Thai Cinema as National Cinema:

An Evaluative History

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary educational institution
Abstract

This dissertation considers Thai cinema as a national text. It portrays and analyses Thai film from the introduction of cinema to Thailand during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910) up until the present day (2004).

At its core, this thesis adopts the ideas of Higson, O’Regan and Dissanayake in considering the cultural negotiation of cinema and the construction of nation. In this study of Thai National Cinema two principal methods are employed—economic and text-based. In terms of political economy Thai National Cinema is explored through the historical development of the local film industry, the impact of imported cinema, taxation, censorship and government policy, and the interplay between vertically and horizontally integrated media businesses. Special attention is paid to the evolving and dynamic role of the ruling class in the local film industry. The dissertation’s text-based analyses concern the social and ideological contexts of these national productions in order to consider extant characteristics of Thai nationhood and how these are either reflected or problematised in Thai Cinema.

Of particular relevance is this dissertation’s emphasis on three resilient and potent signifiers of Thai identity—nation, religion, and monarchy—and their interrelationship and influence in the development of Thai National Cinema. These three ‘pillars’ of Thai society form the basis for organising an understanding of the development of Thai cinematic tradition, now over a century old. This thesis argues that any discussion of the historical, or current, development of Thai National Cinema must accommodate the pervasive role that these three principal forms of national identity play in formulating
Thai society, culture, and politics. The recent challenges of globalisation and postmodernism, as well as the rise of an educated middle-class, provide opportunity for reconceptualizing the relevance of these three pillars. In this way Thai National Cinema can be considered a useful barometer in both reflecting and promoting the construction of Thai identity and thought.
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Thai films have been condemned as being nang nam nao (polluted water films), suggesting that they are undeveloped and valueless. The term nang nam nao is an image of Thai film. As I researched Thai national cinema I found that there are a large number of Thai films containing a variety of genres, stories, and political agendas. The many interesting Thai films that I have seen make me feel enthusiastic about Thai cinema and eager to study it more and more. Thank you Thai filmmakers who created Thai films for Thai people, your films are not only a form of entertainment but also valuable national documents.

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Introduction: Considering Thai National Cinema

The French Lumière brothers projected the first moving film to audiences in Paris on 28 December 1895; a few months later the novelty of moving pictures had reached all over Europe as well as other locations such as Egypt, India, Japan, and Australia (Reeves 1999, 1). From this beginning, films have gone on to play a central role in 21st century life for much of the world’s population. For more than a century, films have been produced for many reasons. They have been designed to create historical records, to provide all kinds of entertainment (including catharsis), to support propaganda, political struggles, and sometimes, to explore artistic and aesthetic agendas. Moreover, films are a great entertainment business and a high-risk business that has the possibility of making huge profits or losses.

Thai people first experienced the cinema in Bangkok in June 1897, just over one year after the first moving picture showed in Paris (Uabumrungrugrit 1997, 101). After that, Thai people enjoyed moving pictures from foreign mobile film troupes such as: Biograph, the Concert Parisiene Troupe and the Pathé Frères from France; the British Cinematograph Troupe from Britain; and the American Phonograph Troupe from America. In 1905, the first movie theatre began business, being run by a firm called the Japanese Film Troupe. At this time, Thai film production was limited to the monarchy. This relationship will be explored extensively in chapter 2 ‘From Monarch’s Hobby to Big Business’. The production of films by Thai royalty began when Prince Sanphasat Suphakit, a younger brother of King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V 1868-1910), made the first in a series of short documentary-style films by recording the public activities of the King and major royal ceremonies (Aree 1997, 147-150).
In 1927 the Krung Thep Movie Company released the first Thai feature film *Chok Song Chan* (*Double Lucky*) (Sukwong 1990, 18). Therefore, the history of Thai film therefore is one of almost one hundred years, which is sufficiently long to enable the history of Thai cinema to be evaluated in relation to the Thai society with which it has interacted.

Throughout this thesis I argue Thai cinema has its own unique character that differs from Western or other Asian cinema. It is, as suggested above, closely related to Thai social experience and has an interpretative and aesthetic history, which distinctly marks it as a Thai cultural product. Thai film contains elements of both Asian and Western cinema, but always retains a character that marks the cinema as uniquely Thai.

In this chapter I shall briefly outline the Thai nation and Thai cinema as national text. By doing so I aim to position the cinema in its historical context as well as helping to identify factors that reflect national importance. I shall first discuss the nation as a concept in the section, “Snapshot of the Nation”, followed by a discussion of Thai national cinema’s historical development in the section, “Problematising Nation”.

1. Snapshot of the Nation

In 2000 the population of Thailand was 60,606,947 (Economic and Statistics Bureau, National Statistical Office, http://www.nso.go.th/pop2000/spc_e.htm). The majority of this population is of Thai ancestry. The most predominant ethnic minority in Thailand is Chinese, and other minority groups include Malays, Kampucheans, non-Thai hill
tribes, and some Vietnamese and Burmese (Srivichit 1995, 5). Physical characteristics such as skin, hair and height among Thais and minority groups are not patently different; therefore conflict between races in Thailand is not frequent.

Buddhism, the national religion, is practiced by 95 per cent of the population. The role and influence of religion in Thai national cinema will be explored in chapter 1. There is total religious freedom and major religions such as Islam and Christianity can be found in Thailand (Srivichit 1995, 5). However, given the predominance of Buddhism, other religions have minimal impact on Thai ways of life and beliefs. In contrast, the influence of Buddhism is obvious in Thailand and affects all aspects of life, and including people's expectations. Public holidays and festivals mark events of importance on the Buddhist calendar, and belief in fate and the law of karma are entrenched in the Thai psyche. Somboon Suksamran refers to ‘Buddhism [as] the most important symbol of, and primary base for, a feeling of national and cultural identification’ (Suksamran 1982, 12).

The official national language, spoken by almost 100 percent of the population, is Thai (Srivichit 1995, 5). However, dialects are used in many areas around Thailand, these are called the dialects of the North, Northeast and the South.

After Khana Rasadorn (the People’s Party) overthrew the system of absolute monarchy on June 24, 1932, Thailand began to be governed by a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary democracy. Thailand is divided into 76 provinces (jangwat), which are sub-divided into districts (ampour), sub-districts (ging ampour), groups of village (tambon), and villages (mu ban) (Srivichit 1995, 5 - 6).
**Nation, Religion, Monarchy**

Most national holidays and festivals serve to evoke a sense of devotion to the institutions of nation, religion and the monarchy (Srivichit 1995, 9). For example, December 10 is Constitution Day, which commemorates the date of the issue of the Thai constitution; the full moon day of July is Asanha Bucha Day and the day after is the Buddhist lent; October 23 is King Chulalongkorn’s (King Rama V 1868-1960) memorial day; December 5 is King Bhumibol’s (King Rama IX 1946 - ) birthday, and September 12 is Queen Sirikit’s birthday.

The three main institutions of nation, religion (Buddhism), and the monarchy are highly respected, powerful and influential to the way of life of Thai people. Likewise, most of the significant political movements in Thailand are related to these three institutions.

Discussing the political movement of October 14, 1973, filmmaker Chin Kluypan states that the students and demonstrators held the tri-color flags, and pictures of King Bhumibol (King Rama IX 1946- ) and Queen Sirikit while moving the mass of people from Thammasat university to a constitutional monument, and the fire brigade dared not use water canons against them (Bhuruthratanapan 2000, 81), as this might be seen as being disrespectful towards the institutions of the nation and the monarchy. One of the primary causes of the massacre on October 6, 1976 at Thammasat university is said to be a result of the *Daw Siam* and *Bangkok Post* Newspaper’s having published an image of a student’s play of a hanged man who looked like the Crown Prince, Prince Vajiralongkorn (Kaewsuk 2000, 100).
At the Olympic Games in 1996, Somrak Kamsing, the boxer, held the picture of King Bhumibol, waved the tri-color flag and ran around the boxing ring when he won the first gold medal for Thailand. This demonstrated that King Bhumibol and the tri-color flag, which are representative of nation, religion and the monarchy, were held in high regard by him; his manner was praised and admired by the Thai people.

From the above examples, it is evident that the three institutions are not only important and respected, but have also become sacred for Thai people. Therefore, the study of Thai cinema inevitably is related to an analysis of the influence of nation, religion (Buddhism) and the monarchy.

2. Problematising ‘Nation’

Tom O’Regan identifies ‘national cinema’ as “Films and film production industry of particular nations. National cinema involve relations between, on the other hand, their various social, political and cultural contexts” (O'Regan 1996, 1). Thus, an understanding of the concept of nation is vital as a basis for the discernment of national cinema. The scope of nation is defined by aspects such as land, culture, and ‘Otherness’.

Thailand covers an area of 513,115 sq. km. and is located in the Southeast Asian mainland. Thailand borders Burma and Laos to the north; Laos, Cambodia and the Gulf of Thailand to the east; Burma and the Indian Ocean to the west; and Malaysia to the
south (Srivichit 1995, 2). A clearly demarcated land and the territory of the Thai nation are represented by mapped boundaries for the purpose of government.

Anthony Giddens defines a ‘nation’ as a form of social relations, which is treated in the image of the nation’s boundary (Giddens, A., 1985 cited in James 1996, 166). Besides being defined by demarcated land boundaries, the nation can also be explored by aspects of culture. Paul James defines a nation as a particular kind of abstract community, which is in the dominant level of its integration and is presented by ways of living (James 1996, 2). This idea is used by Walker Connor, who points out that the bases of ‘nation’ is attitude and cultural identities, which contribute to a people’s sense of uniqueness (Walker Connor, 1994 cited in James 1996, 15). Consequently, each nation has its own identity, which is expressed by culture, ways of life and the sense of uniqueness seen, for example, in language, clothing, food, architecture, and art.

These aspects of uniqueness differentiate one nation from another and are points at which the members of a community integrate; as a result people feel comradeship, affinity, and have a sense of belonging within their community. In the case of a national diaspora, people move out from their home country but their feelings and identity are still tied to their homeland. Consequently, we can see the presence of ‘China Towns’, and the Indian, Vietnamese, and Thai communities in many countries around the world. As John Durham Peters mentions, ‘Diaspora suggests real or imagined relationships among scattered fellows, whose sense of community is sustained by forms of communication and contact such as kinship, pilgrimage, trade, travel, and shared culture–language, ritual, scripture, or print and electronic media’ (Peters 1999, 20).
Anderson explains ‘nation’ as an ‘imagined community’, because the members in the nation can not know each other but they imagine that they are in the same community and share interests and experiences in common. The media is central to this imagination, which is enhanced through many different media of communication.

Print-language is an instrument often used in the unique Thai script to forge the Thai nation’s consciousness; furthermore, print technology creates new forms of imagined communities via the newspaper and novel (Anderson 1991, 44, 46). Therefore, communities can communicate and understand each other by national print-languages as well as record the history, law, myth and the like of their community.

In Siam, the first English newspaper, the *Bangkok Recorder* was published in 1844 by Dr. Dan Beach Bradley, the American medical missionary and scholar. In the 1870s a Thai language periodical publication began being printed (Anderson 1985, 12). A variety of Thai narratives such as history, law, tales, prose and poetry started to be recorded, published and disseminated in this period. Likewise, an imagined community was created at the same time.

At the present time, a variety of media such as television, radio, and the Internet help the Thai to imagine their community, using the national language to disseminate the stories of this community. Cinema is also a significant media that affects the imagined community. Wimal Dissanayake suggests that cinema becomes a mode of communication when it creates an imagined community among both the literate and illiterate groups in the nation (Dissanayake 1994, xiv). Therefore, cinema is an
invention that can record and present the national identity as seen in the way national cinema presents people’s ways of life and ways of thinking. This is an issue that will be further explored in this chapter.

Often, the development of a national identity is driven by two purposes: to promote cohesion, and to identify outsiders. National identity can be used for positive purposes to promote a sense of shared identity and interests; but this sense of identity is based on a process that also marks those who do not share the national identity as different. Secondly, these differences can be used to create a negative focus on the ‘Otherness’ of those who are not part of the nation. This contrast between shared identity and otherness can act to promote social integration within the national community (Winichakul 1994, 3). Further, symbols of national identity such as the national flag, cenotaphs which represent national heroes, maps, and the national anthem are created for the purpose of encouraging social integration (James 1996, 3).

In Thailand, during the reign of King Vajiravudh (King Rama VI, 1910-1925) the national flag changed from the white elephant, an emblem of the absolute monarch, on a red background, to the tricolor flag (Winichakul 1994, 171). The tricolor flag is symbolic; the biggest strip of blue in the middle of the flag represents the monarchy, the two strips of white next to the blue strip represent religion, and the two strips of red on the upper and lower sides of the flag represent the nation. This symbolizes that the monarchical institution and Buddhism are the most important elements of the Thai nation. Therefore, the national tri-color flag reminds Thai people that nation, religion and the monarchy are important.
The three institutions of nation, religion and the monarchy are also emphasized by the Thai national anthem (plaeng chat). The music for the anthem was composed in 1932 by Professor Pha Jenduriyang, while the lyrics used today were written in 1939 by Colonel Luang Saranuprahandh (Srivichit 1995, 6). The national anthem is played at every ceremonial occasion of national importance and for the raising of the flag in the morning and the lowering of the flag in the evening in every town, village, and school in Thailand. Moreover, every day at 8 a.m. and 6 p.m., every channel of radio and television broadcast the national anthem. A literal translation of the anthem is as follows:

Thailand is the unity of Thai blood and body.
The whole country belongs to the Thai people,
maintaining thus far for the Thai.
All Thai intend to unite together.
Thais love peace, but do not fear to fight.
They will not let anyone threaten their independence.
They will sacrifice every drop of their blood to contribute to the nation;
will serve their country with pride and prestige—full of victory.

Chai Yo. (Srivichit 1995, 6–7)

The lyrics of the national anthem were written after the political movements by The People’s Party (Khana Rasadorn) to overthrow the monarchy in 1932. The national anthem does not refer to the monarchy or religion, but rather gives emphasis to people and nation. However, symbols of the monarchy and religion are present in the national flag and are presented every time the national anthem is played.
In contrast, the royal Thai anthem (*plaeng san searn pra baramee*) has many versions; the first version was created in the reign of King Loetlanaphalai (King Rama II, 1809-1824). The present version, the majestic melody, was written in 1888 by the Russian Composer Pyotr Schurosky, and the lyrics were created by prince Naritsara Nuwattiwong and rewritten by King Vajiravudh (King Rama VI, 1910-1925) (Charearnsuk 1987, 79). At present, the royal Thai anthem, acclaiming King Bhumibol (King Rama IX, 1946-), is played during state occasions and at public meetings such as sport events, shows, concerts, and at every movie theater before the showing of films. As a sign of respect, all Thai people are expected stand up when the royal Thai anthem is played. Thus, the significance of the monarchy is emphasized when the royal Thai anthem is played.

In Thailand, the political system changed from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional democracy, following the revolutionary movement on 24 June 1932 that was led by the People’s Party. Before the revolutionary movement, the Thai meaning of ‘nation’ (*chat*) was birth, origin or race (Mektrirat 1999, 90). After this event, the meaning of ‘nation’ was changed to be ‘people’. The new meaning of ‘nation’ related to the political change that aimed to lift Thai people towards political equality (Wongannawa 1999, 7).

Following the change in the form of government, the power of the monarch was reduced under the law, and people from the military and the elite established a government. In 1935 King Prajadhipok (King Rama VII 1925-1935) abdicated, demonstrating the loss of monarchial power (Samaphuti 1997, 34).
The identification of Thailand as a nation is also defined by reference to ‘Otherness’. For example, in Thailand, *farang* is a well-known adjective and noun that refers to Western people, without specification of nationality. *Khaek* refers to people and countries in the Malay Peninsula, the East Indies, South Asia and the Middle East, without any distinction. The aim of such discourse is the identification the un-Thainess by the naming of its opposite (Winichakul 1994, 5). This idea is reflected in categorising films in Thailand. Thai people call all films from the West *nang farang* (*nang*, means cinema or film; *farang*, means western), without specifying the nationality of the film.

The concept of ‘Otherness’ can also be applied to an enemy, which can create greater integration of a nation’s people. Nithi Eeosivong explains that nations exist because rulers can protect their nation from enemies. Therefore, the powerful elite create enemies to maintain the solidarity of the nation and the security of their positions (Feature Magazine Editorial Department 2000, 12, 13).

The idea of ‘enemy’ also changes according to social context. For example, in the period of Field Marshal Plake Phibulsongkram’s premiership (1937-1957), Thailand saw the Chinese as an enemy. Thai scholar Sulak Sivarak suggests that during this period Thai people were taught by Phibulsongkram’s government to hate the Chinese, because the leader intended to increase the solidarity of the Thai race, and create the belief that Thailand was a great nation (Siwalak 1999, 104).
However, the idea of ‘Otherness’ as something that is different from Thainess can convey the idea of ‘the enemy’. The enemy can be a foreign country, race, or political doctrine. Thus, the role of a foreigner or a communist in a Thai film is always presented as that of an enemy of the Thai nation. Dome Sukwong has said that in the period of the Cold War, Thai people were taught to hate and fear Communists. This idea was propagandized in government radio programs, posters, and also Thai films (Dome Sukwong, interview, 2000).

As I have discussed, concepts of ‘nation’ can include notions of land, culture, imagined community, national identity, and ‘Otherness’. Therefore the study of national cinemas is not only the study of cinema, but is a holistic study that incorporates the context of national history, politics, economics and culture (including foreign affairs). In addition, as these are related, they must be studied in conjunction with each other.

2.1 Thai Cinema and ‘Otherness’

Thomas Elsaesser explains two methods for identifying national cinema. First, there is comparing one cinema to another, so that ‘Otherness’ is established. Second, there is an introspective approach, when exploring national cinema in relation to the economics, cultural identity and national politics of that nation state (Elsaesser, 1989 cited in Higson 1989, 38, 42).

In the first approach, ‘Otherness’ is achieved by means of contrast with foreign cinema, especially Hollywood, as well as with regional cinemas such as Hong Kong cinema, Japanese cinema, and Indian cinema. The distinction of Thai national cinema from the
other national cinemas is expressed through language, content, style, and location, which create the special characteristic of the national cinema. For instance, Thai films use Thai language. The content and style most of Thai films are influenced by wankadee (Thai classical literature), nitan chakchak wongwong (Thai fairytales) and Thai dramas such as Lakorn and Likey (Pinyo Kongtong, interview, 9 February 2001).

Enemies or villains that are presented in Thai films often embody the idea of ‘Otherness’. For instance, in the period of the Cold War, the enemies in Thai films were communists or secrete agents from communist countries, as seen in Insea Thong (dir. Mitre Chaibancha, 1970), Sing Sam Oil (The Finicky Lion, dir. Dokdin Kanyaman, 1977). Many Thai historical films such as Khun Suek (The Lord of Warrior, dir. Sakka Jarujinda, 1976), Leard Supan (dir. Cheard Songsri, 1979), and Bangrajan (dir. Thanit Jinukun, 2000) present the legends of Thai warriors who were forced to fight the invading Burmese Empire army in the Ayutthaya period. In other Asian cinema, for example Indian cinema, the colonizing country (in that case Britain) is frequently presented as the enemy of the colonized country, in the production of propaganda. For example, the Indian film Lagaan: Once Upon a Time in India (dir. Ashutosh Gowariker, 2001) presented a group of poor Indian people in a small village using a game of cricket against their ruthless British rulers to win an exemption from an unfair tax; thus the British were represented as the enemy. Instead, because Thailand has maintained its independence from colonizer countries, Thai films use enemies from ancient times, such as the Burmese, for patriotic purposes.

Thomas Elsaesser’s second approach concentrates on the ways in which national identity and social context are expressed or not expressed within the nation’s films.
Most films’ content relates to the story of a people in a particular nation and covers areas such as their ways of life, history, politics, and current affairs. On the other hand, issues that cannot be presented in films, such as sex, religion, and politics, should also be considered. The things that cannot be shown because they are prohibited or considered to be sensitive issues are important in developing an understanding of nationhood.

In most Thai films, Buddhist monks and the King are the important protagonists; they play a role in the solving of problems, the making of final decisions and the provision of a spiritual center that provide strength in times of need. Thai cinema cannot lampoon or show contempt towards monks, especially Buddhist monks, or towards the King or the royal family, unlike films from other nations. For example, the British film Johnny English (dir. Peter Howitt, 2003) makes jokes about the Queen, and the Mexican film The Crime of Padre Amaro (dir. Carlos Carrera, 2003) presents the dark side of a young catholic priest in Mexico. Such subject matter would be unacceptable in Thai films and would alienate Thai audiences, as it would appear to be culturally insensitive.

An example of this that concerns Buddhism is provided by the Indo-German co-production, Light of Asia (dir. Franz Osten and Hiansu Rai, 1925), which was banned in Thailand because it presented the Buddha as a human being, which is proscribed in Buddhist countries such as Thailand (Chatrakul Na Ayudhya 1989, 60).
2.2 National Cinema at the Textual Level

At the textual level, each country has its own content, style, and indigenous aesthetic, and according to Michael T. Matin, national cinema’s defining characteristic is the culture and history of the nation (Matin 1997, 27). In the Thai context, performances such as *lakorn* (Thai traditional drama), *khon* (Thai tradition mask drama), and *likay* (Thai folk drama); literature such as *wankadee* (Thai classical literature), *nitan chakchak wongwong* (Thai fairytales); as well as national costumes, sport, mythology and history all influence the way we analyze and understand national texts.

Andrew Higson identifies four main ideas for consideration in the concept of national cinema:

First, there is defining national cinema in economic terms, establishing a conceptual correspondence between the terms ‘national cinema’ and ‘the domestic film industry’. Second, there is a text-based approach to national cinema that studies a common style, and the sort of projections of national characters. Third, there is a consumption-based approach to national cinema. This idea concerns film audiences, foreign films and an anxiety about cultural imperialism. Fourth, there is a criticism-led approach to national cinema. This method tends to reduce national cinema to the term of art cinema (Higson 1989, 36–37).

These four categories are seen to be appropriate and will be employed in this study. In economic terms, Thai national cinema can be related to the development of the Thai film business, from the beginning of Thai cinema in the period of absolute monarchy, until the period of constitutional monarchy, through to today (2004). In Thailand, the
ruling class—in the form of the monarchy and the government—has played a significant role, having the ability to support or obstruct the development of the local film industry, for example through the control tax and film censorship. Thai national cinema is also related to other media businesses such as videotapes, VCD, television, music, magazines, and newspapers. These businesses and the film industry can support each other to maximize profits, but they can also compete with each other, and adversely affect film production. Thai cinema also needs to be considered in conjunction with the local film business, government, and other local businesses. Paradoxically they paradoxically both support and compete with each other. The economic approach to understanding and defining national cinema is the basis of chapter 2, ‘From Monarch’s Hobby to Big Business’. In this chapter the way in which economic considerations have worked to shape Thai national cinema is explored.

A text-based approach to Thai cinema studies common styles and national characters. However, social context, politics and culture are influential factors in shaping the styles and content of Thai cinema. The ‘Thainess’ that is presented in cinema is not only traditional costume and historical stories, but it is also the story of ordinary people’s ways of life in contemporary times. For example, Thai films often contain stories about wives and mistresses, or missions of secret policemen in rural areas, supernatural powers, and ghosts. As Pam Cook and Mieke Bernick suggest, national cinema can be seen as the ‘cinema through which that country speaks’ (Cook and Bernink 1999, 76).

Needless to say a consumption-based approach to Thai cinema requires an understanding of Thai audiences. Audience characteristics such as taste, interests, age and education set the direction for the content and style of Thai cinema. The varieties
of genres in Thai cinema are created to satisfy the demand of different audiences. For example, melodramas such as *Mae Eye Saearn* (dir. Chutima Suwanrat, 1972) and *Ban Sai Thong* (dir. Ruth Ronapop, 1980) are for women in urban and country regions; action films such as *Tong* (dir. Chalong Pakdeewijit, 1974) and *Ai Phang Ro Pho Tor* (dir. Manu Wannayok, 1982) for men in country region; and social problem films such as *Teptida Rong Rame* (*Hotel Angel*, dir. Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, 1974) and *Ban* (*House*, dir. Chat Kobjitti and Eklack, 1987) are for students and educated persons.

To illustrate the way in which Thai action films are targeted to their audience, note that most of the heroes’ names in action films relate to real places (especially in the countryside), which reinforces ‘nation’ as a geographical and heroic location. Thus, two heroes in the film *Ka Ma Jak Moung Nakorn* (dir. Yotin Thevarath, 1978) are Nart Nakornloung, which means Mr. Nart from the city or Bangkok, and Kom Korat, which means Mr. Kom from Nakornratsrima (Korat) province. The film *Lui* (dir. Ruth Ronnapop, 1977) has a hero named *Lui Lomsak*, which means Mr. Lui from Lomsak, a big district in Petchaboon province. The audiences who live in the same places as the heroes would have a sense of belonging and identification with them. On the other hand, audiences not from the same places as the heroes imagine these as stories of other places of their nation. Thai national cinema thus represents the territory of the nation, through images of landscapes, stories of frontiers and the names of heroes.

Andrew Higson’s consumption-based approach has raised concerns about foreign films and anxieties about cultural imperialism (Higson 1989, 36). Thai cinema is not the only source of mainstream films in Thailand. Hollywood films and Hong Kong films have penetrated a large part of the Thai film market, and are shown at mainstream cinemas.
Indian films were also popular in Thailand before the increased film import tax in 1976. Therefore, Thai people are familiar with foreign films and Thai films must compete with them. The increase in the film import tax in 1976 from 2.20 baht to 30 baht per meter (Uabumrungjit 1997, 95) identified the other national cinemas as economic enemies of Thai national cinema, and the increase in tax was seen as one factor that protected Thailand from the cultural imperialism of other nations.

The consumption of national films is invariably related to foreign films. The local film businesses compete with foreign cinema by fashioning an obvious difference between local and foreign films through period, and historical films. Alternatively, some Thai films imitate the content and style of foreign films, such as Hollywood and Hong Kong films. Furthermore, these Thai films sometimes use foreign stars as co-stars in order to appeal to audiences, and make the film appear more like an international film. For example the film Tong (dir. Chalong Pakdeewijit, 1974) used an African American movie star, Greg Morris, as to be a co-star, and the film Jan Dara (dir. Nonzee Nimibuth, 2001) used a Hong Kong movie star, Christy Chung, to be a star.

Finally, a criticism-led approach to Thai cinema is based on considerations of art cinema. Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell invoke ‘art cinema’ when form and style are influenced by modernist trends. This means considering themes that display a fascination with technology, city life, and problems of personal identity. Such films remain a form of alternative entertainment. Art cinema, moreover, is used by the American film industry to describe imported films of interest principally to upper-middle-class, and college-educated audiences (Thomson and Bordwell 1994, 819, 822).
From Thompson and Bordwell’s description, some Thai films can be considered to be art cinema. Due to of the national film’s uniqueness in the international marketplace and its appreciation at film festivals, in 1986 *Pheesue Lae Dok Mai* (*Butterfly and Flower*, dir. Euthana Mukdasanit, 1986) received an award from an International Film Festival in Hawaii (Uabumrungjit 1997, 95). This film is the story of a Muslim community in Thailand’s Southern Region; in it problems such as education, social welfare and crime are portrayed throughout the lyrical narrative of a boy’s rite of passage. In 1999, *Nang Nak* (dir. Nonzee Nimibuth, 1999), a period film about ghost, and a love story won, the Best Film at the 44th Asia-Pacific film festival (Thai Film Foundation 2000).

In adopting the ideas of Andrew Higson to consider the concept of Thai national cinema, two principal methods shall be emphasised: the economic and the text-based approach. The consideration of Thai national cinema in economics terms will explore the development of the local film industry, the impact of imported films, film tax, and other media businesses. It will be address the role of the ruling class in the local film industry. Moreover, the audience will be explored in economics terms, thus consumption-based analysis will be employed.

The text-based approach will analyse the Thai social context, which includes politics, the economy, and cultural aspects, to explain the dominant characteristics of Thai national cinema. With this approach, the criticism-led analysis of Thai national cinema as ‘art cinema’ will be explored. The text-based approach will be used to identify and understand unique elements of Thai national cinema such as the social problems film
genre and post-modern Thai cinema; this will be placed in chapter 3, ‘The Politics of “Nation”’, and in the conclusion.

The definitions of national cinema by film scholars outlined above suggest that there are many factors which need to be taken into consideration when undertaking an analysis of this sort. Thus, the study of national cinema not only examines cinema in the nation but also the relations between the contexts of ‘nation’ and cinema, the local cinemas and the regional cinemas, as well as the impact of international films on the local film industry. Moreover, the diversity of nationality and culture can produce national cinema in a variety of styles and contents. Thus national cinemas have their own unique character, which is a cinematic approximation of national identity.

This thesis therefore examines Thai cinema through the concept of national cinema, using a perspective that locates Thai national cinema within an historical, political and cultural context. The three significant institutions—nation, religion, and the monarchy—that are the pillars of Thai national identity are seen to have actively shaped Thai national cinema.

**Hypothesis**

Nation, religion (Buddhism) and the monarchy are the main ideologies that link Thai people together and the core features within Thai national identity. These three institutions influence the ways of life and ways of thinking of Thai people. Nation, religion and the monarchy are also significant factors that have influenced the
development of Thai national cinema from the beginning of Thai film production until the present time (2004).

Therefore, this thesis focuses on the roles of these three resilient aspects of Thai national identity—nation, religion, and the monarchy—in the development of Thai national cinema. The influence of nation will be explored with regard to the roles of the ruling class, such as the government, and the monarchy, in the support and control of the development of the local film industry.

I hypothesise that the three pillars of Thai society—nation, religion and the monarchy—form the basis for understanding the development of Thai cinema. Hence, any discussion of the historical, as well as the current, development of Thai cinema needs to take into account the role that these pillars play in Thai society, culture, and social relationships. The influences of these three pillars often overlap and contradict one another; however, the influences of these three pillars as individual progenitors of Thai cinema need to be considered in tandem when discussing the history and future of Thai cinema.

The monarchy and the royal family have played a central role in the development of Thai national cinema as key investors during the period of absolute monarchy, and as patrons and censors during the period of constitutional monarchy. The influence of the monarchy is also explored in the recognition that they are a powerful factor in Thai politics, which has in turn influenced Thai national cinema. Moreover, the political contexts from the beginning of film production in the period of King Chulalongkorn
King Rama V, 1868-1910) until the present time (2004) are explored as factors that have shaped Thai national cinema.

The influence of religion is explored because Buddhism is the national religion of Thailand and is the root of Thai culture, ways of life and beliefs. Religion has also influenced indigenous arts such as drama, literature, painting, and song—all of which have shaped Thai cinema. Buddhism is a significant factor that has influenced the content and style of Thai cinema, and Buddhism and the monarchy are presented in Thai cinema as institutions deserving of respect.

Chapter Organisation

The thesis is organized into 3 chapters. Chapter One concentrates on Thai cinema in cultural terms. This chapter explores the concepts of Buddhism and Thai culture (including indigenous arts) as significant factors that affect Thai cinema. The chapter also examines the influence of the monarchy and the government on Thai cinema in cultural terms.

Chapter Two focuses on Thai cinema in economic terms, from its inception in 1897 to the late 1990s. The chapter explores the development of the Thai film industry, from a royal hobby to a multi-million baht industry. The roles of the ruling class in the form of the monarchy and the government, film taxes, film organizations, film business owners, and other businesses are explored as they related to the development of the Thai film industry.
Chapter Three studies Thai cinema in political terms by exploring the relationship of political movements, cultural movements and Thai cinema from the 1970s to the 1990s. The 1970s was a period of popular uprisings and the struggle between the left wing and right wing groups; the economy expanded rapidly in the 1980s; and in the 1990s Thailand became capitalist country. The political and cultural movements of each period influenced the development of the Thai film industry, affecting content, style, and Thai film genre—such as nang sathorn sungkhom (social problem films), nang bu (action films), and nang wai ruen (teen films). This chapter also discuss the films of the political underground, which fall under the ‘Third Cinema’ genre.
Chapter 1 Religion and Culture

Culture is music, literature, painting and sculpture, theatre and film.  
(Williams 1983, 90)

Raymond Williams’ definition insists that film is one part of culture; as such the relation between culture and film is a significant factor in the study of national cinema. Wimal Dissanayake points out that

Cinema is a very powerful cultural practice. The concept of national cinema can be analysed very broadly at two levels: the textual and the industry. At the textual level we can examine the uniqueness of a given cinema in terms of content, style, and indigenous aesthetics; while at the industrial level we can examine the relationship between cinema and industry in terms of production, distribution, and exhibition (Dissanayake 1994, xii, xiv).

The main idea of culture is that of a system of meaning or signification in all forms of human activities. Raymond Williams defines culture in an anthropological and sociological sense:

Culture as a distinct ‘whole way of life’, within which, now, a distinctive ‘signifying system’ is seen not only as essential but as essentially involved in all forms of social activity, and the more specialized if also more common sense of culture as ‘artistic and intellectual activities’, though these, because of the emphasis on a general signifying system, are now much more broadly defined, to include not only the traditional arts and forms of intellectual product but also all
the signifying practices from language through the arts and philosophy to journalism, fashion and advertising which now constitute this complex and necessarily extended field (Williams 1981, 13).

Wimal Dissanayake focuses on the fundamental systems of meaning in his conception of culture. He thus defines culture as ‘the system of meaning by which human beings externalize and communicate the significance that they attach to their own actions as well as those of others and to the environment that they inhabit. Hence the notion of systems of meaning is central to the concept of culture’ (Dissanayakee 1988, 2). In this thesis, I will argue that it is the conception of culture that sees it as influencing the Thai way of life and systems of meaning that is expressed in various forms of activities and arts, including film.

In this chapter I will examine the content, style, and aesthetics of Thai films beginning with an exploration of the interrelationship between culture and Buddhism, which is one of the roots of Thai culture. This is followed by an exploration of Thai arts such as literature, drama, and painting, which influence Thai films.

The development of Thai culture can be traced back more than seven hundred years to the Sukhothai period (1253-1350). As a predominantly Buddhist kingdom, Thailand has its own distinctive culture, reflected in its unique language, cuisine, art, beliefs and attitudes. Thailand popularly evokes striking images of graceful Buddhist temples and is called the kingdom of the yellow robe. Buddhism is the predominant religion in Thailand. In 2000 there were 57,325,600 Buddhists, representing 92.64% of the total population (see table 1).

\[\text{The yellow robe refers to the saffron robe of the Buddhist monk.}\]
Table 1 The number of devout persons in 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total of population</td>
<td>61,878,746</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total of devout pers around Thailand</td>
<td>60,617,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>57,324,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>2,815,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>438,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>2,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confucians</td>
<td>4,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>19,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No religion</td>
<td>6,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>4,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department of Religions Affairs, Ministry of Education (www.moe.go.th) and Department of Local Administration (www.nso.go.th)
Buddhism’s influence on the Thai way of life, beliefs, and arts is demonstrable. Thai arts such as painting, drama, song and literature are created to present the idea of Buddhism faithfully. Traditional paintings are in the form of religious art for display in Buddhist temples. Song and drama create and enact ceremonies and literature to the stories of Lord Buddha and reflecting the concept of Buddhism. The idea of Buddhism has been represented in Thai arts to the present day, and is present in Thai film, a form of art that remains true to this formula.

The following sections explore the concept of Buddhism, which is a root of Thai culture, and influences the indigenous arts including Thai film. Thai arts, which influence Thai films are explored under four groups: 1) Painting, 2) Dramatic Performances, 3) Music, and 4) Language and Literature. The conventional Thai film style, which has been influenced by popular performance, is explored in the topic, “Dramatic Performances”, while nang chewit (melodrama), which is influenced by the ideas of Buddhism and escapist novels, is explored in the topic “Language and Literature”.

1. The Concept of Buddhism

Buddhism has been in existence for more than 2,500 years (Dhammaloka Buddhist Centre Editor 2003, 1) and forms one of the three pillars of Thai society. Buddhism is divided into two branches: Theravāda or Hinayāna, and Mahāyāna. The Theravāda form of Buddhism is mostly practiced in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and India, while the Mahāyāna is maintained in China, Tibet, Japan, Korea, and
Vietnam (Pra Daksinangadikorn 1973, 1). Accordingly, this thesis will explore the concept of Theravāda Buddhism.

The main concept of Buddhism is suffering (dukhā). Suffering (dukhā) in the Buddhist sense is related to conditions of life that are unpleasant, depressing, or dissatisfying in the body and the mind. These sufferings are most acute in birth, old age, sickness and death. Buddhism is the way leading to the ‘extinction’ of suffering (Podhisita 1998, 33). The way to extinction of sufferings is the Four Noble Truths\(^2\), which involve a manner of perceiving and understanding life.

The idea of suffering (dukhā) is present in Thai films, especially in nang chewit (melodrama), which means “films of life”. These films present the protagonists suffering and at the end of the story they cease suffering by becoming a Buddhist monk or nun, which is the way to eliminate desire. For examples in Kanghan Sawart (dir. Naeramit, 1974) the heroine becomes a Buddhist nun after suffering in her love life and through sickness. In Rarn Dok Ngew (dir. Pantep Attakraiwanwatee, 1987), the hero becomes a Buddhist monk after he hurts the heroine and marries his daughter. By becoming a Buddhist monk, he receives redemption and ceases suffering.

Right speech, right action and right livelihood constitute training in morality. For a practicing lay Buddhist this morality consists of maintaining the five Buddhist precepts, which are to avoid:

\(^2\) The Four Noble Truths are 1) All existence is suffering; 2) Suffering is caused by inherent insatiable desire; 3) In order to cease suffering one must eliminate desires; 4) To eliminate desire one must follow the middle way or the Noble Eightfold Path (Rutledge 1992, 10).
1. Deliberately causing the death of any living being;
2. Intentionally taking for one’s own the property of another;
3. Sexual misconduct, in particular adultery;
4. Lying and breaking promises;
5. Drinking alcohol and taking stupefying drugs, which lead to a weakening of mindfulness and moral judgment (Dhammaloka Buddhist Center Editor 2003, 7).

In Thailand, film censorship is influenced by these Buddhist precepts. The first precept, deliberately causing the death of any living being, and the third precept, sexual misconduct, in particular adultery, are reflected in the criteria for the film censorship. Criteria 2 ‘Films presenting any unusual crime which might lead the audience to commit the crime’, while criteria 3 restricts ‘Films presenting the life of any well-known criminal’; criteria 6 is against pornography (Chatrakul Na Ayudhya 1989, 60). (Details of film censorship will be explored in chapter 2 and chapter 3.) These criteria show that Buddhism influences the contents of Thai films. Though some Thai films have presented the stories of well-known criminals, for example Nai Zee-aui Zae-eng (dir. Banjong Kosanyawat, 1991) and Seo Jone Pan Seo (dir. Tanit Jitnukun, 1998), and unusual crimes—Mue Pean (dir. Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, 1983), and Ang Yee (dir. Nopporn Watin, 2000)—the resolution is always that the criminal is punished for his crime. Meanwhile, pornography is banned because of the influence of the third precept, prescribing the avoidance of sexual misconduct and adultery.

Every Thai Buddhist knows the five precepts and these are the basic norms for being a Buddhist. The five precepts are disseminated through preaching, school texts, radio and
television programs, and film. Some Thai films present individual aspects of the five precepts—especially the topic of sexual misconduct, which is always present in melodrama (nang chewit, literally ‘films of life’). However, there is a Thai film that specifically presents all five precepts. This film, *Knon Jai Bord* (*Blind Heart People* dir. Cheard Songsri, 1971), presented the problems and punishments that occur when people do not practice the five precepts and the happiness that results when they do.

Thais believe that a ‘good’ king must support religion, especially Buddhism. Siddhi Butr-Indr suggests that ‘one of the highest virtues and obligations of the Thai king is the support of religion, as the Buddhists suggest that he is trained in practicing generosity and religious tolerance. It is traditionally stated in the Constitution of Thailand that the King is a Buddhist and obligated to the patronage of all religions in his kingdom’ (Butr-Indr 1980, 15). Thus the two institutions: Buddhism and the monarchy are interlinked with each other, an idea which is also presented in Thai films, especially historical dramas. The relationship between Buddhism and the monarchy will be explored later in section two of this chapter.

In addition to the four noble truths, the middle way, and the five precepts, the law of karma is an influential idea for Thai Buddhists. Karma means action. The law of karma refers to the results of actions (Dhammaloka Buddhist Center Editor 2003, 5) and is founded upon the idea of impermanence. The Buddha taught that existence is suffering (*dukkha*), and is temporal (*anicca*), and that the ‘self’ is impermanent (*anatta*). The law of karma is continual: bad acts have bad consequences and increase suffering, good acts have good consequences and decrease suffering (Rutledge 1992, 11). The consequence of karma may appear immediately or long after an action. Thus a person may receive
the consequence instantly, or have to wait until the next life to gather the result of his/her karma. This is a common belief among Buddhists: that their state in the present time may be the outcome of their karma in previous lives (Podhisita 1998, 36). Karma has led to the idea that through reincarnation humans are morally compensated for the manner in which they lived in previous lives or in a previous life (Rutledge 1992, 11). Thai people, therefore, have a popular proverb that ‘Tham Dee Dai Dee, Tham Chou Dai Chou’, which means ‘do the good thing receive the good thing, and do the bad thing receive the bad thing’.

The idea of karma is also presented in many Thai films. The hero or heroine who is a good person, even though they suffer poverty or misunderstanding or persecution or envy in the beginning of the story, will receive their just rewards—such as becoming rich, or getting to marry their lover at the end of the story—after they prove themselves to be a good person or they do the good thing. This is a popular plot for Thai melodrama; for example, in the popular story, Ban Sai Tong (dir. Ruth Ronapob, 1980), the heroine is cheated of her property by her relatives. She fights for her rights and proves that she is a good person, and at the end of the movie she regains her property, becomes rich and marries her lover.

The rewards include happiness in heaven, after the protagonist’s suffering which they were alive. In the film Rak Aey (dir. Naeramitre, 1968), the young couple have sex outside of marriage. Thereafter the hero is not faithful to the heroine; the heroine commits suicide in a manner that falsely implicates the hero. The hero, having been wrongly convicted and incarcerated, repents for his sin, namely his lack of fidelity, and dies in jail. The repentance of the hero is redemption for the couple’s sin, thus they
become a husband and wife in heaven. The idea of karma is extant in films of the 1990s, for example Kampaeng (The Wall, dir. Thakonkeit Weerawan, 1999), where the hero, a landlord’s son, supports the heroine, a slum dweller, to fight for land; yet, they still cannot marry and die in a fire. However, after death they become a happy couple in heaven. Therefore, the idea of karma is acceptable in Thai film to present day.

Not only melodrama but also other genres present the idea of karma. In action films such as Man (dir. Peak Meekhunsuth, 1975) and Chum Pae (dir. Charan Promrangsri, 1976) the villains are always punished at the end of the story, or in teen films such as Bunchu 2 Nong Mai (dir. Bandit Ritakon, 1989) the good student who studies hard passes his/her university entrance examination. These stories support the idea of karma and elicit audience satisfaction.

In social problem films, the main characters are always poor and subjected to injustices from evil and powerful capitalists, politicians or government officials; however, at the end of the story the problems are not solved, the main characters are still subject to injustices, and the villains (such as policemen and government officials) are not punished. These stories can point to injustice in society; however, this genre is not popular among audiences because the stories do not support the law of karma.

Many ideas supporting the laws of karma are presented in Thai films—especially the idea of obtaining ordination as a monk, which is the main subject of many films. For example, the hero of the film Kha Nam Nom (dir. Chao Meekhunsuth, 1981) is ordained as a Buddhist monk in order to make his mother happy. This is because Thai people believe that a mother can hold her son’s saffron monk’s robe in order to go to heaven.
after death. It is a guarantee of happiness in the next life. In the film 2499 Antapan Klong Moung (Daeng Bailey and Gangster dir. Nonzee Nimibuth, 1997), the hero’s mother is a prostitute and she is desperate to have her son who is a gangster become ordained. However, at the end of the story the hero cannot go into the monkhood because his foes come to disrupt the ordination ceremony. The film shows the happiness of the mother during the ordination ceremony and her despair when the ceremony is disrupted.

The happiness of the mother is reflective of a Buddhist rule, which prohibits women from entering monastic life, a vocation that is the greatest merit for a Buddhist. Her son, however, can act as a representative for his mother to achieve merit. This ordination ceremony scene shows the happiness not only of the family to an aspirant for the Buddhist monkhood, but also that of his friends and the other members of the community. For example, the beginning of the film 2499 Antapan Klong Moung (Daeng Bailey and Gangster dir. Nonzee Nimibuth, 1997) shows the happiness of the mother and the hero’s friends at an ordination ceremony.

Traditionally, in many Thai films the scenes about Buddhism—such as showing respect (wai) to a monk or an image of the Buddha, providing food for monks during the morning (sai bart), festivals or holy occasions at Buddhist temples, visiting Buddhist temples, or making rituals within the home—are full of happiness and are peaceful. For example, the film Phuying Khon Nan Cheo Bunrod (Her Name is Bunrod dir. Wijit Khnavuth, 1985) has a short and quite scene of the heroine paying respect (wai) to the Buddhist monks after she has been raped by her employer. The monks are a symbol of merit, which creates peace in the heroine’s mind.
Thai films that present the theme of Buddhism can be categorized into 4 groups:

1. Films that present the concepts of Buddhism such as the five precepts and the Nitan Chādok (Jataka stories). The Nitan Chādok are stories of Buddha’s previous lives and present Buddhist ethics, philosophy, moral ideologies, and accounts of how the Buddha was reborn and obtained enlightenment. The most widely known is Wessandon Chādok (Wessandon Jataka) (Podhisita 1998, 58). The Wessandon Chādok is contained in the films, Chu Chok, Kanha, Chalee (dir. Rat Seatpakdee, 1973) and Pra Wessandon (dir. Bensil, 1980). The story of Buddha’s followers is also produced in film such as Angulimala (dir. Sutape Tunnirut, 2003), which presents the story of an evil man who becomes a disciple of Buddha. In sum, films in this group present the Buddha’s teachings directly.

2. Films that present a Buddhist monk (pra) as a main character such as the films Pai Daeng (The Red Bamboo, dir. Permphon Chori-arun, 1979), Loung Ta (The Abbot, dir. Permpon Choei-arun, 1980), and Loung Ta 2 (The Abbot 2, dir. Permpon Choei-arun, 1982). The films in this group admire the role of Buddhist monks as a refuges, leaders, and teachers of the people. In these films, where the Buddhist monk as not the main character, the role of the Buddhist monk is given special status in the story. For example, the Buddhist monks in ghost films can suppress ghosts and bring peacefullness back to the village.

3. Films that present the supernatural power of amulets, especially the iconic image of the Buddha; for example, the film Sao Ha (dir. Winict Pakdeevichit, 1976). Most of the
films in this group are nang bu (action films) and do not present the teachings of the Lord Buddha; however, the films raise the idea that Buddha (by using a representation of the Buddha in the form of a small image) protects good against evil.

4. Films that present the Buddhist monk (pra), the Buddhist temple (wat), and the Buddha image (pra bhutarupe) as symbols of peacefulness and happiness that contribute to making the Thai community complete. These symbols may only be presented for a short time in the film. The films in this group do not present the idea of Buddhism, but they use symbolism to show that their stories are set in a Buddhist community. For example, the action film Jangwat 77 Los Angeles (Province 77 Los Angeles, dir. Smith Tinsawat, 2003) presents the story of the Thai community in Los Angeles. Although this community is not located in Thailand, the short appearance of the Buddhist temple (wat) and the Buddha image (pra bhutarupe) emphasizes the characteristic of this Thai community as a Buddhist community.

2. Buddhism and the Monarchy

In Thailand, the institutions of Buddhism and the monarchy have supported each other through an especially strong relationship since historical times. The monarchy has used religion, especially Buddhism, to be a norm for governing the people, and they have also used Buddhism to represent themselves as good and moral authorities. Likewise, the Buddhist institution has prospered by supporting the monarchy in Thailand.

Theravāda Buddhism has been predominant throughout the history of Thailand (Podhisita 1998, 32), spanning the following historical periods: Sukhothai (1253-1350),
Ayutthya (1350-1767), Thonburi (1767-1782), and the Ratnakosin period (1782-present). Before accepting Buddhism, Thais practiced a kind of animism, believing in the spirits of trees, mountains, and other natural phenomena (Kabilsingh 1991, 1). Animism has co-existed with Buddhism in Thai society to the present day. Belief in both Buddhism and animism has been presented through Thai culture and popular Buddhism³.

In the Sukhothai period (1235-1350), Buddhism was promoted and protected by the kings of Sukhothai; for example, King Ram Khamhaeng taught Dhamma (Buddha’s teaching) to the people, and King Lithai used Buddhism to support the status quo by writing Traiphum Phra Ruang (The Three Worlds of Phra Ruang). Traditionally, the story of Traiphum Phra Ruang is painted as a mural painting behind the main Buddha statue in a Buddhist temple. The image of heaven and angels refers to the place reserved for people who do good karma or make merit, and the image of hell and demons refer to the place reserved for people who do bad karma. The law of karma has been emphasized by this story and the paintings. As a result, belief in karma has been very influential to Thai people and Thai culture until the present time.

Brahmanism has been a part of Thai society since the Sukhothai period (1253-1350); however, in the Ayutthya period (1350-1767) a synthesis of Brahmanism and Buddhism prevailed in Thailand. In this period the concept of the Thodsapit Raja Dharm (Ten Kingly Virtues) came to Thailand under the influence of Khmer Brahmanism, in which the king was seen as a devaraja (divine incarnation) (Kabilsingh 1991, 6). These ideas

³ Popular Buddhism refers to a Buddhism that combines with other religions and belief systems such as animism and Brahmanism (Suksamran 1993, 19).
sustained the king as being a sacred being and supported the right of the king to govern the people.

In the period of Thonburi (1776-1782), King Tak encouraged many young men to study Buddhism and go into the monkhood. Because the Tripitaka (The Buddhist scriptures) was lost in the destruction of Ayutthaya, King Tak recopied the Tripitaka by requesting the existing copies from the north and the south (Kabilsingh 1991, 8).

In the Ratanakosin period (1782 - present), Buddhism was patronized by the monarchy. The custom of royal ordination that began in the Sukhothai period (1253-1350) has been in place since the reign of Phrabatsomdet Phra Phuttayotfachulalok (King Rama I, 1782-1809). Even in the modern times, King Bhumibol (King Rama IX, 1946 - ) and the Crown Prince Vajiralongkorn joined the Buddhist monkhood for short periods. King Bhumibol has helped strengthen the connection between the Sangha and the monarchy (Kabilsingh 1991, 10).

The notion of the unity of nation, religion, and the monarchy was developed by King Vajiravudh (King Rama VI, 1910-1925). The king implored Thais to unite to defend their nation, their religion and the monarchy from Western colonial powers. He thus tied national independence to the survival of Buddhism. In order to strengthen people’s adherence to Buddhism, the king introduced Buddhist daily prayers in schools, police stations, army garrisons, government departments, and even in prisons and mental hospitals (Suksamran 1993, 53). Buddhist daily prayers have continued until the

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4 Sangha, literally the community or assembly, is the order of Buddhist monks that became the noble one; it was founded by the Buddha (Pra Daksinganadhikorn 1973, 1).
present day; moreover, the activity includes singing the national anthem and hoisting the tricolour flag, strengthening the link between the three institutions.

The long history of the strong relationship between the monarchy and Buddhism provides Thais with a feeling of security. The king and Buddhist monks in Thai films are always presented as good characters; they are presented as dignified, scrupulous, and calm and promote, good actions such as solving problems and protecting the nation. Thus, the appearance of the king or a Buddhist monk in films has a positive meaning and is a symbol of goodness, justice, peace and safety. Most Thai films contain references to the king and Buddhist monks, and the two roles always support each other. For example, in historical films such as Suriyothai (dir. Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, 2001) and Maharaj Dam (dir. Toranong Srisear, 1981), which depict the war between the Thai and the Burmese in the Ayutthaya period, the king plays the role of a leader and a warrior while the Buddhist monk supports the king by blessing him, and making amulets for his soldiers.

The disaster film Taloompuk (dir. Piti Jaturapath, 2002) tells the story of a gigantic storm, which hits a small village in the south of Thailand; in it Buddhist statues and those of the monarchy are presented as sacred. The film shows many villagers dying because of the gigantic storm; however, some people who hold on to a picture of King Bhumibol (King Rama IX- present) and an image of Buddha survive.

To date there are no Thai films (including underground films) that present a conflict between the king and Buddhist monks or present them in negative role. Thais are inculcated into a system of thought that requires respect of these two institutions.
Moreover, the film censorship legislation is a significant factor that protects the two institutions.

3. Thai Film and Indigenous Arts

Thai art is one of the charms of Thailand. Thai ways of life and ways of thinking are presented through their arts. The three important centres of Thai culture and arts are the wang (palace), the ban (home), and the wat (temple). They are interrelated and influence the development of Thai arts (Rutnin 1996, xiii). The characteristics of Thai art are therefore divided into three groups: 1) Court arts created by groups of the wang, such as the monarchy and the aristocracy; 2) Folk arts created by groups of the ban, such as people who are representative of the nation; and 3) Religious arts created by the faithful who believe in Buddhism through the cooperation of the three groups: wang, ban, and wat. These religious arts are usually presented in a wat. The three groups have created a variety of distinctive indigenous arts that take a number of forms, including painting, sculpture, dance, drama, music and literature. Art has featured as a part of Thai culture since ancient times. The three pillars of, nation, religion, and the monarchy are therefore significant factors that create Thai art through the triangle of ban (home), wat (temple), and wang (palace).

