

## Thailand in the European Cinematic Imagination: The Phenomenon and Legacy of *Emmanuelle* (Fr 1974)

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### Abstract

Movie markets in Europe and the United States saw a considerable increase in the number of erotic films in the first half of the 1970s, followed by a transition to predominantly X-rated films in the second half. The development and rapid proliferation of the soft- and hardcore film genres can be attributed to the Sexual Liberation Movement of the 1960s, changed viewer expectations, the liberalization of film exhibition laws, and the development of new film technologies. A substantial number of European erotic and pornographic films were made in Thailand. The film *Emmanuelle* (Fr 1974, dir. Just Jaeckin) marked the beginning and became an international box-office hit, followed by several French, Italian, Swiss, German, and Danish productions that sought to ride on the wave of *Emmanuelle*'s success. This article seeks to give a concise overview of *Emmanuelle*'s legacy, that is, European adult-oriented films made from 1974 to 1980 because they shaped western representations and popular perceptions of Thailand for many years. It seeks to explore the cinematic portrayals of Thailand in selected films to determine the extent to which the country plays a significant role as a setting, and it explores the relevance of western interracial desires as well as the films' appropriation of the enduring allure of the East felt by many Europeans.

*Keywords:* Bangkok, exploitation cinema, interracial, Orientalism, representation, Thailand

## Introduction

The introduction of the birth control pill in 1960 was a major catalyst for the Sexual Liberation Movement that helped change Western European societies' perceptions of the body and self-determination. In great cultural upheavals, traditional codes of sexual behaviors were challenged, intimate relationships outside of traditional marriage and other forms of monogamous relationships became accepted, and the public's notions of taboos, shame and sin shifted decisively. In many countries, and over a fairly short period of time, legalization of abortion and broader acceptance of same-sex relationships followed.

Within this rapidly changing socio-cultural landscape, first softcore and later hardcore films flourished in western Europe. While "softcore" implies erotic and/or suggestive sexual imagery that does not display sexual organs or penetration, "hardcore" visual material is pornographic, aiming to stimulate feelings of arousal through the display of explicit images, including sexual organs and activity. In 1970s-Germany, for instance, the so-called Porno-Welle (tr.: "porno wave") was initiated by the popular films *Graf Porno und seine Mädchen* (WG 1969, tr.: "Count Porno and his girls") and *Schulmädchen-Report: Was Eltern nicht für möglich halten* (WG 1970, tr.: "Schoolgirl report, what parents do not believe possible"). (See Eitler [2015] for a review of the porno wave in Germany and its impact on the country's socio-cultural history.) The relaxation of pornography laws in the mid-1970s in many European countries allowed for the production and exhibition of increasingly explicit films and facilitated the formation of an industry that specialized in X-rated visual materials. Around the same time, from 1969 to 1984, the United States saw the "Golden Age of Porn". Commercially produced soft- and hardcore films were received positively by cinemagoers and film critics alike, and, regarding printed materials, Playboy magazine reached peak sales figures in the 1970s and contributed to the liberalization movement.

Thailand played an important role in this liberalization movement. Representations of Thailand in western fiction films, documentaries, literary and non-literary texts since the 1950s have been diverse and complex, with images and stories that have had a lasting effect on Westerners' perceptions of Thailand. The British novel *A Woman of Bangkok* (1956, Jack Reynolds, originally titled *A Sort of Beauty*) was the first fictional story with Thailand as a roaming-ground for a white man's explorations and conquests. It is about the tumultuous relationship between young Englishman Reginald Joyce and Bangkok's number one bargirl "White Leopard" at the Bolero night club. The novel was translated into German as *Versuchung in Bangkok* (1959, tr.: "Temptation in Bangkok") and is still in print today.

Since *A Woman of Bangkok*, the theme of "western-man-meets-Asian-seductress" has been explored in numerous erotic and crime stories situated in Bangkok's entertainment districts, but it had already been popularized, for instance, by the Japan-set French novel *Madame Chrysanthème* (1887, Pierre Loti), the American novel *Madame Butterfly* (1898, John Luther Long) and its Italian opera version (1904, Giacomo Puccini), by the American novel *Sayonara* (1954, James A. Michener) and its Hollywood screen adaptation (USA 1957) and many similar stories. The British Hong Kong-set novel *The World of Suzie Wong* (1957, Richard Mason), in which an Englishman becomes enamored with a Hong-Kong courtesan, became a major success and was made into a Hollywood film (USA 1960). (See Algie [2014] for a discussion of the novels *A Woman of Bangkok* and *The World of Suzie Wong*.)

Bangkok's entertainment zone Patpong opened several nightclubs in the late 1960s and expanded in the 1970s to cater to American GIs on their R&R stays. (See Backman [2005] for

an account of Patpong's history.) Western films produced in Thailand in the 1960s, particularly European action-adventure thrillers, Hollywood blockbusters, television documentaries, and Vietnam War reportages, perpetuated impressions of Bangkok, including its nightlife, and contributed to the whole country's reputation as a viable film and travel destination.

*Emmanuelle* (Fr 1974), French director Just Jaeckin's film debut, was released during abovementioned socio-cultural changes and rapid developments in the adult film industry. The story about the sexual awakening of a young Frenchwoman during her stay in Bangkok became an enormous international commercial success. (In 1975 Jaeckin made his second film, *The Story of O*, which he adapted from the 1954-French erotic novel of the same name, written by Anne Desclos as Pauline Réage, but this exploitation film with bondage themes resonated much less with European audiences.) *Emmanuelle* established the association of Thailand with sexual freedom. European film production companies tried to emulate *Emmanuelle*'s success, which from 1974 to 1980 resulted in a substantial number of adult-oriented films fully or partially set in Thailand. These films reflected European countries' social and cultural concerns and revealed a fascination with and desire for interracial erotic encounters. (See Williams [2004] for an analysis of the relations between X-rated films and interracial lust.) The study of *Emmanuelle* and its legacy gives thus valuable insights into western portrayals of Thailand as seen in these stigmatized genres.



Figure 1: Emmanuelle Entertainment Co.  
on Ratchadaphisek Road, Bangkok.

The long-term effect of *Emmanuelle* is visible on Bangkok's Ratchadaphisek Road, where Emmanuelle Entertainment Co. has been a major amusement hub for many years (see Figure 1). Similarly, other entertainment districts feature bars whose names are based on fictional characters, such as "Suzie Wong Agogo" in Soi Cowboy and "Butterflies" in Nana Plaza, or inspire Orientalist fantasies, such as "Sheba" in Soi Cowboy and "Safari" in Nana Plaza.

