature films, as well as the documentary film, were directed by women.

The Asian Film Festival is the result of the contributions of many individuals and organizations. Please see the lists of those who gave time and assistance on this page and our financial co-sponsors on the back page. We extend our warm thanks and appreciation to all of them, most especially the Asian Film Festival Committee.

Nancy Abelmann
Director
Center for East Asian
and Pacific Studies

Anne Prescott
Associate Director
Center for East Asian
and Pacific Studies

Tanya Lee
Program Director
Asian Educational
Media Service

Asian Film Festival Committee 2007

- Jose B. Capino, Asst. Professor of
• Cinema Studies and Gender and
• Women's Studies, U of I
- Clark Cunningham, Professor
• Emeritus of Anthropology, U of I
- Ramona Curry, Assoc. Professor of
• English, Cinema Studies and Women's
• Studies, U of I
- Tanya Lee, Program Director of the
• Asian Educational Media Service, U of I
- Susan Norris, Asst. Program Director
• of the Asian Educational Media Service,
• U of I
- Robert Petersen, Asst. Professor of
• Art, Theatre, and Asian Studies, Eastern
• Illinois University

Special Thanks to:

- Boardman's Art Theatre
- Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Northern Illinois University
- Julia Lamb, Northern Illinois University
- Judy Ledgerwood, Northern Illinois University
- Malaysian Consulate General, New York
- Philippine Consulate General, Chicago
- Beth Pielert, filmmaker
- Embassy of Singapore, Washington
- Karina Sudyatmiko, Grace Heritage Foundation / US ASEAN Film
Festival
- Eng Kiong Tan, Stony Brook University
- Nelly Van Doorn-Harder, Valparaiso University
- Lily Ann B. Villaraza, Northern Illinois University

Asian Film Festival 2007: Southeast Asian Popular Cinema

Friday, November 9

Page

7:00 p.m. Love For Share (Indonesia)

4

9:45 p.m. Citizen Dog (Thailand)

5-6

Saturday, November 10

9:00 a.m. Educator Workshops:

10

Teaching about the Khmer Rouge: Cambodia (1975-1979)

Islamist Dreams, Women's Realities in Southeast Asia

1:00 p.m. Out of the Poison Tree (USA/Cambodia)

6

2:30 p.m. Milan (Philippines)

7

6:00 p.m. Sepet (Malaysia)

8

8:30 p.m. Singapore Dreaming (Singapore)

9



Love for

Share
(Berbagi Suami)

Directed by Nia Dinata

Indonesia, 2006, 120 min.



In Indonesia, the fourth most populous nation in the world and the nation with the world's largest number of Muslims, polygamy is legal, and Islam allows one man to have four wives at a time. Polygamous marriage is not restricted to Muslims but is also found among non-Muslim Chinese, traditional communities, and even some Christians. Though still in the minority, polygamous unions are said to be increasing in recent years. They are found among social and educational elites as well as working people, and the practice is strenuously debated nowadays by the religious and by feminists.

The end of the autocratic regime of President Suharto in 1998 ushered in a new era of "reform" and democracy in Indonesia; freedom of expression now allows more open discussion of controversial topics and the film industry has experienced a rebirth. An example of such openness is this film, *Love for Share* (*Berbagi Suami* in Bahasa Indonesian, or "Sharing a Husband"). Its director, Nia Dinata, a woman, has dared to take on controversial issues such as homosexuality and polygamy in several of her acclaimed films, though she does not consider herself political or even courageous. In an interview, she said, "I've been observing polygamy in my country since I was in my preteen age. A lot of women in my family discussed it and I eavesdropped. I saw sadness in their eyes. I think as a woman director, I have a specific point of view about it. Especially in Indonesia polygamy is often discussed in the media from a male point of view." In this film her woman's perspective is clear, but she shows polygamy as a complex social phenomenon experienced differently by different women.

Now 37 years old, Nia took a film production program at New York University and was part of the French Cannes Young Directors Program. Since her directorial debut in 2001 with *Ca Bau Kan* (*The Courtesan*), she has directed two others and produced seven additional feature films. Several of her films have received both national and international awards and she now owns an independent production company, Kalyana Shira films, which produced *Love for Share*.

