

Representations of Thailand in European Spy and Action Adventure Films of the 1960s: Thirteen Days to Die (1965) and Island of Lost Girls (1969)

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Abstract

Due to the iconic status of the 1960s James Bond thrillers, other spy films made in that decade have largely been forgotten. However, over a hundred spy and action adventure films were produced in Europe at the height of the 1960s spy-mania, six of which were co-produced by West Germany, France and/or Italy and shot and set in Thailand, among them *Thirteen Days to Die* (WG, It, Fr 1965) and *Island of Lost Girls* (WG, It 1969). They are the products of a prolific period of internationalization and diversification in European cinema. This paper seeks to explore the representations of Thailand in these films. To this end, it will engage with the landscape of European co-productions in the 1960s, popular fears of an escalating Cold War, the influence of the Bond film series on an entire genre, and the treatment of Thailand in western travel literature as it extended to film.

Keywords: Eurospy, James Bond, representations of Thailand, Cold War

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Introduction

“The villains pop up like mushrooms from the Thai soil!”¹

This paper studies the representation of Thailand in six continental-European spy and action adventure films of the 1960s: *Mistress of the World* (WG, It, Fr 1960), *The Black Panther of Ratana* (WG, Fr, It 1963), *Cave of Diamonds* (WG, It, Fr 1964), *Shadow of Evil* (Fr, It 1964), *Thirteen Days to Die* (WG, It, Fr 1965), and *Island of Lost Girls* (WG, It 1969).² Co-produced by West Germany, Italy and/or France, these six films incorporated conventions of the European spy film genre (‘Eurospy’) popular in the 1960s and were partially or fully set in Thailand. While Italian companies were involved in the making of all the six films, German companies were the main financial backers for all of them except the French-Italian production *Shadow of Evil*, the film that most clearly emulated the early James Bond films. The paper seeks to appreciate the films’ planned and unintentional modes of representing Thailand cinematically, to which end *Thirteen Days to Die* and *Island of Lost Girls* will receive particular attention because they are characteristic of their genre and representative in their treatment of Thailand as a location. The films will be discussed with a focus on their genre and modes of production, their connections to popular Cold War anxieties and to early James Bond films, and the ways in which portrayals of Thailand in western travel literature were picked up and adapted by them.

For over a hundred years a great number of western films have been set in Thailand, but only a few of them have been subject to academic scrutiny, and their ways of portraying Thailand are even less explored. Christina Klein puts forth an outstanding analysis of *The King and I* (USA 1956) in *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination 1945-1961* (2003), deconstructing the film’s underlying messages, which say that all of Asia needs the West’s help to reform itself and to establish democratic rule. *The Man with the Golden Gun* (UK 1974), *Emmanuelle* (Fr 1974), *Bangkok Hilton* (Aus 1989), and *The Good Woman of Bangkok* (Aus, UK 1991) have similarly received some attention, e.g. by Linda Williams in *The Ethics of Intervention: Dennis O’Rourke’s ‘The Good Woman of Bangkok’* (1997). Of all western films set in Thailand *The Beach* (USA, UK 2000) features most prominently in academic studies, e.g. in Rodanti Tzanelli’s *Reel Western Fantasies: Portrait of a Tourist Imagination in ‘The Beach’ (2000)* (2006) and in Lisa Law et al.’s *‘The Beach’, the gaze and film tourism* (2007), with both articles pointing to the universal imagination of Thailand as a tourist’s paradise. However, writing on the Thailand-set European co-productions of the 1960s has been sparse. Some of the films are contextualized in Matt Blake and David Deal’s book *The Eurospy Guide* (2004), where the authors consider the early James Bond films as initiators and trend-setters of the whole Eurospy genre. In *Screening Geopolitics: James Bond and the Early Cold War Films (1962-1967)*, Klaus Dodds sees the first five Bond films as influences on western audiences’ negative perceptions of countries such as the Soviet Union and suggests that the Bond films even played a role in shaping dominant political discourses. These two publications also touch on audiences’ imaginations of Asian ‘locations’.

