

Speaking Nations, Edge Ways

Reviews of *Postcolonial Hangups in Southeast Asian Cinema: Poetics of Space, Sound and Stability* by Gerald Sim, Amsterdam University Press, 2020; and *Southeast Asia on Screen: From Independence to Financial Crisis (1945–1998)* edited by Gaik Cheng Khoo, Thomas Barker, and Mary Ainslie, Amsterdam University Press, 2020

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Scholars working on Southeast Asian cinema in English-language academia have long lamented about the field's arid state of research. Thus, it was delightful to see two books about Southeast Asian cinema published in quick succession in 2020. *Postcolonial Hangups in Southeast Asian Cinema: Poetics of Space, Sound and Stability* by Gerald Sim and *Southeast Asia on Screen: From Independence to Financial Crisis (1945–1998)* coedited by Khoo Gaik Cheng, Thomas Barker, and Mary Ainslie, are commendable efforts to expand and energize the hitherto slow-growing Southeast Asian cinema studies. Both works seek to get a word in edgewise for the case of Southeast Asia in film studies—a discipline rightly criticized as focusing lopsidedly on East and South Asian cinemas, all too often sidelining Southeast Asia on the world cinema map.¹

1. Khoo Gaik Cheng, "Introduction," in *Southeast Asia on Screen: From Independence to Financial Crisis (1945–1998)*, eds. Khoo Gaik Cheng, Thomas Barker, and Mary Ainslie (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), 13; Gerald Sim, *Postcolonial Hangups in Southeast Asian Cinema: Poetics of Space, Sound and Stability* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), 30.

The two books cover a remarkable lot of ground. Despite a similar subject that they are dealing with, their research directions and methodologies differ in significant ways. *Southeast Asia on Screen* adopted a “sum of parts” approach to ensure that each member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)—Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Burma/Myanmar, Vietnam, Singapore, and Malaysia—is fairly represented in the anthology. Brunei, Laos, and Cambodia are absent only because the call for papers reportedly did not attract any responses about these regional fields. This is understandable, for as Khoo explains, “Nascent independent filmmaking activities are only now appearing in these three countries.”² Khoo’s comprehensive introductory paper succinctly points out the uneven developments across Southeast Asian film industries and within Southeast Asian film studies. The difficulty in assigning equal space to each constituent cinema in the anthology is another reminder of the tremendous work that remains to be done in Southeast Asian cinema studies.

Postcolonial Hangups assumes a different regional and geopolitical approach. In invoking the term *Southeast Asian cinema*, the author refers more to a region-specific postcolonial experience than to the term’s geopolitical dimension. The book examines three particular Southeast Asian cinemas: Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Sim justifies this specificity by identifying a distinctive postcoloniality purportedly shared across these countries—that is, postcolonial identities defined with relatively little hostility; an unconflicted warmth with which these Southeast Asian countries remember colonialism.³ Sim argues that positive affinities with colonial histories are “unmistakable Southeast Asian stories,” which we “cannot help but sense it on the ground and in the air.” Such observations may be surprising “to the uninitiated and those who expect the postcolonial condition to leave subjugated peoples clinging to enmity,” though not so much to “those who

2. Cheng, “Introduction,” 13.

3. Sim, *Postcolonial Hangups*, 24–25.

are more acquainted with critical studies of this sort.”⁴ This is a bold and potentially controversial claim that could benefit from greater in-depth justification. Sim’s brief substantiation of the book’s regional claim leaves much room for negotiation, but his selective focus nonetheless unfurls into four substantial, meticulously researched chapters—two on Singapore and one each on Malaysia and Indonesia—that survey the three cinemas with in-depth examination. Read together with *Southeast Asia on Screen*, the reader is poised to gain a rather comprehensive scope of a very diverse Southeast Asian cinema. The two books also complement each other on temporal dimensions. *Postcolonial Hangups* tends toward contemporary films by such directors as Tan Pin Pin, Yasmin Ahmad, and Joshua Oppenheimer whereas *Southeast Asia on Screen* investigates filmmaking activities from “the end of World War Two, a significant period after which many of such nations gained national independence, and up until the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997–1998.”⁵

