

CHAPTER II

STRUCTURES OF THE DIGITAL FILMSCAPE

In order to analyse a structure requires transparency of its components and an understanding of the nature of their interrelationships. The structure's context, i.e. its positioning in relation to other, similar or competing forces provides a basis for comparison and meaningful appraisal. In the field of film, value chains point out producers', distributors' and exhibitors' positions. The lowest end of the value chain is the production sector, where social, cultural and economic capital is invested and no economic revenue is earned. Adding value to the cultural product film is the distribution sector through commercial marketing and promotion. Trajectories of films are decided at this point through selection and subsequent national or transnational sales in various formats. The exhibition sector generates national box office revenues and income from advertisement at the venue. It follows that corporations, which are represented in all three chains and those in the position of distribution channels are dominant forces in the position to make profits, while those at the production end of the industry have less opportunities. This chapter focuses on the Thai film industry's digital films' trajectories and the framework of analysis is based on the above model structure of a filmscape linked through its chains. Research into economic structures of the Thai film industry's digital filmscape in the period 2003 – 2006 provides a better understanding of the dynamics of regulatory processes shaping the digital filmscape which extends beyond the industry.

It is the objective of this study to contextualise digital film productions from the northern borderlands with those from the national film industry. An understanding of their structures will show how digital film productions are encouraged, restricted and regulated.

2.1. Commercial digital productions

The number of production companies in Thailand's filmscape 2003 – 2006 amounted to over 40 different studios. If commercial advertisement film studios, production service providers and international film production houses were accounted for, this figure would double. This thesis does not study the former, and neither does it include those companies exclusively producing for television broadcasting programmes. Instead, the focus here is especially on the structure of those corporations who have produced digital films. This diverse group consists of four corporations in the Thai film industry, 'independent' studios and individuals, here represented by the Thai Film Foundation. This paragraph first establishes the nature of the film industry before describing and analysing the main features of the structure of the four corporations and their digital film productions.

Based on the above model, the nature of the Thai film industry is largely monopolised by three major production houses, who each dominate a sector in the field. Working in exhibition, distribution and production, GMMM Plc is a powerful force especially since the merging of GMM multi-media conglomerate's film studio GMM Pictures Plc. with film production departments of two of the most successful 'new wave' commercial advertisement production houses Tai Entertainment Co., Ltd. and Hub-Ho-Hin Co., Ltd.'s to form GMM Tai Hub (GTH) established its leading position in the Thai film industry in 2004. The GMM Media Public Company now owns 50 percent of the latter. The multi-media conglomerates' business synergy continues as it is GTH's stated intention to "step up cooperation with Five Star production and Phenomena, a local advertising house and Channel 7's BBTV Productions" (Corben, 2007). GMM dominates the exhibition sector and ticket sales as the head of the powerful trio conglomerate GTH is Visute Poolvaraluck, who founded Tai Entertainment in 1985. His family owns the Major Cineplex Group Plc, Thailand's largest cinema chain, which, in turn, took over Entertain Golden Village (EGV) in 2004, which consolidated the two biggest multiplex operators. Thailand's first multiplex theatre chain EGV is a joint venture between Tai Entertainment and Golden Harvest, which the Board of Investors calls a "pan-Asian multiplex developer", based in Hong Kong, and Village Roadshow, Australia (Rosenberg, 2006). Their combined cinema

theatre occupancy share in Thailand is estimated at approx. 75 percent. Moreover, Major Cineplex' merging with BEC-Tero Entertainment's wholly owned ticketing subsidiaries into the new Thaiticketmaster conveniently allows for a complete monopoly of the ticketing service in Thailand (Kwanchai, 2007). EGV created the concept of 'D-CINE theatres' (living room type style, where audiences compile their own DVD movie show), and had planned an "E- Theatre" network with Shin Broadband Co., Ltd. The project targeted at small (18-20) auditoria bookings employing broadband technology to distribute films to the provinces. Major Cineplex has taken over this strategy to increase audiences by developing the low-cost "E-Cinema". The concept of The Thailand Knowledge Park (TK Park), organized in cooperation with The Thai Film Foundation, which aims at "providing a stimulating learning environment, unlike the perceived dreariness of reading rooms and libraries" (Usanee, 2005), is also planned for Chiang Mai besides wanting to merely innovate cinema environments in Bangkok's commercial shopping centres with the zones 'Lively Library', 'Open Zone', and 'Movie Image' among other venues.

"Movie Image comprises virtual experiences where both children and adults can enjoy an exciting journey into virtual worlds through virtual headsets."(ibid)

Under former PM Thaksin Shinawatra, several more public organizations were established such as The Thailand Creative & Design Centre (TCDC), the National Discovery Museum Institute etc., all under the auspices of the Office of Knowledge Management and Development (OKMD), and some directly under the Office of the Prime Minister. Their establishment is a response to a generation of cinephiles who value Thai film, but underscore the need for diversity of free expressions of style and content. Notably, the application by The National Film Archive of Thailand to become a public organization has as not been accepted, although to salvage Thailand's film archive, their restoration and digitalisation of films, government funding is needed.

Prommitr International Productions Co., Ltd. (PRO) together with Sahamongkolfilm Co., Ltd. (MK) are the leading forces in the production sector. The corporate executives of PRO are M.C. Chatri Chalerm Yugala and his wife Mom Kamala Yukol Na Ayudhaya Kunakorn Sethi. Thailand's Royal Household invested Bt

400 million and Bt 500 million for their productions *The Legend of Suriyothai* (2001) and *The Legend of King Naresuan* (2007), which were marked by large-scale promotion activities in Thailand, and *King Naresuan* was represented with a special booth at the Cannes Film Festival 2006. PRO's film productions have been interpreted as being a major signal intending to promote Thailand as the central destination for film productions in Southeast Asia. The film's director, who has been producing for over 40 years, also engaged in films of the 'films for life' genre of the 1970's – 1980's, when the Thai film industry boomed and taxes imposed to stop Hollywood films flooding the country.

It is in the context of these forces, that this chapter focuses on corporations, who produced digital films in the period of 2003 -2006. Of the 41 production houses who released films in Thailand in that time frame, only five have their own distribution and exhibition channels, two of which distribute globally: GMM and Sahamongkolfilm (MK). Nationwide, the distribution of films by MK rose from 27 percent of all Thai industry film productions released in 2003, to 31.7 percent in 2004, 33.3 in 2005, and reached 37.8 percent in 2006. In the same time frame GMM's distribution of Thai films grew from 9 percent to 22 in 2004, but dropped to 13.8 in 2005 and stood at 20 percent in 2006. Together, these two large scale corporations produced over ¼ of the films released in the last four years. However, in the period 2003 – 2006, this sector has been monopolised by PRO and MK, whose investment in bigger budgets for production and marketing stand out from the rest.

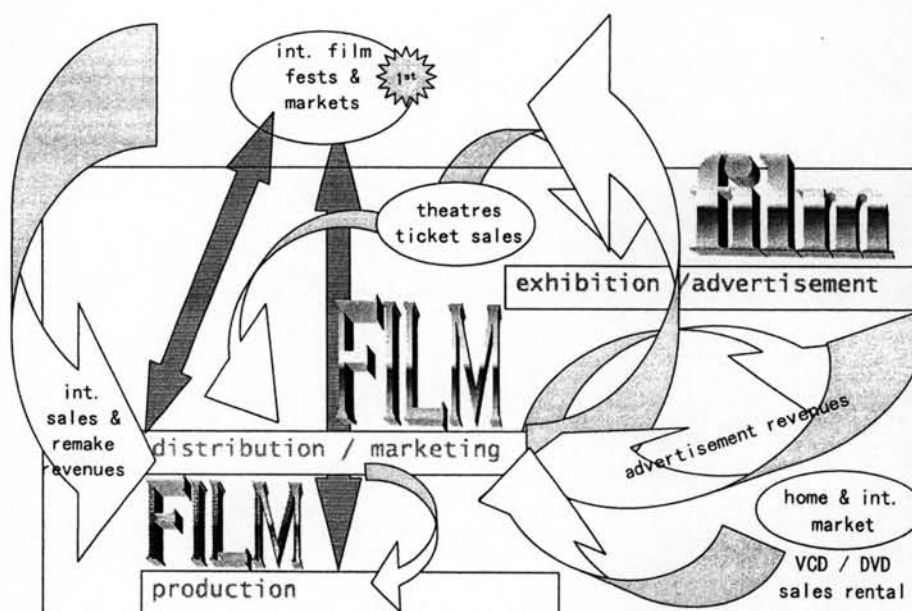
During the period 2003-2006, the Thai film industry released only five feature-length digital films out of approximately 171 productions. The digital films are *Khan Kluay* by Kantana Plc. and distributed by Sahamongkolfilm. MK also picked up *My Space* (2004) to transfer it to 35mm format for theatrical release, and, in cooperation with Baa-Ram-Ewe, produced *Sua Rong Hai* (2005, Crying Tigers) - the first Thai digital documentary ever to be released commercially for theatres. Furthermore, The Film Factory Co., and Five Star Productions Co., cooperated to produce *Citizen Dog* (2004), and R.S. Film released *Garuda* (2004).

