

**Beyond the Handbook:
Thailand's *Bad Students* in the Film, *Arnold is a Model Student***

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Abstract

This paper analyzes how Sorayos Prapapan's film *Arnold is a Model Student* connects to the recent student movement in Thailand through its references to the Bad Student movement's *Manual on How to Survive School* handbook. The film features a network of high school student activists known as the *Bad Students*, who began campaigning against the traditional norms of Thai schools, the government, and even the monarchy in 2020. In addition to closely examining the film and the handbook, this study also explores the different texts and media forms incorporated in the movie and their relationships and interactions. By exploring these unique connections, this qualitative study presents a different approach to discussing the nuanced portrayal of the re-emergence of the Thai student movement in 2020 and conducting film analysis. The study reveals that the film depicts two sides of Thai student activism and enhances the overall message and image of the movement by using the handbook as a point of reference. Through intertextuality and intermediality, the film elaborates on the student activists' message to a broader audience while critiquing the movement and Thai society, demonstrating the power of media in public discourse and activism.

Keywords: student movements, Bad Students, Arnold is a Model Student

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Introduction

The year 2020 witnessed a new milestone in the history of the Thai social movement. After a long hiatus, students again led a series of protests and became the driving force for re-emerging youth activism in Thailand. The massacre of Thammasat University students on October 6, 1976, marked a significant turning point in the Thai student movement. The student demonstration ended in violence as right-wing groups attacked and killed student protesters. This brutal suppression severely dampened the spirit of student activism, leading many Thai students to feel disheartened and less inclined to politics. While some student activists sought to align themselves with broader alliances and societal movements, they were no longer viewed as leaders, unlike in the 1970s (Kongkirati, 2012, pp. 250-253). It wasn't until the context of the anti-democratic military coup of 2014 that students began to re-emerge as a visible force. The said coup was carried out by the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), led by General Prayut Chan-o-cha, and it allowed him to serve as prime minister until 2023. This resurgence reached a critical moment when the Future Forward Party, which had gained significant support from first-time voters and youth, was dissolved by the Constitutional Court in 2020.

Enraged by the dissolution of the Future Forward Party (the recently dissolved Move Forward Party's predecessor), university and high school students started political demonstrations and flash mobs in February 2020, and scholars observed it as the return of students to the streets for the first time since the 1970s. Labeled as one of the most extensive and widespread student movements in Thai political history, this re-emergence of student activism was also notable for including the active participation of high school students. The group, dubbed by its leaders the "Bad Students" or *Nakrian Lew* in the Thai language, formed a vast network of high school students from different schools in Thailand. With a namesake from a book written by former Chulalongkorn University student activist Netiwit Chotiphatphaisal titled *A Bad Student in an Excellent Education System*, this movement started campaigning against the conservative norms of the schools, the government, and even the monarchical institutions in 2020 (Kittisilpa, 2020; Lertchoosakul, 2021, p. 210).

The Bad Student movement staged protests that boldly challenged schools' and teachers' authoritarian actions and traditional rules. The young activists, with their unwavering courage and determination, viewed schools as their first experience of dictatorship. As a symbol of their resistance, they adopted the Hunger Games-inspired three-finger salute during their morning school assemblies, particularly while singing the Thai national anthem. This salute, popularized by the film based on the novel *The Hunger Games*, symbolizes defiance against oppressive regimes and is a powerful visual statement of the students' resistance.

The three-finger salute was first adopted by Thai student activists in 2014 as a form of protest against the military junta. The dystopian novel and film series *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins inspired this gesture. The trilogy's first book was published in 2008, and the film adaptation was released in 2012. In the story, the salute signifies thanks, respect, gratitude, or farewell to a loved one. However, Thai activists repurposed this gesture as a symbol of defiance, drawing parallels between their experiences and the authoritarian regime depicted in the story (Cogan, 2021).

The high school students wore white ribbons to signify their purity and solidarity with the student-led movement against Prayut Chan-o-cha's military regime. The student activists also protested before the Ministry of Education, advocating for education reforms in school

uniform and hairstyle policies and demanding a quality and accessible education. They also brought to light other school-related issues, such as corruption, corporal punishment, abuse, and sexual harassment cases in academic institutions. Led primarily by teenage girls, the movement also brought up societal issues in its demonstrations, such as undemocratic practices, discrimination against LGBTQIA students, patriarchy, and gender inequality in schools and society (Agence France-Presse, 2020; Phasuk, 2020; Lertchoosakul, 2021, pp. 210-212).