Despite being considered lowbrow entertainment, many X-rated films are authentic documents of socio-cultural critique that address and sometimes transgress conventions and concerns about the politics of body, gender, and race. This article explores the legacy of the film *Emmanuelle*, which consists of over a dozen European X-rated films made in the second half of the 1970s that are partially or fully set in Thailand or in some way are connected to Thailand.

The article then focuses on the fabrication and manifestation of oriental desire and interracial encounters in order to scrutinize the films' representations of Thailand. Central questions are thus, whether the country plays an integral part to the stories or serves merely as an exotic background, and whether the cinematic staging of interracial relationships follows western tendencies to depict Asian countries and cultures as mysterious, exotic and erotic. An understanding of *Emmanuelle*'s legacy helps to recognize the West's prevalent perceptions and persistent misconceptions about Thailand, and it explains the benefits to some Thais, namely through business ventures catering to western patrons.

## Precursors

From approximately 1958 to 1964, relaxation in censorship laws led to the production of some low-budget nudist films in Europe and the United States. Elements of the nudist film genre were picked up and developed by the sexploitation film, a subgenre of the exploitation film. On the surface, nudist films served to familiarize audiences with the nudist and naturist movements; however, their underlying intention was to exhibit female nudity. Two films with nudist content include a Thailand episode and are precursors to *Emmanuelle*.

Doris Wishman's *Behind the Nudist Curtain* (USA 1964) is partially set in Thailand. No print is in circulation, but it may still exist. Jarmick (2002) states that the story begins in a nudist camp where detective Sam is relaxing. He receives an assignment, which is to pursue a spy. The chase takes him to Las Vegas, Hong Kong, Thailand, Paris, Haiti, Mexico, Hawaii, Berlin and Tokyo. Everywhere the private eye goes, he gets to observe naked girls. The film surely included images of travel and treated Thailand as one of several destinations for nudists, but its relevance to the representations of Thailand cannot be determined.

The controversial Werner Kunz wrote, produced and directed a dozen naturist films from 1956 to 1973. He tested the limits of the law with ever more risqué productions. Uhlmann (2013) states that Kunz's films belong to the exploitation film genre and that he paved the way for a future generation of rebellious directors (p. 170). In *Die Oben Ohne Story - Flucht ins Paradies* (CH 1965, tr.: "The Topless Story – Escape to Paradise", a.k.a. *The Topless Story*), released in Switzerland, Germany and Finland, Kunz combines the genres of travelogue documentary and nudist film. Fashion designer Nathaniel Pierson travels to destinations around the world in search of inspiration. He is followed by reporter Jo and Pierson's secretary Maya. The journey takes them to New York City, the Aegean Sea of Greece, and beaches near Bangkok and Tokyo. Images of airplanes and aerial views of islands and coastlines emphasize the notion of travel. The shallow story serves as a vehicle to feature scenes of semi-nude women and men sunbathing at secluded beaches. Scenes at the so-called European Sunbathing Club supposedly take place at a Thai beach, but it looks suspiciously Mediterranean. The stock footage impressions of Bangkok show Wat Pho, Wat Phra Kaew, the Chao Phraya River, and the floating market. The fleeting glimpses of Bangkok are accompanied by instrumental music of Chinese rather than Thai origin and by Pierson's tongue-in-cheek voiceover commentaries, such as "My next port-of-call. Now, where is it? Can you guess? A thousand temples. Golden Buddhas", or "The Venice of the East – got it? It's not too cold either." Having observed many people sunbathing and swimming naked, Pierson concludes that he must design more revealing swimsuits.

These two films present Thailand as one of several international destinations that welcomes nudists. Neither film is meant to be erotic because the desire they express is for showcasing the naked human body in harmony with nature. Nevertheless, films with nudist images are

messengers of the Sexual Liberation Movement of the 1960s, and with their liberal attitudes they were precursors of the adult films of the 1970s.

### **The *Emmanuelle*-Phenomenon**

*Emmanuelle* (Fr 1974) is based on Emmanuelle Arsan's erotic novel of the same name, published in French in 1967 and in English in 1971. Thai writer and actress Marayat Rollet-Andriane (né Bibidh), under the pen name of Emmanuelle Arsan, was long thought to be the author, but Wroblewski (online, n.d.) makes the case that her French diplomat husband Louis-Jacques Rollet-Andriane was actually the author. It is about a young French woman who moves to Bangkok together with her diplomat husband. She enters the circles of high-society expatriates and embarks on a journey of sexual experimentation during which she redefines her relationship with her husband, becomes more independent, and ultimately finds her own place in the world.

The film had an extensive international release and struck a chord with millions of viewers, but the critical reviews were generally not favorable. Roger Ebert (1975) wrote one of few positive reviews. In the United States, a minimalist poster (see Figure 2), featured a black background, the film title in white letters and with a positive upward direction, and in the lower right corner the contours of a woman's face with the words "X was never like this" seemingly escaping her red lips. The poster promised a new kind of erotic-cinematic experience and aroused viewers' curiosity. Not least because of it, *Emmanuelle* became a world-wide sensation and established Dutch actress Sylvia Kristel as an icon of erotic cinema. (See Chaffin-Quiray [2004] for an excellent account of the novel-to-screen-adaptation process of *Emmanuelle*, as well as the film's public reception and influence on French and U.S. American cinema culture.)

Shot in Paris, Bangkok, and Chiang Mai (the latter city standing in for the rural hinterland of Pattaya), *Emmanuelle* creates a specific portrait of Thailand. Interior scenes set in Bangkok take place in nightclubs and restaurants, exterior scenes in city streets and along canals. Scenes seemingly taking place in an opium den were shot in a Paris studio. Other parts of the film are set on a traditional estate in the idyllic countryside.

*Emmanuelle* features several intimate encounters. On separate occasions Emmanuelle gets close with the three French women, Marie-Ange, Ariane and Bee. She also has intercourse with her husband Jean and later with two Frenchmen on an airplane in midflight. There are scenes of erotic coupling between Thai house servants in the countryside estate and between two female dancers on the stage of a Bangkok nightclub. In Paris, Jean and a friend receive an erotic massage from two Asian women, and in Thailand he has intercourse with Ariane.