The corporate structure of these four producers is outlined below to be able to analyse if this observation indicates that digital film productions are generally integrated into the film industry. It examines the regulation of digital film productions.

Table 1: Thai film industry digital films

Commercial Producers	Title	2003	2004	2005	2006
Baa-Ram Ewe / Sahamongkolfilm	<i>Crying Tigers</i>			1	
Five Star Co. Ltd. / The Film Factory	<i>Citizen Dog</i>		1		
Kantana	<i>Khan Kluy</i>				1
P.O.V. Production /R.S. Film	<i>Garuda</i>		1		
Sahamongkolfilm	<i>My Space</i>		1		
Total films released (approx.)		45	41	36	45

Figure 2: Global value chains



Sahamongkolfilm Co., Ltd.

Through their vast co-production network, Sahamongkolfilm (MK) releases 12 to 15 movies yearly: Regular film productions are made in association with Baa-Ram-Ewe Co., Ltd. (BRE), but other partners include Yuthlet Sippapak's Mahagan Films, Nonzee Nimibutr's Cinemasia and its subsidiary Film Hunzar as well as Thanit Jitnukul's Thanadnang and Tiger Team Studios. Prachya Pinkaew, BRE's corporate executive, seems to have an output deal of between 3-5 films annually with MK since the late 1990's. Together they produced the first Thai documentary ever to be released commercially for theatres: *Sua Rong Hai* (Crying Tigers, 2005). However, the condition for the director of the Bt 2-3 million production was to create something of mass appeal and starring a popular Thai singer and at a pre-defined 90 minutes length. Santi Taepanich says he had initially intended it to be a film for limited release in ethnographic style to document mainly poor Isaan migrants working in Bangkok. By following the individuals for six months or longer, he would be able to record the real drama of their struggles. He envisioned "[...] a small, semi-underground affair for audiences with real interest" (Rithdee, 2005). Sahamongkolfilm recognised the commercial potential of the story, but their support was not strong enough when the production company of the popular Thai singer from Isaan, who was starring in the film, refused to agree to the release of the documentary film and including the star's songs. When the digital documentary film was finally released, it was screened at SF Cinema, Major Cineplex, EGV, UMG, NK and CF Coliseum in Bangkok. The attraction of the digital format lies in the fact that it is inexpensive and can be transformed into various formats: for theatrical screening, television programmers and digital versatile disks. The economic capital invested for such production is minimal, while the symbolic value as a film produced by a former short film maker raises its value.

This example of 'integration' of low-budget digital film production is exemplary for many other such productions: Although her film had premiered at the Berlin International Film Festival in 2003, GMM hesitated about releasing Pimpaka Towira's film in Thailand, and requested *One Night Husband* to be shortened about twenty minutes and the use of ambient sound to be replaced by music. She says:

“... actually they expected the film to be a good commercial product, like *The Sixth Sense* or something – you know, high concept – but I told them I’d like to continue working in the way I had previously. So I don’t know why they accepted me, but they just told me I had to follow their conditions: one was to stick to a low budget, and second I had to use a superstar in the film, because they needed a star to appeal to a wider audience. So I agreed.” (Williamson, 2004)

These examples indicate that new ideas and independent styles are not accepted in Thailand’s film industry. Sahamongkolfilm (MK), who started its business with foreign film distribution in the 1970’s, especially block-buster films from Hong Kong, is a large scale distributor, which theoretically allows them to foster such a different film culture. MK’s subsidiaries Mongkol Major Co., Ltd. serve as distributor of western films and Mongkol Cinema as distributor of Chinese movies. MK furthermore distributes Promittr productions *Suriyothai* (2001), *Macabre Case of Prom Pi Ram* (2003), *Last Love* (2003), *Home Rong* (2004, *The Overture*) and *The Legend of King Naresuan* (2007). Their revenue from film exports exceeds those from box office sales in Thailand. *Ong-Bak: Muay Thai Warrior* (2003), which cost Bt 300 million, is an example:

“In 2003, after earning more 6 million USD gross box office takings during its Thai theatrical release, the blockbuster “*Ong-Bak*” went on to gross 6.5 million USD in France; 4.73 million USD in North America; over 4 million USD in Japan; over 2 million USD in Spain; 1.3 million USD in Hong Kong, and near 1 million USD in Korea.”(Golden Network Asia Ltd., 2006)

Due to awards granted *Ong-Bak*... at international film festivals, MK’s negotiating power resulted in the pre-sales of multi-territory rights to US distributor Weinstein for the film’s follow-up *Tom Yum Goong*. The corporation is also selling ‘re-make’ rights for Thai films for international audiences. In this way, MK earned US\$ 700,000 from a remake contract with Hollywood for *Tom Yum Goong* in addition to pre-sales at Cannes International Film Festival in May 2005, which raised US\$10 million (Bt 41 million). Similarly, Francis Ford Coppola’s distribution company bought re-make rights from Promittr International for *The Legend of Suriyothai* (2001). And, although

not significant in numbers, yet, twelve MK films are now listed on the official Hollywood.com web-site.

Since sales revenue from *Ong-Bak* VCDs were higher than from box offices in Thailand (reaching over 1 million copies and were still increasing a year after its release), Sahamongkolfilm plans to expand their own distribution network where they previously sold copyrights to international distributors such as Golden Network Asia (HK) for distribution in the region and Europa Corp., Paris for Europe. MK's COE Somsak Techaratanaprasert announced an investment of Bt 300 million in a new subsidiary for VCD production and distribution in the home-cable sector. The new company would produce and distribute DVDs and VCDs of Thai and international films, no matter if they were made or only distributed by Sahamongkolfilm and other companies. This would give movie producers another distribution option and would allow local filmmakers to sell their films to the new firm for higher returns (Kwanchai, 2004). MK's 20-30 percent share in this new company is intended to increase current revenues from VCD producers for the right to make a not specified number of copies of the films.

“We want to change the system, as previously we and other film producers received outright payments from VCD producers without getting unsold discs back. But now we will change to a profit-sharing system, setting a minimum guarantee and adding returns from the profit-sharing deal on top of the minimum guaranteed payment.”
(Somsak Techaratanaprasert, *ibid*)

The Kantana Group Plc

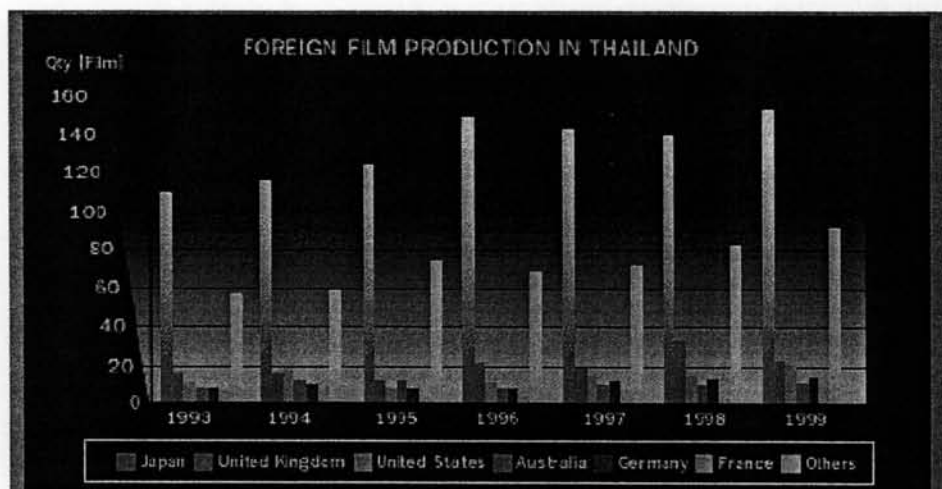
The Kantana Group Plc has 13 subsidiaries, of which four are specialised in television productions and six are related to other digital film production, distribution, exhibition and teaching. Predominantly producing for television programming, Kantana's *Khan Kluy* (2006), which grossed Bt 98 million in box office sales, is a significant move towards digital film productions as a novel format entering the Thai film industry's standard productions. It was Kantana's first production for theatrical release. The multi-

media conglomerate has merely been servicing the movie industry in Thailand as they edited-in the digital effects for celluloid film productions such as *Mekhong Full Moon Party* 2002 and *The Memory* 2006. *Khan Kluay* was produced with a budget of Bt 100 million in collaboration with the Ministry of Information Communications Technology (Bamrung 2004) and “Hollywood expertise” (Kantana’s post-production division has worked for Twentieth Century Fox, The Warner Brothers, Sony Pictures and others). *Khan Kluay*, the 3D animation film of the legendary elephant of King Naresuan marks the beginning of a new episode in Thai film history. After having received the Animadrid 2006 and prestigious Thai film awards (*Pra Suratswadee* and *Supanahong*), the chairman of the Board of Directors of the group, Sombat Intrathut, announced that the film’s success “is projected to boost subsequent sales in our future animated film, t.v. and merchandising efforts” (Sombat, 2007). *Khan Kluay* is broadcast as *The Adventures of Khan Kluay* in a television series in Thailand. It is distributed by The Han Media Culture Co., Ltd., an active sales agent and distributor for many Thai film and television programs world-wide. Han Media is officially authorized by the Thai Film Board under the auspices of the TAT to coordinate and cooperate with foreign production companies and to promote Thailand as a location for filming TV series, Thai documentaries and advertising commercials. Founded by the Hong Kong born twin brothers and directors/editors/ producers Oxide and Danny Pang in 2000, Han Media Culture works as global sales agent and distributor for many Thai films and TV programs through the infrastructure of its sister companies in Hong Kong and Guangzhou. In this way they distributed *Khan Kluay* (2006) for Kantana, *The Remaker* (2005) and *Khun krabii hiiro* (*Sars War*, 2004) for BEC-Tero’s Film Bangkok / Chalermthai as well as Sahamongkol Film’s *The Bodyguard* (2004) etc.

