

the directors and the discussions in the first part of the book. Most readers are unlikely to have access to more than a handful of them.

This book is a valuable addition to Thai cinema studies. It is well-written and instructive. But the fugitive nature of the subject matter may limit its appeal beyond a small corps of aficionados.

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Woman between Two Kingdoms: Dara Rasami and the Making of Modern Thailand. By Leslie Castro-Woodhouse. Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University Press, 2020. 198 pp.

The political role of palace women has long been overlooked. Focused on Thailand, Leslie Castro-Woodhouse’s book provides us with a pioneering account of one such palace woman’s life—namely, a northern Thai princess named Chao Dara Rasami. To reconstruct palace women’s lives, Castro-Woodhouse goes beyond traditional archival materials to include memoirs of palace women, works of historical fiction written by authors knowledgeable about palace life, cremation volumes, oral histories, museum collections, textiles and photographs.

In her fascinating biography, Castro-Woodhouse shows how Dara came to play important roles in consolidating links between Bangkok and the northern region. Dara was born in 1873, the daughter of the rulers of the northern kingdom of Chiang Mai. At age nine, Dara was betrothed to King Chulalongkorn (r. 1868–1910). Of

King Chulalongkorn's 153 consorts, only three came from tributary kingdoms. Furthermore, unlike the usual pattern of families seeking to place their daughters in the Bangkok court, Dara's betrothal "is the only instance in which King Chulalongkorn asked a family to send a woman to serve as his consort" (p. 19). When she was thirteen, Dara joined some three thousand women living in the inner palace of the Bangkok court, serving initially as a lady-in-waiting to Queen Saovabha Phongsri, one of King Chulalongkorn's four principal wives. Although the political position of palace women was typically reflected in the number of children they bore, Dara became increasingly influential despite the death of her daughter in 1892. She served as a cultural liaison on occasions such as the Bangkok visit of a Shan princess in 1906, her own visit to Chiang Mai in 1909, and her continued interactions with Siamese officials from Bangkok after she returned to reside in the north following the death of King Chulalongkorn.

The book is divided into five chapters. In the first chapter, Castro-Woodhouse situates the Lanna kingdom in its broader geopolitical context. As she shows, spreading rumours that the Queen of England wanted to adopt Dara triggered Siamese anxieties regarding Lanna loyalties and prompted the king's engagement offer to Dara. Chapter 2 examines Dara's life in the Inner Palace. Although consorts typically adopted Siamese court practices, Castro-Woodhouse highlights Dara's maintenance of Lanna customs despite incurring "much teasing and humiliation from the other women" (p. 41). Suggesting that there was a significant change in the 'biopolitics' of court women with the growth of a male-oriented administrative bureaucracy, Castro-Woodhouse argues that Dara came to play a new role in negotiating Siamese attitudes towards the Lanna region. Exploring the concept of 'strategic essentialism', in Chapter 3 Castro-Woodhouse compellingly considers the ways in which Dara performed her ethnic Lanna identity through her hairstyle, dress and participation in dance-drama productions. Castro-Woodhouse's fine-grained analyses of photographs enables

her to document aspects such as Dara's long hair in contrast to the Siamese 'brush-cut' and her wearing Lanna *phasin* skirts rather than the Siamese *chongkrabaen* pants-style. She also reveals how Dara also worked with Siamese playwrights, incorporating Lanna elements into performances "to create exotic appeal for a popular audience outside the Inner Palace" (p. 91).

Chapter 4 traces the final phase of Dara's life up to the present. Following King Chulalongkorn's death, Dara lived in Chiang Mai from 1914 until her death in 1933. However, as Castro-Woodhouse shows, northerners viewed her both as a member of Chiang Mai's ruling elite and as a cultural outsider because of the many years she had spent in Bangkok. In comparison with the rebel monk Khruba Srivichai, Castro-Woodhouse notes that Dara's memory today has evolved into a "touchstone for the conservative royalist faction of the local elites, while Khruba Srivichai's memory is evoked by groups at the more populist end of the political spectrum" (pp. 6–7).

The fifth and final chapter considers how in the space of a single generation after King Chulalongkorn's death royal polygyny fell out of vogue with the expansion of Bangkok's bureaucratic middle class. With polygyny increasingly criticized, the Thai marriage law of 1935 was written to recognize only a man's first wife and children. Nonetheless the law did not outlaw additional marriages, which were never formally forbidden under palatine law. As Castro-Woodhouse wryly notes of Thailand's current polygynous king, "[i]ts contemporary usage, however, reflects a totally different view of the political roles embodied by royal concubines in the current Thai state" (p. 7).

Overall, Castro-Woodhouse has written a highly-readable account that provides insights not only into the life of one palace woman and how her life elucidates the geopolitical and sociocultural changes in Thailand, but also the shifting biopolitics of royal women more broadly. With this book, Castro-Woodhouse provides us with an inspiring exemplar in retrieving the lives of palace women, making those once invisible behind harem walls visible to modern readers.

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Empire's Mistress, Starring Isabel Rosario Cooper. By Vernadette Vicuña Gonzalez. Durham: Duke University Press, 2021. 232 pp.

Empire's Mistress is a work of art—figuratively and literally—that unearths the engrossing life of Isabel Rosario Cooper, highlighting the importance and complexity of archival investigation. Vernadette Vicuña Gonzalez's *Empire's Mistress* is not a biography nor a slice of an obscure historical event; instead, it is Gonzalez's attempt to outline the minor existence of Cooper within the contours of imperialism and the metropole's demand for its colony. Historically, prior scholarship has condensed the life of Cooper as the young naïve lover of General Douglas MacArthur to a “scandalous footnote” (p. 8). But through her discoveries in the archives, Gonzalez interprets in her book that Cooper's love story with the general is minor compared to the entirety of her distressing life dictated by the unique relationship between the United States and the Philippines.

Interestingly, Gonzalez's book is both a chronicle and a collection. The book, composed of twenty-four chapters, gives the reader a dive into the depths of the archives and the author's creative imagination. Chapter 4 contains snapshots of telegrams. Chapter 9 is a transcription of a traveller's account based on “early variety programs and similar articles about the Manila vaudeville stage” (p. 67). Chapter 10 is what-could-have-been scandalous correspondence between Cooper and General MacArthur. Fascinatingly, Chapter 13 is Gonzalez's rendition of Cooper and General MacArthur's first meeting—which she based on doubtful accounts and interviews of the former's relative—written in a silent film format.