Thai film was created by mixing western technology and western art with indigenous arts. Indigenous art has influenced the content and style of Thai film and makes Thai film different from that of other national cinemas. This section will explore the way that Thai arts have influenced the content and style of Thai film. Four categories of Thai art will be examined: Painting, Drama performance, Music, and Literature.
3.1 Thai Painting

Thai painting is inspired by a belief in Buddhism. Most Thai paintings appear as murals found on ceilings, doors and windows of temples. These paintings are intended to beautify the temple in which the faithful worship. The spiritual message contained in the paintings, combined with their tranquil beauty, focus the attention of the viewer on Buddhism. The paintings present the stories of Lord Buddha (Leesuwan 1981, 6) for example, *Nitan Chādok* (Jataka Stories), which depicts his stories in various incarnations, and *Traiphum Phra Ruang* (The Three Worlds of Phra Ruang) (Maneechot 1986, 54), which emphasizes the effects of good and bad karma.

Other Thai paintings focus on different aspects of Thai life. For example, royal ceremonies including the royal ordination painted at Wat Rachapradit Satithmaha Semaram, Bangkok and Loy Kratong Royal ceremonies painted at Wat Senasanaram Ayutthaya province (Maneechot 1986, 172-73); activities of the monarch including the painting of the King Mongkut (King Rama IV 1851-1868) who went to see an eclipse at Tambon Wakor in Prajoop Kirikarn province—which was painted at Wat Benjamabopith Dusit Wanaram, Bangkok (Maneechot 1986, 169); and depiction of legends such as the legend of the Emerald Buddha Image, painted at Wat Hongratanaram Rachaworawihan, Bangkok (Maneechot 1986, 178). Scenes from classical literature have also been painted. For example, *Ramakian* (*Ramayana*) was painted at Wat Buththaisawan, Ayutthaya province, Wat Ratburana Pitsanulok province, and Wat Prasriratana Sasadaram Bangkok (Maneechot 1986, 179).
Therefore mural paintings are not only used for the glorification of Buddhism and the depiction of classical literature, but also to portray the idea of the monarchical institution. The Buddhist temple is not only the centre of spiritual knowledge, but also the centre of political power.

In Thai painting, gold leaves are used to brighten the parts which are to be emphasized—important characters such as Lord Buddha, the king, the queen, an angel or the palace (Leesuwan 1981, 6). The main theme of Thai paintings is Buddhism, thus the landscape in these paintings presents heaven, earth, and hell. These landscapes are representative of Buddhist morals. Koanantakool, Paritta Chalermpow explains that the landscape in Thai painting is divided into two regions: the centre and the outside. The centre is the palace, which is filled by members of the royal group, adorned with gold and representing civilization. The outside depicts forests filled with trees and villagers; its color is green and dark, and it represents a lack of civilization (Koanantakool 1993, 91-96). Landscape in Thai painting therefore emphasizes the monarchy as a representation of civilization.

The characters in mural painting are similar to those in Thai traditional dramas such as Khon (traditional masked dance-drama) and Lakorn (dramatic performance); these divide the characters into two groups. The first group comprises the important characters, which are called toa natalak (the dramatic characters) such as Lord Buddha, the king, the queen, and angels for example Pra Bodhisattve is always drawn as a king or toa natalak although he was born as a villager or a bushman. These characters are dressed in clothing similar to the traditional lakorn costume, which is called rad kreung.

Pra Bodhisattve is the one who seek salvation for others, a term especially applied to the Buddha before enlightenment.
An example of this is wearing the *chada* (Thai theatrical crown). The *toa natalak* are drawn in the centre of the painting, tending to be portrayed in a pose, similar to those contained in Thai traditional dance. The characters are androgynous, both male and female, using the good characteristics of males and females and mixing them together. They do not display emotion (Koanantakool 1993, 98, 100).

The other group depicted in Thai paintings consist of ordinary Thai citizens, servants and foreigners. This group is called *toa kak* (chaff characters). The group *toa kak* is drawn far from the centre of mural paintings. These characters are not ornamented with gold leaves, and do not assume stylised poses; they express feelings, dress like ordinary people, and are obviously male and female (Koanantakool 1993, 98, 100). Moreover, some of the bodies of *toa kak* are portrayed with dark skin. In cultural terms, dark skin symbolizes the poor, who work hard outdoors; they are also often bald, thin, and fat. *Toa kak* are portrayed in a variety of ways in which *toa natalak* are not—either making love, giving birth, or naked. Therefore, the characteristics of *toa kak* make the mural paintings lively, and add interest to them as well as contrasting with the central figures.

The characteristics of *toa natalak* are also expressed in the main characters of other forms of Thai art including Thai films. In Thai films, especially those filmed in the ‘conventional style’ (which will be explored later, after the section, ‘popular performance’), the hero and heroine are always shown as being handsome or beautiful, well dressed and having a good character—even though they are often poor and living in a slum or village. For example, in the film *Rak Aey* (dir. Naeramit, 1968), the heroine is a poor girl living in slum, yet she has a nice costume like that of the middle class and were beautiful make up, while her parents wear the clothes of poor people.
Androgynous characters are also present in conventional style films. For example, the heroes in the films *Ban Sai Thong* (dir. unknown, 1956, and dir. Ruth Ronapob, 1980) and *Prisana* (dir. Ruth Ronapob, 1982) are part of the royal family and their characters are very polite and soft. In the same way, the character of the heroine is a tomboy in many films, such as in *Ngen Ngen Ngen* (*Money Money Money*, dir. Prince Anson Mongkhonkarn, 1965, dir. Euthana Mukdasanit, 1983) and *Koung Nang* (dir. Dokdin Kanyaman, 1976)

The characteristics of *toa kak* are also present in other forms of Thai art and performance. In Thai films, male characters are often depicted as fat, thin or black, while women are depicted as fat, old or in sexual tones; both often resemble *toa kak* figures from Thai paintings. These characters are supporting characters, playing the hero and heroine’s friends, as well as villains, servants, and sex stars. While the main characters as hero and heroine have good appearances and do not express their extreme feelings, these supporting characters express their feelings and act in a manner that the main characters do not—for example, eating sloppily, faltering, making love, and being naked. Dokdin Kanyaman⁶ said that ‘sex’ scenes including making love, nakedness, and even kissing were prohibited for the heroines in his films. However, he casts sex

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⁶ Dokdin Kanyaman is a remarkable film director, who began making films during the 16mm. film period. He started his career by being a traditional funeral comedian, a comedian in stage drama and mobile drama, and a scriptwriter. Dokdin’s films have a specific style that is influenced by Thai traditional performance. For example, the hero is good, smart, rich and of high-ranking position; the heroine is good, beautiful, and clever and keeps her virginity for the hero. Dokdin’s film casts consist of a hero, a heroine, assistant heroes, assistant heroines, villains, sex stars, and comic relief characters. Each film depicts a complex blend of emotions including love, action, melancholy, eroticism and humour, as seen in films such as *Nok Noi* (1964), *Ai Tui* (1971), and *Ai Pad New* (1978).
stars for acting in sex scenes (Dokdin Kanyaman, Interview 23 April 2001). Sex stars in Dokdin’s films act as do toa kak in mural paintings.

The Toa kak in Thai films are called toa talok (comedians), daow yoa (sex stars), and toa kong (villains), which were each very popular in Thai film from the 16 mm film period (World War Two to the 1970s). Around the 1980s the group of toa talok, daow yoa, and toa kong disappeared from Thai films, when Thai film became more realistic, but they have reappeared in lakorn TV (Thai soap opera), which has adopted many of the characteristics of conventional style Thai films.

3.2. Dramatic Performances

Natasin (dance) and lakorn (dance-drama) have been significant parts of Thai culture since ancient times. These performances are close to the ceremonies, traditions, and customs of Buddhist, Brahmanist Hindu and animistic popular cults (Rutnin 1996, 1). James R. Brandon categorizes Thai dance and dramatic performance into four groups: 1) village animist-influenced performance; 2) court form; 3) modern popular genres; and 4) modern spoken drama (Brandon 1993, 234). This section will explore the form of performances that influence the content and style of Thai film. These are court performance and popular performance. The village animist-influenced performance is performed among villagers for worship, while the modern spoken drama is popular among a small group of educated people in city; therefore, these two groupings do not influence popular media such as film.
3.2.1 The Monarchy and Court Performance

The royal court has been the centre of Thai classical dance and dance-drama since the Sukhothai period (1253-1350). Dance and dance-drama performances are set in the royal style, which is the national model for public troupes and theatres. The court performances consist of nang yai (large leather shadow puppet shows), khon (masked dance-dramas), and lakorn nai (dance-drama of the inside), that is, inside the royal court (Rutnin 1996, 4, 11).

Nang is the name of shadow puppet shows in Thailand, which literally translates as “cow hide-figures”. The name of this shadow play is derived from the material from which the figures are made. As this shadow play style became popular, the nang became known as nang yai (nang means hide or hide-figures, yai means big) (Kromamun Bidyalabh Bridhyakorn 1958, 6). The nang yai is a large leather shadow puppet manipulated by dancing puppeteers who move in front of and behind a wide white screen 30 feet long and 10 feet high. Two narrators recite an episode of Ramakien (Ramayana) to the accompaniment of a piphat orchestra (Brandon 1993, 236). Nang has been performed since the late Sukhothai period (Rutnin 1996, 7).

The influence of nang or nang yai on Thai cinema is through the use of the word nang to name Thai cinema ‘nang Thai’, in which cinema is replaced by ‘nang’. Cinemas in essence the projection of film onto a wide white screen like nang yai (Kromamun Bidyalabh Bridhyakorn 1958, 7). Moreover, the word pak is the narrative accompanying nang yai, used in Thai films for the narration of silent films, called nang pak. (Details of nang pak are explored in chapter 2.) Other Southeast Asian countries
such as Cambodia also link words from traditional performance with the new media. Cambodia retroactively dubbed the Cambodia shadow puppet (Shaek) as ‘Kon Khmer’ or ‘Khmer cinema’ (Muan and Daravuth 2001, 94).

Khon is a masked dance-drama developed from the martial arts in the Sukhothai period (1253-1350). The story performed is Ramakian (Ramayana). Every episode of Ramakian presents the theme of good defeating evil. Normally, the climatic scenes are battle scenes between Phra Ram (Rama), the virtuous king of Ayodhya, and Thosakan (Ravana), the immoral demon king of Longka. It is customary that the performance ends with the triumph of Phra Ram (Rama), a feature that has influenced plot and structure in Thai films, which end with the triumph of the hero or the heroine. The khon performers are accompanied by chanting narration accompanied by a piphath band (Brandon 1993, 237). These two performances, Khon and Nang or Nang Yai, perform scenes of the Ramakian (Ramayana), are told (pak) by narrators, and use a piphath band. The khon and nang yai are still played as classical performances.

The technical terms from nang and khon were used in Thai film as nang (film) and pak (narration). Moreover, the story of Ramakian (Ramayana) that most Thais know from nang yai and lakorn has influenced the content of Thai performances including Thai film. The concept of the triumph of good over evil is popular in Thai film. The main characters of Ramakian (Ramayana), such as Pra Ram, Pra Lak, Totsakan, Sida, and Hanuman, have influenced the characters of other indigenous performances such as lakorn (drama) as well as those of Thai films—particularly conventional style film, including the nang chewit (melodrama) and nang bu (action films), which were produced in the 1960s and 1970s.
Pra Ram, a representative of goodness, has a significant role in suppressing Thotsakan, a representative of evil. He does this with support from his younger, brother Pra Lak, his monkey warlord, Hanuman, and monkey troops. This character of Pra Ram is often present in the heroic character of many Thai films of the conventional style produced in the 1960s and 1970s. In these films the hero is presented as being from a good and rich family, symbolizing that he comes from the monarchy group. He has to fight with the villain and with the support of his friends he protects the heroine from the villain. Examples of films adopting this theme include Fon Nearn (dir. Chalong Pakdeewijit, 1970) and Ai Tui (dir. Dokdin Kanyaman, 1971).

In Ramakian, Sida, Pra Ram's beautiful wife, is kidnapped by the demon king, Thotsakan and lives at his palace for 14 years. However Thotsakan cannot force Sida to be his wife because her body becomes as hot as a fire and unbearable to touch when he tries to touch her. This characteristic of Sida, namely that nobody can force or rape her, is also present in the heroine in Thai films of the conventional style and in Thai melodrama. For example, the heroine in the melodrama Daw Pra Suk (dir. Somkoun Krajangsart, 1966, and dir. Somyoth Pumsuwan, 1994) works as a prostitute; however, she manages to keep her virginity until she meets the hero. This story shows the idea of virginity as most important for Thai woman. However, in the 1970s this idea began to decline as in many films the heroine was either raped—for example Thone (dir. Somboonsuk Niyomsiri, 1970) and La (dir. Pairat Kasiwat, 1977)—or she has many men in her life, such as in Tong Prakaysaed (dir. Ruth Ronnapob, 1974, dir. Chana Kraprayoon, 1988).
Besides nang and khon, other dramatic performances such as lakorn rum, lakorn nai, and lakorn nok also present stories related to Buddhism, animism, and the promotion of the concepts of the ideal king and loyalty to the monarchy. Most of the stories of dramatic performances are based on the Ramakian and Nitan Chādok.

The characteristic of protagonists’ heroes and heroines who are monarchs and supporting players who are soldiers or ordinary people is also presented in dramatic performances. This characteristic influences Thai soap opera and Thai film of the conventional style. Thus, in Thai film the main characters are always a high-ranking group such as the royal family or a noble family. The supporting characters are ordinary people such as servants, warriors, and friends and have a role for serving the main characters.

*Lakorn Phut* (spoken drama) was developed for political reasons. Its development was influenced by both the monarchy and Western culture. The actors of *lakorn phut* speak the dialogue in verse or in prose. *Lakorn phut* developed fully in the reign of King Vajiravudh (King Rama VI 1910-1925) (Rutnin 1996, 276). The king wrote more than 100 plays supporting nationalism and exalting the monarchy (Brandon 1993, 241), including comedies. Rutnin (1996) explains that *lakorn phut* usually have a happy ending, with all problems solved, conflicts reconciled, wrong-doers reformed and forgiven, and virtuous heroes and heroines rewarded with love, marriage and fortune. This follows with the tradition of Thai drama’ (Rutnin 1996, 157-8).

After the death of King Vajiravudh (King Rama VI 1910-1925), his personal debts caused the new kings, King Prajadhipok (King Rama VII 1925-1935) to close the Krom
Mahorasop (Courtly Entertainment Department) and stop court drama activities, as a means of addressing financial problems (Rutnin 1996, 167). Many of the government officials who had performance skills went to work in the film business (Tanawangnoi 2001, 39). In the reign of King Prajadhipok (King Rama VII 1925-1935) the court performances declined in popularity and were replaced by Thai film. This marked the end of dance and dramatic performance sponsored by the royal court.

After the revolution in 1932, lakorn phut re-emerged during the period of Field Marshal Plake Phibulsongkram’s (1938-1944) promotion of nationalism. The most famous propaganda lakorn phut, written by Luang Wichit Watakarn, was Leard Supam, performed in 1936 to celebrate the new constitution. The success of this lakorn phut inspired filmmakers to make the movie Leard Supam (dir. Mom Rachawong Anusak Hatsadin and ‘Supaluk’, 1936). The film director used the lakorn rong performers from the Pramoithai troupe to play in this film (Tanawangnoi 2001, 145). The story of Leard Supan was produced again in 1979 by Cherd Songsri. These films also used the songs from the original play.

Lakorn rong (singing drama) was a form of dance-drama operetta that emerged in the reign of King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V 1868-1910). The stories were usually translated and adapted from foreign tales, contemporary incidents and situations, or romantic adventures. In the 1940s and 1950s lakorn rong was very popular; however, by the 1960s this performance style had declined in popularity. Like Hollywood musical comedies, lakorn rong used western bands and courting songs, which have continued to be a main feature of recent popular Thai songs known as plaeng Thai sakon (Thai popular song) (Rutnin 1996, 183-4, 276).
Lakorn phut and lakorn rong emerged around the same time as Thai film. However, these modernized performances were more popular in the early days of the film business, and performances declined in popularity as the film business became mature and more popular. The content and style of these performances influenced the content and style of Thai film. For example, often the stories were located in a contemporary situation with a focus on romantic adventure. In contrast, the classical stories such as Ramakian (Ramayana) or nitan chādok have not been widely employed in the production of Thai films—although characteristics of the major characters from these stories are commonly used.

When sound film was introduced in the 1930s, filmmakers used plaeng Thai sakon (Thai popular songs), such as courting songs, and plaeng pluk jai (patriotic songs) in their films for narration, entertainment, and propaganda. The characters in the films of this period sang songs to express their feelings or to tell the story in essentially the same way as that of the performers in lakorn phut and lakorn rong. This performance style was very popular in Thai film from the 1930s, but declined in popularity in the 1980s when ‘realistic’ film became popular. Over time, the songs that were presented in Thai films were changed to follow the trends of popular songs and music, for example, in the 1960s and 1970s plaeng luk toung (Thai country song) were popular and were used in such as Mon Rak Luk Toung (dir. Rangsri Thasanapayak, 1970) and Fon Near (dir. Chalong Pakdeewijit, 1970), in which the characters sang songs to narrate a story or a courting.
Plaeng pluk jai (patriotic songs), which were popular in the 1970s, were also used in films such as Nak Pain Din (dir. Sombat Maetanee, 1977) to raise patriotism. (Details of this type of song will be explored in the section, ‘Thai Music and Film’, and in chapter 3.)

3.2.2 Popular Performances

Thai popular performances have been created by the group called ban (home) or ‘ordinary’ people. These folk performances are called kan sadaeng pern ban (folk performances). As Thailand is predominantly an agricultural country, most of these folk performances relate to agricultural themes such as, ten kum ram kiew (sickle dance) to entertain farmers while they work. Moreover, there are also folk performances held to entertain people after they finish the day’s work, for example hun krabok (bamboo-rod puppet) and nang talung (shadow puppet). These are also played at festivals. However, this section will explore Likay, the folk dance-drama performance that has influenced the content and style of Thai film.

Likay is a popular commercial dance-drama performance that developed from classical dances such as lakorn nok and lakorn chatri\(^7\) (Rutnin 1996, 105). Likay emerged around 1880 (Wirunrak and Janekrabounhad 1995, 73). Likay is a popular performance style, and the story and characteristics of likay have been influential in the content and style of Thai films especially conventional style.

\(^7\) Lakorn chatri is a dance developed from nora chatri (the earliest form of dance and drama in Thailand that chiefly tells nitan chādok, especially Manora) and lakorn nok (Rutnin 1996, 105).
In likay, the role of the monarchy is emphasized through the main characters, such as the hero, the heroine, and their parents. The principle characteristics of these roles include the representation of goodness, their being good-looking, good-minded, and brave. Religion is presented through the law of karma. Thus, the villains are punished by the hero at the end of the story, and the main characters, who are the representative of good people receive a reward at the end of the story—for example, getting married or triumphing in the war.

Likay plays have a variety of storylines based on classical literature, such as Khun Chang Khun Pan, Phra Apai Manee; or, the likay troupe may create new stories. Most of the plots relate to the royal family or problems about love affairs that are solved by miracles (Wirunrak and Janekrabounhad 1995, 232, 238). These themes are also present and popular in conventional style Thai films. Although there are a variety of stories, the characteristics of the central protagonists do not change. Likay characters are always divided into four main groups: 1) phra (the male), 2) nang (the female), 3) kong (the villain), and 4) talok or joke (the comedian) (Wirunrak and Janekrabounhad 1995, 176). These groups are also presented in conventional style Thai films.

1. Phra is a male role and can be divided into three roles: 1) phra-ek is the hero who presents as the romantic one, facing many adventures, fighting and having many love affairs; he does not succumb to actions considered lowly; 2) Phra rong is the minor lead and supports the phra-ek; 3) Pho is the father of hero or heroine. Pho characters evolve into phra-ek pho characters that play the hero in the first part of the play before the story moves to the second generation, when his son becomes a phra-ek (hero). The other character is a simple pho, who is a father of the minor part in a play (Ghulam-Sarwar 1994, 143).

2. Nang is a female group and can be divided into three roles: 1) Nang–ek is the heroine who plays a highly refined, romantic role, and usually expresses strong emotions; 2) Nang rong is the heroine-supporting role and is the parallel of phra rong; and 3) Mae is the mother of the hero or heroine, and this role is divided into two characters nang-ek mae parallel to that of the phra-ek pho, and simple mae parallel to the simple pho (Ghulam-Sarwar 1994, 143).
Likay characters can be grouped into two major groups, as with the characters in mural painting and other dramatic performance. These groups are: tao natalak and toa kak.

The characters of conventional style Thai film are obviously similar to the likay characters and incorporate the four main characters groups of phra, nang, kong, and talok. Although the stories in Thai films are different, these characters remain as central elements as they do in other indigenous art.

We can see how the traditions of Thai performance have been adapted to the medium of film, which became popular in the form known as the ‘conventional style’.

**The Conventional Thai Film Style**

In the post World War Two period many Thai films were released on 16 mm film. (Details of 16 mm film period will be explored in chapter 2.) Thai films exhibited not only urban feature, but expanded to rural areas. Thai films have developed and formed a style to satisfy Thai people who are familiar with and enjoy indigenous arts and performances. Thai filmmakers who worked in indigenous performance before becoming filmmakers, such as Dokdin Kanyaman, integrated the style of indigenous

3. Kong is a group of villains and divided into two roles: 1 kong is the male villain who is rude, and cruel, 2 Itcha is the female villain who is characterised as being jealous, wicked and clownish (Ghulam-Sarwar 1994, 143).

4. Talok or Joke is the comic character and divided into three roles: 1 Talok tam phra is the hero’s confidant who full of wisdom, can solve problems, and is loyal and devoted to the hero, 2 Talok tam nang is the heroine’s confidant (Wirunrak and Janekrabounhad 1995), 177), 3 Talok tam kong is the villain’s clown, and is normally played as a villain’s confidant or sidekick (Ghulam-Sarwar 1994, 144).
arts, including performance, song, and literature, to make a popular style of Thai film. In this thesis this film style will be called the conventional Thai film style.

Dome Sukwong explained the conventional style as ‘krob touk rot’, which means “full of flavor”. He declares that Thai film is like Thai food, which blends a lot of flavor in one meal. The conventional Thai film style blends emotions and emotional states such as melancholy, excitement, arousal, and romance (Dome Sukwong, Interview 7 February 2001). Gerard Fouquet has suggested that:

During the 16 mm era there used to be one sequence devoted to one savour and each scene or sequence was very long, while now they tend to be mixed together in one sequence or group of sequences and in the greater importance given to the story as a whole (Fouquet 1989-1990, 9).

The term krob touk rot depicts the characteristic of conventional Thai film style and its influences from indigenous performance, especially likay.

Momrajawong Kurit Pramoj (cited in Hamilton 1994, 152) states that ‘Thai movies have basically used the structure of Thai traditional drama’. Pinyo Kongthong explains that when Thai people see traditional performances such as lakorn and likey they already know the stories, as the traditional performances use the stories from wankadee Thai (traditional literature) or nitan chakchak wongwong (Thai fairytales). Audiences therefore watch the performance to gain pleasure from acting, songs, dances, and costume (Pinyo Kongthong, Interview 9 February 2001). Thai films always used the plots from popular novels, magazines and radio dramas. (Wankadee Thai, nitan chakchak wongwong) and the novel will be explored in detail in the section on Thai
Thus, films audience expect to enjoy seeing their favourite stars acting, and also to enjoy film’s music, costumes, and scenery.

The groups and roles of characters in the conventional Thai film are similar to those in the likay. The characters of the conventional Thai film style include the main characters phra-ek (hero) and nang-ek (heroine), the supporting characters, phra rong (hero-supporting) and nang rong (heroine-supporting), and the villains toa kong (the male villain) and toa itcha (the female villain), or daw youa (the sex star) and toa talok (the comedian). By playing their appointed roles, these characters fill the one film great feeling. The audience can feel the romance played by the phra-ek (hero) and the nang-ek (heroine), the melancholy played by the phra-ek (hero) or the nang-ek (heroine), the excitement played by the phra-ek (hero) and the kong (villain), the arousal played by the itcha (female villain) or the daw youa (sex star), and the comedy played by the tao talok (comedian).

Lakorn and likay influence the roles of characters in the conventional Thai film style. Main characters in traditional performances such as the heroine, no matter how poor, always wear a lot of jewellery (Momrajawong Kukrit Pramoj cited in Hamilton 1994, 152). Sukwong explained that conventional style Thai film is not realistic; the main characters—especially the hero and heroine—have to look good all the time (Dome Sukwong, Interview 7 February 2001). These features of the main characters relate to the toa natalak in Thai mural paintings, who are beautifully dressed and live in the palace or the forest. Most Thai people feel familiar with indigenous art forms and are therefore satisfied with the conventional style Thai film.
The conventional style, which blends many emotions in one film, is used in many genres such as melodrama, action, and comedy. The emotions are emphasized in genres such as *nang chewit* (melodrama). In the same way, *nang bu* (action films) emphasizes the feeling of excitement, while *nang talok* (comedy) emphasizes the comical.

In the conventional Thai film style, monarchy and Buddhist monks are presented as respected institutions, for example in *Ai Tui* (dir. Dokdin Kanyaman, 1971). This film opens with the scene of a Buddhist monk tolling the bell at a temple in the early morning; it is followed by a scene in which villagers celebrate New Year by singing songs and paying respect to the village headman. Significantly, King Bhumibol’s picture hangs in the room in which they’re celebrating. The appearance of Buddhist monks and the monarch’s picture at the beginning of the film are symbols of the peacefulness of the Thai community. The Thai Nation is presented through the landscape, the way of life, the language and in the main characters such as the hero. The representatives of the state are the police and the military, and they have a role in protecting the nation from enemies such as communists, gangsters, or Burmese troops.

Dokdin Kanyaman, an outstanding filmmaker of conventional style Thai film has said that he adapted the style of Thai traditional performances such as *likay* and *lakorn* to his film. His films successful control the audiences’ feelings. For example, the first scene made audiences cry, while in the second scene he changes the feeling to humour. Audiences thus laughed while tears still ran down their faces. Kanyaman confirmed that his films depict a blend of emotions and suggested that Thai people love this style (Dokdin Kanyaman interview 23 April 2001). Dokdin’s films—for example *Nok Noi* (1964), *Thai Noi* (1969), *Thai Yai* (1970), and *Ai Tui* (1971)—were popular in the 1960s.
and 1970s. In the 1980s Dokdin’s films, which used the conventional style, declined in popularity, and his last film was Sao Dad Deaw (1983).

In the 1970s a new form of realistic style Thai film developed and the new genre nang sathorn sungkhom (social problem film) was released. For the educated groups, the image of the conventional style Thai film became old fashioned and the style was labelled in negative terms as nang nam nao, which means “polluted water film” or nam nao (polluted water). This criticism was confirmed by Australian researcher Annete Hamilton, who notes:

> When I began research in Thailand, apart from those sharing the perspectives of the more radical intelligentsia, and consequently praising certain of the social realist films, virtually everybody decried Thai film with the familiar term nam nao (Hamilton 1994, 151).

The conventional Thai film style began to decline in popularity around the 1980s; however, this style has been presented in lakorn toratat (Thai soap opera). Thai people still enjoy the conventional style, which had its genesis in the indigenous arts and moved to the new media of film and television.

### 4. Thai Music and Film

All kinds of Thai film music and songs are played for many reasons; for example, to accompany silent films, to specify time and place, to enhance feelings, and for propaganda. The three institutions of, nation, religion, and the monarchy are inevitably also presented through film music. The plaeng pearn ban (folk song) and plaeng luk
toung (country music) are used as film music to specify place and a group of people in a rural area. Thus the boundary of the Thai nation is presented through film songs.

The monarchy is strongly propagandized in the plaeng san sеarn pra baramee (royal anthem), as well as short films of the King’s image and activities, which that have been played in every Thai movie theatre for nearly a hundred years. The importance of the monarchy is also presented in plaeng pluk jai (patriotic songs) and plaeng pra raja nipon (the king’s song), which are used in propaganda films. Details of plaeng pra raja nipon will be explored in chapter 3.

Religion (Buddhism) is presented through the genre of plaeng pearn ban (folk songs) and plaeng phithikam (ceremonial song), which are sung in Buddhist ceremonies. These songs always play in period films. In contemporary film; the trae wong (small brass band) plays during ordination ceremonies.

Needless to say, music serves a significant function in all film. In the earliest screenings by the Lumière brothers in 1895, silent films were accompanied by live music performed by a full orchestra (Horrock 2001, 293). The original reason for film music may have been pragmatic, namely to cover up the noise of the film projector; however, it was discovered that music added considerably to the emotional mood of the film (Konigberge 1997, 226).

In Thailand, silent film screenings were also accompanied by live music; however, this music was played by a trae wong (small brass band). Sangun Aankong explains
…before screening *trae wong* played in front of the theatre to promote an enjoyable atmosphere and to attract people. When the silent film was showing, the musical band also accompanied the show. Moreover, live sound effects such as gun shots, ocean sounds, and fire sounds were also made (*Sangun Aankong* 1973 cited in Tanawangnoi 2001, 17; trans. by Patsorn Sungsri).

Details of the *trae wong* (small brass band) will be explored in the topic: *Plaeng Thai Sakon* (Thai and International music). Thus, since the period of silent film music and sound have played a significant role in the Thai film business. Horrock explains that music has an important role relating to cinema’s representation of cultural identity. The use of music can often be understood as a deliberate attempt to influence the audience’s perception of a particular social group. For example, Indian films (Bollywood) have several songs and dances, and sequences often take place in settings that have no logical justification within the narrative. On the other hand, western films follow a temporal and spatial continuity and attempt to construct a rudimentary realism (Horrock 2001, 296). Thai films use many kinds of Thai music and foreign music. In this section, Thai music from ancient times to the present (2004) will be discussed and analysed in the context of the role of music in Thai films.

Thailand has a variety of music, which was created by its many groups from ancient time until the present (2004). Many kinds of Thai music have also been created for particular political, ceremonial, entertainment and business reasons. Moreover, Thai music has been created to appeal to particular groups, such as courtiers, peasants, urban people, and university students.
In this thesis Thai music is categorized into 8 groups: 1) *plaeng Thai dearm* (Thai classical songs/music); 2) *plaeng pearn ban* (Thai folk songs/music); 3) *plaeng Thai sakon* or *plaeng luk kroung* (Thai & Western songs/music); 4) *plaeng luk toung* (Thai country songs/music); 5) *plaeng pluk jai* (patriotic songs/music); 6) *plaeng pear chewit* (songs/music for life); 7) *plaeng pra raja nipon* (the King’s songs); 8) *plaeng pop* (pop songs/music).

The first four groups—*plaeng Thai dearm, plaeng pearn ban, plaeng Thai sakon* or *plaeng luk kroung, and plaeng luk toung*—will be explored in this chapter with regard to the objective, the characteristics, the audience, and the role of Thai music in Thai film.

The other four groups—*plaeng pluk jai, plaeng pear chewit, plaeng pra raja nipon, plaeng pop* which relate to political movements and are representative of both leftist and rightist movements will be explored in chapter 3, ‘Politic of Nation’.

4.1 Songs of the Ancients

*Plaeng Thai Dearm* (Thai classical song/music)

The *plaeng Thai dearm* was first introduced to Thai film in 1931. This was an initiative of an experimental sound film by ‘Srikroung Sound Film’ company. The Wasuwart brothers from since the period of silent film recorded entertainment in Thailand such as *jam aod* (comedian shows), *gniue* (Chinese opera), and *plaeng Thai dearm* (Thai classical songs/music). In the experimental sound film Praya Pumee Saewin played a
sor sam sai (an old form of Thai fiddle with three strings), and Miss. Sanith Banlaengkarn played a jakae (a stringed Thai musical instrument) (Tanawangnoi 2001, 67). In this film the plaeng Thai dearm was used to promote the new medium of sound film.

The plaeng Thai dearm was used as music in the first sound feature film, Long Thang (Going Astray, produced by Srikroung Sound Film Company, 1931). This film had 6 plaeng Thai dearm (Thai classical songs/music), including the songs Boa Bang Bai, Lao Dearn Dong, and Patcha. The song Lao Dearn Dong was sang by Mrs Sanit Banlaengkarn and was accompanied by the violinist Khun Sanit Banlaengkarn (Tanawangnoi 2001, 72). The songs expressed the hero and heroine’s feelings, and presented the idea of ‘The Middle Way’, which is the main concept of Buddhism, namely to have peace in life.

In the 1930s the plaeng Thai dearm was popular among Thai people, and thus Plaeng Thai Dearm was used as the original film music in Thai film. However, as Thai people became more familiar with western music, it permeated into the Thai film business—for example the traewong (small brass band) that played as a prelude to silent film showings. A violin was played in the first sound film Long Thang (Going Astray, produced by Srikroung Sound Film Company, 1931).

The plaeng Thai dearm is used as film music for many reasons: 1) to emphasize Thai characteristics; 2) to promote nostalgia and pay homage; 3) to specify time and to symbolize anachronism.
1. Emphasize Thai characteristics

Owing to the fact that *plaeng Thai dearm* is the Thai traditional music, this music can emphasize the Thai characteristic of many film characters, such as in the film *Khu Karm* (dir. Ruth Ronapob, 1988, and dir. Euthana Mukdasanit, 1995), which is the love story of a Thai woman and a Japanese military officer and is set in the period of World War Two. The heroine, Angsumalin plays a *kim* (Thai dulcimer) to entertain herself. This traditional musical instrument emphasizes the Thai characteristics of the heroine; on the other hand, the Japanese hero Kobori plays a *samizen* (Japanese music instrument) to emphasize his Japanese character.

In the film *Kam Man Sanya* (dir. Konsan Pongsutham, 1987), the *plaeng Thai dearm* is used as a theme song. The hero Sarin sings *plaeng Thai dearm* to express his love and concern to the heroine Da. The *plaeng Thai dearm* melody is slow and the lyrics do not express feeling obviously. The song is representative of the hero who adheres to an old idea of hierarchy; he believes that a sergeant’s son should not marry a commander’s daughter. Thus the song has the role of emphasising traditional Thai views on hierarchy.

2. Create nostalgia and paying homage to traditional music

When western music became popular in the 1930s (see details under the topic, *plaeng luk kroug* (song for the urbanite)), *plaeng Thai dearm* declined in popularity. Anxiety regarding the possibility of *plaeng Thai dearm*’s extinction was presented in many Thai films. For example, the film *Lakorn Re* (dir. Prince Panupan Yukon, produced in the
early 1970s) presented the downturn of *Lakorn Re*\(^9\), which was replaced by the new form of entertainment, *plaeng luk kroung* (songs for city life). The title at the beginning of the film’s start pays respect to traditional Thai dancers and musicians. In this film, *plaeng Thai dearm* was played to accompany the traditional dance. The decline of traditional entertainment depicted in the film was due to the impact in the early 1970s of American culture in Thailand, which was a result of the installation of American military bases in Thailand, Hollywood films, books, and western music. Western culture was viewed as a symbol of modernity; meanwhile, Thai culture became increasingly viewed as anachronistic.

The film *Wai Ra Reang* (dir. Somboonsuk Niyomsiri, 1984) presented the story of a teenage group who enjoy playing rock music. However, at the end of the story the rock music group learned to play *plaeng Thai dearm*. They play *plaeng Thai dearm* as an expression of respect to their old teacher. The film expressed enjoyment for western music; however, the film’s director did not neglect traditional Thai music. Moreover, the film gave new assurance that traditional music would not become extinct.

3. Specify time and symbolize anachronism

Most period films use the *plaeng Thai dearm* to re-create the atmosphere of ancient times. One example is *Rearn Mayura* (dir. Cheard Songsri, 1996), the story of time lost from the Ayutthaya period to the present time (1996). The film used *plaeng Thai dearm* to support the character of the heroine, Nok Young, the daughter of a noble family’s

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\(^9\) *Lakorn re* is a traveling dance and drama troupe, which was popular up until 1932 and for a short time after (Rutnin 1996, 145).
during the Ayutthaya period. Owing to the fact that plaeng Thai dearm dates back to ancient times, this music has become a symbol of traditionalism.

In the film Gnen Gnen Gnen (Money, Money, Money dir. Prince Anusorn Mongkonkarn, 1970 and dir. Euthana Mukdasanit, 1983) the co-starring actress was forced to practice the sor sam sai (an old form of Thai fiddle with three strings) but the character wanted to sing the plaeng Thai sakon, which was popular at that time. In this case plaeng Thai dearm was viewed as anachronism.

**Plaeng Pearn Ban (Thai Folk Song/Music): ‘Bliss of the Field’**

The plaeng pern ban has been a form of village (folk) entertainment since ancient times and has traditionally been passed on orally. There is no evidence for the origin of the plaeng pearn ban; however, in the Ayutthaya period (1350-1767) the plaeng pearn ban was evident in kot mon teian ban (ancient law). The plaeng pearn ban declined in popularity after the World War Two (1939-1945) as a result of radio. Radio was introduced around 1927 and became nationally popular around 1957 (Phongpaichit and Baker 1996, 129). At this time the plaeng pearn ban was replaced by the plaeng luk toung (Thai country song), a song that combines the plaeng pearn ban and western music.

Suvana Kriengkraipech classified plaeng pearn ban into two main groups: 1) Plaeng Phithikam (ceremonial songs): these songs are sung in ceremonies, especially Buddhist ceremonies, or performed as an accompaniment to a rite of passage on different occasions. The songs accompanied agriculture rites and fertility rites. 2) Social songs,
which are sung at festivals as a form of entertainment. Songs sung for entertainment while working in the field or while working in group were also classified as social songs (Kriengkraipetch 2000, 147).

The *plaeng pearn ban* is played as film music in Thai films in order to: 1) specify an area; 2) specify time and career; 3) specify a group of people. Therefore, the Thai national boundary and the ways of life of Thai people are reinforced through the *plaeng pearn ban*.

1. Specify an area

The *plaeng pearn ban* is sung around Thailand. Particular areas have their own songs, such as *joice sor* in the north and *mor lam* in the northeast. The use of the *plaeng pearn ban* in a film evokes a sense of that particular region. For example, in *Luk Isan* (*Son of the northeast*, dir. Wijit Kunawuth, 1982), the story of villagers in the northeast, the film used *mor lam* and *plaeng krom dek* (lullaby) sung in the northeastern dialect. Musical instruments of the northeast such as the *kan* (bamboo mouth organ), and the *phin* (2 to 4 string guitar) also accompanied the songs. The borders of regions within the Thai nation are presented through the music and song of particular regions.

2. Specify time and career

The *plaeng pearn ban* declined in popularity among villagers after the radio became a national media in 1957 (Phongpaichit and Baker 1996, 129). Thus this form of music has become a symbol of traditional villagers. Moreover, the *plaeng pearn ban* was sung
when farmers worked in their fields and at harvest, thus most of the songs belong to farmers. Many period films that present the story of farmers—such as Phlae Kao (The Scar, dir. Cheard Songsri, 1977), Leard Supan (dir. Cheard Songsri, 1979), and Pearn Pang (dir. Cheard Songsri, 1983)—use the plaeng pearn ban to re-create the atmosphere of farmers’ lives in the past time. The plaeng pearn ban was sung when the characters worked in the fields, when they cerebrated after the harvest, and in Buddhist ceremonies.

3. Specify a group of people

Traditionally, the plaeng pearn ban is the song sung by villagers of the past; however, in the film Kam Paeng (The Wall, dir. Thakonkieat Werawan, 1999), the love story of a slum dweller girl and a rich man in Bangkok in the 1990s, the plaeng pearn ban is used as film music. In the scene of the slum dwellers’ celebration after their having built a wall to protect their slum community from the rapacious capitalist, they sing the plaeng pearn ban, lam tad for entertainment. Thus, in modern day Thai films the plaeng pearn ban is used as a symbol of villagers even as they move from rural setting to become urban slum dwellers.

4.2 Between Urban Setting and the Countryside

Plaeng Thai Sakon or Plaeng Luk Kroung (Thai and International Songs/Music)

Literally, the word plaeng Thai sakon means “Thai and international song”. This music uses Thai lyrics, which are Thai verse or adapted from Thai verse. Western melodies
and western instruments are used in this music. The *plaeng Thai sakon* is also known as *plaeng luk kroung*. The word *plaeng luk krong* means “song for the urbanites”. This word is set against the other kind of song *plaeng luk toung*, which means “song for provincial people”. (Details of *plaeng luk toung* will be explored in the next section.) In this section the word *plaeng Thai sakon* will be used.

Western music was introduced into film during the period of the silent film in the reign of King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V 1868-1910). In 1903, Prince Nakorn Sawan Worapinith composed music using western notation and rhythm, but using Thai melody. This music was played by brass bands to accompany silent films (Damrongleart 1990, 35). Thus brass bands were the first western musical types that were introduced to the film business and to ordinary people in Thailand.

Originally, the brass band came from the royal group; however, ordinary people adapted this brass band to be a smaller group, which came to be called the *trae wong* (small brass band). The *trae wong* originated to accompany silent films. Since that time *trae wong* has become a musical band for ordinary people. This form of band is used for parades and celebrations for many occasions, including ordination ceremonies and weddings. The characteristic of the band is informal and the musician’s clothes are casual. In many Thai films the *trae wong* became a symbol for celebration, especially for ordination ceremony, and the enjoyment of ordinary people.

Besides *trae wong*, western music was adapted to Thai music, which was called *plaeng Thai sakon*. Khanjanakpan (1975, 43 cited in Damrongleart 1990, 33) suggests these two main origins of *plaeng Thai sakon*:
1. *Lakorn rong* (singing stage drama)

*Plaeng Thai sakon* began in the reign of King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V 1868-1910) with the *Preedalai* troupe, the *lakorn rong* troupe (singing stage drama), who used western musical tone with *kron supab*, a Thai verse with eight syllables to a line. Around the 1930s the songs from *lakorn rong* were very popular. These songs declined in popularity and were replaced by songs from sound film (Radburi 1994, 13), which became popular around the late 1930s.

2. Movies

The late 1930s was a thriving period for the sound film industry and for *plaeg Thai sakon*. A lot of film music was composed and made into records. The development of sound film and film music in Thailand was parallel to that of the Hollywood musical, which was supported by Broadway composers. Studios also ‘ churned out’ musical in the 1930s (Blandford, Grant et al. 2001, 158). In the same way, the Thai musical and *lakorn rong* were developed in the same period was and they became a new trend within Thai entertainment in the 1940s and the 1950s. The Thai musical did not use only *plaeng Thai sakon* but western dances were also used; for example, Tap and Conga were used in the film *Plaeng Warn Jai* (*His Sweet Melody*, dir. Khun Wijitmartra, 1937) (Karnjanakpan 1998, 75, 79).

The first *plaeng Thai sakon* was the song *krouy mai* (orchid), which was sung in the film *Pou Som Fao Sap* (dir. Khun Wijitmattra, 1933). The song used a western musical
tone with Thai lyrics (Tanawangnoi 2001, 135), and it matched the western costumes of the film. The song was sung by the actress before the showing of the film, and was also made into a record (Damronglaert 1990, 39). Film music became popular among the young generation from this time until the late 1940s. It was customary for film stars to sing their favourite theme songs on stage during intermission—a practice which became a tradition in Thai cinemas in this period (Rutnin 1996, 188).

During this period Thailand had a small number of roads leading into the provincial areas, thus it was not convenient for the lakorn rong troupe and nang re (mobile movie theatre) to show in provincial areas. Most of the films and lakorn rong shows were limited to urban settlements; thus the plaeng Thai sakon became also known as plaeng luk kroung, which means “song of the urbanite”. This name is the opposite of another kind of song, the plaeng luk toung, which means “song of countryman”. (Details of plaeng luk toung will be explored in the next section.)

The plaeng Thai sakon has been used as film music for: 1) narration and enhancement of feeling; 2) as a symbol of the new entertainment for the urbanite; and 3) record business

1. Narration and enhancement of feeling

Many Thai films use plaeng Thai sakon to narrate the story. Most of the theme songs of Thai films have the same title as the film—for example the films Fon Nearn (dir. Chalong Pakdeewijit, 1970), Kang Han Swart (dir. Naeramitre, 1974), and Ban Sai
They are presented as background music or sung by the main character. The songs are usually featured at the beginning of the film as an introduction and when the characters express feelings of happiness or sadness. Most of the content of the plaeng Thai sakon centres on love affairs; thus this type of song always appears in melodramas. In addition, most of the stories happen in the city or the main characters are urbanites.

2. *Plaeng Thai sakon* as a symbol of modern life, from the beginning of sound film period in the 1930s to the 1970s

The *plaeng Thai sakon* became a symbol of modern entertainment for Thai people after World War Two. The appearance of the song in Thai film was accompanied with a move towards western costumes, western musical instruments, and scenes of nightclubs or city bars. For example, in the films *Lakorn Re* (dir. Prince Panupan Yukon, produced around early the 1970s), *Gnen Gnen Gnen* (*Money, Money, Money* dir. Prince Anusorn Mongkonkarn, 1970), and *Kanghan Swat* (dir. Naeramitre, 1974) the main characters played singers and sung the *plaeng Thai sakon* at nightclubs in Bangkok. The appearance of the *plaeng Thai sakon* in Thai film is a symbol of modern life in the post-war period until the 1970s. Thus, in the film *Fah Talai Jone* (*Tear of the Black Tiger*, dir. Wisit Sasanatieng, 2000), the *plaeng Thai sakon* was used to help create the atmosphere of the post-war period.

3. Record business

Since the start of the sound film period, film companies have also released film music records and these records became a sideline business for them. Thus, in the early stages of Thai musical films, the actors always sang songs from the film live. For example,
Jamrat Suwakon sings the song tawan yor saeng in the film Leard Chao Na (dir. Srisuk Wasuwat and Cheo Kanasu, 1936). When the plaeng Thai sakon was popular, plaeng Thai sakon singer superstars also became film actors, for example Sutabe Wongkamkaeng starred in the film Swan Meard (dir. Rat Pestanyee, 1958) and Charin Nantanakorn co-starred in the film Gnen Gnen Gnen (Money Money Money dir. Prince Anusorn Mongkonkarn, 1970). Around the late 1970s the record business declined and was replaced by cassette tape recordings. In the same period, plaeng Thai sakon was replaced by string musical bands and Thai pop music.

**Plaeng Luk Toung (Thai Country Song/Music)**

The word plaeng luk toung means “song for provincial people”. This type of song contrasts with the plaeng luk kroung, which means “song for the urbanite”. Thus the characteristic of this song also contrast with those of the plaeng luk kroung. Anek Nawikamoon summarizes the character of plaeng luk toung as follows: 1) the melody of plaeng luk toung has fast and slow sections; 2) the content of plaeng luk toung covers various themes, such as love affairs, village life, and current affairs (including political affairs); 3) the plaeng luk toung singers are provincial people (Nawikamoon 1989, 14-15). Moreover, the content of plaeng luk toung is ‘down-to-earth’ and the words of the songs are easy to understand and unrestricted. Thus, the plaeng luk toung easily touches the hearts of provincial people.
The elements of the *plaeng luk toung* show are similar to the conventional style of Thai films, which consists of main characters, a hero and a heroine, supporting characters, villains, comedian, and sex stars.

The *plaeng luk toung* thrived from 1963-1970. The success of the singer star Surapon Sombatcharearn encouraged other *plaeng luk toung* composers to release many *plaeng luk toung* (Damrongleart 1990, 51). This occurred during the same period of the 16 mm film boom in Thailand and developed under the first National Economic and Social Development Plan (1961-1966) (see details in chapter 2). Thus, the *plaeng luk toung* and Thai film, especially 16 mm film, were shown around the country for the entertainment of provincial people and, not surprisingly, they became popular among that group.

In the 1970 musical *Mon Rak Luk Toung* (dir. Rangsri Tasanapayak, 1970), the *plaeng luk toung* was used successfully as film music. Dome Sukwong mentions that the film was successful because it used the *plaeng luk toung* and film superstars Mitre Chaibancha and Petchara Chaowarat (Dome Sukwong, Interview 7 February 2001). After the success of *Mon Rak Luk Toung* many Thai films used the *plaeng luk toung* as film music; furthermore, the *plaeng luk toung* singers and composers, joined the film industry as actors and music composers where they have remained until the present (2003). The deaths of the two *plaeng luk toung* superstars Surapon Sombatcharearn (in 1968) and Pumpong Doungjan (in 1992) inspired filmmakers to produce biographical films. The film *16 Pee Kaeng Kwam Lang* (dir. Anmad Bunnak, 1969) presented the life of Surapon Sombatcharean, who was fatally shot in 1968, while film *Rak Arai*

The plaeng luk toung has been used as film music for both narration and the specification of a particular group of people or place.

1. Narration

The plaeng luk toung is played to narrate the story. Like plaeng luk kroung, plaeng luk toung is used for a film’s introduction and to express the characters’ feelings. The songs are sung by the main character and supporting characters that are usually have roles as provincials, and played by plaeng luk toung singer stars. For example, the film Mon Rak Luk Toung (dir. Rangsri Tatsanapayak, 1970) used the song Mon Rak Luk Toung to introduce the story.

Around the late 1960s to the early 1970s the plaeng luk toung was very popular, thus musical films in this period frequently used the plaeng luk toung for their music such as Mon Rak Luk Toung (dir. Rangsri Tatsanapayak, 1970), Fon Neaor (dir. Chalong Pakdeewijit, 1970), and Yark Dang (dir. Houn Ratanangum, 1970). In these films the characters sang songs to express their feelings; however, unlike the actors in Hollywood musicals or Bollywood films, they did not dance. The plaeng luk toung developed from plaeng Thai sakon and plaeng pearn ban, merging the western style and Thai traditional style; however, it did not develop a particular accompanying dance. Therefore, Thai musical films that used plaeng luk toung as film music did not have a dance component.
Around the 1990s the *plaeng luk toung* declined in popularity; however, this form of song is still used as film music, but most of the movies it is used for are B grade films that are produced for showing in provincial areas. Examples of such movies are *Lam Plearn Plaeng Rak* (dir. Sak Morakoth, 1993), *Plaeng Rak Kong Che Moon* (dir. Chinmate Prasathporn, 1994), and *Num Na Khao Sao Lam Nam Moon* (dir. Sak Morakoth, 1995).

2. Specification of a particular group of people or place

*Plaeng luk toung* is sung by provincial singers to tell the story of provincial people. Thus, this song has become their symbol. Consequently, a lot of Thai films presenting the story of provincial people use this form of song to evoke the character of provincial people. For example, in the film *Theaptida Rong Ngan* (dir. Euthana Mukdasanit, 1982), *plaeng luk toung* was used as background film music to support the heroine, a village girl who went to work as a factory girl in Bangkok. In the film *Itsarapab Khong Thongpoon Kokpho (The Freedom of Thongpoon Kokpo)*, dir. Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, 1984) *plaeng luk toung* was used to support Thongpoon, the hero, and at the end of the story the song was used as a symbol of peace when the hero decide to go back home.

*Plaeng luk toung* is not only used to support the provincial group but is also used to portray the poor and uneducated city people. For example, in the film *Tong Pron* (dir. Chuchai Aungartchai, 1990), the robber sings *plaeng luk toung* when he makes jokes with the hostages. In the film *Kok Tee Veerabututh Aram Boy* (dir. Tounthon
Khammesri, 1998), the hero, a poor orphan, Kok Tee, works as a *plaeng luk toung*. singer in a nightclub.

5. Thai Language and Literature

Thai language and literature are important aspects of culture; they also present many features of Thai national identity. This language and literature make Thai films different and unique from other national cinemas. This section will explore the role of Thai language and literature in Thai films.

5.1 Thai Language

Using the Thai language in Thai films makes them different and distinguishable from other national cinemas, especially other Asian nations that have a similar culture and that are also influenced by Buddhism. Language is one of the factors that present the identity of national cinema. The Thai film *Pra Rot Maeree* or *Nang Sib Song* (*12 Sisters*, dir. Naeramitre, produced around the 1980s) and the Cambodia film named *Bhutisen Neang Kongrei* (*12 Sisters*, dir. Ly Bun Yim, 1968) both tell the story of the *nītan chādok* (jataka tale) *Pra Rot Maeree* or *Nang Sib Song* which is a popular story in Buddhist countries such as Thailand and Cambodia (Muan and Daravuth 2001, 98). These two films use the same story and costumes and the characteristics of the actors of Thailand and Cambodia are similar. However, the nationality of the films is easily identifiable by language. The language and script in the titles of these two films are different, as each uses the language of the country in which it was filmed.
The Characteristic of the Thai Language

Thai is the national language of Thailand. Thai belongs to the Tai language family, which is used by the Shan in Burma, the Ahom in Assam, the Tho, the Nung in Vietnam, the Zhvang (Chuang) in southern China, and in Laos. The Thai language is characterized by the fact that there are no endings, agreements or affixes to mark grammatical functions or relationships; meaning depends on word class and word order in sentences; there are no marked singulars or plurals in nouns, no marked tenses in verbs and no definite articles; and meaning usually depends on the context. The choice of vocabulary can indicate social relationship (Herbert and Milner 1989, 25, 26).