Kantana’s decision to increase animation cartoon productions and their “long term commitment to educate the masses” (Madanmohan, 2005) transformed Kantana Video Production Co., Ltd. to be the Kantana Edutainment (International) Co., Ltd. Kantana promoted digital communication technology through organisation of an international conference held in cooperation with Chulalongkorn University and Macquire University (Australia) in 2007. These developments and the conglomerates investment of social capital in training courses on university level with Mahidol University International College to establish a Bachelor degree in Edutainment Media and Srinakharnrinwirot

University respectively, tell of the future of high definition digital technology in the film industry. Reportedly, the British investment house Lombard invested US\$ 11.25 million in Kantana's education projects. "Kantana is currently constructing its Movie Town to comprise of an outdoor sound stage, pre- and post-production studios and Kantana University will offer courses such as movie production and broadcasting" (Madanmohan, 2005: 35). In this way, Thailand is not only being developed to be a regional film production hub, with the support of the Software Industry Promotion Agency and the ICT Ministry, Thailand seems to become a hub for digital animation films, too.

Figure 3: Foreign Film Productions in Thailand



Source: Web-site of the Federation of National Film Association in Thailand

RS Public Company Ltd. ¹

One of the entertainment conglomerate RS Plc's 22 subsidiary holding companies (music, television/radio and print media sectors, as well as movie and TV productions in various formats), Point Of View (P.O.V.), engaged Monthon Arayangkhun, a former

¹ The corporation recently restructured its multi-media business and is no longer 'R.S. Promotion', but, since 2007, entered the stock market as RS Public Company Ltd.

music video producer, to direct the first Thai full-length high definition digital feature movie *Garuda* in 2004. Given that the multi-media conglomerate's roots are in the music production and (digital) distribution business explains the investment of Bt 35 million for the digital film by former 'Rose Sound' (founded 1976). High definition digital video quality is suitable for theatrical release and is considered to be the medium to bridge RS' video based cultural production lines. Although revenues from the film sector amounted to a mere 10 percent of its total revenue by the end of 2002 (60-65 percent from the music sector equalling Bt 1,048 million), RS has pushed its visual media production since 1996-1997 in order to promote its music productions. Success by its subsidiary Avant Film Co. Ltd, the debut film *Killer Tattoo*, which earned over Bt 120 million in 2001, led to the decision to expand into the studio and film production business, and to found five new production companies. Avant Film and its director Rashane Limtrakul's also produce television commercials, and, planned to "produce 10 motion pictures annually and [to] distribute more independent movies"(The Stock Exchange of Thailand, n.d.), but have been considered unsustainable. One of the conglomerates four films produced annually for cinema release interestingly casts – if fictitious – "hilltribe" people. *The Memory* (2006) is set in Pai, in Northern Thailand and tells of the romance of Film, a pop-star, who nearly dies were it not for the help of the "hilltribes". Recent restructuring indicates that RS's 'Motion Picture and Production House' will produce less big-screen movies in the future. The online magazine Television Asia in February 2006 reported an enlargement of their TV production sector as the conglomerate bought Moradok Entertainment, whose focus is on women and children's TV programmes. Without the benefit of owning theatres for exhibition of their films, RS successes lie in the sales of audio CD/VCD/DVD products.

Five Star Co., Ltd.

Five Star Production began its business in 1973 mainly by importing Chinese language productions from Hong Kong and Taiwan. But the company also produces their own films mainly in co-operation with The Film Factory. For the (not entirely)

digital *Citizen Dog* (2004) they worked with ‘new wave’ scriptwriter Wisit Sasanathiang, whose *Fa Talai Jone (Tears of the Black Tiger, 2000)* turned to be the first Thai film ever screened in Un Certain Regard at the Cannes Film Festival and winning other awards at international film festivals. High definition is “a format which facilitates the many visual effects of which the director is so fond, *Citizen Dog* does at times start to look almost like a CGI animation”, writes film critic Williamson about the film. Wisit’s films are renowned for their super-saturated colour effects underscoring the illusionary real and/or the sur-reality of fiction. Not only Five Star, but producers of the ‘nostalgia genre’ (see next chapter) are picking up digital formats to facilitate post-production effects. Wisit is the screenwriter for two financially very successful films directed by Nonzee Nimibutr (*Dang Bireley & the Young Gangsters, 1997* and *Nang Nak, 1999*). Although his *Tears of the Black Tiger* was not successful at box offices in Thailand, his films were picked up for international distribution by Miramax and EuropaCorp respectively. Tian Ponvanit, one of the five founders of Five Star, claims that the company has always been trying to integrate new ideas and ‘art films’ in their annual production of about eight films:

“So [...] these eight or ten films are commercial films, but we can make one which is artistic [...]. We can try [...] since we are the biggest and oldest production company until now... We have the advantage to have a chance to [do so]. If [you are] a small company making one or two films a year, you can not make an artist film without any commercial value.”

In an interview with Jamikara Techasaratoolle and Claude Robin for Asiexpo (2006), he specifically refers to the 1970 – 1980 socially critical films:

“For example, [...] *Mountain People* by Vichit Kounavudhi, it’s a very good film. This one is commercial, but artistic, too. And then [...] one from Euthana Mukdasanit *Vithi Khun Krad* and *Nam Phu*. Let me tell you about one film, *Luk Isan* (Son of the Northeast), it’s a wonderful film. Nobody thought [we] can make this kind of film: No actor – no main actor I mean – no main actress ... on the subject of fighting with nature. [...] Because the Northeast is the worst place in Thailand: No rain ..., the irrigation is very bad and the poverty. [...] Rain, land,

nature ...people are fighting with nature, moving around the northeastern part of Thailand. [...] Do you think this kind... like – what are they called – documentary ... Do you think, if you sit there for two hours, you could concentrate on a small screen? It's very hard. But when you see it the second time, third time, fourth time..., you still concentrate with this one! The 'Son of the Northeast' is really special! ... No actor, no actress, main [professional] I mean. A lot of people – everybody is a big actor.”

Their cooperation with Wisit is thus reflecting the phenomenon of large scale producers using the 'new wave' image as a marketing strategy, but, differing from other production houses, Five Star allowed Wisit to realise his distinct style. What's more, the film is successful with transnational audiences, who think it to be inline with the current 'retro' fashion. More recently, Five Star productions have been distributed internationally by Bohemian Films, Mangpong and Golden Village Pictures (for its transnational co-production with Hong Kong and Japan *Black Night*).

In sum, this study of corporations of the Thai film industry, which released a digital film in 2003 -2006, suggests four major trends: First, three of the four corporations discussed here are not marketing their films merely for a national audience, but work with transnational distributors or submit their films directly to renowned international film festivals to earn recognition and possibly sell their films there. The channels of distribution to US American and Hollywood markets seem to be in the hands of the largest film producing conglomerates in Thailand. Transnational distributors disseminating Five Star's films, and the latter's working with 'indy' director Wisit shows a significant turn of Thai films producing for transnational audiences. Concomitantly, Sahamongkol's investment into a joint-venture for digital reproduction to directly sell films as VCD/DVD (rather than depending on intermediary corporations) reflects that the global home market is very lucrative. Perhaps more importantly, the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology's backing Kantana's projects to popularise ICT and to create a knowledge based environment of digital (post-)production is telling of the plan to boost the digital section of the film industry in Thailand - and its image - in order to turn Bangkok and Thailand into the

hub of filmmaking in Southeast Asia. Transnational investment into Kantana's tertiary education programmes shows the corporation's determinacy to build the basis for future digital content business management. Without long-standing channels of distribution or exhibition for movies, and their main business being in the field of music, RS' recent internal restructuring is indicative on the one hand of the monopoly by the three main forces GMM, MK and PRO. On the other hand, the transformation into a public company encourages (trans-)national investment. These phenomena in the field of digital production and distribution can be described as growing globalisation of the Thai film industry and show the different positions of the four corporations therein. Notable is the outstanding position of Kantana, which further suggests a link between globalisation and digitalisation of the industry. In due turn, Sahamongkolfilm's central (and thus dominating) position in the field of distribution for conventional format Thai films, is preparing to establish themselves in a similar way for digital formats.

