

**The comparison of the movie “Suriyothai” to “Elizabeth”**

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Both Thailand and England still have the Royal system. The movie “Suriyothai” is the story about the queen in the history of Thailand. The movie “Elizabeth” is the story about the queen in the history of England. There are some similarities between these two movies. For example, they are based on true story and are about the powerful queen (the female role) who changes the course of country’s history.<sup>1</sup> For this paper, I will start with the summary details of both “Suriyothai” and “Elizabeth” as the background. Then, I will analyze by using process, worldview, and production values as the keys to interpreting media messages.

The film “Suriyothai” in 2001 was directed by Chatrichalerm Yukol.<sup>2</sup> The film describes historical events in the life of the heroine, Suriyothai, the queen of King Mahachakrapat. The story starts from her age of 15, ranging from love and attachment, royal wedding, resettlement in the capital, court life, intrigues, and sustenance of royal dignity.

The film “Elizabeth” in 1998 was directed by Shekhar Kapur.<sup>3</sup> The film describes the early years of the reign of Elizabeth 1 of England and her difficult task of learning what is necessary to be a monarch. Elizabeth’s first few years are under pressure of many situations, such as the Protestant vs. Catholic problem, marrying the man she doesn’t love to produce an heir, etc. Finally, she realizes she has some decisions to make, the most important being who rules England.

## **Process**

Both Suriyothai and Elizabeth serve multiple functions. Initially, a major communications function is entertainment because these two movies are firstly for the

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.siamzone.com/movie/m/280/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://us.imdb.com/title/tt0290879/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0127536/>

moviegoers. Later, when they are out on video, DVD, or VCD, they are for entertaining family members. Another important function is profit. Both movies are in media industry which is one of the big businesses. They invest a lot in film promotion and production, such as costume, graphic, etc. They also sell to overseas market for more profit. For example, both films are in big cities' theatres such as Los Angeles and New York. Further, they also provide description function. Both movies include factual details of the country history. Moreover, they have latent function which is to impress the audience.

Both movies use the medium's distinctive characteristics very effectively. They explain the history event interestingly. Many people who watch them agree that they are more fun and more interesting than reading the history lessons.<sup>4</sup> They bring the history images to life. However, film has the limit of time, such as to end the story within 2 hours. As a result, the plot has to emphasize what the directors want the audience to see and both movies do not translate easily from the history books to films.

The media communicators of both movies who are responsible for creating the movies are not the people in the history. They don't live when the history events really happen, so they don't have enough details about the history such as the social value, or the lifestyle of people at that period. As a result, the filmmakers of both movies have to do a lot of research to find all the factual details in the past. For example, the filmmakers of Suriyothai have to spend more than 2 years in just finding all details, such as the way people dress in the sixteenth century of Thailand, the language people use at that era, etc., before they can produce the film. For example, they have to ask many history professors and experts in the sixteenth century era. Similarly, the filmmakers of Elizabeth have to find details about

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.siamzone.com/movie/news/index.php?id=1438>

England at that time such as what happen in the Royal family (such as the relationship between Queen Mary and Elizabeth), which is style the queen's dress, etc.

The main audience of both Suriyothai and Elizabeth is the people in their own countries. Suriyothai is mainly for Thai people. Elizabeth is mainly for English people. However, both movies have more than one intended audience. They were already planned to present to the overseas audience since the preproduction. They were planned to join the film festival in France and the United States. For the overseas audience, the purpose of the media presentation is a little bit different from the main audience. The movies tend to promote focusing on the culture of the country which is what the overseas audience wants to know.

### **Worldview**

Both Suriyothai and Elizabeth show the power of the female role in the history. The main character in both movies which are Queen Elizabeth and Queen Suriyothai doesn't present in a stereotypical manner of female because these two movies present the female as a strong, smart, and able to rule the country. For example, Queen Elizabeth knew a lot in politics strategy and she was the one who decide to kill all her country's enemies. Similarly, Queen Suriyothai led her husband shrewd advice on how to improve his political standing and survive during the volatile times (mid 1500's).

Both two movies present the pessimistic view of life. They present the world that everyone wants to be powerful. They also present the world that people cannot trust anyone. As a result, this leads to betrayal, disorder, and war. For example, in Elizabeth, she found later that her lover betrayed her. Also, in Suriyothai, one main character "Srisudachan" betrayed her lover because of the desire for power. Another point these two movies present is the war

between countries because each country wants to be powerful by increasing the land. In Elizabeth, there is a war between England and Scotland. Further, in the movie shows that France and Spain don't like England also. Similarly, in Suriyothai, there is a war between Thailand and Burma.

