

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This thesis links digital film productions in the centre of Thailand's film industry with those from the northern borderlands. By doing so, it intends to divert from the predominant focus on cinema which tends to review the national film industry's past and celebrate its heroes. The decline or new height of cinema is a recurrent topic, while the complex and contradictory aspects of film scapes as contesting forces are little studied. In this research of structures of digital film production, the concurrence of globalisation of this field of cultural production and its transformation through technological innovation are identified as a potential challenge of established structures. To recognise changes, this chapter establishes the nature of the Thai film industry and its structures' effect on other digital film producers in Thailand..

This research encompasses a variety of digital film productions in Thailand, and is especially interested in the northern borderlands as one of the regions whose people and (film) culture continue to be marginalised and misrepresented. Digital technology's facilitating the creation of distinct film cultures is critically analysed through a study of structures of independent film productions and by inquiring into transnational capital's intervention in film's narratives and formal structures. In this way, it seeks to gain a better understanding of the dynamic processes in this field of cultural production.

I will argue that the concurrence of globalisation and digital technology's radical change of the possibilities in post-production lends itself to creating signs and symbols which project reality into more fantastic realms. In this field of contested representation, hyper traditions could emerge as a means to re-invent tradition, re-inscribe history and legitimise power structures.

1.1 Objectives and Hypothesis

The following are the main objectives of this research:

- ◇ To analyse the structure of the Thai film industry in regard to their encouragement, restriction and regulation of digital film productions
- ◇ To compare borderland digital film scape's modes of representation

The following major research questions serve as guidelines:

- ◇ What are the structural mechanisms regulating and the socio-political dynamics shaping digital film productions from the northern borderland?
- ◇ How does the imagery of digital film productions differ from, is it conform with or contesting predominant imagery from the film industry in Thailand
- ◇ How are decisions made about the films' storyline, form and style?

Hypothesis

It is the hypothesis of this thesis that digital films challenge predominant forms of representation and that these films furthermore reflect 'hyper tradition' as a response to globalisation and as a means to re-invent tradition, re-inscribe history and legitimate power structures.

1.2 Literature Review

There is something of a dearth in academic literature regarding digital films in Thailand. More widely available, (in Thai and in English) are publications concerning broadcast format media and commercial films. To a large extent, publications on the latter provide a comprehensive historical overview (Dome Sukvong *et al.* 2001), discuss genre developments or a particular period of Thai film history. Such works will point out famous national actors, directors and prize winning films, place these films in the national socio-economic context (Anchalee Chaiworaporn, 2001; Yoon Hyunjung, 2003), analyse the influence of Hollywood films (Parichat Phromyothi, 2000) or focus on the economics of the Thai Film industry (Kusuma Kongrith, 2005). From another angle, publications address international audience's possible readings of Thai films (Rachel Harrison, 2005), discuss Thai film history in a regional context (Dissanayake, 1992), or in the global context of an emerging Southeast Asian and Asian American diasporic film culture (Jigna Desai, 2004).

Concerning the 'independent' (mainly digital) sector, few publications seem to be available, although Anchalee Chaiworaporn's articles published on her web-site thaicinema.org are well researched and relevant in academic discourse. A felicitations exception is a recent publication edited by Asiexpo (France), which discusses the history, trends, genres development, issues of censorship and piracy of both the commercial and non-commercial film sectors (Asiexpo, 2006). In this volume, Chalida Uabumjungjit, film archivist and co-founder of the Thai Short Film and Video Festival, introduces the history of the Thai Film Foundation and the festival, while the filmmaker Uruphong Raksasad (*Stories from the North*) contributed an article on documentary films. Thida Plitpholkarnpim *et al.* give an overview over Thai independent film productions including government sponsored film competitions. Although not 'seriously academic' in that it does not include cross-references or position itself in any particular discourse, this volume is an expression of the silenced film activists, and the mere fact that it recognises film as a popular culture, albeit limited to the metropolis Bangkok, is a statement in itself.

The generation of new directors *cum* commercial advertisement filmmakers celebrated as 'independent' remains insufficiently studied. A critical article concerning the self-determined attribution 'independent' by a Sociology Ph.D candidate at the University of California, Sudarat Musikawong (2007), whose dissertation concerns cultural memory production about the 1970s political violence in film and the arts in Thailand, examines the production and distribution sector of three exemplary films¹. In her article 'Working practices in Thai independent film productions' she critically analyses the complexities of global networks involved in the value chains of three sample 'independent' films' production and distribution, and concludes that these films are not independent in an economic sense, but merely reflect the commercialisation of this attribute. The choice of her analysis of films being based on criteria reflecting the need for distinction of this new field in the dominant 'Thai film scape in Bangkok', seem to predict the result, whereas another selection (including films of resistance) would have pinpointed that 'independence' can imply exteriority to main chains of revenue. If alternative circuits of symbolic cultural products are or will remain marginal to the new trend which capitalises on the commercial value of certain non-conformist digital films is a question posed in this research.

Notwithstanding analyses of the economic value of 'independent' and commercial films, discussions of meaning and practices of representation in Thai films seem equally unexplored – probably related to its quantitative size. The commodification of nostalgic, exoticised images of historical China for Western viewers' visual pleasure and consumption is a hot academic topic reflexive not only of the vast amount of films released in recent years, but also mirroring the significance of China's economic growth in general. In this context, Taiwanese, Hong Kong, Singaporean and Malaysian films and Chinese diasporas films have been over-privileged in the various fields of cultural studies. Consequently, I have found little academic literature theorising identity, collective memory and representational practices in Thai films (written in English by Thai academics), although Amporn Jirattikorn, a Ph.D candidate at the University of Texas at Austin, has studied the post-1997 phenomenon of *nang yon yuk* ('films that go