Secondly, two out of the four large scale production houses who invested in digital film productions have either direct access to their own television stations, produce regularly for television or have recently merged with a television broadcasting company. This expansion of the (digital) television sector is in due course with globalisation of the structures and digitalisation of the media in the field. Multi-media corporations of the Thai film industry are increasingly consolidating and cooperating to create closer ties between broadcasters and production houses, including Independent TV (ITV) with the Kantana Group and BEC World's links with GMM Grammy (Bamrung Amnatcharoenrit, 2004) as well as BBTVP's investment in almost 30 percent of Matching Studio's shares.

Thirdly, these productions reveal a certain pattern followed by Thai film industry producers: They either cast a famous individual (pop-star or actor) as in *Sua Rong Hai and Citizen Dog* or reproduce history (*Garuda, Khan Kluay*). Promitt's productions (2001, 2007), although not digital, markedly reflect the creation of a (national) heroine and a hero. This formula is not a coincidence as experiences of other independent filmmakers with large-scale producers show. The successes in global trajectories of 'new wave' films have created an ambiguity of 'indy' and 'independent' imagery. Wisit and Rashane are peers of the generation of 'new directors' from the commercial advertisement sector (Nonzee Nimibutr, Pen-ek Ratanaruang, Jira Malikul and Prachya

Pinkaew), whose films marked transnational successes of Thai films in the late 1990's. These new feature-film directors draw on their cultural capital derived from their experience with commercials, i.e. knowing how to advertise and market products. Their innovation of the global business of cultural products can be described as being in the field of marketing and CI (corporate image). Applied to the cultural product film, it implies the creation of styles and formats, but does not deviate from the prevailing conceptual framework of films as the above examples show. Realising this, large scale producers are willing to experiment with digital film projects by newcomers, but merely as a well calculated move using the symbolic capital of 'indy' filmmakers as a marketing device. The choice of 'indy' filmmaker is not entirely in disregard of their style, but is moulded to conform to the conceptual design and patterns of films generally produced. Although not a successful example, this is most evident in the case of Sahamongkolfilm for the comical work of Santi Taepanich to produce the documentary *Sua Rong Hai*.

And lastly, Sahamongkolfilm and Five Star, the two experienced film distributors in this sample of four, have realised the significance of international film festivals in increasing a film's value. In other words, not only the production and distribution but the field of exhibition of Thai films, too, is globalising.

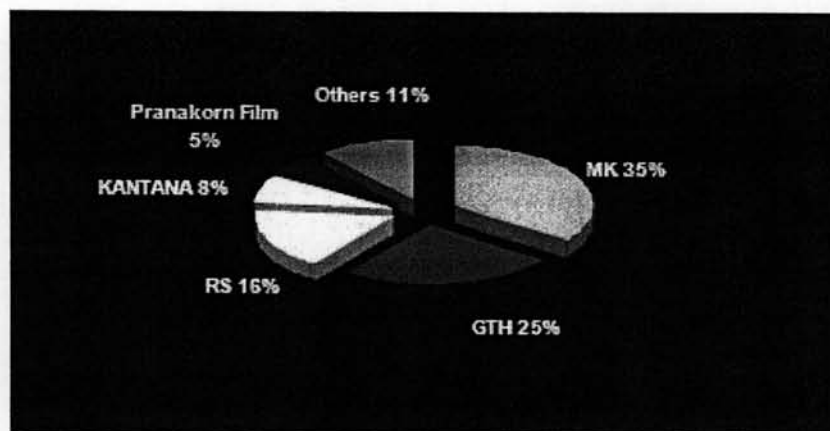
Table 2: Thai corporate situations in the value chain

2003 – 2006 FILM PRODUCERS	IND	ONLY	PRODUCTION & DISTRIBUTION	PROD DISTR EXHIBIT
<i>Avant Film</i>		X	RS Plc	
Andaman Film		X		
Baa-Ram-Ewe		X	Sahamongkolfilm	
Bandhit Film Office		X		
Bangfire Studio		X		
Cherdchai Production			Box Office Entertainment	
<i>CM Film</i>			CM Pictures International	
Coliseum Intergroup			Coliseum Intergroup	COLISEUM
Cyberfish Media Co., Ltd.	x		Cyberfish Media Co., Ltd.	
Dedicate Ltd.	x	X		
Extra Virgin	x	X		
<i>Film Bangkok Chalermthai</i>			BEC-Tero Entertainment	BEC-TERO
Firecracker Film Ltd.	x	X		
Five Star Production Co., Ltd.			Five Star Production Co., Ltd.	FIVE STAR
Gimmick Film		X		
<i>GMM Tai Hub Co., Ltd</i>			GMM Grammy Plc	GMM & TAI ENTERTAINMENT
<i>GMM Pictures Plc</i>			GMM Grammy Plc	
Kantana Animation Studio Kantana Motion Pictures Kantana Movie Town Oriental Post			Kantana Distribution	
Kick The Machine	x	X		
Mahachai		X		
Mahagan		X		
<i>Mangpong Picture</i>		X	PONG: Mangpong Plc	PONG
Matching Motion Picture		X		
Mono Film			Mono Film and Distribution	
<i>Nakornthai Picture</i>			PONG: Mangpong Plc	
New Urban Male	x	X		
<i>Papayon Hansa</i>			Cinemasia	
Phenomena Motion Pictures		X		

Pig-O'nine	x	X		
<i>Phranakorn Film</i>			Phranakorn Film and Distribution	PHRANAKORN
Plapen	x	X		
Promittr International		X	Sahamongkofilm	
Right Beyond			Software Supply International	
<i>P.O.V.</i>			RS Plc	
<i>Sahamongkofilm</i>			Sahamongkofilm	SAHAMONGKOL
Sarana			Sarana Entertainment	
Soros Sukhum		X		
Studio Bangkok		X		
<i>Tai Sadusak</i>		X	RS Plc	
Tang R		X		
Thanadnang		X		
The Film Factory		X	Five Star?	
<i>TIFA</i>			GMM Grammy Plc	
Tiger Team		X		
2002 Big Best Entertainment 2002			2002 Big Best Entertainment 2002	

In *italics* = corporate subsidiary

Figure 4: Market share of Thai movie distributors for the year 2006



Source: GMM Grammy Analyst Meeting No. 1/2007, pp. 17

2.2. Independent digital productions

2.2.1 Independent production houses

In the context of this chapter's study of the structural dynamics of the Thai film industry and its regulation of digital films, it should be noted that official lists of production companies on the Federation of National Film Association of Thailand's web-sites 'Thai Movie Industry News' and 'Thai Film Company Directory' (both www.thainationalfilm.com), provide no information about independent studios. This is in disregard of the fact that (in the timeframe of this study), the number of films produced by Cyberfish Media Co., Ltd., Dediacte Ltd., Foundfootage Film, Kick The Machine, Mono Film Co., New Urban Male, Pig-O'nine and Plapen Production amounted to 13 near feature-length digital films and all genres (Appendices C 1, 2).

Facing the challenges of the dominating Thai film industry, the founding idea for Firecracker Film Ltd. was to create a service organisation which would act as 'art-film' producer, fund raiser and distributor, and eventually to become sustainable. Firecracker-Media's web-site (<http://www.firecracker-media.com>), which was sponsored by the British Film Council, features not only reviews of Thai films written predominantly by Robert Williamson, but discusses film related news from Southeast Asia. Criticine, an online magazine 'elevating discourse on Southeast Asian cinema', also publishes critical articles in English. While the Bioscope magazine, The Thai Film Foundation director's film journal *Nang Thai* (Thai Film Quarterly), which aims at encouraging the study of Thai film history, and filmmaker Thunskā Pansittivorakul from New Urban Male publish articles about Thai cinema in Thai language (*Siam Contemp*). Cyberfish, Mono Film and Pig-O'nine have web-sites on which their films and related information is discussed.

With funding from the Hubert Bals Fund (NL) Firecracker Film successfully produced Apichatpong Weerasethakul's debut feature *Mysterious Object at Noon* (2000), and short films by Aditya Assarat *Motorcycle* (16mm, 2000), *Waiting* (16mm, 2003) and *Hi-So* (2005). The first two films were sold to the Japanese Cinefil Imagica Channel, the (US) Sundance Channel and Film 4 (UK). In this way, Firecracker was

able to independently fund, produce and self-distribute *I-san Special* (2003), Mingmongkol Sonakul's own directorial debut. Various prizes, film festival and talent campus invitations followed in the years 2002 - 2004 and paved the way for Mingmongkol to found her own company Dedicate Ltd., which has taken to adopt the industry formula of including a pop-star in a recent co-production with Aditya Assarat in the feature *Mamee* (2005, digi Beta). The film's production was entirely self-financed, that is, the producers did not have to adhere to a preconceived norm. More recently, Dedicate co-produced *Invisible Waves* (2006) by Pen-ek Ratanaruang, a transnational co-production with Faruk Alatan, Focus Films (HK), Fortissimo Film Sales (NL/HK) and CJ Entertainment, S. Korea. The films' settings develop from Hong Kong to Macau and Thailand and its cast is multi-national "foreigners living in foreign lands". Aware of the compromises, Mingmongkol Sonakul said in an interview "[W]e need bigger budgets to grow the industry and market" (Stein 2007). The reputation she is gaining seems to be paying off as the distribution rights for a Dedicate co-production with GMM Tai Hub and Phenomena Motion Pictures (*Alone*, 2007) were reportedly bought by a US "new indie" distributor by the name of '24 frames' for its extreme label in the year of its release.