Aside from being active on the streets, the movement also launched on November 20, 2021 a handbook called *Manual on How to Survive School* (*koo meu ao tuarot nai rongrian*) (see Fig.1). The handbook, a testament to the movement's unwavering commitment to promoting human rights in educational institutions, contains the students' fundamental rights and emphasizes their demands to include human rights education in the school curriculum (Amnesty International Thailand, 2024). Guided by their objective of promoting human rights in educational institutions, the handbook contains legal procedures for filing complaints to assist students in deciding what to do in case schoolteachers and authorities violate their rights. The movement started distributing the handbook to Thai students nationwide for free on November 22, 2021, and they distributed it on a one book per student basis. The widespread interest in the handbook was evident, with 11,403 students expressing their desire online to receive this handbook on its first release day (The Standard Team, 2021).

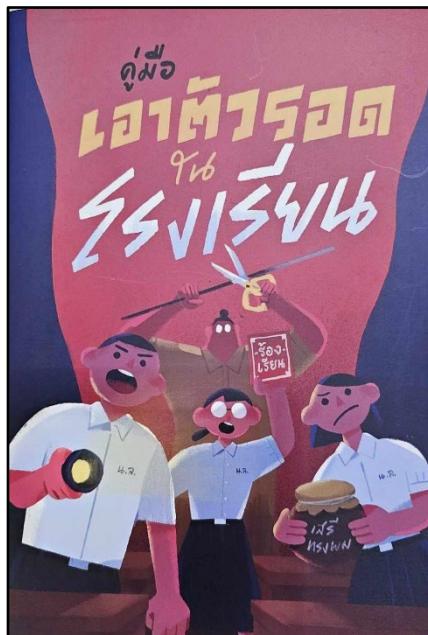


Figure 1: The cover of the *Manual on How to Survive School* by the Bad Students

The handbook asserts children's rights based on various laws and declarations, both domestically and internationally, such as the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand (2017), the Thai Criminal Code (1956), the United Nations (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Thai Child Protection Act (2003), the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1976), and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990). The document is divided into four chapters and written by the leaders and members of the movement, such as Laponpat "Min" Wangpaisit, Thanchanok "Bam" Koshpasharin, Salina

Jintawichit, and Panicha Rodklin. The handbook emphasizes the students' right to their bodies, freedom of speech and expression, properties, and safety (Chaichumkhun, 2021).

The document references the Thai Constitution and the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights to underscore students' rights over their bodies. This includes their autonomy in choosing their dress, hairstyles, and gender identity. The justification for freedom of speech and expression is grounded in the Thai Constitution and the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. This argument affirms that everyone can freely express their opinion, participate in or organize assemblies, and access information (Chaichumkhun, 2021).

It also highlights property rights under the Thai Constitution to protect students' belongings, asserting that teachers should not confiscate them. Furthermore, the Child Protection Act of Thailand and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child reinforce the right to safety, emphasizing children's entitlement to physical and mental safety. The handbook asserts that teacher disciplinary actions should be limited to warnings, point deductions, probation, or behavioral change activities (Chaichumkhun, 2021).

The handbook details what teachers are prohibited from doing under various sections of the Thai Criminal Code. These prohibitions include physical or mental violence, sexual harassment, unauthorized confiscation of personal items, cutting or shaving students' hair, and coercing or threatening them. Such measures ensure accountability for teachers and protect students' rights in Thailand (Chaichumkhun, 2021).

Lastly, it encourages students to create groups and gather friends to support the cause. This material is included in the student movement's "do-it-yourself" form of activism, which promotes change in the Thai education system through an online campaign using a common hashtag and on-site protests (Chaigne, 2021).

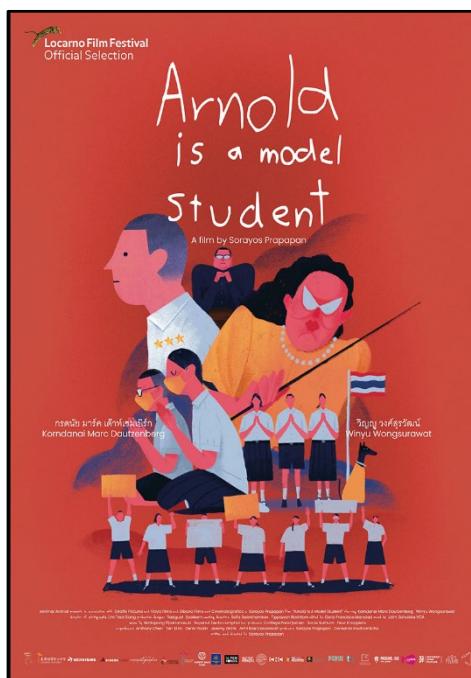


Figure 2: The poster of the film *Arnold is a Model Student*

Inspired by the Bad Student movement and its handbook, the Thai filmmaker Sorayos Prapapan wrote and directed the film *Arnold is a Model Student* (*Arnon pen nakrian tuayang*) in 2022 (see Fig. 2). This film, a comedy-drama set in a high school, centers on the story of Arnold, a gold medal Mathematics Olympiad student who earned the model student status in the eyes of his school. Prapapan's work offers a unique perspective on the student movement and its fight against authoritarianism. It cites parts of the *Manual on How to Survive School* handbook by the Bad Students. The film, chaptered based on the handbook, stresses Arnold's dilemma amidst the growing unrest in the school and exposes systematic issues in the Thai education system, thereby contributing to the discourse of student activism ("Arnold Is a Model Student," 2022; Srinivasan & Northrop, 2022). The film serves as a powerful medium to amplify the message of the young activists, inspiring others to join the cause by bringing their struggles and demands to a broader audience. It also demonstrates the crucial role of media in instilling social change through public awareness and discourse. Drawing from the recent Thai student movement, this innovative approach to storytelling highlights the Bad Student movement's significant impact on the Thai education system and the other side of activism, making it a crucial area of study.

