

Editorial:

Contemporary Cinemas of Southeast Asia

Welcome, dear readers, to the latest issue of the *Southeast Asian Media Studies Journal*. Issue 7.2, titled *Contemporary Cinemas of Southeast Asia*, brings together four original research articles that examine how film and moving-image practices across the region engage with questions of cultural identity, memory, nationalism, and global media circulation. The contributions in this issue reflect the diversity and dynamism of Southeast Asia's cinematic landscapes, spanning popular genre films, national blockbusters, video art, and streaming-era production cultures. Many individuals have contributed to the successful completion of this issue, ensuring its scholarly rigor and quality. Special thanks are due to Associate Editor **Jonathan J. Felix** of RMIT University, Vietnam, and Assistant Editor **Jason Paolo Telles** of Monash College, Australia, for their invaluable support.

Research on contemporary Southeast Asian cinemas is particularly significant at a time when the region's film industries are undergoing rapid transformation. Shaped by globalization, technological change, and shifting audience practices, Southeast Asian cinemas today negotiate complex tensions between tradition and innovation, national specificity and transnational circulation, and artistic expression and market-driven imperatives. From the rise of independent and art-house filmmaking to the growing influence of global streaming platforms, Southeast Asian filmmakers are reimagining how stories are told, distributed, and consumed. Studying these developments not only deepens our understanding of national and regional cinematic identities but also situates Southeast Asia more firmly within global film and media scholarship. The articles in this issue respond to these broader dynamics by foregrounding cinema as a critical site where cultural memory, political ideology, creative labor, and audience reception intersect.

The issue opens with **Isabel Weitschies'** article, *Returning to the Ancestral Home: Vietnamese Ghost Cinema and Cross-Border Cultural Flows*, which explores the growing popularity of ghost and horror films rooted in Vietnamese spiritual traditions. Focusing on Huỳnh (Ngọc) Lập's 2025 ghost-comedy *Nhà Gia Tiên – The Ancestral Home*, Weitschies examines how contemporary Vietnamese cinema engages younger audiences with ancestral beliefs, family structures, and cultural identity. Through digital ethnography and qualitative content analysis, the study shows how the film's narrative, centering on a Gen Z content creator reconnecting with ancestor worship, addresses intergenerational conflict, patriarchy, and filial obligation. The article further traces the film's transnational circulation, particularly its reception among Vietnamese diaspora communities in the United States, where online promotion by Vietnamese-American influencers reframes the film as a means of cultural reconnection. Weitschies argues that contemporary Vietnamese ghost cinema functions as both entertainment and a powerful medium for negotiating identity and cultural continuity in a globalized media environment.

Shifting from popular cinema to experimental forms, **Lan-Chi Nguyen** and **Ngoc-Chau Pham's** article, *Remembering Otherwise: Video Art and Collective Memory in Vietnam*, investigates how video art serves as a site for contesting dominant historical narratives in a tightly regulated cultural

environment. Analyzing selected works by Nguyen Trinh Thi and Nguyen Thi Thanh Mai, the authors explore how suppressed memories, particularly those of women, queer individuals, ethnic minorities, and immigrants, are rendered visible through non-narrative structures and cinéma vérité aesthetics. Rather than directly opposing state-sanctioned histories, these artworks intervene by inserting marginalized personal and communal memories into public discourse, producing what the authors conceptualize as a “double ethical memory.” This study underscores the importance of video art as an independent medium for inclusive memory work and social critique within contemporary Vietnamese and Southeast Asian cultural contexts.

The third article, *From Netflix to Local Streaming Platforms: Taiwanese Filmmakers’ Views of Original Series Creations* by **Wan-Shin Chen**, examines how the rapid expansion of streaming services has reshaped audiovisual production in Taiwan. Drawing on qualitative analysis of industry reports and semi-structured interviews with Taiwanese filmmakers, the article explores the opportunities and constraints associated with producing original content for global platforms such as Netflix compared to local streaming services. While international platforms offer increased budgets and global visibility, they also exert influence over genre selection, casting, and production timelines. In contrast, local platforms tend to allow greater creative freedom but provide fewer resources. Chen’s study highlights how filmmakers navigate these competing pressures while maintaining creative partnerships and negotiating their artistic identities, offering important insights into the broader impact of digital platforms on contemporary cinema and serialized storytelling in the region.

The issue concludes with **Sarata Balaya’s** article, *Ethno-Religious Nationalism and the Crisis of Malay Identity in Mat Kilau*, which critically examines the Malaysian blockbuster *Mat Kilau: Kebangkitan Pahlawan* (2022). Through a combination of textual analysis and audience reception research, the article investigates how the film promotes ethno-religious nationalism by foregrounding Malay-Muslim supremacy. Drawing on Stuart Hall’s Encoding/Decoding model and Benedict Anderson’s concept of imagined communities, Balaya reveals deeply polarized audience readings of the film, ranging from interpretations that celebrate Malay heroism and Islamic values to critiques that view the narrative as ideologically divisive. By incorporating empirical audience data, the study contributes to debates on national cinema, nation-building, and identity politics in Malaysia, while raising broader questions about the social responsibilities of popular cinema.

Taken together, the four articles in this issue illustrate the richness and complexity of contemporary cinemas of Southeast Asia. They demonstrate how film and moving-image practices across the region serve as vital spaces for negotiating cultural heritage, political ideology, creative labor, and global connectivity.

