

Revelation in Movies: Theology of Film in Thailand

Prud Thiphong, CSsR

Abstract

Society today gives importance to film as a means of cultural communication. It has become a significant contemporary language in need of understanding and explication. Movies have increasingly become part of the core curriculum of fields, such as philosophy, sociology, English, psychology and religions. No longer regarded as just simply entertainment and diversion, movies are life stories – we interpret them and they interpret us. Hence, they can change lives and communicate truth; they can reveal, redeem, and bring good news and the message of salvation to people in different contexts. This paper discusses how films in Thailand – a series of epic films and five short commercial films – have been doing this for Thailand, a country currently embroiled in political wrangling and aching to rediscover its most important societal values. It further illustrates how these films, which mirror and reflect Thai society, can also lead to an understanding of how people see and experience God, the divine, in different dimensions.

Introduction

Elia Kazan, controversial filmmaker of the fifties, sixties, and seventies had said, “Film is now the language of (hu)mankind.” Film in today’s many forms—epic movies, shorts, documentaries or independent movies—broadens people’s exposure to life and provides alternate interpretations of life’s meaning and significance. Values and images are formed in response to life experience, with movies providing the data of countless new stories. In fact, as society’s major means of telling its stories, movies have become a type of bridge language that goes beyond the boundaries of its original group, community, and society.

Society today gives importance to film as a means of cultural communication. Cinema has become a significant contemporary language in need of understanding and explication. It has become more commonly used as part of the core curriculum of such disparate fields as philosophy, sociology, English, psychology and religions. Some even believe that cinema studies is positioned to become the new MBA, a means of general preparation for careers in fields as diverse as law and military.

Movies cannot be dismissed as simply entertainment and diversion, though they are also that. Movies are life stories; we interpret them and they interpret us. Hence, the power and the effect of films can change lives and communicate truth; films can reveal, redeem, and bring people good news and the message of salvation in different particular contexts. Films provide us with possibilities not only to know about God but to know God. Movies have the power to transform life.

This study pursues how films—a series of epic films and five short commercial ones—have been doing this for Thailand, which is currently embroiled in political wrangling and is aching to rediscover its most important societal values. The study further illustrates how the films, which mirror and reflect Thai society, can also lead to an understanding of how people see and experience God, the divine, in different dimensions.