For examples the language incorporates special a vocabulary for use in the presence of or referring to the monarch or his extended family, which is called rajasap (the king’s vocabulary). A different vocabulary also exists for Buddhist monks, as opposed to any other religious group. These two groups are viewed as an important and integral part of Thai society. The ordinary people have a sense that to use this special vocabulary pays appropriate homage to the monarchy, and respect to Buddhist monks. Thai films use this special vocabulary to denote characters who belong to royalty and Buddhist monkhood characters, thereby adding a sense of realism and maintaining the high status given to these two groups in Thai society.

Dialect

In Thailand there are four main dialects. The language of central Thailand is the dominant dialect in the country, and is used in schools, by the media, and by officials. The three other major dialects are: Northern Thai, North-eastern Thai, and Southern
Thai. Central Thai is the dialect most frequently used in Thai films. Other dialects are used in Thai film to specify place and a particular group of people in the stories. As an example, the North-eastern Thai dialect was used in the films *Tong Pan* (produced by Isan Group, 1975), *Luk Isan (Son of the Northeast)*, dir. Wijit Kunawuth, 1982), and *Tong-poon Khok-pho Radsadorn Tem Khan (The Citizen)*, dir. Prince Chatree Chalearm Yukon, 1977); the Northern Thai dialect was used in the film *Khon Phu Kao (The Mountaineer)*, dir. Wijit Kunawuth, 1979); and the Southern Thai dialect was used in the film *Pulakong* (dir. Surapon Kornsuwat, 1989).

Dialect has also been used in Thai films to indicate class stratification. Characters who play servants and act as clowns often speak their local dialect. These characters are invariably poor provincial people, and films use dialect to ridicule them, implying that such a characters are stupid. For example, the comedy film *Kaboun Karn Khon Chai* (dir. Chana Kraprayoon, 1986) is a story of people from the provincial areas most of whom only speak local dialects who come to work in an urban middle-class house as servants. This demonstrates that Thai films are a product of the urban middle-class and that the central Thai dialect is accepted as the standard form of Thai language.

**Thai Script**

Thai language is the national language, and has its own characteristic sound, grammar, and script. The first evidence of a Thai script is the inscription in 1292 of King Ram Khamhaeng in the Sukhothai period (1253-1350). The script was modified several times until 1600 when it was adopted in its current form. There are 44 characters in the Thai alphabet. Words are written and printed without spaces (Herbert and Milner 1989, 28). Unlike other Asian countries, Thailand was not subjected to colonization. As a
result no Western countries have forced Thai people to use other languages such as English or French. The Thai language is one of the aspects of national identity that makes Thailand different and unique from other countries.

Thai script also appears in Thai film titles, which makes it immediately evident that these are Thai films. For instance, the film director Pen-ek Ratanareng uses Thai script in film titles to show that his films are Thai films and are produced for Thai people. Ratanareng states, ‘My films will not use English language in the film title. I will use only one English phrase “Made in Thailand” for the foreigner’ (Lintepatip 2001, 20). The appearance of Thai script in Thai films imbues a sense of Thai identity. This has the effect of constructing Thai film as different from other national cinemas and makes Thai people proud of their culture.

5.2. Thai Literature

Thai literature can be divided into three groups: Oral literature or folk tales, Traditional literature, and Modern literature. Thai folk tales and traditional literature were prevalent in ancient times; however, they declined when Thailand modernized in the reign of King Mongkhut (King Rama IV 1854-1868). Modern Thai literature was introduced in that period. These three groups of literature are a significant source of the stories presented in Thai films. This section will explore the characteristics of Thai literature by looking at the influence of the three styles of literature.
5.2.1 Nitan Pearn Ban (Folktales)

The folktales of Thailand can be categorized into a number of genres: nitan chādok (jataka tales or tales of the Buddha’s birth), tamnan (myths), and Jokes. This section will explore only the Thai folktales that are popular in film production and influence the content of Thai film. These are nitan chakchak wongwong (Thai fairy tales), and nitan chādok (jataka tales or the Buddha’s birth stories). The content of nitan chādok is self-explanatory and addressed in the section, ‘The concept of Buddhism’. The main focus of this section is to explain the characteristics of nitan chakchak wongwong (Thai fairytales) and their influence in Thai film.

Nitan Chakchak Wongwong (Thai Fairytales)

Nitan chakchak wongwong are Thai fairytales. Siraporn Natalang (2000) summarized the key characteristics of the nitan chakchak wongwong, stating:

The stories are about the adventurous and polygamous life of prince heroes. In most of nitan chakchak wongwong the hero goes out to find a spouse and eventually there is a fight between them. The hero usually acquires additional wives later on in the story, often leading to jealousy between the co-wives (Nathalang 2000, 1).

Nitan chakchak wongwong are full of supernatural events and fantasy; for example, the human prince who falls in love with a demon princess in Prarot Maeree; Golden flowers falling from the heroine’s mouth in Pikuntong; A woman who gives birth to a conch shell in Sang Thong. The monarchy is presented in a central role in nitan chakchak wongwong. Buddhism, especially the law of karma, is presented through
rewards and punishments. The concept of ‘nation’ is presented through the kingdom that is governed by the monarchy.

The protagonists such as princes or princesses are subjected to the testing of their goodness or willingness to compensate for their bad karma from their previous lives. An example is the beautiful woman who lives in an ugly toad’s body in Utai Taewee; or the stepdaughter who is afflicted by an evil stepmother in Pra Bu Thong. These protagonists typically survive through the support of angels. The stories end with happiness in the form of a victory for a human prince; a prince who marries a princess; a bad wife who is punished; and so on. Patriarchy is presented through the ill fate of female characters whose life depends on the main male characters such as a prince, a king, or a father. This theme influences the stories of Thai films, especially nang chewit (melodrama). For example, the heroine in the film Ban Sai Thong (dir. Ruth Ronnapob, 1980) has to live in a rich cousin’s house because of her father’s decision, after which her jealous cousin torments her; however, she survives with the support and help of a good cousin, who is the hero. This story ends with happiness when the heroine marries the hero.

Nitan chakchak wongwong has been told by storytellers and performed in folk drama for more than three hundred years (Nathalang 2000, 1). As with likay (folk drama), nitan chakchak wongwong retains wide popular appeal to the present day (2004). From 1968 to the present, nitan chakchak wongwong have been produced in the form of a television series on channel 7, a move that was followed by channel 3 in 1986 (Itsaradej 2002, 90). Thus, nitan chakchak wongwong have been handed down from the past into
These stories have been communicated using a variety of media to keep Thai fairytales extant.

There have been a handful of Thai films produced that use the storyline of *nitan chakchak wongwong*—for example, *Prarot Maeree*, or *Nang Sib Song*, (*Twelve Sisters*, dir. Naeramitre, around 1980s) and *Pra Bu Thong* (dir. Chit Kraithong, 1979; dir. Wichein Watcharachot, 1984). The two stories are very popular and were produced as television series before being produced as films. Some films have created stories whose, style is based on *nitan chakchak wongwong*, for example *Luksao Pra Artith* (*Sun’s daughter*, dir. Somchai Ardsanajinda, produced in the late 1960s; and dir. Payong Payakun, 1986). All of these films present the supernatural and the adventure of a member of the royal group. The main character tends to be a prince or princess, and at the end of the story bad people are punished, problems are resolved, and the hero and the heroine marry and return to their monarchical situation. The monarchical situation is a symbol of happiness and success.

The explanation for the small number of films that have been produced based directly on *nitan chakchak wongwong* is that these stories are viewed as being old-fashioned. In Thailand, going to see a movie is a modern activity for the urban middle-class, and old stories like *nitan cakchak wongwong* have little appeal to this group. However, watching television is a family entertainment; Thai people enjoy Thai fairytales viewed in their home.

Although only a handful of *nitan chakchak wongwong* have been produced in Thai film, the contents of the Thai fairytales have influenced the stories of many Thai films. Four
common themes are: the law of karma (Itsaradej 2002, 106, 116); the conflict between co-wives; the conflict between father-in-law and son-in-law (Thitathan 1989, 8 cited in Nathalang 2000, 30); and Monarchy being the centre of the community. These themes are regularly featured in Thai film, and all derive from nitan chakchak wongwong.

The concept of Buddhism, especially the law of karma, is a common theme of nitan chakchak wongwong stories. This concept aims to teach people to do the right thing and illustrates to people that their lives are controlled by the law of karma. Thus the hero or heroine in nitan chakchak wongwong has to endure when he/she suffers because of their bad karma in the previous life and he/she has to do the right thing to overcome the bad karma. For example in the film Luksao Pra Artith (Sun’s Daughter, dir. Somchai Ardsanajinda, produced around late 1960s: dir. Payong Payakun, 1986) the angel tells the heroine to endure her suffering because it is compensation for her bad karma in a previous life.

The conflict between co-wives: In the past polygamy was allowed in Thai society, thus nitan chakchak wongwong often presented this form of conflict. These fairytales encourage a good wife to endure the jealousy of a bad wife or bad wives. At present, although polygamy is illegal, Thai men still have minor wife/wives. This conflict is also presented in Thai films such as Nid (dir. Prakorn Promwitak, 1983), Fire Sanaeha (dir. Ruth Ronapob, 1987), Reao Manuth (dir. Watanasith, 1988), and Kor Keb Hoa Jai Thear Wai Khon Deaw (dir. Jazz Siam, 1995). Moreover, the idea that a good wife will conquer a bad wife by enduring her jealousy also appears in Thai films. The sufferings of female characters, such as being punished by their husbands, present the idea of
misogyny in Thai society. However, the concept of Buddhism, especially the law of karma, decreases the tension.

The conflict between father-in-law and son-in-law, historically, when a Thai man marries, he moves in with his wife’s family. Thus, in the matriarchal household, tension between the father-in-law and the son-in-law is a common occurrence (Nathalang 2000, 30). In nitan chakchak wongwong, the father-in-law and son-in-law fight with magic and sometimes they kill each other. This conflict is also presented in Thai film however in Thai film the conflict between father-in-law and son-in-law takes the form of a comedy with the two playing tricks on each other—for example, Mon Rak Luk Toung (dir. Rangsri Tasanapayak, 1973), Por Ta Pean Hod (dir. Rangsri Tasanapayak, 1977), and Sawadee Ban Nok (dir. Tanit Jitnukun, 1999).

These two conflicts are apparent, as the Thai family is conventionally an extended family. Even though there is a trend toward the nuclear family, Thai families are still based on an extended family structure. Thus, conflicts among family members always happen in real life, and are therefore a subject of interest in nitan chakchak wongwong and Thai film.

In nitan chakchak wongwong, the monarchy is the centre of the community. The happiness or sadness of the monarch is related to the lives of ordinary people. In nitan chakchak wongwong, when a member of the monarchy suffers, ordinary people or an angel help them. Itsaradej states, ‘the suffering of the main characters in Thai fairytales stands as a warning to ordinary people that the monarch’s life is one of suffering, consequently ordinary people are not motivated to become a monarch’ (Itsaradej 2002,
As nitan chakchak wongwong is a form of entertainment for ordinary people, the suffering of the monarch and the way in which he/she survives through the support of ordinary people reflects the lives of ordinary people, making them feel important.

The monarchy has retained power and respect in Thai society from ancient times until the present. The monarch and the royal family play the main characters in many nitan chakchak wongwong and their sufferings are recounted; however, the stories end with happiness for the main characters.

Since 1932, when Thailand became a constitutional monarchy, the concept that the monarchy is the centre of the community has appeared in Thai films. The monarchy in Thai films has power and respectability. Although the monarch in Thai films does not play a hero like the nitan chakchak wongwong heroes, he is the centre of the story and solves people’s problems, as can be seen in the films Meern and Rid (dir. Cheard Songsri, 1994) and Douy Krao (The Seed, dir. Bandit Rittakon, 1987). In these two films the people’s problems are solved by the king. In both nitan chakchak wongwong and Thai film, the status of the monarchy has never declined, in terms of its power or the respect that is due to it.

5.2.2 Wankadee Thai (Thai Classical Literature)

Wankadee Thai is the Thai classical literature, which is produced by those within the royal group. This section will explore the characteristics of wankadee Thai and describe the two stories of wankadee Thai that are popular by being reproduced in Thai film.
While *nitan chakchak wongwong* is an oral literature and popular among ordinary people, *wankadee Thai* (Thai classical literature) was created by courtiers; the readers and audiences were also courtiers who were the educated group of the ancient period. Thus, the stories of classical literature were the stories of the monarchy and royal family and they were a convention of *wankadee Thai* (Thai classical literature) (Bunlear Tapesuwan 1971, 8 cited in Boonkajorn 1980, 18). Wibha Senanan explains that the main characteristics of the Thai classical literary characters are:

...characters thought of no social problems nor did they struggle for their own social successes because they were made to have been born already with wealth and social recognition. They were not made to dream of being anything in the future, but try to marry the persons they love or were predestined to fall in love in the time of peace; and serving the king in the time of war. Therefore as one sees, bedchambers, natural scenery and battlefields normally took up a large part of the setting of Thai literature in the old convention (Senanan 1975, 134).

The characters of Thai classical literature therefore have a role to protect the monarchy and the nation. The importance of the monarchy and the nation are emphasized by their heroic performances.

*Wankadee Thai* was usually written and recited as poetry rather than prose, with the result that there was comparatively greater concern with the aesthetics of its language, its lyrical qualities and how it could be fashioned to conform to prosodic rules. It is taught in schools and universities as an example of literary expression glorifying past history (Philips, Atmiyanandana Lawler et al. 1987, 12, 14). As such, *wankadee Thai* continues to have a significant impact on contemporary Thai culture.
Wankadee Thai presents the love stories of the people at the top of the social hierarchy such as kings, queens, princes, and princesses. These stories also describe accounts of war; thus the nation is presented as a physical land to protect and the unification of the in order people to repel the enemy is described. The natural sceneries in presented wankadee Thai detail the physical aspects of the Thai nation.

Writing in verse is a specific characteristic of wankadee Thai. Wankadee Thai is usually performed as lakorn (traditional drama) at the National Theatre, on radio as storytelling, and on television as lakorn TV (television series drama). The stories from wankadee Thai have also been adapted for films. Among a great number of wankadee Thai, there are two stories, Pra Apai Manee and Khun Chang Khun Paen that are popular with filmmakers. This story of Pra Apai Manee is the adventure of a Prince Apai Manee and his brother. The story contains elements of a love story, fighting, supernatural events, an erotic episode and comedy. This story has been reproduced in film many times as Pra Apai Manee (dir. Rangsri Tatsanapayak, around the 1960s), Sudsakorn Phajonpai (Sudsakorn Adventure, dir. Prayuth Ngoakrajang, 1979) and the story of Pra Apai Manee’s son, which was produced in animation form. The latest version is Pra Apai Manee (dir. Chalath Sriwanna, 2001).

Another famous wankadee Thai, which is popularly reproduced in film, is the narrative poem Khun Chang Khun Paen. Khun Chang Khun Paen tells the story of a love triangle between two men (Khun Chang and Khun Paen) and one woman (Pimpilalai or Wanthon), which ended in the death of the woman. The story contains the same type of elements as Pra Apai Manee, namely a love story, fighting, supernatural, erotic and
comedy. The films that have been based on the *Khun Chang Khun Paen* are *Khun Chang Khun Paen* (produced by NN Papayon, 1934); *Khun Chang Khun Paen* version *Khun Chang* presents a petition to a king (produced by NN Papayon, 1935); *Khun Chang Khun Paen* version *Ghost Wanthong* (produced by NN Papayon, 1939); *Pim Pilalai* (dir. Dokdin, around the 1960s); *Khun Paen* (dir. Naeramit, 1982); and *Khun Paen* (dir. Tanit Jitnukun, 2001).

The reasons the two wankadee Thai, *Pra Apai Manee* and *Khun Chang Khun Paen*, are popular among Thai people and have been produced in film so many times are that the two stories are enjoyable, and that they are written and told by ordinary people. *Pra Apai Manee* was written by Sunthorn Phu; the story uses the *nitan chakchak wongwong* style that contains the account of a prince’s adventure, polygamy, and the supernatural. *Khun Chang Khun Paen* is a wankadee Thai that presents a love story of ordinary people in the Ayutthaya period. Thus, the two stories are based on folktales and the story of ordinary people. Unsurprisingly, Thais appreciate these stories. Although they originated from ordinary people, these two stories are classed as wankadee Thai (Thai classical literature) because of the exquisite verbal expressiveness with which they were written in—poetic form. Moreover they were patronized and approved by the monarchy, thus guaranteeing automatic popularity.

Though *Pra Apai Manee* and *Khun Chang Khun Paen* are written and told by ordinary people, the main characters or the important character in the stories are from the royal group. The main characters of *Pra Apai Manee* are royal figures. On the other hand, the main characters of *Khun Chang Khun Paen* are ordinary people; however, the king
is the centre of the story and he determines the fate of the main characters, such as his decision to send the hero to war, to jail the hero, and to execute the heroine.

When *Pra Apai Manee, Khun Chang Khun Paen*, and other *wankadee Thai* were adapted and produced in films, the films used prose as dialogue to prevent misunderstanding, and because of its suitability for new media such as film. An exception was the film *Ngog Pa* (dir. Prince Panupan Yukon and Somboonsuk Niyomsiri, 1980), a love story of a young tribesman in the jungle, which was adapted from the *wankadee Thai* of the same name, written by King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V 1868-1910). The dialogue in the film is presented, however some parts of the film used melodious verse taken directly from the original literature.

Cinema cannot convey the beautiful verse of *wankadee Thai*; however, the stories can be adapted for production in films. The films that have been adapted from *wankadee Thai*, therefore, use amusing parts of the *wankadee Thai* narrative that are appropriate for film, as can be seen in the animation film *Sudsakorn Phajonpai* (*Sudsakorn’s Adventure* dir. Prayuth Ngoakrajang, 1979), which is the story of the adventures of the son of *Pra Apai Manee* and his mermaid wife.

The stories from *wankadee Thai* and *nitan chakchak wongwong* were presented in the style of Thai traditional performances, which blend many feelings into one story. The style of *wankadee Thai*, *nitan chakchak wongwong*, and Thai traditional performance have influenced the style of Thai film.
The stories of ordinary people as *nitan chakchak wongwong* (Thai fairy tales) and oral literature are fundamental to the two popular *wankadee Thai*, *Pra Apai Manee* and *Khun Chang Khun Paen*. Thus, the themes of *nitan chakchak wongwong* and oral literature have had greater influence on the content and style of Thai films than has *wankadee Thai*, and this style appeals to Thai people. Stories about polygamy, supernatural events, and the highest role of the monarchy from *nitan chakchak wongwong* and *wankadee Thai* have appeared in many Thai films. The concept of Buddhism, which presented in the *nitan chakchak wongwong* and *wankadee Thai*, is also present in Thai film.

5.2.3 Modern Literature

Modern literature is representative of modern society. The context of religion and Buddhism has declined; however, modern literature still concentrates on other pillars, namely the monarchy and the nation. The development of modern Thai literature can be divided into two sections. The first is the nascence of Thai modern literature in the period of absolute monarchy, when the country adopted contemporary western culture as a modern culture. The second section is Thai modern literature in the period of the Thai constitutional monarchy. Thai modern literature underwent a period of change during this period, beginning with the overthrow of the system of absolute monarchy. The two sections will explore the relationship between modern literature and Thai film production.

Modern literature in the period of the people’s uprisings in the 1970s and the transition of Thailand towards a capitalist economy in the 1980s and the 1990s is related to the
country’s political movement, and these issues will be explored in chapter 3, ‘Politics of Nation’.

Modern Literature in the Period of the Absolute Monarchy

The development of Thai modern literature follows a similar pattern to many countries of Southeast Asia. Kintanar (1988) summarized the basic factors that influenced this development:

1. Increasing contact with the West and a growing interest in its culture. The colonization of many countries of Southeast Asia by the West was an important agent in this contact. Thailand, although not colonized, nevertheless was under political and economic pressure and felt compelled to acquaint itself with Western thought and culture. 2. The presence of certain social conditions as a result of the contact. More specifically, this refers to the introduction of printing technology and the development of journalism, concomitant with the broadening of the educational base and the growth of a reading public. 3. The existence of traditional narrative forms which linked the new forms to the indigenous literary tradition (Kintanar 1988, 16).

Around the 1920s the popular prose fictions were sentimental romantic stories, which followed a predictable pattern:

The main aim of this kind of novel is to arouse the emotions. The hero of the story encounters various serious obstacles. The ones that always recur concern status, way of life, and love. It might be love between a young boy and girl, or it
might be a love triangle between two girls and one boy or vice-versa. Typical forms of behaviour, which constantly recur... are snobbery, deception, treachery, and self-sacrifice (Suphanni Warathorn, 1976, 248, 249 cited in Smyth 1990, 4).

These stories were not about the nation and the monarchy but presented the stories of ordinary people. Thus, they helped educated people recognize their importance, and later helped to push toward the constitutional monarchy. This predictable pattern was also a popular pattern in the production of Thai film melodramas for many decades.

Film was introduced to Thailand in the reign of King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V, 1868-1910); these early films were imported films and Thai documentaries, produced by the royal group. During the reign of King Prajadhipok (King Rama VII, 1925-1935) the first Thai feature film was produced. The beginning of the new style of prose literature and the adoption of film as a new style of entertainment were fairly recent phenomenon in Thailand; both were symbols of modernity in that period. The prose fiction style was adopted for use in Thai film productions from the production of the first Thai feature film, Chok Song Chan (Double Lucky, produced by Krungthep Movie Company, 1927).

The story of Chok Song Chan is about

a hero, a northern district officer who goes to Bangkok to arrest a thief. In Bangkok he lives in the house of a noble family and he falls in love with the heroine, the noble’s niece. A thief robs the noble's house and ravishes the noble’s niece. The hero fights and captures the thief and saves the heroine. The story ends with a
policemen arresting the thief and a love scene between the hero and heroine
(Tanawangnoi 2001, 43; trans. by Patsorn Sungsri).

This simple theme about a hero who has a duty to capture the villain and save the heroine was very popular from the beginning of the Thai film industry (Tanawangnoi 2001, 47); although, it has declined in popularity since the 1970s when Thai cinema became more realistic.

The stories that were produced in the beginning of Thai film productions were different from the stories of nitan chakchak wongwong (Thai fairytales) or wankadee Thai (classical literature). Thus, stories about the supernatural, polygamy, princes and princess’ adventures and angels did not originally appear in the beginning of Thai film production. Because these stories were seen as symbolic of outdated and old-fashioned tastes, they were seen as inappropriate for the film industry, which was a new form of entertainment and a symbol of modernity. Moreover, in that time film was popular mainly among the urban elite who enjoyed and had greater exposure to western culture; thus the new stories or patterns of Thai prose fiction formed the template for the stories of the films that were produced in this period.

When Thai film became widely popular among the general populace, folktales and traditional literature were produced in Thai films such as Khun Chang Khun Paen (produced by NN Papayon, 1934), Luksao Pra Artith (dir. Somchai Ardsanajinda, produced in the late 1960s). These old stories have continued to be produced in film until the present time, with films such as Khun Paen (dir. Tanit Jitnukun, 2001), Pra Apai Manee (dir. Chalath Sriwanna, 2001) being prime examples. The ongoing appeal
of these stories occurs because ordinary Thai people are entertained by the rot (flavour) of the traditional stories.

Modern Thai literature and Thai film began in the same period; they were interdependent and both used the Western style as their template. Finally, writers and filmmakers blended western style and indigenous content to create the new style of modern Thai literature and Thai film.

‘Serious’ Novels

During the period after the 1932 revolution up to the Sarit’s 1957 coup\(^\text{10}\), a considerable number of newspapers and magazines were founded, and encouraged literary creativity. A new direction developed during this period of Thai literature as realism and social consciousness were highly valued, as were the ideals of freedom and equality; however, the genre of melodrama also retained its popularity (Boonkajorn 1980, 59, 60).

In 1952 the Anti-Communist Act was invoked as Thailand was threaded by communist insurgency. This resulted in the arrest of writers, newspapermen, young military officers, and politicians who were members of the ‘peace movement’\(^\text{11}\). They were accused of cooperating with the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) in trying to overthrow the government of Field Marshal Plake Pibulsongkram (Masavisut 1995, 10). Communists were created as the ‘other’ of the Thai nation. At this time the idea of

\(^{10}\) On 16 September 1957, Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat overthrew Field Marshal Plake Pibulsongkram’s government; he made a coup again on 20 October 1958 to overthrow Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn’s government (Pothworapong and Pothworapong 1999, 59). During Sarit’s regime a rigid censorship was imposed (Anderson 1985, 19).

\(^{11}\) The Peace Movement was a worldwide organization founded in the late 1940s for the preservation of peace and nuclear disbarment. However, it was viewed as merely communist propaganda (Smyth 1990, 19)
Silpa Pear Chewit (Art for Life) was introduced and became popular. Some novels and poems presented stories that directly related to politics and social problems (Boonkajorn 1980, 301–2) for example *Lae Pai Khang Na* by Sri Burapha, *Raya* by Sod Kumarohit and *Pai Daeng* (Red Bamboo) by Momrajawong Kurit Pramoj (Boonkajorn 1980, 378).

The development of serious novels was suspended during the dictatorial period of Sarit’s government (from 1957–1963). A rigid censorship was enforced; many scholars, writers, and politicians were jailed or driven into exile. Consequently, serious literature disappeared for a generation and was not published again until the 1970s (Anderson 1985, 19). (This serious literature in the 1970s will be explored in chapter 3, ‘Politic of “Nation”’.)

The controversial novels of this period were produced in film when Thai film business expanded after the 1970s. Sri Burapha’s novel *Khang Lang Phap* (Behind the Painting) was produced in film twice; in 1985 directed by Somboonsuk Niyomsiri and in 2001 directed by Cheard Songsri. The two films produced from this novel placed great emphasis on the love story between a middle-aged noble woman and a young university student, and the differences between the old world of the noble class and the new world of the middle class are highlighted through the films.

The novel *Pai Daeng* satirized communism; this story was produced in film in 1979 when the country was experiencing conflicts between proponents of the left and right wing. The film *Pai Daeng* (Red Bamboo, dir. Permphon Choe-arun, 1979) did not change the focus of the novel. In this period issues relating to serious social and political problems were the new trend in literature. However, this genre was controlled.
and forbidden when the country was controlled by the dictatorial government. While serious literature was controlled by the government, melodrama flourished and was very popular.

**Escapist Novels**

Escapist novels were introduced as a translation of melodramatic prose fiction from the period of King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V 1868-1910); however, after World War Two the readership and popularity of escapist fiction increased, mainly because of people who wanted to escape the suffering of their real life through absorption in a novel. Further censorship and political suppression of literature tackling serious issues led to writers producing escapist fiction.

In the post-World War Two period, stories along heart-rending, heart-throbbing, or humorous lines dominated the reading market. Many famous melodramas were released in this period such as *Ban Sai Thong*, *Pothjaman Sawangwong*, and *Dok Fah Lae Dome Phu Jong Hong*, written by K. Surangkanang; and *Prisana* and *Chao Sao Khong Anon*, written by W.N. Pramoanmark (Boonkajorn 1980, 273, 277, 435). Furthermore, these novels presented the conflict between the nobility and ordinary people and the adjusting lifestyles of these two groups.

Interestingly, the escapist novels of the post-World War Two period have been popular for film production for a long period; for example, *Ban Sai Thong* was produced in film during the 1960s (Poster Man 1997, 5), and again in 1980, directed by Ruth Ronnapob. The novels *Pothjaman Sawangwong*, *Prisana* and *Chao Sao Khong Anon* were also
produced in film by Ruth Ronnapob in the 1980s, and these films were all box office successes.

These novels dominated the literature market of Thailand during the period of dictatorial government from the late 1950s to the early 1970s. Escapist literature was very popular and published in many magazines. Pinyo Kongthong categorized escapist literature into 2 groups:

The first group was novels targeted at the male audience. These novels were serialized in magazines for men. There were stories of a hero’s mission in a city to fight with gangsters or against a secret agency that wanted the possession of Thailand and stories of hero’s adventures in the country fighting against gangsters.

The second group was novels for women, which were serialized in women’s magazines. These were love stories of heroines who had to overcome obstacles such as poverty or persecution by jealous cousins in the beginning of the story. At the end of the story the heroine becomes rich and marries a rich noble hero (Kongthong 1985, 28-9; trans. by Patsorn Sungsri).

The three institutions, the nation, religion, and the monarchy were presented through the two groups of the escapist novels. The nation was presented in the first group by the land that the hero protects and the enemies of the Thai nation. The monarchy and religion were presented in characters from second group through the noble families, and the law of karma could be seen to operate when the heroine overcame suffering and was happy at the end of the story.
The escapist novels in this period were not only serialized in magazines but also produced as radio dramas and films (Kongthong 1985, 29). This is evident from the Thai film posters in the late 1950s to the early 1970s, which advertised that films were produced from popular novels and radio dramas. For example, the novel *Prai Rak*, written by Choowong Chayajinda, was produced as a radio drama by the Kaew Fah troupe before being produced as the film *Prai Rak* (dir. Wijan Pakdeewijit, around the 1960s). Similarly, the film *Ban Sao Sod* (dir. Adisorn, 1971) used the story *Ban Sao Sod* written by Rapeeporn which was also produced as the radio drama by Kaew Fah troupe (Poster Man 1997, 31,33).

Escapist literature dominated not only the literature market but also other media such as radio and film. The content of Thai films in the late 1950s to the early 1970s was largely based on escapist novels. Thai films from this period can be divided into two main genres, following the literature genres *nang chewit* (melodrama) and *nang bu* (action film); however, comedy was also popular.

**Nang Chewit (Melodrama)**

The term melodrama is derived from the Greeks meaning “to combine of music (*melos*) and drama” (Kaplan 1993, 11). In recent times, melodrama has been used to refer to narrative in popular art forms such as theatre, literature, film. Women have been the main centre as characters and audiences of melodramatic film (Yoshimoto 1993, 101). Blandford summarized the term melodrama thus:
More recently the term refers to narratives in any popular form (film, television, literature, theatre) that seem contrived or excessive in emotion and sentimentality, in which dramatic conflict and plot take precedence over character and motivation, and in which there is a clear distinction between good and evil, heroes and villains (Blandford, Grant et al. 2001, 146).

European and North American melodrama emerged during the first Industrial Revolution, with the rise of the new bourgeois class. This group needed to differentiate itself from the working and aristocratic classes (Kaplan 1993, 11, 15). In Asia melodrama emerged during the period of modernization. In Asian, countries melodrama is linked to myth, ritual, and religious practices and ceremonies (Dissanayake 1993, 3). Thai film melodrama incorporates the concepts of Buddhism and the aspirations of the Thai middle class.

In the period after the Second World War when the escapist novel became popular, the plots of escapist novels for men were used to produce nang bu (action films) (Details of nang bu will be explored in chapter 3.), while the escapist novel for women was used to produce nang chewit (melodrama films). Escapist novels depict religion through karma; nang chewit also reinforce this narrative trope.

In Thailand, melodrama films are called nang chewit, which means “films of life”. This meaning is related to the main concept of Buddhism, namely that all existence is suffering (dukha) and suffering is related to conditions of life that are unpleasant, depressing, or dissatisfying in body and mind. Nang chewit presents suffering in the body and mind of characters, especially the heroine. For example, the heroine in Mae
Eye Saeurn (dir. Chutima Suwannarat, 1972) is lured into prostitution in Bangkok, and upon escaping from a brothel, she is raped by gangsters. In nang chewit the suffering of the heroine is the main theme of the story.

The law of karma is used in nang chewit to explain the result of the characters’ actions. Therefore the heroine has many obstacles throughout the story; however, she endures the difficulties and finally attains happiness, because of her patience and good action (karma). Buddhist philosophy is reinforced as the solution to problems, as the source of redemption, as encouragement to do well, and as being comforting. In the film Mea Loung (The Wife, dir. Wijit Kunavuth, 1978), the heroine prays to the image of the Buddha to comfort herself when her husband has new minor wives. When the heroine in Kam Man Sanya (dir. Khomsan Phongsutham, 1987) is depressed, she meets a Buddhist monk, through whom the concept of Buddhism is presented.

Where love affairs occur, the main theme of nang chewit is the consequences to characters after their sexual misconduct, namely punishment. The characters, having violated the moral precepts—especially the third precept, which prohibits sexual misconduct in general and adultery in particular—would be punished.

The escapist novels in the post-war period are popular and have been produced in nang chewit. Most of these stories introduced the middle-class as a new group in Thai society, and as a group which always has conflicts with the old, powerful group, the royal family. The middle-class characters such as Pothjaman in Ban Sai Thon (dir. Ruth Ronnapob, 1980), and Tawan, the heroine’s mother in Chao Sao Khong Anon (dir. Ruth Ronnapob, 1982), have to prove that they are “somebodies”, that is figures of
importance. On the other hand, in nang chewit the image of the royal family group began to decline due to their bad behaviour, their not working and their having no money. However, the hero is a representative of a good royal family and has qualities considered princely; namely, he is handsome, clever, kind, and has a good job. The stories that present the conflicts between the two groups end, as in fairytales, with a ménage of hero and heroine.

The stories often end with the heroine, whose mother is a commoner such as—the heroine in Ban Sai Thong (dir. Ruth Ronnapob, 1980) and Prisana (dir. Ruth Ronnapob, 1982)—marrying the hero from the royal family. This form of conclusion in nang chewit appears to have wide audience appeal.

Besides the stories of class conflict between the middle class and royal family, family tension has also become a popular theme for nang chewit. The plots in escapist novels in the 1970s and 1980s were also used to produce films. Popular stories portrayed the conflict between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law or conflicts among wives. For example, often the heroine has a role as a wife who is tortured by family members such as her husband and mother-in-law. The problems of extended families are presented through these themes. The royal family group is not present in these plots.

Plaeng Thai sakon or plaeng luk kroung (Thai & international songs or songs for the urbanite), which present love stories and popular among the urban middle class, are also used in nang chewit to enhance the audience’s emotions.
In *nang chewit*, Buddhism is presented through sermons by Buddhist monks, nuns, or people seeking to comfort the main characters. Buddhism seeks to alleviate suffering. The monarchy is represented through the royal family group. Although this genre presents the bad side of the royal family, the main character is typically a good member of the royal family and has a role to protect the dignity of the royal family. The nation is presented through the ways of life of the middle class.

**Conclusion: Religion and Culture in Thai Film**

The development of Thai film is interrelated with Thai culture, Buddhism, and the monarchy. Buddhism and the monarchy are the two significant institutions that have shaped Thai culture, its way of life and beliefs since ancient times. During the reign of King Vajiravudh (King Rama VI, 1910-1925), the idea of the three pillars—namely, nation, religion, and the monarchy—was co-opted to promote nationalism. Since then the independence of the Thai nation has been tied to religion (Buddhism) and the monarchy. Indeed the three pillars influence Thai culture.

This chapter has considered Thai culture through indigenous arts such as painting, performance, music and song, language, and literature. This is because I see the development of indigenous arts effecting the development and growth of Thai film. Traditionally the indigenous arts have been faithfully created for Buddhism and the monarchy, as well as for the entertainment of the Thai people. Thai film, as a new medium, combines with indigenous arts and western arts. The concept of the three pillars has been transferred from the indigenous arts to influence the content and style of Thai film. This transfer can be seen in the respectful characters of Buddhist monks and
the monarchy in many Thai films. The concept of Buddhism, especially the law of karma is presented in many Thai films as a solution to problems. Meanwhile, the concept of the Thai nation has been transferred from the indigenous arts, to symbolize the Thai language and dialects, the land, Thai way of life, and the role of the state.

Thai national cinema therefore foregrounds Thai culture and highlights the importance of nation, religion, and the monarchy. The existence of these three pillars, as potent signifiers of Thai identity, is characteristic of Thai national cinema.

Evidence of the relevance of these three pillars can be found not only in the cultural evolution of Thai national cinema in but also the economic and social development of the Thai film industry. The next chapter adopts the work of Andrew Higson to consider the concept of Thai national cinema in terms of industry and economy. The interrelationship between these three pillars and the development of the Thai film industry, the impact of imported film, and other media businesses will explored.
Chapter 2: From Monarch’s Hobby to Big Business

Film is not only a kind of art or entertainment, but also a big business that can make a tremendous profit. A lot of money circulates among national and international film businesses through the import and export of movies and equipment, as well as through sponsorship and location shoots. Thus, a study of Thai national cinema needs to investigate its role in economic terms. Following the methodology outlined in the Introduction, this chapter adopts Andrew Higson’s notion (1995) that the national cinema can be defined in term of economics which relate to the infrastructures of production, distribution, and exhibition within a particular state (Higson 1995, 4).

The chapter is divided into four sections, according to the direction of the Thai film industry that developed during different economic periods, and it specifically charts the influence that the Thai monarchy has had on the evolving economic influences of Thai national cinema. The first section focuses on the Thai film industry from the beginning of 1897 to the late 1960s and the end of 16 mm film. The second section focuses on Thai film industry in the 1970s, the beginning of the 35 mm film industry. The third section concentrates on Thai film industry in the 1980s, when the Thai film industry boomed. The final section is about the Thai film industry from the 1990s to the present time, and discusses economic factors behind the industry slump in the middle of this decade and the rebirth of the industry in the late 1990s. In each part, the Thai film industry will be explored by looking at film production companies, distributors and movie theatre exhibitors. Moreover the roles of the monarchy and the government, film tax, the local and regional film organizations, film business owners, and other businesses will be explored as they relate to the film industry in economic terms.
Thai film history started in the reign of King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V, 1868-1910) when Siam (the former name of Thailand) was governed by an absolute monarchy. During the reign of King Vajiravudh (King Rama VI 1910-1925), Thai film companies were established by groups of noble families, the middle class Thai Chinese, as well as royal families. In the reign of King Prajadhipok (King Rama VII 1924-1935), Thai film companies matured, the first Thai feature film was produced, and the film censorship law was enacted. At the end of King Prajadhipok’s reign, the absolute monarchy was overthrown. During the period of the absolute monarchy, two groups had significant roles in the Thai film industry. The first group was the royal court, and the second group was foreign businesspeople.

The film industry in Thailand, during the period of the absolute monarchy, was managed by these two significant groups. The first group was the royal court including the monarch, the royal family and the noble family. This powerful group acted in multiple ways that shaped the Thai film industry, such as being initiators, consumers, filmmakers, businesspeople, and film censorship classifiers. The second group was the group of businesspeople that included the local Thai Chinese, Indian, Japanese, and Westerners (especially Americans) who acted as distributors of foreign films, and managed movie theatres. However, this group was heavily reliant on the royal court, both because the royal court held the power over censorship, and because of their influence over business ventures. Although it is difficult to obtain specific details on the profitability of the film industry during this period, the rivalry between the royal
group and the foreign group demonstrates that this was perceived as a highly profitable business.

The reign of King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V 1868-1910) was a period of reform, with a heavy focus on the modernization of the country. The bondage and the restriction of the slaves were removed. Siam accepted a number of innovations from foreign countries. These included the introduction of a new school system, the telegraph, the railway, and cinema.

Thai people first experienced watching a film in June 1897 (Barme 1999, 308). Then in 1900 Prince Sanphasat Suphakit, a younger brother of King Chulalongkorn, made the first film in a series of short documentary-style films. The prince’s films recorded the public activities of King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V 1868-1910) and major royal ceremonies. Prince Sanphasat Suphakit showed his film to the public at the Wat12 Benjamaborpith Dusitwanaram fair in Bangkok and the film tickets were sold to ordinary people (Tanawangnoi 2001, 13). At that time film was a luxurious hobby for the royal family that had the added benefit that it could be used as propaganda to support the institution of the monarchy.

Film became an instituted business in Thailand when a Japanese travelling film company built the first permanent movie theatre in Bangkok in 1905 (Uabamrungjit 1997, 80), and the monarch named the company the Royal Japanese Cinematograph (Tanawangnoi 2001, 18). It could be construed that by using the term ‘Royal’ in naming this company the King was both showing acceptance of the foreign film

12 Wat means “Buddhist temple”.
company and staking a claim of ownership over the company. The use of the term ‘Royal’ gave the industry the ‘royal stamp of approval’, connoting that the business operated to a high standard and had a good connection with the monarchy. However, this term also implied a form of appropriation whereby the monarch took a degree of ownership of the business, creating an expectation that they would have some influence over how it is run.

Following the establishment of the Royal Japanese Cinematograph, many imported films were shown in Bangkok, particularly films from the French company, Pathe Freres, which had established a distribution branch in Singapore (Uabamrungjit 2001, 121). In 1907 the Krung Thep Cinematograph (Bangkok Film Company) ran by Soochai Ratanamala, a Thai Chinese, and three Italian traders named Pozzi, Marangoni and Valaperta, was built in Bangkok. This theatre also showed imported films (Boonyaketmala 1984, 114). During the reign of King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V 1868-1910), all film businesses involved in the import and distribution of films belonged to foreign businesspeople and Thai Chinese. Thai people consumed imported films as a new entertainment; however, during this period they also saw the potential of this new invention as a business opportunity.

2 The Reign of King Vajiravudh (King Rama VI 1910-1925): The First Step of the Monarchy into the Film Industry

During the reign of King Vajiravudh (King Rama VI 1910-1925) many movie theatre companies and film distributors were established. Competition in the film industry
between the group of the royal court and businesspeople—especially the Thai Chinese began.

In 1911, a cinema, the Phathanakorn Cinematograph, was set up and run by a Thai Chinese named Siaw Songaoun Siboonruang. The company imported films from foreign film distributors (Uabumrungjit 2001, 122). In 1919, Nakorn Kasem Company took over the site of the Royal Japanese Cinematograph and built the first concrete theatre. One year later Phathanakorn Cinematograph and Krung Thep Film Company (Bangkok Film Company) were merged to become the Siam Papayon Film Company (Siam Film Company, 1920-1933). This company was managed by the Thai Chinese, Siaw Songaoun Siboonruang (Uabumrungjit 2001, 122). From 1922-1925 the Siam Papayon Film Company had 20 movie theatres in Bangkok and Thonburi province, and convinced many provincial businessmen around Thailand to set up movie theatres to show films from the Siam Papayon Film Company (Sukwong 1999,109). By the early 1930s the company supplied imported films, especially from America, to the movie theatres in Bangkok and the provinces (Boonyaktemala 1984, 116). This was the beginning of local film distribution in Thailand. From the early 1920s to 1933 film distribution in Thailand was under the control of the Siam Papayon Film Company (Uabumrungjit 2001, 122). Thus, the Siam Papayon Film Company came to monopolize the film distribution business in Thailand.

During the First World War (1914 to 1918), the monarchies of Austria-Hungary and Russia were overthrown (Shafritz 1993, 724). This was not a good sign for the Thai system of absolute monarchy. Thus, King Vajiravudh (King Rama VI 1910-1925) promoted Siamese nationalism. He wrote plays and articles warning against alien
influences, especially from the Chinese, whom he called the ‘Jews of the East’ (Stowe 1991, 6). The monarch’s campaign to promote Siamese nationalism encouraged Thai people to identify with each other, creating a sense of an ‘in-group’, and an ‘out-group’, and emphasising the otherness of foreigners in order to minimise their influence. This campaign led to the notion of ‘otherness’ being associated with the film companies, which were run by foreigners and Thai Chinese—and showed mostly foreign films.

The king’s nationalism policy sought to create integration for Thai people and worked to protect businesses owned and run by Thai people. In 1922, by an edict of the King Vajiravudh (King Rama VI 1910-1925), Siam Niramai Cinema Company was established by Chao Praya Ram Rakob and managed by the noble family, in the form of the Wasuwat brothers. This was in order to overcome Chinese influence in the film industry (Sukwong 1999, 128) seen in companies such as the Siam Papayon Film Company (Siam Film Company) (Boonyaktemala 1984, 115). In addition, the king recognised the potential value of film for the purpose of propaganda, and encouraged the production of newsreels and documentaries to promote the activities of new government departments, such as The Royal Railways. The Siam Niramai Cinema Company distributed film and produced newsreels and documentaries to be shown in their movie theatres (Sukwong 1999, 128).

Besides the Siam Niramai Cinema, in 1922 when Prince Prajadhipok was a commander-in-chief of the Royal Railway unit, the Royal Railway Film Unit was established by Prince Kamphaenphet and Prince Purachat. This unit produced documentaries (Barme 1999, 314) that recorded the activities of the Royal Railway Department, as well as important events in the period of King Prajadhipok’s reign, such as the construction and
opening ceremony of the Prathom Barom Rajanusorn Bridge, King Prajadhipok’s coronation ceremony, and a visit that King Prajadhipok made to the Sam Saen Power Plant (Tanawangnoi 2001, 113). Moreover, this unit also released the first film magazine, *Papayon Siam* (the *Siam Moving Picture Magazine*) (Uabamrungjit 1997, 94). Thus, a new business for the production of film magazines was created to support the film business.

Siam Niramai Cinema, The Royal Railway Film Unit and *Papayon Siam* were representatives of the institution of the monarchy. The monarchy’s involvement in the film industry reflected both its interest in a profitable industry, and its recognition of the power of the film industry for the purpose of spreading propaganda.

Until the reign of King Vajiravudh (King Rama VI 1910-1925), no Thai feature films were produced; however, in 1923 Thai people experienced their first feature film, *Nang Sao Suwan* (*Suwanna of Siam*), which was produced by Henry McRay from Universal Studios. The cast in this film were Thai people, as were many of the film crew (Sukwong 1990, 12). The censorship of films was started in response to the film *Nang Sao Suwan*—due to its containing an execution scene that the monarch felt would depict Siam as an uncivilized country. Thus, this scene was cut before the film could be released for showing (Tanawangnoi 2001, 32). At this time, the king viewed all films for approval, prior to their release in Thailand, and had the right of censorship over them.

During the making of *Nang Sao Suwan*, some people from the Thai crews, such as Khun Patipak Pimlikit, learned to produce feature films. Khun Patipak Pimlikit was a
cinematographer in the Thai film *Mai Kid Laey* (produced by The Siamese Film Co. Bangkok, 1927), which was released in the period of King Prajadhipok (Sukwong 1999, 124, 136).

3 The Reign of King Prajadhipok (King Rama VII 1925-1935): The Beginning of Thai Film Production

In the reign of King Prajadhipok (King Rama VII 1925-1935), filming was very popular among royal families, noble families and the middle class. The film business expanded and a high level of competition developed between film companies run by the local Thai Chinese and the King’s film company. The first Thai film was released in 1927. The legislative act covering film censorship was also introduced.

King Prajadhipok appreciated film as both a consumer and filmmaker. In 1930, the king established and sponsored the Amateur Cinema Association of Siam (ACAS) (Sukwong 1990, 10). In the same year, the Amateur Cinema League Inc. in New York invited the king to be an honorary member (Sukwong 1999, 48). This demonstrates the good relationship that existed between the Thai monarchy and American film studios. Thus, when King Prajadhipok (King Rama VII 1925-1935) established his film company, the Saha Cinema Company (The United Cinema Company), the company was the main importer of films from Hollywood.

The activities of the ACAS included showing films of the King and members of the royal family as well as selling film equipment (Sukwong 1999, 67). The king’s films had two production groups. One was Papayon Song Tai (the king’s filming), whose
The task involved recording the king’s personal activities for the purpose of archiving (these films were not shown in public). The second was—Papayon Amporn, which recorded the official duties of the king, such as attending royal ceremonies and visiting to foreign countries. These films were shown in public (Tanawangnoi 2001, 119). The monarchy learned to use film for propaganda during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V 1868-1910) and this activity was continued in the reign of King Bhumibol (King Rama IX 1946 –). King Bhumibol also established the Kong Papayon Soun Pra-ong (Royal Movie Unit) in 1950 to record his activities for showing in movie theatres around Thailand. The king’s films stopped showing in movie theatres when television broadcasting began around the country (Sukwong 2002, 29), providing a more convenient way of reaching a more widespread audience. During the economic recession of the 1920s many government officials were laid off. Some of them created their own businesses. For example, Loung Sunthorn Asawaraj, the government official of the Royal Drama unit, and his friend established Tai Papayon Thai (The Siamese Film Co. Bangkok), and Loung Kon Kan Jean Jit, one of the Wasuwat brothers and the cameraman of the Royal Railway Film Unit during the reign of King Vajiravudh, became a significant figure in the Krungthep Film Company (Bangkok Film Company) (Sukwong 1999, 134–5).

Therefore, Thai film production was started by government officials who had a background in and understanding of acting and filmmaking, acquired in their roles as filmmakers for the royal court. At the same time, the group of local Thai Chinese had acquired the necessary business skills from running their own businesses, and they

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13 Loung is the first grade of the administrative hierarchy.
recognised the opportunity that the film industry represented; therefore they started to operate film businesses such as film distribution companies.

In 1927 the first Thai feature film, *Chok Song Chan (Double Lucky)* was released by the Krungthep Film Company (Bangkok Film Company). Two months later their competitor, Tai Papayon Thai Company (The Siamese Film Co. Bangkok), released *Mai Kid Leuy* (Uabumrungjit 2001, 125–6). After the success of the first Thai film, *Chok Song Chan*, the group of filmmakers from the Krungthep Film Company released the first sound film *Long Tang (Going Astray)*, produced by the Wasuwat Brothers, 1932) and changed the name of the company to the Sri Krung Sound Film Company. The name choice reflected the fact that most of those involved in the company were from Sri Krung Newspaper (Sukwong 1996, 67). This new name also emphasized that this company produced sound films, a new phenomena within the Thai film industry at that time. The company built a fully equipped sound studio, and adopted similar production methods to those used by Hollywood studios. The company also introduced the `star system` to establish actors and actresses as recognised stars through the use of newspaper advertising, and the sale of film music records sung by the actor or actress. For example, Manee Sumonnat and Jamrat Suwakon, who were the stars of the Sri Krung Sound Film Company, sang songs in the films that they made, and these were then released as records (Tanawangnoi 2001, 157, 160)

From 1932 to 1942 the Sri Krung Sound Film Company released 25 sound films, with an emphasis on musicals (Uabumrungjit 2001, 217–18). In the 1930s, film businesses became popular; many groups from the royal families and the middle class established film production companies—for example, the Hasadin Papayon Film, founded
Company by Momrachawong Anusak Hasadin; the Lawo Papayon Film Company, established by His Royal Highness Prince Anusorn Mongkonkarn; the Burapasin Film Company started by Mr. Tein Srisupan; and NN Film Company, founded by Mr. Bumroung Naeypanith (Sukwong 1990, 34).

From the beginning of the Thai film industry, the press such as Saranukun magazine, Kao Papayon magazine (The Moving Picture News), Pim Thai newspaper, and Sri Krung newspaper, acted to support the film business through advertising and film promotion.

The Beginning of Thai Film Companies

The business of Siam Papayon Company (Siam Film Company) declined after the key manager, Siaw Songaoun Siboonruang who was Thai Chinese, died in 1928. In 1930, King Prajadhipok (King Rama VII 1925-1935) established Sala Chalerm Krung, the big and modern movie theatre to commemorate the 150-year anniversary of the creation of Bangkok. In 1932, Saha Cinema Company (The United Cinema Company), owned by King Prajadhipok, took over the Siam Papayon Film Company and the Queen Theatre Company. Saha Cinema Company largely monopolised the film business for film import, distribution and exhibition in Thailand (Sukwong 1999, 120).

When the absolute monarchy was overthrown by Khana Ras (the People’s Party) in 1932, the monarchy’s organizations, including their film organization, were banned or transferred to the government, thus terminating the monarch’s direct involvement with the film industry. For example, the Amateur Cinema Association of Siam (ACAS)

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14 “Momrachawong” is the lowest rank of royal title.
stopped their activities (Sukwong 1990, 10), the Royal Railway Film Unit was banned in 1932 (Barme 1999, 314), and Sala Chalerm Krung and Saha Cinema Company (the United Cinema Company) were transferred to the control of the Crown Property Bureau (Sukwong 1999, 120). However, Sala Chalerm Krung and Saha Cinema Company (the United Cinema Company) have continued to operate until the present day (2004).

After the end of the absolute monarchy some groups of the royal family and the noble family still ran their own film businesses. Many film companies were established by the middle class, and the government within the constitutional monarchy had a film department for making propaganda films.

**The Film Censorship Legislation**

King Prajadhipok (King Rama VII 1925-1935) had realized that film was not only an entertainment business but also a powerful mass medium. Therefore, in 1930, legislation for film censorship was introduced (Uabumrungjit 1997, 94). Before the *Film Censorship Act* was introduced the King classified films by himself. A good example of this took place with the film *Annad Meod* (*Black Power, produced by Loung Suthorn Asawaraj, 1927*), which had a brothel scene. King Prajadhipok commented that the scene was not appropriate, but he did not forbid the showing of the film. Yet as a result, the film could not be shown because the movie theatres were worried about the King’s comment (Tanawangnoi 2001, 48). In the period of the absolute monarchy, movie theatre owners had to protect themselves from accusations of committing *lese-majesty*. Thus, movie theatre owners and filmmakers had to consider whether or not the films’ content would meet with royal approval.
After film censorship legislation had been introduced, every film had to be investigated by King Prajadhipok before being released to the public (Sukwong 1999, 140); this continued until the absolute monarchy was overthrown. In 1936 the film censorship legislation was revised by the Minister of the Interior to include eleven criteria for the banning of a film. These criteria were:

1. A film or any part of a film that was insulting to any religion.
2. A film presenting any unusual crime, which might lead the audience to commit the crime.
3. A film presenting the life of any well-known criminal.
4. A film showing murder or execution.
5. A film displaying cruelty to human beings or animals.
6. A film containing pornography.
7. A film presenting any act that might harm relations with other countries or people.
8. A film insulting the government, country or government officials.
9. A film containing political content that might weaken the people’s trust in the administration of the country.
10. Films that might promote bad habits.
11. A film that is insulting to the Kingship (Chawalathawat 1999, 52).