Research Objectives

This connection between the handbook of the Bad Student movement and the film *Arnold is a Model Student* offers a different approach to discussing Thailand's 2020 re-emergence of student activism and conducting film analysis. By exploring this unique connection, this study examines how the film references the current student movement in Thailand through its intertextuality and intermediality with the *Manual on How to Survive School* handbook. Intertextuality, a familiar concept in literary and film studies, refers to how texts (in this case, the film) refer to, quote, or draw upon the contents of other works (in this case, the handbook). Through this lens, this study aims to identify the points of reference, connections, and divergences between the film and the handbook. It employs intertextuality, a novel approach to film analysis that focuses on the relationships between texts, to provide a nuanced understanding of the 2020 student movement and how the film enhances the message or advocacy of young activists and provides a critique of the movement, demonstrating the power of media in public discourse and activism. Aside from intertextuality, this study also focuses on the intermedial aspect of the film's audiovisual components and the handbook's contents. Intermediality pertains to the interconnectedness between different media as means of expression and exchange (Jensen, 2016, pp. 1-2). In a nutshell, this study examines the relationship and interaction of the texts and media forms and how they contribute to the discourse of student activism.

Research Questions

Based on this premise, the study answers the following questions: (1) How does the film *Arnold is a Model Student* depict student activism while referencing the *Manual on How to Survive School* handbook by the Bad Student movement as a source of inspiration? Moreover, (2) How do the interactions between the film and the handbook impact the overall message and image of the recent Thai student movement?

Research Methods

This qualitative paper focuses on in-depth intertextual analysis and interpretation of the connection between the film and the handbook to unpack the film's nuanced depiction of the 2020 re-emergence of the Thai student movement. The study uses the data from the focal

text, which is the film *Arnold is a Model Student*, and the source text, the *Manual on How to Survive School* handbook. To strengthen the arguments of this paper on the overall message and image of the recent student movement, it also includes other texts, such as the director's background and the audience's reception to the film through online reviews. It also discusses the intermediality of the audiovisual components of the film and the handbook. In analyzing these data, this paper employs close reading of the focal text and source text, such as various elements of intertextuality and intermediality, including discursive intermediality, material intermediality, and vertical intertextuality, direct quotations or references, allusions, thematic parallels, stylistic elements, and other contextual factors concerning the depiction of the student movement. It also looks at the presence of the media forms in the movie and their relationship and interaction.

Theoretical Framework

Intertextuality pertains to the notion that texts are related to each other in some ways. It was popularized by Julia Kristeva, a French intellectual of Bulgarian origin, in the 1970s, whose work built upon the ideas of Russian literary scholar Mikhail Bakhtin, particularly his concept of dialogism, which explores the interplay between literary works. Expounded in her work, "Word, Dialogue, and Novel," Kristeva highlighted the significance of a text as a heterogeneous combination of various texts linked to socio-cultural and historical contexts. Within the framework of French structuralism and poststructuralism, she underscored the notion that texts exist within complex networks, with their meanings shaped by other texts and sociocultural and historical connections (Raj, 2015, pp. 77-78; Jensen, 2016, pp. 2-3; Long & Yu, 2020, pp. 1-2).

Although derived from literary studies, these texts include verbal components and audiovisual aspects and are not limited to written texts. They can also be formal-informal or artistic-mundane forms of texts (van Zoonen, 2017, pp. 1-2). Media can be considered vehicles of meaning and objects for analysis and interpretation. Thus, in providing an understanding of how the film depicts the recent Thai student movement, this study employs the concept of the intertextuality of texts, especially the concept of vertical intertextuality introduced by John Fiske in 1987 (Jensen, 2016, pp. 2-3). This approach emphasizes the vertical dimension of textual relationships, which includes other media forms that discuss the student movement. In this context, these media texts refer to the handbook and the film.

This paper also touches on intermediality because, aside from the texts, it also involves different forms of media, particularly the audiovisual components of the film and its relations with the handbook. Intermediality, defined as the interconnectedness of modern media communication, examines how different communication strategies interact to form a broader sociocultural context. This study emphasizes discursive and material intermediality, viewing media as texts in line with intertextuality and investigating how these media function as interconnected means of interaction (Jensen, 2016, pp. 1-7). Interpreting the depiction of student activism in the film also relies on its relation to other media, contributing to its intermediality. However, it is more than simply the mixing and copresence of media forms within a specific work such as the film *Arnold is a Model Student*. It is not just a transfer from one medium, the handbook, to another, the film, but more of a relationship between the two materials employing different levels of realities and discourse of the student movement (Méchoulan, 2015, pp. 3-4).