The allusion to the “nation” is of critical interest here. The national axis unmistakably cuts through the individual chapters in *Southeast Asia on Screen*. Organized into three sections (“Independence and Post-World War II Filmmaking: Nation-building, Modernity and Golden Eras”; “Key Directors”; “Popular Pleasures”), the essays address a range of concerns, including gender issues, film-market operations, the politics of genre, auteurism, and transnationalism. Across the chapters, the notion of nationhood is a recurring motif that strings them together. Chapter 1 demonstrates the inherent paradoxes of Indonesia’s classical national cinema, which not only envisions but also consistently questions the viability of President Soekarno. Chapter 5 explores how Indonesia’s New Order war films created heroic spectacles for the military in Indonesia with a strong nationalistic sentiment. By contrast, political negotiations done by civilians and politicians and their struggles for independence were rendered insignificant. Two other chapters in the

4. Sim, 24.

5. Cheng, “Introduction,” 13.

book deal with the possibility of a resistant cinema in Indonesia. Indonesian directors Sjuman Djaya and Teguh Karya are discussed in chapter 6 to shed light on how the filmmakers engaged with and countered social discourses, the repressive Suharto New Order regime, and its forms of censorship. The theme of an oppositional cinema is picked up in chapter 11, which examines the production of exploitation cinema as an alternative form of cultural resistance against the repressive authoritarian regimes of Suharto in Indonesia and Marcos in the Philippines, as well as a transgression of nationhood by an unorthodox cinema intended for the global market.

Chapter 2 explores the practice of *komiks*-to-film adaptation as a form of vernacular modernism in the Philippine context and key to shaping the national-popular imaginary in popular media. Chapter 9 probes director Mike de Leon's place in the second golden age of Philippine cinema. The director continually reconceives and reinvents his cinema to challenge the "cinema that imagines itself as national cinema" during President Marcos's martial-law period.⁶ He also reflexively interrogated the significance of the golden age and accepted histories in the post-Marcos era. This book explores the complex interplay of stardom and politics in chapter 10. It looks into the potentially subversive image of popular teenage jukebox-musical star Nora Aunor and how it was tempered—in essence, co-opted—by the state and film studios to become an icon for a safe expression of freedoms as permitted by the Marcos regime.

Chapter 8 reevaluates the position of the "father" of Thai cinema, Ratana Pestonji, by detailing his history and relationship with Hollywood studios in the early 1950s. The account disputes nationalistic constructions of the filmmaker in posthumous popular opinions, which had seen him as being untouched by the trappings of commercial filmmaking and the Hollywood system. The Boonchu comedy series that addresses the relationship between ruralism and Thai localism is the subject of chapter 13. The author suggests

6. Cheng, Barker, and Ainslie, *Southeast Asia on Screen*, 207.

that the series offers a nuanced negotiation, rather than complete rejection, of the various influences of modernity.

The book supplements an important account of Burmese nationalist cinema history in chapter 3. It delineates a turn in cinematic representation starting from earlier colonial-era practice, in which films conjured up the grandeur of Burmese dynasties to reclaim Burmese sovereignty. The genre of historical-fiction war films was later produced to consolidate archetypes of enemies and glorify the Burmese military and peasants as heroes. Examining *Pearl Tears* (1962) and *Nga Ba* (1961), the author argues that war films advocated national unity over ethnic factionalism, and the country's popular culture industries might have connected audiences with political issues, ideologically aligning them with the army's political projects. Chapter 4 turns to the role of women in Vietnamese revolutionary cinema, focusing on female mobility and spatial transformation in *On Top of the Wave*, *On Top of the Wind* (1967). Chapter 7 reconfigures the position of director Hussain Haniff in Malay film history by showing how he effectively straddled between auteur and popular cinema, social realism and commercialism. Chapter 12 deploys Kristin Thompson's concept of "cinematic excess" to read *They Call Her . . . Cleopatra Wong* (1978), showing how the film reveals regional-national tensions and the specificities of regional and national (Singaporean) imaginaries within ASEAN in the 1970s.

Taken together, these chapters fulfil the anthology's objective to look into "how film industries re-generate against a backdrop of war, (post) colonialism and, ultimately, recovery" by elaborating on "specific periods, popular films and key figures that slice across post-World War II Southeast Asian national cinemas."⁷ Although the anthology "does not purport to be a textbook that provides distinct national film histories," the centrality of nationhood in defining and approaching Southeast Asian cinema, alongside its "sum of parts" editorial strategy, translates into a compelling approach to "explore the conditions that have given rise to today's burgeoning Southeast