After the absolute monarchy was overthrown, the direct involvement of the monarchy in the film business declined. However, the film censorship legislation still acted to protect the three institutions of the nation, religion and the monarchy, and continues to
do so to the present day. The protection of the monarchy is embodied in the eleventh criteria. In the same way, the nation is protected by criteria 7, 8, and 9, while the religion and the concept of Buddhism are protected by criteria 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 of the Act. Thus, the Act is worded in such a way as to protect the three pillars of Thai society from being presented in a negative light.

4. Thai Cinema and Constitutional Democracy

After the absolute monarchy was overthrown in 1932, the constitutional government replaced the role of the monarchy in the film business. In the pre-war period the government used film for propaganda purposes. Meanwhile groups of the royal families and the middle class established their own film companies. During that time Thai film was seen both as a means of distributing government propaganda and as a profitable business. Two different modes of film presentation became popular. The first mode was the presentation of silent films using live dubbing during the showing of the film, with narrators keeping the audience informed of the text of the film. The second form of film presentation was the silent film, which later changed to become the synchronized sound film. The film business stopped for a while in the period of the Second World War. During the war, Thailand was allied with Japan, and thus there were no films imported from Britain, France, or America. Moreover, this also resulted in a shortage of 35 mm film available for film production within Thailand. After the war, film business using 16 mm film with live dubbing prospered, and this attracted many businesspeople from the middle class to invest in them. In the late 1960s 16 mm film production was replaced by 35 mm film production.
With the beginning of the constitutional monarchy, members of the noble families and the royal families became businesspeople, becoming involved in the film industry. In the same period, the Thai middle class, Thai Chinese and foreigners continued to run their film businesses, which included movie theatres, film distribution, and film production agencies.

In the 1930s the film business became popular throughout Thailand. This could be seen by the increase in the number of movie theatres across the country. In the early 1930s there were 68 movie theaters around Thailand, while by the late 1930s there were 120. All of these theatres showed American films, which were supplied by the Saha Cinema Company (the United Cinema Company) (Boonyaketsal 1992, 65). From this period onwards, Thai people adopted film as a popular source of entertainment. American film companies dominated the film market in Thailand, as at this time Thai film production was in its infancy, and Thai film producers learnt to produce films from American films.

During this period the construction of a modern movie theatre was a symbol of modernization and prosperity, as well as a potentially highly profitable investment. King Prajadhipok built Sala Chalerm Krung Movie Theatre in 1933, and Field Marshal Plake Pibulsongkram built Sala Chalerm Thai Theatre in 1949 for stage drama—until in 1953 it was adapted to be a movie theatre (Uabumrungjit 1997, 93). Moreover, the construction of the Sala Chalerm Thai Movie Theatre presented the new leader as being comparable to the King.
The film business in this period was dominated by two groups. The first group was the government, which established their own film production units. These government film units also collaborated with the private film companies in the making propaganda films during the Second World War. The other group included both the middle class and the royal family. This group made films and also created the other businesses that supported the film industry such as film dubbing studios, record production operations, and movie magazines. In this period sound film became popular, and in order to compete, silent film producers created live, dubbed performances.

**Government Film Units**

After the end of the absolute monarchy in 1932, Thailand moved in a new political direction. Civilian and military personnel both had significant roles in the government of the country. In that time there were many conflicts among the political groups. In an effort to combat this, government collaborated with film companies to produce propaganda films\(^{15}\).

Before the first propaganda film was released, the government used three documentaries for propaganda purposes: 1) *Karn Pleang Plang Karn Pok Krong 2475 (The Political Changes in 1932)*; 2) *Wan Ratthamnoon (The Constitution Day)*; and 3) *Karn Prab Pram Kabot Borworndej (Suppressing the Borworndej Rebellion)*, for propagandizing the new government (Sulaiman 2001, 67). These three documentaries are no longer available for viewing; however, the film titles provide insight into their probable content. It can be presumed that *Karn Pleang Plang Karn Pok Krong 2475* presented

\(^{15}\) A propaganda film is one with the intention of persuading audiences to a particular ideology or political cause (Blandford and others 2001, 188). The film institutionalises efforts of government ‘information agencies’ and attempts to manage or shape the reporting of news events (Hammond 2001, 344).
the turning point of Thai politics from the absolute monarchy to the constitutional monarchy. *Wan Ratthamnoon* introduced the details of the new Thai constitution, and *Karn Prab Pram Kabot Borworndej* presumably depicted the ability of the new government to suppress the rebellion. Therefore these three documentaries emphasized to the new politics and the new government, which was the representative of the nation, while the monarchy and religion were not represented.

The first propaganda film in the pre-war period was *Leard Tahan Thai* (*Thai Soldier Blood*, dir. Khun Wichit Martra, 1935). The constitutional government led by Praya Phahon Ponpayuhasaina assigned Sri Krung Sound Film Company to produce this film for the promotion of the armed forces such as the army, the navy, and the air force, as well as the promotion of national idealism. The military provided the arms and military equipment used in the production of the film. Moreover, a real military exercise was filmed during the making of this film. This film was very successful both in terms of audience appreciation and as a promotional activity for the military forces (Tanawangnoi 2001, 139). This was a successful collaboration between the government and a film company. The company received an acknowledgement from the government, and the appreciation of the people. The film was an effective piece of military government propaganda, as well as a profitable enterprise for the film company.

The film *Leard Tahan Thai* was the story of the young soldier going to war. The soldier was inspired by the idealism of protecting nation, religion, and the monarchy, as well as the new constitution (Tanawangnoi 2001, 139). The film emphasized the importance of the military to protect the three institutions. Although in this period the absolute
monarchy had been overthrown by the new government, respect for the monarchy remained an entrenched value of Thai society, and the people retained great respect for the king. The film also introduced the constitution as a new and important institution for the country.

The propaganda film *Leard Tahan Thai* received four showing periods: 3-8 April 1935, 24-25 April 1935, 1-3 May 1935 and a final time from 10-12 February 1942 the period of World War Two. The success of *Leard Tahan Thai* inspired many film companies to produce propaganda films. Another famous propaganda film was *Leard Supan* (dir. Momrachawong Anusak Tebhasadin, 1936) produced by Nakorn Papayon Borisat (Nakorn Film Company) ran by Mr. Cham Sukumarnchan. Prior to the production of this film, the story of *Leard Supan* was a famous stage drama showing at the theatre of the Department of Fine Arts. Thus the reputation of this stage drama made the success of the film easier. Furthermore, the film was supported by a director of the Department of Fine Arts, Loung Wichit Watakarn (Thai Chinese name, Kimleang Watanaparuda) and a Chief of the Predalai Stage Drama Group, Her Majesty Laksamee Lawan, (Tanawangnoi 2001, 144, 146).

Although *Leard Supan* was not supported by the military, it received support from a high-ranking government official and members of the royal family. The success of this film, and many others, relied on the support of powerful groups such as the government and the royal family. While the royal family lost much of their power after the political movement in 1932, they retained the respect of conservative people. *Leard Supan* was a successful collaboration of the middle class, the government and the royal family.
Besides Leard Tahan Thai and Leard Supan, The King of White the Elephant (dir. San Wasuthan, 1941), Ban Rai Na Rao (Our Farmland, produced by Air Force Film unit, 1942) and Songkram Keat Rang (produced by Air Force Film unit, 1942) were Thai propaganda films produced in the period of World War Two. These films became a mouthpiece for the political elite, leaders, and the government.

The King of the White Elephant was produced by Pridi Banomyoung, the Governor General and Regent representing the King Ananda Mahidol (King Rama VIII), in conjunction with the crew of the Thai Film Company (Uabumrungjiit 2001, 128). The film was released in the period of World War Two; its film’s purpose was to promote anti-war sentiments, and to present Thailand as a neutral nation (Sulaiman 2001, 57-58). The King of the White Elephant was a sound film and used English dialogue: it premiered on 4 April 1941 in Bangkok, New York, and Singapore (Tanawangnoi 2001, 207). The film presented the story of the moralist Thai monarchy in the Ayutthaya period. The Thai king fights the Burmese king by himself to avoid the bloodshed of people and soldiers on the battlefield. The film presented the peaceful way of resolving conflict by using the ‘just war’ argument. Because of the use of the English language, this film had limited appeal to Thai audiences. The primary purpose of the film was to influence foreign perception of Thailand as a peaceful and neutral nation that wanted no part in the war. In this case the Thai nation was recommended by other countries.

Ban Rai Na Rao was inspired by Prime Minister Plake Pibulsongkram to promote government policy and nationalism (Tanawangnoi 2001, 219). The film presented the ideal of the modern life for Thai farmers by through the use of western costume such as jeans and boots. Images of the happiness and prosperity of the Thai farmers under the
rule of the new government were shown in the film. This was done in an effort to communicate the belief that the change in government would be beneficial for the farmers.

In the period of World War Two the government realized that film was a powerful medium. Thus, the government and the political elite supported and collaborated with Thai film companies in the making of propaganda films. The film companies benefited from these collaborations by making profitable films that also contributed to the reputation of the film company. Therefore, the government and film companies patronized each other, although no official government policy for the promotion of the film industry existed at that time.

**The Local Film Company**

After the absolute monarchy was overthrown on 24 June 1932, the political power moved from the monarchy to the government. Thus, in this period the influence of the monarch in the film business declined and it was largely replaced by the government, which used film for the purpose of propaganda. At the same time the local film business matured. Thailand had developed movie theatres, and film distribution, and production companies. Although the government had no official policy for the support of the film business, they realized that film was an important source of propaganda and profit. The introduction of sound film to Thailand in 1928 meant that films could be experienced by people both through sight and sound, and this became a popular form of entertainment. In this period many local film companies were established. From 1927
to 1945 around 64 Thai films were released. Most of these films were black and white in 35 mm and 16 mm.

In the 1930s the Thai film business became divided into 2 modes of presentation with the introduction of sound to films. The first mode continued to use silent films; however, in order to compete with sound films, live dubbing was used in the theatres. The other mode of film presentation was sound film production (Sukwong 1990, 33). From 1929 movie theatres in Bangkok and provincial areas changed from silent film projectors to sound film projectors (Yamsa ka 1997, 76). Thus the movie theatres around Thailand were ready for sound film. Thai people were comfortable with and enjoyed sound film. Thus, the silent film business used live dubbing in order to remain competitive and popular.

Live dubbing made it possible for silent films to compete in the beginning of the sound film period. It reduced the gap between the audiences and films. Live dubbing could break the barrier of silence and foreign languages in the silent film era, until in the sound film period, when live-dubbing performers acted as translators and entertainers.

The Thai phrase for ‘live dubbing’ is nang pak\textsuperscript{16}. The idea of nang pak started at the beginning of the sound film period when the Siam Cinema Company tried to solve the problem of an over-stock of silent films. The commentator stood beside the screen and translated the inter-titles of the silent films. In the foreign sound films, the dubbing performers performed live in the cinema. Thus, in every cinema there was a small room

\textsuperscript{16} Nang pak is combined from two words nang and pak. The word nang pak started in 1931 when Sin Sri boonreung (pseudonym Tid Keaw), the famous live dubbing performer, used the word pak to narrate Indian film \textit{Ramayana}; since then, the word ‘pak’ has become synonymous for this kind of dubbing (Uabumrungjit 2001, 130).
next to the projector booth for the dubbing performers. In the provincial areas the live dubbing performers used the regional dialect (Uabumrungjit 2001, 130). The use of dialect made the films accessible to the audiences, and this was a major contributing factor of the acceptance of film as a popular means of entertainment, particularly in provincial areas.

The beginning of the sound film era was started in 1927 by an American film, *The Jazz Singer* (dir. Alan Crosland, 1927) (Koniberge 1997, 363, 372). One year later, imported sound films started showing in Thailand (Sukwong 1999, 36). Thai sound film production started in the early 1930s when the first 35 mm film with synchronized sound, *Long Tang* (*Going Astray*, dir. Wasuwat brothers, 1931), was produced and released by Sri Krung Sound Film Company. The first sound studio was constructed at Sri Krung Sound Film Company (Dunagin 1993, 25) for the making of this film.

This period was the beginning of sound film in Thailand. Most early sound films were created as musicals as this gave an opportunity to maximize the use of sound. Song and music became an important factor in the sound film business. Thus sound film companies often became involved in record businesses as a sideline. For example, Sri Krung Sound Film Company sold a record of the sound track to the film *Wiwa Tieng Kean* (*Midnight Wedding*, 1937) (Tanawangnoi 2001, 164), and The Thai Film Company produced a record of the song *Lom Houn* from the sound track of the film *Mae Sue Sao* (*The Young Matchmaker*, produced by Thai Film, 1938). This record was produced by the Thai Film Company in cooperation with the Deutsche Grammophone Company, Germany (Tanawangnoi 2001, 175).
In this period the Sri Krung Sound Film Company, managed by the Wasuwat brothers, was a pioneering and successful film business. The Wasuwat brothers also had a publishing business, which supported their film business through advertising, as well as their own movie theatre named Sri Krung Movie Theatre. They also distributed foreign films. This was the beginning of vertical business integration for the Thai film industry. Vertical integration occurs in the film industry when a film company controls every area of its enterprise such as production, distribution and exhibition (Berry 2001, 460).

Furthermore, some of the Wasuwat brothers were high-ranking government officials. Loung Kon Karn Jen Jit was a mechanical engineer in the period of King Vajiravudh (King Rama VI 1910-1925) and Manit Wasuwat was a Member of Parliament in the first period of constitutional government (Sukwong 1999, 43, 46, 55). Hence, this connection between government officials and the monarchy was a significant factor that provided the Wasuwat brothers with the opportunity to make notable films.

The other notable local film companies were the Thai Film Company and the Lawo Papayon Company, whose owners belonged to the royal family and were overseas graduates. The Thai Film Company started in 1938. It had a sound studio with equipment from Hollywood, and was run by His Royal Highness Prince Panupan Yukon and a group of overseas graduates. This company released only 5 sound films and sold out to the Royal Air Force in 1940 (Uabumrungjit 2001, 128). The Lawo Papayon Company was established by His Royal Highness Prince Anusorn Mokonkarn in 1936 (Arunrojsuriya 1997, 123). Prince Anusorn Mongkonkarn graduated from a military school in America and he also studied filmmaking in Hollywood before he returned to Thailand (Thai Film Foundation 1995, 13). The group of overseas graduates
was the main group to bring new knowledge of filmmaking to Thailand. In this period, although the monarchy had less direct influence over the film industry, many members of the royal family became involved in film businesses. Members of the royal family often received a foreign education and this provided them with the opportunity to become interested in, and gain access to, foreign production methods. Although the monarch had given up absolute power over the country, the royal group retained a great deal of political power and influence; this benefited them in their business dealings, as did their continued popularity with the general populace.

The other film companies were also run by ethnic Thais. Businesses such as NN Sound Picture, Sri Siam Motion Picture, Song Sahai Film, Asiatic Production, Hasadin Motion Picture and Kanyamite Film belonged to the royal family and noble families (Boonyaketmala 1984, 123). After 1932, the royal family and noble families lost power: this was the period of the new constitutional government. The change in government created a new political elite, and the military and the middle class became more powerful. However, in the field of film business the royal family and the noble families largely retained their power. Thus the local film business was owned (for the most part) by the high-ranking group, which had money, power, and knowledge.

In the late 1930s, 95 percent of the films in the market were American (Boonyaketmala 1984, 126). Competition among the local film companies was dominated by businesses involved in foreign film distribution—especially Hollywood film distributors. In 1947 a company distributing Hollywood films was established in Thailand (Uabumrungjit 1997, 94). Hollywood dominated the film industry market, holding a major stake in
both imported films as well as the supply of materials and film equipment for the local film producers and film exhibitors.

5 Thai Film Industry in the Post-War Period

In the post-war period, following the end of World War Two, the monarchy did not have a major role in film business. King Anan (King Rama VIII 1934-1946) had only a brief period of rule, passing away shortly after he ascended to the throne. Only young at the time of his ascension, he was crowned while living in Switzerland, where he remained until 1945 (Stowe 1991, 367). On 9 June 1946 the king was assassinated by a gunshot, while resting in his bed at the Grand Palace (Leifer 1996, 53). Investigation failed to reveal either the cause of his murder or the identity of the assassin, and this remains a mystery to the present day. Because of his short period of reign, most of which was spent outside Thailand, King Anan had no involvement or influence on the Thai film business.

After King Anan’s assassination Prince Bhumibol, a younger brother of King Anan, ascended the throne in 1946 as the King Rama IX. Only 18 years old at the time of his ascension, King Bhumibol returned to Switzerland to complete his education. During this period, a regent council was appointed to act on behalf of the young king (Naiwattanakul 2000, 50). In 1951 King Bhumibol returned to Thailand to live and take on his duties and responsibilities as king (Vatiwutipong 2000, 92). King Bhumibol has retained the throne until the present time (2004). Since the 1960s King Bhumibol has acted as a patron to the Thai film industry, presenting awards and attending film premieres. (King Bhumibol’s involvement in the film business is explored in detail in the section ‘the role of the monarchy in the film businesses’).
Economic Context in the Post-War Period

During World War Two, Thailand was occupied by Japan. Japanese occupation commenced on 25 January 1942 (Sulaiman 2001, 62). During the occupation the Japanese imposed a fixed exchange rate between the Baht and Yen. Consequently, at the end of the war Thailand shared in Japan’s hyperinflation, and this inflation continued for several years (Warr 1993, 11). Following the end of the war, Thailand was politically and economically unstable. Niti Vatiwutipong mentions that ‘the pro-Liberal and pro-Military factions who had jointly overthrown the absolute monarchy were in the midst of a power play. From 1946, the year when His Majesty was enthroned, to 1951, the year when His Majesty returned to Thailand permanently, there were eleven governments, three constitutions and four elections’ (Vatiwutipong 2000, 92). From 1958 Thailand was under the control of military governments for a period of 15 years: Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat’s regime lasted from 1958 to 1963 and Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn’s regime lasted from 1963 to 1973.

In Sarit’s regime The National Development Program was seen as a policy of top priority. Thailand moved away from an agricultural emphasis towards an emphasis on industry and manufacture. A modern economy began. In this period the development of the country was seen as a way of fighting the influence of communism. Thus the countryside was opened for the material and ideology of modernization (Mulder 2000, 7). America supported Thailand by providing assistance in the form of financial support for development, and the provision of military forces (Bowie 1991, 6).
In the late 1950s the military government promoted private investment in the manufacturing industry. In 1959 the Board of Investment (BOI) was created and given responsibility for implementing the ‘Act on the Promotion of Industries’ (Ingram 1971, 288). In 1959 the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) was established and released the first National Economic and Social Development plan. This plan was implemented from 1961 to 1966 to encourage economic growth in the private sector and the construction of basic infrastructure facilities in transport, communication, manufactories, social and public service. The first development plan focused on the promotion of rapid and broadly based economic growth (Warr 1993, 30). The second plan came into operation from 1967 to 1971 and aimed to continue emphasis on the building of infrastructure. In this period, the agricultural growth declined due to the droughts of 1967 and 1968 (Warr 1993, 33).

In the period of dictatorial military government, Thailand and America shared a close association. The policy of national development was supported by America’s anti-communist policy. There was a strong push towards modernization, which resulted in the development of infrastructure, and the construction of roads around the country. This construction of infrastructure gave people throughout Thailand greater access to various forms of media such as television, radio, books, magazines, and films. These were used to spread the concepts of modernization and anti-communist policy. The rapid increase of manufactured commodities available to people marked the beginning of capitalism in Thailand.
The 16 mm Film Industry

The post-war period was a period of famine around the world. This period of economic hardship forced the filmmakers to create a new style of film in order to ensure the survival of their industry. For example, ‘Italian neorealism’ emerged after World War Two when the economic breakdown (following the Allied invasion and the collapse of Mussolini’s regime) (Cook 1999, 76) meant that Italian filmmakers had to work with a very limited budget. The neorealist film was shot on location, using non-actors, and offhand composition (Thomson 1994, 418).

In Thailand the period after World War Two resulted in a shortage of 35 mm film. The local filmmakers used 16 mm film to cut down film budgets, and the 16 mm film production became popular. The Thai film scholar, Dome Sukwong, mentioned that ‘it was a golden period of 16 mm film productions’ (Dome Sukwong, Interview, 7 February 2001). In this period America became involved in Thailand’s politics, to promote its anti-communism policy, through the provision of support money in order to develop the nation. The military government promoted industry investment—with the exception of the film industry. Roads were made around the country to promote the development of the nation. Following the development of infrastructure, movie theatres were constructed in the provinces and mobile outdoor movie theatres allowed expansion into the remote areas. It was the beginning of film distribution in provincial areas. Thus the local film businesses expanded throughout the country; moreover, the thriving of 16 mm film production attracted many people to invest in film businesses.
This thriving period of 16 mm film production was started by the success of the 16 mm film, *Supab Buruth Sua Tai* (dir. M.C. Sukrawandit Ditsakul and Tae Prakartwutisan, 1949). This film brought the film industry back from the brink of economic collapse. Thus over the next few years the number of Thai films produced increased from 10 to 50 films a year (Uabumrungjit 2001, 132). Dome Sukwong mentioned that the 16 mm film production with live dubbing was a main stream of income for Thai film businesses for nearly two decades: from the end of World War Two in 1947, to 1972 (Sukwong 2002, 38).

Many factors contributed to the push for 16 mm film to be popular in the local film business. Firstly, the 16 mm film price was not as expensive, and the production was less complicated, than 35 mm sound film production. Thus 16 mm film attracted many local filmmakers, especially those making low-budget films. Secondly, live dubbing made it possible for silent films to compete at the beginning of the sound film period.

The construction of roads around the country was the third factor that contributed to the success of 16 mm film in this period, as it enabled the introduction of the mobile outdoors movie theatre business. 16 mm film productions, especially Thai films, were shown at these outdoor cinemas and became popular in the 1950s and 1960s. The expanded road system meant that the mobile outdoor theatre business could go around the country, and especially allowed access to the remote villages. There were many patterns of operation for the outdoor mobile theatre business. For example there was the ‘*nang kai ya*’ (medicine sales movie), a mobile theatre business managed by one man, as the projector controller, live-dubbing performer, and salesman. The audiences did not need to buy film tickets, but they would buy the commodities such as soap,
clothes, food and so on. This business was started by medicine companies and medicine was the first commodity to come with the outdoor mobile movie theatre. The other mobile movie theatre was the ‘nang re’ (mobile movie). This film business also went to show the films in rural areas, but the audiences had to pay for film tickets either with money or agricultural products. Moreover ‘nang re’ mobile outdoor movie theatres were also hired to help celebrate special fairs or ceremonies (Dome Sukwong, interview February 2001).

The number of 16 mm films produced in this period was not recorded but can be estimated by the number of films that the 16 mm film superstars Mitre Chaibancha and Petchchara Chawarat performed in. In this period, these two superstars were very popular and nearly monopolized the 16 mm film productions. For 15 years of Mitre’s career, from 1958 to 1974, he played in 265 films (Arunrojsuriya 2001, 59, 62). Thus at least 265 films were released in the thriving period of 16 mm.

It was not only these three factors that made the 16 mm film business popular for nearly two decades, but also the specific content, style, and superstars of the 16 mm film production era. These 16 mm film productions were attractive to the people from all around the country. (The content and style of 16 mm film productions is detailed in chapter 1, section ‘Thai film conventional style’.)

The production of 16 mm films did not require a big investment and thus the common people could afford to become film business entrepreneurs. For example, film businesses—such as Kanyaman Papayon (owned by Dokdin Kanyanman), Tok Boom Papayon (owned by Sawong Sabsamrouy (Lotok)), Sanaei Silp Papayon (owned by
Sanaei Komarachun), and Cherd Chai Papayon (owned by Cherd Songsri)—all demonstrate the influx of investment into and ownership by common people of, the film production industry. This meant that the film business was no longer limited to the royal family, the noble family and the high-ranking but the opportunity existed for common people to join the film business and learn how to make films. However, given the price of film production equipment, these small-production filmmakers needed to rent film equipment from the big companies. In this period there were three big film companies, Asawin Papayon, Lawo Papayon, and Hanuman Papayon, that had their own studios and equipment available for hire (The Thai Motion Picture Producers Association 1970, 24).

While the 16 mm film production was not seen as a high quality form of production, the making of these films gave many filmmakers opportunities to develop their filmmaking skills. Some of the 16 mm filmmakers worked until 16 mm film production declined and then changed to the production of 35 mm films and went on to become famous film directors in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, such as Rangsri Tatsanapayak, Dokdin Kanyaman, Cherd Songsri, Pan Kam, and Khunawuth. In the period of 16 mm film production, film audiences were no longer limited to the urban-middle class but expanded to include villagers in the remote areas of Thailand. Thus the 16 mm film production belonged to the common people—both in terms of filmmakers and audiences.
The End of 16 mm Film Period

The 16 mm film production thrived for nearly two decades until the late 1960s—when it started to decline—and ended in the early 1970s. There were three reasons for this turning point. The first reason was the success of the two 35 mm sound film productions *Mon Rak Luk Tung* (dir. Rungsri Thasanapayak, 1970), and *Thon* (dir. Somboonsuk Niyomsiri, 1970). These films inspired many filmmakers to produce 35 mm films. *Mon Rak Luk Tung* (dir. Rungsri Thasanapayak, 1970) showed in movie theatre for 6 months and was very successful in the box office, with takings of around 13 million baht. *Thon* was also a box office success, with takings of 3 million baht, as well as receiving good critical acclaim (Arunrojsuriya 2000, 35).

The second reason for the decline in 16 mm film production was that in 1966 Tae Prakadwuthisan, a filmmaker, found that 35 mm film from a laboratory in Hong Kong was cheaper than film sourced from laboratories in England. This encouraged other filmmakers to change over to the production of 35 mm films (Uabumrungjit 2001, 138). The final factor that contributed to the decline of 16 mm film was the government policy of supporting only 35 mm film productions. Because of these reasons the local filmmakers started to produce 35 mm films and the thriving period of 16 mm film production came to an end in the late 1960s.

Government Support of the Local Film Industry

From the beginning of the Cold War, the big production of propaganda films—liked *Ban Rai Na Rao (Our Farmland, produced by Air Force Film Unit, 1942)* and *The King*...
of White Elephant (produced by Pridi Phanomyong, 1941)—ceased, and there was a move towards small 16 mm film productions. In the early 1950s the United States Information Service (USIS) was established in Bangkok. This was an American propaganda center that sponsored the making of propaganda films. Most Thai government units received filmmaking equipment, such as cameras and projectors for promoting the government policy (www.thaifilm.com/Thai/journal). Thus the propaganda films by the government in this period were small productions aimed at the promotion of the anti-communist policy and expressing pro-American sentiments. Rather than taking an active role in the making of propaganda films, the government moved towards a policy of support.

The military government promoted the National Development Policy and supported private industry investment. Therefore, in 1962 the Field Marshal Sarit’s government enacted the Promotion of Thai Film Industry Investment Act (Kantharot 1996, 117). Two years later in 1964 the Thai Film Industry Promotion Committee promulgated the concept that the Thai Film business was an industry of the country (Uabumrungjit 1997, 95). In the same year the local filmmakers requested government support in the forms of: 1) an increase foreign film import tax, 2) a decrease in film and equipment import tax, and 3) the provision of support funds for filmmaking. However, the government of Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn did not approve these requests on the basis that the local film productions were not good enough (Arunrojsuriya 1997, 124). This rejection was supported by a comment from Field Marshal Prphas Charusathien (Army commander-in-chief, 1963-1972, and deputy prime minister, 1966-1973) who said, ‘I don’t like to watch Thai movies…They make me feel embarrassed’ (McBeth 1980, 27 cited in Boonyaketmala 1992, 74). The rejection of the local film producer’s request,
on the basis that the Thai films were not of an acceptable standard, meant that the local industry had to continue to try to compete in a global market without government support.

The filmmakers’ requests showed that the local filmmakers recognized that foreign films were the major competitors to the local film productions. The local filmmakers had to spend a lot of money on the import of film and equipment. The rejection of this request indicates that the government at that time failed to recognize the importance of the local film business as a national business. In a time when the government was seeking to promote national economic development they failed to recognize the need to support and promote the local film industry.

The government’s decision inspired the filmmakers to assemble as a lobbying groups called the Thai Motion Picture Producers Association in 1967. This Association campaigned for support from the government for the local film industry (Uabumrungjit 2001, 137). The Association supported the local film companies to negotiate with the government. The formation of the lobby group was a declaration that local film production was no longer a small business that the government could ignore.

In 1969 Field Marshal Thanom’s Government supported investment for film producers under the conditions that they produce 35 mm film and that the film company had a budget of at least 5 million baht (Sukwong 1990, 45). At that time among numerous 16 mm film production companies there were only a handful of 35 mm film production companies—such as Hanuman Papayon by Rat Pestanyee, Asawin Papayon by His Royal Highness Prince Panupan Yukon and Lawo Papayon by His Royal Highness
Prince Anusorn Mongkonkarn eligible to receive support from the government under these conditions (Arunrojsuriya 1997, 124).

Although the government developed a policy to support the local film businesses in the late 1960s, this policy was of no practical assistance for many of the local film companies. The wording and conditions of the policy meant that was only of assistance to the handful of local film companies set up to produce 35 mm films. Therefore, at that time most of smaller Thai film companies, which produced 16 mm film production, continued to run their businesses without support from the government.

**The 35 mm Film Production**

After the Second World War the two major film companies, Sri Krung Sound Film Company and Thai Film Company, stopped production, and this became a thriving period for 16 mm film production. However, some 35 mm films were still produced. In the post-war period three well-known film companies were established. In 1936 Prince Anusorn Mongkonkarn set up Lawo Papayon (Lawo Film Company) (Arunrojsuriya 1997, 123). The company started by making 16 mm film productions and around the 1950s the company constructed a 35 mm film studio and released the 35 mm film *Paktongchai* (dir. Mom17 Ubon Yukon, 1958). Following this, many remarkable 35 mm film productions were released from this company such as *Nang Tad* (1960) and *Ngen Ngen Ngen* (*Money Money Money*, 1965).

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17 Mom is a title of prince’s wife.
In 1949 Asawin Papayon (Asawin Film Company), owned by His Royal Highness Prince Panupan Yukon, was established. This company started by producing 16 mm films, until 1961 when the company released the 35 mm film Rearn Pae (Arunrojsuriya 1997, 123).

Hanuman Papayon (Hanuman Film Company), owned by Rat Pestanyee was established in 1952 (Dissayanan, 14). The company aimed to make 35 mm synchronized sound films that could compete with the international standard (Uabumrungjit 2001, 135). The company released the remarkable 35 mm film Santi-Veena (dir. Tawee N. Bangchang (pseudonym Maruth), 1954), produced by Rat Pestanyee. The film won Cinematography, Art Director and Cultural Promotion awards at the Asian Film Festival, Tokyo, Japan in 1954 (Sukwong 1990, 38).

The owners of these companies, especially Prince Anusorn Mongkonkarn and Mr. Rat Pestanyee, not only ran their businesses but were also the key men involved in establishment of the Thai Motion Picture Producers Association in 1967. Both of them presided over this association for a period, and fought to win support for the local film industry from the government. Moreover, Prince Anusorn Mongkonkarn’s influence was a significant factor in the success of negotiations between the Thai Motion Picture Association and the government. In the period of the military government, the institution of the monarchy had a good relationship with the military. Thus, during that time the royal family still received respect from the Thai filmmakers and the government, which made Prince Anusorn a highly influential person.
The Foreign Film

The period of national development from 1957 to 1973 was mentioned by Dome Sukwong as the ‘golden time’ for the film business in Thailand. In this period there were around 150 movie theatres in Bangkok, around 700 movie theatres in provincial areas, and countless mobile outdoor movie theatres around Thailand (Sukwong 2002, 13). Thus, many films were produced or imported to support the movie theatres. However, the local film productions could not dominate the film market. Hollywood still had a great deal of power in the Thai film market, as is shown by the number of films from the USA shown in table 2. Furthermore, Hong Kong/Taiwanese, Japanese, and Indian films were also major competitors against Thai films. These foreign films were the economic enemies of the local filmmakers. The Thai Motion Picture Producers’ Association made the claim that ‘the businessmen prefer foreign films to Thai films. Therefore, Thai filmmakers struggle hard, but Thai film quality cannot improve. The film market for Thai films is limited because they cannot compete with foreign films’ (The Thai Film Production Committee 1970, 66). During this period the government had a limited policy for the support of local filmmakers, as was explored in the previous section; however, the Thai film industry faced an additional barrier in this period in that there they also received no support from the monarchy.

Television commenced broadcasting on 24 June 1955 (Sittirak 2000, 151). This marked the beginning of the new mass medium in Thailand. Initially, television was not a competitor for the local film business, because television ownership and access was out of the reach of the majority of people, and broadcast infrastructure was limited.
Table 2 Films Passed by the Film Censorship Committee of Thailand (1961 to 1970)

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Source: The Film Censorship Committee, Police Department, and Ministry of Interior and the Bank of Thailand (Boonyakhetmala 1992, 78).
6. Thai Film Industry in the 1970s

Thailand in the 1970s had many political conflicts between left-wing and right-wing political opponents. The dictatorial military government was overthrown after the uprising of student and people on 14 October 1973. However, the military returned to power following the massacre at Thammasat University on 6 October 1976. This tense political atmosphere caused a period of economic instability. Moreover, during this decade there were two fuel crises—in 1973 and 1979—which led to a huge inflation in oil prices and drove the economy into a downturn. In the 1970s economic development was guided under the direction of the Third National Development Plan (1972-1976) and the Fourth National Development Plan (1977-1981).

In conjunction with the industrialisation of Thailand, film businesses became vertically integrated such that film production, distribution and exhibition companies were merged into one big company; most of these big film companies were owned and run by Thai Chinese. During this period the royal family’s involvement in the film industry decreased, with only a small number of members of the royal family, such as Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, and Prince Panupan Yukon, working in the industry as film directors. The government supported the film industry through its investment policy, foreign film import tax, and the creation of a national film archive. The number of Thai films being produced increasingly by around one hundred films per year after the increase in the film import tax in 1976. In the 1970s, the Thai film industry adapted itself to the new direction of the country.
The Role of the Monarchy in Film Industry in the 1970s

After the overthrow of the monarchy in 1932, the influence of the monarchy did not dominate the film business as it had in the previous period— for example, when King Vajiravudh (King Rama VI 1910-1925) supported the Siam Niramai Film Company and when King Prajadhipok (King Rama VII 1925-1932) owned the Saha Cinema Film Company and Sala Chalerm Krong Movie Theatre.

In the current period of constitutional monarchy, King Bhumibol (King Rama IX 1946-) has supported the local film business by presenting the Tutathong Film Awards in 1964 and 1965 (Arunrojsuriya, 45, 47). The king has also attended Thai film gala premieres such as Mae Sri Prai (dir. Wijit Kunawuth, 1971) (Kunawuth 1997, 99). These activities were seen to demonstrate that Thai films were of a good standard, and the King’s actions raised the appeal of these films for other audiences. His actions also demonstrated the monarchy’s support of local industry. However, in the 1970s and 1980s, King Bhumibol did not play a significant role in the local film industry.

Since the 1970s the royal family has reduced their influence in the film business, including a decrease in the number of film companies owned by them. On 2 December 1973, His Royal Highness Prince Anusorn Mongkonkarn, the owner of Lawo Papayon Film Company and Chalerm Keth Movie Theatre ended his involvement in the film business, by selling the Chalerm Keth Movie Theatre and ceasing to produce films (Dalinews editorial 1974, 1). This signified the end of the royal family’s direct involvement in the film industry, where they had played powerful roles since the beginning of film business in Thailand. However, some members of the royal family
have continued to work as film directors such as Prince Tipayachat Chatchai, Prince Panthaewanop Thaewakun, and Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon. Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon has continued to produce powerful films for three decades (from 1970 to the present time, 2004). Since the 1970s the local film businesses, especially movie theatres and film distributors, have been predominantly run by Thai Chinese.

Economic Context of the 1970s

In the 1970s the Thai economy was guided towards industrialization by the Third National Economic and Social Development Plan (1972-1976) and the Fourth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1977-1981). The former promoted export industries. The economic policies supported industrialization in many ways, such as through low levels of taxation, maintenance of a strong currency, and the promotion of both domestic saving and the influx of foreign funds. Moreover, from the 1970s the industrialization of Japan and other Asian countries resulted in rapid economic growth for the region. This consequently encouraged Thai trade and stimulated industrial growth within Thailand (Fulkus 1995, 23-4).

The Fourth National Development Plan encouraged the development of large-scale export firms and trading companies and an export-processing zone was established (Suphachalasai 1995, 71). These Plans drove Thailand to become an industrialized country, and resulted in a booming economy in the late 1980s.

The Office of the Prime Minister Royal Thai Government reported that the agriculture’s share of the national gross domestic product declined steadily from about 40% in 1960
to 35% in 1977. Meanwhile, the manufacturing sector expanded, and increased its share of the national income from 13% in 1960 to 20% in 1977 (Office of the Prime Minister Royal Thai Government 1979, 169). In 1973 there was the first oil shock in the world economy. In Thailand the rising oil price caused an increase in the import bill, but fortunately the agricultural product exports commanded higher prices and this reduced the size of trade deficits (Dhiratayakinant 1995, 103). Although Thailand had expanded its manufacturing sector as it moved to become an industrialized country, agricultural products still made up a large part of the national income.

During this period the Thai economy coped with shock the swiftly of rising oil prices in 1973 and 1979; recession; and the stimulation of recovery. In 1973-1974 Thailand was affected by a dramatic rise in inflation. The price increase in oil of 1973 added to the pressures on the domestic price of traded goods. The second large increase in oil prices occurred in 1979, and world oil prices rose by 80 percent. Thailand depended on the import of petroleum products for 90 percent of its petroleum demand. By the end of this decade, the Thai economy was experiencing fiscal imbalances (Mucat 1994, 132, 152, 155, 158). These two oil shocks also affected the Thai film business and will be discussed in the section ‘The role of government in film industry in 1970s’

On 8 August 1967 the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established. The members were Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Laos, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. The formal purpose of this association was the promotion of economic and social cooperation; however, the undeclared goal was political co-operation (Leifer 1996, 59-60). ASEAN forged new alliances and relationships between the Southeast-Asian nations in an effort to
strengthen their competitive position vis-à-vis overseas markets (Office of the Prime Minister Royal Thai Government 1979, 250). Since the 1970s the countries involved in ASEAN have worked to support each other and have become a political power in the global market. The formation of ASEAN shaped the evolving structure of film business in the region in many ways. This is an important aspect of Thai cinema, since it links its development to the region and further reveals the interdependence of the various social-economic relations between the countries of the region as central to the development of Thai cinema.

The assembly of the regional film business emerged before the ASEAN. On 20 November 1953 the film business in this region assembled in the name of the Federation of Motion Picture Producers in South-East Asia. The members were Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and Japan. The Federation’s purposes were the promotion of film business and the arrangement of the Film Festival, in South-East Asia (Arunrojsuriya 2000, 169). Since 1978 the Federation has expanded to include the whole of Asia and the Pacific region, and was renamed ‘The Asia-Pacific Film Festival’. By 2000 there were 14 member countries: Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, the Republic of Korea, India, Australia, New Zealand, Kuwait, and Vietnam (www.thainationalfilm.com). This organization has supported the film business in this region and has provided the economic and political basis of power for the members of the Federation to protect their businesses from Hollywood’s dominance of the market. The Film Festival and film competition organised by the Federation encourages filmmakers to create quality films. The good local films attract the local audiences, and this is an important step in protecting the local film business.
The Role of Government in Film Industry in 1970s

From 1964, the period in which the government moved to promote the industrial sector, the local film businesses were marketed by the Thai Film Promotion Committee as being an industry of the country (Uabumrungjit 1997, 95). From the 1970s the government supported the local film industry by policies such as the increase in the foreign film import tax, support for investment through the Board of Investment (BOI), and the establishment of a film organization.

The government did not produce films itself, as in the period of World War Two; however, they supported the industry through the provision of military equipment for the production of anti-communist films, and films that promoted the three institutions of the nation, religion, and the monarchy.

The first supporting policy in this decade was begun in 1969—and ended in 1972—by Thanom’s government. The Board of Investment (BOI) directed Thai film business towards the development and adoption of 35 mm films with special subsidies such as exemptions from import tariffs on equipment designed for 35mm film production, as well as exemption from income tax for 5 years, on the condition that the company produced only 35 mm sound films and that the company had 5 million baht for investment. This policy provided only limited support to Thai film industry as only 3 of the film companies had the capacity to make 35 mm films at that time. In 1972, this subsidy to promote 35mm film production ceased (Yamsaka 1997, 140). However, the policy for the promotion of 35 mm sound film production was the first step by the
In 1974, the fuel crisis caused the government to restrict the hours of operation for movie theatres throughout the country (Uabumrugjit 1997, 95). The government gave order number 1/2517 for the conservation of energy, which was to be achieved by restricting cinema show times. According to the order, movie theatres were restricted to times between 2 pm and 10 pm on weekdays, and between of 12 pm till 10 pm on weekends (Dalinews editorial 1974, 1). Before order 1/2517 was released, Thai film screening-times were four times per day: 12 am, 3 pm, 7 pm and 9.45 pm. Under the conditions of the order, theatres could only run two session-times per day because the standard length of Thai films was around 2 hours and 20 minutes. Because of this, the Thai film industry slowed down and some movie theatres closed, as they could not make a profit. Consequently many filmmakers stopped producing, films because they did not have financial backing from movie theatre companies and film distributors (Dalinews editorial 1974, 1). In the early 1970s the main financial support available to the local filmmakers came from movie theatre companies and film distributors, thus these businesses were the powerful groups in film business. Around the mid-1970s the local film businesses became more vertically integrated to combine film production, exhibition and distribution in the one company (details on vertical integration will be explored in the section ‘The integration of the local film companies’).

In February 1974 the government relaxed the order by increasing film screening times by one hour, allowing theatres to show films from 1.30 pm. Thus, foreign films (because of their shorter length) could be shown four times per day at 1.30 pm, 2.30
pm., 5.00 pm, and 7.15 pm and Thai films could be shown 3 times per day at 1.30 pm, 3.30 pm, and 6.30 pm (Thairat newspaper editorial 1974, 13). The expansion of screening times reduced the discontent of the film business owners; however the number of Thai films that could be shown during the set hours was less than that of the foreign films, because of the longer length of Thai films. Thus the Thai film producers were still at a disadvantage in comparison with the foreign films, because theatres could make greater profits by showing foreign films.

In the period of Thanin’s government, three decrees that supported the local film businesses were released. The first decree was introduced on 24 December 1977. The government increased the foreign film import tax from USD 0.11 per metre to USD 1.50 per metre. The second decree put an end to the traditional 7 percent business tax that was charged at the point of entry; and taxed the imported films based on their declared value. The last supporting policy from Thanin’s government was a reduction of the film admission tax from the original 50 percent to 40 and 10 percent, depending on the price of the ticket (Boonyaketmala 1992, 84). In addition to generally raising the costs associated with the import of foreign films, and giving local films greater competitive advantage, the increased import tax prompted an American boycott regarding the export of Hollywood films into Thailand. Thus, these decrees had an effect on the import and screening of foreign films, especially the American films that had dominated the film market in Thailand for a long time.

From January 1977, the Motion Picture Export Association of America (MPEAA) boycotted film export to Thailand, until May 1981 when the MPEAA rescinded the boycott, and once again approved the export of films to Thailand (Boonyaketmala 1992,
This demonstrated that the Thai film market was too large for the MPEAA to continue to ignore. At the time of the boycott there was a shortage of Hollywood films to feed the cinemas. This provided a good opportunity for the Thai filmmakers to release their films. The number of Thai films released in the 1970s started to increase after the film import tax increased (see table 3). Hence, in the 1970s the increase in the film import tax was a very significant government policy that worked to support the local film business in a practical way.
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Source: The Film Censorship Committee, Police Department, and Ministry of Interior and the Bank of Thailand (Boonyaketmala, 1992, 77-8)
The Integration of the Local Film Companies

Since the 1970s, local film business ownership has changed from high-ranking such as the monarchy, the royal family, and the government, to the Thai Chinese. During the period of the absolute monarchy, most of the Thai Chinese were discriminated against and prevented from working as bureaucrats; therefore they started their own businesses. These were often developed and evolved to become big businesses. Thus the Thai Chinese group has been involved in the film business for a long time. When Thailand became a constitutional monarchy and developed as an industrial country, the Thai Chinese had a chance to further develop their businesses. Consequently, since the 1970s the Thai Chinese have come to dominate the film businesses by monopolizing ownership of film distribution companies, movie theatres, and film production companies.

The Big Four

Around the latter half of the 1970s the smaller and independent film producers, especially 16 mm film producers, began to disappear. The local film businesses adopted a system of vertical integration, which combined film production, film distribution and exhibition. During 1977-1982 the four big film companies were established: Pyramid Entertainment, Saha Mongkol Film, Five Star Production, and Go Brothers. These companies run their businesses as a vertically integrated enterprise. All of these companies were owned by Thai Chinese.
1. Pyramid Entertainment was run by Kampon Tansatja (Chinese name, Sia\textsuperscript{18} Tong). The company had 12 movie theatres including Siam, Lido, Scalar, Intra, Chalerm Thai, Samyarn, and Oscar. The company expanded into film production as Apex Production (Sokatiyanurak 1977, 169). In addition, the company also worked as a distributor of foreign Thai films (Sirikaya 1988, 162).

2. Saha Mongkol Film has been owned by Somsak Taecarathapraserd (Chinese name, Sia Jeang) since 1970. Somsak has invested in the making of Thai films and the import of foreign films for a long time (www.mongkolfilm.com). The company had just 2 movie theatres in 1970—President and Petch Piman—but has since expanded to become a multiplex movie theatre operator (Sirikaya 1988, 163).

3. Five Stars Production was run by Keat Aieam-peng-porn. The company started business in 1973 by distributing both Thai and foreign films. Two years later the company expanded into film production and started to produce Thai films in 1975. Around 1977 the company made a contract with the owners of the Athens movie theatres to show of their films (Five Star Production 2001). In 1985 the company expanded into a film studio. Many well-known Thai film directors have worked for this company. They included 16 mm film directors such as Wijit Kunawuth, Sakka Jarujinda and Ruth Ronnaphob, and the new wave film directors such as Euthana Mukdasanit, Peak Poster, and Bandit Ritakon (Jongrak 2000, 3).

4. Go Brothers, belonging to the Punworarak Family, started their business in 1957 as the Sri Talaplu Movie Theatre in Thonburi Province. Since 1963 they have expanded

\textsuperscript{18} Sia is generally reserved for wealthy Chinese businessman.
into movie theatre businesses in Bangkok such as Petch Rama, Petch Empire, Metro, Century and Mecanna (Kaewtape 2002, 86). In 1985 the company expanded into film production as the Tai Entertainment Film Company (Chan-urai 2001, 25).

These four big film companies have dominated the Thai film industry since the 1970s, and have continued to do so the present time (2004). They have dramatically expanded the number of movie theatres throughout Thailand, and led the way in the adaptation of their movie theatre businesses from stand-alone movie theatres in the 1960s and the 1970s, to mini-theatres in the shopping malls in the 1980s, and through to the multiplex movie theatres that became popular in the 1990s.

The big four companies started their businesses by working as Thai and foreign film distributors and as movie exhibitors. These businesses make a high profit and the local filmmakers depend on them. When the companies integrated, it forced the filmmakers to automatically work for the big film companies; otherwise, it was very hard for them to sell and exhibit their films. The filmmakers therefore produced films under the company’s direction, which guided such choices as the selection of superstars, and genre. On the other hand the companies have made the filmmakers confident about access to budgets, exhibition and distribution for their film. Moreover, the companies have encouraged their filmmakers to produce films to support their movie theatres. Thus in the 1980s a large number of Thai films were released: around one hundred films per year (see table 6). Although in 1981 the MPEAA stopped the boycott against the export of American films into Thailand and Hollywood films were once again readily accessible to the Thai market, the production of Thai films continued to be supported by the integration of the Thai film industry, which guaranteed a market for Thai films. In
this period big projects and remarkable films were released by the four big companies, such as *Luk Isan* (*Son of the Northeast*, dir. Wijit Kunawuth, 1982) and *Pheesuer Lae Dok Mai* (*Butterfly and Flower*, dir. Euthana Mukdasanit, 1985) from Five Star Production, *U-ka Fha Leuang* (*Yellow Sky*, dir. Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, 1980) from Sahamongkol Film, and *Puk Pui* (dir. Udom Udomroj, 1990) from Tai Entertainment.

7. The Thai Film Industry in the 1980s

The 1980s was a politically stable period, being under the control of the semi-democratic government of Prem Tinsulanond for nine years (March 1980 - August 1988). The economy stabilised in the last period of Prem’s government. In the late 1980s, the economy boomed in the period of Chatichai’s government as Thailand flourished as a capitalist country. In that time the number of the middle class increased. Thailand changed from an agricultural country to become an industrialized country under the direction of the National Development Plans. In the 1980s, economic development was guided under the direction of the fifth and sixth National Development Plans (1982-1986 and 1987-1991 respectively).

For the Thai film businesses, the 1980s was a period when the local film business matured and adopted the studio system of film production, distribution and exhibition, gaining the benefits of economies of scale. At the same time independent filmmaking declined, faced with the cost of equipment hire, and limited access to distribution and exhibition networks. Meanwhile, television and imported and pirated videotape recordings came to compete with the film industry, and pushed film businesses into an
economic decline. These media influenced the new pattern of movie theatres from stand-alone movie theatres to mini-theatres in shopping malls. In response to the new, targeted audience of the shopping mall, teen films became a new popular genre. Meanwhile the foreign films from Hollywood and Hong Kong continued to dominate the film market. In this decade, Thai films thrived in the first five years but experienced a downturn following the successful penetration of television, and video players, into homes.

The Role of Government and the Monarchy in the Thai Film Industry in 1980s

In the 1980s the political situation stabilized and the economy matured. The government did not release any significant policy for the support of the local film business; however in 1984 under Prem’s government the National Film Archive was established (Uabumrungjit 1997, 95). It was the beginning of film preservation in the country and a centre for Thai film studies. Therefore, the thriving of Thai film in the 1980s was the result of the increase in foreign film tax in 1976. During this decade the monarch did not have any significant role in the Thai film industry. However, members of the royal family such as Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, Prince Anusorn Monkonkarn, Prince Tipayachat Chatchai, and Prince Pantaewanop Taewakun continued to work as film directors.

Television, Videotape and Mini-theatre

In the 1970s and 1980s the number of Thai films produced rose after the foreign film tax was increased in 1976; about one hundred films per year were released until the late
1980s. The situation of Thai film business was better than in previous times. However, the number of foreign films, especially those from Hollywood and Hong Kong, still dominated the film market in Thailand (see table 3).

In the 1980s, television programs and videotapes became new competitors for the film business. Thailand was the first Asian country to have a television service in 1955. By 1979 television was broadcast nationwide (Siriyuvasak 1992, 97). In the nascence of the television service, television was used for the dissemination of government propaganda. However, entertainment programming had just begun, and television was expensive. Thus, initially, the television service was not a competitor for the film industry, and films were the main source of family entertainment.

Until the early 1980s, there were only 4 television companies. Two channels belonged to the Army and the others belonged to private companies. All stations were commercial and the most popular programs were Thai soap operas (Office of the Prime Minister Royal Thai Government, 238). The monarchy had not become involved in the television and video business; however, the monarchy’s activities were presented as the royal news program on every channel everyday before the news program. Thus television was used to propagandise the monarchy.

By 1986, at least 80 percent of urban households had one TV set, and in the rural areas television ownership was at about 40 per cent (Siriyuvasak 1992, 97). As televisions sets became cheaper, the television industry became a major competitor to the film industry. At the same time video rental was introduced and this has been popular entertainment since 1981 (Uabumrungjit 1997, 96). The lakorn toratat (Thai soap
opera) and videotape became the family’s primary entertainment. A decrease in audiences, especially adults, attending movie theatres occurred, as they were happy with the cheap and new entertainment in their homes. Thus, in the latter half of the 1980s the competitors of Thai films were not only foreign films, but also television and videotapes.

Television and videotapes had a dramatic impact in changing the film business in the 1980s. The first change was the move from stand-alone movie theatres to mini-theatres in shopping malls; the second was the boom in the Thai teen films from the late half of the 1980s.

The two new media forms of television and videotape caused a downturn in the film industry, especially in the movie theatre business. Wichai Punworarak, the EGV multiplex movie theatre owner, said, ‘in 1979 when the video tape boomed, many movie theatres were pulled down to make way for condominiums, car parks, and shopping centres. The movie theatre business decreased for around six years from 1979 to 1985. After that it was a time of mini-theatres in shopping malls’ (Santiwuthimathee 1997, 159). The movie theatre became smaller; however, its numbers increased and they spread into shopping malls around Bangkok.

Although the local film business had new competitors, the number of Thai films did not decrease (see table 3). This was due to a change in audience demographic. Teenagers became the new target audience for film companies. They went out to shopping malls for socializing and to see movies. Consequently, in the latter half of the 1980s many teen films were released and became the dominant genre in the film market until the
early 1990s. The other factor that supported the survival of the film industry was the increasing vertical integration of the industry. Thus, companies released Thai films to support their movie theatres, including distribution of the films around the country.