¹ Male voice-over in the trailer for *Island of Lost Girls*. German original: “Die Schurken schiessen wie Pilze aus der Thai Erde!”

² See the filmography for their respective original titles.

In his extensive study *International Adventures: German Popular Cinema and European Co-Productions in the 1960s* (2005), Tim Bergfelder explores the European and particularly the West German cinema landscape of the 1960s with an eye on the emergence, impact, and eventual decline of popular genres. His comments on *Mistress of the World* are particularly valuable as they help to define similar films in economic and artistic terms. Finally, concerning the representations of Thailand in western travel literature, Caron Eastgate Dann's *Imagining Siam: A Travellers' Literary Guide to Thailand* is a comprehensive book. She deconstructs dominant social, cultural, economic and ideological influences on western travel literature set in Thailand from the 16th to the 19th century, and shows the numerous connections between this literary corpus and that of 20th-century novels and selected films.³

Representations of Thailand

The representations of Thailand in the first half of the 20th century are often steeped in the preceding decades' colonial-imperial attitudes. During the silent film era, approximately twenty European and US American short films and three feature-length films were made in Thailand, whereby about a dozen of Bangkok-set documentary clips (1919-1920) by American travelogue filmmaker Burton Holmes and the ethnographic feature film *Chang* (USA 1927) by Ernest B. Schoedsack and Merian C. Cooper stand out. Of the early sound period of the 1930s, the short documentaries *Siam to Korea* (USA 1931) and *Serene Siam* (USA 1937), both part of James A. Fitzgerald's Traveltalks series, are also remarkable. The lavish post-World War II Hollywood production *Anna and the King of Siam* (USA 1946) and particularly the musical drama *The King and I* (USA 1956) received widespread attention and revived the interest of western audiences in the Kingdom of Thailand.

The pace of western filmmaking in Thailand picked up in the 1960s, as during its 'Golden Era', Hollywood produced pertinent blockbusters, and the European rediscovered Thailand as a setting for spy and action adventure films. *The Ugly American* (USA 1963) was shot in Thailand and Los Angeles and pretends to be set in 'Sarkan', a fictional Southeast Asian country threatened by the spread of Communism. *Tarzan's Three Challenges* (USA 1963) was shot in Thailand yet takes place in an unnamed fictitious Asian country. And *Operation C.I.A.* (USA 1965), the third Hollywood film of note, was shot in Bangkok but is set in Saigon. All three films are politically charged and exploit Thailand as a stage for clashes between opposing cultures and ideologies. Furthermore, during the Vietnam War the US Army and US television networks produced a great number of short documentaries presenting Thailand as an important ally to western forces in the fight against Communism. A few documentaries were also sponsored by aviation companies such as Pan Am, e.g., *New Horizons: Thailand* (USA 1960), to raise awareness of the emerging mass-travelling market. Finally, German, French and Italian production companies often joined forces. The six Thailand-set films that came out of these collaborations are listed in the introduction, and two of these six films, *Thirteen Days to Die* and *Island of Lost Girls* are the subject of the discussion below.

³ See the bibliography for two of my articles on the representations of Thailand in western films and novels.

In *Thirteen Days to Die* detective Ralph Tracy and his two sidekicks, John Warren and Pongo, are hired by the imposter prince Gulab to solve the mystery of a stolen necklace that the prince claims to be his property. During a quest that takes them around Bangkok, the three friends have to protect Thai lady Chitra whose fate is connected to the necklace, overcome many obstacles and fight against the henchmen of Su Ling and Perkins, two evil masterminds. Gulab is assassinated after thirteen days and the story moves to the jungle, where the climax takes place in the ruins of an old city and the heroes defeat the villains. Chitra is discovered to be the rightful queen of the ancient people of 'Fo' who have been living in the jungle; moreover, the necklace contains a map to a uranium field underneath the city the villains were after.

