

# Neo Realism in Thai's Film after Political Crisis in October 14, 1973 and Political Crisis between 2005-2014

Pison S.

**Abstract**—The objective of presenting this article is to analyze between Thai's film and Thai society in political crisis, to study the development and trend of the film which reflects society in Thailand from political crisis of 14 October 1973 and the present day political crisis using a comparative study of the two era, both the similarities and differences in the film reflects the society in an era of change.

**Keywords**—Film, Political, Neo Realism, Thailand.

## I. INTRODUCTION

A present day participation of the people of Thailand with the politics is so powerful of interesting. The story of the day that the public made comment and driven attitude to take some ideas about politics and society, is the same thing from 40 years ago, in the political crisis called the "October 14 [1]", a visual memory of the Thai people since the incident form that day. Picture of student and Thai people progression uprising on 14 October 1973 and a picture of the people uprising in 2014, is a picture of the people who bring politics into a street fight with the injustice of state power: people must uprising and fight. The image of communication is so sensitive for public because events may be distorted a true thing at all times. The two of period is the country's political problems in Thailand are problems until today.

For political participation of citizens, the second period is a battle that may look similar, although the expression of political of people in 1973 to present day as a thin line regarding the history and the inspiration to come out against the people.

The narrative of Thai film after October 14, 1973 and the narrative of Thai film in present days were different, but the filmmakers from two eras grown up and came from the same political crisis. This article would like to learn and analyze in relative Thai film with the second generation of the political force similar of why development of Thai film is remarkably different.

## II. NEO REALISM IN THAI'S FILM AFTER POLITICAL CRISIS OCTOBER 14, 1973

Events on October 14, 1973 was recorded as documentary film by Chin Krypan and Thawisak Wiriyasiri. The documentary "October 14 Heroes Diaries [2]" after done

P. S. is with Suan Sunandha International School of Art (SiSA), Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Bangkok, Thailand (phone: 662-160-1350; fax: 662-160-1351; e-mail: pison.su@ssru.ac.th).

filming and editing, Chin Krypan gave this film to Thammasat University and it was shown every year on the anniversary of October 14, 1973. On the other hand, the documentary film of Thawisak Wiriyasiri recorded in the same situation, never released [2], except to be seen among a group of friends. These two documentary films become the first step of Thai films which tell the truth of event in social life of Thailand, before October 14, 1973, Thai films only released Melodrama and Comedy films [3].



Fig. 1 Picture from political crisis October 14, 1973



Fig. 2 Picture from political crisis 2013

The Revolution of Thailand did not happen by itself. However, it was the reflection of current social world since late 1960s, when the American people questioned the government that why the families had to send their husbands and sons to the war in Vietnam. Moreover, the influence of art reflects the social and conceptual uprising and music of Bob Dylan, John Lennon, Simon & The Garfunkel, including films such as, *The Graduate* (1967, the year of release in Thailand),

and Walking Tall (1973, the year of release in Thailand) [4] etc. as well as books and paintings in that period, caused the young ones to raise question in their minds towards the military dictatorship that ruled by strangulation.

Social and artistic influences thus inspired to create the film which reflects society more clearly. While the political crisis in the gradual climbed to 14th October, before that, there was a new wave of filmmakers in Thailand. MJ Chatree Chalerm Yukon and Charuchinda initiated brilliant ideal model to make a social-critical film.

"His Name Is Kan [3]" of MJ Chatree Chalerm Yukon is one of the first films which truly reflects social problems. The story is about a young doctor with high idealistic thoughts who fights against corruption in the bureaucracy long before ending up his own life in a remote village. The result of this film had faced several obstacles before its release, which was from the need to negotiate with Chom Phon Kittikajjo, dictator Prime Minister at that time. SAKA CHARUCHINDA also brought "Talad Prommajaree [3]" (The Virgin Market) to the screenings at the same time. The film was recognized by both critics and viewers.



Fig. 3 Poster of "His Name Is KAN"

The next few months came the movement of the student demonstration. Although, the neo realism film may not be a motivation for the masses to initiate the political battle, at least this is the first era of films which encourages people to face the truth in society instead of focusing on entertainment alone. After the victory of the student demonstration and freedom began to blossom in Thailand, the film had a short period of time to celebrate the freedom and independence only 3 years from 14 October 1973 to 6 October 1976, which is too short for filmmakers to create their cinematic pieces. Thus, the way to convey freedom of expression does not reflect from the content of the films directly but often integrated into advertising and dub.