8. Thai Film Industry in the 1990s

In the 1990s media and telecommunications became powerful and popular businesses. These included businesses such as television, cable TV, videotape, VCD, and the Internet. Thus, during this period the local film industry confronted new, powerful competitors. In 1993, the Chuan government decreased the import tax on films, resulting in a rapid increase in the number of foreign films imported, especially Hollywood films. As a result, the number of Thai films being produced decreased, such that in 1999 and 2000 only 9 Thai films were released. Since the mid 1990s there has been a growing belief that the Thai film industry is dying, as was presented in the article ‘Nang Thai kamlang ja tay lae kardhary pai jark sangkom Thai’ (‘Thai film is dying and lost in Thai society’) written by Sakun Bunyathat. This was published in the program of the 7th National Film Award in 1998 (Bunyathat 1998, 42). The second event that had a major impact on Thai society was the Chavalit government’s announcement of the baht devaluation on 1 July 1997. This marked the beginning of an economic crisis. Many businesses went bankrupt and closed down.

Surprisingly, since this time the local film business has been reborn. The Thai film industry’s rebirth started from the release of the film 2499 Antapan Klong Meoung (Daeng Bailey and Gangster dir. Nonzee Nimibuth, 1997) that broke box office records with takings of 75 million baht. The film also won the Grand Prix Award at the 19E
The success of this film encouraged many Thai filmmakers to once again produce films and many of these films have been successful at the box office such as Nang Nak (dir. Nonzee Nimibuth, 1999) which earned 150 million baht, Satree Lek (Iron Ladies, dir. Yongyuth Thongkhongthun, 2000) which earned 99 million baht, and Bangrajan (dir. Tanit Jitnukun, 2000) which earned 134 million baht (Pongsuwan 2001, 23). At the same time, during the late-1990s there was a movement away from stand-alone movie theatres and mini-theatres. In Bangkok and other big provinces, there has been a move towards large multiplex movie theatres.

The Role of the Monarchy in the Film Industry in the 1990s

In the 1990s the monarchy began to play a direct role in the local film industry when the Crown Princess Sirinath attended the Thai National Film Contest and presented the Subanahonsa Awards on 4 April 1992 (Tanawangnoi 1994, 29). The princess’s activities encouraged Thai filmmakers to feel that the monarchy supported the local film industry. However, this symbolic support was not strong enough to raise box office taking for Thai films.

In 1996 the release of the propaganda film, Getarachan (produced by Kantana Motion Picture, dir. Don Ratanatadnee, 1996) was organized by the National Identity Office to celebrate 50 years of King Bhumibol’s reign. The film presented the story of King Bhumibol’s love of music and the origin of the plaeng pra raja nipon (the king’s song which will be explored in chapter 3 in the section cultural context of the 1970s.) The film was shown in movie theatres around the country on 23-27 December 1996, and the
revenue was offered for the King’s social programs (Star pics reporter 1996, 41-2). Getarachan was backed up by the state office, thus this film was different from other propaganda films, which were produced by private companies. In this special event, the film was one medium used to promote the king’s activities and his image as great and beloved, thus depicting the greatness of the institution of the monarchy. However, this event did not support the local film business. This also showed that the monarchy and the state are interdependent.

In the late 1990s the monarchy supported the epic film Suriyo thai (dir. Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, 2001). This film promoted the monarchy by presenting the heroic performance of Queen Suriyo thai who sacrificed her life to protect the king in the battlefield against the Burmese invasion during the Ayuttaya period. On the first day of shooting (7 April 1999) the present Queen Sirikit presided and played respect to the monument of Queen Suriyo thai. This event was broadcast on television (Aree 2001, 59) and evinced the support of the monarchy for this film. Further, the respected status of the monarchy aided in promoting the film on television. Moreover, the worship by Queen Sirikit made the film sacred and superior.

Queen Sirikit also chose Lady ML Piyapas Bhirombhakdi, the queen’s lady-in-waiting, to star as Queen Suriyothai (Gampell 2002), and gave support to the film’s production by going to see the film being shot, or by encouraging the crew on location at Surin province (Panupong 2001, 1). King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit went to the royal premiere on Queen Sirikit’s birthday, 12 August 2001 (Gampell 2002).
The support of the monarchy enabled the filmmaker to gain assistance from the military, such as their using 80 horses from the cavalry in Bangkok and Saraburi province, their using 2,000 soldiers to be extras, and the use of military helicopters for the shooting of the film (Panupong 2001, 27-8, 38). This presents the genial relation that exists between the monarchy and the military. With the support of the two institutions, the film became a grand production. The film is the most expensive Thai film to be produced, and cost between 300 million and 400 million baht (Amnatcharoenrit 2001). The film broke box office records: 700 million baht. Further, it beat box office records for the Hollywood film, Titanic (dir. James Cameron, 1997) that earned 200 million baht (Pongsuwan 2001, 23-4). The support of the monarchy and military for this film was the significant factor that made it box office success. It should be noted that the film also promotes the monarchy as the greatest institution of the Thai nation.

**Economic Context of the 1990s**

In the early 1990s, Thailand continued to develop under the direction of The Seventh National Development Plan (1992-1996). This plan focused on the diversification of export markets, as well as the development of the specific industrial areas that drove Thailand to become an industrialized country (Suphachalasai 1995, 71). By the early 1990s foreign investment was flowing into Thailand (Phongpaichit 1996, 29). Real estate development grew rapidly from 1987 and peaked during 1991–1992. Land prices were high as a result of speculation and construction grew by 20% per year during this period (Vatiwutipong 2000, 135). Thailand also became a modern country, as many skyscrapers and shopping complexes mushroomed around Bangkok and other big cities.
The middle class expanded and became a powerful group. Kevin Hewison explains the atmosphere of this period:

The boom brought rapid change. Confidence brimmed, employment opportunities grew, absolute declined, wealth inequalities increased, and fabulously wealthy magnates were created (Hewison 2000, 196).

During the period of economic boom, media businesses such as telecommunications, cable television, television and the Internet grew and become powerful. This commenced when Thaksin Shinawatra sold IBM computers to government departments in 1988 and expanded technology-based businesses such as mobile-telephone networks, paging systems, and pay-TV service. In 1993 he launched the first of Thailand’s communication satellites, for the expansion of television broadcasting and telecommunications (Phongpaichit 1996, 29). These businesses supported the nation’s modernization. They led to a rapid expansion in the dissemination of information, knowledge, and brought a modern life style and consumerism to Thailand, which was imported from foreign countries, especially America, Europe and Japan.

In 1990 there were 11 television stations and 381 radio stations nationwide. This reflects an increase of more than double the stations that were in operation in 1970 (see table 4). By 1990, television ownership had reached 90 percent of urban households and 70 percent of rural households (Lockard 1998, 181). This meant the local film

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19 Thaksin Shinawatra was a senior police officer and successful telecommunications entrepreneur cum politician. He was a leader of Palang Dharm Party on May 1995. In July 1998 he found the Thai Rak Thai Party and has been the elected prime minister since February 2001.
business confronted powerful competitors; they were competing not only against foreign films but also television, video, cable television and the internet.

Also by 1990, the number of universities had increased nearly fivefold, compared with the number in operation in 1970. Hence the number of tertiary-educated people also increased. This group has become a large consumer of media during this decade. This new wave of educated middle class had different tastes in music and media, and sought a more sophisticated and modern style; therefore, the content and style of media changed—including Thai film (this will be explored in Chapter 3).
Table 4 Complexity and change in Thai broadcasting and education

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<th>1970</th>
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<td>TV stations</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>Radio stations</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>381</td>
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<td>Universities</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>39</td>
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Source: The *Investor* (November 1977); Brown & Frenkel (1992); Ogilvy & Mather (1991); Family Health Division (1984); Ministry of Public Health (1988); *Statistical Yearbook Thailand* (various issues); *Bangkok Post* 1 May 1990; Board of Investment (1990)
In the 1990s, Thai people, especially the urban middle class, were energetic, educated, and for the most part involved in the business sector. Therefore, in the events of *Prusapa Tamin*, the massacre of 17-20 May 1992, most of the demonstrators were urban middle class, and they utilized multiple forms of technology such as mobile telephones, faxes, and pagers for the purposes of protesting. (Details of *Prusapa Tamin* will be explored in the chapter 3.) After the massacre, Thailand was governed by civilians, and businessmen have had a significant role in this form of government—such as, Thaksin Shinawatra, who became deputy prime minister in 1995 and went on to become Prime Minister in 2001. Moreover, the *Prusapa Tamin* event made Thai people realize the power of information and the media. Media as a business has become important and influential.

**The Economic Crisis of 1997**

In the period of economic boom, Thai investors needed more capital for investment. They used short-term credit loans from foreign sources, this caused the national debt to increase dramatically. By 1996 the national debt was as high as 50.14%, and businesses declined (Vatiwutipong 2000, 140). The economic crisis began when Chavalit’s government announced the devaluation of the baht on 1 July 1977 (Chaiwarakan 2000, 17). In August 1997, the Chavalit government revealed the true state of the nation’s foreign reverses and the extent of lending through the Financial Institutions Development Fund (FIDF), as preconditions for assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). After that, currency speculators and foreign creditors withdrew their loans and the value of the Thai currency began to drop. Consequently, private
capital flowed out of Thailand and caused an increase in layoffs, sales to decrease, and the bankruptcy of many businesses (Phongpaichit 2000, 3). This crisis came speedily and seriously, and it caused anxiety around the country. It shocked and affected not only the middle class, but the working class as well.

The economic crisis affected the economic system and the quality of life for all people. As a result, the Eighth National Development Plan (1997-2001) placed emphasis on human resources, assistance for poor and disadvantaged people, reducing unemployment, the development of local infrastructure and planning in the form of preparation for the long-term development of human resources through education, public health and social welfare (Vatiwutipong 2000, 143).

**The Role of the Government in the Film Industry in the 1990s**

The role of the government in supporting the local film industry commenced in 1990, when the Chatichai government established the Film Board of Thailand under the purview of the Prime Minister’s Office. The Film Board was composed of movie-business personnel from both the state and private sectors. This organization coordinates the state sector, in the form of the Movie Industry Promotion and the Public Relation Department, and the private, sector, in the form of Federation of National Film Association of Thailand. The Film Board has set measurement, activities, development paths, and future policy direction for the Thai film sector, to maintain its existing culture (identity of the nation), in movies as follows

1. Policy in Quality Development and Marketing for Thai Movies
On the National Movie Contest, the committee concentrated in presenting the awards for excellent movies annually under the mane of government to encourage continuity of development and maintenance on the quality of movies to be accepted by the audience both domestic and overseas. It is an activity to attract the audience to be more interested in Thai movies, assuring them that the result of the contest is acceptable to personnel both in-and outside the film industry, as well as bringing pride to the awarded persons that may lead to expansion of the audience, from the young to any ages. The government, therefore, specified upon the contest that the most excellent film awarded could be considered to be the representative under the name of the Thai government in the International Movie Contest; for instance, the Kahns, the Oscar Awards, the Fukuoka; the Thai government will share all expenses for the contest. At the same time, the Thai government will send many Thai movies to overseas marketing places under the official cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Industry.

2. Policy to improve Movies Act, B.E. 2473, supervision development on movie investigation:

The Committee of the Thai movie Industrial Promotion, together with the Ministry of Commerce, the directly responsible organizations according to the Movie Act, B.E. 2473, which has been in practice for a long time, considered in revising the new movies Act to apply the main objectives of National Social and Economic Development Plan, Book 8, decreasing the government role from supervision to promotion: increasing the measurement of promotion, and improving investigation methods for movies where in the past most of the problems were originally checked; in particular those suitable for Thai society that might specify more about the ages of audience. However, it is still under
supervision of the government in instruction rather than by a ban and it is open to the modern concept that the producers develop more the main idea as well.

3. Making long-term plans for the framework of more investment:

The government realized the advance and importance of telecommunication to the country’s development and business competition; and consequently, specify the private sectors in cinema business to take their role of supervision on their own, including free trade development by setting up a Cinematographic Business Training Institute, taught by foreign tutors for business persons to compete with the free trade that could create good result is for qualified movies, through international markets. In the country, the government opened an opportunity for the private sectors by gathering them in the country to compete with the foreign trade by developing, promoting and encouraging the business sectors to compete with international markets. The state has united the movie service sectors in a whole organization by restructuring them. (www.thainationalfilm.com)

These three policies are still in operation (2004). The Subanahongsa Awards and Thai National Film Contest began in 1992 through the cooperation of the Film Board and the Federation of National Film Associations of Thailand, and are still running at the present time (2004). However, although winning the award may encourage filmmakers, the contest does not provide any practical support to the local film industry and this is reflected by the decrease in the number of Thai films from 1990 until 2000 (see table 5), and the failure of Thai films to compete with American films at the box office (see table 6).
Meanwhile, the revision of the Film Act of 1930 is still not complete. The current method of film censorship is not suitable for Thailand’s modern society (Details of the Film Act in 1930 was explored in chapter 3). Moreover, the Cinematographic Business Training Institution has not been established. The support from government for the local film industry has moved very slowly, and has disappointed many local filmmakers. The conclusion of the latest Federation of National Film Association’s Work Shop (on 30 November - 2 December 2001) presented the dissatisfaction of the local filmmakers who suggested, ‘the government has never supported Thai film seriously’ (Chaiwisut 2001, 37).

**The Federation of National Film Association of Thailand**

Because Thai governments have not strongly supported the local film industry, many private organizations have been established to assist each other. In the 1960s, the Thai Film Producers, Association was established (Chaiwisut 2001, 95). It was the most powerful group in the film business in the 1970s and 1980s. However, it was only assembled among film producers, so this organization was not vocal enough to promote the local film business or negotiate with the government.

On 21 April 1990, the Federation of National Film Associations of Thailand was established. The Federation combined 11 categories: producer, director, actor, production staff, lab technician & movie technician, theatre owner, distributor, and entertainment reporter. The main duty of the Federation is to be the representative of the movie industry in dealing or coordinating with government sectors and other private organizations; to support, promote and develop the film industry.
After the Federation was established, the role of the Thai Film Producers’ Association became redundant.

The role of the Federation is to cooperate with the nation’s Film Board, for the promotion of local film businesses. For example, the Federation has organized the National Film Contest since 1992, through collaboration with the Film Board. The Federation also arranges film conferences. The latest conference (on 30 November-2 December 2001) concluded that there was a need to present local film-business problems to the government, such as the need to review the film censorship law, to make a quota for Thai film showing-times per year, and to provide a film subsidy (Chaiwisut 2001, 37). These problems have been raised since the 1970s, and at the present time (2003) the problems have still not been resolved. As long as the government fails to release policies to support local film, the local film industry cannot overcome strong competition from Hollywood.

**The Big Four Consolidate and Media Companies**

In the 1990s the four major film companies, Apex, Sahamongkol Film, Five Star and Go Brothers continued to dominate the market, but faced new and strong competition. In the period of the economic boom in Thailand, media companies became the new trend in business. These media companies have developed their businesses with a focus on vertical integration. They have expanded chain companies into a variety of media such as music, television programs, radio programs, advertisements, publishing, videotapes, CDs, and the Internet. In the 1990s, media companies began to produce
films. This move into film production was started by the two big Thai music companies, Grammy Entertainment and RS Promotion.

Grammy Entertainment was established in November 1986 by a group of university graduates: Paiboon Damrongchai, Raewat Phuthinan, Kittisak Choungarun, and Busaba Dawreoung (Grammy Entertainment Public Company Limited 1998, 1)—unlike the traditional four companies which were family businesses. The company also had good relations with the politician and businessman, Thaksin Shinawatra, as he was a member of the board in 1994 (Official letter of recommendation, Department of Trade Registration, 25 March 1994). The company began as a music business. They produced pop music, master tapes, and various software—such as tape cassettes, CDs, and VCDs. Grammy Entertainment expanded into media businesses such as radio, television and publishing. In 1994 the company expanded into the film industry with the establishment of Grammy Film, and released their first film *Khu Karm (Sunset at Chaopraya*, dir Euthana Mukdasanit, 1995). Grammy Film has continued to produce films to the present day (2004) (Grammy Entertainment Public Company Limited 1998, 1, 2). The central figure of Grammy Film has been Euthana Mukdasanit, the veteran film director of the 1980s. Mukdasanit produced films and supported new film directors who came from music video, TV programs and TV dramas, such as Pinyo Rutham, the director of *Rak Ook Bab Mai Dai (O-Negative*, 1998) and Takonkieat Weerawan, the director of *Kampang (The Wall*, 1999). The idea of the three pillars—nation, religion, and the monarchy—is presented in films such as *Khu Karm*, which presents nationalism though a love story set in the period of World War Two. Meanwhile, religion and the monarchy are presented in some parts of other films such as the landscape of the Royal Palace and Wat Pra Kaew in the film *O-Negative*, and the
happiness of a couple in heaven, after a fiery death, in the film *Kampang*, which emphasized the idea of law of karma and next life.

Grammy Entertainment’s major competitor was the music company RS Promotion. The two companies were shadows of each other. RS Promotion began business in 1982 and was run by a Chinese family, Kreingkrai and Surachai Cheatchotsak (Prayuksilp, 2003). The company had produced Thai pop music and expanded the business into television, radio and publishing. In 1995 the company expanded into the film sector as RS Film & Distribution, and released their first film *Lok Thang Bai Hai Nai Khon Deaw* (*Romantic Blue*, dir. Rashane Limtrakul, 1995) followed by *Keard Eek Tee Thong Mee Thear* (*Dark Side Romance*, dir. Pradya Pinkeaw, 1995). Adirek Watleela, a famous director of teen films in the 1980s, works as a film producer supporting new film directors who came from the music video industry. The company also has chain companies such as AVANT, Red Rocket, and Film Surf that have produced and distributed films with the support of the main film company, RS Film & Distribution ([www.rs-film.com](http://www.rs-film.com)). Although these films use the new style from music video, which uses pop stars, is full of pop music, and creates a visual spectacle, the Thai way of life, beliefs, landscape, and Thai language is still present and remains unchanged in these films.

Besides the two music companies, another media company, BEC World Public Company Limited (which was formed in 1995) also entered the film business. The company is run by the Maleenon family. One member of this family, Pracha Maleenon, became the Minister of Communication and Minister of Interior in Thaksin’s Government (2001–). The company is involved in broadcasting and media businesses
through a joint operating agreement with the Mass Communication Organization of Thailand to run media such as television and radio broadcasting, and the Internet. The company also has program sourcing and production that has released entertainment shows, music, news, and films; moreover, the company has subsidiary businesses involved in studio, studio equipment rental, videotape production and the CD business (www.becworld.com). In 2000, Film Bangkok, a subsidiary of BEC World Public Company Limited, was established. The company has released 4 films: Fah Talay Jone (Tear of the Black Tiger, dir. Wisit Sasanatieng, 2000); Bang Rajan (dir. Thanit Jitnukul, 2000); Bangkok Dangerous (dir. Oxide and Danny Pang, 2000); and Goal Club (dir. Kitikorn Liawsirikul, 2000) (Film Bangkok 2003, 5). These films are postmodern in style, including nostalgia and intertextuality. (Details of these films will be explored in the conclusion.)

The vertical integration of film businesses requires ownership of production, distribution, and exhibition facilities. Horizontal integration requires the ownership of different entertainment media by a single corporation allowing the company to market films and television through ancillary products such as soundtrack recordings, radio networks, and print publishing (Berry 2001, 460). These media companies used their chain of vertically integrated entertainment businesses to support each other. For example they have used pop stars to play leading roles in their films, and advertised films through their media such as television and radio programs and publishing. On the other hand, these companies use their films to promote music, through the distribution of soundtracks, and audiocassettes. The companies can retail the films through their chain of videotape companies and VCD companies. Moreover, most of their film directors developed their production skills from producing music videos and television
programs. So the companies have many facets cross-promoting their films at the box office. For example, *Lok Thang Bai Hai Nai Khon Deaw* (*Romantic Blues*, dir. Rashane Limtrakul, 1995) by RS Film made 55 million baht, *Khu Karm* (*Sunset at Chaopraya*, dir. Euthana Mukdasanit, 1995) by Grammy Film made 44.5 million baht, and *Bang Rajan* (dir. Thanit Jitnukul, 2000) by Film Bangkok made 151 million baht. However, these media companies do not have their own movie theatres as their emphasis lies in film production and ancillary product sales. Therefore the four major film companies and movie theatre companies can maintain their power in the film business, although they do not control other media businesses such as television and radio for the promotion of their films. Thus, between the group of the four major film companies and the three media companies, no groups can monopolize film businesses.

In this period most of the local film companies have turned towards vertical integration. They were divided into two groups; the first group was the four original film companies that were established in the late 1970s. These companies combined movie theatre businesses, film production and film distribution. In the 1990s the second business structure emerged; businesses forming this structure combined many media businesses such as television, radio, publishing, internet, as well as film production and film distribution. The Thai Chinese have been an influential group in the running of these businesses. Moreover, the strong relationship between the companies and politicians has supported the growth of these businesses.

In the 1990s VCD became a new technology and a new competitor for the film industry. The VCD and VCD player are cheap to buy and VCDs are easy to copy. VCDs have become a popular form of home entertainment while videotape has decreased in
popularity. The local film business has solved this problem by expanding into video and VCD Chain Companies, or making contracts with video and VCD companies. They have sold film copyright to the video and VCD companies and made this software legal. For example Grammy Film sells film copyright to the CVD Entertainment Public Company, RS Film sells film copyright to Right Picture Public Company, and Film Bangkok sells film copyright to Movie Disc Company. Thus, the film company can retain an advantage by controlling and selling the copyright, and controlling the timing of release on video and VCD. On December 2000, movie producers, regional distributors, theatre operators, and production houses administered by The Federation of National Film Associations of Thailand set up a three-million baht fund to clear out illegally copied Thai movie VCDs (Amnatcharoenrit 2000)(www.siamfuture.com). Thus, besides the Hollywood films, the local films businesses have had to fight with pirate VCDs.

**Multiplex Movie Theatre**

In the 1990s mini-theatres in shopping complexes were replaced by multiplex movie theatres. The multiplex business began in Bangkok and has expanded to big cities around the country. The multiplex movie-theatre concept was introduced in 1994 by the Entertainment Golden Village (EGV). The EGV is a joint venture between Entertain Theatre Network Co., Ltd from Thailand, Golden Harvest Group from Hong Kong, and Village Road Show from Australia. Entertain Theatre Network Co., Ltd, owned by Wichai Punworarak, has run movie-theatre businesses in shopping complexes, and also has a film production section as Tai Entertainment Film Company. In 1994, the company joined with the Golden Harvest Group from Hong Kong,
managed by Mr. Raymond Chow, and Village Road Show from Australia managed by Mr. Roc Kirby (Wad Fhan 1994, 76).

In 1994 the Major Cineplex was established by Wicha Punworarak (Film Maker 2002, 71). The company not only runs the multiplex movie-theatre business but also has bowling, rental space, and advertising interests (Major Cineplex 2002, 14). This business is a Theatre Complex, which is different from shopping-complex theatres. The theatre complex combines the multiplex theatre and other entertainment businesses into one building development.

In 1999 another multiplex movie theatres, SF Cinema City was established, managed by brothers Suwat and Suwit Tongrompho. The company was a part of the SF Entertainment chain, which has run the film distribution businesses in the eastern provinces for 30 years. The company began in the movie-theatre business from stand-alone theatres, then to mini-theatres and moved into multiplex in the late 1990s. The SF Cinema City also has other businesses within multiplex, such as bowling, Karaoke, fast food restaurants and rental space (National Film Archive documents, 2002).

The multiplex movie theatre is a big theatre that combines many theatres in one place; therefore audiences have many films to choose from when they go to a multiplex theatre. The theatres contain modernized seats, projectors and sound systems, such as Dolby Digital-Surround EX and Sony Dynamic Digital Sound (SDDS). The new technology of sound systems is suitable for Hollywood films. The change in movie theatres towards multiplex entertainment has persuaded people to see the movies again as a chosen form of entertainment; however, they go to enjoy Hollywood films more
than Thai films. In relative terms, there is more choice of Hollywood films than Thai films (see table 5). This also affected the downturn of Thai film production in the 1990s.

In the 1990s the number of movie theatres increased dramatically. In 1992 there were 77 theatres (Starpics Editorial 1992, 86). In 2000, multiplex cinemas had about 80% of the market. There were 242 theatres in Bangkok, with some areas experiencing an oversupply. Consequently, the three major companies—EGV, Major Cineplex, and SF Cinema—faced strong competition (Amnatcharoenrit, 2000). The numbers of theatres—especially multiplex—have continued to increase; in 2001, in Bangkok, there were 286 theatres (Film Maker 2002, 57). This increase, which included improving quality of the theatres, has led to a rise in the theatre business after the depression of the 1980s—when videotape boomed and many people stopped attending the theatres.

**The Downturn in Thai Film the 1990s**

In the 1990s, local film production declined, with the number of Thai films being produced beginning to decrease in 1991. In 1999, 104 Thai films were released, but by 2000 there were only 9 Thai films released (see table 5). This period was catastrophic for Thai filmmakers. Many reasons contributed to the downturn in the Thai film industry; these included: 1) the decrease of the foreign film tax, 2) Thai film became old-fashioned for a modern society, 3) television, videotape and VCD expanded around the country, 4) Thai film companies released only teen films, and 5) an economic recession in the late 1990s.
Table 5 Film numbers in the 1990s.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>Hong Kong / Taiwan/China</th>
<th>India</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Thailand</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>101*</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>104*</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1442</td>
<td>793</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>427</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Film Censorship Committee, Police Department, film numbers in 1990 and 1991 from Thairat Newspaper
In 1992 the Chuan government was forced by the Clinton administration to decrease the foreign film import tax from 30 baht per metre to 10 baht per metre, in exchange for the Generalized System of Preference (GSP) of Thai commodities, especially textiles. In this period, exports made strong national revenue at 12.5 billion baht (Boonyaketsala 1999, 270). The decrease in the foreign film import tax has resulted in an influx of Hollywood films, to more than one hundred films per year following the change in import duties in 1992 (See table 5). The number of Thai films released decreased, as the takings of Thai films decreased at the box office. The revenue of Thai film decreased dramatically from 18.94% in 1996 to 5.8% in 1998, while at the same time western films dominated the film market in Thailand. Western film revenue increased continuously from 75.95% in 1996 to 90.08% in 1998 (see table 6).

Since the economic boom of the late 1980s, Thailand has entered the global market. The middle class has expanded and the number of educated people has increased. These people have adopted new knowledge, information, and lifestyles from western countries, especially the United States. Bangkok and other big cities in Thailand have become highly westernized. Hollywood films became one of the symbols and influences of the modern lifestyle. Thai audiences have learnt to model their modern lifestyle from Hollywood films: for example, fashion, fast food, and sex life. Therefore, there has been a reduction not only in the number of Thai films, but also in films from other Asian countries, such as Chinese films from Hong Kong, Taiwan and China, and Indian films (see table 5). Thai films and Asian films became outdated and unfashionable for the younger generation.
Table 6  Box office taking from 1996 to 1998.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Western Revenue</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Thai Revenue</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Chinese Revenue</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total Revenue</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>1,443,605,795</td>
<td>75.95</td>
<td>360,000,000</td>
<td>18.94</td>
<td>97,100,000</td>
<td>5.11</td>
<td>1,900,705,795</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>1,749,082,403</td>
<td>81.54</td>
<td>327,087,603</td>
<td>15.25</td>
<td>68,822,694</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>2,144,992,700</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>2,084,302,932</td>
<td>90.08</td>
<td>134,095,247</td>
<td>5.80</td>
<td>95,296,142</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>2,313,694,321</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Entertainment Pictures Ltd. Cited in (Kaewtape 2002, 72)
The Thai Farmer Research Centre surveyed Thai people’s film preferences in 1999, in Bangkok and its suburbs. The number of people surveyed was 1432. The poll showed that 64% of Thai people prefer to see foreign films—especially American films—and that only 6.5% of Thai people stated a preference for Thai films (see table 7). This poll illustrates the crisis that faced Thai film in the late 1990s.
Table 7 Thai people’s stated film preferences in 1999.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Film</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thai Film</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Film</td>
<td>93.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- American Film</td>
<td>64.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Hong Kong Film</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- British Film</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- France Film</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- China</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Italian Film</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Indian Film</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Other</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Economic Poll, Thai Farmer Research Centre, number 209, 10 June 1999 (Thai Farmer Research Centre, 1999).
In the 1990s, Thai TV soap operas boomed, and many people were transfixed to their televisions during prime time. The music company Grammy Entertainment expanded business Exact Co., Ltd. to produce TV soap operas in 1994 (Grammy Entertainment Public Company Limited 1998, 1). However, the music company was not the main group to produce soap operas. Most Thai soap operas have been produced by soap opera companies such as Dara Video and Kantana (Pinyo Kongthong, Interview 9 February 2001). This period was a turning point for entertainment businesses in Thailand. While Thai soap opera became popular, Thai film declined. The most popular genre of Thai soap opera was melodrama. Examples are Daw Prasuk, Ban Sai Tong and Khu Karm. Moreover, many film superstars such as Jarunee Suksawat and Sorapong Chatree turned their career to work in TV drama, when Thai film started to experience its downturn in the late 1980s (Santiwuthimathee 1997, 144). Meanwhile, nang chewit (melodramas) and nang bu (action films) declined in the Thai film market, while nang wai ruen (teen film) became the dominant genre. So, Thai soap opera served mature audiences around the country. Furthermore, videotape and VCD became popular form of home entertainment. With an especially pronounced downturn in the mature audiences, teenagers became the predominant demographic for the Thai movie industry.

The national economic crisis of 1997 also contributed to the decline in the number of international films released in Thailand. In addition to the reduction in Thai films produced, the number of American films released in Thailand also decreased slightly, from 171 films in 1979 to 113 films in 1998. However, the release of American films increased in 1999 to 141 films and by 2000 had reached 160 films (see table 5). In the
period of economic crisis, many Thai people chose to see big production films such as Hollywood films that they thought worth the ticket price.

**Rebirth in the Late 1990s**

As we have seen, in the 1990s there were many factors that contributed to the Thai film industry downturn. However, in the late 1990s a new phenomenon emerged in the Thai film industry that gives rise to optimism for the future. New film directors, trained in advertising careers (such as Nonzee Nimibuth, Wisit Sasanatieng, Yongyooth Thongkonthun, and Pen-Ek Ratanareung) released films that were not only popular at the box office but also won international film awards at many international film festivals.

For example, the film *2499 Antapan Klong Moung* (*Daeng Bailey and Gangster*, dir. Nonzee Nimibuth, 1997), earned 75 million baht at the box office (Vanijaka 2002, p.11), and won the Grand Prix Award from 19E Festival International du Film Independence in 1997 at Belgium (Chaiwarakarn 1998, 23). *Nang Nak* (dir. Nonzee Nimibuth, 1999) made 150 million baht in the box office; this was more successful than the Hollywood film, *Jurassic Park* (dir. Steven Spieberg, 1993), which made only 78 million baht (Starpics Editorial 1999, 80). *Nang Nak* also won the Best Film, Best Direction, Best Sound, and Best Art Direction in the 44th Asia-Pacific Film Festival in 1999 (Thai Film Foundation, 2000). *Fun Bar Karaoke* (dir. Pen-Ek Ratanareung, 1997) only made 5 million baht at the box office (Starpics Editorial 1999, p.80); however, this film received the Special Prize of the Jury to the Three Continents at Nantes, France in
The new generation of Thai filmmakers have become a source of hope for the revitalization of the Thai film industry.

**Conclusion: From Monarch’s Hobby to Big Business**

The development of the Thai film industry has been influenced by many factors, such as the monarchy, the government, local film companies, and foreign films. At the commencement of film history in Thailand—the period of absolute monarchy—film was limited to the monarchy and high-ranking officials. They filmed and exhibited films as a new hobby; at the same time the films were used to propagandise the monarchical institution. Meanwhile, foreigners, Thai Chinese, and groups of high-ranking officials used film to create businesses such as exhibition, distribution, and film production. When the film business developed, the monarchy became involved by establishing film companies such as Siam Niramai Fim Company, in the reign of King Vajiravudh (King Rama VI 1910-1925), and Sala Chalerm Krung Theatre and Saha Cinema Company (The United Cinema Company), in the reign of King Prajadhipok (King Rama VII 1925-1935). During the latter’s reign, the king had the role of censor. Finally, in 1930 the Film Censorship Law was enacted and has been used up to the present time (2004). The Film Censorship Law therefore plays a significant role in maintaining the importance of the three pillars. In contemporary Thailand the Film Censorship Law still impacts on the content of films and creates difficulties for Thai filmmakers who may be uncomfortable in negotiating what is acceptable to authorities on screen. Today, Thai filmmakers should have the opportunity to craft their films without the restraint of censorship, enabling a greater variety of Thai films to be released in both local and international film markets.
After the absolute monarchy was overthrown, the monarchy did not have a significant role in the Thai film business, until in 1999 the monarchy supported the historical film *Suriyothai* (dir. Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, 2001). The support of the monarchy made the film successful at the box office. This showed the power of the monarchy to raise a film’s success at the box office.

In the period of the constitutional monarchy, the government became involved in the local film business by producing propaganda films. In the post-war period 16 mm film production was popular and ordinary people had a chance to run film businesses and have their films exhibited around the country. The government gave short-term support for the film business in the late 1960s, but the policy was not successful. In 1977 the Thanin Government increased the Film Import tax: it was the first time that a government had had a policy to protect the local film business. However, in 1992 the Chuan Government decreased the Film Import tax, enabling Hollywood films to dominant in the market. The government did not have any policy to protect or support the local film business. The development of the Thai film industry has been improved by Thai film companies themselves.

The local film business began with the high-ranking officials, and in the 16 mm film period, the ordinary people began to play role in the film industry—from the local film companies’ vertical integration since the 1970s, to the 1990s music companies’ expansion into the film business. The local film businesses have had to compete with other media, such as television, videotape, VCD, and foreign films—especially Hollywood films. However, there was no particular policy from the government to
support the local film businesses, as they are national film. The development of Thai film industry without specific support from the government has seen the local film industry evolve gradually. Despite this, local film companies have managed to integrate many aspects of the film business to produce large entertainment businesses. In economic terms, Thai national cinema, demonstrates how the influence of the Monarchy and government have, at times, both supported and obstructed the film industry. Another pillar, religion (Buddhism), has no significant economic role in supporting or hindring Thai film.

The following chapter explores political aspects of Thai national cinema. A text-based approach is used to detail unique thematic nuances of Thai film evident in genres such as such as the social problem film (nang sathorn sungkham), action film (nang bu), teen film (nang wai ruen), and Third cinema.
Chapter 3: The Politics of ‘Nation’

Politics is a significant factor that influences the development of national cinema. It relates to the support and control giving by government to local film production, and includes their attitude to and politics towards imported films. Politics also inspires filmmakers to create and present their films, influencing the content and style in various genres to include certain political ideas. For example, British propaganda films during the First World War and the Second World War, propaganda films in the Soviet Union in 1917-1928, Italian neorealist films in 1942-1952, or Third Cinema in Latin America, Africa and Asia. Consequently, national cinema can serve the political agenda of the group in power.

This chapter will explore the political influences on Thai cinema by dividing it into three decades: the 1970s, the 1980s, and the 1990s. Each of these decades contained significant political events: the people’s uprising to overthrow the military dictatorial government and the struggle between left-wing and right-wing groups in the 1970s; the Communist Party of Thailand’s (CPT) collapse, economic expansion in the 1980s; and Thailand’s move towards capitalism in the 1990s. Every political movement influenced the development of the local film industry, including underground films. The role of the government, religion (Buddhism), and the monarchy in shaping Thai national cinema will be further explored in this chapter.
Thai Cinema in the 1970s: The Period of Political Uprising

To study Thai films of the period from the 1970s—a period when they changed to a new style and new wave directors emerged—it is necessary to understand the political and cultural context in the 1960s and 1970s, a period which extends from the prime ministership of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat (1958-1963) through to the reign of Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn (1960-1973). During this period the Thai people were ruled by a military government for 15 years. This dictatorial period produced pressure for change, led to the emergence of a student movement, and culminate in the events of 14 October 1973 that called for changes to many aspects of Thai society such as politics, people’s consciousness, and the arts. In this period a separation between left wing and right wing groups was obvious and brought conflicts, struggle, protests and massacres. The three institutions of the nation, religion, and the monarchy were co-opted in this struggle between the right-wing and left-wing groups. This section starts with an examination the American influence in the Cold War period, followed by an assessment of the role of the military dictatorial government, student movements, the political events of 14 October 1973, the massacre at Thammasat University on 6 October 1976, and Thanin Kraivichian’s government. The cultural movements such as music and literature that emerged in the period of the people’s uprising, as well as the influence Thai film in the 1970s will be explored. This first section will address the political influences on Thai film in the 1970s and explore the genres, nang sathorn sungkhom (social problem films) and Third Cinema.
1. The American Influence

During 1945 to 1950 Southeast Asia became a part of the Cold War. In March 1947 the American president Harry S. Truman declared America’s intention to obstruct communist doctrine by backing the countries that fought against communism. In 1949 the American government summarised that the triumph of communism in China and Vietnam would directly impact on Thailand; therefore, America assumed Thailand to be an ally for opposing communism.

In Field Marshal Sarit’s regime (1958-1963), foreign policy was sustained by an alliance with the USA (Leifer 1996, 240). In 1952, the United States, stated foreign policy intention was to halt the movement towards communism in Southeast Asia. Between 1950 and 1975 the United States contributed $650 million towards economic development programs in Thailand called; these programs were called “nation building” and their aim was to prevent the communist threat. This naturally included strengthening the Thai armed forces (Girling 1981, 235).

During this period the economy grew rapidly with the help of United States aid, so a great number of Thai families were able to send their children abroad to study. Furthermore, through the Fullbright Program, the American government gave a large number of scholarships to Thai students to undertake higher education in the United States (Keyes 1987, 149). During this time the number of university and college students increased dramatically in line with Sarit’s policy of national development. However, many students were taught by young teachers who had studied abroad, particularly in the United States, and ironically the idea of student-based anti-war
protests especially with regard to the United States involvement in the Vietnam War—was passed on to Thai students (Keyes 1987, 82). It is paradoxical that Thai students learnt how to oppose foreign influences, especially the United States, through other Thai students who had studied in the United States.

1948 to 1973 was the period of military dictatorial governments in Thailand (Field Marshal Plake Phibulsongkram 1948-1957, Field Marshal Sarit Thanarath 1959-1963 and Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn 1963-1973). During this period America supported the Thai military with contributions amounting to US$ 1.147 billion (Phongpaichit and Baker 1996, 461–4). Eight major military bases and many minor installations were established around the country during the course of the Vietnam War. A major destabilizing influence was the rise of prostitution, drug abuse and American cultural influences on Thai culture and society (Anderson 1985, 24).

It was a time when America influenced both Thai government policy and Thai culture. The government’s decisions and actions depended on America, and, furthermore, the American military bases throughout Thailand forced Thailand to participate in the Vietnam War. American films, pop music, novels and fashion rapidly dominated Thailand. It was a time when Thai people learnt to imitate American culture including, paradoxically its counter-culture and anti-war sentiments. It was the beginning of student movements and new wave film directors.
2. The Rule of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat (1958-1963)

Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat became a powerful dictator after he led a coup to overthrow Field Marshal Plake Phibulsongkram’s government on 16 August 1957 (Pothworapong and Pothworapong 1999, 28). In 1958, Field Marshal Sarit appointed himself Prime Minister as well as Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, Commander-in-Chief of the Army, Director General of the Police Department, and the Minister of Development. He also appointed Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn to be the Minister for Defense and Field Marshal Praphas Charusathien to be the Minister of the Interior (Phongpaichit and Baker 1996, 458). Thus, to Field Marshal Sarit and his subordinates, Field Marshal Thanom and Field Marshal Praphat occupied powerful posts—especially in the army and the police. Moreover, these two men were also groomed to be his political heirs.

Field Marshal Sarit also built his power base by reviving the monarchy through the promotion of King Bhumibol (Rama IX 1946-) and Queen Sirikit (Anderson 1985, 20). The duties of the king and queen were arranged by Sarit’s government and included royal ceremonies, visiting countries, and conferment of diplomas of the public universities (Phongpaichit and Baker 1996, 427). In the period of Field Marshal Sarit the relationship between the military and royal family became one of trust and openness. Sarit called the military ‘the military of the King’ (Phongpaichit and Baker 1996, 474). Thus, through the support of Field Marshal Sarit, the monarchy was returned to greatness in the reign of King Bhumibol, after its decline in the reign of King Prajadhipok (King Rama VII 1925-1935) and the mysterious death of King Anan (King Rama VIII 1935-1946). On the other hand, Sarit’s government was strong and
stable owing to a good relationship with the monarchy. This shows that the monarchy was a respected institution for the Thai people and gives an indication of its status as a pillar of the Thai nation. Through the co-opting of the monarchy, Field Marshal Sarit assumed an air with the legitimacy for Thai people.

During his 15 years in power, Field Marshal Sarit abolished the elected legislature, abrogated the constitution, and prohibited political parties and all participant political activity (Morell and Samudavanija 1981, 184). He was an operational military dictator who used ruthless censorship to control, with punitive consequences for progressive politicians, intellectuals and writers. Consequently, some writers were imprisoned, jailed, and driven into exile—for example Jit Phumisak 20, Itsara Amantakun21, Sri Burapha22 and Kamsing Srinok23 (Keyes 1987, 190). The arrest and execution of Khrong Chandawong MP in May 1961 came after he had been labeled a communist; although he had never been a member of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), he had supported the proposal to abolish the Anticommunist Act (Morell and Samudavanija 1981, 81). His execution alarmed many progressive politicians and the group opposed to the government. It is not surprising that this period was called *Yuk Thamin* (the Dark Ages).

20 Jit Phumisak wrote *Sinlapa Pear Chewit Silpa Pear Prachachon* (*Art for Life, Art for People*); later he becomes the ideal of the new generation of serious writers (Kaye 1987, 190). He was shot by government troops on 5 May 1966, when he joined the Communist Party of Thailand. He was a kind of cult-hero to students during the 1970s (Bowie 1991, 16).
21 Itsara Amantakun wrote many political short stories.
22 Sri Burapha wrote social realism fictions, which condemned the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy for taking advantage of the poor (Keyes, 1987, 189).
23 Khamsing Srinok is most famous for his short stories and articles, which were published in *Samkomsat Paritat* (*Social Science Review*). After the massacre of 6 October 1976, he joined the Communist Party of Thailand (Keyes 1987, 191). He wrote the screenplay for and also performed in the Third Cinema film, *Tong Pan* (produced by Isan Group, 1976).
Field Marshal Sarit was a powerful authoritarian until he died in 1963 (Keyes 1987, 103). Sarit the authoritarian was followed by his political heir, Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn, who oversaw another period of dictatorial government.

3. The Period of Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn (1963-1973)

Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn became Prime Minister after Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat died in 1963. He retained power through a dictatorship and Field Marshal Praphas Charusathien helped him govern the country. Moreover, he planned to support his son, Colonel Narong Kittikachorn (the son-in-law of Field Marshal Praphas Charusathien) to be his political heir. Field Marshal Thanom was in power for 10 years until the protests of 14 October 1973, which helped depose him. Field Marshal Praphas and Colonel Narong fled into exile.

Although Field Marshal Thanom’s government was a dictatorship, during his reign political tension was reduced. In 1969, students were allowed to organize the National Student Centre of Thailand (NSCT) (Pothworapong and Pothworapong 1999, 65). This organization was the mainstay of organizing the people’s uprising on 14 October 1973, which brought it the dictatorial military government to an end.

The Student Movement

As noted above, the student movement had developed during the period of military government under Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat in the late of 1950s. In the meantime, the number of students increased from approximately 18,000 in 1961 to over 100,000 in
In the mid-1960s Thai students who had studied abroad brought the ideas of left-wing politics to Thailand. During 1970-1972 many Thai scholars became interested in Marxism, which was popular in Western countries. In this period, the main topics that students and people protested against were social problems such as corruption, labour problems, the poverty of the peasants, and education problems (Phongpaichit and Baker 1996, 512-13). Moreover, Thai people felt oppressed under the dictatorial military government; thus, a coalition of students, scholars, journalists, artists and politicians joined together to overthrow the dictatorial regime of Field Marshal Thanom and to force the withdrawal of American troops in Thailand (Anderson 1985, 30).

The main activities of the National Student Centre of Thailand (NSCT) were to organize protests against the dictatorial government, American cultural imperialism and Japanese economic imperialism. The NSCT also supported other political organizations such as the peasants, and labour movements. In this period the students concerned themselves with programs of the development and rural poverty that was being experienced at that time. In November 1972, the NSCT, led by Theerayuth Bunmee, protested against foreign economic domination by boycotting Japanese businesses (Anderson 1985, 35-6). This campaign was successful, and gained the support of the Thai people; it led to the next protest, which called for a new constitution, and finally to the events of 14 October 1973. During this time the student movement was a strong and important cog in the wheel of change in Thai society—a ‘cog’ that called for democracy.
The Events of 14 October 1973

The protest of 14 October 1973 marks a major historical event for Thai people, one that significantly affected Thai political history, causing a change from military authoritarian government to democratic government. There were many factors that had led to this event. In May 1973, high-ranking army and police officials illegally hunted a protected animal at Thung Yai national reserve. This affair was covered up by the Thanom government and became a national scandal. For this reason, Ramkhamkaeng University students made a leaflet that ridiculed the government cover-up. The Thung Yai scandal was used to criticize the extension of the term of prime ministership of military officer Field Marshal Thanom. In response, Dr. Sak Phasukniran, Dean of Ramkhamkaeng University dismissed 9 students. This brought about a protest by the National Student Centre of Thailand (NSCT) involving 50,000 students from every institute, which took place around the Democracy monument on 21-22 June 1973. They called for Ramkhamkaeng University to reinstate the 9 students. The students were reinstated and Dr. Sak Phasukniran resigned. Afterward the protesters requested the reinstitution of the constitution within 6 months (Thailand had not had a constitution since the coup of 1971) (Randolph and Thompson 1981, 21). When the demand did not succeed, the NSCT, activists and scholars created a group to call for a constitution. On 6 October 1973, the police arrested 11 people including 8 students, a politician, a journalist and a lecturer when they distributed pamphlets urging the creation of a permanent constitution. On 7 and 9 October 1973, one further student and a politician were arrested.
The students started to protest at Thammasat University on 8 October 1973, calling for the release of all 13 detainees and for a permanent constitution. Many students from universities, colleges and schools around Bangkok and nearby joined the demonstration until, by 13 October 1973, around two-hundred-thousand demonstrators moved from Thammasat University to the Democracy monument. In the afternoon of that day the 13 detainees were released.

In the morning of 14 October 1973, the riot police clashed with a group of demonstrators in front of the Jitlada royal palace. Once the hostilities had begun, over one hundred demonstrators were killed and several government buildings such as the Revenue Department (seen as a symbol of exploitation), Lotteries Building (seen as a symbol of temptation), and the Department of Public Relations (seen as a symbols of dishonesty) were burned down (Morell and Samudavanija 1981, 147). At 7.40 pm, King Bhumibol declared the resignation of Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn and appointed Professor Sanya Thammasak as the Prime Minister. On 16 October 1973, Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn left for exile in the United States of America (Feature Magazine Editorial Department 2000, 35–45, 49, 51).

After the events of 14 October 1973, Thailand turned to democracy. The roles of students, especially the NSCT, became acceptable to Thai people. Workers and peasants were permitted to organize groups to represent their interests, such as the Farmer’s Federation of Thailand (FFT) and the Labour Coordination Centre of Thailand (LCCT). Between 1973 and 6 October 1976, the student organizations energetically campaigned for social reforms. For example, the NSCT supported the first large-scale protest by farmers in March 1974, to request a higher rice prices and the Sanya
government spent 300 million baht to support farmers. In the same year the NSCT supported 20,000 textile workers to strike (Keyes 1987, 91–2).

The military was removed from the centre of power, and the two most free elections in Thai history were held (in January 1975 and April 1976) (Anderson 1985, 37). Thai people enjoyed democracy and freedom, and they recognized their political power. In this period the student movement was strong as never before. It was also a time for the young and new styles of literature, music and film to emerge.

**The Aftermath of the 14 October 1973 Uprising**

Immediately after the events of 14 October 1973, Thai people enjoyed their triumph, which finally revealed the level of corruption endemic in government. The number of strikes and leftist organizations increased dramatically. Labour protests also increased considerably after the event of 14 October 1973 (see table 8). It was evident that the events of 14 October 1973 manifested the power of the people and encouraged labour to protest for their rights.
Table 8 Labour strikes from 1966 to 1976

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Labour Strikes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1 Jan.-14 Oct.)</td>
<td>(134)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(14 Oct.-31 Dec.)</td>
<td>(367)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,370</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During this period, not only the workers, but also the farmers, protested. In Thailand, the farmer’s status has traditionally been that they are poor, passive and inferior—particularly in relation to bureaucrats. This period was the first time that the farmers became organized and protested against their situation. They started a large-scale protest for higher rice prices in March 1974 with the support of the NSCT, and followed this in June 1974 with protests for land and rent control (Morell and Samudavanija 1981, 214, 217). Lastly, with the support of students, the farmers organized the Farmers’ Federation of Thailand in December 1974 (Keyes 1987, 94).

The labour and farmer movements in this period were a new phenomenon for Thai society. Normally, the image of the farmer that was shown in Thai films was that of a poor, passive person who was taken advantage of and shown contempt by profiteers, bureaucrats and rich people. Meanwhile, the role of labourers was rarely shown in Thai films. After 14 October 1973, the role of farmers and labourers in Thai films changed—they were shown to be fighting for their right, which can be seen in the films Nong Ma Woa (Mad Dog Swamp dir. Surasee Phatham, 1979) and Tebtida Rong Ngan (Factory Angel, dir. Euthana Mukdasanit, 1982).

Nong Ma Woa presented the problems of the farmers in Nong Ma Woa village of northeastern Thailand. This film showed farmers being taken advantage of by rice dealer profiteers. They organized a paddy-marketing cooperation to fight back. The film portrayed the power of poor people when they assembled. Moreover, the film presented labour’s problems through a farmer who used to be a labourer in the city. He was oppressed and finally expelled from the factory because he and his friends protested.
against the factory owner. *Tebtida Rong Ngan* presented the lives and problems of labourers, especially women labourers. The first scene showed female villagers who went to work in Bangkok because they were poor. This film sought to expose the unjust system in the factory in which they worked. Through the story of the women, the labourers, and finally the heroine, declared that the factory conditions in which they worked were the equivalent of slave labour and that they would no longer put up with them. Although this film did not present the struggle of a labour organization, it presented a labourer (the heroine) fight back against a factory owner by renouncing an unjust system.

The stories of *Nong Ma Woa* and *Tebtida Rong Ngan* showed that the problems of the farmers and labourers were interrelated, and that, therefore, they could not be presented separately. The stories of farmers and labourers were also presented in underground films such as *Tong Pan* (produced by Isan Group, 1975), *Prachachon Nok* (*On the Fringe of Society*, dir. Manop Udomdej, 1979) and *Karn Tor Su Khong Kamkorn Ying Rongngan Hara* (*The Hara Women Workers’ Struggle* dir. John Ungpakorn, 1975). *Tong Pan* presented peasant’s problems as a result of a dam construction. In *Prachachon Nok* and *Karn Tor Su Khong Kamkorn Ying Rongngan Hara*, the farmers and labourers organized to fight for their rights. These three underground films will be explored in the section ‘Third Cinema’.

During this period, the stories of poor people in Thai films were rising up as stories of the Thai nation, while the monarchy and religion were not presented as significant means for solving problems. These films reflected the political atmosphere of a people who were uprising.
An increase in the number of political parties after the event of 14 October 1973 created a political atmosphere in which people became interested in democracy. The number of parties increased from 10 (in the ninth election on 10 February 1969) to 22 (in the tenth election on 26 January 1975) (Pothworapong and Pothworapong 1999, 72). These new parties included leftist parties such as the Socialist Party of Thailand (Pak Sungkom Niyom Haeng Prated Thai), and progressive political parties such as the New Force Party (Pak Palang Mai). This was the highest number of political parties in the period between the first election on 15 November 1933 and the nineteenth election on 17 November 1996.

As a consequence of the flourishing of democracy, Thai society was filled with protests, and many inequalities and social problems were unearthed. However, this caused the raising of tension amongst the right wing. Dr. Pouy Ungpakorn, Dean of Thammasat University, 1974-1976, mentioned that after the events of 14 October 1973:

…when the students went to rural areas, they stirred up conflicts between the bureaucrats and villagers. Then they thought that their power was strong enough to oppose government organizations such as the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC), the Ministry of the Interior, and the military. The students protested so frequently that the general population became bored with them (Ungpakorn 1998, 65).

Dr. Pouy’s comments suggest that the students’ and leftist politics became too extreme. Thus, the students’ comradeship lessened as the opposition to them grew. Right-wing organizations also emerged against those of the left. In the 1970s, here were 3 powerful
right-wing organizations—Nawapon, Krating Daeng (Red Bulls), and Luk Sua Chaoban (Village Scouts)—whose activities directly opposed the left wing.