The film was directed by the German Manfred R. Köhler (who later co-wrote *Island of Lost Girls*) and the Italian Alberto Cardone (as Albert Cardiff). It features several stars of the era, e.g. German Thomas Alder as detective Tracy, and Peter Carsten and Serge Nubret (a famous French bodybuilder) as his sidekicks Warren and Pongo. The German actor, Horst Frank, who also stars in *The Black Panther of Ratana* and *Cave of Diamonds*, plays the greedy Perkins. Notable is the Thai actress Metta Rungrat (as Chitra Ratana) as Chitra. She also had supporting roles in the German-led co-production *The Mystery of Three Junks* (WG, It 1965) and the Thailand-set Hollywood film *Hot Potato* (USA 1976), and she enjoyed a prolific career in Thai film and television. Seven companies were involved in the production process: **Rapid Film** (WG), Société Nouvelle de Cinématographie (SNC) (Fr), Compagnie Lyonnaise de Cinéma (Fr), Gala Film (It), Gala International Film (It), Metheus Film (It), and Publi Italia di Lucio Marcuzzo (It). IMDb lists Thai Tri Mitr Films (Th) as another company involved but the nature of its contribution – financial and/or logistical – is unclear. Apparently, the only other film Thai Tri Mitr Films co-produced is *Island of Lost Girls*. *Thirteen Days to Die* was released in 1965 in Germany as *Der Fluch des Schwarzen Rubin*, in France as *Espionage à Bangkok pour U-92*, and in Italy as *Agente S3S Operatione Uranio*.

In *Island of Lost Girls*, the wealthy Thai-Chinese Madame Kim So is recognized as a generous supporter of social causes; what is unknown, however, is that she is the head of a criminal organization whose members carry a tattoo of three interwoven snakes and that she runs a human trafficking scheme. Her thugs abduct tourist and Thai girls and take them to the 'Island of Thousand Lotus Blossoms' where they are drugged into pliable sex slaves for male visitors to the island. When a young American tourist is abducted, her mother – rather than going to the Thai police – hires Captain Tom Rowland and Joe Louis Walker (Kommissar X), to solve the case. Mr. Landrou, a French philanthropist and expert on Eastern cultures, answers to Madame Kim So. Alarmed by the threat to their island-business he orders his thugs to eliminate the western detectives. Thus, the detectives have several run-ins with gangsters before they can find the island and free the captives. This was the only spy film that Italian Roberto Mauri directed, as he is better known for his work in exploitation cinema. The four writers were the American Jameson Brewer, who wrote much for film and television, the German filmmaker Manfred R. Köhler (director of *Thirteen Days to Die*), the German novelist Paul Alfred Müller (as Bert F. Island – a contributor to the *Kommissar X* series), and the Italian filmmaker and writer Gianfranco Parolini (as Robert F. Atkinson). Notable actors included the Italian Tony Kendall (born Luciano Stella) as Kommissar X and the American Brad Harris as Captain Rowland. Many of the supporting actors were German. The only credited Thai actress was Vilaiwan

Wattanapanich, who also had a small role in *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (USA 1957) (as Vilaiwan Sriboonruang) and a long career in Thai film and television. The principal production companies were Parnass Film (WG) and G.I.A. Cinematografica (It). Peer Oppenheimer Production Inc. (USA) and Thai Tri Mitr Films (Th) cooperated in the production, but the extent of their involvement is unclear. *Island of Lost Girls* was released in West Germany in 1969 as *Kommissar X – Drei Goldene Schlangen*, in France in 1972, in the USA in 1973, and in Mexico in 1976.

This section of the paper seeks to reveal why Thailand was often imagined as a place of threat and mystery. The spy film genre of the 1960s was shaped by Cold War ideologies because it picked up on and expressed existing fears fueled by highly politicized events that contributed to a sense of permanent threat. Creators of spy and action adventure films often deliberately exaggerated political realities and popular fears for dramatic effect, e.g., the early Bond-films in particular were infused with Cold War dogma. Western spy films of the 1960s served to dramatize the political discourse; therefore, much of the negotiation of values and issues regarding the Cold War happened on the cinema screen, and spy films contributed to audiences' imaginations of cities, countries, and entire regions because fictional agents were sent on missions to places where they were sure to encounter great perils. Films could effectively influence the popular imagination of and opinions about the foreign places frequented by fictional spies, such as the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, and even entire geographical regions by portraying them as dangerous. Consequently, the actual appropriation of geographical settings by spy and action adventure films of the 1960s is significant.