Controversial are the scenes in which Emmanuelle – after having fallen under the tutelage of the much older and deviously appreciative Mario – is apparently raped by a Thai man in an opium den (although this scene may be interpreted as her drug-induced hallucination) and later sodomized by a Muay Thai fighter who has "won" her in a bout. Kristel has stated that she was displeased having to shoot this humiliating rape-scene at Jaeckin's insistence and with two men who were not actors (Shipka 2011, p. 299; Brown 2012).

Also contentious and somewhat out of place is a scene in which a Thai nightclub dancer lights a cigarette lodged in her vagina. Shipka (2011) states that producer Rousset-Rouard added the scene for the final edit to add more "spice" to the film and did so without Jaeckin's knowledge (p. 299).



Figure 2: *Emmanuelle*. US film poster with the slogan “X was never like this.”



Figure 3: *Emmanuelle*. French film poster.

In the final scene, *Emmanuelle* is sitting in front of a mirror (see Figure 3). This echoes the opening scene and suggests that the entire story may have been her daydream. More importantly, it indicates that *Emmanuelle* has grown as a person. She is liberated from social conformity, taboos and male definitions of her body and personality. She has taken control of herself and her future.

*Emmanuelle* struck a chord with the 1970s sexual liberation movement because of its affirmation of the female body, women’s encouragement to take control of their sexuality, and the depiction of a variety of female characters, from the initially naïve to the later, mature *Emmanuelle*, from the aggressive seducer Ariana to the lolitaesque Marie-Ange and the passionate Bee. Not surprisingly, it is the unselfish Bee who becomes *Emmanuelle*’s true lover. Nevertheless, female audiences’ responses remained mixed due to the apparent sexual objectification of the protagonist. According to Shipka (2011), many Asian women

experienced *Emmanuelle* as a liberating film because they focused on her strength as a woman rather than her exploitation (p. 300). Kristel herself stated that “[i]n France, the feminists complained that Emmanuelle was a femme objet – an object of male fantasies. But the Japanese feminists were rather delighted with the film because they thought Emmanuelle was dominant, just because of this one scene where she climbs on top of her husband. That was the moment when all the Japanese women stood up and applauded” (Brown 2012).

According to Sylvie Blum-Reid (2003), *Emmanuelle* was influential in its shaping of the East-West literary and cinematic discourse. The film stirred up the French film industry and opened a discussion about censorship and cinematic portrayals of the naked human body (p. 23). Moreover, *Emmanuelle* was the first ambitious European X-rated film set in Thailand. With it, the social acceptance of buying a ticket for an erotic film grew, which paved the way for a more liberal view of adult-oriented films in the public domain. At the same time, its popularity gave western interest in Thailand a push, and the cultural environment was such that European erotic films could try to emulate *Emmanuelle*’s style and atmosphere. Thus, *Emmanuelle* immediately became the template for more than a dozen European films made between 1975 and 1980.

## The Legacy of *Emmanuelle*

### *Emanuelle nera – Orient reportage* (It 1976)

The most widely distributed film of *Emmanuelle*’s legacy is *Emanuelle nera – Orient reportage* (It 1976, a.k.a. *Emanuelle in Bangkok*), starring Indonesian-Dutch actress Laura Gemser. It was directed by Joe D’Amato and released across Europe. With her dark skin, lean body and Asian features Gemser embodied the ultimate version of the exotic seductress of western male erotic power-fantasies. Labelled as “Emanuelle nera”, that is. “black Emanuelle” (see Figure 4), Gemser was a contrast to the blonde, fair-skinned Emmanuelle character played by Sylvia Kristel. Gemser had made her debut in *Amore Libero – Free Love* (It 1974), followed by *Emanuelle nera* (It, Sp 1975, a.k.a. *Black Emanuelle*), and *Emmanuelle: L’antivierge* (Fr 1975, a.k.a. *Emmanuelle 2*). In the latter film Sylvia Kristel plays the main role. In one scene, the two Em(m)anuelles are paired up for a sensual body-to-body massage. *Emanuelle nera* had already exploited the success of *Emmanuelle*, but *Emanuelle nera – Orient reportage* was the first and only film of the Italian-produced series that was partially situated in Bangkok. In the titles of the Italian films, Emanuelle is written with one “m” to avoid legal repercussions. Thus, the film title *Emanuelle* itself is a nod to the exploitation film genre.

*Emanuelle nera – Orient reportage* borrowed shamelessly from the original *Emmanuelle* film. For instance, the marketing hook “X has never been hotter” (see Figure 5) titillates the viewer and tries to outdo the slogan on the *Emmanuelle* poster “X was never like this”. Both advertising hooks point to the symbolic power of the letter X and the seductive attraction viewers must have felt by attending a public screening of such a film and enjoying the excitement of breaking a taboo.

Emanuelle is a U.S. American newspaper journalist and travel photographer based in New York. In Venice she and her boyfriend Roberto, an archeologist, board a cruise ship set for Bangkok. Roberto will join an excavation site some hours’ drive north of Bangkok, while Emanuelle is invited by a character named Prince Sanit. (Sanit is played by Italian actor Ivan Rassimov who already took the lead role in the Thailand-set exploitation film *Il paese del sesso selvaggio* (It 1972, tr.: “The land of savage sex”, a.k.a. *Man from the Deep River*.) At their destination, Emanuelle and Roberto go separate ways. She lodges at the renowned Siam

Intercontinental Hotel and soon meets her Thai host Sanit who gives her a tour of Bangkok during which they are shadowed by a sinister-looking man. Sanit leads her to the Japanese masseuse Gee – whose name is a reference to the character Bee in *Emmanuelle* – whom Emanuelle befriends. Roberto returns briefly to Bangkok, accompanied by the American couple Jimmy and Frances, new friends he made on the way.

Emanuelle perceives Bangkok as other-worldly when she reveals to her Thai host: “Your city is fascinating. Sometimes I think that living here is like living in another dimension.” Her roaming through the city and its outskirts give her many impressions. Equipped with her camera and often in the role of a tourist who gazes in awe at the world around her, she explores China Town, random streets and a busy public market, gets fleeting glimpses of towering billboard signs advertising Thai movies, passes the Democracy Monument, Phra Sumen Fort, the Golden Mount, various temples on Rattanakosin Island, Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, and Sanam Luang. Don Muang Airport, Siam Intercontinental Hotel and Wat Arun feature extensively. Idyllic and rural views are offered during boat rides on Bangkok canals and the Chao Phraya River, from where Emanuelle observes life along the shores. During a visit to what looks like Sam Phran garden resort in Nakhom Pathom province, she takes pictures of a traditional Thai dance performance, a sword fight, a Muay Thai fight, and rides on an elephant.