7. Cheng, Barker, and Ainslie, 14.

Asian cinemas,” piecing together the early history of the region’s cinemas as a coalition of national cinemas steeped in their distinctive nation-specific histories, politics, and aesthetics.⁸ In this regard, *Southeast Asia on Screen* complements preceding anthological efforts such as *The Films of ASEAN*, *Glimpses of Freedom: Independent Cinema in Southeast Asia* and *Film in Contemporary Southeast Asia: Cultural Interpretation and Social Intervention*, crucially filling a temporal gap with its focus on the understudied 1945–1998 period.⁹

The same is true for *Postcolonial Hangups*. Within the scope of Singapore, Malaysian, and Indonesian cinemas, Sim further zooms into “films that make national statements,”¹⁰ initiating a “nationally delineated study”¹¹ that “conceives postcolonial film style along national lines,” thus producing “portraits of national cinema.”¹² Sim’s concern with nationalism is intrinsically tied to his interest in the peculiarities of these nation-states’ postcolonial conditions in which various film styles transpire. The book begins with a study of Singapore cinema in chapter 1. Sim argues that Singapore cinema has always been spatially oriented from golden-age Malay films to contemporary films by such directors as Royston Tan, Boo Jun-feng, Charles Lim, Tan Pin Pin, etc. Singapore cinema is habitually attentive to social and politicized spaces, invested with representations of the island-state in the form of aerial maps, bird’s-eye views, and cartographic symbols.¹³ It exhibits “a national aesthetic that relies heavily on space to

8. Cheng, Barker, and Ainslie.

9. Jose F. Lacaba, ed., *The Films of ASEAN* (Quezon: ASEAN Committee of Culture and Information, 2000); May Adadol Ingawanij and Benjamin McKay, eds., *Glimpses of Freedom: Independent Cinema in Southeast Asia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2011); David Lim and Hiroyuki Yamamoto eds. *Film in Contemporary Southeast Asia: Cultural Interpretation and Social Intervention* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

10. Sim, *Postcolonial Hangups*, 45.

11. Sim, 38.

12. Sim, 36.

13. Sim, 62 and 78.

define identity and orient itself within the world system.”¹⁴ This spatial obsession is not simply a postmodern condition (spatializing temporality à la Fredric Jameson), Sim asserts, but a manifestation of Singapore’s geographical and sociopolitical reality: “This country’s imagination was always spatially defined. Without a developed pre-colonial identity, and after a postcolonial phase that lurched headlong into Late Capitalism, its past hardly existed before the eternal present arrived.”¹⁵ Sim explains that this spatial preoccupation is also interwoven with colonial residues, recalling colonial mapping impulses and scanning, often affectively, material remnants from British colonialism—colonial architectural and geographical identifiers that are ubiquitous in the country.¹⁶ Sim thus coins the term *colonial cartographic cinema* to describe Singapore cinema, in which “spatial awareness, along with aerial and affective instincts, become readable as a national style—a colonial cartographic cinema,” positing that “a colonial atlas is part of Singapore’s spatio-cinematic vocabulary through every phase of its national cinema history.”¹⁷

Sim further develops his thesis from a historical perspective in chapter 2. Although film production lay essentially dormant for approximately twenty-five years between the golden age and mid-nineties revival, Sim identifies a “common cartography” and “spatial poetics” in Singapore cinema, which functions to “unify the older and contemporary eras by illuminating the less obvious colonial intonations within recent films.”¹⁸ In this regard, Sim joins scholars like Sophia Siddique in addressing the “25 years” gap in Singapore film history.¹⁹ This chapter also unpacks spatial characteristics of new-wave films in contemporary Singapore cinema in the treatment of space

14. Sim, 63.

15. Sim, 62.

16. Sim, 85 and 92.

17. Sim, 84 and 92.

18. Sim, 98.

19. Sophia Siddique, “Images of the City-Nation: Singapore Cinema in the 1990s” (PhD thesis, University of Southern California, 2001).

that brings to mind the Deleuzian concept of “time-image” but works out in quintessentially Singaporean ways. Recurrent images of subjects disconnected from their environment can be read in line with Deleuze’s exposition, relating to symptoms of modernity’s failure and debilitations brought on by late capitalism and an authoritarian state.²⁰ Yet this cannot fully account for the films’ often dispassionate gaze on spaces because, herein, “natural history” and “historical history” (original term in the book), in Deleuzian terms, are not binary opposites. A spatial contradiction between attachment and alienation exists in these time-images, as the Singaporean subject is never completely alienated from the physical spaces in this nation—they are inescapably invested in them.²¹ In this way, Sim effectively speaks against theories of cultural authenticity and contamination, which assume that borrowed new-wave aesthetics (e.g., the language of alienation) denote “foreignness,” “Westernness,” or “otherness.”²²