Many viewers watched such films with preconceived notions and expected these notions to be confirmed. Even when places appeared to be little more than colorful backdrops for lackluster stories, the fact that these stories were about secrets, espionage and conflicts contributed to how the real places – such as Bangkok and Thailand – were imagined in the US and in Europe. In turn, the actual political discourses and audience expectations influenced filmmakers' choices of locations for spy films and how they chose to depict them. A country such as Thailand in the 1960s, being an Asian country in fairly close proximity to communist states and feared to fall to Communism, was also considered as a place of danger, albeit one where western influence could still win the day.

Commenting on the influence of Bond films on the Eurospy genre and the star-power of films, Blake and Deal (2004) wrote: “Whether in France, Spain, Italy or West Germany, filmmakers tended to follow the Bond template as laid down in *Goldfinger*. This was when the series films came into their own. *Kommissar X* [incl. *Island of Lost Girls*], *OSS 117* [incl. *Shadow of Evil*], *Agent 077* and many others all wowed the box office. Actors like Roger Hanin, Ken Clark, Tony Kendall [*Island of Lost Girls*] and Giorgio Ardisson became stars, albeit for a fleeting moment. This was the period during which a number of the most identifiable “sixties spy films” were made [...]” (p. 12). In the six Thailand-set European co-productions, the directors, scriptwriters, and the cast came from Germany, Italy, France, the United States, England, Thailand, and many other countries. This international diversity of the cast became the common practice in the mode of film production of genres such as spy and action adventure films. It certainly allowed companies to market their films in many countries, but the artistic quality of many films suffered e.g. because actors'

voices had to be dubbed. More importantly, however, the filmmakers often had to neglect cultural sensitivity in favor of action-paced plots, which in turn led to the perpetuation of cultural stereotypes and misrepresentations of Thailand.

Symbolically significant in the James Bond films are the roles of the spy and the villain, as well as the nature and location of their clash. The archetypal battle between good and evil – in which the good always prevails – was paramount to the formula that led to the popularity of James Bond films and was emulated by continental European film productions in many variations. They all featured conflicts between virtuous western agents and detectives with their nemeses, such as deranged masterminds or greedy thugs, which was clearly in the spirit of the Bond films. The diametrically opposed actions and objectives of the agents and the villains were considered necessary to push the stories forward and to inadvertently lead to a final fight. For example, in *Thirteen Days to Die* the villains are Su Ling, who is of Thai-Chinese descent, and his western henchman Perkins. Prince Gulab is a double-edged character. On the one hand, this man of Thai-Chinese ancestry hires the detectives to find and return the necklace.

On the other hand, he is a power-hungry imposter. In their greed for supremacy and wealth the villains are after a necklace of rubies because it is the key to further precious stones and a secret uranium field. The men of virtue are agent Ralph Tracy and his sidekicks John and Pongo. Their objective is to find the stolen necklace and to reveal its mystery, which they do, and they defeat the villains in the ruins of an ancient city. And in *Island of Lost Girls* villain Madame Kim So, who looks Thai but has a Chinese name, is the mastermind behind a scheme resulting in young women's abductions and their forced prostitution. Her eccentric character is shown through her fondness of crocodiles and embalmed animals. Her right hand, Frenchman Mr. Landrou, lacks empathy and is also a collector of exotic animals – living and dead. Madame Kim So's objective is to keep her sex business profitable and undetected. The initial goal of the detective duo Kommissar X and Captain Rowland of finding the abducted American soon extends to breaking up Kim So's criminal organization. Once they have located the secret island they achieve their mission. Moreover, the criminal masterminds in *The Black Panther of Ratana* and *Cave of Diamonds* are similarly driven by excessive greed, and *Mistress of the World* and *Shadow of Evil* are most akin to the Bond films as the criminal geniuses seek world domination.