Nawapon was a powerful right-learning group in 1975-1976 (Morell and Samudavanija 1981, 323). The leader, Wattana Kiewvimol, was an excellent orator. He appealed to his audiences for commitment to the king, the nation and religion. Nawapon’s members were primarily ‘up-country townspeople’, not villagers or Bangkok urban dwellers. Closely linked to Nawapon, was the charismatic monk Kittivuddho Bhikkhu. In mid-June 1976, he gave a sermon which claimed that killing communists was not sinful but meritorious as communists were bestial and agents of the devil who threatened the nation, the religion, and the monarchy (Keyes 1987, 95). The three pillars—especially religion—were used by rightist groups for claiming a mandate to suppress leftist groups.

Krating Daeng (the Red Bulls) had the backing of the military. This group was formed in 1974 (Morell and Samudavanija 1981, 323) and organized by officers connected with ISOC. The Krating Daeng membership comprised former army officers who had fought with the US military in Laos and vocational students in Bangkok (Keyes 1987, 95). The purpose of Krating Daeng was to defend the honour of the nation and the king, and to prevent the spread of communism (Morell and Samudavanija 1981, 242).

The last group was the Luk Sua Chaoban (Village Scouts), who was very powerful in 1975-1976. This group was formed by the Border Patrol Police (BPP) in 1971 and received official support from the Ministry of the Interior, as well as endorsement from the monarchy. Their objective was to mobilize the rural masses against communism (Morell and Samudavanija 1981, 242–4). In 1973, King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit
became patrons of the Luk Sua Chaoban. After the events of 14 October 1973, the Luk Sua Chaoban became identified as a royalist rather than a government movement. During the training for new scouts, the themes of nation, religion and monarchy were given expression in many activities, such as songs, games, and plays (Keyes 1987, 96).

The purpose of the three main right-wing organizations was to oppose the left-wing groups by instilling admiration for the three institutions of the nation, religion and the monarchy, and by bringing about the elimination of communism. By inference, the enemies of these right-wing groups were the groups that despised the three institutions and supported the communists.

The roles of the right-wing groups were also presented in Thai films. For example, in the film Sao Ha (dir. Winith Pakdeevijit, 1976) the five heroes join the military to suppress communist at the command of a Buddhist monk. In the film Nak Paen Din (dir. Sombat Maetanee, 1977) the hero is the Luk Sua Chaoban (Village Scout) whose role is to fight against communist.

During this period, the political clashes between right and left-learning groups grew more obvious and violent. Benedict Anderson states that the victims of political violence were middle-class student activists associated with the NSCT, the leaders of peasant organizations, trade unionists, and left-wing journalists (Anderson 1998, 184). For example, from March 1974 to August 1975, twenty-one leaders of the farmers’ movements were killed (Keyes 1987, 96). On March 1976, Dr. Boonsanong Punyothayan, the Secretary General of the Socialist Party of Thailand, was assassinated (Bowie 1991, 14). In the same month plastic bombs were thrown into
demonstrators who demanded the withdrawal of American troops from Thailand—the result being four people killed and eighty-five injured (Morell and Samudavanija 1981, 167).

Prior to returning to Thailand on 19 September 1976, Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn was ordained as a Buddhist novice in Singapore, and subsequently served his novitiate at Borwormniwate Temple in Bangkok (Kaewsuk 2000, 96). The protest that ensued upon his return was the cause of the massacre at Thammasat University on 6 October 1976.

**The Massacre at Thammasat University on 6 October 1976**

The most violent picture was the picture of the students’ corpses with wedges of wood being driven into their chests, and in the background was the Royal Palace.

In that moment it was very hard to carry my camera…

Wirot Mutitanon, a Thairat newspaper photographer and witness of the massacre at Thammasat University (Santiwuthimatee 2000, 145; trans. by Patsorn Sungsri)

The massacre at Thammasat University on 6 October 1976 was the most ruthless political event of Thai history. The rise in tension between the left wing and the right wing after the events of 14 October 1973 culminated on 6 October 1976 at Thammasat University, as students protested against monk Thanon’s return to Thailand.

As stated previously, the causes of the massacre started on 19 September 1976, when Field Marshal Thanom returned to Thailand as Buddhist novice. On 24 September
1976, two activists were murdered and hanged by police at Nakorn Pratom province after they distributed anti monk Thanom posters. On 29 September 1976, the NSCT led a demonstration at Sanam Luang24, demanding that monk Thanom be exiled and the arrest of the murderers of the two activists. Meanwhile, Krating Daeng group and the Luk Sua Chaoban guarded monk Thanom at Boworniwet temple. On 3 October 1976 the demonstrators moved from Sanam Luang to Thammasat University, due to the disruption of right-wing groups (Kaewsuk 2000, 97, 99). On 4 October 1976, at Thammasat University, the student theatre played a mock hanging to draw attention to the murder of the two activists in Nakorn Patom province. On 5 October 1976 students from many universities joined the protest. On that day the two newspapers Dow Siam and Bangkok Post published a picture of the mock hanging, and a change of lèse-majesté was brought against the students because the picture in the newspaper showed the actor’s face, which looked like that of the Crown Prince (Prince Vajiralongkorn). In the early morning of 6 October 1976, the armed border patrol, the police and right-wing vigilante groups such as Nawapon, Krating Daeng and Luk Sua Chaoban started to rampage through the campus (Leifer 1996, 270). Many students were shot dead; some students ran away from the campus to Sanam Luang and were crushed under foot as they ran; other were burned and lynched from trees (Kaewsuk 2000, 114). Morell points out that the official government reports listed 46 dead, but other observers believe the toll was higher (Morell and Samudavanija 1981, 275). After the massacre, the military once again assumed power. Many students and activists joined the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) in the jungle.

24 Sanam Luang is a ground located in front of the Royal Palace, Thammasat University and Silpakorn University. The formal name is Toung Pra Maru (Pra Maru Ground). The ground is used for royal ceremonies, people’s recreation and for political purposes such as protests.
In this event the three institutes of the nation, religion, and the monarchy were used to rally support for the right-wing groups. The first was Field Marshal Thanom’s ordination to the Buddhist monkhood; the second was the mock hanging picture that resembled the Crown Prince. At this time, when right-wing groups—especially the *Luk Sua Chaoban* and *Nawapon*—came into existence, Thai people were trained to believe that the nation, religion (especially Buddhism), and the monarchy were the most important and untouchable institutions. Moreover, Thai people were scared by the threat of encroaching communism, as Keyes has pointed out:

In April 1975 the communist victories in neighbouring Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam intensified fear among urban middle and upper classes and conservative peasants in Thailand that the students, labourers, and farmers’ movements could be the vanguard of communist revolution in Thailand (Keyes 1987, 94).

Right-wing groups emphasized that the left wing opposed religion and the monarchy and did not reflect the beliefs of the Thai nation. By implication, they suggested that these were communist beliefs. The two political events of 14 October 1973 and the massacre of 6 October 1976 have not been recorded in schoolbooks at any level. On the one hand, the events of 14 October 1973 encouraged Thai people to recognize their power, as Chanvit Kasatesiri, the historian, mentioned, ‘Without the events of 14 October 1973 the villagers from Pak Moon dam area could not protest in front of the Government House, they would have been crushed underfoot in front of the dam’ (Kasatesiri, *Siamrath Weekly*, 15 October 2000 cited in *Matichon* Editorial Department 2002, 39). On the other hand, the massacre of 6 October 1976 wounded not only leftist supporters but also people who had only justice in their minds. Ten years later, after the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) collapsed in 1984 (Phongpaichit and Baker 1996,
and the conflict between the left and right declined, these wounds were expressed through characters in Thai films.

The massacre on 6 October 1976 points to the status of the three pillars and how crucial they are in expressing the Thai nation. The continued alignment of the monarchy with the politicians of the day and the continued influence of religion in shaping the moral fiber of the nation reveals some of the links between the three pillars. Film was never behind in this cultural expression. The massacre on 6 October 1976 was presented in films such as *Chang Man Chan Mai Care* (*I Don’t Care*, dir. Prince Pan Taewanop Taewakun, 1986) and *Kru Somsri* (*Teacher Somsri*, dir. Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, 1986).

In 1986 two films were produced, *Chang Man Chan Mai Care* (*I don’t care*, dir. Prince Pan Thaewanop Thaewakun, 1986) and *Kru Somsri* (*Teacher Somsri*, dir. Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, 1986), which touched upon the massacre of 6 October 1976. *Chang Man Chan Mai Care* was a love story between a workaholic female advertiser and a male prostitute. The massacre of 6 October 1976 was presented by the heroine’s nightmare. Pim, the heroine, was a Thammasat University student who was one of the demonstrators on 6 October 1976. She survived, but the ruthlessness of the event still haunted her. The film presented a small fragment of the massacre and the activists’ lives ten years later. The scene showing a restaurant near Silpakorn University depicts the place as quiet and deserted, in contrast to the same place in the 1970s, which was alive with artists, journalists, scholars and activists. The desolate atmosphere

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25 Silpakorn University is the university that is located near Thammasat University, the Royal Palace and Sanam Luang.
symbolized the political atmosphere of the 1980s, when the young were not interested in politics or social problems. The film portrayed the activists of the 1970s as the yuppies of the 1980s—a period when Thailand tried to be the next Asian Newly Industrialized Countries (NICs). *Chang Man Chan Mai Care* was a commercial film, which dared to mention the name of the massacre on 6 October 1976 at Thammasat University. Although the theme of the film was a love story and not related directly to politics, the political atmosphere in 1976 was presented by the characters.

*Kru Somsri (Teacher Somsri* dir. Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, 1986) depicted the struggle of slum dwellers against a capitalist entrepreneur. Bunpeng, the hero, lost his girlfriend, Ratsamee, in the massacre of 6 October 1976. The film did not mention the name of the event, but the images presented were those of the massacre of 6 October 1976. Before Ratsamee died, she questioned Bunpeng about the value of life. She asked him to work at helping people, and not only to work for money but Bunpeng responded by saying “no”. The image of Ratsamee (who was assaulted in the massacre of 6 October 1976) disturbed Bunpeng when he saw Somsri a teacher had been injured by police after forming a mob to protest against the capitalist entrepreneur. Moreover, the question about the value of life was again raised, but this time Bunpeng was fighting for the rights of the poor people living in the slum. The film *Kru Somsri* not only called for the rights and dignity of slum dwellers to be upheld, but also asked the previous generation (who survived the massacre of 6 October 1976) how to address the issue of the value of life.

After the massacre on 6 October 1976, Thailand was governed by Thanin Kraivichian’s civilian government, which was under the control of the military. Social problem films
stopped being produced until the political tension declined in the period of Kriangsak Chomanan—a time when social problem films were produced continuously.


Professor Thanin Kraivichian was the Prime Minister from 8 October 1976 to 20 October 1977 (Pothworapong and Pothworapong 1999, 75). He was a strongly anticommunist Supreme Court Judge. Moreover, he was close to the king, because he was a member of the Privy Council. The political atmosphere in this period was under the control of the dictatorial civilian government and the military. For instance, some newspapers were closed and some publishers were threatened. Political assemblies and labour union activities were prohibited. University lecturers and government officials were forcefully indoctrinated about the pernicious nature of communism. Furthermore, more than 8,000 persons were arrested on allegations of being social menaces (Phongpaichit and Baker 1996, 522). The monarchy and the military also propagandized on television. Since 1977, the military television stations broadcast throughout Thailand. Everyday, news programs, commenced with the king and the royal family performing their duties, followed by news of the activities of the Prime Minister, and other politician and military leaders (Phongpaichit and Baker 1996, 529). The Thanin government’s anticommunist ardour resulted in a relapse of education standards. Pinyo Satorn, the minister for Education enacted the new social studies curriculum on 25 March 1977; its purpose was to support the ideals of the nation, religion, the monarchy, and anticommunism. For example, the level-3 textbook for social studies stated about communism:
the first danger to national stability is communism, and communism’s purpose is to
destroy nation, religion and the monarchy’ (Pongpaiboon 2001, 45; trans. by
Patsorn Sungsi).

Thus, in this period Thai people were taught to be afraid of communism and that the
way to survive was to believe in and protect the three institutions of the nation, religion
and the monarchy. This idea was presented in many Thai films—especially action
films—during the 1960s, and even more obviously in the 1970s, following the
communist victory in Indochina. After the massacre of 6 October 1976, villains in Thai
films were communists, usually from Vietnam, and heroes were soldiers or from right-
wing groups such as Luk Sua Chaobam. An example of these films is Nak Paen Din
(dir. Sombat Matanee, 1977), the story of a communist invasion in northeastern
Thailand. The hero was a retired military officer and worked as a farmer, and he was
also a Luk Sua Chaoban. In the film he united the villagers to fight the communists.

The poster for Nak Paen Din emphasized the role of the Luk Sua Chaoban protecting
the country by illustrating the hero in a Village Scout’s uniform. Also, in the poster the
hero held up the tri-colour flag that is the symbol of the nation, religion and the
monarchy, and the background scene was of a battlefield. Moreover, the name Nak
Paen Din, (literally translated, means “scum of the earth”) and came from the right-
wing propaganda song, Plaeng Pluk Jai (a patriotic song). This song was played by
right-wing advocates on both radio and television daily during 1975-1976, and records
of the song were distributed to schools all over the country. Many listeners took one of
the songs phrases, “insulting and demanding the Thai race”, as a reference to the
leftists’ presumed preference for communist rule, which would “enslave the Thai
people” (Morell and Samudavanija 1981, 252). By using this song in the film Nak Paen
Din, its ideas were more widely propagated.
Another example was *Sing Sam Oil* (*The Finicky Lion*, dir. Dokdin Kanyaman, 1977), an action comedy film that presented the story of a gallant military officer who fought against the communists and against the influence of smugglers in a northeastern province of Thailand. Dokdin advertised his film by writing a letter in *Lok Dara (The World of Star)* magazine that said ‘… I pray that people, especially those who love Thai film, have happiness, luck, and overcome sadness through entertainment. Please have the one idea: to be devoted to nation, religion and the monarchy …’ (Kanyaman 1977, 22). Dokdin’s letter conveyed that the three institutions were an important ideal to unite Thai people, a concept he explored in his films. Most of Dokdin’s heroes were soldiers or policemen, the symbol of the officials who protected the nation from communism. Moreover, images of the king and queen were frequently shown in his films, such as in the scene of the soldier’s office in *Ai Pad Neay* (dir. Dokdin Kanyaman, 1979).

These two examples show that in Thai films during this period the villains were either communist, or those who opposed the three institutes of nation, religion and the monarchy. On the other hand, they also referred to leftist activists, villagers, and the students who went to join the CPT after the massacre of 6 October 1976. During this time, Thai people lived in an atmosphere of anxiety about communism.

Thanin’s dictatorial government also controlled the film industry. Consequently, through the tightening of film censorship, support for the ideal of nation, religion and the monarchy were further compelled in Thai film. The chief of the Film Censorship Committee in the Thanin government warned those producing political films to “watch every step they take” and “not touch on sensitive political issue, or else their films
would be banned with out mercy” (Chao Thai, October 14, 1976 cited in Boonyakhetmala 1992, 84). The massacre of 6 October 1976 and the authoritarian control of government created an oppressive atmosphere for both left-wing advocates and filmmakers alike. An example was Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon’s production of the comedy Rak Kun Kao Laey (I’ve Already Loved You, dir. Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, 1977), the story of two playboys who fell in love with a rich widow and a young teacher from a school for the mentally retarded. In explaining why he produced this film, Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon said ‘I produced Rak Kun Kao Laey after 6 October 1976. I remember that [on 6 October 1976] I went to Silpakorn University with my camera where I saw many terrible things, especially people being assaulted, and people were trampled underfoot near me. I felt very bad…So, I decided to produce the film Rak Kun Kao Laey’ (Sarajuta 1993, 47; trans. by Patson Sungsri). Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon said that his film was full of ‘songs, dances, and crazy love’ because at that time nobody could speak freely, and say what they really wanted to say (Srikaew 1991, 72). So, the film Rak Kun Kao Laey was produced as a satirical response to the dictatorial atmosphere. It was the only tactic available for a serious film director such as Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, who always produced social problem films during this authoritarian period.

During the period of Thanin’s government, when people were depressed by the rigid political atmosphere, comedy films such as Rak Ut Ta Lut (dir. Somboonsuk Niyomsiri, 1977) and Thehpabuth Ta Tink Nong (dir. Sompong Treebubpha 1977) were successful at the box-office (Kantharoth 1996, 119). In this period the production of serious films stopped.
Whilst Thanin’s government used strict film censorship, it also supported the local film industry by increasing the film import tax from 2.20 baht to 30 baht per meter; this was to oppose the influence of foreign cinema, especially Hollywood films (Uabumrungjit 1997, 95). Conversely, the result of the increase in film import tax was that Thai people, especially the young, lacked the opportunity to see foreign, particularly American films. Then, the American culture—particularly its counter-culture—did not permeate Thai society as it had in previous times. The strategy of the dictatorial government was to block the young from learning Western culture from films.

For this reason, the Motion Picture Export Association of America (MPEAA) boycotted the distribution of films to Thailand for four-and-a-half years, from January 1977 to May 1981 (Boonyaketmala 1992, 85). As a result, the number of Thai films produced increased gradually, whereas the number of Hollywood films shown in Thailand decreased until 1981, at which time the number increased again following the end of the boycott (as shown in table 9).
Table 9 Film Passed by the Film Censorship Committee of Thailand 1961 to 1989

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>Italy</th>
<th>Hong Kong /Taiwan</th>
<th>Japan</th>
<th>India</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Thailand</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>1961</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>52</td>
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<td>38</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>458</td>
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<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>46</td>
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Source: The Film Censorship Committee, Police Department, and Ministry of Interior (Boonyaketmala 1992, 77–8).
The MPEAA boycott from 1977 to 1981 was a good time for Thai film producers. Due to a shortage of films being available to movie theatres, the producers had the power to negotiate with the movie theatre owners, and therefore they could sell their films more easily (Sirikaya 1988, 161). After the MPEAA boycott ended, the Thai film industry changed to a new stage of capitalism. Furthermore, Boonyaketmala acknowledges that ‘by the first half of the 1980s, independent filmmakers could speak of “The Big Four Monopolies”: Apex Productions, Five-Star Productions, Sahamongkol Films, and Go Brothers, all of which were active in exhibition and Sino-Thai operated’ (Boonyaketmala 1992, 86). These four companies had film directors, producers and stars affiliated to them. As a result, it was difficult for independent film producers to produce and sell their films, resulting in the closure of their businesses. Thus, the Thai film business was dominated by big film companies and the number of film releases was high and stable. It was a result of the rise of film import tax that pushed the local film industry to use the form of capitalism. (Details of the ‘Big Four’ are explored in chapter 2.)

In November 1977, General Kriangsak Chomanan overthrew Thanin’s government. This ended the period of dictatorial government. The more lenient policies and general amnesty offered by the Kriangsak’s government meant that the students and activists who had joined the CPT after the massacre of 6 October 1976 could return home. The political tension declined so that serious film directors returned to producing serious films, particularly social problem films. Thus, many interesting Thai films began to be released again at the end of the 1970s.
5. The Cultural Products of the 1970s

In the period of uprisings in the 1970s, cultural products such as song and literature were produced to support the political ideas. This section explores the songs and literature that were produced in the 1970s by left-wing and right-wing groups. These songs and literature were used in Thai films in the 1970s.

There are three Thai music genres, which are related to politics. The first genre is plaeng pluk jai (the patriotic song), which began during the monarchical period and was still used for political reasons until the 1970s. The second genre is plaeng pra raja nipon (the king’s song), which the king used to encourage feelings of patriotism among the Thai people. The third genre is plaeng pear chewit (a song for life), which emerged in the period of student uprisings in the 1970s. The genres of plaeng pluk jai and plaeng pear chewit were used to oppose each other especially in the 1970s. These genres were explored as film music in Thai films.

Plaeng Pluk Jai (the Patriotic Song): A Vigorous Song from the State

The plaeng pluk jai are Thai patriotic songs. The songs were created by the state to encourage patriotism, and loyalty. This genre also includes the royal anthem (plaeng san searn pra baramee) and the national anthem (plaeng chat). The three institutions, nation, religion, and the monarchy were used as themes in these songs to emphasize the characteristics of the Thai nation. Meanwhile, the enemies of the Thai nation such as the Burmese nation and communists were depicted with a sense of ‘otherness’.
During the period of absolute monarchy, the royal anthem or \textit{plaeng san sern pra baramee} was the earliest \textit{plaeng pluk jai}. This song was played to express admiration for the monarchy, and to remind Thai people to respect the monarchy. The \textit{plaeng san sern pra baramee} is played on state occasions and for public meetings such as sporting events, concerts, and cinema showings. Even though members of the royal family may not be in attendance, the \textit{plaeng san sern pra baramee} symbolizes the King, and the playing of the anthem cements the respect of the Thai people for their monarch.

Dome Sukwong mentions that \textit{plaeng san sern pra baramee} (the royal anthem) has been played in movie theatres since the period of King Vajiravudh (King Rama VI, 1910-1925). During the prime ministership of Field Marshal Plake Phibulsongkram (after the 1932 overthrow of the absolute monarchy), this Field Marshal’s praise song was played in movie theatres before the films showing and the \textit{plaeng san sern pra baramee} was played at the end of the film (Sukwong and Suwanpak 2002, 110). At present (2004), the \textit{plaeng san sern pra baramee} is only played when an image of King Bhumibol is show during any activities at which the king is present. As such, movie theatres have been a place to propagandize the monarchical institution for a long time—although the film showing may not be a propaganda film.

The \textit{plaeng san sern pra baramee} is not used as film music, as the song is played specifically in support of the monarchy. However, the song is played at every film showing and in every movie theatre around Thailand, emphasizing and reinforcing for movie patrons the importance of the monarchical institution.

The other important \textit{plaeng pluk jai} (patriotic song) is the \textit{plaeng chat} (national anthem). The music for the \textit{plaeng chat} was composed in 1932, while the lyrics were
written in 1939 (Srivichit 1995, 7). The song was composed after the absolute monarchy was overthrown, thus it does not mention the monarchy. The song is played on all ceremonial occasions of national importance and while the national flag is being raised and lowered in every school and government office. The plaeng chat is not played in movie theatres as is the case with the plaeng san searn pra baramee. The latter song had begun being played in movie theatres before the plaeng chat had been created. Thus, it would not have been appropriate to replace the plaeng san searn pra baramee with the plaeng chat—to do so would have indicated disrespect towards the monarchy.

Besides the plaeng chat and the plaeng san searn pra baramee, the plaeng pluk jai are created when the country has a crisis or political conflict. For example, after the 1932 revolution when the absolute monarchy was overthrown, the government used the plaeng pluk jai to encourage feelings of patriotism. On the other hand the government wanted to decrease the power of the monarchical institution, thus the plaeng pluk jai they used did not mention the monarchy (Kiratibutr 1985, 52). In fact, there are no plaeng pluk jai (patriotic songs) that condemn the monarchy, as the Thai people retain a nostalgic appreciation for the monarchy. The other political movement that resulted in plaeng pluk jai was the people’s uprising on 14 October 1973. The government released many plaeng pluk jai (patriotic songs) to oppose the left-wing group.

The triumph of the left-wing group on 14 October 1973, the communist victories in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos in 1975 (Shafritz, Williams et al. 1993, 699), and the abolition of the Laotian monarchy at the end of 1976 (Anderson 1985, 39) created anxiety for Thai right-wing groups such as the monarchy, the government, and the
military. In reaction, right-wing groups produced many plaeng pluk jai to promote the idea of nation, religion, and the monarchy and to oppose the plaeng pear chewit (songs for life), which were used by the left-wing groups and played in universities and at protests. Sirinthorn Kiratibutr mentions that during this period many plaeng pluk jai were composed and released by the monarch, who also acted as patron to the composers of other plaeng pluk jai (Kiratibutr 1985, 79). Plaeng pluk jai declined as conflicts between left-wing and right-wing groups decreased in 1982, the year in which the CPT (the Communist Party of Thailand) became ineffective due to a lack of support (Nation Weekend editorial 2002).

In the 1970s, the dangers of communism were presented as an enemy of Thai nation. The monarchy and religion were presented in the songs to support the identity of a Thai nation. For example, the song Nak Paen Din (“Scum of the Earth”) was written by a Thai Army major, Boonsong Hakritsuk, and was sung to a military march. Herbert P. Phillips translation is as follows;

(Refrain)

Scum of the Earth, Scum of the Earth
These are those who are the scum of the earth:

Whoever calls himself “Thai”, whose body looks like that of a Thai, who lives in the shade of the Golden Bo tree of our royal land,

But who in his heart thinks always of destroying our realm.

Whoever sees the Thais as slaves, who has contempt for the Thai race, Thailand,

But who earns his living by exploiting our resources, while reviling us as slaves.
Whoever agitates the Thai people into disunity,
Whoever mobilizes them into confusion and disorder,
Whoever divides us into camps fighting each other,
Whoever praises other nations but abuses our own,
Whoever can be bought off to kill even a Thai, and who curries the favour of other nations as if they were relatives.

Whoever sells himself and his nation,
Whoever helps the enemy to destroy our Thai forces and prevents us from retaliating,
Whoever lulls us as our enemy attack,
Whoever thinks of doing evil to us and pushes us around,
Whoever wants to do away with Thai traditions,
Whoever supports the prejudice of dangerous doctrines and spreads them through our homeland.

The song was written and sung by the military band and words of the song such as, ‘live in the shade of the Golden Bo tree of our royal land’, mention the importance of the
monarchy. This song presented the collusion between the military and the monarchy to maintain power.

In the 1970s, the government did not produce propaganda films or support the local film industry (see details in chapter 2). The films produced in this period were 16 mm and were small productions. Thus it was rare for these films to produce original songs for film music, as this required time and was costly.

Between the 1970s and the early 1980s, the government and the monarchy released many plaeng pluk jai; however, they did not produce propaganda films like those produced after the 1932 revolution. This indicates that the right-wing group discounted the power of film and instead relied on other media such as radio and television. The conflicts between left-wing and right-wing groups, and the anxiety surrounding the spread of communism, encouraged some filmmakers such as Sakka Jarujinda, Sombat Maetanee, and Cheard Songsri to produce propaganda films. The films Khun Seuk (dir. Sakka Jarujinda, 1976) and Leard Supan (dir. Cheard Songsri, 1979) are period films that present the struggle of Thai villagers against Burmese troops in the Ayutthaya period. The film Nak Paen Din (dir. Sombat Maetane, 1977) presented the struggle of the luk sear chao ban (the village scouts) against communists. The three films used the plaeng pluk jai as film music to support their stories and enhance patriotic feelings.

Since the early 1980s, after the CPT collapsed, the plaeng pluk jai declined in popularity. However, this song was played in period films to specify time. For example, the films Raya (dir. Permpbon Choep-arun, 1981) and Yuwachon Thahan (dir. Ehnana Mukdasanit, 2000) used the plaeng pluk jai to specify the period of WWII.
Interestingly, the film *Bangrajan* (dir. Thanit Jitnukun, 2000), released after the economic crisis in the late 1990s, did not use the *plaeng pluk jai* as did the first version (filmed in 1938) and the second version (filmed in 1965). By this period the popularity of the *plaeng pluk jai* had declined significantly and it was no longer required to promote patriotism. It should be noted that many *plaeng pluk jai* were created to represent the right-wing group in the period of cold war. In 2000, the conflict between left-wing group and right-wing group ended; moreover, so too did the military’s power after the massacre in May 1992. The 2000 film, *Bangrajan* by Thanit Jitnukun emphasized the sacrifice of ordinary people to protect their homeland and not the Thai nation; moreover, the film did not mention the importance of the monarchy and the military, but it did emphasize the importance of the religion through the role of Buddhist monk.

*Plaeng Pra Raja Nipon (The King’s Song)*

Chapter 2 showed that Thai cinema was largely the hobby of the monarch; so too patriotic songs were in effect the domain of kings. The word *plaeng pra raja nipon* means “a song written by the king”. During King Bhumibol’s reign (1946 - ), music has been one of the king’s favorite hobbies. Somsak Jeamteerakun categorizes the history of the *plaeng pra raja nipon* in 3 phases: the first phase from 1946 to 1966 was that of romantic songs; the second phase from 1966 to 1976 featured political songs; and the last phase from 1976 to the present, has focus on details the king’s life (Jeamteerakun 2001, 30). This section discusses the *plaeng pra rja nipon* in the first phase and the second phase, the period during which the songs were used for political reasons.
In the first phase the plaeng pra raja nipon were romantic songs composed for entertainment such as singing and dancing; they included songs such as Saeng Teian (Candlelight Blues) and Chata Chewit (Destiny). However, concepts of Buddhism such as the law of karma were also presented in these songs. (A tradition that dates back centuries as was seen in chapter 1) From the 1950s to the 1960s the king also played music with his family and his attendants at parties, charity fairs for disabled children, radio programs, and universities (Kantana Motion Picture 1996, videotape Gitarachan). The king used his plaeng pra raja nipon songs to draw closer to the Thai people. In the 1970s during the conflicts between the left-wing and the right-wing groups, the king stopped playing music for the university students in 1973 and his other musical activities also declined (Kantana Motion Picture 1996, videotape Gitarachan). This may have been a reflection of the royal group’s concerns about security, and the situation of the monarchical institution.

The plaeng pra raja nipon of the first phase were used as film music in films that were produced to adore the King Bhumibol. The mainstream film Douy Kroa (dir. Bandit Rittakon, 1987) presented the Kroung Karn Loung (The Royal Development Projects), such as public health (mor loung, royal doctor), agriculture (fon loung, royal artificial rain), and education (toun loung, royal scholarship). It was the story of poor farmers in the north of Thailand. The film showed the problems of the farmers and how they resolved their problems through the support of the Kroung Karn Loung (The Royal Development Project). The film used the plaeng pra raja nipon to support both its content, which related to the King’s development projects and its sense of aesthetics. Thus the songs were used to propagandize the monarchy.
The *plaeng pra raja nipon* from the second phase were composed in the 1970s, when there were conflicts between left-wing and right-wing groups. King Bhumibol composed the propaganda songs to encourage patriotism. For example, the songs *Rao Sue* (1976), whose lyrics were written by Sompob Chantaraprapa and whose melody was composed by King Bhumibol, and the song *Kwam Fhan Un Soung Sud* (1971), whose lyrics were written by Maneerat Bunak and whose melody was composed by King Bhumibol, were composed in this period (Jeamteerakun 2001, 33, 53). The *plaeng pra raja nipon* in this period were not used as film music, as there were no large-scale propaganda films produced in this period, which would have been suitable for the King’s Song. Furthermore, television and radio were being used for propaganda.

The *plaeng pra raja nipon* are rarely used as film music, though the contents of songs touch upon various subjects are such as love, nature, and encouragement. Because of the strong association of the songs with the king, these songs are automatically used for special occasions for the king. Moreover, a special permit from the Office of the Royal Household Department is required to use the songs in film. The credits of the film *Douy Kroa* (dir. Bandit Ritakon, 1987) noted that ‘the king gives a permit to play 9 *plaeng pra raja nipon*’.

*Plaeng Pear Chewit (Songs for Life): From University to Grass Roots*

After the people’s uprising on 14 October 1973, the political groups were clearly divided between left-wing and right-wing groups. During this period left-wing groups such as university students, activists and scholars released a new song genre song called
the *plaeng pear chewit* (songs for life); its purpose was to protest against the government and to mobilize people.

The word *plaeng pear chewit* (songs for life) first appeared in *Sangkomsat Parithat* (*The Social Science Review*) before the events of 14 October 1973, in a column with the title, *Plaeng Pear Chewit*. In this column, the columnist translated the protest songs from western countries such as the songs of John Lennon, Bob Dylan and Joan Baez. Before the events of 14 October 1973 Thailand had only a handful of *plaeng pear chewit*, and these were composed for protests; for example, the *San Sang Tong* lyrics by Surachai Chantimatorn, with music adapted from ‘Find the Cost of Freedom’, and the *Su Mai Thoy* lyrics by the outstanding student leader, Saksan Prasertkun (Suntornsri 1998, 17-19). During 1973-1974 the *plaeng pear chewit* bands preferred to translate or adapt western songs to Thai lyrics accompanied by acoustic guitar (Jiravinitnun 1989, 24).

After the people’s uprising on 14 October 1973, many universities students created songs to promote their activities in the universities and to be played during political protest marches and rallies. They used rock bands and string bands to play the songs. Around 1975 to 1976 the students re-adapted the music by using *plaeng pearn ban* (Thai folksongs) and traditional musical bands to play *plaeng pear chewit* (Jiravinitnun 1989, 24). Some musical bands mixed regional music and instruments with western instruments. Most of the songs presented social problems, the suffering of farmers, labourers and women, called for the American and Japanese to be driven out, and condemned the authoritarian government. It should be notified that religion does not appear in *plaeng pear chewit*. The concept of Buddhism, especially the law of karma,
does not encourage the people to struggle against tyranny—rather; it seeks to support the maintenance of a status quo.

The popular plaeng pear chewit in the early of this genre—such as the song Khon Kab Kway (Man and Buffalo)—presented the suffering of farmers and encouraged them to fight for their rights. The songs created a sense of class-consciousness by mentioning the bourgeoisie as the enemy of farmers. The lyrics of Khon Kab Kway are:

Man tills the land with other man,
Man tills the land with the buffalo,
Man and buffalo have depth of meaning that comes from their having worked together forever.
Happiness and fulfilment have come from this.

Let us go, all of us together
To carry guns and plants to the fields,
Because of the poverty and sorrow we have borne for so long.
These have reversed the flow of our tears
As we suffered in our hearts all hardship
However anxious you are, do not be afraid.

These are the lyrics and music of death
For having had our manhood broken
By the bourgeoisie who, elevating themselves into a superior class, have devoured the excess value of our labour.
Contemptuous of the peasant class,
Reviling us as savages,
Truly and surely the oppressors will die.

(Philips, Atmiyanandana Lawler et al. 1987, 333)

During the period from 14 October 1973 to the massacre on 6 October 1976 there was a large amount of tension between the left wing and the right wing. In this period, the two groups used plaeng pear chewit (songs for life) and plaeng pluk jai (patriotic songs) to present their ideals and oppose each other.

In this period, three underground films were produced: Tong Pan (produced by Isan Group, 1975), presented the impact of a dam construction on poor villagers in the northeast; Karn Tor Su Khong Kamkorn Ying Rong Ngan Hara (The Women Labourer Protest, dir. John Eungphakorn, 1976) presented the struggle of women labourers against capitalists; and Pracha Chon Nok (On the Fringe of Society, dir. Manop Udomdej, 1979) presented the suffering of the poor in urban and rural areas. These three underground films used the plaeng pear chewit as film music. The songs narrated the suffering of farmers and laborers. Furthermore, the songs were also used to create an atmosphere of suffering and rebellion.

In the mainstream films that presented the story of Thailand in the 1970s—especially the events of 14 October 1973 and the massacre of 6 October 1976—plaeng pear chewit were used to indicate a period of popular uprisings. Two examples of such films are Ku Kam II (dir. Banjong Kosanyawat, 1996) and 14 Tula Songkram Prachachon (The Moon Hunter, dir Bandit Rittakon, 2001).
**Wannakam Pear Chewit (Literature for Life)**

During the 1960s Thai scholars, activists and students used serious literature, called *wannakam pear chewit* (literature for life), to educate readers to understand politics, their rights, and their power. Moreover, these groups wanted to reshape Thai society to be free from authoritarian government.

This *wannakam pear chewit* was released by the left-wing groups of university students and activists. Three groups were at the forefront of producing this literature: 1) *Sangkomsat Parithat* (Social Science Review), 2) *Phrajan Sieaw* (The Crescent Moon Group), and 3) *Num Nao Sao Suay* (The Young and the Beautiful Group). These three groups played significant roles in the release of serious literature; however, only the writers and activists from the *Phrajan Sieaw* Group and *Num Nao Sao Suay* Group worked in the film industry. *Nang Sathorn Sangkhom* (social problem films), which emerged and became popular in this period used stories from these groups. Thai Third cinema *Tong Pan* (produced by Isan Group, 1975) was also produced in collaboration with these left-wing groups.

*Sangkomsat Parithat* (*The Social Science Review*) was an outstanding journal that commenced publication in 1963 (Morell and Samudavanija 1981, 140). This journal presented three main political ideas: liberal democracy, democratic socialism and communism. However, the main focus of this journal was Democratic Socialism. *Sangkomsat Parithat* was a medium for public opinion that opposed American cultural imperialism and Japanese economic imperialism (Niyomthai 1989, 68 (abstract)). *Sangkomsat Parithat* provided the opportunity for progressive scholars and the young to
practice to learn, and to write articles about politics, social science, and the arts. Many
new writers emerged as a result of an association with this journal. Further, the journal
was successful in arousing in its readers recognition of the problems in Thai society and
an awareness of many political theories. This atmosphere of political and social
awareness spawned the nang sathorn sungkhom (social problem films) production. The
writers from Sangkomsat Parithat had little direct interaction with the film business,
other than in 1975 when a member of this group joined in the making of the
underground film Tong Pan (produced by Isan Group, 1975).

Phrajan Sieaw (The Crescent Moon Group) was founded in 1967 and disbanded in
1976 (due to the massacre on 6 October 1976 at Thammasat University). The members
of this group, such as Suchat Sawatsri, Witayakorn Chiengkun, Surachai
Chanthimathorn, Suwat Srirceea, Weeraprawat Wongpourpan, and Eutthana Mukdasanit
were interested in art, philosophy, and literary theory from the west. Their works were
published in journals such as Sangkomsat Parithat (The Social Science Review),
Chatyapleak, and Vitayasat Parithat (Science Review). This group not only penned
literature but also composed screenplays, stage-theatre and music (Kongthong 1985,
70). The members of this group also joined with the Isan Group to produce the
underground film Tong Pan in 1975. After the group disbanded in 1976, its members
went on to become film directors, film music composers, and script writers.

Weeraprawat Wongpourpan wrote a story called Taewada Daen Din, which presented
the criminality and violence among teenagers in the period of the people’s uprisings in
the 1970s. He also worked as a scriptwriter for the film, Taewada Daen Din (Grounded
Surachai Chantimathorn was an outstanding musician; he was a head of the Caravan, a famous *plaeng pear chewit* band. He wrote songs, poems and short stories, which presented the stories of poor people, social problems, and protests against authoritarian government. He also produced the underground film *Tong Pan* in 1976 and has composed film music for many *nang sathorn sungkhom* (social problem films).

Suwat Srichea wrote surrealist novels. When he became a film director in the 1980s he changed his name to Toranong Srichea (Interview Pinyo Kongthong, 23 January 2001). Most of his initial films were war films such as *Sat Songkram* (1981), *Maharaja Dam* (*King Naresuen the Great*, 1981), *Nakrob Prajanban* (1984), and *Kambodia* (1985). These films presented the ruthlessness of war. Interestingly, in the war film *Maharaja Dam* (1981) he presented the heroic performance of King Naresuen to restore the Ayutthaya Kingdom from Burma. This shows that the monarchy was a respected institution even for left-wing activist like Suwat Srichea. In 1988 he produced *Ubatihod* (*Bangkok Emergency*, dir. Toranong Srichea, 1988), which depicted crime and poor people of Bangkok. In 1990 he presented the sad story of a Thai prostitute in Japan in the film *Kon Karm Haeng Kwam Rak* (*Twilight Tokyo*, dir. Toranong Srichea, 1990).

Euthana Mukdasanit was not a writer, but he created a stage-theatre during the time he studied at Thammasat University where he became interested in social problems. In

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26 The Caravan band was at the forefront of *plaeng pear chewit* bands in the 1970s. The band supported the student movements, and their songs presented the stories of poor people and the struggle for equality in society. After the massacre of 6 October 1976 the band joined the CPT in the jungle and they returned to the city after the Kriengsak Government offered amnesty in 1979.
1975 Euthana also joined the Isan Group to produce the underground film *Tong Pan*. When he started his career as a film director, his debut film was a musical film *Thebtida Bar 21* (*The Angel of Bar 21*, 1978), adapted from the Existentialist novel, *Respectful Prostitute*, written by Jean Paul Satre. The film was based on a western novel and a Hollywood musical. However, Euthana’s next films used stories from Thai novels and Thai current affairs—for example, *Thebtida Rongngan* (*Factory Angel*, 1982), which presented the story of women labourers; *Nam Pu* (1984), which focused on drug problems by using the story of Suwannee Sukhutha’s son; and *Pheesue Lae Dok Mai* (*Butterfly and Flower*, 1985), which presented the story of a poor Muslim boy in the south of Thailand, based on the story from Makuth Ornrudee’s novel. Euthana has continued to produce films until the present time.

Among the writers and activists of the 1970s, the members of Phrajan Sieaw (The Crescent Moon Group) have played the most significant roles in shaping the Thai film industry, especially in the production of nang sathorn sungkhom (social problem films) in the late 1970 and the 1980s. In the 1990s the number of nang sathorn sungkhom (social problem films) declined; however, members of this group have continued to work in the film industry. Euthana Mukdasanit works as a film director and Surachai Jantimathorn works as a film music composer and actor.

In 1975, a group of activists named the Isan group produced the political underground film *Tong Pan* (produced by Isan Group, 1975). This film was a collaboration between the progressive young and scholars such as Sanei Jamarik, Tebsiri Suksopha (an artist), and Khamsing Srinok (a writer). Members from the *Phrajan Sieaw*—such as the
musician, Surachai Chantimathorn, the filmmaker Euthana Mukdasanit, and the scholar, Sulak Sivalak from Sangkomsat Parithat—also joined in the making of this film.

Num Nao Sao Suay (The Young and the Beautiful Group) was a humorous group of writers who worked together from 1964. They were interested in art, archeology, ancient literature and classical Thai culture. All of them wanted to be writers, and were bored by the university system and dissatisfied with the social and political scene of that period (Kongthong 1985, 72). The members of this group whose novels have been produced in films are Narong Janreang and Suwannee Sukhontha.

Narong Janreang wrote the novel Theptida Rongrame (Hotel Angel), which presented the story of a prostitute, how she becomes a prostitute and how she reclaimed her dignity. This story was produced in the film Theptida Rongrame (Hotel Angel, dir. Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, 1974).

Suwannee Sukhontha wrote a great number of novels and some of her stories have been produced as films. Suwannee Sukhontha is the author of the famous novel, Kho Cheu Karn (Dr.Karn), which won the SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization) literature award in 1970 (Kongthong 1985, 82). This novel presented the story of an idealistic young doctor who works in a rural area and is confronted with public health problems, the corruption of government officials and illegal gambling. This story has twice been produced in film: in 1973, by Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon and in 1988, by Ruth Ronnaphob. Suwannee’s novels rebel against the way in which the conventional heroine is depicted in the Thai novel and Thai film; in most of her novels the heroine is independent and has a lot of men in her life. Moreover, Suwannee’s heroines are not
virgins and innocent like those in the escapist novels of the 1950s and 1960s. Her novels were produced in film such as Tong Prakai Said (dir. Ruth Ronnaphob, 1974, and dir Chana Kraprayoon, 1988), Kwam Rak Krung Sut Tai (The Last Love, dir Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, 1975 and 2003), and E-Pring Khon Reang Meoung (dir. Reangsiri Limaksorn, 1980).

While serious literature was popular among university students and the young in the late 1960s and 1970s, the mainstream writers still wrote escapist novels that were serialized in magazines. These novels were also produced as mainstream films. For example, the novel Khao Yai is an action adventure story written by Sak Suriya, serialized in a men’s magazine named Bangkok Weekly Magazine, and was produced as the film Khao Yai (dir. Rangsri Tasanapayak, produced circa 1970s); the romantic comedy novel Sud Hoajai, written by Tomyantee, was produced as the film Sud Hoajai (dir. Pairat Kasiwat, 1973)(Poster Man 1997, 58, 76).

During this period, the new trend of wannakam pear chewit (literature for life) began to prevail in academic literary circles, the popular novels were branded ‘nam nao’ which means “polluted water” (Masavisut 1995, p.19). The word ‘nam nao’ was intended to condemn popular novels, which presented escapist stories of melodrama, comedy and action. These themes were the same as the novels of the post-war period. The conventional style of Thai film, using storylines from escapist novels were termed nang nam nao (“polluted water film”). In this period, not only was literature divided into two genres: serious literature, wannakam pear chewit, and escapist novels, niyai nam nao, film was also divided into two genres: social problem films, nang sathorn sungkhom and conventional style films, nang nam nao.
Thai Film in the 1970s

During the period of the military government (1957 to 1973), the business of movie theatres, foreign film distribution and Thai film production grew, as cinema was a cheap and popular form of entertainment. The number of movie theatres in Bangkok grew from 100 to 150 and there were 700 movie theatres in provincial areas, as well as many mobile outdoor theaters around Thailand. This was due to the 1962 Economic Development Plan (Copy 1) of Field Marshal Sarit (1959-1963), the aim of which was to develop the rural areas. Thus, many new rural communities emerged and local movies theatres were built to support the people in these new communities (Sukwong and Suwanpak 2002, 13). The large number of movie theatres meant that a large number of foreign films and Thai films were able to be released to the movie theaters around Thailand (see table 9). In the atmosphere of political change of the 1960s and 1970s, the cultural movement built a new genre of literature, song and film. After the triumph of the students and ‘the people’ on 14 October 1973, many political organizations of the left and the right matured, and the atmosphere in this period motivated Thai people to think about social problems. This atmosphere inspired new filmmakers to produce a new style of Thai film.

In 1972, film censorship was transferred from the Ministry of the Interior to the Police Department (Chatrakul Na Ayudhya 1989, 60). However, the film censorship legislation, which was included in 1930 and the eleven film-censorship criteria, which were revised in 1936, did not change. In an effort to give an appearance of trustworthiness to the Film Censorship Committee, the committee was expanded to
contain 117 members from the Prime Minister’s Office, the Ministry of Defense, the Interior Ministry, the Education Ministry, the Police Department, the Office of the Attorney General, and the Religion Department, as well as some other specialists (Boonyaketmala 1992, 74). The member of the committee covered security of the nation, religion, and education. The filmmakers produced films within a framework that protected the three pillars of, nation, religion, and the monarchy.

The 1970s was not only the turning point of Thai politics, but also of Thai film. During this period filmmakers stopped producing 16 mm films and started to use 35 mm film, as was explained in chapter 2. This period also saw the emergence of a new wave of directors and the emergence of Third cinema in Thailand.

**New Directions in the 1970s**

Dunagin has claimed that the 1970s was the golden age of Thai cinema, with a move from a conventional style to a progressive style (Dunagin 1993, 62). Many young directors emerged in this time and they created elaborate and realistic films that expressed a concern for social problems. There were many reasons for the change in style—one being the box office success of *Thon* (dir. Somboonsuk Niyomsiri, 1970). This new style received critical acclaim and the film director Somboonsuk Niyomsiri was hailed as a new wave director. Another reason for the change in style was that after the events of 14 October 1973 Thai’s enjoyed a form of democracy that provided them with increased freedom. As a consequence, Thai’s became more openly interested in politics and social problems. These interests shaped the content of films. Youth from many disciplines and activist groups began to work in the film business.
To discuss this aspect, I have divided this discussion of Thai film in the 1970s into three groups. The first is a new style that was realistic and elaborate, but not related to political or and social problems. The second group is the Nang Sathorn Sungkhom (social problem films), and the third group is Third cinema.

**A New Style of Realistic Films**

In 1970, while the conventional *Mon Rak Luk Toung* (dir. Rangsri Tatsanapayak, 1970) was successful in the box office, the realistic film *Thon* (dir. Somboonsuk Niyomsiri, 1970) was also successful, and received good critiques. Somboonsuk Niyomsiri (pseudonym Peak Poster) created his film by integrating the conventional style and the new style. Thus, *Thon* is full of rot (flavor), and some characters such as the clown and the villain have clearly been influenced by Thai performance. This new style broke with the conventional style of Thai film in that it contained a scene in which the heroine was raped—which broke the rule of a virgin heroine. *Plaeng luk toung* (Thai country songs) and *plaeng pop* (Thai popular songs) adapted from the west, were also used in this film. These were popularly received by the audiences of this film, who were both ‘ordinary’ and educated people (who typically disliked Thai films made in the conventional style).

Somboonsuk Niyomsiri was an artist before he became a film director, thus in his new style he is concerned about artistic aspects such as lighting, image and edition. Moreover, *Thon* was a story of the young generation; adults and elders were not represented in this film. Therefore, the film achieved a sense of relevance with students.
and educated people, at a time when the role of students was strong and widely accepted.

Although the story of *Thon* was not related to social problems or politics, it was the first film that changed the direction of Thai films towards being more realistic and elaborate—the latter scene its concern with cinematography, lighting, and songs. Between 1970 and 2000 Somboonsuk Niyomsiri made films continuously, directing 27 films. Some of his films became legends of the Thai film history, such as *Chu* (*Adulterer*, 1972), which used only four performers; *Khoa Nok Na* (1975); which addressed the issue of an illegitimate half-caste child, the product of a union between an American soldier and a Thai prostitutes, and *Wai On-la-won* (1976), the first 'teen film'.

After the success of *Thon*, many Thai film directors realized that Thai audiences were concerned about the quality of the films being presented to them, and they were ready to accept new ideas. Thus, some directors dared to change from the conventional style and focus on aspects such as storyline, photography, lighting, sound and so on. Chana Kraprayoon made *Tang Koung* (1975), which presented middle-class teenage problems, and *Wai Tok Kra* (1978), which presented an old woman’s loneliness. Wijit Kunawuth created *Mea Loung* (*The Wife*, 1978), the story of a man who had many wives. Cherd Songsri was successful with his period film, *Phlae Kao* (*The Scar*, 1979), the love story of a poor farmer.

Another phenomenon that occurred after 14 October 1973 was the increasing use of sexuality as a main selling point for newspaper and billboard advertising. Previously, it
has been unheard of for the actresses who performed as heroines to act in sex scenes (Arunrojsuriya 2000, 37). Examples of these more sexuality explicit films include: Tebtida Rong Ram (Hotel Angel, dir Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, 1974), Kang 8 (dir. Winith Pukdeevijit, 1974), and Tong Prakay Saed (dir. Ruth Ronnaphob, 1974). It could be argued that sex was a symbol of the greater freedom of that time. In addition, with increasing western influences, especially in the form of Hollywood films, it was no surprise that the audiences began to accept this phenomenon.

**Nang Sathorn Sungkhom (The Social Problem Films)**

In Thailand, the 1970s was a time for the young generation. University graduates went into the film business and worked in many positions, one of these that of film director, for example Euthana Mukdasanit from the Phrajan Sieaw (The Crescent Moon Group), and Prince Pantaewanop Taewakun from Thammasat University. Moreover, young people with newspaper and advertising experience also became film directors, such as Kid Suwansorn, Permphon Choei-arun and Suchat Wuthichai (Sukwong 1990, 52). This new group of directors were educated and interested in social problems and politics, and their films addressed these issues. The films they produced have been called ‘social problem films’.

Marcia Landy defined the social problem film as ‘the film that was directed toward the dramatization of a topical social issue such as capital punishment, prison life delinquency, poverty, marital conflict, family tension, and to a lesser degree, racism’ (Landy, M., 1991, 432 cited in Neale 2000, 113). Ira Konigsberg has variously termed
the social problem film as the social-conscience film, the social consciousness film or
the problem film. He defined such films as:

a film that deals with some social problem from a moralistic perspective,
exposing injustice and suggesting some type of ameliorative action. Such
films are often quite simplistic, presenting a complex social issue in a
manner that will offend few and not interfere with box office receipts, but
will stir the social conscience of its audiences making viewers feel good
about themselves for condemning the injustices they see on the screen
(Konigberge 1997, 369).

Thai films of this genre are called nang sathorn panha sungkhon (literally “reflective
social problems films”) or nang sathorn sungkhom (literally “reflective social films”).
This thesis uses the term nang sathorn sungkhom for a film that represents social
problems. The social problem films in Thailand boomed from the 1970s through to the
mid-1980s. Most of them presented the problems of poor people such as prostitutes,
peasants, and slum-dwellers. In addition, the problems of the middle class were shown,
such as family tension, drug addiction and so on. The presentation of problems and
problem-solving strategies in nang sathorn sungkhom shapes Thai national identity.
The audience realizes the problems in their society and the presentation of such
problems is the first step towards a solution. These films were driven by individual
filmmakers, influenced the growth of the nang sathorn sungkhom style. These
filmmakers included Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, Euthana Mukdasanit, and Surasee
Phathum\(^27\).

\(^27\) The three filmmakers, Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, Euthana Mukdasanit, and Surasee Phathum, are
representative of the new direction in the crucial period 1970s and 1980s. Their films are very critical
and foreground political influences and the encroachment of modernity into Thai cultural life.
Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon

Discussion regarding social problem films in Thailand must include Yukon, who was a pioneer film director of social problem films. Yukon is the great-grandson of King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V). His parents were Prince Anusorn Mongkonkarn and Mom Ubon Yukon, who were also filmmakers and the owners of the Lawo Film Company. He grew up in the atmosphere of filmmaking. He studied at the University of California (Los Angeles), where he majored in Geology and film production in 1960. While he studied, he also worked as an assistant cameraman at Merian C. Cooper's studio (Srikaew 1991, 46).

Yukon made his first film in 1970 when he was 28 years old, at which time Thailand was under the military dictatorship of Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn. His first film *Man Ma Kab Kwam Meud* (*Out of the Dark*, 1970) was a science fiction movie, which told of the story of an alien invasion of Thailand. This film was not successful at the box office (Srikaew 1991, 141). In his first film, he used new actors Sorapong Chatree and Naiyana Chewanan, whereas other filmmakers typically used established superstars. After the failure of *Man Ma Kab Kwam Meud* in 1973, Yukon created his first social problem film, *Kho Chou Karn* (*Dr.Karn*, 1973), which criticized the Thai bureaucracy and presented the problems of a rural area.

