

local knowledge networks as represented by Adam Gotusan's practice, the question of rigid academic categories in terms of authenticity (culture as being unchanged from the past), and the question of alienated ownership of knowledge in capitalistic frameworks through intellectual property rights. The tension between cultural change through indigenous agency and cultural authenticity imposed by the colonial gaze remains unresolved in the monograph.

In attempting to present multiple antithetical perspectives between local and colonial (academic and state) ways of knowing, Cai is ambivalent on the positive role that certain brokers play and the impossibility of representing the depth of indigenous cultures and traditions to outsiders or audience misinformed by the colonial lens. Positively, brokers create webs of relations and responsibilities between themselves, indigenous community groups, and external stakeholders. There are negative cases when these relations and responsibilities break down, especially when prioritizing capitalist, private, and state interests over local responsibilities.

A similar ambivalence on the role of brokers and the tension between indigenous agency and the colonial lens is played out in the case of Anne Lasimbang. Anne Lasimbang works as a broker to position indigenous peoples in Sabah as "ecologically noble savages" in order to gain cultural and land rights from the Malaysian state. She talked about her choice to wear a "loincloth" as her act to reclaim her pride in being both indigenous and educated (in Western sciences). Cai interprets this as an act of strategic essentialism that "consciously maintains the construction of difference between indigenous and non-indigenous people, recasting the former as backward and undeveloped" (p. 143). Within this tension, it remains unclear if Anne Lasimbang's fight for indigenous rights is co-opted into a colonial discourse of the "primitive native" or that the Malaysian Forestry Department has failed to ethically collaborate with different indigenous communities to come up with a respectful definition of *adat* (native customary rights).

In conclusion, *Staging Indigenous Heritage* is filled with detailed ethnographic notes on various rituals and cultural practices within the four case studies that will be of interest to scholars interested in learning more about the dynamics within indigenous community groups in Malaysia. It also serves to inform future Asia development studies projects on the issues on the brokerage system.

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Brushed in light: calligraphy in East Asian cinema

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Markus Nornes' *Brushed in Light* is a fantastic investigation of the history and importance of calligraphy in East Asian cinema. In starting this review, I must admit that I am not the book's target audience. At heart, I suppose this text is best described as a work of film or media studies, which is far outside of my own field. To limit the importance of this work to a single field, however, is to greatly miss the point. While centered around a discussion and analysis of Asian cinema, the book's vast range of data and examples – coupled with Nornes' accessible writing style – make it something of value to anyone interested in film, art, writing systems research, linguistics, cultural studies, and a range of other fields. As a sociolinguist, for instance, the interviews with calligraphers were especially

fascinating, as was the review of the social history and controversy around the definition of “good” calligraphy itself. Ultimately, the book’s topic is original, and the analysis is both thorough and accessible, making *Brushed in Light* one of those rare works that I never knew I needed until I read it.

The book opens with a rather straightforward conceit. Despite his long interest in the use of cinematography in film, a number of art historians told Nornes that “there is no calligraphy in Asian cinema.” As a result, Nornes put off this project until a set of chance encounters made him believe he could disprove the aforementioned historians’ notion. Across the rest of the introduction, six chapters, and conclusion, Nornes debunks their argument thoroughly. Nornes begins with a background of his own interest in cinema and calligraphy. As part of this he notes that like many others (including myself), his appreciation of calligraphy in cinema was at first superficial. This of course brings home a key point early on: there is something grabbing about the use of calligraphic titles and props even if you can’t read them. As the introduction continues, it does a good job setting the stage for readers outside of film and Asian studies, providing a valuable introduction to misunderstandings of the sinographs used throughout Asia, before closing with a tantalizing and brief discussion of the use of 終 at the end of films. Through touching on issues of shape, placement, and meaning in this short section, Nornes readies the reader for the expansion of these concerns that occur throughout the later chapters.