¹ *Mysterious Objects at Noon* (2000), *Voodoo Girls* (2003) and *Mamee / Three Friends* (2005)

back in time’) and analyses the multi-layered reasons for increased nationalism and nostalgia. She writes that the film *Suriyothai* (2001) can be interpreted as both “a royal conceptualization of nationalist ideology, and a defender of Thai-ness” (2003: 303). Perhaps even more significantly, she notes that the invention of Queen Suriyothai as a heroine in the film is in part a reaction against a local Bangkok instigated cult of Princess Suphankalaya and concomitantly intended to outdo the Hollywood movie *Anna and The King*. Placing the film in the context of the financial break-down in 1997 and anti-colonial sentiment, her article provides ample evidence for monopolised practices of fictionalising history to communicate real life role models. More explicitly still, Adadol Ingawanij refers to *nang nak* (1999) as an example of Thai bourgeois cinema. She aptly defines main features of *nang yon yuk* in the process of globalising as: “Their novelty in the Thai context lies in combining the aesthetics of the nostalgia film, the promotional practices of the high concept film, with the insistent claim of attentive historical representation as a mark of quality and seriousness” (2007: 180).

The underlying conflicts of the Thai film industry over issues of representation, Hamilton (1994) suggests to be due to its tripartite composition namely, the conservative power elite, the Western-oriented bourgeoisie, and rural/provincial people. Notwithstanding the importance of discussing viewer interpretations and issues of identity in the context of political sciences, Hamilton underscores psychological aspects of memory and consciousness in the concept of ‘the national imaginary’. Her analysis of Thailand’s history of modern mass media’s role in circulating images and ideas about national self and others is based on the understanding that an awareness of ideological domination creates alternative channels of communication, information, criticism and “sometimes wild imaginings” (1991: 344-5), but she offers no explicit research findings proving that stereotypical images are interpreted differently beyond Bangkok or not.

Work theorising implications and effects of digital films’ and media in general on identity formation of local and transnational communities has evolved from discourses in (visual) anthropology and ethnographic filmmaking (Appadurai, 1996, 1997; Crawford *et al.* 1992; Ginsburg, 1991, 1994; Nichols, 1994; Prins, 1997; Ruby, 1991 among others). Due to the relative novelty of the digital film phenomenon – postponed in Thailand due to the 1997 financial crisis – and since the use of film as the subject of

research in ethnography or anthropology is not, yet, accepted as academically equivalent to written text, this is not surprising. Elsewhere, too, it has taken some time for anthropologists to cite another's ethnographic film as a source of data, let alone analysis, in a written publication. A few case studies from Thailand documenting the usage of digital media by cross-border ethnic communities and by researchers is being discussed in Thailand, however, and partially published. At a seminar in Chiang Mai in 2006 sponsored by the Open Society Institute, Nora Yeh from the Library of Congress presented case studies of text-, audio-, photo- and video based efforts to document cultures for preservation and presentation purposes. She also covered issues concerning permission and rights, access, usage, security and maintenance of such materials. Kwanchewan Buadaeng (b 2005) pointed out concerns about these latter issues at the meeting 'Intangible Cultural Heritage: Safeguarding and Inventory-Making Methodologies' in Bangkok. While Wasan Panyagaew (2006), a professor, researcher and filmmaker as well as Amporn Jirattikorn (2006) report on their research on music and music VCD productions re-establishing ethnic spaces among the Dai of Xishuangbanna in Yunnan Province, Peoples' Republic of China, and Burmese-Thai cross-border Shan communities respectively. Whereas Prasit Leepracha from the Centre for Ethnic Studies and Development (Social Research Institute, Chiang Mai) shows how new media technology is "reproducing transnational Hmong ethnic identity" (2006). More generally underscoring the significance of using digital photography for longitudinal research projects, Charles Keyes reported on his studying four decades in a rural Thai-Lao community in northeastern Thailand at the Chiang Mai meeting in 2006.

The impact of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) on Asian communities is a field relevant for this discussion, although research on moving images and films in particular seems unavailable or limited. This is despite of the fact that non-academic hyper-text published on the internet is a widely used medium for discussing and exchanging views on 'new wave', shorts, transgender and other Thai films. Research into this field of virtual communication through digital technology would enrich our knowledge about the diversity of imagery of Thai film cultures, but besides the appropriation and usages of ICTs, which predominates research (Kamolrat Intaratat and Piyachat Lomchavakarn 2007), its political economy, i.e. questions as to who makes economic profits from the digital content business, and who regulates its free

flows, seem a useful addition to existing studies. An analysis to this end is 'Remediation and Local Globalizations' by Teri Silvio (2007) from the Institute of Ethnology at the Academia Sinica, Taiwan. Although not overtly critical or political in his analysis of a popular animation series produced by a multi-media company for television broadcasting in Taiwan, his description how traditional hand-puppet theatre is transformed through animation and digital effects to appear to be human life, a hyper-real world to which fans add by creating animated short films on websites and by enacting the characters at costume-play conventions, Teri concludes to be a sign of Taiwan's multi-media corporations' imbrications in the global information technology industry. "The Pili puppet serials represent the fantasy of a cosmopolitan world in which nation-states have been replaced by competing corporations marked by distinctive management philosophies, but whose animating deity is unmistakably Taiwanese."

Case studies of hyper-modernisation in Thailand's architecture, have been presented by Sidh Sintusingha (2006), notably the hyper-modern infrastructure project of Suvarnabhumi Airport, which he holds to be "robust extensions of the traditions". The architect does not entirely dismiss motives of de-colonisation as driving agents of attempts "to exceed the modernisation of the 'West', to be (or at least perceived to be) 'more developed' (from the 'developing' status), to be 'more advanced' (from the status of being 'backward')". At the same conference 'Hyper-traditions', Soranart Sinuraibhan presented 'Reading Tradition and Displacement of Illegal Migrants Through the Film *Blissfully Yours*' (2006). Arguing with Foucault, he claims that fictitious spaces in the film mirror the particular social order of human beings. In this way, Min, who has lost the power of control over his body (he has inexplicable rashes and is inhibited to speak lest his identity be discovered), is identified as a 'real' migrant. His sheer visibility is a trap. Soranart argues that the film is a site for re-imposition of issues of 'real' traditional displacement of peoples.