Chapter 3 turns to Malaysian cinema and examines director Yasmin Ahmad’s oeuvre. In reading Ahmad’s films’ under subtitling and overloaded soundtrack, Sim seeks out a “locally particular phenomenology” via Jean-Luc Nancy’s concepts of “ecouter” and “resonance.” In Ahmad’s films, it is the cacophonous, linguistically indistinguishable soundscapes that define the characters’ subjectivities rather than linguistic hybridity and heteroglossia per se. Hence, Ahmad’s films invite audiences to inhabit this liminal “resonant subjectivity,” which, in turn, “houses a Malaysian character, specifically that of a multicultural society with a globalized economy.”²³ Interracial romantic melodramas set in globalized milieus, Ahmad’s films are not “stylistically radical or politically confrontational”; The director is, strictly speaking, “not an anti-colonial radical.”²⁴ Yet the social and political strength of her films lie in their deftness in conjuring sentiments and affects

20. Sim, *Postcolonial Hangups*, 116–17 and 121.

21. Sim, 129 and 135.

22. Sim, 128.

23. Sim, 155–56.

24. Sim, 160–61.

that enable us to “sympathize with Malaysia’s postcolonial experience and apprehension of the world” (i.e., “Malaysian signs of a global affliction”).²⁵ This entails a crisis of “sense” and “world,” an obliteration of meaning, and breakdowns in subjectivities. In other words, Ahmad’s films’ “keenest insight is an understanding of the Malaysian postcolonial-global amalgam.”²⁶ More than just vivid snapshots of local culture and discourse, her ethnic and cultural pluralism exudes a sense of illusory warmth that can be understood “as statements on behalf of capitalism, an ideology that has no use for cultural difference that is not commodified for the market.”²⁷ This befits Malaysia’s postcolonial, multicultural legacy that has always been entwined with economic prosperity and a penchant for globalization uncharacteristic of postcolonial experiences in the “developing world.”²⁸ Sim’s reading renders familiar postcolonial models and tropes such as Third Cinema, accented cinema, hybridity, and creolization not entirely fitting for the case of Malaysian cinema.

Sim scrutinizes Indonesian postcoloniality in chapter 4 to redefine Indonesian colonialism vis-à-vis American influences and locates a key characteristic of its cinema in the “appearance of an American uncanny through film genre discourse.”²⁹ Here, Sim reassesses the generic stability of contemporary Indonesian cinema—in particular the post-*New Order reformasi*-inspired films, positing that “deep within genre films lie the vestiges of a national imperative on stability and order that once served both the New Order and America’s Cold War machinations.”³⁰ Noting Indonesian cinema’s deep ideological commitment to Hollywood storytelling in terms of the classical principles of coherence and closure, Sim contends that the seemingly anticolonial, politically critical Indonesian

25. Sim, 163 and 165.

26. Sim, 162.

27. Sim, 161.

28. Sim, 144.

29. Sim, 174 and 183.

30. Sim, 177.

films could have been conduits of Americanism,³¹ which reenacted New Order priorities and delimited aesthetic choices for films to negotiate the past.³² Genre stability, which was previously thought to be Indonesian cinema's localizing quality, in fact "underwrite[s] the values of stability and order that legitimized Suharto."³³ It demonstrates how US neocolonialism had held sway on Indonesian subjectivity and memory.³⁴ Sim argues that this has stultified post-Suharto reformasi filmmaking as the practice set to work through the traumas of Suharto's US-backed New Order violence.

Overall, Sim's main thesis is that postcoloniality "manifest[s] stylistically through Singapore's preoccupations with space, the importance of sound to Malay culture, and the Indonesian investment in genre."³⁵ His book covers the topics of Singapore-space, Malay(sia)-sound, and Indonesia-(genre) stability, adding new insights to similar subjects in previous studies.³⁶ The book succeeds in "vary[ing] and renew[ing] postcolonial film studies"³⁷ and broadening the aesthetic taxonomy of postcolonial cinema and postcolonial theories.³⁸ It is a valuable addition to the study of national cinema poetics, with its demonstration of how these national cinemas and their postcolonial poetics diverge from conventional Anglo-American studies of postcolonial film aesthetics that tend to emphasize hybridity, syncretism, and creolization extracted primarily from experiences from the Middle East, South Asia,

31. Sim, 186.

32. Sim, 196.

33. Sim, 186.

34. Sim, 194.

35. Sim, 19.

36. Lilian Chee and Edna Lim, eds., *Asian Cinema and the Use of Space: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, first ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015); Adil Johan, *Cosmopolitan Intimacies: Malay Film Music from the Independence Era* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2018); Thomas Barker, *Indonesian Cinema after the New Order: Going Mainstream* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2019).

