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Nationalist Discourses from Thai Historical Films in the Ayutthaya Period (2000 -2018 A.D)

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to analyze the nationalist discourses from Thai historical films from 2000 – 2018. The finding indicated that most of Thai historical films in the Ayutthaya period from 2000 -2018 were focused on the concept of nationalism and patriotism which are products of modernity that occurred after Thailand turned into the modern nation-state. These Thai films were used as an instrument to motivate nationalism and cultivate patriotism in audiences by created the common enemy which is Burmese who overpowered Ayutthaya twice in her long history.

Keywords: Film; Nationalism; Ayutthaya; History

Discursos nacionalistas de películas históricas tailandesas en el período de Ayutthaya (2000- 2018 d.C.)

Resumen

El propósito de esta investigación fue analizar los discursos nacionalistas de las películas históricas tailandesas de 2000 a 2018. El hallazgo indicó que la mayoría de las películas históricas tailandesas

en el período de Ayutthaya de 2000-2018 se centraron en el concepto de nacionalismo y patriotismo que son productos de modernidad que ocurrió después de que Tailandia se convirtiera en el moderno estado-nación. Estas películas tailandesas se utilizaron como un instrumento para motivar el nacionalismo y cultivar el patriotismo en las audiencias al crear el enemigo común que es birmano que venció a Ayutthaya dos veces en su larga historia.

Palabras clave: Película; Nacionalismo; Ayutthaya Historia

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Comb, film is a unique medium in that it reproduces images, movement, and sound in a lifelike manner as it fuses meaning with evolvment as time passes in the story depicted (COMB, 1994) while historical film involves a particular perspective and with particular goal in mind – perspective and goals that are historical. (ALLEN&GOMERY, 1993) And in the opinion of Kuhn and Westwell (2012) historical film is A historical film is a fiction film showing past events or set within a historical period. This extensive genre shares territory with the biopic, costume drama, heritage film, and epic film. Therefore, historical films may help created an imaginary past that sometimes, made audiences accepted them as historical facts.

Film was first introduced to Thailand in 1897 and in 1923, the first Thai films, Nang Sao Suwan, or Miss Suwanna of Siam, was premiered at the Phathanakorn Cinematograph. Since then, film industry was flourished and became major recreation for Thais.

Historical film is one of popular genres in Thailand, both Thai and international films since most of them are action war films. The plot was normally focused on the cruelties of war, as well as for their portraits of heroism.

Historical films in the period of Ayutthaya during 2000 – 2018

From 2000 - 2018, there are 21 Thai historical films that has a background in the Ayutthaya era. 1.) Bangrachan (2000) 2.) Suriyothai (2001) 3.) Nai Kanomtorn (2003) 4.) Khunsuek (2003) 5.) Supankunlaya (2004) 6.) Kabot Thao Srisudachan (2005) 7.) The Legend of King Naresuan Part I (2007) 8.) The Legend of King Naresuan Part II (2007) 9.) Sriyama (2008) 10.) Bangrachan Part II (2010) 11.) Samurai Ayodhaya (2010) 12.) The Legend of King Naresuan Part III (2011) 13.) Khunlongpaludchoo (2011) 14.) The Legend of King Naresuan Part IV (2011) 15.) The Legend of King Naresuan Part V (2014) 16.) The Legend of King Naresuan Part VI (2015) 17.) Peeha Ayodhaya (2015) 18.) Puntai Norasigha (2015) 19.) Siamyuth (2015) 20.) Thongdee Funkao (2017) 21.) 400 Nukrob KhunlongPaludchoo (2018)

Ayutthaya was a powerful kingdom of Siam for 417 years and fell to the enemy only twice. First time in 1569, to Hongsawadee and completely destroyed in the second time to Ava, both are the ancestor of modern-day Burma. So, these films have one theme in common, the war with Burma.

2. METHODOLOGY

As Walsh suggested, historical films are also reconstructing the beliefs, practices and objects associated with a national identity which convinced viewers to characterize these meanings and symbols as “national imaginary”. (Walsh, 1996) Most of Ayutthayan Historical films were made realistically in the vanguard in terms of visual style and cinematic technique. However, dialogue from these films can be often

The Legend of King Naresuan is a Thai biographical historical drama film about King Naresuan the Great, who ruled Ayutthaya from 1590-1605. It was divided into 6 parts from his childhood as a hostage in Hongsawadee (former capital of Myanmar) until his untimely death. The first film began with the period of Hongsawadee invasion and soon Ayutthaya was defeated and agreed to be a vassal state. Prince Naresuan became a hostage to guarantee Ayutthaya’s loyalty. Each film in the series told story of how Prince Naresuan who later succeeded to the Ayutthayan throne, liberated from Hongsawadee.

