CHAPTER VI

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

Of the two main objectives of this thesis, one was to study social, economic and political processes and structures of the film scape in Thailand in order to understand who and how digital film productions are encouraged, restricted and regulated. The specific research questions inquired into structural mechanisms regulating and the socio-political dynamics shaping this field of cultural production. These conditions for digital film productions are understood to be linked to modes of representation, the study of which was the second and main objective of this research. It focused on the potential agency of digital film as medium reflecting 'hyper tradition'.

1. Structure of the film scape

Generally, the findings of this research into social, economic and political processes and structures of the Thai film industry suggest that large scale corporations are in the position to monopolise smaller and independent producers. This enables them to restrict the quantity and genres of films produced, distributed and exhibited.

Examples of the commercial sector encouraging digital film productions and integrating independent film productions show, that creative input is in fact limited by the former. In commercial film productions there is merely an interest in the potential economic capital gained through using an 'indy' director. Neither the comedian short filmmaker Santi Taepanich's documentary about Isaan migrants for MK, nor Pimpaka Towira's One Night Husband for GMM worked out as expected. The commercial film sector industry encourages digital films only in so far as they adhere to their preconceived standards. The main finding of this research is an increasing globalisation of commercial and independent film productions. The particular structural mechanisms are explained below for the different producers of the Thai film scape (A), as well as the effects on representational modes (B).

A) Globalisation

The findings of this research demonstrate an increasing globalisation albeit in various degrees of dependency on transnational capital and staff. It differs depending if the producers are: a) Large scale conglomerates and b) restricted producers of medium and small scale in the field of commercial film productions. And in the field of c) independent producers studied, these are 1. independent production houses and agents of independent film in Bangkok, and 2. film productions from the northern borderlands.

a) Large Scale Producers

Increasing globalisation of the commercial film sector has led to a greater concentration of dominant powers in the last few years: In 2004, one large-scale multi-media conglomerate's quasi merging with the largest exhibitor and entertainment conglomerate for ticketing in the country is an example (GTH and BEC). The transformation of dominant large scale conglomerates' productions is reflected in their increasing investment in and revenues from productions competitive with Hollywood films (PRO, MK). Since the two main forces in the field are also socio-politically dominant powers, their productions are independent from transnational capital. It is the globalisation of distribution channels which effects their productions. Large scale distributors are on the one hand cooperating with predominantly US based distributors (Francis Coppola and Weinstein) but also French television (TF1, Paris). In order to increase sales revenues, their film productions replicate Hollywood style aesthetics. As these large scale conglomerates are competing in the global commercial film market at festivals (Cannes, Venice) where their films are promoted as Thai films, a specific identity needs to be created. These producers resort to history and tradition, which reflects their position in the social elite.

b) Restricted Producers

Globalisation's effect of increasing concentration of large scale commercial producers causes the overall number of production houses to decrease. Restricted producers are co-producing with each other and are merging especially with television broadcasters (Kantana Plc and ITV, BBTV and Matching Studio) or are returning to their corporate business sectors of television broadcasting not to rely entirely on production for cinema (RS Plc). Medium sized corporations are found to be more dependent on transnational capital than large scale producers (FS, Film Bangkok/Chalermthai, Cinemasia). Commercial production houses whose background is in advertisement and marketing have been relatively successful in their production and distribution in the climate of increasing domination and homogeneity of production. Their background creates a style considered appealing to a majority of people. Rather than taking financial risks, these corporations resort to re-producing storylines, which the dominant forces have successfully marketed. Consequently, no different formats or new storylines emerge.