Another pessimistic view of life is the main character of both movies doesn't have a chance to be happy. Most of the times, both two queens are under pressure to do what they don't want to do. For example, Queen Elizabeth cannot marry her lover "Lord Robert Dudley" because he is not considered suitable. Similarly, Queen Suriyothai cannot marry her lover "Khun Pirenthorathep" because of the same reason as in Elizabeth. However, these two queens are in control of their own destinies. They are courageous to make their own decisions. In Elizabeth, no one can force her to marry, so she ascends the throne as the "Virgin Queen". The sentence "I marry England" which she said in the end of the film shows the courage decision. In Suriyothai, no one can stop her from joining the battle between Thai and Burma.

Another worldview shows in both Suriyothai and Elizabeth is the Royal system which rules the country. People who can rule the country have to be born in the noble social class. They have grown up in the palace. They are rich and powerful. Their commands are absolute so that everyone has to follow. Other people pay respect to them. Consequently, there occurs the contradiction within the Royal family such as who the King should be between the son and the younger brother. For example, in Elizabeth, after Queen Mary died, Elizabeth who is Queen Mary's half-sister had to continue the throne because Queen Mary has no heir. Also, in Suriyothai, when the king has no heir, one of his brothers has to continue the throne.

Further, both movies show that the religion is important and relates to the Royal system. In Elizabeth, the Royal has to be the Catholic. At that time, the Catholic is powerful, so Elizabeth, who is a Protestant, has to face many Catholic supporters who tried to make the throne falling back into Catholic hands. Moreover, the Royal ceremonies such as the cremation of the queen have to do in the Catholic way. In Suriyothai, King Mahachakrepat and Queen Suriyothai have to be the Buddhist. Many Royal ceremonies are based on the Buddhist way. For example, the Royal marriage, the cremation of the queen, etc. have to do in the Buddhist way.

Finally, both movies show that people who are rewarded in this world are people who are courageous to do what is helpful to the country, even though they have to sacrifice themselves. In Elizabeth, Queen Elizabeth knows that the most important thing is to rule England. As a result, she gave up her love and normal life which she preferred, and learnt how to give a formal speech to people under the command of her, learnt more about politics plan, etc. In Suriyothai, Queen Suriyothai knows that she cannot marry the man she loves because she has to retain the royal system by marrying another man (Prince Thienraja/ King Mahachakrepat). Also, she knows the battle with Burma is important, so she decides to join the battle to help the country.

## **Production Values**

### ***1. Editing***

Both Suriyothai story and Elizabeth story relate to a long history of Thailand and England. However, when they become movies, they have to finish their stories within the appropriate time. Suriyothai movie is 2 hours and 22 minutes. Elizabeth movie is 2 hours and 4 minutes. As a result, both Suriyothai and Elizabeth filmmakers have to select and arrange

the significant information. For example, both movies doesn't present the childhood of the queens. They begin with the queens who are already young adults and are already in love with

the man. The movies don't present when and why they are in love because these points are not important to the main theme of the presentation.

## ***2. Color***

Both movies use lots of dark red color which relate to the blood and the war. For example, in *Suriyothai*, the sky is dark red instead of pale blue, especially on the battle day. In *Elizabeth*, dark red is used in the scene which Queen Mary died. Further, most of the scenes in both movies are in gray such as in the palace. Gray brings the emotion of sadness, depression, weakness, and death. The audience can know that something bad is going to happen.

## ***3. Lighting***

Both movies use Dim lighting and shadows. These relate to the death and trouble. For example, the *Elizabeth* palace uses the shadow at the corner to present that there is something untrustworthy hidden. In the later scene, one main queen servant was killed. Similarly, the *Suriyothai* palace uses this technique and in the later scene, one main character "King Chairachatirath" was killed.

## ***4. Shape***

Both movies use lots of angular in the palace which relate to the villain thing hidden. The palace is not a safe place. However, the main hall of the palace where the Queen usually

lives is rectangular. This shape presents the greatest, the preciseness, and the strength of the Queen. Also, the chair and the table in that hall are elegant and are in square shapes which reinforce the highness of the Queen.