Kick The Machine, on the other hand, is continuing to produce Apichatpong Weerasethakul's experimental and art-house films, which are usually not digital, but are included in this survey of independent production. Initially also intended as a production *and* distribution company, the filmmaker has succumbed to the given structures of distribution. He says: "[...] it's just too much of a financial burden. Just to survive myself has to be the priority" (Williamson, 2007). Kick The Machine's co-productions include Young Urban Male production of Thunskaa Pansittivorakul's *Heartbreak Pavilion*, which has been awarded a grant at the 2005 Pusan Film Promotion Plan (Sudarat, 2007: 257). Apichatpong's films are entirely funded by transnational art film funding organisations, commissioned by film festivals and transnational corporations as well as national and transnational government organisations. To enter the Thai chain of distribution and make known his extensive work in Thailand, Firecracker's *One Night Husband* (2003) was co-produced with multi-media conglomerate GMM, and the distribution and marketing of *The Adventures of Iron Pussy* (Kick The Machine) was also handled by them. To the same end,

Apichatpong worked with Sahamongkolfilm for the distribution of *Blissfully Yours* (2003). This seemed to be a formula evading potential limitations concerning his story and styles, while concurrently finding a distribution channel. But their marketing and advertisement did not pay off.

“Because we won an award at Cannes, the distributor [Mongkol Film] just saw money. But they didn’t know how to deal with it because it’s not a mass-appeal film. So they just advertised how popular the film was at Cannes and opened the movie in the multiplexes. So people who went to the theatres were very upset because it wasn’t what they expected. So it was a big failure.” (ibid)

Success at international film festivals or otherwise derived fame seems a precondition to find funding to produce, distribute or market an independent film. The screening of Plapen Production’s *Stories from the North* (Uruphong Raksasad, 2005) at various international film festivals, for example, helped to find financial support by the Hubert Bals Foundation (NL) for the director’s next project to be produced by ExtraVirgin’s Pimpaka Towira. To maintain independence, multiple skills are required, and organisations like the Fédération Internationale de la Presse Cinématographique (International Federation of Film Critics) and *Produire au Sud* (Producing in the South) are helpful in that they provide trainings. *Produire au Sud* selects young producers from the South and offer courses to learn management and marketing techniques as preparation for a professional career as producer and director/filmmaker. International conventions regarding legal, financial and marketing strategies, i.e. the co-production business and screenwriting as well as ‘pitching’ techniques for individual feature-length film projects catering for European markets are introduced. The ‘Cinemas of the South’ initiative - also known as ‘World Cinema’ was launched to similar ends with the support of the International Council for Film, Television and Audio-Visual Communication (IFCT), member of the alliance for global cultural diversity (UNESCO).

Producer Areeya Chumsai (Pig-O’nine), who had originally conceived of *Dek Toh* (2005, Innocence, miniDV) as a feature length fiction, was also unable to secure

funding for the former Miss Universe 1994's film project from studios in Thailand or from international organisations although she had hoped her social status would help. In 'Thai Cinema' (2006) Areeya tells of the conditions imposed on transnational co-productions and that "there was only one studio [in Thailand] that was willing to give us 30% of the funding, the others all said no" (Thida *et al.*, 2006: 221).

"...If you wanted to co-produce the film with a Japanese company, you might have to add a Japanese character in your film. Another company from France said they would support the postproduction but we had to do it in France." (ibid)

Building on their own social network, private initiatives and Chang Beer, Areeya filmed, edited and distributed *Dek Toh* together with independent editor and director Nisa Kongsri. Although her social status as former Miss Universe 1994 did not immediately have a positive effect to find sponsorship, it helped shape relationships with ethnic minority children and the headmaster of the school in Northern Thailand. And once the film was finalised, Areeya Chumsai's production company Pig-O'nine promoted and advertised *Dek Toh* on their web-site and showed the film at one of the two 'alternative' spaces for film screenings in Bangkok, the Lido. *Dek Toh*'s screening was extended due to its popularity, and the release of a DVD helped increase donations for the "hilltribe" education project. In 2006, the film was also shown at the Tessaaloniki Documentary Festival in Greece, the Pusan International Film Festival, Bangkok International Film Festival, and was rewarded the 'Cultural Diversity Prize' by the French Cultural Centre Cinemekong Film Festival. Perhaps due to the film's content being in line with commercial Thai films' predominant storyline, it differs from other independent film productions also in that the DVD is sold in outlets of major renowned chain-stores in Bangkok. The distribution of independent films is an unsolved problem. While Kick The Machine is recognised (through Apichatpong's work) and thus have opportunities to work with art-house distributors in Europe (Anna Sanders Film), who distributed *Blissfully Yours* (2003) and *Syndromes and A Century* (2006). New Urban Male's Thunskas Pansittivorakul, on the other hand, self-distributed his *Voodoo Girls* (2002) to be screened at national and international film festivals, and it made public through the commercial US section of the Internet Movie Database (<http://www.imd.com>). This eventually led to a San Francisco based film festival

organiser to distribute the follow-up of the trilogy on young contemporary Thais in their search for cultural identity (*Happy Berry*, 2004). Except for the abovementioned TIFA and Sahamongkolfilm, only Lao-Ong Dao and Fortissimo Film Sales Ltd. (NL/HK) developed and marketed independent films in Thailand in 2003 - 2006. Fortissimo's Hong Kong based founder Wouter Barendrecht has a high reputation as distributor and producer of renowned 'cutting-edge' directors. He has access to a global and multi-tiered social network of distributors, film festivals, film financing and marketing events and is a member of the European Film Academy, as well as being on the advisory board of the Federation of National Film Associations of Thailand. Fortissimo Film has cooperated with Hub-Ho-Hin/Tai Entertainment (before their merging with GMM), as well as GMM, Dedicate and Cinemasia, i.e. Thailand's 'new wave' directors.

In lack of alternatives, studios produce straight-to DVDs and use digital channels of distribution, i.e. the internet. Mono Generation Plc, a subsidiary of the Mono Generation Group, has integrated the cultural product film amongst the other products available on their site. International markets expressed an interest in the company's digital films at local and international festivals, which led to Mono Film's recent productions *Sau Khab Dab* (The Tiger Blade, 2005), *Phra Apaimanee: Sudsakorn* (The Legend of Sudsakorn, 2006), *Prairee Pinart* (Vengeance, 2006) and *The Gig* (2006). *Me ... Myself*, released earlier this year, screened at the Bangkok International Film Festival, and has been bought for a remake by Korea's K& Entertainment. Twenty percent of the company's sales revenues derive from its digital media and content businesses, i.e. e-commerce and software, online travel services and automobiles advertised on their website with the exotic title 'passionasia'. Mono Generation also publishes a celebrity magazine, and makes TV programs. 'Digital media and content' constitute only one of the three business sections besides 'e-commerce' and 'entertainment'. With direct links to government authorities in charge, this public corporation has become the largest e-commerce site in Thailand with revenues of Bt 1-2 million daily (Pichaya, 2006). Mono Film has produced four films in the years 2005-2006. Pete Bodharamik, cofounder of the group, and son of a former commerce minister comments: "Although many observers say Thai filmmaking is a high-loss industry, I see an opportunity, particularly for overseas sales in home entertainment" (Pichaya, 2006). In Thailand, the Department of Intellectual Property

(DIP) is a government agency, operating, however, under the Ministry of Commerce, responsible for policy development of enforcement efforts. Smaller companies with clear target audiences like Cyberfish Media Co., Ltd., also produce straight-to-VCD/DVD productions. The Thai/UK joint-venture released *Rainbow the Movie* (2005) and *Club M2* (2006) for a specific audience interested in GLBT issues. Their DVDs are sold online, where other information, news and links concerning gay and lesbian issues are also available. Lacking alternative channels, Santi Taepanich, the director of *Crying Tigers*, also attempted to break into the commercial market with his independent VCD 34-24-36 in 2003. Only Apichatpong has worked with the commercial digital distributor Pongsaap Public Company Limited (PONG), who own 'home entertainment' retail chains with main business in audio / video copyright ownership, film and music production, and work in the digital distribution sector. Founded in 1981, Mangpong (Shop) turned to be a brand name for movie and music products (also as 'MAXX Music'). Throughout Thailand, the company has a sales network with 250 outlets in department stores, and works through sales agents, distributors, shops and the internet. It plans to create a new outlet chain called 'Grande' "to sell low-priced VCDs to fight piracy" (Bangkok Post 2006). Mangpong Public Company Limited (2003) has signed a contract with Sahamongkolfilm and its affiliates to purchase a film library of 266 titles during 2005-2006 in return for monthly instalments of Baht 32 million (SET n.d.). In 2003 and during the 1st half of 2004, revenue through sales in shops alone amounted to Bt 681 million and Bt 398 million - equivalent to respectively 47% and 56% of the company's total revenue (Reuters n.d.).