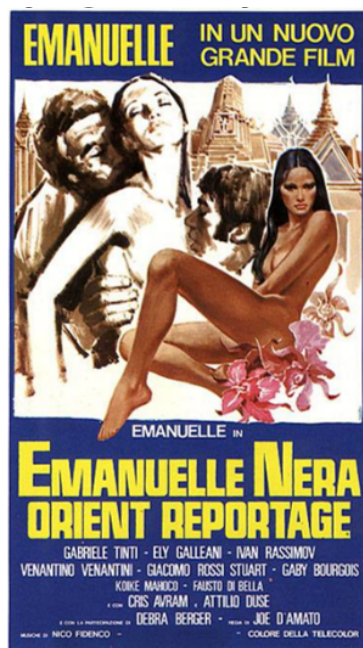


Figure 4: *Emanuelle nera – Orient reportage*. Italian film poster.

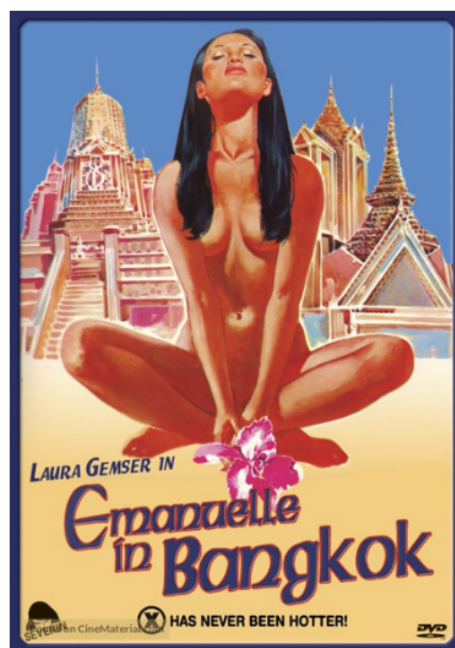


Figure 5: *Emanuelle in Bangkok*. U.S. DVD cover with the slogan “X has never been hotter!”

After her passport is stolen and the sinister thug and his gang have become a threat, she decides to leave. She flies to Casablanca to reconnect with Roberto who has left Thailand before her. In Casablanca her adventures continue as she befriends Roberto’s new fiancée Janet and the American ambassador’s daughter Debra. Emanuelle roams the streets and markets, attends social gatherings in the luxurious home of the American ambassador, and continues her journey to rocky hills and the desert. Although the portrayals of the Moroccan places, people and culture are steeped in European Orientalism and would be worthy of scrutiny by themselves, the focus of this article shall remain the Bangkok episode.

Scenes of sights and sounds in Thailand are alternated with scenes of erotic titillation. Emanuelle discovers the country not only with her camera but also with her body. In the opening scene, she and Roberto share a moment of intimacy and later they have intercourse in the cabin of the cruise ship. She appreciates Gee's body-on-body massage, and in her hotel room she dances with a Thai bellboy and lets him massage her. In a small club, she, Roberto and their friends are treated to lascivious go-go dance performances, where one dancer plays with a burning candle, dripping wax on her body. A scene of a go-go-dancer "playing" with ping-pong balls, and a quasi-gang-rape scene in which Emanuelle gives in to a group of Caucasian men have been cut from some DVD releases. This is also the case of scenes where Emanuelle takes pictures of a cockfight for gambling and a bloody struggle between a mongoose and a cobra. These scenes portray Thailand as a country of perversion and savage fights and place the film solidly in the Italian exploitation genre, yet their inclusion on a DVD would change the rating and raise the required minimum age of buyers.

A central scene takes place in a luxurious teak house where Emanuelle, Gee, Sanit, Roberto, Frances and Jimmy share an opium pipe. The opium is ceremoniously prepared and then smoked. Soon, the scene becomes an orgy where Sanit observes the guests losing their inhibitions and caressing one another. Male-to-male intimacy is avoided, so as not to threaten male viewers' heterosexual identity.

Sanit leads Emanuelle to a separate room. There, they caress each other, and he philosophizes in the voiceover:

You are not like them. You are different. You understand how to control your ecstasy. You are capable of letting the pleasures of the earth center all your senses. You live them with your entire body, not just with those few erotic zones westerners conceive to love-making. I can make you cry out with pleasure. But you must first give back that which you have been given. And you do know how. This is God's gift to you. You know how to suspend yourself in a tunnel where time no longer has meaning. And when the moment arrives, when your pleasure is on the verge of becoming glorious pain, then, only then you permit yourself that most sublime moment of all, which the French call "le petit mort", ["la petite mort" is correct] a little death, and we Orientals call "the great ecstasy".

The idea of a drug-induced erotic scene is of course taken from *Emmanuelle*, and Sanit's philosophical monolog is in the spirit of similar musings by the character Mario. Sanit's praise for Emanuelle's self-control and deep understanding of pleasure, pain and ecstasy is based on the Orientalist notion that assumes a fundamental difference between the Occident, which supposedly stands for knowledge based on logic and science, and the Orient, which derives its knowledge from spirituality and uninhibited sensuality.

Regarding the attitude of women, *Emanuelle nera – Orient reportage* tries to strike a similar chord as *Emmanuelle*. The female roles are self-confident and proactive in their choices of partners. Emanuelle is as independent as the men she meets, which is emphasized by her photojournalistic work. Gee is portrayed as the ultimate oriental lover because she sleeps with anyone she feels attracted to. The carefree American Frances separates from her husband Jimmy just as quickly as she married him and takes off to India in pursuit of pleasure and spiritual awakening. The British archeologist Janet ends her engagement with Roberto because she wants more experiences before settling down. And the American ambassador's young

daughter Debra, who grew up without a mother, is taken under Emanuelle's protective wing, just like Bee guides Emmanuelle in the French film. Emanuelle builds up her self-confidence and sense of independence. Thus, the women in *Emanuelle nera – Orient reportage* are proud to be free of social constraints. In fact, it is a man, Roberto, who is the only character who ever shows jealousy and regret over a breakup.

Nevertheless, in some instances women still appear to rely on men's approval. They like to celebrate and flaunt their body in front of them. For instance, in a tent in the Moroccan desert, Emanuelle and Janet join a dark-skinned North-African woman's dance performance in front of a group of Tuaregs. The two western women were symbolically abducted by the men, and the seductive Nubian woman reminds one of a popular subject of French Orientalist paintings, for example *A Slave Market* (1866), *Pool in a Harem* (1875) and *Phryne before the Areopagus* (1891) by Jean-Léon Gérôme. As in so many scenes, men remain dressed and watch, while women are (semi-)nude and perform to satisfy men's interracial desires. The Tuaregs form a circle around the three dancers, lift up their robes and cover them, that is, they take symbolic possession of them.

