galleries – as Madrid did not – that regularly showed avant-garde art, such as the Galeries Dalmau and the Galeries Laietanes. Surrealism found its greatest champions in Catalonia in the magazines L’Amic de les Arts and Hèlix; by 1932 some of the agitation gave rise to the formation of ADLAN (Friends of New Art) who sponsored imaginative exhibitions exemplifying new aesthetics (such as ‘Objects of Bad Taste’ and ‘Comparative Dancing’). A 1936 exhibition by the Logicofoibistes (The Logic-Fearing) showcased the work of a young generation of followers of surrealism who were soon dispersed by war.

The sections on artistic activity during the Spanish Civil War are preceded by an especially fine summary of what was at stake in the war. Of particular importance are the pieces devoted to poster propaganda (on both sides) and artists’ contributions to the Spanish Pavilion in Paris in 1937, with discussion not only of Picasso’s Guernica but also Miró’s The Reaper and Julio González’s emblematic sculpture evoking the plight of the peasant woman, Montserrat. As several of the contributors observe, Catalonia was fighting overwhelmingly on the side of the Spanish Republic, to defend a Catalan identity as well as a central government which had allowed the community a degree of autonomy, yet the art reminds us that many were fighting as well for the cause of the working class.

This catalogue will surely become a major point of reference for its subject. Its articles are clear and engaging and deftly interwoven, returning naturally to a common historical hub even as they strike out in a fresh direction, as if forming the spokes of a wheel. Readers who know little of Catalan history and culture will be delighted by what they find here, as will anyone interested in Spanish art who has, so far, not looked much beyond ‘Spain’ as the point of origin of the art of some great moderns.

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ASIAN CINEMA IN A GLOBAL FRAME


This book, edited by Anne Tereska Ciecko, and with contributions by specialist writers on cinema from countries ranging from India to Japan, is an introduction to popular Asian cinema, attempting, through its postcolonial critical approach, to contextualize and critique contemporary Asian narrative feature films as a worldwide phenomenon in the age of globalization.

There have been several studies of Asian cinema over the past couple of decades, but they tend to be focused on specific areas such as Indian Bollywood or Japanese films, or they are encyclopaedia articles on ‘world cinema’. Thus this book fills a gap by providing an inter-related overview of Asian cinema today. Overall, this book is dominated by the issue of globalization and its impact on cinema at all levels. This is indeed the common denominator of all the essays: local responses to globalizing forces seem to define local Asian cinema.

As Ciecko states in her very thoughtful introduction, the use of ‘Asian’ here is somewhat contentious, for it excludes the cinematic productions of the Middle East
and South West Asia, seen as beyond the scope of the book. Also ‘Asian’ is a problematic term and should really include international co-productions, Asian-produced and Asian-themed films, and Asian audiences and Asian film-making talents around the world. For Ciecko, therefore, ‘There is no Asian cinema . . .’ (5). Her opening essay ‘Theorizing Asian Cinemas’ sets the tone, providing a series of theoretical frameworks for the analysis. Using Bakhtinian dialogism in relation to some specific examples – the films *Dil Chaata Hai* and *Forever Fever* – she attempts to describe the plurality of cinematic voices within Asian films and the film/audience interactions. She reflects on the multiple connotations of the term ‘popular’ in connection with Asian cinema, proceeding to discuss (and interrogate) issues of the national, transnational, regional, and global identity in, and of, Asian cinema. She refers to the Asian cinematic spectacle and the ‘subject’ of Asian cinema – ‘When watching Asian films whom and what do you see?’ (30) – and advocates the use of postcolonial theory as an apt critical tool to ‘assist in conceptualizing paradigms of cinematic spectatorship and representational politics’ (31).

The chapters that follow begin the exploration of the films of a number of Asian countries, from India eastwards to Japan. As Asian cinema is still relatively unknown, I will here summarize the content of each contribution.

José Capino discusses hybridity in the cinematic production of the Philippines. The essay, subtitled ‘You’re nothing but a second-rate trying hard copycat’, taken from the lines spoken by the heroine of a well-known Tagalog film, is a reflection on the several registers of hybridity in Philippine cinema – a hybridity, he says, that would characterize all national cinemas (43). Hybridity, for Capino, is also the frame which not only allows us to understand the harsh economic realities of globalization, it also recasts the relationship between cinema and television in the Philippines not as a competitive one but one in which television is but an extension of cinema, with television ‘picking up the slack for the ailing film industry . . . at a level of profitability that film productions simply cannot beat’ (44).

Panivong Norindr follows with an essay on the radical transformations of contemporary Vietnamese cinema, clearly related to the changing social, political and economic climate of recent decades. Norindr’s genealogy of Vietnamese film highlights the shift from propagandist socialist realism to pluralist, edgy and more commercial productions, but wonders whether film makers will ‘continue to raise important questions about contemporary life in Vietnam’ (57) as they were meant to do during the more specifically propagandist phase of Vietnamese film production, or whether commercialism will reign supreme.