Alexander J. Klemm

Phnom Penh, Cambodia

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ABOUT THE EDITOR

ALEXANDER J. KLEMM holds a Licentiate in English Studies and Film Studies from the University of Zurich and a PhD in Media and Communications from the European Graduate School. He is a full professor at Paragon International University in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, where he serves as Director of the Office of Research and teaches courses in digital arts and design as well as business administration. His research focuses on the representation of Southeast Asian cultures and societies in Western print and audiovisual media. He has served as managing editor-in-chief of the *Southeast Asian Media Studies Journal* since 2021.

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Original Call for Papers

SEAMSJ 7.2:

Contemporary Cinemas of Southeast Asia

SEAMSJ issue 7.2 invites submissions for a special themed issue **on “Contemporary Cinemas of Southeast Asia,”** focusing on current trends and developments in cinema across the region. This issue seeks to highlight the diverse and dynamic cinematic landscapes of Southeast Asia, exploring how they reflect and shape the cultural, social, and political contexts of their respective nations.

Southeast Asia, a region rich in cultural diversity and historical complexity, is home to vibrant film industries and emerging voices in global cinema. The term “Southeast Asian cinemas” encompasses the distinctive cinematic traditions, practices, and innovations of countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, and others. These cinemas not only reflect their unique national identities but also engage in cross-cultural dialogues that contribute to the region's collective cinematic identity.

The theme “Contemporary Cinemas of Southeast Asia” is significant as it sheds light on the ongoing evolution of these national film industries amidst rapid globalization, technological advancements, and shifting audience dynamics. From the rise of independent filmmaking to the growing influence of streaming platforms, the region's cinemas are navigating challenges and opportunities that shape the stories they tell and the ways they are consumed.

This issue welcomes a wide range of submissions, including case studies of specific films or filmmakers, analyses of national trends, explorations of cross-border collaborations, and discussions of industry developments. Contributors are encouraged to address questions such as: What defines contemporary Southeast Asian cinema today? How do national cinemas within the region negotiate tradition and modernity? In what ways are these cinemas engaging with global film markets and audiences? We look forward to receiving papers that engage critically and creatively with these questions and help further our understanding of contemporary Southeast Asian cinemas.

AREAS OF INTEREST

Abstracts should examine contemporary cinemas in Southeast Asia, focusing on current trends and developments in national or regional contexts. Submissions may address practical, historical, or theoretical aspects. Topics of interest include:

1. **National Cinemas and Identity:** Exploration of how contemporary films reflect and shape national identities.
2. **Independent and Art-House Filmmaking:** The rise of independent films and their impact on regional cinematic landscapes.

3. **Genre Trends and Innovations:** Examination of evolving genres, such as horror, romance, or action, in Southeast Asian cinema.
4. **Streaming and Digital Distribution:** The influence of global streaming platforms on production, distribution, and consumption.
5. **Cultural Representation:** Depictions of tradition, modernity, and cultural hybridity in contemporary films.
6. **Filmmaker Perspectives:** Case studies on notable contemporary directors, screenwriters, or producers in the region.
7. **Industry Dynamics:** Analyses of production practices, funding mechanisms, and co-production strategies.
8. **Audience Reception:** Studies on how local and international audiences engage with Southeast Asian films.
9. **Festivals and Recognition:** The role of regional and global film festivals in showcasing Southeast Asian cinema.
10. **Transnational Collaborations:** Exploration of cross-border filmmaking within Southeast Asia or with international partners.
11. **Technology in Filmmaking:** The adoption of new technologies, such as VR, AR, or AI, in Southeast Asian cinema.
12. **Censorship and Regulation:** The impact of governmental policies on creative expression and storytelling.

We welcome submissions that engage critically with these and related areas of inquiry and offer innovative perspectives on the evolving cinematic landscape of Southeast Asia.

ABSTRACT GUIDELINES

- Title: 5 to 12 words
- Length: 200-250 words
- Content: Include major elements such as background, scope, research focus, research method(s), key argument(s), and significance of the study. If already known, include key findings and implications. Avoid quotations in the abstract.
- Keywords: 4 to 5
- References: Short list of 5 key works to be referenced in the full paper
- Short bio: 150 words, including affiliation, degrees, and work experience
- Language: American English or British English
- Font: Arial, size 11, 1.5 line spacing

PAPER GUIDELINES (for accepted abstracts only!)

- Title: 5 to 12 words
- Length: 5,000 to 6,000 words (excluding abstract and references)
- References: 20 to 40 (80% from 2019 to 2025)

- Short bio: 150 words (separate on final page)
- Font: Arial, size 11, 1.5 line spacing
- Paragraphs: Do not indent paragraphs; put one empty line between paragraphs
- Pagination: Page numbers in the lower right corner
- Style: **Chicago Manual of Style**
https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-1.html
https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-2.html
- Figures: A maximum of 3 graphic images (figures) of excellent quality
- Tables: A maximum of 3 tables of excellent quality
- Language: American English or British English
- File: MS Word file (no PDFs)
- Samples: See <https://seamsa.org/seamsjournal/> for published journals

IMPORTANT DATES

- April 15, 2025: Abstract submission opens
- May 15, 2025: Abstract submission deadline
- June 1, 2025: Notification of accepted abstracts
- August 1, 2025: Full paper submission deadline
- Sept. 15, 2025: Notification of double-blind peer review results
- Oct. 15, 2025: Revised full paper submission deadline
- Dec. 1, 2025: Target publication date

SUBMISSION AND INQUIRIES

Submit abstracts and direct all inquiries to **Dr. Alexander J. Klemm, SEAMSJ editor-in-chief**, at eic.seamsj@gmail.com.

Put **[SEAMSJ 7.2 CCOSEA]** in the email subject line.