In all six films the virtuous western men can also be seen as defenders of the 'Free World', just like agent Bond. For example, the Swedish agent Lundström and the Italian agent Belamonte (*Mistress of the World*), as well as agent OSS 117 (*Shadow of Evil*) serve their respective government agencies and humanity in general because they avert the danger of mass-destruction. Detective Ralph Tracy (*Thirteen Days to Die*), Kommissar X and Captain Rowland (*Island of Lost Girls*) serve fictional US American agencies and humankind too because their fight becomes one against exploitation of women. Like supermen, the agents and detectives demonstrate great intelligence, courage, fighting spirit, endurance, invincibility, and honor in their actions. Their masculinity is confirmed by victories in physical fights and/or the conquest of women. Once the battle is won they are rewarded with male friendship, female companionship, and the promise of another mission. It becomes clear that these men will not stay in Thailand, which does not imply a rejection of Thailand as a place of habitation. It is simply in line with the notion that on the surface these films

treat Thailand as a place of transit, as an exotic background to the western-centered adventure stories in the foreground. However, there is more to it. Even if thought of as a picturesque background, the places and spaces depicted in the six films are significant in how they contribute to the structuring of the narrative.

The impressions of Bangkok serve to present Bangkok – and consequently all of Thailand – as a place of spectacle and as a location considerably different from any European city. The visitor is offered excitement, adventure, beauty and also danger. Places beyond the city limits, however, whether rural areas or the jungle, portray Thailand as an underdeveloped nation full of peril. The story of *Thirteen Days to Die* begins in Bangkok and later moves to the jungle. It features a floating market and impressions of canals, private mansions and gardens, Bangkok's city streets, and Don Muang Airport. Famous sites include Sanam Luang park and Grand Palace. Similarly, *Island of Lost Girls* takes place in Bangkok and moves to the secret island for its finale. Locations include a floating market, canals, Sanam Luang park, Grand Palace, Siam Intercontinental Hotel, Chao Phraya River, Assumption College, Mandarin Oriental Hotel, Memorial Bridge, private residences, impressions of city streets, and the island. Most of these places appear to be spectacular. Eastgate Dann discusses fictional and documentary-style descriptions of Siam and the role of the Western visitor regarding these descriptions: "Descriptions of Siam in the 16th and 17th centuries invariably present it as a spectacle, observed by the male Western visitor who is barely involved in the scenario before him. There is a sense of unreality to the spectacle described, a sense that Siam is not the 'real' world" (p. 40). This sense of Thailand as an almost unreal place is also present in the films. Grand images of Bangkok's golden temples and the wide Chao Phraya River feature in almost all of them, sometimes just briefly, sometimes extensively. Many films include an action-packed boat chase through the canals on the city outskirts and/or car rides through Bangkok by day and night. For viewers in the 1960s the impressions of such fast-moving sceneries were probably impressive. Because the protagonist of each film is a western man in his thirties or early forties, the films' perspective of Thailand is invariably male. This is fully intended because they were catered to young male viewers. Furthermore, while early travel writers in Siam often preferred a rather passive stance, the agents' actions and objectives move the stories quickly from place to place. It is through the protagonists that the viewer gets to see Bangkok and Thailand as they take on the roles of adventurers and explorers on dangerous missions, but they are hardly ever interested observers of their surroundings.