This thesis intends to contribute to the existing studies by including digital films from the borderlands. It discusses the structure of the industry and that of independent producers in Bangkok to establish their relationship. The originality of the thesis will lie in its contextualisation of four sample films from the borderlands, their self-representation, and their visual texts reflecting or diverging from fixed imaginations and dominant narratives.

1.3 Definition of Terms

Digital Film The term is used in its most encompassing meaning, which is not limited in scope by genre but stressed its format. This was necessary in order to gain an as holistic as possible overview of the digital film scape. The technical term digital film then refers to films initially filmed with a digital camera, i.e. is exclusive of 16 or 36 mm format films. The usage of the term ‘digital’ conveniently attributes to a film mere technical characteristics without revealing a filmmaker’s background marked as being a film school graduate or artist (expected to produce animation, cartoon, experimental, feature length, fiction or short films), a social scientist (making anthropological, ethnographic², documentary or special feature films) or otherwise indicating the film’s genre (comedy, drama, horror, science-fiction film, etc). In practice, digital films are identical with ‘independent’ films, however.

Commercial Film The term is not used to refer to commercial advertisement films, which are excluded from this research. It is used here in accordance with Pierre Bourdieu, who makes this distinction to differentiate between ‘pure art’ and ‘commercial art’, and argues that it is crucial in the struggle over the right of cultural production to uphold the distinction. ‘Commercial’ films produced by the film industry are then distinctly different from ‘independent’ films.

Independent Film The sector of independent film is usually associated with innovative formats and experimentation. Independent films, here, are defined as part of the overarching category ‘digital films’. (But independent films could also be in analogue format.) They also pertain to a variety of genres: art-house as well as ethnographic, experimental, feature and documentary films. The attribute ‘independent’ separates these films from ‘commercial’ films, a crucial distinction according to Bourdieu. When independence is in terms of exclusion from funding from the national film industry, dependence from otherwise derived sponsorship might exist. If

² By limiting my survey to ethnographic film “made by a trained ethnographer/anthropologist as a means of conveying anthropological knowledge obtained from field work” (Ruby 2000), indigenous media by community members outside of the academic system would have been excluded.

independent cultural production is possible at all, is the question. The abbreviated forms “indy” and “indie” are interchangeable. But this author prefers to use “indy” to refer to the conscious (ab)use of this attribute by the film industry as a label to market and promote certain films in which young directors or scriptwriters have participated. “Indie” is used parallel, since independent filmmakers in Thailand’s capital Bangkok represent themselves on their English language web-site in his way.

Borderlands Throughout this thesis, I will use the term ‘borderlands’ in its literal sense as the “land on the frontiers of adjoining countries” (Websters New Universal Unabridged Dictionary, 1979). Uraivan Tan Kim-yong (1983) has suggested the term *khon chai daen* in Thai for ‘borderlanders’. Specifically, the term ‘borderlands’ refers to Thailand’s nine northern provinces and Isaan, i.e. it spans the Western part of Northern Southeast Asia. The term ‘region’ is used as a synonym, while ‘area’ refers to a particular part of the borderland region.

Regulation Regulation is taken to describe the processes during which control is or can be exercised. It refers to negotiations of form and content of films as well as other expectations a producer faces in return for financial or other external aid. In the context of the value chains of production, distribution and exhibition of films, the structure of the field is understood as a dynamic process of regulation. The focus here lies in transnational capital and staff’s interventions in films’ trajectories, i.e. the regulation of the value chain, and the effects thereof on narratives.

From ‘Tradition’ to Hyper tradition The notion of ‘hyper tradition’ is rooted in radical social theory developed by Jean Baudrillard as a reaction to the perceived dramatic qualitative changes of the ‘modern’ social order. Hyper tradition is understood to be the self-conscious disembedding of concepts ostensibly referring to past practices from their original social context, and their rerouting into new ones. Whereas the point of reference seems to have always been given for Habsbawm (1983: 4-8), who writes that ‘extinct’ traditions can become ‘(re-)invented and revived, and that this is most likely to occur in times of rapid social transformation or the perceived disappearance of

'old' traditions, Baudrillard's (1995: 81) hyper traditions pass through several phases and finally become *simulacra*.

Marginalisation This research adheres to the entry in the Encarta World English Dictionary (Bloomsbury 1999) which explains 'to marginalise' as meaning "to take or keep someone or something from the centre of attention, influence or power." Applied to the social science discourse, the term is inevitably linked to Immanuel Wallerstein's (1974) influential world systems theory conceptualising hierarchical, asymmetric and often exploitative relations between so called 'centres' and 'peripheries'. Critical Cultural Studies and certain anthropologists are recognising that academic definitions of 'culture' are themselves positioned and political and therefore a resource too easily functionalised in establishing or challenging processes of domination and marginalisation. In the context of the globalisation discourse, as Andrew Walker points out, bi-polar notions such as the centre-periphery model, applied to mainland Southeast Asia, has stimulated interpretations of contemporary and pre-colonial social relationships between economic, administrative and religious centres in the densely settled lowlands, and less powerful settlements in the forested and mountainous hinterlands (Walker, 1999).

In this study of the structure of the Thai film scape and participants' positions, Bangkok and the northern borderlands constitute the specific research framework conceptualised as 'dominating' and 'dominated' spaces. The means to achieve and maintain 'marginalisation' discussed here are economic and socio-political regulatory mechanisms in the field of cultural production. Institutionalised practices are critically evaluated as to their marginalisation of newcomers and filmic representation.

Globalisation The term is generally understood as a particular, contemporary regulatory mechanism of capital on a global basis. This study inquires into the effects of transnational capital investment in film productions. In particular, effects on narratives and form of commercial and independent films are researched, and regulatory mechanisms identified.