*Emmanuelle* attracted female audiences because the film follows the adventures of a female main character and presents many events from her perspective. While *Emanuelle nera – Orient reportage* also has a female protagonist, it is already a step away from the female-centered experience of Oriental desire. This film is more alluring to male viewers because Emanuelle's naked body is foregrounded to arouse male desire. The films that make up the main body of the *Emmanuelle* legacy move yet again further away from the female-centered erotic experience. They feature predominantly white men's adventures in Thailand where women are objectified by the male gaze.

### ***Naughty Girls* (UK 1975) and the E. C. Dietrich Trilogy**

The British film *Naughty Girls* (UK 1975), shot in Thailand, Malaysia, Sydney and on Bali was released one year before *Emanuelle nera – Orient reportage*. To this day it is one of only a handful of British films with an overt Thailand connection. A better-known British film set in Thailand is the James Bond spy adventure *The Man with the Golden Gun* (UK 1973). Although *Naughty Girls* is not in circulation anymore, synopses are available. Speed (1976) states that this is an X-rated "British sex film about four girls abroad and their adventures at work and play" (p. 177). Gifford (2001) summarizes: "Four girls describe their sex experiences to an investigator" (p. 857). Thus, *Naughty Girls* is about the journey of a whole group of women and thus appears to be a variation of the female-centered *Emmanuelle*-concept. It tried to benefit from *Emmanuelle*'s popularity by making female travelers from Europe the main characters and by including Thailand as one of several destinations where carefree women could explore their sexuality. Apart from *Emanuelle nera – Orient reportage*, it is the only *Emmanuelle* legacy film that focuses on the Thailand-adventure of women rather than men.

Swiss producer Erwin C. Dietrich sought to cash in with *Die Sex-Spelunke von Bangkok* (CH 1974), *Heisser Sex in Bangkok* (CH 1976), and *Nach Bangkok der Liebe wegen* (CH 1977). From the 1960s to the 1980s Dietrich was a prolific Swiss writer, director and producer who worked across many genres, including exploitation cinema. Not surprisingly, he jumped on the *Emmanuelle*-bandwagon. Eppenberger & Stapfer (2006) state that the output of Dietrich's company was so high that former employees could not recall some production details (p.118), and that *Heisser Sex in Bangkok* was released in 1973, followed by *Die Sex-Spelunke von Bangkok* in 1975 and *Nach Bangkok der Liebe wegen* in 1977 (p. 93), yet

admitting uncertainty about those years (p. 175). The order and years given in this article are the correct ones however.

The trailers and promotional posters for the softcore film *Die Sex-Spelunke von Bangkok* (CH 1974) are insightful regarding the portrayal of Bangkok and the intention to entice male viewers' oriental desires, to which end the depictions are based on interracial power dynamics. A dozen European men – a tourist group named “Je ferner, je lieber” (tr.: “The further away, the better”) – are sitting on board of an airplane ready to take off from Bangkok airport. They are daydreaming about their recent conquests which the film then tells in retrospect. Two evenings in a row they are gathered in the lobby of a Bangkok hotel to discuss their plans for the night. First, they venture to a massage parlor to meet Asian women. The following night is spent at the “Yellow Inn of Bangkok” where they watch the performances of female dancers and have intercourse with them in front of other patrons. A third sequence of intimate encounters is shown in slow-motion to indicate the men's dream-like reminiscing as the airplane has already departed. The blond tour-guide Sylvia has been frustrated because in Bangkok the men rejected her advances but stirred by their memories and in the absence of Asian women, a couple of them sleep with her. The dream of erotic adventures in Bangkok, the midflight scenes, and the tour-guide's name are references to *Emmanuelle* and Sylvia Kristel.

*Die Sex-Spelunke von Bangkok* begins with stock footage of Bangkok to establish it as the setting. The impressions are those of airport runways, landing and departing airplanes, life along the canals, patches of jungle, and cock fights for betting. The use of stock footage is seen not only in this but also in many other *Emmanuelle* legacy films. It was a convenient and inexpensive way to situate the story.



Figure 6: *Oriental Vixen*. US film poster.

A poster promoting the same film as *Oriental Vixen* (see Figure 6) has a titillating announcement: “Oriental Beauties... Bizarre Love Rituals... You’ve Never Seen as Much in Any Place! SUZIE CHINA is the ORIENTAL VIXEN ... She’s HOT!” (One of the actresses credited is Mai-Ling Chang, which is probably a pseudonym. Her name may be in reference to actress Mai Ling, who plays a stewardess in the James Bond film *Goldfinger* (UK 1964). In 1979 German satirist Gerhard Polt performed his sketch *Mai Ling* about a German man who is “very satisfied” with his Thai mail-order bride. Moreover, “ling” means “monkey” in Thai. (Are these just coincidences?) This shifts the focus away from Bangkok, toward the oriental woman imagined as an object of pleasure. Obviously, the name Suzie China is a reference to the main female character in the novel *The World of Suzie Wong*, and the description of her as a “vixen”, that is, a female fox, dehumanizes her and marks her as sexually promiscuous. The poster can also be construed as an attempt to establish the male spectators sitting in the chairs and at a distance as appreciative voyeurs – and with them the male viewers in the darkness of a movie theater – of the women who appear to derive their own pleasure from flaunting their bodies and receiving lustful looks. Moreover, the poster is meant to awaken the Orientalist erotic male-power fantasy of owning a harem.

A male voiceover in an official English language trailer makes these promises:

Learn the secret pleasures and vices of the Far East. Nothing is withheld in *Banging in Bangkok*. Featuring the most thrilling girls of all Thailand. [...] The venomous enchantment of the East will lure you to shocking depths of degradation. [...] The exotic perfume of the erotic Far East will go to your head and haunt you forever after you’ve seen *Banging in Bangkok*. (*Die Sex-Spelunke von Bangkok*, DVD extras)

The trailer promotes *Die Sex-Spelunke von Bangkok* as *Banging in Bangkok*, which is consistent with the English language soundtrack when one of the men says: “Let’s go banging in Bangkok.” (IMDb.com misleadingly states that *Banging in Bangkok* is an alternative U.K. video box title of *Heisser Sex in Bangkok*.)