--Clark Cunningham is Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at the University of Illinois



Like *Citizen Kane* (dir. Orson Welles, 1941), the classic movie that the English release title of *Mah Nakorn* (dir. Wisit Sasanatieng, 2004) playfully evokes, *Citizen Dog* depicts its characters sorting out what in life they most value. But the epic American drama and the whimsical Thai musical comedy have little else in common. A more literal translation of the Thai title --“Dog-opolis”-- more aptly captures both the film’s satiric tone and its focus on the challenges and small daily pleasures of cosmopolitan Bangkok. Trying to frame the film’s quirky originality in familiar terms, Western reviewers have compared *Citizen Dog* to Jean-Pierre Jeunet’s 2001 *Amelie*, but a more productive analogy might be to the French surrealist animated feature *Triplets of Belleville* (Sylvain Chomet, 2003): both capture the drive to survive in vividly memorable terms.

Citizen
Dog
(Mah Nakorn)

Directed by
Wisit
Sasanatieng

Thailand, 2004,
100 min.

Citizen Dog, cont.

(continued from p. 5) Sasanatieng’s second feature (following his parodic musical *Western Tears of the Black Tiger*) offers fresh visual and aural delights as we follow country boy Pod (Mahasamut Boonyaruk, known in Thailand as a rock guitarist) to Bangkok to make his way. His adventures begin when he loses a finger in a Chaplinesque work speed-up in a sardine cannery, then, in finding (and reattaching) it, meets a “finger buddy.” He gradually makes other acquaintances who seem equally flummoxed but ultimately undefeated by urban life, including a zombie motorcycle taxi driver; a foul-mouthed 8-year-old girl (or is she 22?) and her whiskey-drinking teddy bear; and Pod’s own grandmother, now reincarnated as a gecko.

He also encounters the love of his life in Jin, played by Saengthong Gate-Uthong, a young Thai model, here in de-glamorized guise. Like Pod, Jin has migrated to Bangkok from the countryside. While intently cleaning offices, Jin harbors vague ambitions about bettering her lot which Pod doesn’t share; a young man without a dream, he is, in the film’s terms, “without a tail.” He just wants to soothe Jin’s itchy arms and tell her how pretty she looks in her blue maid’s uniform—inspiring the most entrancingly bizarre of the film’s several musical numbers, performed by Bangkok passers-by and Thai indie rock bands Modern Dog and Saliva Bastard.

The film’s trailer sardonically remarks on how “abnormal, lonely and cruel” life in Bangkok can be: Pod’s powers of imagination and sensitive observation make it appear otherwise. You won’t readily forget the film’s hyper-saturated, kaleidoscopic color and unique computer animated imagery, nor its catchy soundtrack. Like as not, you’ll leave the theater humming.

--Ramona Curry, Associate Professor of English, Cinema Studies and Women’s Studies, University of Illinois

Out of the Poison Tree

Directed by Beth Pielert
USA/Cambodia, 2006. 56 min.



- At seven years old, I remember sitting in a Hebrew school class reading about Anne Frank who perished in the Holocaust. We were told never to let the Holocaust happen again. It was 1977 and 13,000 miles away, the Holocaust was happening again, but instead of Eastern Europe, it was in Cambodia. Years later I met a former Nuremberg prosecutor who sparked a theme for a film: people who were creators of justice after a great injustice had occurred. After being introduced to one of the founders of the Yale Cambodian Genocide Studies Program at Yale University, in 1998 I began researching films that had been made about Cambodia and discovered many detailed accounts of the genocide, but none that explored the forgiveness and reconciliation process.
- During the seven years that it took to make *Out of the Poison Tree* I traveled up and down Cambodia, cleared landmines with former Khmer Rouge cadres, listened to the stories of torture and starvation from monks who had been forced to disrobe and dozens of villagers who were brave and kind enough to talk to me about their experiences. All these people had one desire in common: they want to know how this happened and why.
- --Beth Pielert, director, cinematographer, and editor

MILAN

Directed by
Olivia M.
Lamasan

Philippines,
2004, 135 min.