1.4 Theoretical Background

This paragraph develops the main theories useful to achieve the objectives of this research. These are, on the one hand, inquiring into the digital filmscape in Thailand and the film industry's structural mechanisms regulating it. On the other hand, dynamic processes shaping independent digital film productions are the subject of investigation, and the analysis of four sample films should answer questions concerning different or similar narratives and images used in comparison with commercially produced films. The theoretical basis of this thesis, which studies both power structures and meanings of cultural products, is placed in globalisation discourses. It reflects the bi-polarity in the discourse of globalisation's effects. Two main arguments prevail therein: One holds that digital modalities and its wide-scale availability constitutes an opportunity of the "margins coming into representation" (Stuart Hall 2000: xx), while the other argues that the ensuing dynamics trigger a more complex network of its management and regulation. Applied to the symbolic good film, the optimistic view sees digital technology challenging the established cinema value chain given lower costs for a digital film's production and its possible channelling through digital distribution and exhibition networks. Digital films' potential is to circumvent channels established by the film industry on the structures of which the economic values generated by the movie business is founded. Digital formats can potentially be digitally marketed as film clips and other imagery on the internet, through portable phones and on screens in means of public transportation etc. Their distribution is not necessarily bound to traditional shops and chain-stores, instead e-content business conveniences the buyer and seller through download options upon receipt of a password or by using postal services. Most importantly, digital technology theoretically allows for other forces but traditional authorities to enter the filmscape. Arguably, this is a form of empowerment for communities hitherto marginalised from access to the medium. The symbolic capital gained through their expression of values and meaning adds to the cultural circuit of exchange in the system of representation (Stuart Hall, 1997).

On the other hand, the negative view holds that the effects of increased globalisation in the field of (digital) film, or other business for that matter, equals an intensification of the power struggle and competition over economic capital and thus is

a favourable condition for new alliances, consolidation and merging in the fields of production, distribution and exhibition as a means of regulation. Accordingly, large scale cross-sector conglomerations' and large multi-media corporations expansion is legitimised as a means to establish or maintain the status of the national market of this resource. It thus legitimises a monopolistic status in the industry against the forces of trans-national interventions in national and regional markets through transnational co-productions, diversion of value chains and thus revenues. In addition, it is argued that socio-political forces are losing control over the monopoly of representation. Cooperation of intra-national forces re-confirms dominance over content. Overall, this negative perspective claims that recent globalisation triggers the enforcement of economic, socio-political and legal, i.e. 'cultural' regulation. Thus, contrary to neo-liberal reasoning, the 'liberalisation' of global information flows through globalisation might impact on digital film productions in that it fosters quantitative growth, but not necessarily greater diversity or "de-regulation" of the market.

The above dynamics are traced in the Thai film industry by describing the fields of film production, distribution and exhibition in Thailand, its nature and structurally grounded regulatory mechanisms effecting the field of independent digital film, since it is the objective to assess who and how digital film productions are encouraged, restricted and regulated.

The recurrence of studies of the role of the media and images, the imaginary and imagined communities, is striking, and appears to be linked to discourses on the commodification of culture and theories of consumer society. Guy Debord (1973), for example, saw as culminating in 'the image' - the ultimate carrier and activity (agent) of capitalism. Frederic Jameson noted that:

"With this universal commodification of our object world, the familiar accounts of the other-directedness of contemporary conscious consumption and of the sexualisation of our objects and activities are also given: the new model car is essentially an image for other people to have of us, and we consume, less the thing itself, that its abstract idea, open to all libidinal investments ingeniously arrayed for us by advertising." (1979: 125-126)

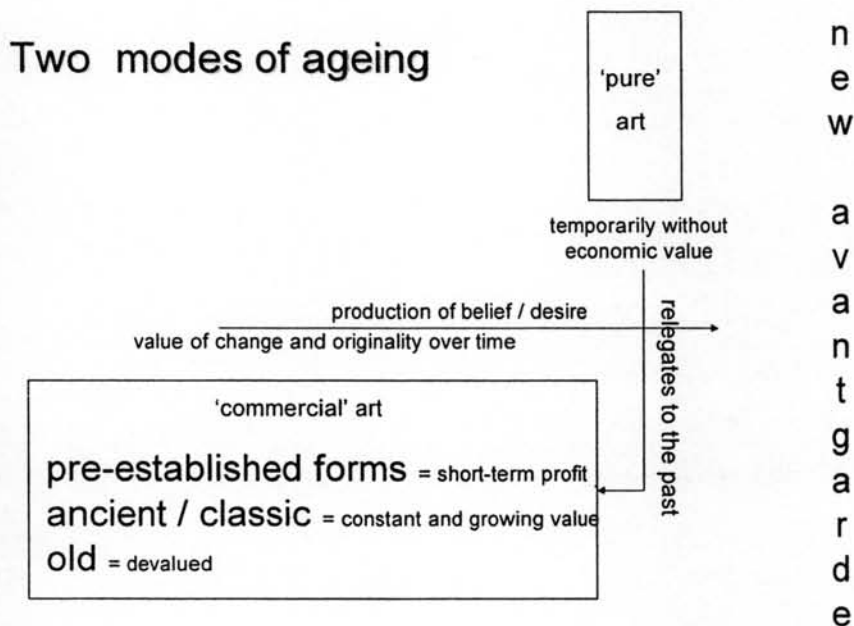
Jean Baudrillard perceived of the new technical order (of his time) to be dominating modern life by organising society into “ensembles, structures and significations” (Kellner, 1991: 8-11). According to Baudrillard’s theory of a ‘system of signs’, “production is entangled with an *order of consumption*, which is an order of the manipulation of signs” (1970: 29-30, emphasis added). In his first published book, *Le système des objets*, Baudrillard (1968) describes a ‘new environment’, which leads to a ‘new morality’ and a ‘new form of hyper-civilization’. “Baudrillard was mesmerized by the qualities of the new forms of technical society”, writes Kellner (1991: 11). He perceived of the transformations inherent to consumer society as undermining an ostensibly traditional environment to which he attributed more personalised functions of objects, expressive and symptomatic of familial history, subjective taste and tradition. Such arguments seem to resemble current evaluations of the effects of globalisation and digital technology. In the field of film, globalisation has strengthened those arguments envisioning Hollywoodisation as the end of the diversity of film cultures and describes the narratives of a globalised cinema as subject to ‘hyper-inflation’ characterised by “the endless repetition of narrative formulas” (Sharret, 2001: 319). Baudrillard claimed that ‘traditional systems of signification’ were no longer valid, which led to his later theories emphasizing the sign and signifiers creating ‘hyper realities’. In his own words the hyper-real is “that which is always already reproduced” (1983: 146). With technology enabling infinite reproduction of commodity goods (objects) and their features, Baudrillard claims that their symbolic value as a sign is more significant for their consumers than their ‘real’-value. As Kellner points out, Baudrillard was fixed on “technical imperatives and psychological projections” rather than valuing the power question “as to what forces are primary in overthrowing one mode of civilization and producing another” (1991: 11).