Chapter 1 kicks the book off with an important and well-constructed introduction to calligraphy itself, including calligraphy in Western film. While there are points here where Nornes could have done more to assist readers unfamiliar with cinema, a critique I will return to later, he spends just the right amount of time ensuring that readers without a background in Asian writing systems can follow along. The chapter is also importantly critical of terms like “East Asia” and, indeed, the representation of East Asia in Western film, providing a history of Asian calligraphy across China, Korea, Japan, and the West which is illuminating in both its breadth and its enthusiasm in tackling common myths. As a sociolinguist, I also appreciated sections touching on how the construction of quality and beauty in these calligraphic traditions differed across times and borders. Although I would have loved to see these notes expanded, that would make the text an entirely different book. As is, the details do a wonderful job of ensuring that the reader realizes that even the act of writing text in a specific way is always “humanized,” as in attached to an author and their world, rather than a neutral act of representation divorced from temporal and social concerns. Interviews with calligraphers scattered throughout the chapter ram this point home, providing further insights into the human element always lurking behind the brush or pen.

Chapter 2 continues to introduce readers to the text’s background, covering the first uses of calligraphy in cinema through an overview of theatre banners and the intertitles of silent films. The chapter’s discussion then touches on the use of calligraphy in props and subtitling, before moving into fascinating examples of how technology and traditional calligraphy have combined in contemporary film. Notes on the existence of calligraphic databases, where writers can draw up and manipulate the writing of centuries old masters, are particularly fascinating. There is something truly incredible at being shown examples of calligraphy from the 800s being revived and even animated into the titles of films from this millennium. Chapter 3 expands on this discussion of calligraphy in film to examine the meaning of “cinematic calligraphy” itself, with a special focus on examples of writing on non-traditional mediums (e.g., skin) via non-traditional devices (e.g., chopsticks, blood). The chapter cleverly frames this entire discussion around an overview of the “Four Treasures” of calligraphy (ink, brush, paper, and inkstone). By examining how these objects are valued in both calligraphy and film, including in films which place these objects on the screen itself, Nornes expands this concept of four treasures into seven by describing the importance of computers, sound, and movement in producing calligraphy within the cinematic realm. The chapter also touches on concerns of style, rhythm, and arrangement, with the ultimate goal of showing the wide range of practical, personal, and artistic concerns involved in the use of calligraphy in film.

It is here that I should note Nornes’ use of photographs and film stills to describe and detail his arguments, as it is one of the most stellar features of this text. *Brushed in Light* is fortunately never satisfied to just tell you that a certain movie used a character written ten centuries ago, or that

prop warehouses in East Asia are filled with calligraphy. In every case, the book makes absolutely sure to *show* you. Anyone who has ever attempted to use an image from a media publication in an academic text knows the work involved, and this is doubly true once the requests start crossing languages and national borders. I don't believe I have a single colleague in Japanese Studies who has not given up on including an image they loved due to the often labyrinthian process involved in securing permission. Yet Nornes has somehow managed to reproduce a shocking 129 figures, ranging from single film stills to multiple photographs showing movement across distinct scenes of a film. Moreover, none of these images feel redundant or excessive. Rather, every single picture in every chapter comes across as well selected to prove a singular point, and this refined use of visuals means that the arguments, descriptions, and claims Nornes makes throughout all have a fantastic and immediate impact. When the book mentions a document "painted by mouth [...] and surrounded by tearful drops of blood," words stylized to "pull apart as if they could tumble in a heap," a scroll with the character for "longevity" haunting "the background like a shadow," or court cases centering around calligraphic plagiarism, the images being described are always there. We even get to see what happens when a chopstick is used as a brush and then preserved for over twenty years, leaving the tip "bulbous with layer upon layer of dried ink." Through the images he provides, even Nornes' most flowery descriptions always feel supported, and the reader is never burdened with imagining unfamiliar text or scenes through details alone. Indeed, in many ways, the quality and selection of these images should be treated as a triumph of scholarship which truly makes the book. I recall a book I read as an undergrad wherein the author discussed paintings in detail, but included self-drawn sketches of the paintings in their place. Whether the author was unable to get permission or didn't try is unclear, but ultimately their attempts at reproduction were lacking compared to the masterpieces they discussed. This led to a reading experience that, for me at least, was confusing and limited. How are we to tell if an obscure painting is striking in the way described without seeing it? How do we discuss the use of color when presented with a black and white sketch? *Brushed in Light* leaves no such quandaries. While the text would be a strong piece of research on its own, the work collecting the photographs throughout deserves significant praise as a scholarly act, and makes the book a multisensory experience.