The series became the most expensive film ever made in Thailand. They were also funded by Thai government and sponsored by companies in order to honor the monarch. The teaser of all films in this series began with “An epic movie of independence. The movie of pride to honor the warrior king.” Concept of nationalism, freedom, liberty was inserted throughout the film as exemplified below

“As long as you don’t fight, a prisoner will stay prisoner.” (Phra Manoo: The Legend of King Naresuan Part I)

“Fighting is the only way to gain independence.” (Teacher of Prince Naresuan: The Legend of King Naresuan Part I)

“For fifteen years we have been oppressive, deprived of liberty and honor of Thai. Now it’s time for Ayutthaya to take back its independence and nationality even if we must pay with our blood and our lives.” (Prince Naresuan: The Legend of King Naresuan Part II)

“Protect the land and rivers. Protect the sovereignty. Fight for our nation.” (King Naresuan: The legend of King Naresuan Part IV)

Not only men who has portrayed the image of patriotism but woman as well. In the series of the Legend of King Naresuan films, Phra Supankunlaya, the older sister of King Naresuan, who was mentioned only a sentence in the royal chronicle of Ayutthaya, paid an important role as a heroine who gave up her life for her country. After Ayutthaya fell for Hongsawadee, King Bayinnong brought her back to his kingdom to be one of his consorts. Before leaving Ayutthaya, Princess Suphan Kunlaya gently fetched a handful of soil and brought it to her palace in Hongsawadee. When asked by Bayinnong, her response was “its Ayutthaya soil, I would never live anywhere but my motherland. And I will never change my nationality or identity to anything but Siamese until my dying day.” Instead of punishing Princess Suphan Kunlaya for her arrogance, the king admired her and called her “Amyoyo” which mean those who dignified in their own clan. This scene gave an impression of a sense of belonging to a particular group that can lead to the possibility of a nationhood.

After King Naresuan liberated Siam (Ayutthaya) from the control of Burma (Hongsawadee), the princess refused to escape back

to her country but insisted that she is a hostage and will gladly die a hostage if it can help her brother and her country.

“I’m waiting for so long for this day. The day Ayutthaya announced her freedom. Finally, I can die in peace because freedom will be return to me and my nation.” (Princess Supankunlaya: The Legend of King Narsuan Part III)

The role of Princess Suphan Kunlaya clearly represented the woman, the second class of society during Ayutthaya period, who dutifully loyal to her country and adhere to her nationality and willing to sacrifice herself for the country.

Beside repeatedly mentioned the importance of liberty and freedom, the film also raised awareness of unity as quote below.

“The reason Hongsawadee can defeat us last time is the rupture between rulers of Ayutthaya and northern cities. If we were in harmony, no one can defeat us at all...when the leaders became divided, the land was ruined” (King Naresuan: The legend of King Naresuan Part IV)

When Hongsawadee army first invaded Ayutthaya in the first part of the Legend of King Naresuan, the film show the great ability of fighting of the king, the crown prince and people of Ayutthaya (grandfather and uncle of Prince Naresuan) but the defeat was inevitable when one of the Ayuttayan powerful nobles, Orkya Chakri, betrayed and opened city gate. Orkya Chakri was later ordered to kill by King Bayinnong of Hongsawadee who said “You betrayed even your own king. You have everything because of him and the crown

prince and you still treacherous. If I patronize you, one day you will betray Hongsawadee as well.”

It was clear that the series of *The Legend of King Naresuan* films intended to send an important message to viewers about duty and citizenship along with the constructing of a nationalism of a state.

While the legend of king Naresuan focused on the bravery of warrior king who protected Ayutthaya from enemy, other films concentrated on the intrepidity of commoners. *Bangrachan*, *Bangrachan 2*, *Sriyama*, *Siamyuth*, *Thongdee Funkao*, and *400 Nukrob KhunlongPaludchoo* were all told story of a group of villagers, commoners who would sacrifice themselves bravely in order to protect their land which emphasized as “Nation”.