### ***5. Scale***

Both movies use the rule which is the larger an object appears, the more important it is. Even though there is the other man in the same scene, the Queen is still bigger than the man by using the camera technique. For example, in Elizabeth, the scene that Queen Elizabeth consults the politics tactics with Sir Francis Walsingham, she looks bigger than Sir Francis. In fact, Sir Francis is a very big man compared with Queen Elizabeth's slim body. However, she has to be bigger in that scene because she is the most important character and her position is the highest in the country. Similarly, Queen Suriyothai looks bigger than other men in the same scene, such as Baron Muen Rachasineha who is a big military guy.

### ***6. Relative Position***

In addition to the scale that makes the Queen bigger in the scene. The filmmakers usually set the main character on the right side of the screen because the audience will pay more attention on that side. In many scenes of Suriyothai and Elizabeth, the Queen stands on the right side. For example, the scene that Queen Elizabeth dances with Lord Robert Dudley, the scene that King Mahachakrepat gives the present to Queen Suriyothai.

### ***7. Movement***

Both movies use the psychological principles of Western culture movement which is left-to-right movement. Further, the movies use the movement directed toward the audience to make the Queen looks more powerful when she comes closer to the audience. For example, in

the last scene of Elizabeth, the way she walks closer makes her become bigger in the screen so that the audience can feel the power of the Queen. Also, in Suriyothai, when Queen

Suriyothai dresses a warrior suit and walks toward the audience; her appearance is bigger in the screen, so the audience can feel the strength of the Queen.

### ***8. Point of view***

Both movies use the extreme close-up camera shot (XCU) with the Queen. Because the queen is the most important character in the movie, the filmmakers have to present the facial reactions such as the smile, the eye, etc. to reveal her innermost thought and emotions to the audience. For example, the camera usually zooms in her face when Queen Elizabeth gives a speech to show her firm decision. In Suriyothai, the camera zooms in the Queen Suriyothai's eyes to show her brave when she decides to join the battle to help the country.

### ***9. Angle***

Both movies use the low camera's angle in the Queen's scenes to make the queen appear larger, more important, and powerful. Further, it affects the audience's feeling that the Queen looks more elegant, respectful, and sometimes fearful because of her power. For example, when Queen Elizabeth or Queen Suriyothai stands in front of the screen toward the audience, the audience can feel that she is higher than them. On the other hand, the people under control of her such as her servants are filmed from a high angle, so they look smaller and much less powerful than the Queen.

### ***10. Connotation***

*Connotative Word* – Both movies use the word “Gold” in a good meaning. (In Suriyothai, the word “Tong” means gold). Gold is used as a meaning of civilization. For example, one sentence in the Elizabeth movie is “Queen Elizabeth era is the golden age of England”. This sentence means England is so civilized when Queen Elizabeth rules. England increases its power over other countries in Europe in her era. Similarly, Queen Suriyothai is in the Ayuthaya era which is one of the golden ages of the country. Lots of great temples and palaces were built in that era.

*Connotative Image* – Fire is used in a bad meaning. It symbolized the destruction. For example, in Suriyothai, fire brings the disorder. It relates to the small pox disease which spread and killed many people. The movie also uses fire in the battle. Further, fire which is red color relates to blood and death.

## ***11. Performance***

*Nonverbal Performance Skills* – The main characters of both movies, which are Cate Blanchett (Queen Elizabeth) and M.L. Piyapas Bhirombhakdi (Queen Suriyothai), are good actresses. They perform the Queen’s manner and dress the Queen’s costume and make up the same as people in the history. For example, in Suriyothai, the queen has to walk not too fast to keep the good manner of a high-class lady. So does Queen Elizabeth. Even though they are the queens from different countries, their manners such as the way they sit, eye contact with people under control of them, etc. are similar.

*Verbal Performance Skills* – Both actresses who play the Queen role perform well. They speak clearly and not too fast to make every word clear and strong as the Queen powerful commands. Also, they use the formal and polite words.

## ***12. Sound***

The dialogues of both movies use their own languages. Suriyothai uses Thai language. Elizabeth use English language with British accent. Further, the music in both movies is mainly used for arousing feelings of tension and drama. It is not used for funny theme, or cheerful theme. As a result, the music is slow. For the natural background sound and the sound effects, both movies use them to impart a feeling of realism of drama, especially the people crying, and the crowd noise at the battle.

In summary, even though both Suriyothai and Elizabeth are the movies from the different country, there are many interesting similarities in the process (such as the entertainment function), worldview (such as the role of the female, the Royal system, etc), and production values (such as the use of color, the relative position, etc).

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## **Bibliography**

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