c) Independent Producers

1. Independent production houses and agents of independent films

The dependency from transnational capital, i.e. globalisation, is highest in this field. The globalisation of the independent part of the Thai film scape is evident through their almost exclusive co-productions either with large-scale distributors working in the region or with international production houses specialising on films of distinct genres and styles: art-house films, suspense, documentary, etc. Their films are valued, appraised and awarded funding from transnational sponsors (Hubert Bals Fund, Jeonju International Film Festival, etc), production houses (Anna Sanders Films, Thoke Moebius, Illumination Film), and transnational distributors (mainly Europe and Asia

based art-house film distributors like Fortissimo Film). Their productions are selected for a diversity of international film festivals (Asian-American, Berlin, Hong Kong, Pusan, Rotterdam, Toronto Reel Asian etc.) and more specialised events such as documentary film festivals (Taiwan, Yamagata, etc.), short film festivals (Bangkok, Busan, Hong Kong, Norway, etc.) and specific festivals related to the subject of their films. This globalisation of independent production houses shapes styles, format, and narratives (see appendices C. 1 and 2), which clearly mark the majority of independent films from Bangkok based production houses as belonging to the genres experimental, documentary and drama, while few commercial films of these genres exist. Independent film productions are then likely to be artistic films because transnational capital is made available for such productions. The agents of independent film, who have a central role in adding to their value, are also working on a global level. They increasingly engage in global exchange activities and work as distributor of submissions to international film festivals and selections of new talent in Bangkok. Their networks reflect the intellectual elite, which they represent in Thailand. Thai independent (digital) films are encouraged and appreciated through these transnational channels, whose interests are very diverse, and whose aesthetic preferences reflect their being a socio-political minority.

2. Borderland productions

The Hermit Cult of the Karen in Tak

The Chiang Mai University based government research institute CESD's status as a public organisation guarantees its relative independence. The digital film production and media unit of Kwanchwan Buadaeng is free to decide over the topics of the films, and enjoys relative autonomy with the funding of this CESD project sponsored by the government. The production was realised with a team of Thai academic

researchers and a local editor. The production unit is thus fairly homogenous and based on ethnographic research which informed genres, style and the narrative of this film. The impact of transnational funding for two staff members managing the distribution helped to realise the objectives of this film.

Mirsaw Law-eu'

Of the independent digital film projects from the borderlands of this study, *Mirsaw Law-eu*' is the most autonomous, although structurally embedded in a complex network of different MPCD (Akha and other ethnic communities) associated organisations, which depended on transnational investment. The fact that the producer is part of the family who initiated SEAMPCD puts him in a powerful social position amongst the Akha, and the structure of the organisation thus did not influence his work. The filmmaker is an autodidact with extensive research experience. However, the film's music sound track, for which the filmmaker wrote the music, was produced by an independent artist from Austria. The fact that transnational capital from previous projects was available, the filmmaker's research experience and participation in media productions shaped the film's style and narrative.

The Ethnic Group in Thailand - Learning Pack

The Mirror Art Group's Virtual Hilltribe Museum Online video production is entirely dependent on transnational capital's investment. Although a Thai humanitarian organisation is the main sponsor of the Mirror Art Group, the Thai, Akha, Lahu and Lisu staff, equipment and other facilities for their video productions are externally funded. This does not influence their work, however, since no external staff regulates form, structure or content of the digital film productions. The processes of negotiation are a result of multi ethnic group discussions, which differs

from a film made by a single author and production unit. The teams educational background is mixed, since some of the editors are local villagers, while others have been mainly working as volunteers, and only the project coordinator trained in Bangkok.

Shoot on Sight

Images from this region are prohibited, and taken only under great risk. The combined force of the BI borderland video production team is embedded in a network of transnational advocacy workers, donor organisations, Human Rights organisations and cross-border Karen communities. The production's infrastructure and staff are funded with transnational capital. The latter teach technical, ethical and cultural standards for advocacy film productions. The film's distribution to relevant agencies and its sales also depends on three main humanitarian aid organisations. Their staff has university level education, while the videographers and editors were educated in Mae La refugee camp's Baptist school.

B) Agency of digital films and 'hyper tradition'

If the above structure of globalisation of the Thai film scape have an effect on representational practices in digital films – especially as agents of 'hyper tradition' – was the second objective of this research.