*Kho Chou Karn* is a novel written by Suwannee Sukontha a member of the *Num Nao Sao Suay* (The Young and the Beautiful Group), which received an award from SEATO. *Kho Chou Karn* (*Dr.Karn* dir. Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, 1973) was the story of an idealistic doctor named Karn who travelled to the countryside with his wife.
to practice medicine. Karn realized that in remote areas, poor peasants lacked access to public health services such as medicine and medical instruments. He ran into conflict with a corrupt district officer who had an illegal gambling house. Finally, Karn was murdered. This film was successful at the box office and received good reviews; moreover, Yukon won the Tuktatong Award for the best director (the Thai Film Award), signifying his recognition as an outstanding director in Thailand.

As the villain in *Kho Chou Karn* was a district officer (*nai umpour*), this film had trouble passing the film censorship committee. In discussing this film, Yukon commented, ‘…this film talked about corruption directly, an issue that nobody dared to touch in this time. I showed this film to Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachom and asked him “This is a true story, isn’t it?” He replied, “Yes, it is true.” Then this film passed censorship’ (Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, 1978 cited in Srikaew 1991, 54; trans. by Patsorn Sungsri). It is also likely that if Yukon were not the great-grandson of King Chulalongkorn, the film would not have passed the censorship committee. It was not easy for a film director to gain a meeting with the Prime Minister, and without this meeting it would have been impossible for Yukon’s film to have passed the film censorship committee. This ability to highlight weaknesses within Thai bureaucracy indicates the level of respect and power acceded to the royal family by Thai society. Ironically, a film that criticized the Thai bureaucracy passed censorship due to royal influence—thereby undermined the censorship standards. Yukon realized the power of the monarchy in Thai society, and that he is not a normal filmmaker but a representative of the monarchy who produces films.
After the success of *Kho Chou Karn*, Yukon produced films continuously. From his first film in 1970 to his latest film *Suriyothai* (2001), he has produced 24 films. Most of his films present the problems of poor people, such as the prostitute in *Thebtida Rong Ram* (*Hotel’s Angel*, 1974), a taxi driver in *Thongpoon Kokpho Ratsadorn Tem Khan* (*The Citizen*, 1977), and slum-dwellers in *Kru Somsri* (*Teacher Somsri*, 1986). Furthermore, his films show social problems in their many aspects, such as the environmental crisis in *Uka Fha Leang* (*The Yellow Sky*, 1980) and *Khon Leang Chang* (*Elephant Keeper*, 1989), and drug addiction in *Seai Dai* (*Daughter*, 1994). However, Yukon has also produced propaganda films. *Suriyothai* (2001) presented the story of Queen Suriyothai, who died in battle against Burmese troops in the Ayutthaya period; the film’s purpose was to promote the monarchical institution. Yukon produced many *nang sathorn sungkhom*, indicating that he is also a representative of monarchy, who has a role in maintaining their elevated situation.

**Euthana Mukdasanit**

Mukdasanit studied at Thammasat University during the period of political changes following the events of 14 October 1976. He was a member of the *Prajan Sieaw*. It is not surprising that a University student such as Mukdasanit was interested in social problems. When he was a University senior in 1974, he created the stage drama *See Pain Din* (*Four Reigns*), which presented the story of a noblewoman who lived during the reign of King Chulalongkorn to the end of King Anan. Mukdasanit became famous because King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit went to see his stage drama. On 1975 he joined the Isan Group for the making of the underground film, *Tong Pan*. Mukdasanit said, ‘because King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit went to see my stage drama, it
guaranteed that I was not communist. So, when I made *Tong Pan* nobody disturbed me’ (Euthana Mukdasanit, interview 15 March 2001).


Mukdasanit’s first film, *Thebtida Bar 21* (*The Angel of Bar 21*, 1978), a musical adaptation of Jean Paul Sartre’s novel, *Respectful Prostitute*, was not successful at the box office, but received good reviews and awards for best actress and supporting actor at the *Tukta Tong Awards* (Thai Film Awards). This story presented the dignity of poor people. The film combined elements of western style films such as a story from France and a musical genre from Hollywood, with Thai details, such as its location, characters and music.

After the critical acclaim of *Thebtida Bar 21*, Mukdasanit has produced films continuously until his latest film, *Yuwachon Thahan Pead Term Pai Rob* (*Boys Will Be Boys, Boys Will Be Men*, 2000). Most of his films have been social problem films and serious drama. His films, *Thebtida Bar 21* (*The Angel of Bar 21, 1978*) presented the
ideas of Existentialism; *Thebtida Rongngan (Factory Angel, 1982)* was the story of the women’s labour movement and called for human rights; *Nam Pu (The Story of Nam Pu, 1984)* presented the problem of drug addiction; and *Pheesue Lae Dok Mai (Butterfly and Flower, 1985)* presented the story of a poor teenage Muslim. Most of his films have received critical acclaim and awards from film institutes both in Thailand and internationally. It can be said that Euthana Mukdasanit was a product of the student movement within the context of the events 14 October 1973.

**Surasee Phatham**

Surasee Phatham has been recognized an outstanding director since he created *Kru Ban Nok (Rural Teacher, 1978)*. His background is different from that of Yukon and Mukdasanit, who graduated from university. His training included only an elementary school education, after which he worked as an announcer in local radio and was in a country music band. He then worked as a narrator in outdoor cinema in the northeast. After the events of 14 October 1973, Phatham offered himself as a candidate in the national election representing the Socialist Party of Thailand; but was unsuccessful, so he turned to work as a reporter for a local newspaper. He learned to produce films by working as an assistant director to the film, *Mon Rak Mai Nam Moon*—a love story set in the north east (*Samakom Phu Seou Koa Banterng Haeng Prated Thai 1982, 61*). Phatham grew up in a rural area in close association with the peasants, so he understood the peasants’ problems and characters. *Kru Ban Nok*, his first film, was adapted from a contemporary Thai fiction, *The Teacher of Mad Dog Swamp* by Khammaan Khonthai. Khammaan was a famous northeastern novelist who wrote about the lives of northeastern villagers. *Kru Ban Nok* was the story of an idealist rural schoolteacher
who fought a group of illegal timber traders, until he was finally killed. This film presented the struggle of an individual against a group with a vested interest in remaining corrupt. This film represented the commitment by teacher educated in 1970s to the rural poor. Phatham became known as an outstanding director after the success of this film. Most of his films presented stories of rural teachers, life in northeastern villages and politics. Due to his life experience, Phatham is a film director who understands the politics and social problems of this region, and this knowledge is expressed clearly through his films.

**Third Cinema in the 1970s**

Political trends in the filmic world such as Third Cinema were actively accepted and practiced by Thai filmmakers. This section argues that the Thai experience of cinema as being part of this world culture.

In the 1960s, there was a boom in radical filmmaking after Fidel Castro declared cinema to be a tool of the revolution (Royal Geographic Society 1996, 106). This boom marked the beginning of Third Cinema. The term ‘Third World’ emerged from the Bandung Conference of non-aligned African and Asian nations in 1955. Stam explained the definition of the term Third World as follows:

> The fundamental definition of Third World had more to do with structural economic domination than it had with crude humanistic categories (“the poor”), development categories (“the non-industrialized”), (binary) racial categories (“the non-white”), cultural categories (“the backward”), or geographic categories (“the East”) (Stam 2000, 93)
The Third World is defined variously; however, the main conception held is that of economically impoverished countries. Third Cinema is not limited to the Third World, but rather is found in the environment of resistance to a power position involving the minority. It is often found among formerly colonised people, but is also in developed countries such as the case in England or France. The film, *Battle of Algiers* (dir. Gillo Pontcorvo, 1966) is an example of a Third Cinema film produced by a person from a developed country.

The concept of Third Cinema originated in the late 1960s in Latin America and has recently been taken up again in the wake of Teshome Gabriel’s book *Third Cinema in the Third World, the Aesthetics of Liberation* (1982). As an idea, its immediate inspiration was rooted in the Cuban Revolution (1959) and in Brazil’s Cinema Nôvo (Willemen 1989, 4). In 1986, the Edinburgh International Film Festival (EIFF) addressed the idea of a Third Cinema and its relevance to contemporary film culture (Willemen 1989, 1).

Third Cinema has the following general characteristics: a left-wing political stance, anti-imperialist (especially anti-American) intentions, and a rejection of the values of escapist entertainment (Bawden 1976, 687). The objectives are to produce a compelling means of mass persuasion, cultural consolidation, and consciousness-raising (Cook 1996, 877). The contents of these films address class, race, religion, sex and national integrity. Third Cinema represents class struggle, which is at the core of Third Cinema production (Hayward 1996, 385).
Likewise, Third World countries generally share the common problem of poverty. However, each country has uniquely articulated the common causal factors including racial strife, colonialism, and dictatorial governments. Thus, the character of a national cinema in a particular Third World country depends on that country’s problems and its conception of the root causes of the issues. It has been argued that Third Cinema, as a product of Third World countries, is not aimed at entertainment but rather is used as a weapon for poor people.

The idea of Third Cinema has spread through many Third World countries in Africa and Asia, which have created their own national cinemas. In Thailand, Third Cinema films were produced when the country underwent political upheaval. The 1970s was a period in which the Thai people rose against the military dictatorship, as seen in the events of 14 October 1973. During this period, there were obvious conflicts between left-wing and right-wing groups. Also, at this time left-wing filmmakers produced Third Cinema to present the suffering of poor people and their struggle. Around the time of the massacre of 6 October 1976 at Thammasat University, the left wing was violently suppressed; consequently, the left-wing filmmakers stopped producing films. In the 1990s, Third Cinema films began being produced again following the massacre at Radamnearn Road in May 1992, a period that came to be called Prusapa Tamin (Black May).

Third Cinema presented political conflicts, and was produced as underground film. The films were low-budget, and showed covertly among students and activists. Free from the restrictions of film censorship law, Third Cinema presented these conflicts and
political ideas freely. Third Cinema is an important aspect of Thai national cinema as it presents the conflicts in Thai society and record, political history.

Three Third Cinema Films in the 1970s: The Stories of Poor People

The people’s triumph on 14 October 1973, which led to the overthrow of the military dictatorship and the subsequent liberal political atmosphere, also led to a focus on class conflicts and to criticism of the bureaucracy. This atmosphere inspired filmmakers to produce underground films. Three particular underground films—*Tong Pan* (produced by the Isan Group, 1976), *Pra Cha Chon Nok (On the Fringe of Society)*, dir. Manop Udomdej, 1978), and *Karn To Sue Khong Kamkorn Ying Rong Ngan Hara (The Hara Women Labourers Struggle)* produced by John Eungparkorn, 1976)—were produced for the purpose of consciousness raising, and were popular among left wing university students, activists, and labour unions. These films targeted corruption within the bureaucracy, the influence of capitalism and the struggle of poor people. The three films fall within the Third Cinema genre because of their subject content, their ideology of peasant revolt, and their representation of class and revolution.

*Tong Pan (Produced by the Isan Group, 1976)*

*Tong Pan* presented the impact of dam construction on villagers in the north-eastern provinces. The film starts with an image of manual labourer carrying water and walking past electricity pylons. This is a strong statement opposing development,

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28 The three films *Tong Pan, Pra Cha Chon Nok (On the Fringe of Society)* and *Karn To Sue Khong Kamkorn Ying Rong Ngan Hara (The Hara Women Labourers Struggle)* are chosen for analysis because these films were popular amongst left-wing groups in the 1970s and are also available at the national film archive.
which was the main controversial topic addressed in this film. Tong Pan is the name of a peasant who goes to Bangkok at the invitation of a university student to attend a seminar about the effects of dam construction. The film shows the irony between what the seminar is talking about and what the community is actually experiencing—two ‘parallel’ events that provide the structure of the film. While experts in the seminar room talk about the effects of dam construction, electricity and development, the peasants have to relocate, cannot find fish, starve, become sick and die. The issues of development are interrogated through the seminar; however, the peasants do not see the use of the meeting, they get bored and Tong Pan goes away, since he knows that the seminar is useless for peasants and that their input and opinions would be disregarded. The seminar scene depicts a large gap between those who are presented as experts—scholars, government officials, an American expert—and the peasants. This gap is also emphasized by the word ‘jao nai’. This word means an ‘important person’ or “big boss”. This word is used by Tong Pan, Tong Pan’s wife, and some of the other peasants when they refer to the scholars, government officials, and students. The word is used to reinforce the self-perception that peasants have, which is they are not important people.

In this movie students are also seen as a force of change. Tong Pan does not want to be involved in the struggle and, after his wife dies, he disappears from the village. The student takes on the responsibility of finding Tong Pan and helping him. This film did not present the struggle of the peasants as forcefully as the Bolivian film, Blood of the Condor (dir. Jorge Sanjiné, 1969), which ended with the Indians raising guns against their oppressors—instead, it simply highlighted the condition of the peasant.
Because the film was released after the massacre on 6 October 1976—a period in which the left-wing activists were being suppressed—the film crews were kept anonymous. The film simply stated that it was presented by the Isan group. The tough situation of the film crew, which included students and activists, was explained through at the end of the film.

Shortly after the shooting of this film in October 1976, a violent military *coup d’etat* of a magnitude never before seen in Thailand brought an end to three years of parliamentary democracy.

An extensive purge followed during which more than half of the participants in Tong Pan were either jailed, or compelled out of fear for their lives to join the Thai jungle soldiers or flee in to exile.

According to publicly available information, an estimated 3000 students, professional, artists and intellectuals have disappeared.

(*Tong Pan*, produced by Isan Group, 1976)

Because this afterward mentions the massacre of 6 October 1976, *Tong Pan* was banned in 1976 (Kantharoth 1996, 167, 168). The prevailing political atmosphere of this time did not support left-wing activists. As Mukdasanit explained, ‘I worked as an assistant director and I shot the seminar scene. We had to work secretly. At that time Surachai Jantimatorn (one of the filmmakers) lived in the jungle and he could not go to work in Bangkok’ (Euthana Mukdasanit, interview 16 March 2001).
The actors in the film were famous activists such as Sulak Sivaluk, the editor of *Sangkhomsat Parithat* (the Social Science Review); Surachai Jantimatorn, a musician and a member of *Prajan Sieaw* (The Crescent Moon Group); Sanie Jamarik, a scholar; Tebsiri Suksopha, an artist and writer; and Kamsing Srinok a writer. The filmmakers also used peasants to play roles—such as Aong-art Maneewan, who played the role of Tong Pan, and other peasants’ characters who were also played by real peasants.

The production team of the film was finally revealed at the Samanchon Bon Vithee Karn Moung Film Festival at Thammasat University on 6-15 September 1996. *Tong Pan* was not only a collaboration of Thai activists but also included an American, Mike Monro, who was a film director, and Frank Green as director of photography. Moreover the names of many now well-known Thai film directors such as Euthana Mukdasanit, Surasee Phatham, and Paijong Laisakun were shown in the brochure for the film festival (Kantharoth 1996, 167).

**Pra Cha Chon Nok (On the Fringe of Society, dir. Manop Udomdej, 1978)**

*Pra Cha Chon Nok (On the Fringe of Society)* is a piece of Thai Third Cinema from the 1970s that did not show in movie theatres because of the political atmosphere after the massacre on 6 October 1976. The film presented the struggle of farmers and labourers against rice merchants, capitalists and corrupt government officials. The film is structured around two parallel stories; one is about a farmer in a rural area who joins in the creation of a communal farm to protect his community from capitalists and corrupt government officials, and the other is about a farmer who goes to Bangkok to become a labourer.
In the part of the story that focuses on the first farmer, the film shows how the rice merchant takes advantage of the farmer by joining with government officials to force the rice price down. Moreover, the district officer accuses the farm leader, Charat, of being a communist, because he leads the villagers to make a communal farm and he supports a program to bring university students to the village to learn about farmers’ lives. In the film, Charat is shot and dies.

In the sequence that focuses on the farmer who becomes a labourer, the film presents the life of Tong Tan, a poor farmer who goes to Bangkok to become a labourer. This part presents the lives of labourers from coolies to factory labourers and the role of the labor union protecting the laborers’ rights and benefits from capitalists. The filmmaker uses Tong Tan’s letters to his wife to explain the hard situation of laborers in Bangkok. This part ends with the leader of the laborers and his fellow laborers friends being accused of being communists and being imprisoned.

The film ends with the village headman, Sawai, pointing a gun at the rice merchant. This is the beginning of the people’s fighting back. The role of the people in this film is not passive like that of the peasants in the film Tong Pan; instead, the peasants organize themselves to construct a commune and labour union. The film also encourages people to fight back to protect their rights. Unsurprisingly, the film did not show in movie theatres. The film was, however, shown secretly for students and activists at Thammasat University and Bangkok Bank Music and Art Centre (Sangkeat Centre) (Kantharoth 1996, 155).
Karn To Sue Khong Kamkorn Ying Rong Ngan Hara (The Hara Women Labourers Struggle produced by John Eungparkorn, 1976)

Karn To Sue Khong Kamkorn Ying Rong Ngan Hara is a documentary produced by John Eungparkorn. This is the story of the protest of some women labourers against the owners of the jeans factory in which they work, on the basis that they were receiving an unfair wage. The labourers were beaten when they assembled to ask for a fair wage and better welfare conditions. They protested against the owners in many ways; for example, they occupied the factory and took over the business. Finally, the labourers were jailed. The film ends with the labourers being bailed and planning to fight again. The film recorded their protest step-by-step with interviews of the labourers, images of conditions at the factory, and to use of information and pictures from newspapers. The film was shown at Hara Factory and other factories (Chaiwarakarn 1998, 17). Thus, this film was used to educate labourers about how to protest against their capitalist employers and how to mobilize the workforce to which they belonged.

In each of these three underground films, plaeng pear chewit (songs for life) were used to communicate the suffering of the poor people and as a symbol of their struggle. For example, the film Tong Pan used the song khon kab kway (Man and Buffalo). This song ends with the sentence, ‘Contemptuous of the peasant class, reviling us as savages, truly and surely the oppressors will die’. The protest film shown at the Hara Factory used songs that encouraged the labourers and presented the power of labourers.
Nation, Religion and the Monarchy in Thai Third Cinema

The three above mentioned films all negatively presented the role of government officials who acted to support the capitalists to take advantage of oppressed poor people. They emphasized the conflicts among classes and how these conflicts led to revolt.

Scenes involving Buddhist monks were presented in Tong Pan and Pra Cha Chon Nok. In Tong Pan, the Buddhist monk did not have a significant role; he was only presented in the scene of Tong Pan’s wife’s funeral. Pra Cha Chon Nok presented the role of the Buddhist monk as an advisor to the leader of the farmers, and the monk encourages the leader when he has problems. The appearance of the Buddhist monk amongst the poor represents the Thai belief that Buddhism provides spiritual support for the whole community. This was also an attempt to rebuff the right wing’s propaganda: those communists have no religion.

Reference to the monarchy was not made in any of these three underground films. In the 1970s, the conflicts between left-wing and right-wing groups were obvious and violent, and the monarchy was often seen to support the right-wing’s viewpoint. However, for production teams to have made any negative reference to actions of the monarchy would have been dangerous given the political climate, as it would have seen them condemned as communists. Thus, avoiding references to the monarchy in either a positive or a negative light was a necessary caution for the production teams. The Thai Third Cinema supported the nation and religion, but not the monarchy.
In the 1980s, the conflicts between left-wing groups and right-wing groups declined. The left-wing filmmakers who made the underground films in the 1970s became mainstream film directors and began creating social problem films. For example, Euthana Mukdasanit produced Thebtida Bar 21 (The Angel of Bar 21, 1978) and Thebtida Rong Ngan (Factory’s Angel, 1982); Manop Udomdej produced Yar Proa Mee Chou (The Accusation, 1985).

At the present time (2004), Tong Pan (produced by Isan Group, 1976), Pra Cha Chon Nok (On the Fringe of Society, dir. Manop Udomdj, 1978), and Karn Tor Sue Khong Kam Korn Ying Rong Ngan Hara (The Hara Woman Labourers Struggle produced by John Eungparkorn, 1976) have been shown openly at the Bangkok International Film Festival (22 January-2 February 2004) as part of an ‘In the Realm’ program, which showed underground films and short films from the 1970s (www.thaifilm.com). These three films no longer serve their original role of raise the consciousness of Thai people, but the films have a role to play in recording the history of poor people in the period of a military dictatorial government in Thailand.

**Thai Cinema in the 1980s: The Expansion of the Economy**

In the period of the 1980s, Thailand was again governed by a military government, starting with Prime Minister General Kriangsak Chomanan from 1977 to 1980, followed by Prime Minister General Prem Tinsulanond from 1980 to 1988. Yet the political atmosphere was not stern like the previous military dictatorial government. The conflicts between the leftists and rightists declined, while the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) collapsed because of the anti-communist policies of General Kriangsak.
and General Prem. At the end of this decade the economy expanded during the period of the civilian government of Prime Minister General Chatichai Choonhavan from 1988 to 1991.

1. The Political Context in the 1980s

In the 1970s the military lost power following the students’ uprising in October 1973. Three informal military factions were formed between 1973 and 1981: the Young Military Officers group (Young Turks), the Democratic Soldiers, and the Military Academy graduates of Class 5 (Bunbongkarn 1987, 11, 17). These three factions wanted to revive the military institution and were influential in politics during the period of the 1980s.

The Military Factions

The Young Military Officers group took the name ‘Young Turks’ from the movement that originated in the Ottoman Empire in 1908. They played a political role within a factionalized military. The members of the group graduated class 7 of Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy in 1960 (Leifer 1996, 297–8). Suchit Bunbongkarn mentions that this group was the most influential faction in the Army prior to 1981 (Bunbongkarn 1987, 13). On 20 October 1977, the group staged a coup under the leadership of Admiral Sagnad Chaloryou. They attempted to overthrow Thanin’s government and install General Kriangsak Chomanan as Prime Minister (Pothworapong and Pothworapong 1999, 145). On February 1980, the group switched their support from General Kriangsak to General Prem Tinsulanon. At that time General Kriangsak
resigned and on 3 March 1980 General Prem was appointed as Prime Minister (Bunbongkarn 1987, 13) (Pothworapong and Pothworapong 1999, 148). On 1 April 1981, the Young Turks attempted a coup because they did not agree with the selection of government cabinet ministers made by General Prem. General Prem was supported by King Bhumibol and this led to the failure of the coup. On September 1985 the group once again attempted a coup and once again failed, leading to the collapse of the faction at that time (Phongpaichit and Baker 1996, 552).

The members of the ‘Democratic Soldiers’ came from staff officers in the Army and the Internal Security Operation Command (ISOC). Their ideas developed after the political movements of 1973-1976, and were based on experience gained from previous political strategies used to fight against the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) (Phongpaichit and Baker 1996, 533). They believed that democratization was essential at all levels and in all major institutions; moreover, democratization would defeat the communists as well as working to develop the country. The group had connections with union leaders, students, scholars and politicians. The ‘Democratic Soldiers’ influenced the formation of the Prime Ministerial Order No. 66/2523, which was aimed at defeating the CPT (Bunbongkarn 1987, 14–5) by using a combination of political strategy and military tactics (Phongpaichit and Baker 1996, 553). This order was declared on April 1980, while General Prem was the Commander of the Army, (Bunbongkarn 1987, 16) and Prime Minister (Phongpaichit and Baker 1996, 524). As a result of the Democratic Soldiers’ strategy, the CPT collapsed.

The ‘Democratic Soldiers’ broke up in November 1981 because they could not expanded their ideas within the Army or the body politic, and received pressure from
senior military officers to disband (Bunbongkarn 1987, 15). However, one of their more outstanding members, General Chavalit Yongchaiyut, still had a significant role to play in politics. He later served as Prime Minister from 25 November 1996 to 9 November 1997 (Pothworapong and Pothworapong 1999, 31).

Members of the ‘Class 5’ group were graduates of the fifth class of Chulachomklao Military Academy in 1958. The ideal of this group was loyalty to the monarchy, and protection of nation, religion and the monarchy. The ‘Class 5’ group did not agree with the ‘Young Turks’ and the ‘Democratic Soldiers’ that the military was the representative of people (Phongpaichit and Baker 1996, 557). The purpose of the group was to counter the Young Turks. They judged the ‘Young Turks’ as being ‘soldiers out of line’ and without respect for their senior officers. In the abortive coup of 1 April 1981 that was led by the ‘Young Turks’, the ‘Class 5’ group was the first group to stand against the ‘Young Turks’ (Bunbongkarn 1987, 16). They disapproved of the ‘Young Turks’ intention to overthrow General Prem Tinsulanond, the appointed Prime Minister who had been chosen by King Bhumibol. Moreover, in November 1977 the ‘Young Turks’ overthrew Thanin’s government, which was chosen by the King. Therefore, the coup on November 1977 and the abortive coup on 1 April 1981 were perceived by the ‘Class 5’ group as disrespectful the institution of the monarchy.

The leader of the ‘Class 5’ group was Colonel Suchinda Kraprayoon, who later served as Prime Minister from 7 April 1992 to 10 June 1992 (Pothworapong and Pothworapong 1999, 31). As Prime Minister, he caused the massacre that occurred on May 1992 at Radamneam Road—an event that will be further explored in the section on the political context of the 1990s.
A core value of the Thai military is sacrifice for nation, religion and the monarchy. Furthermore, the concept of seniority is very important for military officers. Thus, conflict occurs when either of the three institutions or seniority is disrespected. The Thai military’s spirit is presented in many Thai films. For example, Kam Mam Sanya (dir. Komsan Pongsutham, 1987) presented the values of a military officer, especially with regard to seniority. This movie portrays a love story between an Army commander-in-chief’s daughter and a sergeant’s son. The hero, sub-lieutenant Sarin, ran away from the heroine, Da, because he believed that a sergeant’s son was not worthy of an Army commander-in-chief’s daughter. While this was a romantic film, it also presented the relationship among military officers who adhered to a seniority system—a system that resulted in suffering for the young couple.

The film Mue Pern (Gun Man, dir. Prince Chatree Chalerm Yokon, 1983) portrayed a hit man, as well as addressing the topic of the rights of hit men, soldiers and police to kill. The film also addressed the issue of seniority within the military. One character, Sergeant Sommai lost his leg and was abandoned in a battlefield while he protected a lieutenant, Tanu. Through these two characters the relationship between a military officer and a sergeant was presented. When he returned home, Sommai still respected his chief Tanu, as was demonstrated by the fact that he placed a picture of himself and Tanu in his house and talked to Tanu respectfully. Moreover, he was proud of the military institution, as seen in one scene in which he teaches his son, ‘if you want to be a soldier you have to patient’. Later in the movie, Tanu, who after the battle became a policeman, helps Sommai (the assassin) by telling him to run away from the police. Sommai’s adherence to seniority had brought about a patronage system.
Such a patronage system is also reflected in the film *Kam Man Sanya*, which tells the story of an ill-fated romance. Sarin, a sergeant’s son, could study in the Chulachomkloa Military Academy because of the patronage of his father’s senior officer. Most of the roles of military officers are presented respectfully in films; conversely, the privates are often presented in the role of a clown such as in *Tahan Roua Ma Laew* (*The Navy*, dir. Lotok, 1981), *Kong Pan Tahan Ken* (*The Conscript Battalion*, dir. Prayoon Wongchem, 1984), and *Hae Ha Mea Navy* (*The Navy’s Wife*, dir. Prakob Chaipipath, 1984).


General Kriangsak Chomanan became Prime Minister after overthrowing Thanin’s government on November 1977 (Pothworapong and Pothworapong 1999, 80), with the support of the ‘Young Turks’ (Leifer 1996, 157). In the period of his rule, political tensions declined. Through the introduction of moderate social policies, including the ending of Bangkok’s curfew, and allowing the free expression of visual images and opinions in the press and at the universities, General Kriangsak was assured re-election in 1979 (Morell and Samudavanija 1981, 278). Moreover, after 1979 the Kriangsak government allowed students, labourers and farmers to organize action groups, albeit with some restrictions (Keyes 1987, 101). In this period, the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) lost much power as a result of Kriangsak’s policies—a factor that contributed to their collapse in the period of the Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanond.
The Collapse of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT)

The Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) was founded in 1942 as a branch of the Chinese Communist Party (Keyes 1987, 111). The insurgents of the CPT were influenced by Maoist doctrine (Philips, Atmiyanandana Lawler et al. 1987, 340). After the massacre of 6 October 1976, leftists including students, labourers and farmers, and totalling around 3,000 persons, joined the CPT to flee from the rightist violence and to fight the dictatorial government. However, in the jungle there were conflicts between the student leaders and the CPT leaders. The students criticized the CPT for following Maoist doctrine, claiming that these ideas were not suitable for Thai society. The CPT leaders in turn did not trust the student leaders (Phongpaichit and Baker 1996, 522).

In April 1972, Kriangsak declared national elections (Prizzia 1985, 21). This was a sign that the period of dictatorship was over. In November 1978, Vietnam invaded Cambodia, and in February 1979, China attacked Vietnam (Phongpaichit and Baker 1996, 523). Kriangsak persuaded China to end support for the CPT in exchange for Thai government support for the Khmer Rough against the Vietnamese invasion (Anderson 1985, 186). On July 1979, the CPT radio propaganda, the ‘Voice of the People of Thailand’ (VOPT), which had been based in China, stopped broadcasting and China decreased support for the CPT (Phongpaichit and Baker 1996, 523). At that time General Kriangsak offered an amnesty to the radicals who had joined the CPT. By early 1980 some 400 activists had returned from the jungle. In 1980, General Prem declared Prime Ministerial Order no. 66/2523 (Bunbongkarn 1987, 16). By this order, the army attacked the CPT base at Kho Ko, Petchaboon province in 1981, and the base at Suratthanee province, Nan province and Leay province in 1982. By the middle of 1984,
the Internal Security Operation Command (ISOC) declared its triumph over the CPT (Phongpaichit and Baker 1996, 523).

Twenty years later student leaders from the period of October 1973 to October 1976 had risen to prominent positions. For example the former student leaders, Teerayuth Bunmee and Seksan Prasertkun, are lecturers at Thammasat University, and Cheeranan Prithpreecha, is now a famous poet. Even Prapath Saichou, whose well-known image of holding a stick to fight with a soldier symbolized the events of 14 October 1973, is a minister for agriculture in the Thaksin Shinawatra government (2001). The story of the student movement in the 1970s and the CPT was portrayed in the film *14 Tula Songkram Prachachon* (*The Moon Hunter*, dir. Bandit Rittikon, 2001).

The scriptwriter of *14 Tula Songkram Prachachon* was Seksan Prasertkun—a student leader in the events of October 1973, who later joined the CPT. The film portrayed the student movement during the 1970s, started by the events of 14 October 1973. The conflicts between the CPT leaders and the student leaders exacerbated the collapse of the CPT and the students’ return home. The story was narrated by Seksan Prasertkun and presented through Seksan and Cheeranan’s life. The introduction to the film notes, ‘By the fate of the nation, lies the fate of a man’. Thus the lives of the two activists represent a part of the political movement in the 1970s. The film emphasized significant events, places and times by describing such things as the events of 14 October 1973, the CPT base, the war between Vietnam and Cambodia, and the war between China and Vietnam. Thus, *14 Tula Songkram Prachachon* acts as a record of the student movement of the 1970s and the CPT. Moreover, the events of 14 October 1973, the massacre at Thammasat University as well as the history of the CPT, had not
been recorded in school texts; in 2001, after the film was shown in movie theatres, these parts of Thailand’s history once again brought into the public sphere.

After the election in April 1979, General Kriangsak Chomanan was retained as Prime Minister (Prizzia 1985, 94) on 2 May 1979 (Pothworapong and Pothworapong 1999, 30). However, Kriangsak retained power for only ten months, because of controversy over rising oil prices and the influx of refugees (Pothworapong and Pothworapong 1999, 30). Furthermore, the ‘Young Turks’ turned their support to a new leader, Army General Prem Tinsulanond. Finally, Kriangsak had only reluctant support from King Bhumibol, as he had overthrown the King’s appointed Prime Minister, Thanin Kraivichian (Keyes 1987, 102). On 3 March 1980, General Kriangsak resigned (Pothworapong and Pothworapong 1999, 30).

2. Cultural Products in the 1980s

_Plaeng Pear Chewit (Songs for Life) in the 1980s_

After the massacre at Thammasat University on 6 October 1976, the left-wing group escaped from the city to join the CPT in its struggle against the government. During this time the _plaeng pear chewit_ (songs for life) lost popularity for a while. This was largely the result of the left-wing group being suppressed violently by the right-wing group, which meant their activities such as playing the _plaeng pear chewit_ stopped.

In 1979, Prime Minister General Kriangsak Chomanan granted amnesty to the students and activists (Anderson 1985, 40). In the early 1980s many of left wing musicians
returned to the city, which lead to a resurgence of *plaeng pear chewit*. During this time, songs for life became more romanticized, diluting their political message in order to accommodate the political climate (Siriyuvasak 1998, 208).

Virasak Sunthornsri, one of the founders of the band, Caravan—mentioned that since the 1980s, the contents of ‘music for life’ did not mobilize people to fight for their rights, but rather presented the stories and feelings of individuals (Sunthornsri 1998, 157). However, these songs were still used to promote democracy and to motivate audiences to think about society’s injustices.

In the 1980s many *plaeng pear chewit* bands signed with music companies. This movement was started by the most famous band, Caravan, signing a contract with EMI Tape Company after they returned from the jungle and played a concert in Bangkok (Sunthornsri 1998, 155). In this period, many *plaeng pear chewit* bands, such as Carabao and Zuzu, put more emphasis on the commercial value of their music, and the political massage was subtle.

No underground films were produced in the 1980s; however, many films addressing social problems were released. These films, especially Prince Chatree Chaleam Yukon’s films such as *Mue Pern* (*The Gunman*, 1983) and *Itsarapab Khong Thongpoon Kokpho* (1984), contained original film music, using the style of *plaeng pear chewit* to present the destiny of the poor characters. However, once again the political message in the songs was not presented as strongly as it was in earlier *plaeng pear chewit* songs.
Modern Literature in the 1980s

By the early 1980s, after the collapse of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) and the general amnesty offered by the Kriangsak government, left-wing students and activists returned to the city. Interest in political activity declined, and the ideas of left and right-wing extremists lost popularity. This period ushered in a new phenomenon in Thai literature. Pinyo Kongtong stated that *wannakam pear chewit* (literature for life), popular in the 1970s, presented political ideals and encouraged people to fight the dictatorship for human rights. In the 1980s, *wannakam pear chewit* (literature for life) began to talk about the essence of life and the misery of people such as prostitutes, slum-dwellers, and peasants (Pinyo Kongtong, interview 23 January 2001). For example, Makuth Ornrudee had written many short stories that presented political ideas, especially socialist ideology. In the early 1980s, he changed his direction to focus on the lives of poor people. This can be seen in his novel *Pheesue Lae Dok Mai* (Butterfly and Flowers), which presents the life of a poor Muslim boy who works as a rice smuggler on the border of Thailand and Malaysia to support his poor family. This optimistic story does not talk about the causes of poverty, but presents the way that a good poor boy survives in terrible circumstances. This story was produced in film of the same title of the novel by Euthana Mukdasanit in 1986, which won the award for best film at the International Film Festival in Hawaii in 1986 (Uabumrungjit 1997, 95).

During this period a new group of writers such as Chat Kobjitti, Mala Kamjan, and Wimon Sainimnoan emerged. Most of their stories presented the fate of poor people. Their stories were produced in films in the 1980s and in the early of 1990s—for example, *Ban (House)*, dir Chat Kobjitti and Ekalak, 1987), adapted from the novel *Jon*
Trok (To Be at Bay), written by Chat Kobjitti in 1980. This is the sad story of a poor peasant named Bunma and his family who move to live in a slum in Bangkok. Chat Kobjitti’s novel Kom Pi Pak Sa (Verdict) was written in 1981 and won the SEA Writer’s Award (Southeast Asia Writer’s Award) in 1982. This novel’s storyline was produced in the film Kom Pi Pak Sa (dir. Permphon Choei-arun, 1989), which is a story about an unlucky janitor who is wrongfully accused by villagers as having had an affair with his insane stepmother. Like the 1970s, the serious novels were produced into nang sathorn sungkhom (social problem films).

In the 1980s, it was not only wannakam pear chewit (literature for life) that changed direction, but a new genre of Thai poetry called klon prao (free verse) also emerged in the mid-1980s, and this genre was very popular among teenagers. Klon prao is a form of non-rhyming verse that is different from traditional Thai poems, which adhere to a strict metrical structure. Most klon prao present the content of love, broken hearts and loneliness. The 1980s saw the introduction of magazines aimed at the teenage market and during this time many teen magazines that contained fashion, short stories, gossip and klon prao became popular. In the meantime, many Thai teen films were produced and were successful. It became a new trend of Thai film in the late of 1980s to direct films targeted specifically at teenage audiences.

In the 1980s, popular novels were serialized in various magazines. These novels were brought out in book form and the most popular among them were produced in lakorn toratat (Thai soap opera) and films (Kintanar 1988, 38). Among popular writers in the 1980s, Nantana Weerachon was a very famous melodrama writer who presented stories of family problems that surrounded sex. The main characters were now married women.
not teenagers—as had been the case in popular novels in the previous period. These novels were produced in films such as *Rarn Dok Ngue* (dir. Pantape Attakraiwanwattee, 1987), and *Peak Marn* (dir. Pornpoth, 1987).

**Television and Videotape Boom in the 1980s**

In the early 1980s, television and video businesses became increasingly popular (Uabumrungjit 1997, 96). Television was established in Thailand in 1955 during the government of Field Marshal Plake Pibulsongkram, and it was used largely to convey propaganda that communicated the dictatorial government’s policies (Sittirak 2000, 1, 266). In 1979, television was first broadcast nation-wide. By 1986, 80 percent of the urban population had a TV and 40 percent of the population in rural areas had a TV (Siriyuvasak 1992, 97). In this period many foreign and Thai television programs were released: news, variety shows, game shows, foreign films and *lakorn toratat* (Thai soap opera). Since the 1980s *lakorn toratat* has been very popular, as demonstrated by the broadcasting of *lakorn toratat* in prime time and the publishing of most *lakorn toratat* scripts in newspapers before the TV broadcast. The content and narration of these soap operas, similar to Thai film, was influenced by folklore, traditional literature and traditional performance. By the late 1980s, *lakorn toratat* programs came to rival Thai films in popularity. The three pillars have also been presented in *lakorn toratat*; for example, *Pan Tay Norasing* (produced by Kantana, 1986) presented the importance of the monarchy, *Sarawat Tearn* (produced by Kantana, 1987) presented the nation through the mission of policemen, meanwhile, many ghost stories and melodramas presented religion through the role of Buddhist monks and the ideals of Buddhism.
In the 1980s, not only did *lakorn toratat* boom, but the new business of videotapes also become a competitor to Thai film. Dome Sukwong claimed that in this period videotapes became a new form of entertainment for adults. Consequently, adult audience numbers attending movie theatres decreased. Nevertheless, teenagers kept going to the movies (Dome Sukwong, Interview 7 February 2001). By catering to this change in audience demographic, teen films became successful, whereas melodramas and action films that had been popular among women and men in the 1960s and 1970s declined in the late 1980s.

3. Thai Film in the 1980s: Brilliance and Variety

In 1976, the Thanin Kraivichian government had increased film import tax from 2.20 baht per metre to 30 baht per metre to restrict the influence of foreign cinema, especially that of Hollywood. In 1977, a group of Hollywood film distributors protested the film import tax increase by stopping distribution of Hollywood Films in Thailand (Uabumrungjit 1997, 95). These were national policies of Thailand and America, in order to protect their nation’s economies. During this period of boycott, the number of Thai films released averaged more than a hundred films per year (see table 10). This situation continued until 1993, when the government of Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai decreased foreign film tax from 30 baht per metre to 10 baht per metre, because of pressure from the 301 Act of Bill Clinton’s government (Chaiwarakarn 1998, 15). The number of Thai films being produced has since decreased dramatically, such that in 1999 only 9 Thai films were released.
Table 10 Thai Film in the period of 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>The number of Thai films</th>
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<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>73</td>
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2. 1992-1999: the Film Censorship Committee, Police Department.
In the 1980s, Thai films were popular, and a variety of genres existed. Many remarkable films were produced, and new film directors emerged. The increase of the film import tax in 1976 stimulated Thai film producers to produce more films. Although, in 1981, Hollywood films were once again distributed in Thailand (Uabumrungjit 1997, 95), the number of Thai films did not decrease. Therefore, the relaxed political atmosphere and the economic prosperity of the 1980s helped to support the Thai film industry.

In this decade, two major events showed that both scholars and government had realized the national importance of Thai film: it was not only an entertainment business but also acted as a national intellectual asset.

The first event was the establishment of the National Film Archives in 1984 (Uabumrungjit 1997, 95) to preserve, restore and research Thai film. The National Film Archives were started when scholars and activists—like Dome Sukwong and volunteers—cleaned an old abandoned, building in Bangkok to make a film archive. After that, it was transferred to the control of the Department of Fine Art in the Ministry of Education (Uabumrungjit 1997, 95). The realization of a National Film Archive by independent scholars and volunteers displayed a blatant neglect, by the previous governments, to preserve Thai film as national documents. As a result, many old films have been lost or destroyed because the previous governments did not have the necessary policy framework in place. This is confirmed by Sukwong, who explains the support received from the government in relation to the National Film Archives:
The support of the government [for the film industry] is always less than for any other form of culture—compared to the museums, the library. The government thinks that films or movies are cheap entertainment. So, it is difficult, but the people are willing to support the archive. They are happy to come here and learn about what we are doing to restore or preserve the films (Richardson 1993).

Owing to little support being received from the government, Sukwong used the monarchical institution to excite the government’s interest in the National Film Archive. He explained:

The reason why the government paid attention to my project was that I had a very old and rare film concerning the king. You know we have to use the king as a weapon to strike the government's attention. I found a Swedish film concerning King Rama V, King Chulalongkorn, and shot while he was in Europe during 1897. You know King Chulalongkorn is like a god; people worship the king like a god. When I received this film, an official from the Fine Arts Department (of the Ministry of Education) called me to come to his office and told me that the Fine Art Department would set up the National Film Archive (Richardson 1993).

This also presents the government’s point of view—that films documenting the monarchy are national documents and have the priority for preservation.

The second event occurred when a film director, Wijit Kunawuth, was selected to be Thailand’s National Artist by the National Culture Committee in 1987 (Uabumrungjit 1997, 95). Most of Kunawuth’s films were dramas, concerned with poor people. Some such films were Khon Phu Khoa (The Mountaineer, 1979), Luk Isan (Son of the Northeast, 1982), and Phuying Khon Nan Cheo Bunrod (Her Name is Bunrod, 1985). These films presented Thai life in different regions and encouraged people to do the
right thing, but did not criticise the bureaucracy as social problem films had. Unsurprisingly, Kunavuth’s films were accepted by the state office. These two events confirm that Thai film was accepted by both academics and the government, and that they recognized that film is a kind of national text.

Thai films also received international awards and recognition throughout the 1980s. In 1981, a period film, Phlae Kao (The Scar dir. Ched Songsri, 1977) won Best Film in Film Festival in France (Chaiwarakan 1998, 21). In 1983, Luk Isan (Son of the Northeast dir. Wijit Kunawuth, 1982) received an award at the Manila Film Festival. In 1986, the story of a poor, smuggler, Muslim boy, Pheesue Lae Dok Mai (Butterfly and Flower dir. Euthana Mukdasanit, 1984), received the Best Film from the International Film Festival at Hawaii (Uabumrungjit 1997, 95). These three examples were evidence of the quality of Thai film during this period. Nevertheless, many Thai films that did not receive international awards were also remarkable. They presented a variety of genres. Examples include social problem films, such as Thebtida Rong Ngan (Factory’s Angel dir. Euhana Mukdasanit, 1982) and Mue Pern (Gunman dir. Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, 1983), melodramas such as Ban Sai Tong (dir. Ruth Ronnaphop, 1980) and Chao Sao Kong Anon (dir. Ruth Ronnaphop, 1982), action films such as Sao Ha (dir. Winith Pakdeevijit, 1982) and Nak Rob Dam (dir. Sukhum Kamphee, 1988), and teenage films such as Wai Ra Reang (dir. Somboonsuk Niyomsiri, 1984) and Pream (dir. Adirek Watleela and Thanith Jitnukun, 1986).

The next section explores the genres nang sathorn sungkhom (social problem films) and nang bu (action films). These two genres represent left-wing and right-wing politics, and were produced in greater numbers during the period of cold war tension in the
1970s and 1980s. The other genre, *nang wai ruen* (teen film), which was also popular in the late 1980s, will also be explored.

*Nang Sathorn Sungkom (Social Problem Films) in the 1980s*

The *nang sathorn sungkhom* was first produced in the period of the student uprisings in the 1970s. This genre was suspended after the massacre in 6 October 1976 at Thammasat University, when Thailand was once again controlled by a dictatorial government. Leftist students and activists joined the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) in the jungle. In the early 1980s the CPT collapsed, conflicts between left-wing and right-wing groups declined, students and activists returned home, and the *nang sathorn sungkhom* was produced again.

The content of *nang sathorn sungkhom* in the 1980s was similar to the *nang sathorn sungkhom* produced in the 1970s. They presented various problems in Thai society: Mostly the stories of poor people, such as slum dwellers, in *Kru Somsri* (Teacher Somsri dir. Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, 1986) and *Ban* (House, dir. Chat Kobjitti and Ekalak, 1987), or poor peasants, as in *Luk Isan* (Son of the Northeast, dir. Wijit Kunawuth, 1982). Only some of the films showed the problems confronting the middle class, such as family tension—in *Kwa Ja Ru Dieangsa* (dir. Chana Kraprayoon, 1987), drug addiction—in *Nam Pu* (dir. Euthana Mukdasanit, 1983) and media violence—in *Yeaor* (The Victim, dir. Chana Kraprayoon, 1987). Furthermore, attention was directed towards environmental problems in *Uka Fah Leang* (The Yellow Sky, dir Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, 1980) and *Kon Leang Chang* (Elephant Keeper, dir. Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, 1989).
The protagonists in *nang sathorn sungkhom* were usually poor people in rural and urban areas. The plots of the films usually involved the conflict between classes, such as between poor people and their oppressors. The villains in *nang sathorn sungkhom* were usually the capitalists, embezzling, politicians and corrupt government officials. Thus the villains in these films were examples of bad governance and corruption. At the end of these films, the conflicts could often not be resolved, the poor people were the losers and the injustices continued.

In *nang sathorn sungkhom* the roles of the monarchy and Buddhist monkhood are not present through the main character or characters to make a final determination. However, the two institutions are presented in cameo performances to symbolize the Thai community, such as a picture of the king and queen in the government office, or a Buddhist temple landscape. This may be interpreted as the makers of *nang sathorn sungkhom* films believing in the two institutions; however, their belief in the religion and the monarchy does not extend to the two institutions solving the problems of poor people.

In *nang sathorn sungkhom*, the nation is presented through a bureaucratic system, which is criticized. High-ranking government officials in the films were portrayed in a negative light: they had secret connections with embezzling politicians, and capitalists. On the other hand, the images of ‘new-generation’ government officials were positive: they were presented as individuals, and their roles in the films were to support poor people. For instance, a chief of a police station in *Itsarapab Khong Tongpoon Kokpho* (*Freedom of Tongpoon Kokpho* dir. Prince Chatree Chalerm Yokon, 1984) interrogated
the poor hero Tongpoon politely, and released him when Tongpoon proved that he was innocent. In *Kru Somsri* (*Teacher Somsri* dir. Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, 1986), the young government official supported slum dwellers in their fight with capitalists and corrupt, high-ranking government officials, by using the courts. In *Khon Leang Chang* (*Elephant Keeper* dir. Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, 1989) the young government forestry official was murdered because he fought with an illegal logger who had a connection with a high-ranking government official. However, the new-generation staff followed his idea to protect the forests. The ‘new-generation’ government officials in these films are reflection of the ideals of young Thais in the 1970s, who became the middle class in the 1980s. The films reminded them of Thai commitment to the poor.

In the 1980s *nang sathorn sungkhom* presented the ‘new-generation’ government official, who became the hope of solving social problems and of making the bureaucratic system better. This is a large contrast to *nang sathorn sungkhom* of the 1970s, such as *Kho Chou Karn* (*Dr. Karn*, dir. Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, 1973) and *Kru Ban Nok* (*Rural Teacher*, dir. Surasee Phatham, 1978), in which the main characters were killed, not having the support of the bureaucratic system or the ‘new-generation’ government officials.

In the following discussion, *Mue Pern* (*Gunman* dir. Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, 1983) has been chosen as representative of *nang sathorn sungkhom*. This example explores *nang sathorn sungkhom* in its presentation of the conflicts between poor people, and government officials and capitalists.
Mue Pern was successful at the box office and received good critiques. It is the story of a veteran named Sommai who works as an assassin after he had lost his leg in a battle in Laos. The opening scene of the film shows Sergeant Sommai shooting his victim, and the ensuing police investigation. A chief of a SWAT team, Tanu, is introduced in this scene. He is well-known through the mass media, and has a reputation for killing criminals. The two protagonists were comrades when they were soldiers in Laos: Sommai protected his chief Tanu in the battle, but lost his leg and was abandoned. The war scene displays Sommai to be brave and responsible and a skillful gunman in battle; on the other hand, Tanu is cowardly, and loses control in battle.

Questions about the right to kill are debated in the film, with scenarios including killing by soldiers, police and assassins. Tanu and Sommai had a right to kill the enemies of the nation when they were soldiers. As a policeman Tanu had a right to kill criminals. The mass media confirmed that his killing was right, and he was admired. On the other hand, it raised the question of whether Sommai was right or wrong when he killed his victims. The first Buddhist precept, ‘Deliberately causing the death of any living being’ was a controversial topic in the film. However, the film does not affirm who has the right to kill.

The characters in the film are divided into three groups: in the first are the government officials—soldiers and policemen; in the second are the powerful business bureaucrats, and in the last are poor people, such as the assassin and his family. The conflict arose when the power of the three groups was not balanced. The last scene of the film showed a young policeman pointing his gun at Sommai. It meant the killing would
continue in the film—and in real life. Mue Pern is like many other nang sathorn sungkhom, as it presents reality in society. As Yukon said:

My films relate to social problems in that time, because films act as a mirror of society. My films have never dictated and never told how to do anything. Every film just left the end open. My films present the problems that happened but I have never told how to solve the problems in my films (Yukon cited in (Santiwuthimathee 1997, 150; trans. by Patsorn Sungsri)

**Nang Bu (Action film)**

Action film is defined as ‘a film with fast-paced narrative featuring a lot of violence and physical action such as chases, fights, stunts, crashes and explosion, and where action dominates over dialogue and characters’ (Blandford, Grant et al. 2001, 5). In Thailand, action films are called ‘nang bu’. Nang bu contains not only violence and physical action, but most of this genre also presents the right-wing ideology of the three institutions of nation, religion and the monarchy. The films also contain supernatural belief, especially about the sacred image of the Buddha, or about lockets or sacred incantations that can make people indestructible—which takes place when they hang the sacred lockets around their necks or mutter the sacred incantations. Moreover, nang bu follows the conventional style, where sex stars and comedians play supporting characters in order to make nang bu lively. The style of nang bu is in the conventional style. The audience can experience melancholy, excitement, a sense of thrill, laughter, arousal and other emotions and reactions.
Nang bu is popular among men in provincial areas and urban working-class males. To achieve a sense of realism, or connectedness, to this audience, the stories of nang bu are located in the provinces. The characters are the people who live in the provinces—such as villagers, luk sua chaoban (village scouts), taharn pran (local rangers), ethnic groups, local government officials such as a nai amphue (district officer), a phu yai ban (village headman), provincial capitalists—such as rice millers, contractors, mine owners, timber merchants—and foreigners such as communists from China or Vietnam. Moreover, policemen and the military are always an important group for solving the problems, or supporting the hero as he solves the problems. The conflicts in nang bu happen among these groups and these tensions bring about action scenes.

The stories of nang bu are not complicated. Among hundreds of nang bu, their are two popular plots. The first is of the story of the hero, as a secret policeman or soldier, disguised as a villager. He goes to a remote village in northeastern Thailand for a secret mission to destroy a communist invasion. The theme of the story is that the heroes join with the villagers, policemen or military to protect the three institutions from communism. Finally, the heroes and their company defeat the communists. Examples of these films include Soa Ha (dir. Winith Pakdeeovijit, 1976), Petch Lam Prapleang (dir. Suvicha Mee-sang-gnun. 1985), and Sua Phu Pan (dir. Suvicha Mee-sang-gnun. 1986). This plot was popular in the 1970s and 1980s. In the late 1980s, after the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) collapsed, this plot became less popular.

The second plot that is popular in nang bu is the story of the hero, a poor villager, and his family who are bullied by phu mi itthiphon (literally, “a man of influence”, which is

29 Northeastern Thailand is a poor area where the border touches the communist countries of Laos and Cambodia. Many of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) bases were located in this region.
explained in general detail later) in order to seize his land; or the hero obstructs the corrupt action of the *phu mi ittiphon*. After this, scenes involving the hero and the villains are shown. In this plot, the villains are not foreigners or communists, but local gangsters, to depict the class struggle. At the end of the story, the conflicts are solved by the hero—with support from his friends, or policemen, or soldiers, to constrain the villains. In *nang bu*, government officials have the role of solving the problems of people. In this plot, the hero fights for his land, his family and his peaceful village. Examples of such films include *Chai Chat Soa* (dir. Pa-youg Payakun, 1980), and *Yang Tone* (dir. Pa-youg Payakun, 1981).