The use of striking visual examples is particularly useful in Chapter 4, which discusses the use of calligraphy on props and deviations from standard calligraph forms. The chapter covers questions of illegibility, temporal change, and the effects of distinct brush types and strokes on the production of calligraphic art. Thanks to well-selected visuals, the reader leaves this chapter knowing clearly the distinction between non-traditional calligraphy wherein "the individual stroke does not call for attention" and thick strokes which convey a "swelling desire to slaughter." The chapter also discusses the very question of where to place calligraphic titles, an idea touched upon briefly elsewhere, which is then expanded upon in Chapter 5 using the work of Hou Hsiao-hsien as an exemplary case. Through examining this director's films, the chapter delves into how the director considers the importance of calligraphy in everything from typeface, to set design, to even methods of expressing the passage of time between scenes. Again, each analysis is complemented well by selections from interviews, and a reflection on the undeniably human element of the acts of writing throughout Hou Hsiao-hsien's films. Chapter 6 then takes all the narratives and data shown so far and combines them to look for similarities between the fundamentals of cinema and calligraphy. Here we return to some of the discussions from the early chapters, such as the use of calligraphy in the promotion around film, only to see them expanded broadly. Nornes especially discusses the importance of calligraphy done by directors, be it for their films, as part of signage, on (or as the target of) forgeries, in drunken stupors, and even the boxes containing the death masks of their colleagues. Again, this analysis emphasizes the strong links between acts of calligraphy and the humans and societies behind them, which are so easily ignored when we just see text on a screen or page. Throughout the chapter, Nornes also makes the important point that both calligraphy and film are tied to movement, time, and space, which leads into the final chapter's summary on how calligraphy in cinema is an act of brushing with light.

All in all, in summarizing the book, I hope it is clear that I find it a fantastic accomplishment. The text is not only original in its fundamental topic, but fascinating in its depth of detail and generally

superb in its execution. Nornes deftly combines discussions of calligraphy's history and conservative protection under formal schools with the novel, playful, and exceptional use in cinema in a way that is engaging even to those without a background in the various fields his book straddles. By the end of *Brushed into Light*, a reader is left with no doubt that there is a calligraphy of cinema, that it is important, and that fundamental overlaps exist between calligraphy on the screen and on the "page". Thanks to the aforementioned selections of images, it is even a delightful book to just flip through, as reading the captions of the individual figures alone is often enough to stimulate new thinking on the importance of calligraphy – in or out of film.

Despite my overall enthusiasm for this book though, I do have two critiques. The first is fairly minor. At times, the layout of the book seems a bit scattered. I first noticed this in the introduction, as Nornes jumps back and forth between moments in his life and the history of calligraphy. He talks about his first notice of calligraphy in cinema during grad school before moving to its history in the 1940s, flashes forward to the present to detail discussions he had before starting the book, goes back to an event in grad school, and then jumps around conversations and acts of data collection near to the present. This sort of meandering through time and topic continues throughout. Indeed, one of my reasons for combining summaries of each chapter together into paragraphs here is that their discussions and data often bleed together. In reading some chapters, I even felt myself get a little lost. I often found that I once had gotten far enough through a chapter, I could not remember its main goal until I was snapped back by the summary at the end. While this could be a fatal flaw in some texts, I call it a minor critique here in that the meandering ultimately didn't bother me. The journey from the start to the end of each chapter is so delightful, the data and discussion are so interesting, and the summaries of each individual chapter are so tightly connected to its themes, that it doesn't really matter that the contents sort of float around. The presence of the book's straightforward introduction and conclusion chapters also assists here. But at times it is easy to get lost in the flowering weeds.