This study takes the negation of the sign as value equalling the signified as a confirmation of notions of symbolic power and the principles of the value of cultural production expounded by Bourdieu. Both are taken to underscore the significance of the notion of symbolic capital, albeit from two different perspectives of analysis (negative and positive). Baudrillard assumes an inflationary system of values, while Bourdieu builds on change and innovation. Pierre Bourdieu contributed a different dimension to the sociological discourse of culture and power relations. Based on extensive research

into the French education system, he found that certain forms of knowledge, skills and expertise, verbal facility and aesthetic preferences are transmitted and produce 'cultural capital'. He stressed the significance of cultural capital derived from social environments, which he conceived of as 'habitus' shaping social groups' 'tastes' (Bourdieu, 1986: 230-232; 1993: 14-18). In the field of cultural production, the perception of "symbolic goods" (music, painting, print media) translates into distinct 'tastes' and value systems (1996: 230-233). Bourdieu holds that cultural reproduction in an economy of taste makes cultural and social capital (and thus power) interchangeable with economic and symbolic power (1986: 227-230). 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'. The power struggle arises over the power to consecrate cultural products, and over monopoly of the imposition of legitimate categories of perception and appreciation, i.e. representation. The struggles occur "between the dominants whose strategy is tied to continuity, identity and reproduction, and the dominated, the new entrants, whose interest is in discontinuity, rupture, difference and revolution." (1996: 157). The dynamics are described as the former forces are trying to endure, whereas the latter consign to the past "those who have an interest in stopping time, in eternalising the present state" (ibid.) Symbolic systems, Bourdieu writes, reinforced in class relations and capitalist enterprise, reproduce certain forms and patterns (the economy of tastes) to legitimise power. Interestingly, he points to the

historical 'safety' of tradition in this context. The right to (re)produce symbolic goods is then a significant power to own, and their dissemination becomes a crucial link acting as regulatory force in their value chain. It is in this context of the power struggle that hyper tradition could be relevant - albeit not as a concept, but as signifying globalised struggles over representation. Hyper traditions have materialised through particular features of globalisation such as transnational tourism, transnational architecture and also transnational film productions. If and how globalisation effects film production in Thailand, then becomes a relevant question. It necessitates a study into the structures and dynamics of co-productions with transnational capital and staff and the effects of their interventions. More importantly, it raises the question, if the case study digital films constitute a "counter-politics of the local".

Figure 1: The Market of Symbolic Goods



Source: Pierre Bourdieu (1996: 142-154)

1.5 Methodology

The methods of research are divided in two phases of 'survey' and 'analysis'. During the extensive survey 'digital films' and their producers were identified to be able to speak of a digital film scape. The analysis followed a selection process, which aimed at being as representative as possible. This is reflected in the term 'digital film' as defined above. Certainly, this use of the term digital is ambivalent, but in practice, the reference to a technical term rather than a genre resulted in a higher turn-out of my survey: University libraries and archives have distinct systems of cataloguing their films, which did not necessarily include the class of ethnographic film, anthropological film etc. When asking for digital films, an understanding was established that I was not looking for broadcast formats or recordings of television programs on VHS. Where the 'digital' identified the format, the use of 'film' marks the cultural product as finished, i.e. unedited footage, collections of still images, or other digitally storable material were excluded. Music CDs were not included, since their structural formats of editing differ from more cohesive narratives of a film, although a similar effect is often achieved.

Given the fact that independent digital films in Thailand are more often than not privately funded, the industry standard of 90 minutes 'feature length' (as distinct from 'short film') has been generously circumnavigated here to balance the *a priori* lopsidedness of production environments. The fixed standard length of the films included in the survey is at a minimum of 30 minutes, but films slightly shorter have been included. Short film series, which are intended to be shown as a sequence, but edited to a length convenient for teaching purposes (for example), are included, notably the MAG film series. Of the entire group, the main criterion of selection was 'northern borderlands' indicating its origin from or narrative about this geographic region. Further details of selection processes are explained below.

This research constitutes of a first part of quantitative and a second part of qualitative studies. Data about all digital films produced by the Thai film industry and independent films from 2003 – 2006 had to be collected prior to their study. Surveys in both the commercial and the independent field were conducted as follows:

Commercial digital films

To identify, if the commercial film sector had produced digital films between 2003 -2006 a survey had to establish titles, production houses, years of release in Thailand versus international year of release, and additional information about the film industry in Thailand. These data were collected mainly through comparison of available catalogues and web-sites of the Bangkok Film Festival, the Thai Short Film and Video Festival, but also Thai Takes, Rotterdam International Documentary film Festival, Berlin International Film Festival, Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival among others. Data about independent films from the borderland were systematically collected firstly through visits of major libraries and offices of government and non-government research institutions, and systematic visits of ethnic minority souvenir, music VCD and book shops, research in official and minor tourist agencies in Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai city as well as Bangkok.