The commentary marks Bangkok as a city of western male penetration and as a mysterious city of the “erotic Far East”. Positive associations (“pleasures ... thrilling girls”) are juxtaposed with warnings of danger (“vices ... shocking depths of degradation ... haunt”) and enticing ambiguity (“venomous ... enchantment ... lure”). Bangkok is imagined as a dangerous yet alluring city where the yearnings of hedonists will be satisfied. The reference to “exotic perfume” is to appeal to the viewer’s olfactory sense and hints not only at the smell of lotus flowers but also at the supposed pleasure of smoking opium.

Exchanges between a male and a female voiceover on the trailer define gender roles and construct power dynamics:

*m.v.*: “You’ll be tempted by the little ...”  
*f.v.*: “... Thai girls. Those little Thai girls are for us.”  
 [...]
 *m.v.*: “What is your secret, little Thai?”  
*f.v.*: “You’ll find out.”  
 [...]
 *m.v.*: “I’m taking you now, doll, just like this.”  
*f.v.*: “I’m ready for you.”

[...]

*f.v.:* “My little lotus blossom. I’m going to deflower you.”

*F.v.:* “Take me!”

The dialogs define Thai women as petite (“little”), treat them as inanimate objects for play (“doll”), flowers (“lotus blossom”), and mysterious (“secret”), and portray them as eager conquests (“I’m ready for you”, “Take me!”). Female voice and male desire strangely merge when *she* says that the Thai girls are “for us”, meaning for western men.

The Asian women’s staged hyper-sexuality and the performed acts of interracial desire, which are all presented as based on mutual attraction, create the main spectacle. This is supported by the fact that the actresses are of various ethnic backgrounds and have light to dark skin. Furthermore, soft- and hardcore films often include lesbian scenes to double the male viewer’s pleasure. In *Die Sex-Spelunke von Bangkok* such scenes are absent, which may be attributed to the intention to focus on interracial heterosexual couplings and to avoid any threat to the male sexual identity. The film essentially serves to affirm Caucasian men’s masculinity, heterosexuality, and virility through mutually satisfying intimacy with Asian women. Furthermore, it constructs a two-class system between white and Asian women. The men’s repeated rejection of tour-guide Sylvia and their eventual agreement to sleep with her in the absence of Asian women stigmatizes all white women as unable to compete with Asian women and their ability to awaken and satisfy western men’s desires.

The other two Bangkok-set films by Dietrich also borrow from *Emmanuelle* and are variants of *Die Sex-Spelunke von Bangkok*.

The story of *Heisser Sex in Bangkok* (CH 1976, tr.: “Hot Sex in Bangkok”) is similar and some of the actors are the same. A group of bowling buddies heed the call of pleasurable adventures and travel to Bangkok. The package tour costs less than a thousand Swiss Francs, implying that a trip to Thailand is affordable. The men are portrayed as sleazy sex tourists who frequent massage parlors and bath houses. Their comments are sexist and racist. Every Thai woman is attractive to them, flirtatious, and readily available. No white man is ever rejected. Once their vacation has ended, the men leave reluctantly and daydream of a quick return. Adhering to exploitation film genre conventions, *Heisser Sex in Bangkok* features stock footage of Bangkok and tortured animals. The Thai actresses are credited with Hong-Kong Chinese pseudonyms, which not only protects their identity but also blurs the lines between Thai and Chinese nationalities. One of the names is Suzi (Eppenberger & Stapfer 2006, p. 93), a reference to *The World of Suzie Wong*.

The erotic film *Nach Bangkok der Liebe wegen* (CH 1977, tr.: “To Bangkok for Love”) was shot in Zurich and Bangkok. It features elements of parody because the comedy genre was flourishing in 1970s German-language cinema. A travel agent of Asian descent recommends a goofy Swiss bachelor to travel to Bangkok, enticing him with the possibilities of passionate encounters. The film then follows him to Bangkok where he has intercourse with Asian and Caucasian women. The alternative German title *Sexpuppen aus Fernost* (tr.: “Sex Dolls from the Far East”) points to the notion that Asian women are mindless pleasure-providers and that Thailand is a geographical part of the Far East. According to Berndt & Schweer (1991), Dietrich initiated this third and final Bangkok-film but at some point, Swiss film producer Edi Stöckli adopted it and made it his first hardcore release on VHS for German adult business pioneer Beate Uhse.

### ***Drei Bayern in Bangkok* (WG 1976)**

German company Lisa Film has produced many films in Thailand, one of which is *Drei Bayern in Bangkok* (WG 1976, tr.: “Three Bavarians in Bangkok”, a.k.a. *Bathtime in Bangkok*), shot in Bangkok and the Bavarian Alps. Under the pretense of promoting a Bavarian brand of beer abroad but actually hoping to bed Thai women, the mayor of a small town and his friend travel to Bangkok. They are tracked down by the village vicar. (The concept of the vicar-mayor-rivalry is based on the competition between the catholic priest Don Camillo and the communist mayor Peppone in a French-Italian comedy series of the 1950s and 1960s set in provincial Italy.) Sightseeing tours and slapstick chases around Bangkok follow, as well as a run-in with Thai thugs, a puzzling identity switch, and several semi-erotic scenes.

Bangkok is more than just an exotic background because the film includes a flurry of outdoor scenes, for instance impressions of Sanam Luang, the Grand Palace, Chinatown and Silom, food markets, canals, and a floating market. Following the *Emmanuelle* original there are scenes at airports, hotels and gardens, which present the city as a tourist destination. Curiously, scenes at a beach resort, possibly shot in Rayong, imply that Bangkok offers beautiful beaches. Superficial intercultural experiences are also had, for example when the mayor, craving Bavarian-style sausages, visits a food market whereby accident he eats freshly made Thai sausages instead.

Time and again strikingly blond German women and dark-skinned Thai women undress in the presence of men. In fact, all women in the film are uninhibited, always eager to get naked and to seek physical contact with the German men. For instance, having arrived at the hotel, the men are stunned by three Thai masseuses who hurriedly disrobe and chase after them. A key scene takes place inside a massage parlor, labelled a Turkish bath. Thai women sit behind a large window waiting to be selected by a patron. Having made his choice, the mayor pays cash for her at a counter. The whole scenario may appeal to a power-fantasy where a man is master over an entire harem; however, this is quite extraordinary because the scene blatantly condones the money-for-sex-transaction.