Since digital films are predominantly produced independently, and that the latter field of cultural production is marginalised in the structure of the film industry and society, it follows that the re-invention of tradition, re-inscription of history and legitimisation of power structures is likely to be found in the commercial sector rather than in the independent sector. That is unless strong contesting political power structures exist in the independent film sector. This survey into digital films did not find examples of the latter. Instead, it found a

digital and a celluloid film representing Thailand's northern borderlands and reinscribing history, but produced by large scale corporations of the film industry.

a. Large Scale Producers

The study of signifiers in commercial films about borderlands produced from 2003 – 2006 found that the imagery produced is preoccupied with two interrelated topics: historic nostalgia and social transformations through modernity and globalisation. Spiritual traditions signifying religious values originating in the past, but still existing as religious practices and are in the first two of the "successive phases of the image" defined by Baudrillard (1995: 81). Outstanding, because not related to the present and redefining history, are two historic epics, one of which is a digital film: *Khan Kluay* (2006). It repeats the standardised version of Thai borderland history, and the 'symbol of Siamese independence': King Naresuan symbolised by *Khan Kluay*, his elephant. This signifier is not bearing any relation to a reality, and is what Baudrillard called "its own pure simulacrum" (ibid.).

b. Restricted Producers

One of the productions released in this sector was a partially animated digital film (Garuda, 2004) by RS Plc., and the same production house released *The Memory* (2006), which stars three ethnic minority people in the North. The se productions are in line with the predominant storyline of a decaying modernity and symbols of tradition. The latter is not a digital film, but outstanding, since the ethnic community's symbolises tradition, a role they are usually denied.

c. Independent productions

1. Independent production houses

The only film by an independent studio addressing the northern borderlands and taking as its subject ethnic peoples is Dek-Toh (Pig-O'nine, 2005). Rather than representing ethnic identity, however, the collective experience in a Thai school is underscored. It is not contesting dominant imagery, but symbolises its identification with it. Storylines of other independent productions address a variety of topics amongst which are socially and politically critical themes, but this research found only one film about the northern borderlands from this sector, and Blissfully Yours (2003) is not a digital film. It does contest pre-established narratives and normative signifiers of borderland relations. Its conscious avoidance of any symbolism, stylistically emphasises the producers point of view. Among the submissions to the Short Film and Video Festival in Bangkok in recent years, only one short film tells of an Akha family, while other films from the northern borderlands were made by Tai people and address the history of Lanna or specific Tai communities and their historic linkages with cross-border peoples.

2. Borderland productions

The Hermit Cult of the Karen in Tak

The film differs from contemporary imagery of the region in that it brings into representation a community of people living in an area which is geographically, politically, culturally and economically marginalised, yet is claimed of great historical significance. *The Hermit*... does not de-construct or refer to this legacy. Instead, it narrates a different history of migration and change, which is symbolised by the

leader of a contemporary religious movement, the hermit. It thus contests commercial films' narratives and is based on anthropological research. Yet, by telling the story on the basis of a script, devices are used in a way fiction film productions are conceived.

Mirsaw Law-eu'

Showing the producers' village, *Mirsaw Law-eu*' is a documentary film and its style leaves the audience in the role of participant observers. It uses no visual symbols as signifiers but refers to Akha history of migration and issues of civil rights through sound. The lyrics of the songs refer to the reality of cross-border Akha/Hani relationships. In this way, predominant history is contested although markedly subtle in Akha language.

The Ethnic Group in Thailand - Learning Pack

Of this compromise collection only two films about the Akha were analysed in depth. Yet, the format seems to unify individual editors differing styles, which are merely expressed in opening credits, different length of films and selected topics. The multi-ethnic team's authorship is homogenised although the film series' narrative explicitly contests such practices. Although wanting to de-construct prejudices, the films refer to these categories, and thus re-establish them. The films refer to basic realities, but through well known symbols of Akha-ness retold according to a script, which serves as main structuring device.

Shoot on Sight

This documentation of escalation of human rights violations on the border between Thailand and Burma does not need symbolism to transmit its information. It is this reality which is not represented in commercial films, or censored. Legitimated by the people who explain their situation, the film additionally underscores pain, suffering and loss through editing. History or religious practices are not used to reproduce identities, as bare life contests other narratives.

2. Conclusions

The specific focus of this research into borderland films' and 'hyper tradition' is understood as commenting and reacting to predominant national and global narratives, and the coming into representation of the borderlands - a "cultural revolution" (Hall 2000). Signifiers and signified were categories of modes of representation.