Independent films from the borderlands

Although the term 'digital film' seemed an obvious technical category to include all independent genres, the concept had to be operationalised. To be able to speak of a filmscape, the scope of digital filmmaking had to be outlined through a wide-ranging survey. The selection process of the four digital films *by* and *about* ethnic communities in the borderlands is documented here. The three major methods of research employed in are interview analysis, document analysis and film analysis. Preliminary quantitative content analyses of data banks at Chulalongkorn, Thammasat and Silapakorn university libraries as well as the SAC aimed at finding some data and possibly suggest an appropriate coding system and categories, but categories turned out to be at random. Samples from these existing archives would result in zero units, when searched for the code 'digital'. 'Film' on the other hand was too broad a category to be useful. I decided, instead, to include all films with moving images of ethnic peoples showing their way of life to be included in my survey, and not to specify the topic ('ritual', 'dance', etc.), and not to limit the genre either (ethnographic, documentary, fiction, action movie). Once samples of a big enough size for selection would have been collected, I would proceed with categorisation. This procedure led to a late ending of the digital film survey. That

institutional structures shape digital film production was a research objective and guided interviews from the beginning.

Fieldwork Research: Mae Sot, Mae La camp, January 25 -30, 2006

Fieldwork Research: Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai Nov./Dec. 2006 (1 month)

Exploratory Interviewing Chiang Rai

Rajapath University, Inter-ethnic Studies Center, Sombat Boonkamyung,
director, Aoy researcher; Yang Xinghua, student

Hill Area and Community Development Foundation, Juthamas, director

Participant Observation - Phase 1 (Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai)

- Local film festival and festivities in honour of H.M. King Bhumibol
- Special ethnic exhibit in Chiang Rai City
- Virtual Hilltribe Museum, Hilltribal museums (Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai)
- Doi Suthep Nature Study Center (“multi-media museum”)

A) Document Collection (secondary)

- Sampling impossible - few data available
- Digital film survey and data collection in BKK, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai
Libraries: Chiang Mai University, Chulalongkorn University, Payap
University, Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre, Rajapath
University, Silpakorn University, Thammasat University
- Other: Ethnic souvenir shops, book shops, video rental shops, local fairs
- Developing interview materials (ethnic data, historical data, film data)

B) Interviews

Burma Border Consortium, Sally Thompson

National Museum of Ethnology (to-be), curator Ajarn Patcharin

Short Film Shop Chatu Chak Market, Khon Nathaphong

Silpakorn University, Fine Arts Department, Noraset Vaisayakul

C) Semi Structured Interviews

Bioscope Magazine, Thida Phalitaphonkanpim (editor), Panu Aree
(filmmaker)

Chiang Mai University, Dept. of Anthropology, Wasan Prakobkwae

Chulalongkorn University, SEA Studies programme, Sunait Chutintaranond

Imagesasia, Sam Kalayanee

Pongsarid Tomechai, filmmaker

Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre, Chewasit

Boonyakiet Silapakorn University, Faculty of Archaeology, Department of
Anthropology, Damrongphon Inchan and Pranee Wongtaeb

Srinakarni Wirot University, Chupinit Kedmanee, formerly TRI

Thammasat University, Faculty of Mass Communication, Boonrak

Boonyaketmala

Informal and exploratory interviews were conducted throughout fieldwork research period 1, and when meeting with new subjects during phase 2. Semi-structured interviews would typically serve to find out the subjects' role in the film project, general interests, educational background, etc. Focus group discussions seemed valuable in reflecting dynamics of the working environment. Structured interviews were considered inappropriate because the information to be elicited focuses on processes rather than 'data' reducible to one or two words. Analyses were conducted by comparison of information provided during separate interviews of members of the production team, and through their contextualisation with document analysis and the film.

Fieldwork Research (Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai, January – April 2007)

A) Document collection

- Self-documentations of digital film producers (if available)
- Systematic recording of representational differences in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai museums and ethnic exhibition

B) Informal Interviews

- Chiang Mai University, Unit for Social and Environmental Research, Po Garden, researcher
- Mirror Art Group, Virtual Hilltribe museum (first visit)
- Filmmakers: Jakatae, Joe, Santiphap Inkong-ngam, Santipong Changpuak, Sutthirat Supaparinya, Karina Zur Strassen

Category Development A - Digital Films Borderlands

Analysis of primary and secondary data, and interviews

Primary criteria

Common Class: Producer in the region –

Categories: 1) *about* Akha, Bulang, Hmong, Karen, Lisu, Lahu, ‘Tai

2) *by* Akha, Bulang, Hmong, Karen, Lisu, Lahu, ‘Tai’

Theoretical Class: Significance / use (education, research, archive, tourism)

Secondary Criteria

Feasibility of further interviews, maintain diversity of data, ethical issues

Categories: Small versus large scale producers

Large scale production: Tai films (many found ‘about’, but production environments in research institutes not readily disclosed; few are ‘by’ – mainly artists who are open for interviews)

Small scale production: Hmong films (no Hmong community identified in research area, circulation?)

