

Film is Dangerous: Ten years of Censorship in Thailand's Cinema, 2010-2020

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Source: www.matichon.co.th

2014 Thee-finger salute from “The Hunger Games”

Patterns in Censorship tactics- Thailand's political contexts

Expansive and politically contentious, 2010-2023

- 2006 Military coup
 - 2010 Red Shirt Massacre
 - 2014 Military coup
 - 2019 Elections- Military Party victory
 - 2020 Youth & Pro-Democracy Movement
 - 2023 Elections- Move Forward pop vote only
- 1) Thailand seems free, but need closer examination
 - 2) Patterns of censorship case are truncated by 2006 & 2014 coups
 - 3) State violence- 2010 Red Shirt Republicanism Populist and Democracy Movements
 - 4) Since 1980, the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances has recorded 82 cases of enforced disappearance in Thailand (spike post 2014); instigating political artists in exile
 - 5) Lese Majeste Article 112 proliferated after 2006 coup, 2016 change of monarchy, rise of anti-Thaksin movement by social/political elite (3-15 years + fines per incident /internet post)
 - 6) Censorship tactics: targeting and re-targeting same individuals and groups/collectives due to monitoring (interview with Thai Human Rights Lawyers)



**2005 Thai Patriots Network
(Yellow Shirts)**



2006 Thai coup d'état



**2010 The United Front for Democracy
Against Dictatorship (UDD) – (Red Shirts)**



2014 Thai coup d'état

Legal Techniques

- 1) Sedition (by instigation) or Section 116 Criminal Code(1956/2003);
- 2) Lese Majeste or Section 112 Criminal Code (1956/1976/2007);
- 3) Internal Security Act (2008)
- 4) 1930 Cinema Act(later film and VDO, 2008 rating + banning systems);
- 5) Section 44, 2014 Military Constitution
- 6) Computer Crimes Act 2007(2017)

Thai Modern Political History



1932



October, 1973



October, 1976



May, 1992

Digital Independent Cinema and Short Films

- Trend independent film reckoning contemporary political violence, counter-public discourse emerged under constraints/censorship and politicization
- **2006 military coup and 2010 violence** were important turning points for independent filmmaking for what is now two generations of Thai independent filmmakers- those in 40-50s and youth movement under 30

Counter-Public Sphere Under Authoritarianism

- **Thai Indie Film counter-public:** Not only opposition to the state's agendas but part of social movements
- **Thailand Authoritarianism, before 2023 Elections:** shrinking public sphere and offenses of thought and expression that threaten the moral order of national security.
- Increasing social agency of marginalized through critical discourse in hopes to transform policies and politics itself

Pro-Democracy Content in Digital Production & Exhibition

ALTERNATIVE PUBLIC Venues

- Thai Short Film and Video Festival
- Universities
- Cafes
- Bookstores
- Art galleries
- Digitization
- Open access online platforms (YouTube, vimeo)
- Domestic and international film festivals

Insects in the Backyard (2010, 2015)

- Director Thanwarin Sukkhapsit appealed to administrative court to revoke the ban in 2010.
- 5 years later, ruling ban based on morality defeated in court, but a 3 second pornographic pirated scene was categorized as prohibited.
- Editing out pornography = unbanned w/ 20+ rating.
- Pornography is a violation of criminal code Article 287, (an offence "against public order and morality.")

Venue: Art House Cinemas, universities, Film Archives, pirated digital files and DVDs



(Source: Interview with Thanwarin 2016; Hunt, 2020, 64-68; Ministry of Culture, 2011: 26-30; (iLaws 2015, Case 140))

Paradoxocracy/ Prachatipa'thai (2013)

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Thailand's Pen-ek Ratanaruang on Risking It All to Film the Paradoxes of Thai Democracy (Q&A)

BY PATRICK BRZESKI
JULY 8, 2013 5:12AM PDT



Hollywood
REPORTER

2 week exclusive limited to Bangkok, Major Cineplex Group, the leading cinema chain attempted to dissuade ticket sales at their own theatre, making producers sell their own tickets.



GETTY

Pen-ek Ratanaruang, one of Thailand's most celebrated working directors, has often represented his country abroad at international festivals — including Cannes,

hollywoodreporter.com

Pasakorn Pramoolwong & Pen-ek Ratanaruang Co-directors faced censor board editing, complied with sound edited in silence with redacted subtitling (ironic impact of making audiences more active listening to silence, thinking, knowing why).