Results and Discussion

The interplay between the movie *Arnold is a Model Student* (focal text) and *Manual on How to Survive School* handbook (source text) offers a distinctive perspective on the recent Thai student movement. This intertextual and intermedial relationship illustrates the dual facets of Thai student activism. While it emphasizes students' collective actions, the film also offers a critique by showcasing the opposing side of student activism. In addition, this relationship reflects the contentious criticisms of the Thai educational and socio-political system through various elements of intertextuality and intermediality, including discursive intermediality, material intermediality, and vertical intertextuality.

Discursive Intermediality and Vertical Intertextuality

The interaction of the film and the handbook supports the tertiary text category of vertical intertextuality introduced by John Fiske in 1987 and the discursive intermediality classification by Jensen (2016, pp. 2-3). These classifications highlight the idea that media are both texts that convey meanings and objects for analysis and interpretation. Within this framework of intertextuality, three categories emerge: primary texts, which serve as the vehicles of information; secondary texts, which comprise references within the media; and tertiary texts, which include the audiences and discussions surrounding the media. The primary texts discussing the Thai student movement refer to the film *Arnold is a Model Student* and the handbook. The secondary texts encompass publicity and reviews of the film, while tertiary texts pertain to the audience's conversations about it. Including English subtitles for audiences engages both international and local viewers, integrating them as part of the intermediality and discourse stemming from the primary texts.

As part of the intertextuality and intermediality concepts, translation and direct quotations from Thai to English form a relationship between the handbook as a source text and the translated text shown in the film. Since the handbook only caters to Thai students, the translated chapters into English presented in the movie allow the public to see its content. The new medium, through the English subtitles provided by the film, allows the message of Thai student activism and the handbook of the Bad Student movement to reach an international audience.

Similar to how the student movement in 2020 utilized the social media hashtag **##WhatsHappeningInThailand** to raise political and social awareness and to seek international attention to apply public pressure on the government, the film *Arnold is a Model Student* with English subtitles also engages meaningfully with a global audience. The film informs viewers about the situation in Thailand and calls on the Thai government to address the students' demands. By drawing attention from the global community, creating a film centered on the recent student movement underscores the significance of the student activists. It recognizes their contributions as a pivotal moment for the Thai people. This further legitimizes their role and impact on Thai society and politics. In addition, the film also presents a critique of the movement and the realities facing Thailand, serving as an essential starting point for discourse among international and local audiences.

A key distinction in the interaction between the film and the handbook is that the film not only translates the messages of the handbook and the student activists but also situates them within a relevant context. By using the handbook as the source text, the film enhances the viewers' understanding of the Thai student movement through visual imagery and cultural references and putting them into context.

Translation and integration of direct quotations are fundamentally intertextual activities. It must be emphasized that translation involves more than just converting text from one language to another. This process, as seen in the interplay between the film and the handbook, includes incorporating multiple meanings, effectively replacing the original handbook text with a translated version, and enriching it with visual elements of the film.

Similarly, when direct quotations are included within intertextuality, the text assimilates various discourses. In this context, the film acts as a translator, serving as an intermediary between the messages articulated by student activists and the international audience interested in watching the movie. Despite its global reach, the production remains mindful of cultural nuances and limitations surrounding politically sensitive topics in Thailand while offering a critical perspective on the student movement.

Adhering to the principles of intertextuality in translation, the film interprets the original text—the handbook—and conveys its message to the public by assuming the role of both intermediary and author of the English subtitles and the translated script. This dual role is evident in how translations are enriched with additional cultural contexts and explanatory notes throughout the film.

For example, the film starts and focuses on the first chapter of the handbook translated as “Our Rights. School should be a safe place.” The film establishes the story's context by focusing on this chapter and adding “However, in Thailand...” in the English subtitle and translated title chapter. It highlights the problem of schools in Thailand not being safe places for students. It can be seen through different depictions in the film, such as the use of corporal punishment by teachers and strict policies on haircuts and style, school uniforms, traditional etiquette, and cultural practices. The movie also emphasizes school as the breeding ground of corruption through scenes where a parent gives gifts to the school and director in exchange for favors and the mutualistic relationship between the education ministry and the school director. While the students demand schools to be their safe place, as reiterated in the handbook, the film underscores the reality that the world outside of school is dangerous and challenging for them. It can be noticed in the character of Mr. Bee and his cram school for a military academy, which operates in a gray area, promoting a system of cheating and corruption.