All in all, *Drei Bayern in Bangkok* is a holiday and travel film that follows the concept of softcore titillation and lowbrow humor films popularized by Lisa Film and other production companies in German-speaking countries in the 1970s. It is ironic that the “Bavarian sex film” was a prolific genre, since Bavaria was and still is Germany’s most catholic-conservative state. Older generations of Germans subscribed to traditional morality and were likely shocked by the homemade films that violated taboos and endorsed liberal dealings with male desire for Asian women.

### **French Productions**

*Emmanuelle* was most often emulated in France because both the original novel and film came from there. Five films – some of them coproduced with Hong Kong and Italian companies – are relevant. They gradually reduced the time given to the characters’ explorations of Bangkok and increased the intensity of explicit interracial encounters, with Bangkok being diminished to the role of an “exotic background”.

*Jambes en l’air à Bangkok* (Fr 1975, tr.: “Legs in the air in Bangkok”) is a softcore film with elements of comedy, travel and adventure. The original length is 98 minutes but only shorter versions are available. Henri Sala directed this and other X-rated films, that is, *Emanuelle e Lolita* (1976). (See the European Girls Adult Film Database.) Ducas is a wealthy industrialist, Patrick a photojournalist and Ducas’ personal assistant. To provide his boss with information

about erotic extravaganzas, Patrick travels to Bangkok. Once there, he sleeps with a Thai masseuse and the French photographers Anna and Dorothée. There is an explicit group orgy with two western men and two Thai women, followed by Patrick's visit to a Patpong massage parlor where he selects a masseuse from a group of women waiting behind a window. This scene may have inspired the similar one in *Drei Bayern in Bangkok*. Bangkok is presented with impressions of city streets, markets, canals, temples, a Khon dance performance and a Muay Thai fight.

In *Jouir à Bangkok* (Fr 1977, tr.: "Enjoying Bangkok") two robbers steal Max's briefcase during a delivery. His companion Paulette sleeps with their manager to save his job. But Max has already secured a new position as an illustrator for posters of X-rated movies. Max then meets Soja who convinces him to visit Asia. Rather than featuring Asian actresses, the film constructs an opposite between two women: one blond and fair-skinned (Carole Piérac), the other dark-skinned and of North-African descent (Hare Krane). The contrast of skin color and the interracial sex scenes are the main spectacle. *Jouir à Bangkok* is the first European film that associates Bangkok with hardcore. However, it pretends to be partially set in Bangkok by using a collage of stock footage of a Bangkok street market and a staged sword fight, alternated with stock footage of Hong Kong streets, which reveals the producers' assumption that viewers would be oblivious to the setting. The word "Bangkok" in the title and a handful of authentic impressions are apparently enough to locate the story in the mind of the viewer.

In the softcore film *International Prostitution: Brigade Criminelle* (Fr, HK 1980), police officer Philippe Degato is on a mission to solve a murder mystery. He pursues an Italian pimp from Paris to Antwerp, Bangkok and Hong Kong. Through the Asian woman Tazzi (Laura Gemser), he is introduced to the world of prostitution. The film shows a school for prostitutes, massage parlors, prostitution on a train, and a casino-brothel where women are the prizes for the winners. The movie poster (see Figure 7) connects Gemser's face and fictional character with the word "prostitution", and the viewer is invited to extend this connection to Bangkok and all Asian women. Swiss producer Dietrich distributed the film on VHS in Germany as *Kriminalbrigade im Kampf gegen den schwarzen Markt der Liebe* (tr.: "Criminal brigade in the fight against the black market of love") ("Prostitution International").

*Le journal érotique d'une Thaïlandaise* (Fr, It, HK 1980) with adult film actresses Brigitte Lahaye and Sylvie Cointreis a hardcore film (also available in a softcore version) and stands out from the group. In a shallow story set in Paris and Bangkok, agent Paul Vernon, disguised as a fashion photographer, travels to Bangkok on a mission to find two vanished colleagues. He explores Bangkok's sites and nightlife together with the blonde models Yvonne and Claudine. His desires are fulfilled by the charming Thai woman Clito. She is hassled by a group of mobsters but refuses Vernon's help for his own protection. The Bangkok scenes feature authentic places, such as Don Muang Airport, Siam Intercontinental Hotel, Victory Monument, city streets, canals, and what appears to be Sam Phran garden resort. The touristic activities of sightseeing, elephant riding and touring the canals are alternated with the characters' erotic encounters. A standard scene occurs at a massage parlor, when a patron chooses one of dozens of waiting women, which again reflects a male-power fantasy, just like the whole film caters to the male gaze, emphasized by Vernon's temporary role as a photographer. The featured sites in and around Bangkok merely serve to create an ostensibly exotic tourist experience. The German alternative title *Emmanuelle – Im Teufelskreis der Leidenschaft* (tr.: "Emmanuelle – In the Vicious Circle of Passion") ties the film to the original *Emmanuelle*. The same is true for a promotional poster (see Figure 8), which centers on Lahaye.



Figure 7: *International Prostitution: Brigade Criminelle*. French film poster.



Figure 8: *Le journal érotique d'une Thaïlandaise*. French film poster.

The Spectacular Trading Company (Hong Kong) co-produced the film. The 1970s Hong Kong cinema boom brought forth films like the Thailand-set *The Big Boss* (HK 1971) with Bruce Lee and the Italian-Hong Kong coproduction *Crash! Che botte ... strippo strappo stroppio*. (HK, It 1973, tr.: “Crash! That banged ... I ripped my stomp”, a.k.a. *Superman against the Orient*). An obscure coproduction is *Massage Girls in B’Kok* (1979). It is a lowbrow mixture of sex and crime about two men on a trip to Bangkok where they get into trouble with gangsters (“Die Massagesalons von Bangkok”). “Against a background of paradisaical [sic] beaches and exotic animal farms, Thai girls survive in a capital of adult entertainment, as nude dancers, nude models, or nude masseuses. Some do not survive. Documentary-style drama” (“Massage Girl in B’Kok”). The German and English titles point to western involvement in the production and the common fascination with Bangkok’s red light districts.

The hardcore film *Body-Body à Bangkok* (Fr 1980, tr.: “Body-to-body in Bangkok”) follows the concept of using the word “Bangkok” in the title and combining random impressions of the city with scenes of interracial lust. It features footage from *Le journal érotique d'une Thaïlandaise* and is a confusing collage of a staged photoshoot in Paris, a group-sex orgy in a park, and explicit scenes in a hotel room. These are alternated with scenes in Bangkok, which include a photographer taking pictures of two blonde women on a canal boat – a reference to Emmanuelle and Bee’s boat ride in *Emmanuelle*. Later, the photographer and a Thai woman travel through Bangkok in a rickshaw, stroll through a busy market, and visit an elephant camp and a crocodile farm. Thai people are incidental to the plot and are relegated to the role of the exotic Asian other, for instance when Thai children are seen jumping into the murky canal water, a typical image found in many 1970s and 1980s western films and photographs produced in a Bangkok-context.