FILIPINO DIASPORIC COMMUNITIES AND THE FILM MILAN

Filipinos are sojourners. From the designation of Las Islas Filipinas by the Spanish empire when the natives of the archipelago traveled into various parts of southeast and east Asia, to present day overseas workers spread out all over the globe, Filipinos have traveled long distances to seek their fortune and engage in trade to help improve the social and economic condition of those back home. Today, it is estimated that there are over 11 million people of Filipino descent outside of the Philippines (the majority of them, 4 million, reside in the United States). In 2006, it was estimated that there were half a million Filipinos legally living and working in Italy. The remittances that Filipinos overseas send back to their families in the Philippines totalled about \$14 billion in 2006, making up over 10% of the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

While the money sent back to the Philippines has improved the overall economic condition of the country, there have been both positive and negative ramifications upon the social and familial structures of Filipino society. Depression and feelings of loneliness and sadness amongst those who are abroad is coupled with the enormous pressure to send home balikbayan boxes filled with goods and money as a show of their faithfulness to the family. Families are broken and estranged as those abroad try to assuage their absence with material goods. The family, in turn, fills their homes with luxury items and spread the wealth across the extended family, showcasing of the success of their relative outside the Philippines as a show of that absent relative's continued commitment to the family.

--Lily Ann B. Villaraza, PhD student in History, Northern Illinois University

Milan is not the typical sort of Third World art film that circulates in the West. It's a big-budget production from Manila's commercial film industry. It stars a matinee idol. It is unabashedly melodramatic and populist. Perhaps "worst" of all, it has a cheesy English theme song. And yet *Milan* is arguably the best kind of Third World cinema: a film that marshalls craft, insight, affect and appeal to represent the hidden life of the global underclass.

Olivia Lamasan's film comes at a time when more than one out of every ten Filipinos is working abroad at any given time. The filmmaker's achievement lies in her ability to capture in the most mundane of events the painful contradictions haunting the migrant worker's experience of cosmopolitanism. In one scene, we observe Jenny (Claudine Barretto) in her routine of packing gifts for relatives back home. As she wraps the handbags and shoes snugly in plastic, they begin uncannily to resemble body bags—the emblems of her sacrificed life. In another scene, we see Lino (Piolo Pascual), a college graduate, tending to a lush vineyard, his presence and menial labor so calmly, painfully at home in the picturesque scene. His words from a different moment of painful epiphany supply non-simultaneous commentary to the scene: "Here in Europe," he cries, "a [Philippine] diploma puts you right in front of the crapper."

Milan registers Philippine society's changing attitude towards cosmopolitan mobility by modifying the conventions of the picaresque film. The images of beautiful Italy are tinged with the hues of melancholia rather than wonderment. Views of the Trevi fountain, the Spanish steps, the Venetian square function only as peripheral attractions. Characters move aimlessly around or past these landmarks in a striking image of the migrant worker's deceptively restricted mobility. Peregrinations of the sort that we witness in *Milan*—especially the harrowing leap across the Swiss border—trace narratives of globalization that are conveniently ignored by its beneficiaries in the First and Third Worlds. Such travel tales are nothing short of essential at a time when the members of a global underclass move in great numbers to places where hospitality towards their kind is scarcer than ever.

--José B. Capino, Assistant Professor of Cinema Studies and Gender & Women's Studies, University of Illinois



SEPET

Written and
Directed by
Yasmin Ahmad

Malaysia, 2005
102 min.

Sepet is not so much a realistic look at interracial relations in Malaysia as it is a gently subversive film that undermines Malay assumptions about ethnic identities and their historically strained relations. As the film begins we see the tender relationship between the ethnic Chinese boy Jason and his mother as he reads a passage from a Rabindranath Tagore poem entitled “The Judge” (1913).

*Say of him what you please, but I know my child's failings.
I do not love him because he is good, but because he is my little child.
How should you know how dear he can be when you try to weigh his
merits against his faults?*

The poem provides a warning to the viewer not to judge the film's characters for what they represent or even the actions they take, but to see them from the perspective of their loving parents. Indeed, the families of Jason and Orked, the young Malay girl Jason falls in love with, are not the ones who stand in the way of this relationship. Thus the movie is not a Romeo and Juliet tale of warring families, but rather an indictment of the wider institutional and economic disparity that threatens to tear these lovers apart. It is unfortunate that this message of tolerance and understanding was lost on the government censors who insisted that elements that were critical to ethnic Malays be edited out, while elements critical of ethnic Chinese were allowed to remain, thereby making the director seem more biased than she was.

Despite the cuts by the censors, *Sepet* maintains its humor and drama by not conforming to expectations. Time and again, stereotypes' racial assumptions are upended in this film as a way of saying “why not?”

Jason's mother guesses that the Tagore poem is by a mainland Chinese author, underscoring her own assumptions of cultural authority, but also providing the recurring message that other cultures can speak to us across social barriers. Similarly, when we are first introduced to the young Orked she is reading the Qur'an in prayer, demonstrating she is a good Muslim girl, but when she opens her closet, she reveals her infatuation with numerous pinups of Western-style pop singers. *Sepet* is not an exposé on Malay race relations but a daring wish for something better, something more mixed-up.