Anchalee Chaiworaporn and Adam Knee go on to discuss Thai cinema, prefaced by an editorial note pointing out that although Thailand was the only nation in Southeast Asia not to be colonized, Thai cinema is preoccupied with restating a Thai identity as a response to globalization. This emerges as the main theme of the essay, which after providing some background on the Thai film industry and its internationalization, focuses on the epic biopic *Suryothai* (2001) re-presented in a newer version in 2003 with the title *The Legend of Suryothai*, aimed at a western international audience. The new version, though fairly faithful to the original, blurs Queen Suryothai’s significance in Thai cultural terms which is what, according to Chaiworaporn and Knee, makes the first version ‘distinctly Thai’ (70).

Jan Uhde and Yvonne Ng Uhde’s essay on Singaporean cinema follows, in which they discuss developments, challenges and projections from the early days when Malay identity was emphasized, to its more pluralistic image, promoted by the
Singaporean nation-state. The issue of state censorship is discussed at some length, particularly its ideological impact and its position vis-à-vis the use of Singlish – the peculiar English spoken in Singapore – disliked by the censors, who want to encourage the use of ‘proper’ English. An analysis of the film I Not Stupid (2002) concludes the essay. This film, very successful on the international circuit, is described as an intelligent and bold satire and is seen to have ‘touched a nerve with the audience’ (82), reflecting on issues of human dignity and marking a transition in Singaporean cinema, which now seems to have reached, in the authors’ view, greater maturity.

William Van der Heide introduces Malaysia – again prefaced by an editorial note on the multi-ethnic and multi-religious identity of the country. Mainstream Malaysian cinema is ‘introspective’, a cinema by Malays for Malay-speaking people belonging to a Malay society and culture. Having made this appraisal of Malaysian cinema, the author moves on to consider low-budget digital video productions that reject the hegemonic Malay-ness of Malaysian films, subsequently analysing some controversial film productions which have had a brush with the censors. The common denominator of such films is that they attempt to go beyond ‘Malaysian-ness’ interlocuting with a more global, international audience.

Krishna Sen is the author of the chapter on Indonesian film, which focuses on the post-Suharto (post-New Order) period. The military-ruled New Order (Order Baru) was characterized by severe censorship and minute regulation. Sen’s nuanced chapter reveals an in-depth knowledge of Indonesian film production and Indonesian society. Her take on Indonesian post-New Order films is thought-provoking, highlighting some continuity with New Order film production but also pointing out the moments of rupture and the reason why post-New Order films can be identified as such – it is obvious that many of the directors active today began their career under the New Order, so what is it that distinguishes their contemporary work? Sen points out that ambiguity, the presence of Chinese characters (the New Order discriminated against the Chinese) and, in general, making room for contradictions is what characterizes post-Suharto film production. I would add that the success of the recent internationally acclaimed film by Garin Nugroho, Opera Jawa (2006), based on the Ramayana story, hinges precisely on such premises.

Wimal Dissanayake writes about Sri Lankan cinema, focusing on the interconnection of art, commerce and cultural modernity. Dissanayake’s conclusions are illuminating: influenced by Indian cinema, both Tamil and Hindi, Sri Lankan films nevertheless lack their Indian counterparts’ sophistication. They are also clearly shaped by Buddhist cultural values. Dissanayake argues that Sri Lankan cinema continues to operate at the level of ‘family melodrama’ (119).

Zakir Hossain Raju discusses Bangladeshi cinema and its discourse. Bangla cinema represents ‘the conflict between nationalist discourse and global forces’ and yet achieves the goal of ‘reorganizing nationhood by covering up the conflicts within nationalism in the age of globalization’ (32). Bangladeshi middle classes are, in other words, ‘constantly re-defining the role of film’ (132).

Jotisha Virdi and Corey K. Creekmur are the authors of the chapter on Indian (Bollywood) film. Much has been written on Bollywood and its history. This Bombay-based film industry has taken on a global identity – everyone seems to be aware of Bollywood, readily identifiable by its ubiquitous song and dance sequences. Bollywood has also had an impact on other Asian cinema and on Asian audiences – in most Asian countries there is a television channel showing the latest Bollywood box office success,
often dubbed into the local language. Here the authors focus on *Dil Se* (1998) by Mani Ratnam, selecting this as an example of a popular film tackling topics usually reserved for art films – thus highlighting the complexity of Bollywood film production, which does not easily conform to stereotyping, despite all efforts to pigeon-hole it.

Augusta Lee Palmer tackles Chinese films from mainland China, noting the country’s shift from politicized mass culture to consumerist individualistic culture (145) and how the film industry has reflected this, in ‘the continuing negotiation between self and society [which] is the primary subject matter for many contemporary Mainland films’ (154). In Lee Palmer’s view, the films reflect but also critique the ‘consumer revolution’, helping to ‘solidify the central place of the shopping mall and popular culture, rather than the public square and mass politics’ (155) in contemporary China, in keeping with its economic shift.

Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh discusses Taiwanese cinema, its contradictions, and its interconnection with Hong Kong cinema. Taiwanese cinema’s historic reliance on Hollywood seems to have been challenged by audiences ‘who wish to be entertained by story tellers who dwell among them, not just blockbusters from afar’ (168).

Ciecko contributes the chapter on Hong Kong, discussing its recent history and pointing out how the element of memory and nostalgia for a long lost past seems to emerge as a regular theme in more recent productions, for example, the much acclaimed, *In the Mood for Love* (1997) by Wong Kar Wai, set in the 1960s.

South Korean cinema is featured in the essay by Hyngjin Lee, who opens with the remark that the success of South Korean cinema ‘offers a new perspective on the homogenizing trends of globalization led by Western cultural commodities’ (182). After historicizing South Korean film production, Lee goes on to discuss the New Korean Wave and its international recognition, focusing on specific examples and how these relate to national history and memory.

The final essay by Darrell William Davis focuses on Japanese cinema. Highly developed, with a long history and multiple categories, Japanese cinema has long been a key player on the international scene. Davis’s essay gives a brief history of Japanese film, highlighting its major moments, and moments when it achieved the most international recognition, even setting trends – as in the case of the cult horror film *The Ring* (1997). Following a period of decline, Japanese film has ‘bounced back’ since the late 1990s. The reasons, suggests Davis, are several, but a major one can be identified in increased foreign exposure.

This book is both well written and thought provoking. However, it covers only the ‘tip of the iceberg’. There is no conclusion to help the reader to gather all the threads together. One would also have liked to have some pointer, perhaps in an appendix, to recommended critical studies of different Asian cinemas, and a filmography. The bibliography is impressive but readers have to navigate it on their own, creating their own connections, and this can at times be frustrating. There is also a complete lack of visual material. I realize that the book has a theoretical focus, but a few images – photos of scenes or reproductions of posters – would not have harmed it. This leads to the main caveat for readers of this book. Ciecko herself is painfully aware of it: the fact that inevitably, ‘because of market inequitability and asymmetrical flows’ (9), not all the films mentioned in the book will be available to (western) readers. I would suggest that Asian audiences will also find it difficult to get hold of the films discussed with the exception, perhaps, of Bollywood, Hong Kong *kungfu* and Japanese horror movies. There is no evidence of Asian cinema being in broad circulation in countries other
than the ones where the films were made, except when featured at a few international inter-Asian festivals.

The nature of cinema is such that without any visual clue, reading about an unseen film – no matter how engaging the writing – can seem at times rather meaningless. Film synopses can be given but synopses are no substitute for the cinematic experience. The book is meant to be ‘an up-to-date resource for teachers, students, scholars and aficionados of Asian cinema especially those interested in screening across and making connections between Asian cinemas’ (8), yet not a single video-clip has been made available. This is not meant as a pointlessly negative and ungracious criticism. Unless Asian popular and art films can be more widely seen and discussed in a comparative frame critical interest in them in the western world will remain circumscribed within a very small and somewhat elitist audience of connoisseurs. In this instance, an accompanying DVD with some excerpts would have, in a small but sure way, helped to counter those very asymmetrical flows bemoaned by Ciecko.

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CONTESTED BODIES
Chains: David, Canova and the Fall of the Public Hero in Postrevolutionary France by Satish Padiyar, Pennsylvania, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007, 225 pp., 21 col. and 23 b. & w. illus., £39.05

Jacques-Louis David made his first studies for Leonidas at Thermopylae in about 1800, intending a pendant to The Intervention of the Sabine Women, of the previous year. The respective subjects allegorized urgent present concerns: the threat to la patrie, and the need for political reconciliation and national unity. The painter abandoned the project until 1812, completing it after much revision in the summer of 1814. Having been excluded from the salon by the Restoration authorities, he showed the finished painting in his studio, alongside the Sabine Women. Leonidas attracted little comment at the time, and has found scant critical support since. Satish Padiyar, in an ambitious, original and deeply researched study that centres on the painting, is from the outset frank as to its failings. Stylistically outmoded in its day, it is also fragmented in structure, the array of classic male nudes juxtaposed in frozen sculpturesque poses, the central figure strangely isolated from the rest; ostensibly, it epitomizes academism. Boldly, and against the critical grain, Padiyar argues for the importance of the painting, seeking to show that it testifies to ‘David’s postrevolutionary radicalism’ (his italics) (48), in complementary contrast to what Thomas Crow pioneeringly demonstrated with reference to The Oath of the Horatii (1784). (In his chapter on David in Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris (1985), Crow argues that, through radicalism both of form and content, the Oath confronted authority – the art bureaucracy – and laid militant claim to the public space opened up by the Salon.) Leonidas begins and ends the book, whose subsidiary and cognate subjects are anacreontism, Canova, Kantian beauty, de Sade, and the fraternal chain.

The ‘chains’ of the title are in the first and last instance bodily. In his concluding chapter, ‘Sade/David in Chains’, Padiyar places an illustration for La Nouvelle Justine,