### The Danish Color Climax Corporation

The Danish adult entertainment production company Color Climax Corporation (CCC), founded in 1967 and still in business today, took viewers' equations of Bangkok and Thailand with uninhibited interracial sex several steps further. Once the leader of Europe's adult entertainment industry, it produced many explicit films and magazines. In the 1970s, CCC used Super 8 mm film stock and later switched to video technology. From 1977 to 1983, it produced at least eighteen pornographic films with a Thailand connection. Some used the words "Bangkok" and "Thai" in the title, such as *Bangkok Bangers* (Dn 1979), *Lesbian Thai Maid* (Dn 1979), *Thai Tease* (Dn 1980), and the more explicit *Young Thai Whore* (Dn 1979). Many CCC films feature Thai adult actresses whose true identity is unknown. While some films were shot on location in Thailand, for instance *Oriental Ecstasy* (Dn 1980) in Phuket, most were shot in Denmark or elsewhere in Europe and predominantly indoors to keep production costs low. Thus, the CCC catalog includes works such as *Young Thai Tourist* (Dn 1983) with adventurous Thai women visiting Copenhagen. The titles were chosen to attract their target viewers with an indication of a low inhibition threshold and the promise of satisfying their Oriental desires. Their selling point was the inclusion of dark-skinned Thai performers and graphic scenes of interracial intercourse. Since all CCC films were widely distributed in western Europe, were dubbed into other languages – German in particular – and now circulate in the Internet as "vintage porn", they have contributed to the fantasy of Thailand as a utopia for sex.

### Conclusion

This article has given an overview of the body of European films made between 1974 and 1980 that constitute the legacy of *Emmanuelle*. They are either (partially) set in Thailand or include other Thai connections, for instance through stock footage or a title referring to Bangkok.

*Emmanuelle* was preceded by two 1960s-nudist films, which portrayed Thailand as a welcoming destination for free-spirited westerners. Many films tried to benefit from the *Emmanuelle* phenomenon by emulating its structure and ideas. As the 1970s progressed, they gradually escalated from soft- to hardcore and deviated from the emancipatory theme of *Emmanuelle* and *Emanuelle nera – Orient reportage* to ever more explicit scenes of oriental desire and interracial intercourse that cater to male erotic power-fantasies. The complete absence of transgender and gay male erotic scenes in the films that emulated *Emmanuelle* can be attributed to the fact that their target audience were heterosexual white males.

Cold War fiction films and novels of the 1960s and 1970s treated Bangkok as a zone of dangerous conflicts between western and communist spies. While Vietnam War documentaries presented Thailand as a key ally in the West's mission to stop Communism, documentaries presented Thailand as a paradise for European travelers and tourists. Not surprisingly, more fictional tourists, spies, photojournalists and hedonists followed in the footsteps of the character *Emmanuelle*.

Regarding the portrayal of Thailand, the characters' occasional explorations of Bangkok suggest that the city is an integral part of the story, but famous sights and landmarks often come into view only in passing. In *Emmanuelle* and *Emanuelle nera – Orient reportage*, Thailand and Bangkok are central to the story, yet in the majority of films that followed, the country and city are just a fleeing and ostensibly exotic background. Several low-budget productions used stock footage of Bangkok to locate the story, building on and contributing to the city's reputation and treating it as a stage for western men's adventures – but ultimately this stage

remains elusive. Furthermore, none of the relevant films had been shot in Pattaya, which in the early 1970s was frequented by American GIs on R&R and was arguably one of the cradles of the Thai sex trade but had not yet transformed into a tourist hub.

After 1980 Thailand suddenly ceased to be a shooting location for European X-rated films. A major reason was the impact of the new VHS technology, which lowered the film production costs significantly. The video cassette moved the place of exhibition of adult-oriented films from the sleazy city cinemas to the television set in the viewer's living room. Another reason may have been a growing awareness of HIV/AIDS in the first half of the 1980s.

Even though *Emmanuelle* was successful in North America, U.S. film productions did not copy it because adult-oriented films were produced domestically. The only significant film is the X-rated *One Night in Bangkok* (USA 1985). It followed years later, borrowed its title from Murray Head's popular song of the same name (1984), and used Hong Kong as a stand-in for Bangkok.

The European films discussed in this article contributed to the notion that Bangkok is a western paradise for erotic adventures. The cinematic staging of oriental desires and interracial encounters adheres to the pre-globalization western imagination of Asia as alluring and to the portrayal of Asian countries and cultures as mysterious, sensual and awaiting western penetration. Many scenes cater to male power-fantasies, as when Thai women are eager to serve the visitors from the West. *Emmanuelle* and the Thailand-set adult films it spawned remain important documents in our understanding of western representations of Thailand.

How did the Thais in the 1970 receive foreign films made Thailand? They probably heard about the handful of large productions, such as *The Big Boss* (HK 1971), *The Man with the Golden Gun* (USA 1973) and *The Deer Hunter* (USA 1978), which brought Hong Kong cinema and Hollywood A-listers to their country. These films were reviewed in national newspapers and also screened in Bangkok cinemas. However, one needs to keep in mind that despite the existence of red light districts in Bangkok and Pattaya, Thailand was a conservative society throughout the 1970s and experienced much political turmoil with a bloody popular uprising and the fall of a military regime in 1973, followed by the return to military rule in 1976. Any kind of film production, distribution and exhibition – Thai and foreign – had to follow the laws. The homegrown cinema scene received an important push in 1977, when a heavy import tax on foreign movies led to a temporary Hollywood boycott. Thai filmmaking then focused mainly on low-budget local productions that adhered to action, drama and comedy genre conventions. The 1970s-films by director Chatrichalerm Yukol, a member of the Thai royal family, were notable exceptions. They delivered social messages, such as the drama *Theptida Rong Raem* (Th 1974, a.k.a. *Hotel Angel*), in which a young woman moves from the countryside to Bangkok with high hopes of a better life but is forced into prostitution by the Thai men around her. Thus, there was certainly some awareness among Thais that prostitution existed; however, they had little to no knowledge about the existence of *Emmanuelle* and the soft- and hardcore erotic films discussed in this article because they were not distributed or screened in Thailand.

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