Table 3: Independent production houses' digital films

Production House	2003	2004	2005	2006
Bioscope Magazine	-	2	-	-
Cyberfish Media	-	-	1	1
Dedicate	1	-	1	1
Firecracker	1	-	-	-
Foundfootage	-	1	-	-
Pig-O'nine	-	-	1	-
Plapen	-	-	1	-
Total films (approx.)	3	4	4	3

2.2.2 Agents of independent digital film

Interestingly, little has been published in English language about these activities or the films. Although director/producer Thunskā Pansittivorakul (also a graduate from Chulalongkorn University) regularly publishes in several magazines including the Bioscope magazine, TFF's Thai Film Quarterly, Hamburger and Movie Time Weekly. Independent films get publicity also in international community in Bangkok through film critic and "film festival explorer" Kong Rithdee's writing for the Bangkok Post (*Real Time* and *Outlook*). He is also writing for the Thai inflight magazine *Sawasdee*, *Cineaste*, *Cinemaya*, and some film festivals such as Pusan. His excellent English language skills and meaningful critique have gained him fame so that he had opportunities to contribute to the *US Film Comment* and the Thai Association of Arizona, Asian community in Phoenix publishes his articles on their web-site. He says:

"Some people ask why I bother writing about films in the film festivals when these films are not even screened in Thailand, but that is exactly the point. [It's about] opening the world so that we know what others watch and think, what the pulse of global cinema is like, and how Thai films can join in that pulse. When we want to compete with them—and this is competition on a global scale—we have to see what their competitions are like. I hope my writing helps in terms of knowledge. I go with what I'm interested in. The first time I went to Deauville—I was invited. And then it was Berlin. After that I went myself – Rotterdam, Venice, Cannes. I met people, exchanged perspectives. Sometimes I would get in-depth information, and this is the important thing that makes [these festivals] a must-go." (Thunskā, 2006)

This research found, that independent production houses are using the internet as a means of publicizing their films and to disseminate other information. Notably, they do this in English language. This might not be extraordinary for Cyberfish Media, a joint UK-Thai venture, but some of the commercial film conglomerates discussed above do not consider a world-wide profile an important feature of their identity. Independent production houses, however, make extensive use of this digital channel to shape their identities. Their web-sites are designed according to different tastes. The art-house

design of Firecracker Media differs from that of Pig-O'nine because targeting at 'independent label' distributors requires a visual distinction from targeting documentary film festival organisers. Pig-O'nine advertise the *Dek-Toh* DVD on their web-site and describe the subject of their film – the “hilltribe” children school project - calling for donations. Firecracker and Kick The Machine do not offer their films for sale in this way, but instead provide documentation and, in the case of Firecracker (as well as Thai Cinema and the Thai Film Foundation, who are not producers) emphasise critical evaluation of Thai commercial films. The promotion of socio-political activities and dissemination of information for gay and lesbian rights interested audiences (Cyberfish), in turn, are displayed in visually distinct designs from the site of e-content business Mono, who cater for large-scale visitors. These web-sites reflect the competition over target audiences not merely to advertise the different films, but indicate different social groups, and the significance of distinction in the context of the world-wide-web. This necessity for distinction is also reflected in the nature of these production houses English names: Cyberfish or ExtraVirgin, Kick The Machine or Dedicate, as well as Pig-O'nine are nominal markers but also distinct expressions of difference, whereas Mono Generation is a rather bland name in comparison.

Beyond Bangkok, the supporters of independent film are as globally connected as their contemporary generation of independent filmmakers who have become famous. (“I would like to thank the festival because I started from being a filmmaker to be the jury of the festival” Apichatpong writes in its 10th anniversary catalogue.) Thai Short Film and Video Festival director Chalida Uabumrungjit studied film at Thammasat University and began as a writer for magazines and newspapers in 1992. Her film *Rain in May* screened at the 6th International Animation Festival Hiroshima '96. She continued her studies in the field of film archiving at the University of East Anglia in Norwich (UK) from 1998 to 2000 and also works as film archivist at the National Film Archive of Thailand. Through a research project on Japanese documentary films Chalida is especially close to the prestigious Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival, where she served as a juror in 2001. And through TFF's work at the Bangkok International Film Festival the team is connected with various festival circuits. The Thai Film Foundation also cooperates with Thai Links (founded in New York 2002), “a

creative collective dedicated to increasing awareness on issues affecting Thai communities at home and abroad through art and activism” (<http://www.thailinks.org>). Amongst other activities, Thai Links organises the biannual Thai Takes, an independent *Thai* film festival. For its second happening in 2005, ‘Contemporary Thai Films’, Thai-USA was one of the fiscal sponsors. The Association (<http://www.thai-usa.org>) is a fund raising organisation for non-profit organizations in Thailand. Funding is allocated to a variety of groups working in the field of poverty alleviation, education, health, human rights, citizenship and culture that is marginalised peoples – including Thai filmmakers. In the US in particular, 18 other Asian-US film festivals incl. non-mainstream films are listed besides 28 major Asian festivals on the ‘asian cinevision’ web-site. Amongst them is the National Asian American Telecommunications Association (NAATA)’s San Francisco International Asian American Film Festival - open to feature length, short films, videos and most genres, i.e. narrative, documentary, experimental, animation and music video. These screenings add to the films’ value through ‘consecration’ (Bourdieu, 1983) which works as symbolic and cultural capital transformed into economic capital in the market of symbolic goods. Their value is accumulated not through investment in commercial promotion, but through ‘selection’ by the circuit of international film festivals.

In sum, the basic findings of this study of independent production houses in Bangkok confirm that their access to production resources and the value chains of distribution and exhibition is largely blocked, but that a few producers enter global value chains instead. In a central position deciding over degrees of innovation through selection processes are the organisers of the Thai Short Film and Video Festival, but also independent projects including more than just filmmaking. The festival is the only regular event valuing independent films in Thailand, where ‘new talents’ are ‘discovered’ and awarded. However, only a small number of producers of independent films can be nurtured this way, and support by the Ministry of Culture seems limited. Despite domination by the film industry, the diversity of independent digital films is increasing. The Thai Film Foundations’ collection of film submissions to their festivals over the last ten years documents quantitative growth, which has resulted in the adding to and diversifying of award categories of the festival. The former ‘prize system’

differentiating between 'students or not', and 'animation or not' seems no longer suitable. The innovation of adding "unusual subjects" as a prize winning category for digital films implies that the field of independent film production in Bangkok is also qualitatively diversifying in genre and style. Besides animation films, shorts and short features, documentary-style films address socio-political challenges, and issues of individual and collective identities of marginalised social groups as well as covering less unusual subjects.

In the last ten years, a few production houses have emerged to form a loose structure of mutual support. This study found the majority production units to be very small and the 'producer' identical with the 'director' of the unit. Notwithstanding the Mono Generation Plc, this applies to all the forces in the field of independent production and includes straight-to-DVD producers. Mono Generation is independent from the structures of the Thai film industry, but works in the field of e-commerce, in which films constitute one product line. The Mono corporation has access to top levels of certain parts of the Thai socio-political network and uses digital technology as a means to mass market and distribute their vast scope of services and goods. Their social networks cover the Tourism Authorities of Thailand and the Ministry of Commerce; their cultural production of films for commercial purposes is thus similar to the film industry's approach rather than differing from it.

As has been demonstrated, independent producers largely depend on external funding and compete on a global level over recognition of their films, which differ from the mainstream in Thailand. This transnational orientation is reflected in the fact that English language version web-sites in a variety of forms and contents exist. To emphasise their presence and identity, independent production houses use desk-top design and names, colours and content to shape their self-presentation on the web. To 'pitch' a film for particular transnational audiences such as art-house film funding organisations, film festival curators, regional and global distributors, and film critics, the internet is not the appropriate medium, however. In this competitive field distinction is a major element of recognition, and the internet serves to create an image of a production houses general identity rather than being an alternative channel of distribution or exhibition. The digital medium world-wide-web although not delimiting content or its presentation, seems an adequate place to reach large audiences for mass

produced goods, but does not seem to work as a means to reach cultural agents or as a medium capable to channel distinct expressions of difference. Specifically, internet presentations do not guarantee that transnational potential distributors can be reached. Their scope includes festival juries in Asia, agents of European art-house and documentary film, US based Thai diaspora community cultural agents with a critical awareness of social issues in Thailand, and Japanese agents of documentary film, global circuits of film critics, and other specialised distributors, who have 'identified' specific transnational audiences for independent films.