The second chapter is translated as follows: “Our rights are violated. It is an uphill battle against authoritarianism, but if we don't fight, we can't beat this monster. This monster is devouring the youth of this country. To end this vicious cycle, we must fight, but how?” This part builds up to the points presented in the first chapter by providing concrete scenarios, such as the teacher's caning of the students and emphasizing that school is the students' first dictatorship experience. The film vividly portrays the Thai school system as a monster and authoritarian, devouring the students based on the handbook. It strengthens the purpose of the student movement's demands by making the document's content relatable to the audience and providing visuals to them. But how does the film depict student activism using the handbook as a source text and reference? Moreover, how do the interactions between the film and the handbook impact the overall message and image of the recent Thai student movement?

The interaction between the film and the handbook depicts student activism as a collective action by highlighting the handbook's third and fourth chapters. The third chapter is translated as “File an official complaint. To conquer authoritarianism, we need a powerful weapon: paper and words. Together, they will become a sword that strikes against authoritarianism. Let's take a look at how we do this.” The fourth chapter is translated as “Unite and Fight. This monster is too strong? Should we unite and fight it? Unity is strength.

Let's unite and fight authoritarianism. Let's learn how to work together and fight it in this chapter." Both chapters in the film are supplemented by visuals and imagery of student protests against the authoritarian nature of the Thai education system and how each student can help one another fight the monster. For example, a sample letter of complaint from a student, extracted from the handbook, is presented and contextualized within the film's narrative. Notably, an artificial intelligence voice is utilized to read the letter aloud, allowing viewers sufficient time to absorb its content. This interplay between the film and the handbook instructs viewers on procedures for filing a complaint. It empowers them to unite and stand against abuses within the school, emphasizing the importance of collective action in the Thai student movement. In addition, the distribution of the handbook by students to their fellow students exiting the school premises in the latter part of the film signifies their continuous struggle by spreading the word to their fellow youth, just like how the film spreads the message of recent Thai student activism to the public.

Despite showcasing the students' collective action by expressing their rights, the film also portrays the dangerous side of student activism. It can be seen in the conversation between Arnold and his mom when Arnold shows the video he took of the protest while going home. His mom warns Arnold that protesting is dangerous and reminds him that his dad was expelled from Thailand for actively criticizing the Thai government. The visual imagery of the water cannon, barbed wire, and police visibility in the film add fear and show the negative consequences of fighting against the authorities.

In addition, activists in the film are also described as bad people. In the scene where Teacher Wanee, the civic duty teacher, reads the book to the class, she utters the following lines translated into English: "Humans are social animals. There are good and bad people by nature. What compels people to live in harmony? Harmony is law and order. The law is a set of rules that treats everyone equally. But there are loopholes. This is how bad people can cheat. Our duty is to plug the holes and get rid of bad people so good citizens won't be taken advantage of. That's how we create a righteous society and a better country." Allotting time for this scene in the film emphasizes the authoritarian perspective in society and undermines activism and human rights. It connotes that the activists who fight for human rights and resist repressive rules are seen as evil entities.

Although not a chapter in the handbook, the film highlights a specific page and relates student activism to freedom of expression. This part of the film is translated as "Students having freedom of expression. Teachers must not threaten the students or use their authority to force them into submission." This section showcases the realities of Thai society, not just the school system. In Thailand, children are not exempt from *lese majeste* charges under Section 112 of the Thai Criminal Code, which imprisons people for three to 15 years for insulting, defaming, or threatening the Thai monarchy. Even at the young age of 15, they can be charged with this law ("Teen political activist steps out of limelight as her mentor continues hunger strike in jail," 2024).

The handbook written by the Bad Student movement mainly focuses on students' rights. However, the film highlights the irony of students' irresponsibility and mischievousness while fighting for their rights. Alongside the student protests demanding their rights, actions of students such as cheating during exams, sleeping in class, vaping and drinking alcohol inside the school premises, skipping classes, and disrespecting teachers were also included in the film, reminding students that there's a corresponding responsibility in every right.

The movie also portrays the reality that in a social movement such as the one led by the students, there will still be some privileged students who don't care about the struggles the sector is fighting for or are torn between their aspirations and dreams for society. For example, Arnold is privileged to have wealth and intelligence unaffected by the students' demands. He can go abroad to study and earn the school director's trust because of his contribution to the school's image by winning the Math Olympiad. In addition, Arnold declines to sign the students' petition against Teacher Wanee because he is already graduating, which disappoints his classmates. Arnold states in the film: "We will graduate soon. These stupid rules won't hurt us anymore." This action eventually bothers Arnold towards the end of the movie while he reads the recommendation letter from his homeroom teacher at the airport. Despite having internal battles and a conscience about this matter, he still pursued his dreams because he seemed to have no choice, which is a reality every privileged student faces. It reflects the dilemmas of the real world, especially in the context of the middle class, who are busy with their own matters while being constantly confronted by the social ills of Thai society.