37. Sim, *Postcolonial Hangups*, 32.

38. Sim, 33 and 46–47.

Africa, and Latin America.³⁹ With its contextualized use of critical theory, the book also has potential in “rejuvenat[ing] Southeast Asian studies by ‘deparochializing’ the field and encouraging greater interaction ‘between scholars of and from the region.’”⁴⁰

Considering that the national paradigm has lost much of its luster over the past decades (giving way to the rise of border transcending and the “transnational” approaches), it is noteworthy that both *Southeast Asia on Screen* and *Postcolonial Hangups* invoke the “national” in framing their subjects. Taking into account factors such as the lingering effects of founding Southeast Asian national narratives and the rise of Southeast Asian “new nationalisms,” among others, the “national” remains a germane conceptual tool for studying a complex geopolitical region that bears its recent histories of anticolonial, nationalist, and independence movements.⁴¹ Even as global(izing) forces continue to mine “post nation-states” or the condition of the “postnational,” the notion of nationhood remains one of the most preminent forces shaping the realities and imaginations of the region and its peoples. In this regard, Sim is forthright in his defense of the national model, expressing a strong resolve from the outset to “withstand strong intellectual countercurrents [against the national model].”⁴² In the introductory chapter, Sim contends that transnational cinemas are “ill-fitting categories for what remain nationally specific experiences in Southeast Asia.”⁴³ Likewise, several chapters in *Southeast Asia on Screen* demonstrate the histories of state interventions and various nationalization schemes in the film industries of Southeast Asian countries between 1945 and 1998. These books

39. Sim, 19 and 25.

40. Sim, 47.

41. Maya Tudor and Dan Slater, “Nationalism, Authoritarianism and Democracy: Historical Lessons from South and Southeast Asia,” *Perspectives on Politics* (May 2020): 1–17; Tuong Vu, “Southeast Asia’s New Nationalism: Causes and Significance,” *TRANS: Trans-Regional and National Studies of Southeast Asia*, special issue, *Redefining and Recontextualising Politics in Southeast Asia* 1, no. 2 (July 2013): 259–79.

42. Sim, *Postcolonial Hangups*, 37.

43. Sim, 37–38.

suggest that the paradigm of “national cinema” proves to be indispensable in understanding filmmaking activities in the Southeast Asian region.

Having said that, both books seem to work strategically at the “edges” of things, presenting two different methodologies in critically invoking the concept of the national. *Southeast Asia on Screen* pushes the boundaries of nationalism further to address a broad spectrum of Southeast Asian nationalisms instead of conforming to state-endorsed nationalism. The ideological analysis and causal reasoning in some of the chapters may seem a little overdeterministic at certain points, but their collective perspectives concur with the editor’s claim that the chapters “address counter-narratives told on screen” and “interrogate how ‘the national popular’ is both imagined and represented, highlighting obedient state-aligned depictions as well as subtle critical response and the wider transnational trends impacting across the region.”⁴⁴

If *Southeast Asia on Screen* urges us to reevaluate Southeast Asia national cinemas and rethink their conceptual boundaries vis-à-vis state-endorsed versions, Sim’s theoretically invested work reinstates the nationalistic value of films that fundamentally reject or rupture epistemological traditions and boundaries. Sim seems to point the reader to a critical discourse of post-colonial nationalist self-determination effected through filmmaking practices that question conventional means of interpretation, myth making, and meaning making. With reflexive quality, Tan Pin Pin’s cartographic cinema foregrounds the impossibility of representation and the difficulty in grasping the past with absolute certainty. Yasmin Ahmad’s cinematic soundscape is logos defying and recalls Jean-Luc Nancy’s concept of “resonance” and his counsel to deprioritize the search for absolute meanings. The Indonesian reformasi films unwittingly inherit US neocolonialism and the New Order regime’s claims to legitimize order and stability as a result of their adherence to the road films’ narrative and formalistic structures. Throughout the book, Sim seems to affirm the transformative potential of formalistic

44. Cheng, “Introduction,” 14.

experimentation over structural conventions, suggesting that cinema's boundary-blurring practices can be a salient way of constructing a self-reflexive (postcolonial national) self that has a nuanced understanding of the past and the present and is better equipped to deal with power complexities and potential "colonial hang-ups."

