**Ghost-Movies in Southeast Asia and beyond.**  
*Narratives, cultural contexts, audiences*  

**Workshop, Oct 3-6, 2012,**  
*University of Goettingen, Social and Cultural Anthropology*  
*Dynamics of Religion in Southeast Asia network*

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. 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. This holds true for rapidly transforming societies such as Thailand, Taiwan, Vietnam, Singapore or Indonesia, to mention only few examples.

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. 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. Such films are world-view mirrors but also enhancers of morals and convictions. They reflect traumatic events of the past, but can also be used as instruments of social criticism, ironic or moral comments, or as validation of magical machinations behind a mundane surface.

However, the audience of the extremely popular ghost-genre is largely unknown.

The workshop 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. Methodological problems involved should be taken as special challenges in this workshop.

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? Why do people like to be scared (and pay for this experience)? Are ghost-movie morals perceived as conservative or anarchistic, or do they back middle-class values? In what ways is scary entertainment related to worldviews, politics, aspirations and religious convictions of the (middle-class) audience? Do “tele-visions of the otherworldly” promote forms of imaginations that undermine (or stabilize) the dominant knowledge formations? How about violence and terror in such movies? What about irony and overt critique as stylistic devices of the ghost-film genre? Are the products of the film industry sources of re-enchantment, or do they simply produce forms of “banal religion”, or do we need different analytical categories, beyond the enchantment-disenchantment metaphor?

Deadline for submission of abstracts: April 30th, 2012. Please submit an abstract of not more than 300 words to pbraeun@uni-goettingen.de.

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