Commercial films reveal a certain pattern: They either cast a famous individual (pop-star or actor) as in Sua Rong Hai and Citizen Dog or reproduce history (Garuda, Khan Kluay). Promittr's productions (2001, 2007), although not digital, markedly reflect the creation of a (national) heroine and a hero. 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) of their films. This is mirrored in King Naresuan, which is self-financed, so to speak, by the Royal Thai Government as it is funding its own film project. The attempt to re-inscribe national history and legitimate power structures as also expressed in the Khan Kluay as a phenomenon of 'hypertradition' thus arises in response and often in direct opposition, to radical transformations, here increasing globalisation, transnational investment in the film industry in Thailand, and transnational co-production and distribution.

The hypothesis of this research was, however, that digital films challenge predominant forms of representation and that certain films furthermore reflect 'hyper tradition' as a response to globalisation. Although the convergence of technological development of digital filmmaking devices and globalisation have facilitated digital documentary film production in the borderlands in recent years, the hypothesis was not confirmed. Forms and styles of digital films from the borderland vary according to social status and educational background of the individuals involved in the production and target audiences. Only one film specifically refers to the predominant imagery, and attempts to re-inscribe traditions. Although distinctly different, another production suggests that transnational intervention in a local digital film production is likely to change its narrative, style and meaning albeit for the better. The academic film directly contests the historic epics' narrative, which the producers' social status allows for. While the film with the least funding and only one person involved, shows greatest independence. If the gap between the field of commercial films and 'pure art' films can be turned into a dynamic field of film production in Thailand, not only depends on the capital invested, but also if these independent production houses have accumulated enough symbolic capital to attract audiences. Independent production houses in Bangkok are more comprehensively integrated into global value chains, while digital films from the borderlands only marginally come into representation. Perhaps digital technology offers opportunities to transform subjectivities and empower. This is only possible, if channels of distribution and exhibition for films are not systematically blocked.

Suggestions for future research

This study of social, economic and political practices and structures of the current Thai digital film scape draws a diverse and dynamic picture of the processes shaping this field of cultural production. And although it indicates that transnational investment make possible alternative film cultures and forms of representation, the long-term effects on empowerment and cultural change are unclear. To nurture diversity of the Thai film culture, it would be important to understand which aspects of education foster such developments, and which role digital technology has.

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3. BANGKOK INDY FILMMAKERS

BKK INDY FILMMAKERS ¹	SHORT(s) & DOCU FEATURES (d) FILM TITLE / YEAR OF PRODUCTION
Anocha Suwichakornpong	Graceland (2006), Like. Real. Love. (200x), The Sparrow
ANOCHA BOONYAWATANA	Down The River (2004)
Apichatpong Weerasethakul	Bullet (1993), 0116643225059 (1994), Like the Relentless Fury of the Pounding Waves (Mae Ya Nang, 1995) thirdworld (Goh Gayasit, 1998), Windows (1999), Malee and the Boy (1999) and features: Mysterious Object at Noon (2000), Blissfully Yours (2002), Iron Pussy (2003), Tropical Malady (2004), Ghost of Asia (Tsunami project 2005), Worldly Desires (d 2005, 28', footage of Pimpaka Towira making his film²); The Anthem (2006, 5', 35mm); Syndromes and a Century (2007)
Apiwat Saengpataseema	Mentioned by Thida BIOSCOPE
Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook	The Insane (2006)
Araya Suriharn	Mon Pud Dai (Pillow Talk, 2005)
ATTHASIT SOMCHOB	Our Film (d 2005, 22')
Banjong Pisanthanakool	Colorblind (2002, 13', video)
CHANATIP KUNASAYEAMPORN	As Am Are (2004), Jaw Modulation (2005), Sit And Spin (2005)
Chawit Waewsawangwong	Fireflies, Hate, Enough (2007, 3.45'), Continue (2005, 2' animated)
CHUKIAT WONGSUWAN & NARUMON JAISA-ARD	Kwam Riab Ngai Tee Pasompasaran (Painless Sex, Harmonious Simplicity), Happy End (A Lesbian Thai Short Film), Door (xxxx) DV feature film ³ ?
CHULAYARNNON SIRIPHOL	Sleeping Beauty (d 2006) 40', mini DV ⁴
Ing K	Green Menace: The Untold Story Of Golf (1993, High 8), Casino Cambodia (1995, High 8), My Teacher Eats Biscuit (1998, 16mm), Citizen Juling (d 2007, HD video)
Issara Maneewat	My First Boyfriend (2004, 90') Bioscope
Jakrawal Nilthamrong	Dripping (2004) (7', 2 Channel color video), Enemy (2005) (12', b/w video), Patterns of Transcendence (e 2006) (49', 16 mm to DV), A Stranger from the South, 2007, 20.20)
Jaturaphat Bejranan	Love? (2005)
Kamol Phaosavasdi	Memories Haunt (200x)
KANIPORN KOKSANTHIA	