Thailand has often been imagined as a paradise. Such notions were developed in 19th-century travel literature and are closely linked to the wish for physical and mental intrusion and ownership of Thailand. This mode of representation is rooted, among others, in the way the West treated it differently from other Southeast Asian nations. Unlike its neighbors, which had all been colonized, Thailand always remained an independent and sovereign state. At the same time it had to subscribe to western values to some degree to safeguard this independence. Its enduring autonomy led to Thailand's Eastern paradise image in the West. *Thirteen Days to Die*, *Island of Lost Girls*, and *Shadow of Evil* include images that have the underlying intention of showing Thailand as a paradise, e.g. scenes of picturesque landscapes, inviting hotels, tranquil beaches, relaxing pool areas, romantically available women, and some cultural events. Such impressions are often short, serve to anchor the story in an

‘exotic’ country, and intentionally present Bangkok as a potential travel destination for mostly male viewers who want to explore paradise.

Eastgate Dann writes: “Travel from Europe to the East in the 19th century can be seen as an attempt to revisit the past in search of an idealized Europe, as it was in the early 18th century before the industrial and agricultural revolutions.” (p. 51) In other words, 18th- and 19th-century western travelers to Thailand and the readers of their stories used to search for remnants of an irrevocable European past within the Thai present – which may still be the case for some contemporary writers and their readers. There was nostalgia for Thailand as it was seen as existing in a time and space which could remind westerners of an ostensibly better past of rural idyll before the onset of urbanization and modernization processes. Despite the obvious desire for the rural idyll in much of the travel literature on Thailand, the six co-produced films do not have the intention to depict Bangkok and/or the countryside as idyllic but rather as places of constant danger for westerners and Thais alike. Thailand is not treated as an idealized space and there is only a small sense of western nostalgia for it, if any, but it is still portrayed as an attractive place in the sense that it promises adventure and excitement. Thailand, then, also serves to give viewers the impression that Europe is still, despite the Cold War, much safer and more civilized. Moments of serenity are few and only hinted at, e.g. in *Thirteen Days to Die* when detective Tracy and Thai lady Chitra are watching an annual procession of barges on the Chao Phraya River, they see Thailand’s King Bhumibol Adulyadej sitting in one of them, and discuss the cultural roots of the procession.

In a generic spy film the climax involves a confrontation between the spy and his nemesis, whereby the location of this final fight takes on a symbolic meaning. The climax of several of the six films, therefore, takes place in rather unfriendly places. In 19th-century travel literature set in Thailand the jungle is romanticized, viewed as alluring and as a place of exciting exploits. However, it is also equated with chaos, danger, threat, and seen as a frontier between wilderness and civilization. The six films make ample use of the visual and metaphorical possibilities that the tropical forest offers, as it is in such hostile environments that the western heroes must prove their virtues. For example, the climax of *Thirteen Days to Die* takes place in the ruins of a supposedly ancient city somewhere in the jungle. The scenes there include impressions of wilderness, temple ruins, and the heroes’ struggles with wild animals and the villains. And since most of *Cave of Diamonds* takes place in a diamond mine that resembles a forced labor camp deep in the jungle, the impression viewers get is that in Thailand life is fragile. The male voice-over in the film’s trailer exclaims: “The fist dictates men’s law in the jungle!”⁴ This credo generally applies to all six spy and action adventure films: In the jungle only the strongest survive.

Like the jungle, a distant island may become a metaphor for absence of civilization and moral behavior. In *Island of Lost Girls* several scenes and the climax take place on a supposedly secret island in the Gulf of Thailand.

⁴ German original: “Die Faust diktiert das Gesetz der Männer im Jungel!”

It is a curious place because it plays on western fears of women being captured and forced to live in a harem. Eastgate Dann explains: “The ‘harem’ has long been used in literature as the focal point of Eastern life, one of the essential differences in the minds of Westerners, between ‘us’ and ‘them’. As Grewal (1996:82) explains, the harem ‘became the racial sign for “Eastern” culture’” (p. 137). In 18th and 19th-century travel literature, the fascination of the Oriental harem extended to the Siamese kings’ harems and obviously reverberated in a film such as *Island of Lost Girls*. Moreover, not only did this ‘us and them’ opposition emphasize differences between western and eastern cultures, it was also pivotal to Cold War rhetoric and ideology. Perpetuated through travel literature, the harem became a symbol by which the West defined the East – not just the Orient, but Thailand too. The harem captured the imagination of western audiences not least because it expressed the male power-fantasy of controlling many women. *Island of Lost Girls* exploits this fascination with the harem. It features prominently and is given a clearly defined place. The film’s quasi-harem of female sex slaves is a metaphor for the high possibility of immorality and the abuse of innocent people in an Asian country. Western viewers in the 1960s may have concluded that Asian cultures are backward and that careless westerners, like the abducted girls, will be victimized by them.