--Robert Petersen, Assistant Professor of Art, Theatre, and Asian Studies, Eastern Illinois University



Educator Workshops

Women and Islam

Genocide in Cambodia

Saturday, Nov. 10, 2007

9:00am - 12:45 pm

Springer Cultural Center

Rm 207, 301 North Randolph, Champaign

- The Asian Educational Media Service (AEMS) is pleased to offer an opportunity for local educators—K-12 and beyond—to engage with Southeast Asian film as a tool to teach about culture and society. Registration is required. Free.

- 9:00 – 9:15 a.m. Registration (Springer Cultural Center)
- 9:15 – 10:15 a.m. Islamist Dreams, Women's Realities in Southeast Asia
- 10:30 – 11:30 a.m. Teaching About the Khmer Rouge: Cambodia (1975-1979)
- 11:45 – 12:45 p.m. Thai Lunch and Conversation
- 1:00 – 2:00 p.m. Screening: *Out of the Poison Tree* (Boardman's Art Theatre)

● **Workshop #1: Islamist Dreams, Women's Realities in Southeast Asia**

- Nelly Van Doorn-Harder's presentation on woman and Islam in Southeast Asia will draw on two feature films: *Love for Share* (Indonesia, screens Friday at 7pm) and *Sepet* (Malaysia, Saturday at 6pm) Van Doorn-Harder is the Patheja Chair for World Religions and Ethics at Valparaiso University. Her studies of Islam in Southeast Asia and Christianity in the Middle East focus on gender studies, inter-faith issues, and contemporary daily practices. Before coming to Valparaiso University in January 1999, Van Doorn-Harder taught Islamic Studies at a university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, and helped initiate an Institute for the Study of Religion and Inter-faith. Her recent publications include *Women Shaping Islam: Indonesian Women Reading the Qur'an* (University of Illinois Press, 2006).

● **Workshop #2: Teaching about the Khmer Rouge: Cambodia (1975-1979)**

- Judy Ledgerwood will present a workshop guiding educators on teaching about the Khmer Rouge genocide in Cambodia, with reference to the documentary film *Out of the Poison Tree*. Professor Ledgerwood is a cultural anthropologist whose research interests include gender, refugee and diaspora communities, and the transnational movements of people and ideas. Her current research is focused on Cambodian Buddhism and ideas of cultural identity. Professor Ledgerwood's dissertation was on changing Khmer conceptions of gender in Khmer refugee communities in the United States. She teaches general cultural anthropology, anthropology and human diversity, history and theory of anthropology, women in cross cultural perspectives, Asian-American cultures, anthropology of gender, and peoples and cultures of mainland Southeast Asia at Northern Illinois University. Her new edited book, *At the Edge of the Forest: Essays on Cambodia in honor of David Chandler*, will appear from the Cornell Southeast Asian Studies Program in 2008.

Asian Film
Festival 2007
Co-Sponsors:

The Malaysian Consulate
General in New York City

Unit for Criticism

Dept. of Anthropology

Dept. of East Asian
Languages and Cultures

Unit for Cinema Studies

Dept. of Speech Communication

Illinois Program for
Research in the Humanities

Dept. of Linguistics

Women and Gender in Global
Perspectives Program

Program in Comparative and
World Literature

Gender and Women's Studies

E|A|P|S | The Center for
East Asian and
Pacific Studies

WWW.EAPS.UIUC.EDU

WWW.AEMS.UIUC.EDU

a e m s

Asian Educational Media Service



"THE ONE STOP POP CULTURE SHOP"

ONE MAIN PLAZA
CHAMPAIGN, IL 61820
(217) 398-MAIN
www.ExileMain.com

NEW AND USED
MUSIC, MOVIES AND VIDEO GAMES

OPEN 12-8 PM, EVERY DAY!

COMMON GROUND FOOD CO-OP IS A COOPERATIVELY OWNED
BUSINESS THAT PROMOTES LOCAL AND ORGANIC PRODUCTION,
FOSTERS CONSCIOUS CONSUMERISM, AND BUILDS COMMUNITY.

COMMON
GROUND
food * co-op

610 E. Springfield Ave, Champaign
Illinois Disciples Foundation Building
www.commonground.coop