In regional area, "Outdoor Movies" is the one medium to emphasize expression of freedom in political issues as the voice actors often interfere with social criticism. Meanwhile, there was a demonstrative march when MJ Chatree Chalerm

Yukon filmed "Thepthida Rongram" (The Hotel Goddess) during the event on October 14 and 16. MJ Yukon held the camera out on Ratchadamnoen Road; he then inserted the event into the film. When the movie was screened, it succeeded very well because people are emotionally involved with the characters, events which were on the go back then.

After the tragedy on 14 October, the country was back into the dark age again when Mr. Kraivichien was appointed as the Prime Minister. The country was not dissimilar from the military dictatorship glorious moment. Most filmmakers have to fall into servitude since they had to cease their political role by default. The films production during this phase became fully entertainment again, mostly of the comedy market. In the government of Tanin, the measurement to raise taxes on the import of foreign films from 2.20 baht per meter to 30 baht, resulting in temporary slow order of foreign films. In contrast, the group of filmmakers Thailand gets jammed up. During this time, Thailand increased the production to approximately 160 films per year [3].

Year 1978-1980, The Thai neo realism film began spilling into the film industry as a group of new wave emerged, such as "Kru Ban Nok" (Teacher of Countryside), "Thepthida Bar 21" (Goddess of Bar 21), "Namkang Yod Deaw" (One Dew Drop), "Meung Korthan" (City of Beggars) etc. From the list, "Kru Ban Nok" gained most of success even almost everybody in a group of actors were newly recruited. In continuous years during the decade of 1977-1986, there was a great moment in the history of Thai cinema, when the directors both old and new ones presented their best qualifications. Vijit Khunnavudh created "Khon Phukao" (The Mountain People) (1979) and "Luk Esan" (A Son of Northeast) (1982), MJ Chatree Chalerm Yukon gave the creation of "Thongpoon cokepoe Ratsadorn Tem Kan" (The Ultimate Citizen) (1977) and "Mue Peun" (The Assassin) (1982). Cherd Songsri produced "Plae Gao" (Old Scar) (1977) Yuthana Mukdasanit created "Nampu" (The Story of Nampu) (1983), and "Piseua Gab Dokmai" (Butterflies and Flowers) (1985). If there is a great selection of films in Thailand in this present time, it is inevitably certain that more than half of the 10 or first 20 films are from those said 15 years [3]



Fig. 4 Poster of "Luk Esarn"



However, after 1982, The Thai neo realism film obviously decreased its popularity. No exact factors, which caused the collapse of this genre of movie, have ever been said. Since 1986, The Thai neo realism film gradually disappeared from the silver screen when teen films from new-wave directors such as Adirek Wattaleela (Uncle) and Thanit Chitnukul (Peud) were wildly accepted by the audience.

### III. FEATURE FILM AFTER THAILAND POLITICAL CRISIS 2005 – 2004

Political crisis in Thailand BE 2005 - 2014 is a series of events that occurred in Thailand which continued to the present. It is a conflict between political groups which is either the resistance or support former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. The crisis, which raises doubts about press freedom, as well as political instability in Thailand which reflect disparities and cleavage between urban and rural violation, prerogative the Lese Majeste and the conflicts of interest, has undermined Thai politics for a long time.

Thailand film industry stepped into more business-like style and the film reflects the social and ideological with sincere expression has decreased quality and popularity since 1982. When starting a new decade in 1997 [5], there was a rebirth of phenomenal film industry awareness in Thailand once again. That is the kind of record-breaking movie of all time in Thailand with more than 70 million baht from “2499 Antapan Krong Mueng” (2499 Gangsters). From year 1997 to 2005, the revenue of film success has been established continuously. Nine Thai films can prosper more than 100 million baht. “Nang Nak” released early 1999 has triumphantly gained 150 million baht. “Bangrachan” of Thanit Chitnukul gained 150.4 million baht. “Meupeun Lok/Phra/Chan” (Gunner / World/ Monk /Moon) of Yuthalert Sippapark gained 120 million baht. “Satee Lek” (The Iron Ladies) of Yongyuth Thongkoon gained 99 million baht. In 2001, the film “Legend of Suriyothai” received the income by more than 700 [6] million baht then defeated in 2013 by “Pee Mak Phrakanong” with revenues of nearly 1000 million baht.

Before 1982, the conditions of political participation were concentrated, which sent the impacts to obstruct films which are sincere and true to the audience. However, in this decade, with the formation and growth of independent film and film homosexuality started to grow until 2000, a film by director Yongyuth Thongkoon “Satee Lek” (The Iron Ladies), based on the true story of the men's volleyball team from Lampang, succeed with revenue of 98.7 billion baht, and has a sequel in the second film which made another 71.2 million baht.