Conclusion

The objective of this paper has been to explore various representations of Thailand in European co-produced spy and action adventure films of the 1960s pertaining to various contexts: the practice of German, Italian and French film production companies to join forces, the influence of early James Bond films, common fears about the Cold War conflict and the rise of Communism, and the influence of representations of Thailand in travel literature on western cinema.

The silent film era and the post-World War II decades established a European and US American tradition of filmmaking in Thailand. Such ethnographic and documentary-style films usually engaged with the country’s religion, culture and society. *Thirteen Days to Die*, *Island of Lost Girls*, and four other co-produced European films set in Thailand in the 1960s broke with much of this tradition when the interest shifted toward using Bangkok, its rural vicinities and the jungle as ostensibly exotic backdrops for action-packed stories and in order to depict Thailand as a dangerous country threatened by foreign and domestic criminals. Each of the six films features a fast-paced adventure with conflicts en masse and a climax in which the virtuous western man always saves the day and the villain is eliminated. The overviews of the films’ talent, production and distribution details have highlighted the internationally diverse circumstances in which they were made and pointed to advantages (such as international marketing) and disadvantages (such as the lack of artistic ambition and cultural sensitivity) of such modes of production.

Situating the six films in politico-historical contexts has pointed to influences of Cold War fears about Communism, nuclear threats, and power-hungry rogue states. The films express the hope – rather than the certainty – that in a clash between the virtuous West and ‘evil’ foreign forces, the West’s presumed moral superiority would emerge victorious and all enemies would be brought to justice. The films were largely inspired by spy films, particularly the early Bond-films, to attract male viewers. Just like agent Bond, their protagonists are attractive, charming, brave, and invincible. The villains and their criminal networks, on the other hand, are driven by greed for

disproportionate power and wealth. They are either of Asian ancestry, such as Chinese, Chinese-Thai or Indian, or blond and blue-eyed westerners. This latter type of villain may point to the realization that threats of terror can also grow within western societies. The cinematic ‘outsourcing’ of European-internal conflicts to Thailand, therefore, may have been a way for European countries – Germany in particular – to account for their World War II past.

The depicted places in Thailand are diverse. In Bangkok, the characters pass a flurry of famous sites, and car rides and boat chases give impressions of life along the streets and the canals. Bangkok is presented as an attractive but not particularly modern city where excitement and danger are omnipresent. Following descriptions of Bangkok in travel literature, the city is also presented as a spectacle and as a traveler’s paradise, particularly through images of golden temples, Buddha statues, the Chao Phraya River, and Grand Palace. As these impressions are woven into the story lines, they also serve to promote Thailand as a travel destination.

The films give glimpses of rural idyll, which is also a common image in western travel literature about Thailand because it is through such views of pastoral tranquility that the actual Thailand of the present comes to stand for an imagined Europe of the past, an idealized Europe that was a product of a utopian imagination but also desired by those Europeans who struggled to accept the modernization processes at home. Not surprisingly, then, the jungle features prominently in most of the six films because it is the symbolic frontier between civilization and wilderness that stands opposed to the idea of paradise. It is in isolated and ostensibly dangerous places such as the jungle or a secret island where the outcome of several of the films is determined.

The voice-over in the trailer to *Island of Lost Girls* proclaims: “This country holds dangerous mysteries.”⁵ Hopefully, this paper could solve some of the mysteries about the representations of Thailand in European spy and action adventure films of the 1960s.

⁵ German original: “Dieses Land hat gefährliche Geheimnisse.”

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