Bangrachan 2 is a film about a group of villagers during the time Ayutthaya about to fall for Burmese army for the second and the last time. They tried to survive by fleeing until they met Phrya Lek, the general of Ayutthaya army who reminded them their duty to the nation. The film spread message that nation must come first.

“Soldier’s duty is to fight for nation Public affair is more important than private one.” (Mun: *Bangrachan 2*)

“They are about to seize our land. I can’t be calm.” (PhrayaLek: *Bangrachan2*)

“Hide and rob maybe a good choice but how long can you survive? Burmese are out there. They will not leave until our nation is ruined. If you are brave enough, come with me, the battle will be notorious.” (PhrayaLek: *Bangrachan2*)

400 Nakrob Khunrongpaladchoo is a film based on the history of 400 men who tried to protect their village during the invasion of Burma before the fall of Ayutthaya. Their story was mentioned only two lines in the Royal Chronicle of Ayutthaya, but the local oral history made them a public history figures and local heroes. The film also encouraged people to be devote to their country.

“I, Khun Long Paludchoo, I will give my loyalty and devotion to my nation until the end of my life. “(Khunrongpaladchoo)

Another Samurai Ayutthaya is a film based on a true historic figure during Ayutthaya period, the film depicts the life of Yamada Nagamasa, a Japanese adventurer who gained considerable influence in the royal court and became the governor of a prominent city in the south. The film told story of a Japanese who was betrayed by his countrymen, helped by Thais and later respected Thai boxing and loyal to Thai King. Nationalist discourses were used repeatedly in this film and patriotism was suggested.

“Patriotism can occur to anyone who wants to be buried beneath the soil of his motherland.” (Master: Samurai Ayutthaya)

The word “ชาติ” (Nation) was firstly appeared in the reign of King Rama V of Bangkok period in 1881, more than one hundred years after the fall of Ayutthaya. The concept of nation was used in a school textbook describes a duty of citizen which consisted of patriotism, nationalism, and royalism (กมุทพิสมัย, 1982) However, it was the reign of King RAMA VI that the word nation was repeatedly used as an instrument to create nationalism. When King Rama VI ascended to the throne, the concept of democracy became widely

known to Thai people especially those who graduated from Europe. Siam (Thailand's former name) was in the process of turning into modern state. In order to maintained absolute monarchy system and his power, King Rama VI created the concept of state which divided into three basic elements, Nation – Religion – Monarch. These three elements are inseparable and represented by Thai flag that used until nowadays. Various scholars have addressed nationalism is a product of modernity. The nation-state was nonexistent during the greater part of history until the reign of King Rama VI.

Historical films in the Ayutthaya period are reconstructing the beliefs, practices and objects associated with a national identity which convinced viewers to characterize these meanings and symbols as “national imaginary”. (Walsh, 1996) They leaves an impact on the psyche of the audience and thus influence the collective consciousness of the nation- nationalism. (ESSAY, 2018)

These films also spread a strong nationalist message for the duty of each group.

Duty of king

The historical films indicated that the King or the leader must have virtue of the king. For example, stay true to his duty as the head of state must and overcome defilement and indolence and devote himself to protecting the people. He must also adhere to what is right in keeping with the principles of justice. It was shown in the films, the ideology king can lead the country to the glorious and the disaster king can ruin his kingdom.

Duty of woman:

The chronicle of Ayutthaya and other evidences have not mentioned any women in particular, but the rhetoric of nationalism is not always based on historical facts. Even though the role of women in Ayutthaya period were hardly anything than wife and mother, the film suggested that woman also have their own duty to serve and sacrifice for the country as well as a man.

Duty of commoner:

The commoners were hardly mentioned in the tradition history but in these films the commoners were symbolized viewers and was the main target of these nationalism ideology message. Gratitude to the land and loyal to the king became the main civic duty.

3. CONCLUSION

To sum up, historical films in the period of Ayutthaya used technique of creating modern nationalist discourses into the context of past in order to establish the patriotism among Thais. The historical film provides an emotional connection to history and help shaping the past.

way to understand the Ayutthayan historical films is through focusing on the identity politics of a nation. These nationalist discourses reflected the context of modern day politic and social rather than the past and reflecting the cultural sensibility of the period in which it was made. By reconstructing the nationalism, these nationalist discourses are internalized through psychological effects on the

collective consciousness of viewers. The analysis of the Ayutthayan historical films reaffirmed that films can be used as an instrument of nationalism.

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