

Spirits in and of Southeast Asia's Modernity

Within the diverse and colorful religious landscape of Southeast Asia ghosts and spirits play an important role, not only in the pre-modern past but also in the post-colonial presence. Spirit discourses and rapid modernization processes frequently appear parallel to one another. Spirits become visible and audible in shrines and temples, through trance mediums and by the means of performance, but also in mass media such as TV-series, blockbuster cinema, cartoons and tabloids.

For example: Cinematic Ghosts



Whereas a good deal of studies focus on spirit cults and spirit-mediumship, the realm of consumer culture, of entertainment and the popular is rather unexplored when it comes to "ghostly matters". In the late 1990s, right in the middle of the Asian crisis, ghost-movies became great box-office hits. J-Horror, a brand name for the most exquisite cinematic thrill by then, stimulated ghost-movie productions in Korea, Thailand, Taiwan, Hongkong, and Singapore.

Entertaining Horror



Frenzy, ghastly homicides, terror attacks, communication with unredeemed (Un)dead, vengeful (female-)ghosts and their terrifying grip on the living - all this is part of popular TV- and film-entertainment in Southeast Asia.

Such films are world-view mirrors but also enhancers of morals and convictions. The audience, however, and the effects of this peculiar film consumption are largely unknown.

... and its Audience

The research project aims at film-reception research and the comparative analysis of ghost-discourses in the realm of popular culture of various Southeast Asian countries and beyond.

Research questions

What are the sources on which such film narratives are based (myths, urban legends, stage drama, social drama, literary fiction, crime)? What kind of people (age, gender, class, education) become horror-movie fans? Do "tele-visions of the otherworldly" promote forms of imagination that undermine (or stabilize) the dominant knowledge

formations? What kind of emotions are desired, what affects aroused? Are the products of the film industry sources of re-enchantment, do they simply produce forms of "banal religion", or do we need different analytical categories, beyond the metaphor of enchantment-disenchantment?



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