Highlighting the other side of the student movement and the realities facing Thai students shows the discursive aspect of intermediality and vertical intertextuality. The film does not merely translate and directly quote the handbook; it also provides sociocultural aspects and contexts related to the student movement, allowing audiences to see a more complete picture of the recent Thai student movement.

Prapapan's film also depicts a student movement anchored to its concrete advocacies, such as women's empowerment. It is noteworthy to underscore that in the film, the leaders of the student protesters are girls. In this work of art, it is inspiring to observe that the female students take the lead and initiate the complaints against Teacher Wanee, who caned their male classmates after breaking a vase while playing football in front of a shrine. During the re-emergence of Thai student activism in 2020, most of the active students in the protests were female. Teenage girls were considered the backbone of the Bad Student movement, attributed to the lack of gender equality in Thailand (Agence France-Presse, 2020). Adding this detail to the film highlights the significance of female students in the student movement. In a country where patriarchal culture is still dominant, the portrayal and representation of females in a film created by a male matter.

The movie also depicts the contentious criticisms of the student movement against the Thai socio-political system by containing allusions, political parodies, and archetypes that, due to their sensitive nature, audiences are encouraged to interpret by themselves. The main character, Arnold, pronounced in Thai as Anon, is the namesake of human rights lawyer and activist Anon Nampa. Nampa was one of the leading figures of the 2020 student movement and was sentenced to years of imprisonment because of *lese majeste* charges. The scene where a male teacher is feeding a stray dog wearing a cloth with sticky rice while talking to the school security guard beside him and saying that the dog is greedy is subjected to the imagination and interpretation of people watching the film. Some scenes in the film expose the realities of Thai society, particularly Thai nationalism and democracy. Examples include the meme of Teacher Wanee that Arnold created, which states, "Nationalism puts you in a coconut shell," and the exam review question of the tutor teacher to her students, "Which do you prefer for a democracy? A corrupted politician or a good dictatorship?" In addition to these scenes, Mr. Bee's question to the students about his cram school is also an example of a puzzling point emphasized in the film. His question is, "Which European country is governed by a dictatorship?" Vatican City, Germany, Hungary, Poland, and France are the options, and

Arnold answers Vatican City because the rest of the countries mentioned are democratic. He explains that the Pope heads the Vatican City as the religious and state leader.

Material Intermediality

The interplay between the film and the handbook underscores the concept of material intermediality introduced by Jensen (2016, pp. 4-7), which posits that media are interconnected as material means of interaction, characterized by three degrees of typology. Human beings represent the first degree of media as the source of communication. The mass media functions as the second degree, amplifying this communication, while the third degree, such as digital computers, further enhances it. Within the Thai student movement context, the Bad Students and their handbook exemplify the first degree of media. Then, the film disseminates the message of the student activists, which serves as the second degree. At the same time, social media and the streaming platform Netflix represent the third degree as the audience enables them to engage with the media interactively. The film is available on Netflix, making it more accessible to the public and international audiences. Before its release on Netflix, the film *Arnold is a Model Student* successfully premiered first in various international film festivals. It was also nominated and recognized in the 2022 Singapore International Film Festival, the 2022 Hong Kong Asian Film Festival, the Five Flavours Asian Film Festival, and the Berwick Film and Media Arts Festival ("Arnon pen nakrian tuayang," 2022).

Following the three degrees of intermediality typology, the audience's varied reception from the local and international scene opens up a further discussion on the recent student movement in Thailand. The film's use of the *Manual on How to Survive School* handbook puts the significance of student activism in the mainstream, making it continuously active and relevant to Thai society while at the same time offering a critical analysis of the movement.

The film's portrayal of Thai student activism and its interaction with the handbook and other mediums as points of reference solidify the overall message and dual-face image of the recent Thai student movement. Through intertextuality and intermediality, the overall message of the student movement focusing on their rights resonated with the Thai people who share the same school experiences. Prapapan's movie also contributed to the international community's awareness of Thailand's political situation. His film not only presented the positive aspects of the student movement but also showcased the harsh realities and dangerous side of student activism in Thailand.

Based on the online reviews, the film and its interactions with the handbook successfully highlighted the complex and multifaceted aspects of the Thai student movement. First, the film strengthens the anti-authoritarian message of the student activists and the tendency of schools to become training grounds for the normalization of dictatorship in Thai society. The satires and comedic portrayals in the film effectively present an image of the Thai student movement, which is against strict discipline, rigid hierarchy, and conformity.

Anya Somwaiya, a Thai raised by an American mother, reviewed Sorayos Prapapan's film in the *University College of London Film & TV Society Journal*. In her review, she finds a personal connection to the movie due to her own experiences attending Thai school. Anya is accustomed to the authoritarian nature of Thai education, which she seeks to explore in Thai discourse and cinema (Somwaiya, 2024).

The film contains funny scenes, but the international audience, particularly non-Asians, did not seem to laugh when it premiered at the film festivals in Western countries.