The second critique is larger, but may be inapplicable for the text's target readership, such as scholars with a background in cinema studies. For me, the book seems to have underappreciated just how wide of an audience it is of interest to. In many places, the writing, framing, and explanation appear to assume that only scholars of cinema would open the book. On the most minor level, this results in a lack of explanation of cinematic terminology and the importance of certain directors and films. Major theories and ideas are always detailed, but there's a lot that the reader is still assumed to know, ranging from semi-specialist vocabulary like "mise-en-scene" to the names of directors or schools of cinematography. As a result, there are points at which readers outside of cinema studies will become aware that they are not getting everything they could from the text. More importantly though, in addressing cinema studies specifically, the book frames itself around refuting the claim that there "is no calligraphy in cinema" in a way that never feels necessary, and I ultimately feel holds it back. Personally, even with my only lay interest in film, I felt the "no calligraphy in cinema" argument to be silly from the start. Even if I didn't, Nornes convinced me it was wrong before I had finished the first chapter. In centering around debunking the argument though, I feel that the book misses out on an attempt to make more daring conclusions about calligraphy that go beyond cinema studies, and indeed are hinted at throughout the book. This is especially true regarding the text's allusions to the human and social nature of writing acts, and the perhaps universal tendency to forget that text is more than just a way of representing words.

The worst manifestation of this issue is when, in what seems to be an attempt to emphasize the value of calligraphy in East Asian cinema to unfamiliar readers, the book repeatedly creates unnecessary contrasts between calligraphy's importance in Asia and Europe/the West. While Nornes is absolutely correct that calligraphy has a larger day-to-day role in Asia than, say, America, stressing this divide does not make the book's arguments stronger. The arguments in the book are convincing and fantastic as they are, and would stand even if the West (still) had an active tradition of calligraphy on par with China, Korea, or Japan. As Nornes even mentions, the linked orthographic histories of these nations is itself enough to justify focusing on them. So when Nornes then makes claims like "the only substantial examples of writing calligraphy I can think of in the West are Name of the

Rose (1986), which shows rows of medieval scribes hunched over parchment, and Game of Thrones,” his arguments feel weakened by not only the uncharacteristic lack of clarity and images (which scenes in Game of Thrones?), but objections immediately spring to mind. Any fan of horror can easily recall scenes of a camera swivelling across a quill etching out some demonic contract, Danny Torrance scratching out “redrum” on a door in childish strokes of lipstick, or some hapless victim scrawling a final message in blood. While some of these may not be calligraphy in the traditional sense, they are all akin to acts that *Brushed in Light* recognizes as calligraphic in East Asian cinema. I similarly doubt that someone can watch an entire period piece film or TV show set in the premodern area without at least one shot of an aristocrat sitting down to put quill to paper. At the very least, the parodic use in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* comes to mind. Importantly, beyond just being potentially specious, the forced separation here prevents the book from communicating with deep analytical celebrations of calligraphy outside of Asia like Florey’s *Script and Scribble* (2009) or Trubek’s *The History and Uncertain Future of Handwriting* (2016). This bounds the book’s final claims about the humanistic, cinematographic, and artistic importance of written acts to a specific geographic region in a way that feels artificial, unnecessary, and heavily limiting. Indeed, it even seems in some ways contradictory to the text’s own opening forays against conservative definitions of calligraphy and “East Asia” as static constructs.

Ultimately though, these two critiques are in many ways personal reflections of what I – as someone outside the field and the book’s construction – wanted to see the book expand upon and discuss. Neither of my critiques are so large that I would hesitate to recommend this book to almost anyone, and neither prevent the text from being a rousing success at what it sets out to do. Rather, I just feel that the book provides data and arguments that can be used by a broad range of scholars and fields, but unfortunately limits its framing to prevent advertising this potential as well as it could. No critique I have outlined changes the fact that *Brushed in Light* opens an understudied and overlooked world to a broad audience in a way which is immediately grasping, visually stunning, and highly accessible. The ultimate result is a text that ensures any reader with an interest in cinema, writing, or Asian Studies as a field can enjoy the experience. Without a doubt, they will absolutely find some arguments, data, images, or just clever turns of phrase that will be of use to their own work. The book may not end with conclusions as daring as I think it could, but it accomplishes every goal it sets forth with aplomb, and provides an incredibly original reminder that there is always something human, social, and artistic behind a written act.

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Opposing Democracy in the Digital Age: The Yellow Shirts in Thailand

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Aim Sinpeng’s *Opposing Democracy in the Digital Age: The Yellow Shirts in Thailand* is a valuable volume for readers who want to make sense of Thailand’s post-Cold War 30-year (1991–2021) struggle