¹Names in bold font from the website **Thai Takes**: Contemporary Thai Film Directors, names in CAPITALS officially listed as Thailndie's filmmakers, all indie films since 2004: [http://www.thaiindie.com/wizContent.asp?wizConID=202&txtmMenu_ID=62]

² commissioned in 2005 by the Jeonju International Film Festival, source:

http://www.rottentomatoes.com/vine/journal_view.php?journalid=100000335&entryid=226640&view=p ublic

³ Interview with Pimpaka Towira by Robert Willamson, January 27, 2004

[[]http://www.thaifilm.com/articleDetail_en.asp?id=41]
4 http://thaiindie2.exteen.com/20060811/ten-long-years-of-shorts-the-10th-thai-short-film-videofest

Kunwee Jundee	Extinct (2006, 19')
Lawan Jirasuradej	La Vida: The Strength Within (1997), Painted Earth
Manuss Worasing	Sleeping Beauty (d 2005, 40')
MAY-THUS	Take A Message (s 2006, 18', DV), Home Alone (2006,
CHAICHAYANON	15'), Hello, How Are You (2007, 13')
MONCHAI	Different Degree (d 2006, 10'), 12 Nov (2006), Sathorn
CHATBUMRUNGSUK	(2006), Secret (2006),
Nutthorn Kungwanklai	Rak Kueab Kliad (2005), 2 and a Half Stories (2007, 5')
NAWAPOL THAMRONGRATTANARIT	Shit Happens (2003, 52'), There, There (2005), See (2006, 10', DV), My Shrunk House (2004), Bangkok Tanks (2006, 6'),
Noppadol Suneta	3 Minutes (6', s 2006)
NISHA JURAIRATTANAPORN	The Table's Space (2006, 15', DV)
NITIPONG TINTAPTHAI	Dusk and Dawn (d 2005, 12'), Krasob* (Opportunities?, 2006, 12', DV), Life Show* (2006)
Nitivat Cholvanichsiri	Old Woman and a Tale (2002, 13', video)
NONTAWAT NUMBENCHAPOL	Lokparach (Weirdrosopher World, d 2006, 90') with Athit Phannikul), Bangkok Noise (2006, 7', DV), War of Fluorescent (d 2006, 7', DV); Rahei (Volatilize, 2007)
Olan Netrangsi	
Panata Ditsuvankul	Lost Foundation (d 2007)
Panu Aree	Destiny (xxx), Magic Water (xxxx), Parallel (xxx), Karn Lakrung Neung (2000), In Between (d 2006, 43')
Paradon Vesurai	Bedtime Story (2005, DV Cam)
Patana Chirawong	Looking Through The Glasses (xxxx), Pick Up (2002, 10', video), Sugarless (2005, feature)
PATHOMPON TESPRATEEP	Reverse Thai Music Video; Ngoo-Kai (Swallow Melody 2003), Love Assassin (e 2004, 5');
Pimpaka Towira	The Truth Be Told(2007, 110')
Pramote Sangsorn	Tsu (2005) part of the Tsunami Digital Short Films
Prinn Vadhanavira, R-na Rattanaphan	Kiss The Machine (2005, DVCam)
Poopaan Sornwismongkol	Afternoon (2005)
Punlop Horharin	Kiad (Silence Will Speak 2006), Everything Will Flow (2000, 182')
SAMART SUWANNARAT	Rough Night (2001), ?Before (2006, 13', DV)
Saniphong Sutthiphan	Kod (2005)
Santiphap Ingkong-ngam	The Kong Legend (d 2003), From Santiphapto Santhipap (d 2006)
Santhi Taepanich	Shorts and Suao Rong Hai (Crying Tigers, 2005)
Sarawan Weerawat	6 or 5 (2006, 56')
Sarunyoo Chiralak	assistant director feature films: Nang Nak, The Tears of Black Tiger, Jan Dara before working on his own short films The Lazy Man and Dog & God (2002, 9', video)
Sasithorn Ariyavicha	Drifter (1993, 8'), Birth Of The Seanema (2004, 70', MiniDV), Winter Remains (2004, 19'),
SATHIT SATTARASART	By The River (2006), Breeze (2006), Sleep Of Dream (2004), Untitled (2005), Space (e 2005, 7')
Sivadol Rathee	Coming Home (d 2004) Bioscope Magazine, Dek Chai Hamburger (2006, 29', DV, Hamburger Boy)
SOMPOT	Andaman 2005 Tsunami Film Project, Heartbreak