Independent film production companies, which this study found to represent an individual film director or a small collective, depend on international sponsor organisations, transnational co-production, and other agents unless they have reserves of capital from previous film sales to self-fund a production. Only exceptionally, these studios are granted support from national corporations. The lack of funding persists even if formats and narratives are partially in accordance with those of the mainstream film industry. As the paragraph on commercial producers shows, the industry is interested to distribute only films which have gained fame at certain (mainstream) international film festivals. In this way, Kick The Machine's *Blissfully Yours*, which had won several prizes after its special mention at the Cannes Film Festival, raised distributor Sahamongkol's interest. However, the marketing strategy usually applied (promoting merely its international acclaim rather than being specifically different), did not turn out a successful campaign for *Blissfully Yours*. One could argue that this was due to a genuine lack of interest by the general public, i.e. that there is no audience in Bangkok for art-house films. On the other hand, informed marketing research and better understanding of the reception of independent films might well have turned out better results.

Such experience seems to reinforce small restricted production houses Firecracker, Kick The Machine and ExtraVirgin in particular to mutually support each other and join resources for their films' production instead of turning to GMM's 'independent' TIFA. In this way, the symbolic capital in form of recognition and financial support as filmmaking grants by organisations such as the Hubert Bals Fund is not channelled into the film industry, but remains within the loose structure of the independent circle. Dedicate producer Mingmongkol also claims to be accumulating

social, cultural and symbolic capital to be able to create a firmer structure for independent film productions in Thailand. This results in the phenomenon of restricted production houses' directors becoming producers and vice versa. In lack of support from the industry, hybrid formations are created to build own structures independent from large scale producers, distributors and exhibitors. Additional training provided by transnational film associations or on the occasion of workshops at film festivals work to this end. An example for such a hybrid formation on transnational level is Dedicate's co-production with Fortissimo Film for *Invisible Waves*. Fortissimo Film is not originally a production house, but works mainly in the field of distribution, marketing and sales, while Mingmongkol, the film's executive producer, is experienced in the field of production in Thailand. This transnational co-production establishes a hybrid structure covering production and distribution and adds symbolic capital for Dedicate having co-produced with regionally renowned forces. It accredits Dedicate with symbolic power and positions the production house on a new level on the global scale. According to research by Bourdieu, the field of cultural production is distinctly delineated between 'commercial' and 'pure art' (1971, 1996). Based on extensive research into education systems, he found that certain forms of knowledge, skills and expertise, verbal facility and aesthetic preferences are transmitted through educational systems, and produce what he calls cultural capital. He stressed the significance of cultural capital derived from social environments, which he conceived of as 'habitus' shaping social groups' 'tastes'. In the field of cultural production, the perception of "symbolic goods" (music, painting, print media) translates into distinct 'tastes' and value systems. Bourdieu holds that cultural reproduction in an economy of taste makes cultural and social capital (and thus power) interchangeable with economic and symbolic power. The reproduction of symbolic goods is used by certain forces in the field to legitimate power and reinforces class relations. In *The Rules of Art* (1996), he extends the logic of distinction inherent in perceptions and appreciations of the dichotomy 'commercial' versus 'pure art'. He stresses that the production and reproduction of the belief in these opposites is a fundamental condition and effect of the "functioning of the field" (1996: 166). He argues that the production of belief in 'creation' versus mere 'reproduction' of symbolic goods conceals what is at stake: "the struggle for the monopoly of legitimacy" (1996: 167). This socio-political struggle is

symbolically represented through works of art and the permanent production and reproduction of the *illusio* of their being 'pure art'. He holds that the production of desire for such symbolic goods is an essential part of its value creation. The outcome of the struggle is thus determined by those who know how to use the inherited privileges of cultural capital and are in a position to increase the production of desire through the system of agents and institutions producing and reproducing their 'habitus'.

Although this study has not systematically investigated individual filmmakers' educational backgrounds, information about the education of Thai contemporary and independent film makers on the web-sites of Thai Takes (www.thailinks.org) and Thai Indie (www.thaiindie.com) confirm Chalida's and film historian Sukvong's claims that independent film in Thailand has its roots amongst university students. Sample studies of this research (Thunskas, Chalida, Jira, Mingmongkol, Apichatpong, Uruphong, Kong, Pen-ek) not only prove Bangkok universities and especially Chulalongkorn University to have played an important role in the history of independent film, but demonstrates the relevance of universities in England and the US shaping the independent filmscape. The abovementioned producers/directors either studied film and communication or pursued economic and marketing studies. More in-depth research is required, but the kind of tertiary education received in Thailand and Northern Europe and the US suggests a distinct 'taste' (Bourdieu 1986) of an elite class of intellectuals. Independent producers like Firecracker's Apichatpong have created a social network of peers with similar tastes whose production of other symbolic goods such as a designed web-sites, name-giving, publishing interviews about each other, organising the film festival, integrating other Thai independent producers, participating in international film festivals, and cooperating with transnational forces, etc. helps to produce the value denied by the predominant forces of the field of film production. The internet alone does not suffice as an agent working to this end. Individual production houses depend on successes in international film festivals, co-production with a renowned producer, recommendations, and vast social networks. Films' screenings at renowned festivals is a significant tool to add value to the films, but equally reconfirm and reproduce tastes of the filmmaker. Besides being a major platform of publicity, the consecration by transnational 'expertise' and recognition by peers serves the end of accumulating symbolic capital and socio-political power useful for future negotiations of the value of the respective

'independent' (digital) film. Their cultural and social capital as 'Thai' and 'filmmakers', already helped to accumulate symbolic capital as is shown by example of diasporas Thai and other Asian American communities, mainly in the US, it seems. The production of value through transnational agents has been actively developed by the main group of Thai independent film producers especially with Northern European countries' sponsoring channels, the US, where Thai-US or Asian American communities appropriate the films to be used to their (similar) ends, as well as Hong Kong, S. Korea and Japan, which constitute important centres of Asian film. Their tastes and Thai independent filmmakers' converge, in the context of accumulating symbolic power serve to add value to their films, and to come into representation. The exchange of forms and patterns of 'taste' reinforces power relations of the same social order. In this way, independent films recognised as a cultural asset by transnational social elites enables the films to enter the global value chains and competition. The implications on the imagery of transnational cooperation in the production of cultural goods are a crucial question. How storylines, narratives and styles are transformed is a focus of the analysis of four case study digital films from the borderlands of Thailand. Restrictions by transnational production houses and expectations of transnational audiences raise questions as to the degree of possible independence of predominant 'taste', especially when different cultures' stakes over the monopoly of legitimising the power of representation are at stake.

This study of the economic and socio-political structure of the Thai film industry and the major forces shaping films' values through the chains of production, distribution and exhibition shows the regulatory processes shaping the (digital) filmscape and emerging trends of digitalisation and globalisation. While the number of producers in the Thai film industry suggests diversity, the analysis of the distribution and exhibition channels demonstrates that 'independent' digital films can not enter value chains. Moreover, 'independent' producers compete with large scale corporations from the Thai film industry at transnational marketing events to secure funding for (co-)productions and (copyright) sales. Their successful pitching is a challenge to predominant representational practices, but the story of this struggle remains unknown.

2.2.3 Independent Films (Thai Film Foundation, a.o.)

According to Chalida Uabumrungjit (2006: 194), Dome Sukvong² and Ing K.³, the seeds of the movement of film activists promoting film as culture in Thailand are rooted in student film screenings especially at Chulalongkorn and other universities in Bangkok in the mid 1990's. At the time, the now famous director Jira Malikul supported *kang jor* (set up screen) at Chulalongkorn University, and Dome Sukvong, founder of the Thai Film Archive, initiated the first *Junlakum Nang Naksuksa* (Student Film Mini Festival) in 1995. Officially founded in 1994, the Thai Film Foundation (TFF) team are film activists, who initiated the first short film competition in 1997, when Thai cinema was celebrating its 100th anniversary, and the Thai film industry was at an all-time low of ten films released that year. At the time and still today, the TFF's annual screening event mainly served the purpose to create an alternative public platform for the exhibition of non-commercially made films by young Thai students, visual artists etc. and of selected international films considered worthwhile. Curated by a changing group of dedicated filmmakers and visual artists, their choice encouraged an independent spirit and creativity. In the meantime, the movement has grown to include Thai Short Film, Bioscope magazine and Thai Indie. They promote independent film production in Thailand through publications, festivals, trainings, workshops, and campaigns which have expanded beyond a university campus.