This self-conscious spirit guides the author's extensive analysis of Indonesian director Edwin's films *Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly* (2008) and *Trip to the Wound* (2008) in his concluding chapter. Sim notes that Edwin's films are coated with ambiguity. The director "insists on obliqueness over direct narration, distance instead of immersion, and defamiliarization not identification," overloading images with "stylistic gestures that deposit opacity on screen."⁴⁵ Hailed as a "trailblazer for Indonesia" at international film festivals where Western critics celebrate his visual excess and lackadaisical plots, Edwin has, however, been derided by his fellow Indonesian critics because his stylized films are viewed as "facile, self-indulgent veneers that distract him from serious issues."⁴⁶ Local critics have faulted Edwin for "abdicating responsibility to speak more directly on politics, and selfishly seeking festival approbations by fashioning a pastiche of foreign art cinema instead."⁴⁷ Even though his films "dwell intently on Indonesian cultural politics and pick at some of the freshest scars in its national history of social conflicts," Edwin is, at best, "critically marginalized in and around his own country."⁴⁸ Sim recuperates Edwin's socially conscious works from their bipolar assessments and finds "productive connections between Edwin's style and politics" by reading the films through the lens of haptic cinema and essayistic filmmaking.⁴⁹ Sim argues that Edwin's films engage the viewer through distantiation as "the Brechtian thinking goes."⁵⁰ Since the director encourages witnesses to

45. Sim, *Postcolonial Hangups*, 212 and 217.

46. Sim, 219–21.

47. Sim, 221.

48. Sim, 212.

49. Sim.

50. Sim, 219.

grasp the artistic encounter politically and invites self-determination in his films, the unbound narratives free audiences to harbor doubt and insecurity, as well as autonomy and possibility, and raise a forceful counterpoint to the ideological classicism of transparent storytelling and formulaic genres. In light of links between US neocolonialism, authoritarian New Order ideology, and genre conformism, Sim reaffirms Edwin's aesthetic style as a powerful tool for postcolonial (self-)critique and political criticism: "Whereas many [*reformasi*] films making willful interventions in social controversies and hot button issues remain constrained by a generic affliction of postcolonial history, Edwin in contrast seems indifferent when he wanders from the aesthetic mean. His work eschews clarity and the ideological mandate for ordered and stable texts."⁵¹

Sim's assessment of Edwin's style is a vindication of cinematic self-reflexivity that threads through *Postcolonial Hangups*. The author embraces self-critical, nonconformist, edge-tottering aesthetic styles as the productive means to interrogate national and postcolonial subject formation in Southeast Asia. His apparent disdain for (or suspicion of) fixed and stable edges in cinematic representation is informed by his staunch belief in the importance of self-analysis in subject formation:

This means taking seriously the best values of *humanitas*, the "self-reflective knowing about knowing and . . . the legislation of new means of knowing to which 'man' willingly subjects himself," Those words echo in Chen [Kuan-hsing]'s proposal for the colonized as well to undergo "self-critique, self-negation, and self-discovery . . . to form a less coerced and more reflexive and dignified subjectivity." Collectively, they inform the process of self-analysis that I began in the introduction and continued here. Among the filmmakers presented, Tan Pin Pin and Edwin are exemplary in that regard, inordinately ready to test the limits and contingencies of their respective subjectivities. For Chen, underwriting these risks is part of

51. Sim, 212.

the painful but necessary process of deimperialization, during which both colonizer and colonized transform their understandings of each other. This ultimately rehistoricizes and decenters the world. The focus of this conclusion, by holding a mirror up to itself, represents the book's resolve to fulfill that duty.⁵²

Sharing a critical interest in examining the “national” in Southeast Asian cinemas, *Postcolonial Hangups* and *Southeast Asia on Screen* make use of distinctly different methodologies and focus on diverse geopolitical regions and their cinemas. The two books expand the limits of Southeast Asian, Asian, national, and postcolonial cinema as well as lend insights to film aesthetics. Both books have incorporated valuable and new perspectives with much-appreciated historical depths. Invested readers will surely benefit from the vast array of film texts examined as well as the knowledge and critical perspectives offered by these specialists of the field.

52. Sim, 229–30.