CHIDGASORNPONGSE	Pavillion* (2006, with Thunska Pansittivorakul)
Songyos Sukmakanan	worked in advertising and TV commercial production, first short film My Elephant (2002, 11', video)
SURACHAM	
MUNKONGWONGSIRI	
Surapong Pinijkhar	Shorts and script/director of The Siam Renaissance (2004)
Sutat Pavilairunt	Gluttonous Ghost (2006, 13', DV)
Sutthirat Supaparinya	Omkoi District (d 2004, 14'), It Seems Like You're the Right one (2006), The Taste of Noodles (d 2006, 21')
Suwan Huangsirisakul	Still Alive (d 2006, 90')
Thanon Sattarujawong	The Enlightenment (2004, 25')
Tossaporn Mongkol	Bus Stop (2004)
Thatthep Thongthab	Deep Inside (s 2005)
THAWATPONG TANGSAJAPOJ	True Nature (2002), Our Child (2003), Island (2001), Sil 5, Nuad (Massage 2006, 4', Animation),
Thawisak Srithongdee	Hero (2006)
Tavepong Pratoomwong	A Little Dad (2002, 13', video)
THUNSKA PANSITTIVORAKUL (only 2008 production 35 mm) Modern Films Production vodo	Private Life (s2000), Sigh (2001, 11'), <u>Voodoo Girls</u> (d 2002, 79'), Chemistry (2003, 10'), <u>Happy Berry</u> (d 2004, 76'), Unseen Bangkok (2004, 6'), Aftershock* (2005), Life Show (2005, 10'), Vous vous souviens de Moi? (2005, 14'), You Are Where I Belong To* (d 2006, 11', DV)
Teekhadet Vucharadhanin	Ordinary Romance (2005, DV, 90', b/w, feature), Malady Diary (2004, 90')
UNNOP SAGUANCHAT	When I Dance (2006-7), Hear The Wind Sing (2007), Live In Bangkok, About Eve (2005),
URUPHONG RAKSASAD	Stories From The North (d 2005, DV), The Funeral (d 2006, 20', DV)
Virada Chatikul	Boonkhun (2006, 22', DV)
Vithit Kamsrakaew	Over the Fishing (2005)
Warathap Pasayadaj	Shorts and video installations
Wasan Reawklang	The Tree (2002), 10', video
Wirat Yangyuen	One Man (2006), 19.19 (2007), Effects (2007, 12')
WITCHA SUYARA	A Girl Called Hero (2004), Clean Hands Boy (2005), A Discussion With Ghost (2004)
WICHAT SOMKAEW	Songkran (d 2006), One True Thing (2006-2007, 80') also as Truth?!
Wutthidanai Indhrakaset	Make Love Stories (2003, 16')
ZART TANCHAREAN	The same Old Story As I Thought It was, But It Wasn't (2005, Mini DV), The Everlasting Replication of Time (2007, 20')