The annual Thai Short Film and Video Festival is still the most significant event fostering the diversity of Thai film culture. Submissions are no longer exclusively from university students (ibid: 195), however, but increasingly from a computer literate generation belonging to the general public who use digital technology as daily means of communication. The overall number of submissions to the festival is steadily rising, and in 2006 totalled 332 films (from 30 in 1997). In as far as indicated in the 2006 film festival catalogue, 18.3 percent of the film submissions were from out-side Bangkok. (Submissions from postal code areas [first figure] were 2: 4, 3: 9, 4:12, 5:11, 6: 4, 7:11, 8: 3, 9:7, and 17 did not indicate their origin – the remaining 254 were from Bangkok.) It would be interesting to further study where calls for contributions to the short film

² Personal communication August 13, 2007

³ Personal communication June, 29, 2007

festival are posted, and whom they reach beyond the growing group of short filmmakers in Bangkok. Although most are short films, this study was able to identify 39 digital films of 'near feature length' as defined for the research purposes from submissions in the period under research. Formats exceeding the average length of short films (approx. 2 -12 minutes) have increased to the extent that TFF launched the first 'Digital Forum' of feature-length documentaries in September 2007. This development is paralleled by an increasing number of categories of festival prizes. Initially, these were the categories filmmakers 'from the general audience' and 'students'. But new award categories distinguish by age (under 18), genre (animation), cinematography and "distinctive achievements in filmmaking" as well as "short films with unusual subjects". The creation of the special program 'Digital Momentum' during the festival reflects the fact that short films are getting longer, and in 2006, a documentary won the competition in this field. The organisation does not distribute the submitted (or any other) independent films. (A shop which Thai Short Film opened for the purpose of selling independent films was opened in 2006, but closed shortly after.)

"Since Thai Film Foundation has considered cinema as intellectual asset rather than merely entertainment, the Foundation has organized numerous activities, working towards raising the recognition of Thai films to become one of the country's cultural heritages."

The survey conducted of independent films of 2003 -2006 found the representation of people other than Thai or Tai noticeably few. Excluding the government initiated special projects (see below), which did not focus on the North, these were the films I found about borderlands: The Bangkok based filmmaker team Nuttorn Kungwan-klai and Punthipa Poongsompoj submitted a five minute short film about Akha *Normal* (2006) – described in the synopsis as 'some can not pursue life in the old-fashioned way'. Three films were from 'Lanna': *Just A Second -The Khong Legend* (2003) and *From Santiphap...to Santhipap* (2006) by Santiphap Inkgong-ngam (fictitious Tai Yong history and genealogy); as well as *Poylong* (2006) by Komsak Boonpleung (a documentary about traditional Lanna beliefs). One film concerning being a Muslim in Thailand: *My Home* (2006) by Chingchai Fanomchat tells of a boy from the South who comes to Bangkok, but can't forget the unrest in the South. Two

more films about Moken people, which don't seem to be from the Reconciliation Film project and date to 2006, are by Comjak Thongjib, Pirat Khumwan and Anuchit Muanprom (*Moken Freeman*), the latter is “[a] story about a Moken family whose life is full of injustice” (Thai Film Foundation, 2006: 147-188).

My research findings suggest that the Thai Short Film Foundation did not receive digital films from ethnic communities; the largest amount of films from the North comes from Tai people, and Santiphap Ingkong-ngam's contributions are the longest and the most. *Yong in Transition* was the first film he made in his hometown in Lamphun. Santiphap is an artist, and his films have been part of Navin Rawanchaikul's art projects which include filmmaking. The goal of 'Fly With Me To Another World' is to involve local people in a range of 'artistic' collaborate projects, and artists considered as indigenous tribes. The capitalisation on indigenous knowledge was a major topic at the symposium held in February 2005 in Chiang Mai's Art Museum. Artists, art professors, local artist initiatives, art critiques, curators, filmmakers, international foundations and NGOs working in the Southeast Asian region visited the project site in Lamphun and critically discussed the government's folk art promotion in non-contemporary art spaces, and collectively worked out plans to bring them into contemporary spaces. The freedom of imagination and critique against institutional terror and art curricula creating commercial art was addressed. The use of galleries for art was questioned, they would not add value, and private alternatives were encouraged. During the concluding meeting, Thai artists accused international NGOs of using artists for their own aims in aid projects. The public intervention triggered emotional reactions, incomprehension and disappointment. Part of the interactive exchange with local Yong people and the film were to be initiated by Santiphap. But, he says: “We realized that their life is already like that of artists. They don't need discussions with us” (personal communication January 19, 2007). Santiphap is Yong and wanted to make a film about his people ever since he had met Dai Le people in Xishuangbanna (P.R.C). Part of the film project and Fly With Me projects is the mobile travelling aspect of migration, encounter and continuous change. Santhipaph has worked with Apichatpong on *Blissfully Yours*, but his own films are more specifically about Tai Yong identity. The story of *Yong in Transition* works with long sequences of movement and transition telling a personal story. *The Khong Legend*, is constructed through oral history telling

for which researchers provided the historical material, and local people retold these stories. Apichatpong's influence is thus undeniable, but Santiphap's films are more ethnographic than the formers'. Funding should have been provided by the Ministry of Culture, but turned out to be more difficult than expected. Supported directly by Navin and his art project, the film had to match the overall project objectives which emphasise local communities' input and artists' exchange with them in their work. Given that Navin's personal art interventions happen in Japan, New York and Europe, the negotiations about the film had to be mediated through another the manager of the project. "I explained to Bo why I couldn't possibly organize a workshop, and then he talked to Navin. [...] The people in my hometown really liked the film. It was the first film I shared with my parents. They never knew what I was doing. They thought I'd get a job and a house ... I can't show my films [artwork] to my parents." (ibid.) The cover of *Just A Second – The Kong Legend* reads as follows: "This is not the movie, but a collaborative arts of the Khong artist on moving images."

Table 4: Independent production BKK and North 2003 - 2006

MPCD/SEAMP	2 films + CDs	2
The Mirror Art Group / Mirror Foundation	5 films + 25 short films + CDs	5
The Peace Foundation / BI	5 films + short films	5
Thai Film Foundation (2003-2006) *	15 (≈20'), 48 (≈25'), 15 (≈30')	
Production Houses, TFF, Thai Indie a.o.	5 8 13 28	54
Total digital films (approx.)		70

* Submissions total in 2006: 332 films; catalogues do not list films' format or genre

** Thida Plitpholkarnpim *et al.* (2006) 'Come Together: 2005-2006 Thai Independent Films Overview', Asiexpo Edition, pp. 217

2.2.4 Special government projects

Exceptionally, and under the auspices of the National Reconciliation Committee (NRC), TFF managed film productions for the 'Films for Reconciliation' project in cooperation with the editors of Bioscope, a film magazine. The films are downloadable at (<http://www.filmforpeace.net/fes/>). The report of the NRC lists this activity of conflict management through peaceful means 'Overcoming Violence through the Power of Reconciliation', and appendix E, Section 4 explains it "to promote the power of cultural diversity in Thai society"⁴. As the editors of the Bioscope magazine put it: "It [was] a national emergency issue. So we thought movies could play a role on this topic which no one dares to talk about, or has prejudice" (Thunskaa, 2006). According to the editor Thida Plitpholkarnpim, Bioscope facilitated the exchange between social scientists, social activists and film activist (Action Aid, the Urban Media Society and Public Dissemination for Social Awareness, who work with stateless children) by organising seminars and workshops, while technical workshops were held by independent filmmakers from Thai Short Film. The call for film project proposals through Bioscope magazine resulted in approximately 300 proposals of which 12 were chosen based on the feasibility of the film and on criteria evaluating its potential to raise the public's understanding of the complex realities in three of Thailand's Southern provinces. The symbolic empowerment of the South through film was mediated by Bangkok filmmakers.

'The Tsunami Digital Short Films Project' was also organised with cooperation of the Thai Film Foundation and with Apichatpong Weerasethakul's creative consultancy. The Ministry of Culture's Office of Contemporary Art and Culture asked film teams, mostly independent short filmmakers to shoot (in five days) their film in the areas which were hit by the Indian Ocean Tsunami in December 2004, i.e. in Phuket or other provinces in southern Thailand. The project's 13 digital films – of which six were compiled for a DVD with limited distribution – and were screened at a special event. Including the Child Media Project, these were exceptional activities, however. They brought independent Thai film activists into a public light.

⁴ http://thailand.ahrchk.net/docs/nrc_report_en.pdf

Table 5: Special government projects

Organisations	2003	2004	2005	2006
Office of Contemporary Arts and Culture in cooperation with the Thai Film Foundation	-	-	13***	-
The National Reconciliation Commission with Thai Short Film	-	-	-	12**
Chuan Dek Doo Nang (childrens' films)	-	-	10*	-
Total films (approx.)	-	-	23	12

***All contributions, *de facto*, independent filmmakers: Apichatpong Weerasethakul and Christelle Lheureux, Pipope Panitchpakdi, Pramote Sangsorn, Sompot Chidgasornpongse, Suchada Sirithanawuddhi, Thunskas Pansittivorakul

** Ditto: Haris Maschay, Kwankaew Kepdon, Mahwin Lhisen, Monsak Hinprakorb, Natrin Boonshu, Siwadol Rathee, Seri Lhachannobat, Piyanat Visurt, Ratt Champamool, Suppachai Thongsak, Suvisan Kwanthongchum, Sasa Kongvijitr, Santiphap Ingkong-ngam,

* Ditto: Pimpaka Towira, Taweewat Wanta, Aditya Assarat, Tatthep Thongtab, Pattana Jirawong, Lek Manont, etc.

Table 6: Government organisations

Government Organisations	2003	2004	2005	2006
SAC	-	6	5	4
CESD	-	-	-	4
Tribal Museum	x	2	1	3
Total films (approx.)	x	8	6	11