“The Iron Ladies” was very well guidance to this independence and homosexuality genre until now an also change the attitudes toward sexuality issues in Thailand in better ways. In the independent film, “Sood Sanaeha” (Blissfully Yours) by Apichatpong Weerasethakul in the year 2001 becomes Thailand's first film which won the award at the Cannes Film Festival awards, "Un Certain Regard Award" and in 2002, “Sad Pralard” (Tropical Malady) also won Jury Prize in competition for Palme d'Or which is the third from top

award. Until 2010, Apichatpong again won the Palme d'Or in Cannes Film Festival No. 63 from the film “Loong Boonme Lareukchart” (Uncle Boonmee who can recall past lives) which is the first Southeast Asia film to receive this award. In the meantime, the independent cinema in has grown to create the filmmakers who created underway in the film world, in many countries, Aditya Assarat, “Wonderful Town”, Urupong Raksasatya “Hungarian Utopia” and Nawapol Thamrongrattanarit “Mary is Happy, Mary is Happy”. The filmmakers made their name in this part from the short film competition of which the Thai Short Film Festival provides opportunity. The contest, which is open to the general public or film students submit their work in unlimited topics and in video format, which makes it easier for production process: freedom of opinion and not overpriced investment. Even Thailand's independent film industry is growing; there are barriers to broadcast in the country that is government censorship. Despite the age restriction of the audience, there are still problems for independent filmmakers and markets in bringing social issues to be critical in the movie itself [7]. To reflect the fact the film was strictly controlled, we see a film that presents a precarious, as “Sang Sattawat” (Syndrome and A Century) (the film received a grant from the Venice Film Festival's by Apichatpong Weerasethakul) and “Sheakespeare Must Die” by Ing Kanjanavanit, which was adapted from a chapter of drama play piece of Shakespeare's Macbeth. These two films have made the Appeal in legislation process for several times but never once were allowed to screen in its own original land, Thailand.



Fig. 5 Picture from “Loong Boonme Lareukchart” (Uncle Boonmee who can recall past lives)



Fig. 6 Picture from “Sheakespeare Must Die”

Political crisis that led to riots and violence in 2010 was presented in the teen movie “Tang Wong” by Kongdej Jaturanrasmee in 2013. With the model of the political crisis event, the making of this teen film, portrays culture and beliefs of Thailand along with scenario of violence in the late 2010 which creates impact on the growth of the characters. Interpolated stories social commentary scoreboards make “Tang Wong” available in limited cinemas; however, the film won Best Film in Supannahong Awards in 2014.



Fig. 7 Picture from “Tang Wong”

#### IV. THE RETURN OF THAI NEO REALISM FILM

The Thai neo realism film is difficult to return to prosperity once again. Society in transition to a capitalist society and the sensor is a barrier to the creation of the filmmakers despite the political participation of the people in equality. Perhaps during the year 1978-1980 may be the only one period in the history of cinema which the film in Thailand recount society with the most obvious legendary narration. It is hoped that, as the end of political conflict, freedom in battling public presentation of social issues and questions will be presented to be popular again.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The article would like to give thanks to Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University for giving us the research fund, directions and suggestions. We would like to thank to Thai Film Foundation for information in [www.thaifilm.com](http://www.thaifilm.com)

#### REFERENCES

- [1] K. Phrajak, *40th years 14 October: Sarakadee Magazine*, vol. 344, Oct-Nov 2013, pp. 78-83.
- [2] A. Panu, R. Kong, K. Kaweeniphon. *Shadow of The History*. [Video File]. Video posted to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2s12jnFGsEc> [11 March 2014].
- [3] C. Anchalee, *Thai's Film with The social (1973-1986)*. Online: <http://thaifilm.com/articleDetail.asp?id=11>. [9 August 2004].
- [4] W. Thatchai, *40th years 14 October: 17 Watch the Hollywood Film : Sarakadee Magazine*, vol. 344, Oct-Nov 2013, pp. 109.
- [5] S. Suttakorn. *Thaifilm decades from 1987-1997*. Online: <http://thaifilm.com/articleDetail.asp?id=12> [9 August 2004].
- [6] Anonymous. *All Time Thailand Box Office*. Online: <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/intl/alltime/thailand.htm> [25 January 2006].
- [7] S. Phattira, *Two decades (film) political 'banned'?*. Online: <http://manager.co.th/Daily/ViewNews.aspx?NewsID=9490000029160> [3 March 2006].

**Pison S.** was graduated bachelor of art majoring at Film and Performing Art at Faculty of Communication Arts, Bangkok University in 2006 He was graduated master of art majoring at Film and Photography at Faculty of Communication Arts, Chulalongkorn University in 2013. He was working in media and production of TV and Film since 2006. He is now the lecturer in department of film production at Suan Sunandha International School of Art, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Bangkok, Thailand.