Based on interviews, Prapapan was puzzled by this because people laughed at his previous short films. He guessed that it could be that the Western audience was shocked by the Thai situation or that they were too politically correct (Chen, 2022). I remember watching this film in House Samyan in Bangkok, and people were laughing with me in the funny parts of the movie.

Several international magazine sites, such as *Slant Magazine* and *The Film Stage*, also reviewed Prapapan's film. These sites described Prapapan's work as a subtle approach to discussing a solid political message and the absurdities of Thai society through a slow observational style (Robb, 2023) and as a balanced perspective on social issues while employing critique and humor. Prapapan skillfully balances humor and seriousness in his film. While he playfully mocks certain aspects of the student movement, he remains deeply sympathetic to its goals (O'Connor, 2022).

Next, the film presents an image or the reality that not all students support the student movement. The people who watched the film fully remembered how the character of Arnold represented the privileged people in society. It resonated among the audiences because the film illustrated that not all students, especially the privileged ones, resist the oppressive system because they benefit from it. On the other hand, it also presented the challenges faced by students not privileged enough, especially those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, to escape the system and pursue their aspirations. Somwaiya (2024), in her review, emphasized that most Thai students will never be like Arnold, and she wonders how ordinary students or those with poor social mobility fare under the Thai system. Robb (2023) stresses in his review the complexities of individual agency within a collective movement. Arnold and other Thai students with the same privileged position and ambitions as him naturally experience self-actualization and tension of prioritizing their aspirations and desires over participating in the student movement.

142 film enthusiasts rated the film on the social media platform *Letterboxd* with 3.4 out of 5 stars, while 147 users of the popular rating website *IMDb* rated the film 6.5 out of 10 stars. One of the components in the film rating that the people discussed was the story's relatability to the people. It resonated with the audience because they shared the same school experiences, particularly the authoritarian nature of schools as presented in the film. Some reviews also looked for depth in the character of Arnold. They criticized the fact that the film only showcases middle-class Thai students, and commented that the character development of Arnold needs improvement (IMDb, 2022) (Letterboxd, 2022).

Lastly, the film underscores the message of collective action of the student movement. By exposing problems in the Thai school system, the film can tickle the viewers' minds and inspire them to question abuses of authority and demand change. After watching the movie, Somwaiya (2024) engaged with other Thais about their perspectives, and one young man admitted he had never questioned the Thai school system until now. For Anya, Prapapan's film was humorous and thought-provoking, helping her process her frustrations with Thai society while providing new insights.

The various reviews and discussions surrounding the film highlight its intertextual and intermedial qualities alongside the handbook. From the printed version of the Bad Students handbook to the film's screening, international and local audiences have actively engaged in dialogue about the Thai student movement. This interaction between the film and the handbook and the utilization of mass media and digital platforms facilitates a broader discourse regarding Thai student activists.

The film interacts with the handbook and other media, such as viral video clips on social media. This intermediality contributes to the audience's general understanding of the re-emergence of the Thai student movement and discourse on student activism. The use of actual video clips of the student protests of the Bad Student movement during the school's flag ceremony and morning assembly and the violent dispersal of the military against the street demonstrators in 2020 provided reality and context, significantly contributing to the audience's understanding of the student movement. Although the film attempted to re-enact the students' protest, these external videos presented the gravity of Thailand's actual situation. The viral video clip of an actual teacher caning his students for discipline included in the film emphasized the corporal punishment still being employed by Thai teachers to the students.

In addition, the film also used the Ministry of Culture of Thailand's production videos as a reference to the informative video "How to Behave Elegantly Like a Thai" by Teacher Wanee, the civic duty teacher in the film (Srinivasan and Northrop, 2022). As part of the workshop on civic duties focusing on Thai etiquette crafted by the teachers, because the Ministry of Education's committee in charge of examining education standards audits the school, this video teaches the students how to respect adults through different gestures such as the *wai* or putting hands together and simultaneously bowing down slightly and the *krab* or going down onto the floor to prostrate before elders, parents, and teachers. Including this in the film stresses the point of opening a discourse on how Thai schools serve as a space for Thai practices that the students in the present times start to be critical of because they emphasize hierarchy and the ideals of authoritarianism. While the teachers in the film are preparing for the school visitation of the said committee, one of the teachers utters the following lines to counter the plan of Teacher Wanee's workshop on civic duties: "But being a good citizen isn't only about being polite and respectful. We should allow students to be creative and express themselves freely." The school director ignores this comment because Teacher Wanee's plan is what the committee is looking for.

The use of the Thai national anthem at the film's beginning points out the discussion on nationalism. It highlights the point that schools are places to instill nationalism. However, the students later use this national anthem to protest by raising their three-finger salute during their morning assemblies. They argue that schools are their first dictatorship, and their civic duty classes are useless in real life and superficial because they only train them to love the nation, religion, and the monarchy. It is aligned with the notion of nationalism the 2020 student movement offered in their discussion. They redefined nationalism so that it was not just about Thainess but also anchored to human rights. The student activists' notion of nationalism was further emphasized through the representation provided by the film.