Result of Analysis: Focus on Akha, Lahu, Lisu and Karen films

Participant Observation (phase 2)

- Amphoe Muang Chiang Rai, Tambon Doi Hang, Baan Camnu and Baan Aboe (Pakeyaw and Akha villages, 2 weeks, communal ritual *ge djie nitosaw*, first film screening, visit Taiwanese tea plantation, raided Lisu village, tourist attractions
- Doi Chaan (Akha coffee plantations, ‘wealthy’ community)
- Baan Ruamnrit (tourist site – family relative Baan Camnu works there)

- Lanna Wisdom Institute (festival and several follow-up visits)

Further comparison of data and interview materials (ethnic data, historical data, film data) .Data for document analysis were collected prior to and after interviews and film analyses. Data for an analysis of the history of structures of institutions and research organisations involved in digital film making today could not be systematically gathered since the history of the ethnography of northern Thailand is inadequately documented (in English). It is largely restricted to a vast amount of accumulated documents at the Tribal Museum (former Tribal Research Centre, Chiang Mai), and much of the information is written by international anthropologist working at or advising the TRI in the 1960's-1980's (Hinton, Geddes, Hanks, Tapp, a.o.) For a systematic analysis of the development of a structure of ethnographic institutes in northern Thailand, it would be relevant to understand which Thai assistant researchers went to study in Australia and where they worked upon return to Thailand (the agreement between SEATO, TRI and the TRI's initial advisors), if the two other Thai anthropologist conducted research in the North, etc. It would be significant to understand the role of those trained outside Thailand in shaping anthropological research after the Cold War period. For the history of the TRI, four interviews were conducted and literature consulted.

Informal Interviews

- Hilltribe Museum Chiang Mai, Somkiat Jumlong
- Hilltribe Museum Chiang Rai, Alberto C. de la Paz
- The Rockefeller Foundation, Alan Feinstein

Semi-structured Interviews

- BBC Trust Fund, Chiang Mai, Sai Aom Seng
- Chiang Mai University, Unit for Social and Environmental Research, Po Garden, researcher
- Hilltribe Museum, Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai
- IPS Asia Pacific, Johanna Son, regional director

Digital Film Survey (Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai)

Production Year:	2003 – 2006
Format:	digital, 1 film approx. 30 min. <i>or</i> a series' of 30 min.
Producer:	from the region
Genre:	open (no short films, no unedited footage, no television broadcasts, no music VCDs)
Result (total):	25 (CESD, TRI, SEAMPCD, MAG, BI, artists)
Themes:	ethnic communities in North Thailand, border regions
Result:	23

Category Development B Digital Films from Borderlands

Content analysis (manifest) 1 (frequency):

- Films by Christian organisations (not found)
- Cross-border films (made by European)
- Multiple claims to the one Lahu film's authorship (impossible to verify)
- Only one Lisu film available (no comparison possible)

Result: selection from films by and about Akha and Karen only

Content analysis (manifest) 2 (space):

- Mountain People for Culture and Development (known prior to survey, *by* 2 films by Akha)
- The Centre for Ethnic Studies and Development (*about* and *by* 1 Karen belief and 1 Karen ritual, 1 Hmong ritual, 1 Hmong ancestor worship)
- The Mirror Art Group (*about* and *by* 1 large series Akha, 1 small series Karen)
- The Peace Way Foundation (known prior to survey, *by* 5 Karen only)
- Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre (*about* 1 Karen)
- Tribal Museum (*about* and *by* mixed ethnic housing, current situation, mixed Karen and Hmong healing, mixed Mien Akha healing, mixed city people, Hmong hemp, swinging Akha, royal ceremony = 1 'series' Akha, 2 'series' Hmong, and 3 all mix)

Category developed: Large scale producers in the North (Akha, Karen)

- BI, CESD, MAG, MPCDE, TRI, SAC

Category/Selection criteria 4 Films From Borderlands

Of the large scale producers' films, a further selection had to be made for in-depth film analysis of four films, this selection was achieved through

Manifest analysis 3 (frequency of topics): Akha films = ritual ceremonies most frequent; Karen films = no one topic prevails (ritual ceremony, elephants, weaving, human rights / advocacy)

A selection was made of 2 Akha and 2 Karen films, each a sample of self-representation and representation by others.

Film Analysis

Each of the four films was analysed according to the following criteria

- 1). Latent analysis: Formal structure of images without knowledge of translation of Thai narrative (camera, editing, sound), recurring motives, identifiable sequences,
- 2.) Second analysis: construction of narratives (comparison how narratives or images are 'in synch' or loosely scattered, if rhythm of editing follows narrative/script or vice versa, use of sounds – layers additionally to narrative, are patterns in relation to narrative distinguishable
- 3.) Third analysis: analysis according to data collection about structures of production house, check with interview data and analyses of interviewees, contact relevant subject in case of questions

Focus Group and Focused Interviews

- *Hermit Cult of Karen in Tak Province*

Chiang Mai University, Social Research Institute, CESD

Kwanchwan Buadaeng

Prasert Leepracha,

Khon Bua and Khon Nun

- *The Ethnic Group in Thailand – Learning Pack*

Bannok TV, Pi Pan, director

The Virtual Hilltribe Museum, Parisudha Sudhamongkhala, director and Atee Chermeu (ICT); Nadine, volunteer; Jakatae, videographer

Jalern, former village head man of Baan Pong Nam Lon, Tambon Doi Hang

Homi, Shan tourist guide

- *Mirsaw Lwa-eu'*

MPCD -SEAMP, Deuleu Dzoeq baw, coordinator

SEAMP-CD-ROI, Higashide Noriko, former director

AFECT, Aju Dzoeq baw, coordinator; Gangq sar, musician

The Baptist Development of Agriculture and Education Project for Akha (DAPA), Cha So, director;

- *Shoot on Sight*

Burma Issues Project Coordinator Research and Publications, Zetty Brake

Saw T. video project coordinator; Saw Htoo, Naw Paw Tha Lar Hoo

Filmmakers: Yannick Jooris, Jeanny Hallacy

Focused Interviews

- Filmmakers: Ing K., Sutthirat Supaparinya, Uruphong Raksasad

- National Film Archive Dome Sukvong, director

- Thai Film Foundation, Chalida Uabumrungjit, director

Digital Film Survey (Bangkok)

Prod. Year: 2003 – 2006

Format: digital, 1 film approx. 30 min. *or* a series' 30 min.

Producer: from the region

Genre: open (excludes: music VCDs, footage, TV broadcasts, shorts)

Result (total): Film industry 5 digital films, 52 independent (Appendix C.1.,2.)