** Audiences can watch for free on YouTube.

Shakespeare Must Die (2012)

- Ing K and Manit Sriwanichapoom received seed money support from Ministry of Culture, but ultimately banned despite script already approved by MoC; Note: Thai satirical adaption of MacBeth
- “The Board deems that Shakespeare Must Die has content that causes divisiveness amongst the people of the nation (Centeno, 2012).”
- In a longer interview, the filmmakers noted how the censors objected to scenes from the 6th October 1976 massacre, and the use of the color red. The filmmakers remarked that “[t]he censors asked for “corrections” [...]our use of red, Lady M’s jewelry, the lynching scene[.]”
 - impossible to reshoot or censor
- Censors Must Die (2013) was the filmmakers response and that film passed censors



No public access for viewing; My Teacher Eats Biscuits (1997) also banned.

Timeline of Film Productions

	Date	Film/ Art Project	Director	Event	Genre
1.	2007	Spoken Silence Series	Thai Film Foundation	Reaction to 2006 military coup	experimental short films (slow)
2.	2009	Mundane History	Anocha Suwichakornpong	PDRC- rise pro-royalist movement	narrative feature (slow)
3. *	2010, 2015	Insects in the Backyard	Thanwarin Sukkhapsit	Same sex rights movements	narrative feature
4.	2010	The Promise of Those who Came Before/ 6 Principles	Aphichon Rattanakorn	Return to People's Party 1932/ end of absolute monarchy	documentary
5.	2010	Uncle Boonmee Recalls his Past Lives	Apichatpong Weerasethakul	Imagined pasts- monarchy, Cold War, current	experimental narrative feature (slow)

Timeline of Film Productions

	Date	Film/ Art Project	Director	Event	Genre
6.	2011	A Brief History of Memory	Chulayarnnon Siriphol	2010 Red Shirt Massacre	experimental short
7.	2011	Terrorist	Thunskā Pansittivorakul	2004 Tak Bai Massacre; martial law in south	experimental documentary (slow)
8. **	2012	Shakespeare Must Die	Ing Kanjanawanich & Manit Sriwanichapoom	6 October 1976 Massacre;	Camp adaptation of McBeth
9.	2013	Censors Must Die	Ing Kanjanawanich & Manit Sriwanichapoom	Court battle against banning of Shakespeare Must Die	Documentary
10. ***	2013	Paradoxcracy	Pen-ek Ratanaruang	1932, 1973, 1976, 1992, 2010	Documentary

Timeline of Film Productions

	Date	Film/ Art Project	Director	Event	Genre
11.	2013	Boundary/Fa Taam Paendin Soong	Nontawat Numbenchapol	2008 Preah Vihear Temple military border shootings & 2004 martial law in the south	Documentary
12.	2013	Pain	Akara Patchakkhapati	Shows footage of national mourning from King's death	Documentary Short
13.	2013	Long Live the Kim	Sorayos Prapapan	Parody of 2011 Kim Jong-il funeral mourners	Experimental Documentary Short
14.	2014	Silence Memories	Saowanee Sangkara	6 October 1976 Massacre	Historical documentary

NOT EXHAUSTIVE LIST

Timeline of Film Productions

	Date	Film/ Art Project	Director	Event	Genre
15.	2015	Cemetery of Splendor	Apichatpong Weerasethakul	Young military recruits in coma; surrealist absolute monarchal	Experimental art house (slow)
16.	2016	Before it Gets Dark/ Dao Kanong	Anocha Suwichakornpong	1976 October Massacre;	Art house (slow)
17.	2013	Boundary/ Fa Taam Paendin Soong	Nontawat Numbenchapol	2008 Preah Vihear Temple military border violence & 2004- martial law in south	Documentary
18.	2014	Silence Memories	Saowanee Sangkara	6 October 1976 Massacre	Historical documentary

Conclusion:

Ambiguous Counter-publics

- Structure of violence now incorporated censorship of speech acts, self-censorship, and thought policing- so filmmakers use humor/satire, double meanings, aesthetics camp and **slow cinema, historical documentaries, bearing witness**
- conditions of suppression → heightened politicisation for 2 generations of independent filmmakers
- Fragmented Thai indie counter-publics in micro-spaces
- convergence of real time and space with social lives online through open source platforms: YouTube, Vimeo and social networks of Facebook, Twitter, LINE are new conditions of subversive counter-publics