Nationalism asserts that the nation is the central principle of political organization and the only legitimate framework for political authority. A defining characteristic of nationalism is patriotism, which embodies the emotional connection of individuals to their nation (Heywood, 2017, pp. 452-456, 462-463). Nationalism celebrates unity and cultivates love and reverence for one's country. In Thailand, nationalism is deeply rooted in the concept of "Thainess," or *khwam pen thai*, which is intertwined with the three pillars of nation, religion, and monarchy. It encapsulates the spirit of the Thai nation, drawing from values, national arts, the Buddhist faith, the Thai language, and Thai cultural heritage (Traijakvanich & Rojanaprapayon, 2020, pp. 420-421).

However, nationalism can take on an aggressive form, often called expansionist nationalism, in which militarism is one of its key features. Militarism involves achieving objectives through military means and extending military ideologies, values, and practices into

civilian life. This belief was dominant during the late 19th century when the European powers linked national prestige to expansionism (Heywood, 2017, pp. 500- 502).

The interplay between nationalism and militarism often manifests in authoritarian regimes. These governments prioritize their authority over individual rights, suppressing the populace by excluding them from political processes, irrespective of popular consent (Heywood, 2013, pp. 269, 277). Such regimes typically exhibit central solid power, with limited freedoms for the people (Traijkvanich & Rojanaprapayon, 2020, pp. 420). Authoritarianism is frequently linked to military rule, dictatorship, and absolute monarchy (Heywood, 2013, pp. 269, 277). For the Thai student activists, these narratives surrounding nationalism are evident in the Thai context, and they are trying to redefine and challenge these conventional notions of nationalism.

The conservatives branded the student protesters as “non-Thai” and “nation haters” because of their activism and assertion of their new definition of nationalism, which emphasizes the importance of human rights. During the 2020 student movement, popular hashtags and protest slogans encapsulated this demand, such as “Decrease Thainess, Increase Humanness” and “The nation is the people.” These catchphrases refer to people as Thais, citizens, and humans, encompassing any culture and ethnicity (Wongngamdee, 2020).

Aside from the points mentioned, the film is also interrelated to the background of its creator. The director, Sorayos Prapapan, based the story of his debut feature-length film on his experiences in the Thai education system, his upbringing, and the current student movement in Thailand (“Arnold is a Model Student,” 2022). Prapapan is known for incorporating humor in discussing complex topics and social critiques. Before creating this film, he had already produced several short films since 2013, establishing his signature blending of humor and the everyday lives of ordinary people (Chen, 2022).

Prapapan conceptualized this film in 2014, at the beginning of former prime minister Prayut Chan-o-cha's military junta. With his educational background at Thammasat University, he started questioning the media and his high school friends who supported the military coup. He felt that something was wrong with what was happening at that time. He thought it could be rooted in the authoritarian nature of the education system of Thailand and began to look at social problems closely. Then, when the Thai student movement re-emerged in Thai society in 2020, he got the opportunity to incorporate it into his initial concept (Chen, 2022).

Given the points mentioned above, undoubtedly the interplay between the film and the handbook through intertextuality and intermediality offers a distinctive perspective on the recent Thai student movement by emphasizing the students' collective actions and, at the same time, providing a critique of the movement and presenting social realities of Thai society.

Conclusion

Through various elements of intertextuality and intermediality, including discursive intermediality, material intermediality, and vertical intertextuality, the film *Arnold is a Model Student* provided a nuanced understanding of the 2020 student movement beyond what was emphasized in the handbook. Using the *Manual on How to Survive School* handbook by the Bad Student movement as a point of reference, the film depicts the two sides of Thai student activism. It highlights the students' anti-authoritarian stance and collective action while simultaneously portraying the dangerous side of student activism. As the film emphasizes human rights and the student's freedom of expression, it also tackles how student activism was

seen as an evil entity in Thai society because of the resistance to traditional order and repressive rules and policies. The film portrays the earnest character of the students in promoting their societal campaigns and advocacies and, at the same time, showcases the nature of students as mischievous and immature. In addition, despite the collectivism of the movement, the movie also stresses individualism, which is that not all students share the same sentiments with the student movement due to personal aspirations and intentions in life.

Aside from intertextuality, the intermedial aspect of the film's audiovisual components and the handbook's contents also contribute to the discourse of student activism. The film's interactions with the handbook and other media contribute to the audience's general understanding and discussion of the re-emergence of the Thai student movement. Without a doubt, the film's portrayal of Thai student activism and its interactions with the handbook and other mediums as points of reference strengthen the overall message and image of the current Thai student movement while at the same time being critical of it. It also enhances the student activists' message to a broader audience, demonstrating the media's power in public discourse and activism.

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