Themes: ethnic communities in North Thailand, border regions

Result: 0, only one documentary about Isaan, 3 analogue format

Film Analysis industry films (166 total)

- Units: producer, distributor, cast (borderland people), genre, storyline (Appendix B2, 3; C2, 3)
- Method: synopses (several sources per film) and sample viewing five digital films manifest (structure)
- The Legend of King Naresuan, Blissfully Yours* (latent analysis)
- Result: nostalgia, spirituality, Buddhism, modernity's challenges, 'ghosts', rural-urban disparity in terms of traditional values, nostalgia and superstition even in horror movies

Distinct differences: images Isaan versus North

1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Study

This research into the films scape of Thailand and 'hyper tradition' reflected in digital films focuses on a selection of four films produced from 2003 - 2006. Other Films included in this study are digital feature films released by the industry and independent films. An overview of past and present imagery of people in the Northern borderlands is given by comparison of narratives of films produced by the Thai film industry from 2003 -2006 and the social drama film genre of the 1970's – 1980's.

The specificities of film selection have been outlined in the 'Methodology' section of this chapter, but a few additional comments are provided here. The structural analysis of the film industry neglects digital films made for television broadcasting, although a significant impetus of digitalisation stems from the industry engaging in digital-content business. As has been outlined, large scale movie production houses in Thailand are aware and changing course from material production of films to virtual control through attention to copyrights. The large sector of straight-to-DVD and home video production not made for public screening are categorically excluded here. For the purposes of this

research, the particular category 'digital films about and from the northern borderlands' was open to any genre, but did not find sufficient samples for a comparison of genres³ (besides ethnographic films). Instead, productions were selected according to their production environment, i.e. large scale producers. The choice of digital films of a certain topic, a spiritual practice for example, was not possible due to the limited scope of films. My research would have to include Hmong, Lahu and Lisu media producers in particular, but also Tai-Yong, Tai-Yai and other Tai peoples' films. The choice for two 'Karen' and two 'Akha' films is explained in the methodology section above. It also reflects the fact that representatives of these communities are and have been involved in cultural (media) productions for over a decade.

Accurate financial information was a sensitive topic, but since precise figures are not strictly required for my research purposes, I did not insist, merely tried to cross-check the information provided.

The limitations of this study are a result of its too ambitious scope. Thus time restraints did not allow for a third visit during which I planned to screen digital films. The befriended Karen and Akha audiences of various religious denominations in several villages would have constituted a valuable critic or confirmation of my own analyses.

Generally speaking, I cannot rule out inaccuracies or incompleteness especially concerning information about the digital distribution sector, as many of the web-sites are in Thai language. During my field work research, I was able to communicate with Akha, Shan and Karen informants in English or Chinese. For focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews with Pakeyaw Karen and Akha in the villages of Ban Yang Camnu, Ban Aboe and individuals in Doi Hang, sub-district of Amphoe Muang Chiang Rai, I worked with local interpreters, while the Haw Chinese in Ban Pong Nam Ron speak Chinese.

³ Only one Akha handi-craft shop in Chiang Rai sold a commercial Akha music VCD, while the only commercial film production entitled 'The Hilltribe Peoples of Thailand' is only available on VHS – to be released digitally at the end of 2007.

1.7 Significance

Interviews and discussions with individual members of ethnic minority communities during my fieldwork research more often than not turned into discussions of their socio-political and economic positions and challenges faced. In the context of unevenly distributed recognition and resources, representation ranks second. And yet it is clear that economic and symbolic capital are linked.

Academically speaking, the findings of this research contribute to the existing scholarship a different approach and focus. It places digital films from the borderland in the overall filmscape of Thailand instead of grounding their analysis in anthropological discourse or neglecting these films. In this way, power structures involved in their production is underscored, and the specific culture represented in the film is secondary. This shortcoming should be explicable in an environment in which transnational capital is investing in every sphere of ways of life. The study of culture should be inclusive of its economy and its management as a resource.

1.8 Detailed Outline

This digital film scape constitutes of research into commercial and independent film production, distribution and exhibition in Thailand,. It studies its structures to better understand the conditions of digital film productions especially their encouragement, limitation and regulation. This study is furthermore is furthermore inquiring into the potential agency of films as a medium reflecting hyper tradition.

In chapter II, commercial digital film production is studied particularly by example of the four corporations, which have produced digital films from (2003-2006). Research into processes of digital film production helps our understanding of emerging trends and digitalisation of the Thai film industry. To be able to do so, not only their production sector but the corporations' network of digital distribution and exhibition channels is explored. In contrast, Bangkok based independent digital production demonstrates their relationship. A comparative analysis of two recent films about the northern borderlands *The Legend of King Naresuan* (2007) and *Blissfully Yours* (not

released in Thailand) serves to demonstrate the distinctness of narratives in Thai films which is possible through globalisation of the commercial and independent field.

Chapter III reviews critical social commentary films produced in Thailand in the 1970's – 1980's to gain an overview of modes of representation in particular of the borderlands at a time when Hollywood films were restricted. Contemporary commercial films' representation of the northern borderlands serves to contextualise the usage of symbolism and predominant narratives. These serve as comparison for the analysis of *The Ethnic Group in Thailand – Learning Pack* and *Hermit Cult of Karen in Tak Province* in Chapter IV and *Shoot on Sight* and *Mirsaw Lwa-eu'* in Chapter V. The structures of their respective productions units - Northern Thai (national and local) research institutions and organisations – as well as their sources of funding and the dynamic processes which shaped the production of their digital films is analysed in both chapters. How the imagery differs from or is conform with or contesting predominant imagery from the commercial film industry is one of the major questions in addition to finding the mechanisms regulating socio-political dynamics shaping these digital films. Conclusions concerning the regulation of digital films in Thailand are presented in the final chapter VI.