The three pillars of Thai society are presented in *nang bu*. Religion is represented by Buddhist monks, who have important roles in these films. They are the spiritual centre for the good people. They give sacred Buddha image lockets to the heroes and they also mutter sacred incantations to protect them. *Nang bu* emphasizes that Buddhist monks take the side of good people and support them so as to protect the monarchy and the nation. The monarchy is portrayed as the most important institution, although it is not represented by a character in the film, but rather by a picture. In *nang bu* the monarchy is sacrosanct, protecting the hero. In *Nak Paen Din* (dir. Sombat Matanee, 1977) the hero prays in front of the image of the monarchy, the Buddha and the tri-color flag before he goes to fight the communists. ‘Nation’ in *nang bu* means a country governed by a constitutional monarchy; Buddhism and the monarchy are the respected institutions that complete the Thai nation. The military and police have important roles to protect the nation from enemies with no religion and do not respect the monarchy, who come from the communist countries. In *nang bu*, the three institutions are overtly represented.
Most nang bu has a happy ending with the conflicts solved. Nang bu, as such, has a role for social catharsis. The audience will be happy with the triumph of the heroes, who are representative of themselves, in the fight against the communists or the powerful and corrupt. Moreover, the triumph of the hero emphasizes the idea that adherence to the three institutions is the right way to build a peaceful country.

In the following discussion, Soa Ha (dir. Winith Pakdeevijit, 1976) has been chosen as a representative of nang bu. This example will be used to explore nang bu in its presentation of the nation, religion, and monarchy.

Soa Ha (dir. Winith Pakdeevijit, 1982) is a useful example of the nang bu of the late 1970s and 1980s. This film was very successful at the box office, and became a legend of the nang bu genre. For instance, the film Kaow Pra Kum Krong (Where is Tong? dir. Theerathon Siripanwarapon, 2001) refers to the film Soa Ha as a legend of heroes who were protected by the sacred Buddhist image lockets when they go to the secret mission.

Soa Ha is a story of five heroes who were born on a Saturday (the Thai word is Wan Sao) in the fifth month. Thai people believe that children who are born on that day have a good horoscope and that enemies cannot defeat them. These five heroes each receive a sacred Buddha image locket named pra sao ha from Buddhist monk masters to make them invincible. The monks order them to join a secret military mission for the suppression of foreign enemies—who are western, or other Asian peoples, as well as Thai hooligans—in the northeast of Thailand (where many of the CPT bases are located). The five heroes swear that they are willing to sacrifice their lives for the three
institutions while they hold the tri-color flag in their hands. The middle part of the film shows action such as Thai boxing, guns, and the supernatural power of the lockets. Finally, the military joins the heroes to defeat the villains; at this point of the film arms and military equipment were shown.

The film was produced in the period when the conflicts between the right and left wings were extreme, through government propaganda programs on television, radio, plaeng pluk jai (patriotic song) and news, Thai people were educated to believe that communists were evil, did not have religion and did not respect the monarchy. Thus, the audiences accepted the order of the Buddhist masters, even though they ordered the heroes to kill the enemy. This order reflected the attitude of the charismatic monk, Kittivuddho Bhikkhu, who gave a sermon in mid-June 1976 saying ‘killing communists was not sinful but meritorious because communist were bestial types and agents of the devil (Mara) who threatened the nation, the religion, and the monarchy’ (Keyes 1987, 95). This sermon depicted communists as devils, thus killing communists was not killing human, so did not go against the Buddhist precepts.

The importance of the three institutions was emphasized many times through dialogue, symbols such as the tri-colour flag and sacred lockets, as well as by the storyline. This film presented the anti-communist fear of Thai people in the 1970s and 1980s, and promoted the right-wing agenda by admiring the three institutions. Furthermore, the supernatural power—and its influence which most Thai people believe in were presented in the film.
The Villain in Nang Bu and Nang Sathorn Sungkhom

The villains in Thai films represent the fears and loathing of Thai people. The sense of otherness is presented by the villain in Thai films, and also emphasized as the enemy of the nation. Villains change by genre and period. During the Cold War, communists were the number one villains of Thailand. Dome Sukwong mentions that ‘in the 1960s and 1970s, Thai people including filmmakers were taught through successive government propaganda programs, to be afraid of communism. Thus, most of the villains in Thai films during this period, especially nang bu, were communists. Moreover, the military also supplied military equipment for the film producers’ (Dome Sukwong; Interview 7 February 2001). In the 1980s, the villains in nang bu were also communists. Following the collapse of the CPT in 1984, the role of communists as villains in nang bu decreased and it disappeared completely from Thai films in the 1990s.

In the 1980s, the villain, in nang bu began to change from communists to local gangsters, such as an itthiphon meud (literally, “dark influence”), phu mi itthiphon (literally, “man of influence”), and chao pho (godfather). The word itthipon meud was defined in the Prime Ministerial Order Number 66/2523 as ‘the big capitalists who oppressed and exploited the poor’. They include rice millers, contractors, mine owners, timber merchants and corrupt government officials. The itthipon meud were associated with various illegal businesses, such as gambling, smuggling, prostitution, illegal felling of forest reserves, and loan shark rackets (Bunbongkarn 1987, 69).

30 Order Number. 66/2523 was a policy to defeat the communists by using political offensives and destroying armed groups, in order to eliminate the evolutionary situation (Bunbongkarn 1987, 90, 91).
The word *phu mi itthiphon* is defined by Sombat Chantornwong as ‘someone who can exert pressure. This term is used by the authorities to label certain individuals whom they deem to constitute a threat to the country’s social, economic, and political stability’ (Chantornwong 2000, 55). Kewin Hewison explains that *chao pho* are powerful provincial businesspeople who control many local businesses—some legal and others illegal (for example prostitution, gambling) (Hewison 1997, 266). The meanings of the three words are similar and can be interchanged. This thesis uses ‘*phu mi itthiphon*’ to refer to the capitalists in urban or provincial areas, or corrupt government officials who are powerful and oppress the poor. They have a connection with politicians or bureaucrats and make various illegal businesses. These corrupt and powerful people became the new villains in Thai films, replacing the communists, after the CPT collapse and Thailand’s progression towards becoming a capitalist country in the 1980s. The conflicts in *nang bu* are no longer between the political ideals of democracy and communism but turned to depict the conflict between the local gangster, such as *itthiphon meud, phu mi itthiphon, or chao pho*, and poor people in provincial and urban areas. In *nang bu* most of these conflicts come from fighting for land, or against illegal business profit and oppression from *phu mi itthiphon* against poor people.

The villains in *nang sathorn sungkhom* are different from *nang bu*. The films criticize the bureaucratic system represented by corrupt government officials such as policeman, district officer, and *phu mi itthiphon*. Bad governance is represented by the suffering of the protagonists. Thus, it can be said that the villains in *nang sathorn sungkhom* originate from bad governance. On the other hand, the villains in *nang bu* are the other that seeks to destroy security of the state.
In such films, the monarchy, the Buddhist monkhood and the military are not represented as villains. This confirms that the three groups are powerful and sacrosanct institutions in Thai society. However, following the massacre on May 1992, the military was criticized in underground films such as *Top Boot on My Head* (dir. Wasan Sittikete, 1993), *Land of Laugh* (dir. Manit Sriwanitphum, 1993) and *Just Game* (dir. Kumron Khunnadirok, 1993). The three films will be explored in the section, ‘Third Cinema in the 1990s’.

**Nang Wai Ruen (Teen Film)**

In the 1980s, when conflicts between leftists and rightists declined, the economy boomed and the young middle-class expanded (Boonyak etmala 1992, 89). At this time, television and video boomed, and adults were no longer the main audiences of films. They were happy to watch videotape and television in their houses. Nevertheless, young people still went out to socialize, shop—and also to see movies. Since 1986, many big movie theatres (those with more than 1000 seats) have been demolished to build shopping malls. Mini-theatres in shopping malls boomed and cinemas became one of the commodities in the shopping mall (Uabumrungjit 1997, 96). The shopping mall became a teen centre where the young could buy teen commodities such as fast food, clothes, teen magazines, pop-music cassette-tapes, and also see movies. Teen films became the new trend of Thai films from the middle of the 1980s.

The film studies dictionary defines teen film as ‘films featuring teenage protagonists in narratives focusing on the difficulties in, and responsibilities of, coming of age and specifically addressed to young audience.’ (Blandford, Grant et al. 2001, 238). In
Thailand, teen films are called *nang wai ruen* (teen film); they are the films that present the Thai teenage ways of life and of thinking, the relationships between friends, and those between young people and adults. Adrian Martin: that ‘the teen movie is not a strict, enclosed genre’ (Martin 1994, 65). The *nang wai ruen* is also present in many genres. Most of the *nang wai ruen* are comedies such as *Chalui* (dir. Adirek Watleela, 1988); some are drama—*Lok Thang Bai Hai Nai Kon Daew* (*Romatic Blue*, dir. Rachain Limtrakun, 1995), action—*Take See Rak Lop Krot Laew* (dir. Ong-anrt Singlampong, 1999), and thrillers, for example 303 *Klou Kra Arkat* (dir. Sonjing Srisupab, 1998).

*Nang Wai Ruen* was first introduced in the 1970s, when university students played a significant role in political affairs. Somboonsuk Niyomsiri, the new wave director in this period created *Wai-on-la-won* (dir. Somboonsuk Niyomsiri, 1976), the first *nang wai ruen* in Thailand (Tongket 1996, 1). This film was successful in the box office and received favorable critiques. It was a good start for *nang wai ruen* in Thailand. *Wai-on-la-won* is a story of Taom, a poor country youth who comes to study at the university in Bangkok. He works as a labourer while he studies in the university. The atmosphere of a peaceful lower-middle class community, complete with garden and clean canal, in suburban Bangkok, is shown in this film. The film is not only a comedy but also a nostalgic film that talked about a peaceful community, while in this period the political atmosphere was intense, and the universities were full of radical students. Somboonsuk Niyomsiri said about his film:

> *Wai-on-la-won* was produced in a period when the conflicts between leftists and rightists were extreme. In that time university students were powerful… Honestly, I
was dissatisfied the university students who wanted to be leaders of poor people. I
think they could not (Somboonsuk Niyomsiri interviewed by National Film Archive 6
May 2000; trans.by Patson Sungsri).

Thus the hero Taom does not become involved in political activities when he studies in
the university. He understands the poor people because of his work as a labourer. After
he graduates, he remains good friends with his fellow labourers. The film showed that a
peaceful society is created though the harmony between educated people (Taom) and
the working class (Taom’s friends).

In the late 1970s another group of film directors sought to produce apolitical films. One
of these directors was Supawat Jongsiri (whose pseudonym is Supaksorn) who
produced Rak Talent (Cheeky Love dir. Supawat Jongsiri, 1978), a comedy about
university students, their loves and lives. He used university students to perform as
themselves in his film. The film portrayed characters such as an ‘artistic guy’ from
Silpakorn University, and a ‘sweet girl’ from Chulalongkorn University. The film
presented the university students enjoying their lives in their university, by playing,
travelling, and courting girls. The film was successful and ranked Jongsiri as an
outstanding teen film director. After the success of Rak Talent, Jongsiri produced many
nang wai ruen that presented the lives of university students. He also used to perform
in his films, for example in Wan Wan Young Warn You (dir. Supawat Jongsiri, 1983),
Wan Nee Young Me Tour (Today, dir. Supawat Jongsiri, 1983) and 18 Karat (dir.
Supawat Jongsiri, 1985). Moreover, he also had a publishing house named Bong-Khote
for publishing teen magazines; this publishing house produced funny stories about
university students’ love lives. Thus, Jongsiri was not only a teen film director but he
also introduced a culture of hedonistic university life to Thai teenagers.
The young protagonists (in the films from Somboonsuk Niyomsiri and Supaksorn) did not concern themselves with political activities that many university students in the period of 1970s were interested in. The films were romantic comedies, and they presented the other side of the university students in the 1970s, who sought only enjoyment whilst at university. The films were a sign that the student movement had started to decline in power in the late 1970s.

After the success of *Wai On-la-won* (1976) and *Rak Talent* (1978), many *nang wai ruen* were released; however, they did not dominate the film market. In the 1980s and the early 1990s there were three successful *nang wai ruen*: *Shem Noi Noui Ka Lon Mark Noui* (*Happy Go Lucky*, dir. Adirek Watleela and Thanit Jitnukun, 1985), *Boonchu Phu Na Rak* (*Boonchu the Nice Guy*, dir. Bandit Ritthakon, 1988), and *Kling Wai Korn Phoa Sorn Wai* (*The Rolling Stone*, dir. Somjing Srisuphab, 1991). These three *nang wai ruen* began the heyday of the *nang wai ruen* genre.

*Shem Noi Noui Ka Lon Mark Noui* (*Happy Go Lucky*, dir. Adirek Watleela and Thanit Jitnukun, 1985) and *Preum* (dir. Adirek Watleela and Thanit Jitnukun, 1986)—the second part of *Shem Noi Noui Ka Lon Mark Noui*—began the period of *nang wai ruen* (Santitawat 1997, 131), and made the two directors Adirek Watleela and Thanit Jitnukun prominent. These two films were slapstick comedies, stories about young male graduates who live in the same tenement in Bangkok. The locations and activities used were places familiar to teenagers, such as tenements, and spending time at shopping malls, fast food restaurants, and the swimming pool. Pop music was also used in the films. The directors used the young models from teen magazines to star in these
movies. Adirek said about his films, ‘I used gags from Hollywood films, Hong Kong films, and a Thai comic magazine *Kai Hoa Roog*’ (Sangchuroag 1987, 27). The films combined both the Western style and Asian style, thus the films are funny and in fashion for Thai teenagers. The success of *Shem Noi Noui Ka Lon Mark Noui* and *Preum* encouraged film directors to produce many *nang wai ruen*.

In 1988, *Boonchu Phu Na Rak* (*Boonchu the Nice Guy*, dir. Bandit Ritthakon, 1988)—a funny story about a naïve country boy who went to study at a university in Bangkok—brought Bandit Ritthakon recognition as a director. He created the character of Boonchu who represented Thai peasant characteristics (such as shyness and humility) in a jovial manner, spoke with a provincial accent, and made this fact out to be a joke. Moreover, this character had not graduated from high school, but was ordained as a Buddhist monk and successfully completed his studies in a temple. This character of Boonchu made the film *Boonchu Phu Na Rak* different from the other *nang wai ruen* where most of the characters are the fashionable young Bangkok middle class. Thus, the Boonchu films made audiences nostalgic for the naïve character of the peasant and a peaceful Thai village.

Owing to the success of *Boonchu Phu Na Rak*, Bandit Ritthakon created the following film about of Boonchu in 6 parts—and every part was successful. Thus, the character of Boonchu influenced other *nang wai ruen* protagonists, such as the hero in *Kwam Rak Korng Khun Chui* (*Mr. Chui’s Love*, dir. Bandit Ritthakon, 1989)—who is a shy university student; and the heroine in *Bab Wa Loke Nee Mee Nam Toa Hu Kab Kru Rabeab* (*The Soy Milk and Teacher Rabeab*, dir Panya Nimchareanpong, 1994) who
came from Supanburi province (the same province as Boonchu) and speaks with a provincial accent.

The success of the films of the directors Adirek, Thanit, and Bandit created a film market which led to the production of *nang wai ruen* in the late 1980s. In the early 1990s, *Kling Wai Korn Phoa Sorn Wai* (*The Rolling Stone* dir. Somjing Srisuphab, 1991), a funny story of high school students, was very successful. It focused on the coming-of-age of high school students, as they searched for their skills, dreams and futures. The film showed a group of high school boys who were happy and not interested in study as they grew up. This was a successful *nang wai ruen* which used high school students (boys and girls) as protagonists. After *Kling Wai Korn Phoa Sorn Wai*, high school students became protagonists of *nang wai ruen* instead of university students or graduates: for example *A-nueng Kid Teung Phor Sang Keb* (dir. Bandit Rittakon, 1992), and *Kraplong Ban Ka San* (dir. Chatchai Kaew-sa-wang, 1993).

The *nang wai ruen* produced by these three film directors influenced many *nang wai ruen*. In the 1990s, this genre remained popular and came to dominate the market. Moreover, the big music companies, such as RS Promotion and Grammy Entertainment, expanded to include a film section. The companies used their pop stars to be protagonists, and music video directors became film directors. For example, the film *Lok Thang Bai Hai Nai Khon Daew* (*The Romantic Blue*, dir. Rachain Limtrakun, 1995) produced by RS Promotion Music Company, used singer super-stars to play the hero and the heroine, while the film director, Rachain Limtrakun was originally a music video director.

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Most of *nang wai ruen* present the relationship between friends who study in the same school, or university, or live in the same tenement. The young’s activities in *nang wai ruen* are studying, playing, and courting. Most of the protagonists are middle class who live in a big city such as Bangkok or Chiangmai[^31], which are full of shopping malls, fast food restaurants, concert halls, schools and universities. In the same way the audiences are also the young middle-class who feel familiar changing image of nation with the characters and location. Besides the city, the other popular locations are the seashore or national parks, where the young go on vacations and camping trips. The protagonists in *nang wai ruen* are the modern lifestyle models for Thai teenagers. *Nang wai ruen* do not have sex scenes. They present only ‘puppy love’. This is because the film directors are aware of film censorship laws, and that the films would be banned if they depicted or suggested lasciviousness or sexual relations (Boonyakatemala 1992, 73).

The relationship between young people and adults is also presented in *nang wai ruen* between such groups as parents and progeny, teachers and students, seniors and freshmans. These relationships between ‘*phu yai*’ (literally, “big man, patron”) and ‘*phu noi*’ (literally, “small man, client”). Phaitoon explains the meaning of *phu yai* and *phu noi*:

> The *phu yai* is distinguished either by his position and status in society or his high rank in the administration, his age, and his experience. The *phu noi* should behave respectfully and considerately toward his superior and should ask for the latter’s opinion and not offer his own in case it differs from that of the *phu yai* or disturbs him (Phaitoon, 1970 cited in Girling 1981, 40).

[^31]: Chiangmai is a traditional and beautiful city in northern Thailand. This province is popular with tourists.

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In most of nang wai ruen, the relationship between teacher and student is very popular and jokes are made about this relationship. In the films, the naughty students tease or provoke their teacher, and the teacher punishes them in funny ways. In these films, the phu noi challenges the power of phu yai. Finally, at the end of the films, the students and their teacher understand each other. The phu noi (the students) become good adults with the support of the phu yai (the teachers). The phu yai turns out to be a powerful and respected person at the end of the story. The relationship between parents and progeny presents family problems—such as the generation gap and conflicts about choices for further study, namely fine art and music, as opposed to a vocational profession—are the issues on which these conflicts are based. However, at the end of these films they come to understand each other and the young can choose the field they want to study, with the support of their parents. Thus nang wai ruen retain the Thai conservative idea about hierarchy.

In the period of the political uprisings in the 1970s, the power of phu yai (the dictatorial government and the military) was overthrown by phu noi (university students and poor people) in the political events of 14 October 1973. After the massacre of 6 October 1976 at Thammasat University, phu yai became powerful again and the role of phu noi in politics decreased. The status of phu noi in nang wai ruen was similar to the political context in the 1980s and 1990s—one which was dominated by phu yai, who possessed power in Thailand. The challenge from phu noi to phu yai was temporary both in nang wai ruen and in real history.
In *nang wai ruen* in the 1970s to 1990s the idea of the three institutions—nation, religion and the monarchy—are not presented obviously as they are in *nang bu* (action film). Religion is represented by Buddhist monks in the comedy films *Boonchu Phu Na Rak* (*Boonchu the Nice Guy*, dir. Bandit Ritthakon, 1988) and *Boonchu 2 Nong Mai* (*Boonchu 2 the Freshman*, dir. Bandit Ritthakon, 1989). The Buddhist monk is the centre of spirituality and a teacher of the young hero who lives in a small village in Supanburi province. In the film the Buddhist monk’s role is to preach to the hero and help him become a good person. He appears in only one scene in the beginning of the films but the content of his preaching provides key words for the story: ‘pay attention to your studies and avoid a girl’ and ‘work hard towards passing your entrance examination and make your mother happy’. Besides *Boonchu Phu Na Rak* and *Boonchu 2 Nong Mai*, Buddhist monks are rarely present in *nang wai ruen* because most of the films of this genre are comedy and present the happy life of urban teenagers. So, it is hard for the filmmaker to present the Buddhist monk (a respected institution) with a sense of humor. For the same reason, the monarchy is not presented in *nang wai ruen*. It is not suitable for the highest institution, monarchy, to be presented in this genre, which is full of funny stories. The nation is presented through the locations. These locations show the characteristics of the landscape and of people in particular locations. These help the audience to realize the boundary of ‘nation’.

**Thai Cinema in the 1990s: The Period of Military Decline**

In the 1990s two significant political events occurred in Thailand. The first of these was the *Prusapa Tamin* (Black May): the people’s uprising against the military, which led to the massacre on 17-20 May 1992 in Bangkok. The second event was the Chavalit
government’s announcement of the baht devaluation on 1 July 1997, which that caused the beginning of the economic crisis. These two events impacted on Thai society in many ways.

1. The Political Context of the 1990s

*Prusapa Tamin (Black May, 1992)*

The cause of *Prusapa Tamin* (Black May) occurred on 23 February 1991, when the National Peace Keeping Council (NPKC), a military junta that was allied with the Class 5 graduates of the military academy, as well as with big business groups, (Samudavanija 1997, 53) made a coup to overthrow the civilian Chatichai government. The main reason articulated for the NPKC coup was perceived corruption (Phongpaichit and Baker 1996, 181). The new government was led by appointed Prime Minister, Anand Panyarachun, who was chosen by the NPKC and who governed until the election in March 1992 (Chumsanit 2000, 35).

During this time the NPKC controlled the political system and prepared a new constitution. The new constitution stated that the NPKC could nominate the Senate, and gave these House significant legislative and parliamentary powers. Thus, the prime minister could be chosen by the parliament—and the position was not reserved for a member of parliament (Hewison 1993, 162). At that time, Thailand was ruled by the military again. According to Pasuk Phongpaichit, ‘many people felt anxious about the return of the military, and did not feel that this fit with the image of Thailand as the modern state’ (Phongpaichit and Baker 1996, 189). The NPKC staged their coup during
the period of economic boom (the late 1980s to the early 1990s), when the middle class rapidly expanded. However, as a result of the 23 February 1991 coup, the economy slowed down (Charoenlert 1993, 137). Therefore the middle class was the main group that lost their benefits following the coup. Hence, in the protest against the NPKC and General Suchinda in 1992, the middle class was the main group of the demonstrators.

After the NPKC-controlled election on 22 March 1992, the military-backed Samakki Tham Party was firmly entrenched, with the largest number of seats. Narong Wongvan, the Samakki Tham Party leader, was nominated to be prime minister. At that time he was publicly discredited by the United States Representation as having a connection with a drug dealer. General Suchinda Kraprayoon soon resigned as army commander, and afterword the NPKC presented General Suchinda as prime minister on 7 April 1992 (Chumsanit 2000, 188).

The appointment of prime minister General Suchinda, showed that Thailand was once again under the control of the military—especially the Class 5 group—the conservative military faction that was loyal to the monarchy (Phongpaichit and Baker 1996, 557). By 1992, the members of the Class 5 group held many high ranks in the Supreme Command, the Army, and the Police. Moreover, the group controlled major enterprises, such as the Telephone Organization of Thailand and Thai Airways International (Samudavanija 1997, 53). This meant that the Class 5 group held hegemonic power at that time. Consequently, many pro-democracy groups—such as scholars, businessmen, students and politicians—were dissatisfied. As discussed in the 1980s section, the military consisted of different factions for example the Young Turks, the Class 5 group and the Democracy military. Major General Chamlong Srimuang, a member of the
Young Turk military faction, who had a conflict with the Class 5 group in the 1980s, was one of the mainstays in the demonstrations in May 1992 against Prime Minister Suchinda Kraprayoon and the NPKC.

Major protests commenced on 8 April 1992, after the NPKC presented General Suchinda Kraprayoon as the prime minister. The protestors demanded that General Suchinda resign, and that the NPKC constitution, that gave military domination over parliament, be amended. In April the demonstrators numbered about 20,000 people. But within a month this number increased to more than 200,000, and forming a mass street demonstration during 17-20 May 1992 (Piriyarangsan and Phongpaichit 1993, 27).

The demonstrators in May 1992 were different from those who had protested in the two political movements in 1973 and 1976. The latter involved mostly university students. In the May 1992 protests, most of the demonstrators were business executives, stockbrokers, civil servants, owners of small and medium businesses, scholars, and other white-collar workers (Piriyarangsan and Phongpaichit 1993, 27), who were unhappy with the economic decline following the coup on 23 February 1992. Andrew Brown has assessed, ‘this protest represented the increased power of the middle class in Thai politics’ (Brown 1997, 163). This was a new phenomenon in Thai society, and it was reflected in the underground film Just Game (dir. Kumron Khunnadirok, 1993).

Students and activists also participated in the protest, but they were a minority group in the mob. Moreover, they were involved on an individual basis (Piriyarangsan and Phongpaichit 1993, 27). However, in the three days of violence from 17 to 20 May
students and youths from the slums and the urban underclass sustained the protest until its lethal climax (Piriyarangsan and Phongpaichit 1993, 34). Hence, the protest became a collaboration of the middle class and the under class.

The leaders of the 1992 protest came from two groups. The first group included representatives from the Campaign for Popular Democracy (CPD) and the other was the Student’s Federation of Thailand (SFT). They were the mainstay during the first part of the protest; most of them people had been students and activists in the political movements of the 1970s. The leader of the second group was Major General Chamlong Srimuang, the leader of the opposition Palang Dharma Party (The Moral Force Party), and a former member of the Young Turk military faction from the 1980s (Feature Magazine Academic Section 2000, 200). On 11 May 1992, the two groups assembled and formed the Confederation for Democracy (CFD) (Bamber 1997, 241) in order to decrease the conflicts between the two groups. Thus, the leaders in the protest were an assembly of left-wing activists from the 1970s and former military officers.

During 17-20 May, the military violently suppressed the protest. They fired on the demonstrators; more than 100 people died and a large number were injured (Piriyarangsan and Phongpaichit 1993, 26, 27). On 20 May at 11 pm King Bhumibol called General Suchinda Kraprayoon and Major General Chamlong Srimuang to his palace for a televised meeting to stop the crisis. Three days later General Suchinda resigned as prime minister (Leifer 1996, 260). The military-dominated government yielded to the demonstrators’ demand. They amended the constitution and permitted another general election in September 1992 (Piriyarangsan and Phongpaichit 1993, 26, 27).
The political movement in May 1992 showed that the military was no longer the major power in Thai politics. The middle class had become a powerful group that could negotiate with the government. And as King Bhumibol’s intervention demonstrated, the monarchy remains the most respectful and powerful institution in Thailand.

After the massacre, videotapes of CNN and BBC footage—showing the military firing into the demonstrators—were sold on the streets of Bangkok, and distributed up-country through non-government organizations (NGOs) (Phongpaichit and Baker 1996, 190). These CNN and BBC videotapes were a positive effect of globalization. The Confederation for Democracy (CFD) also produced the videotape titled *Bantuk See Dum (The Black Record)*. This videotape presented the political events in chronological order, starting with the coup on February 1991 and ending with King Bhumibol’s intervention on 20 May 1992. The videotape did not criticize or analyse the events; and by ending with the intervention of the monarch, it emphasized that the monarchy was the strongest institution that could bring peace back to the Thai nation. For that reason, this videotape was distributed by NGOs throughout Thailand.

**Cultural Products in the 1990s**

*Plaeng Pear Chewit in the 1990s*

During the political event *Prusapa Tamin* (Black May), the *plaeng pear chewit* was played to support the pro-democracy protests. However, most of the *plaeng pear chewit* bands that played in this protest were the bands from the 1970s, and activist bands, but
there was no band of university students. After the *Prusapa Tamin*, the *plaeng pear chewit* was played in the protests of grass-roots organizations against the government. These songs were played by a handful of activists and local musicians bands.

After the *Prusapa Tamin*, three underground films were produced: *Land of Laugh* (dir. Manit Sriwanitphum, 1992), *Top Boot on My Head* (dir. Wasan Sittikhet, 1993), and *Just Game* (dir. Kounron Khunadirok, 1993). The three films did not use the *plaeng pear chewit*. By the 1990s the *plaeng pear chewit* had become associated with the legend of the political movements of the 1970s.

**Literature in the 1990s**

In the 1990s, the ‘serious’ novel witnessed a new movement and the creation of a new literary style. The acclaimed authors who created this new style included the writer Win Leaywarin, who wrote the novel *Prachatiptai Bon Sen Kanarn* (*Democracy on Parallel*). The novel presented the political movement, from the 1950s up to the massacre of May 1992. Leaywarin depicted the struggle between the left and the right political wings, and wrote using a similar style as newspapers article as a background for this novel. This novel received the ‘SEA Writer’s Award’ (The Southeast Asia Writer’s Award) in 1997. Win’s short story *Sing Mee Chewit Tee Reak Wa Khon* (*A Creature Named Human*) also won an SEA Writer’s Award in 1999. In this story, Leaywarin also used the style of a news article. Another successful author, Prabda Yoon, also adopted this device as his new style.
Popular magazines of this period presented stories of the young, fashionable, middle class. The style was chic and showy. The literary movement in this period emphasized style over content. It preferred a style like advertising that focused on image and music, not dialogue and content. Euthana Mukdasanit commented:

In this period there were not any books that talked about social affairs, unlike the 1970s and 1980s, which had good novels such as Kam Pipaksa (The Verdict, written by Chat Kobjitti in 1982) that presented an identity of nowadays. In the 1990s there were no novels to inspire filmmakers to make a film’ (Euthana Mukdasanit, interview 2001).

Pinyo Kongtong has also discussed the literature movement in the 1990's stating, ‘in this period new writers enjoyed creating new styles, but neglected serious content’ (Pinyo Kongtong, interview 2002).

The cultural movements of the 1990s changed in tune with Thailand’s move towards an entrenched capitalist economy. Music, TV programs, and literature emphasized fashionable style more than serious content. Music, TV programs and literature merely became a commodity. Most of these were produced for the middle class, especially urbanites, who possessed a high purchasing power in this decade.

2. Third Cinema in the 1990s

In the 1990s, overtly political films were again produced, depicting the political events of 17-20 May 1992. In 1992 and 1993, three films that criticized the military actions and the government were produced. These were Land of Laugh (dir. Manit

These three films each criticized the role of the Thai military in Thai politics and economics. The films were not shown in commercial movie-theatres but at the national film archive in 1993. Thus the audiences of the three films were limited to a small group of scholars, and activists. In contrast, videotapes of *Bantuk See Dum* (*The Black Record*, produced by The Confederation for Democracy (CFD), 1992) and the footage from CNN and the BBC were disseminated extensively.

*Land of Laugh* (dir. Manit Sriwanitphum and friends, 1992) is an experimental film that received a budget and collaboration from the Goethe Institute (in Germany) and the Thai National Film Archive. The film criticized the military and the politicians. It was produced and shown at the national film archive after the massacre on May 1992. The film won an award from the Young Asian Cinema in 1992 at Tokyo. The filmmakers compared the military and politicians with animals like the tiger, the lion, the bison and the rhinoceros. In Thailand these animals represent wickedness and unfaithfulness. The film ridiculed the military by showing an image of the military parading as walking robots inter-cut with images of dinosaurs and of children laughing.

*Top Boot on My Head* (dir. Wasan Sittikete, 1993) is also an experimental film, again presenting the image of the military as an oppressor of Thai people. In this film the presenter wears a suit and has a military top boot on his head. He walks around Bangkok’s streets, in places such as a bus station, a shopping mall, and a fast food restaurant. His face shows no concern with the top boot on his head. At the same time
no pedestrians are concerned about the top boot on the actor’s head. At the end of this film he reads a newspaper on a lawn. The presenter in the suit is a representative of the Thai middle class who are unconcerned with military oppression. It is an absurdist satire, showing the daily life under military oppression.

*Just Game* (dir. Koumron Khunnadirok, 1993) is another film that criticized the role of the military in Thai politics, and was financed by a British television station, channel 4 (Boonyaketmala 1999, 254). The film uses a soldier who went to suppress the demonstrators (in the protest of 17-20 May 1992), as a narrator. The first section shows the soldier telling the story of the massacre, and expressing his guilt and confusion over the incident. Footage of the military firing on, and beating and tormenting the demonstrators is shown. The political events of 14 October 1973 and the massacre on 6 October 1976 are also presented in the film. Thus, it demonstrates that the military is a powerful institution, which dominated Thai politics for a long time.

More of the film *Just Game* courageously presents the complicity of the monarchy and the military, although this relationship is not presented in great detail. According to the ‘lese-majesty’ law, the monarchy is the highest institution in Thailand. But the film presents the role of the monarch as a warrior in ancient times, as well as describing how, at the present time, the monarchy continues to support the military, just as the military has a duty to protect the monarchy.

This film shows the negative role of the military in Thai politics. The three sequences of bloody suppression in the 1970s and 1990s are powerfully presented. Moreover, the film refers to the relationship between the monarchy and the military. Unsurprisingly,
the film was sponsored by a foreign country and was not disseminated extensively. *Just Game*, however, recorded the negative role of the Thai military in Thai politics evidently.

3. Mainstream Thai Films in the 1990s

In the 1990s, Thai film declined in popularity. During this period the number of Thai films decreased, falling to 9 films in 1999; however, the small numbers of the films produced have received acclaim including many popular films from the new, young filmmakers who came from advertising and music video. The style of the films from the new directors in the late 1990s was different from the previous era. They presented films that were influenced by advertising and music videos. The new directors emphasized spectacular visual imagery, with a new editing style, and production design. Previous Thai films mostly placed emphasis on content, dialogue, and the use of sequential events. This period was a turning point for Thai film after which, it move to a postmodern style in the late 1990s

In the 1990s, *nang chewit* (melodrama), *nang sathorn sungkhom* (social problem films), *nang bu* (action films), and *nang wai ruen* (teen films) declined in popularity. Political ideas were not present in the films as in previous decades. In this period there was more focus on urban life and people enjoying consumerism. Therefore, the stories of city life, the urban middle-class, and white-collar classes were introduced in many Thai films. While the role of the monarchy and Buddhist monks do not change, they were presented as respected institutions as in Thai films in the previous decades. On the other hand, the
role of the military declined in this decade, owing to the massacre on Prusapa Tamin the after-effect of which was to limit the role of the military in Thai politics.

1. The Story of Urban Middle-Class

The Thai middle class expanded from the period of the 1980s, when the economy boomed, and this group showed their power in the political event Prusapa Tamin. In the 1990s, the idea of urbanization expanded around the country by means of television programs, radio programs, newspapers, and films. Therefore, in this period the number of films that presented the story of urban life and the middle class increased. On the other hand, the number of films produced for provincial people—such as action films and ghost films—declined. Meanwhile lakorn toratat (Thai soap opera), which had boomed since the 1980s, satisfied the people who enjoyed the conventional style of Thai film.

In the early 1990s, when Thailand became a capitalistic country, until the economy went bankrupt, in the late 1990s, most of the films presented the stories of people in the big city (Bangkok). For example, in Luk Ba Tieaw La Sud (dir. Ittisunthorn Wichairak, 1993), Phuchay Hoa Jai Mai Pei Ruea (dir. Pisuth Prang-sang-aiem, 1995), Rak Tai Bot Tee Nueng (dir. Suteb Tanniran, 1995), the main characters are young white-collar workers. Their routine work and life is boring. They do not have any political mission or case for which to fight—for right-wing or left-wing groups—as did the characters of Thai film in the 1970s and 1980s. So they try to find something exciting in their life. A miracle is an alternative way for these characters to find excitement in their lives, like the hero in Luk Ba Tieaw La Sud, who knows his ‘death-day’, and has only one day to
do something that he has never done before. The hero in Phuchaey Hoa Jai Mai Pei Ruea becomes a woman in the daytime, and this brings him to be a close friend of the woman he falls in love with. These films presented the daydreams of many white-collar workers in the big city, whose lives were routine. The white-collar worker was introduced into Thai film during this period.

On 1 July 1997, Chavalit’s government announced the baht devaluation, and this was the beginning of an economic crisis (Chaiwarakan 2000, 17). The anxiety of the economic crisis was presented in some films. For instance in Cloning Khon Copy Khon (The Cloning, dir. Piti Jatupat, 1999) the anxiety of the economic crisis is seen in the hero. He has his own small computer business and has to work hard to survive in the period of economic downturn. In the same year, Reueng Talok Hok Kaow (Sixty-nine, dir. Pen-ek Ratnarueng, 1999) presented the story of a working woman who was laid off from a finance company. In this period, the number of Thai films decreased dramatically. Among the small number of the films produced, most of them presented the story of the urban middle-class.

2. The Monarchy

In the 1990s the monarchy retained its status as the Thai institution worthy of the highest respect. Especially after King Bhumibol intervened in Prusapa Tamin Thai people adore him as the hero who ended the crisis.

Reflecting this, role of the monarchy in Thai film in the 1990s retained the highest position, solving problems, making the final decision, and symbolizing of ‘Thainess’.
For example, in *Am Daeng Mearn Kab Nai Rid* (dir. Ched Songsri, 1994) the monarchy was presented at the end of the story to make a good, right, final decision for Mearn’s court case. Moreover, in many Thai films, the image of King Bhumibol was presented in government offices, such as in the room of district officers, in schools, and in military camps. His image was placed with the tri-color flag and an image of the Buddha. These are the symbols of the three institutions—nation, religion and the monarchy—and they are placed in the government, which that are representative of state power.

3. The Military

After Prusapa Tamin the role of the military in politics declined. In the same way, the role of the military in Thai film also declined, especially in the role of the hero. Military heroes were popular in the period of the military government from the 1960s to the 1980s. However, in the 1990s some Thai film stills presented the story of the military—comedy films such as *Taharn Ying Harm Harm Ruien 11* (dir. Ken, 1993), *Kong Roy 501 Rim Daeng* (dir. Manoon Wanayok, 1993), and *Kong Pan Tahan Gain* (dir. Prayoon Wongchien, 1996), and the action film *Kong Pan Dib 234* (dir. Roungroth, 1993).

The three comedy films are B-grade films, produced for showing in provincial areas. Moreover the heroes were privates and played the role as of clowns. This presented the military as having lost power and popularity among the urban middle-class. However, the military—even a military officer or private—never play the role of the villain. This showed that the military still retained some power, even though their power had declined after Prusapa Tamin. On the other hand, the police do not have the same
political power as the military. Thus, unsurprisingly, the villains in some Thai films since the people’s uprising from the 1970s until 1999 are police, such as in *Thebtida Rong Ram* (Hotel Angel, dir. Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, 1974), *Khon Leang Chang* (The Elephant Keeper, dir. Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, 1989), and *Kon Jorn* (dir. Attaporn Thaihiran, 1999).

4. Religion

The Buddhist monk still has an important role in Thai film, even though he does not play a role as a protagonist. The Buddhist monk is the centre of spirituality and can solve problems in the films. For example, in the science fiction film, *Kawao Tee Bang Plaeng* (dir. Nirattisai Kanjaruek, 1994), the abbot is the representative of goodness, and the spiritual centre to help the villagers fight the aliens. In *Am Daeng Mearn Kab Nai Rid* (dir. Cheard Songsri, 1994), the abbot has a role as teacher. In *2499 Antapan Klong Meong* (*Daeng Bailey and Gangster*, dir. Nonzee Nimibuth, 1997), the Buddhist monk is a symbol of goodness. Daeng, the head of the gangsters is implored by his mother to quit his illegal job and join the monkhood to seek redemption. In *Nang Nak* (dir. Nonzee Nimibuth, 1999), the Buddhist master has a role for giving a medical treatment, to the hero and suppressing the ghost. Thus, the Buddhist monk is not only a representative of Buddhism, but also a symbol of knowledge, goodness and safety.

Conclusion: The Politics of ‘Nation’

Politics is a significant factor that has influenced the development of Thai films. Since the period of absolute monarchy, film was used for promoting the monarchy. When
Thailand changed to a constitutional monarchy in 1932, Thai film was produced to propagandize governments. This chapter has concentrated on Thai cinema in political terms since the period of people’s uprising in the 1970s until the present (2004). Three political events—the events of 14 October 1973, the massacre on 6 October 1976 at Thammasat University, and Prusapa Tamin (Black May)—influenced the development of Thai film. The new genre nang sathorn sungkhom (social problem films) emerged in the 1970s, after the people’s uprising in 1973 and the Thai people’s subsequent enjoyment of democracy. Nang sathorn sangkom presented the problems besetting Thai society, and also criticized the bureaucracy. However, their content was not as strong as in Third Cinema films, which were produced as political underground films. These two genres represent of leftist ideas. Meanwhile rightist ideas, namely those which sought to propagandize the three pillars (nation, religion, and the monarchy) are presented in nang bu (action films). The problems in nang bu, like communist oppression of the nation, religion, and the monarchy, and the phu mi itthiphon (local gangsters) who oppress villagers, are solved by the state through the luk soa chao ban (village scout), policemen, and military, with support from Buddhist monks. Nang bu extols the importance of the three pillars, while nang sathorn sangkhom presents the role of the monarchy and Buddhist monks in either negative or positive roles. In nang sathorn sangkhom and Third Cinema films, social problems are caused by the state. On the other hand, the problems in nang bu are solved by the state.

The massacre on 6 October 1976 at Thammasat University caused a cessation in the production of nang sathorn sungkhom and Third Cinema films until the 1980s, when political tensions declined. Nang sathorn sungkhom was produced again and declined
in popularity in the 1990s. For nang bu in the 1980s, the villains changed from communists—who were common villains in the 1970s—to the phu mi itthiphon.

During the 1980s when the economy expanded, apolitical films termed nang wai ruen (teen films) were produced and achieved success amongst the teen market. The young characters in this genre are not concerned with social problems and the three pillars are not immediately obvious. The nang wai ruen presents the nation through landscape, language, and dialect.

In the 1990s, the political events of Prusapa Tamin inspired filmmakers to produce Third Cinema films again, and these films emphasized the role of the military in political affairs. Meanwhile, mainstream films did not develop any new genres. In the late 1990s, a group of filmmakers from the advertising and music video industries released Thai films in a postmodern style, and this style became the new trend for Thai film from 2000. The three pillars are once again presented in this new trend as respected institutions and also emphasize the characteristics of the Thai nation.

For thirty years (the 1970s to the 1990s) the three pillars have been represented in Thai national cinema. The monarchy and religion (Buddhism) are presented as respected institutions. Film censorship law protects the two institutions and the filmmakers are faithful to the two institutions. Thus, Thai national cinema strengthens the importance of the monarchy and religion (Buddhism). Meanwhile, perception of the bureaucracy as a representative of the Thai nation varies, according to the political climate and film genre. Clearly, political movements have an effect on the content and style of film genres.
Chapter 4: Conclusion

This thesis involved investigating characteristics of Thai national cinema in which I have argued that Thai cinema has its own unique character that differentiates it from other national cinemas. My approach relates to Thai social experience and aesthetic history, which focuses on the three pillars of nation, religion (Buddhism), and the monarchy. The three pillars are highly respected and powerful influences on way of life and thinking of Thai people. This thesis finds that the appearances of the three pillars in Thai cinema persist in Thai national identity. I therefore explored the three pillars’ interrelationship and influence on the development of Thai national cinema in cultural, economic, and political terms.

Thai cinema focus in culture terms relate to Buddhism and indigenous arts such as painting, drama, music/song, and literature. Buddhism is the root of Thai culture, which presents through ways of life, belief, and indigenous arts. Buddhism is presented noticeably in Thai cinema through the role of Buddhist monks, nuns, landscape of Buddhist temples, and the stories of the Buddha. The concept of Buddhism especially law of karma, suffering, and Buddhist precepts is also represented in Thai cinema as reward and punishment, redemption, and through story lines. Buddhist precepts also influence the film censorship criteria. Thai films are produced under Buddhist norms.

The indigenous arts influence on content and style of Thai film, and the three pillars present in indigenous arts are transferred to Thai cinema. The importance of Buddhism and the monarchy pass on incessantly from indigenous arts to the new media. Meanwhile national expression in indigenous arts, which is presented as land to protect
from the enemy, as landscape, and as Thai way of life, is also transmitted in contemporary Thai cinema whose development is also related to the development of Thai indigenous arts.

The study of Thai cinema in economic terms explored the development of Thai film business, which and how it relates to the monarchy, the government, the local film companies, and foreign films. The monarchy has been involved in the film business since the beginning of film history in Thailand. The monarch of that day introduced film in Thailand as a new hobby for the royals and high-ranking officials and also used film for promoting the monarchical institution. When groups of foreigners, Thai Chinese, and high-ranking Thai’s developed film production, exhibition, and distribution to the level of a film business, the monarchy was involved in establishing film companies, movie theaters, and enacted film censorship legislation. The role of the monarch in film business declined when the absolute monarchy was overthrown in 1932. He was replaced by governments, which sought to produce propaganda films and private film companies to make film businesses. Since then the development of Thai film businesses have been run by common people with low support from government. Since the 1970s, Thai film companies vertically integrated film production, exhibition, and distribution in one big film company. Since the 1990s the music companies and media company have also expanded film business sections. Thai film businesses competed with foreign films and other media such as television soap opera, videotape, and VCD. The development of Thai film business was improved by private film companies and the development followed the global film market. In all these developments what has been evident is the continuing presence and influence of the three pillars. Even as the industry moved away from the financial hold of the monarchy
the influence has not waned as seen in the ties that the royals continue to maintain with film production and distribution institutions.

Thai cinema in political terms was explored in three decades. The period of the people’s uprising and counter culture in the 1970s where the new Thai film genre nang sathorn sungkhom (social problems film) and Third cinema were introduced. In the 1980s the economy expanded and nang wai ruen (teen film) became popular. In the 1990s Thai film declined in popularity because Hollywood films became dominant in the local film market. However, in the late 1990s Thai film postmodern style was introduced. The political atmosphere correlates directly with the emergence or decline of film genres.

Political groups, leftist or rightist used Thai films to promote their political ideas. The role of the monarchy and Buddhist monkhood are presented as significant characters and no film has criticized or condemned these two institutions since the beginning of Thai film history (2004). Film censorship law protects the two institutions and film directors are faithful to the monarchy and Buddhism. The nation is presented in Thai film as land to be protected from enemies such as communists, local gangsters, or Burmese troops. Representatives of the ruling class such as government officials and policemen are varied according to the political atmosphere. The military however never portrayed in a negative light or criticized in Thai films. However as the country enters the 21st century it has come to grips with other themes and styles that in many ways could be seen to challenge the influence of the three pillars in Thai cinema. The growing Asian markets, the acclaim that Thai cinema gathers at international film festivals and indeed the combination of digital technologies of movie production have
all inclined the cinema towards newer influences and approaches. These developments have however still been contained within the three pillars’ impact.

More recently postmodern style and queer films have become a new trend of Thai cinema. The three pillars have been presented in the new mode of Thai cinema and maintain significant roles to present Thai identity in Thai cinema. It is imperative that these new trends also be discussed within the context of the Thai nation and account for the direction that Thai cinema is taking.

21st Century Thai Cinema, Postmodern and Queer Film

Following the decline in radicalism that marked the 1960s, the phenomenon of postmodernism was introduced to both First and Third World countries in the 1980s and 1990s. In this period the world saw the predominance of capitalist values (Stam 2000, 298). In Thailand the late 1980s saw the end of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), which was accompanied by a decline in political conflicts, and the economic boom. In that period media businesses such as telecommunications, cable television, and the internet grew to become powerful businesses. This resulted in the rapid spreading of information, and adoption of the modern life style, and consumerism from western countries. Meanwhile the phenomenon of postmodernism was also introduced to Thailand.

The word ‘postmodernism’ is used to refer to particular cultural texts and aims to describe a prevailing postmodern aesthetic in literature texts, television, music, architecture, film, and so on (Brooker 2001, 198). This section argues that Thai films in
The late 1990s were largely postmodern. These films blurred the line between high culture and pop culture, involved Thai nostalgia film, parody and intertextuality, thus creating a unique genre of film.

In the 1990s the number of Thai films being produced decreased dramatically (see table 5). During this time Thai film genres such as nang wai ruen (teen films), nang bu (action films), nang chewit (melodramas), and nang sathorn sungkhom (social problems films) were no longer popular and began to disappear from the local film market, and were largely replaced by American films.

Following the downturn in the Thai film industry new film directors trained in advertising such as Nonzee Nimibuth, Pen-ek Ratanaruang, Wisite Satsanatieng, and music video directors such as Pradya Pinkaew, Rachain Limtrakun initiated a move to produce a new style of Thai film. This new style was influenced by MTV and advertising, as well as being influenced by the globalization.

Jameson mentions postmodernism as ‘the effacement of some key boundaries or separations, most notably the erosion of the older distinction between high culture and so-called mass or pop culture’ (Jameson 1996, 186). Thai films that fall in the group of mass culture are “B” grade films that are produced on a low budget and are aimed at audiences from provincial areas. Mainstream films used the conventional Thai style that blends rot in one film (as explained in Chapter 1). In contrast, ‘high culture’ Thai films tend to be serious films, which focus on content and production techniques. These films are popular among the urban and educated population. In the late 1990s the ghost film Nang Nak (dir. Nonzee Nimibuth, 1999) was the first Thai film that blurred the line between high culture and pop culture. This ghost story is a legend of a Thai ghost that
is called Mae Nak Prakanong and the story has been produced in film many times such as *Mae Nak Prakanong* (dir. Rangsi Tasanapayak, 1959), *Mae Nak Prakanong* (dir. Saee Paopradit, produced around 1970s). However, most of these films were small production, B grade films. Nonzee reproduced the B grade film ghost story of *Mae Nak Prakanong* in a large-scale production that incorporated a focus on mise en scène, visual spectacle, production design and sound. The film director also reconstructed the original story of *Mae Nak Prakanong* by creating a new modern image for the heroine including such characteristics as short hair, chewing gum and writing the name of the heroine, using a different spelling to that used in the old version.

Another example of Thai postmodern film was the teenage ghost film *Pop Weed Sayong* (*Body Jumper*, dir. Haeman Chatemee, 2001) that used the popular B grade ghost film series *Ban Phee Pop* (*Ghoul’s House*, dir. Srisawat, 1989 to the early 1990s) and remade it in the new mode. *Pop Weed Sayong* used the aesthetics of a music video; young urban teenagers played the main characters, with pop music, and dance scenes featuring in the film. However the film retained elements of the original *Ban Phee Pop* such as a comic chase scene between *phee pop* and her victims. The film also parodies original films by using the actress to who played as a *phee pop* (ghoul) in the original series to play as an expert for subduing *phee pop* (ghoul). In the same way the films intertextually pays homage to the original film *Ban Phee Pop*.

Hayward explains that with the erosion between high and low art form, postmodernism has made space for minority cultures (Hayward 2000, 284). Gay and lesbian people form a minority culture in Thai society; this group has been presented in Thai film for a long time however they usually do not have a chance to be main characters.
Homosexuals usually play as supporting characters to the heroes and heroines as assistants and also as comic relief. For example in Mae Eye Saean (dir. Chutima Suwannarat, 1972) the heroine’s assistant is a lesbian, in Kaew (dir. Somboonsuk Niyomsiri, 1980) the heroine’s assistant is gay, and in Pratana Haeng Houjai (dir. Pisan Arkasanei, 1986) the hero assistant’s is gay. Since 2000 gay characters have been featured in films such as Satree Lek (Iron Ladies, dir. Younguth Thongkongthun, 2000) and Satree Lek 2 (Iron Ladies 2, dir. Younguth Thongkongthun, 2003) based on the true story of a gay volley ball team, Prang Chompu (Saving Private Tootsie, dir. Kittikorn Leawsirikun, 2002) told the story of a group of soldiers on a mission to save a group of gay people whose airplane had crushed in enemy territory on the border of Thailand and Burma. Beautiful Boxer (dir. Ekachai Uekrongthan, 2003) presented the true story of a gay Thai boxer. These films not only promote the stories of gays in Thai society as the main characters but also communicate the need to recognise the dignity of gay people as human beings.

Pastiche is the most significant of practices in postmodernism (Jameson 1996, 187). Hayward summarizes that ‘pastiche pertains to the symptomatic, in that it imitates previous genres and styles, but unlike parody, its imitation is not ironic and therefore not subversive. In its uninventiveness, pastiche is but a shadow of its former thing (parody). Postmodern art adopts from already existing images and objects and either repeats or reinvents them as the same’ (Hayward 2000, 277). According to Jameson ‘pastiche is very much within mass culture and it is known as the “nostalgia film”’ (Jameson 1996, 190).
Nostalgia films present history in a stylized or allegorical form; therefore nostalgia films do not present realness in the past but present the imagination of human history. Nostalgia films reconstruct the historical past and remake the past from the present time in order to foresee the future (Chan Sui Hung 2000, 256).

In the 1990s many Thai ‘nostalgia’ films were released. These films always refer to both the struggle of Thai people and the monarchy against Burmese troops in the Ayutthaya period, or emphasize the prosperous period of Thai film in the 1950s to the 1980s. These two groups of Thai films fall into the nostalgia paradigm that Bryan S. Turner summarized:

There is the sense of historical decline and loss, involving a departure from some golden age of ‘homefulness.’ Second, there is a sense of the absence or loss of personal wholeness and moral certainty. In this dimension, human history is perceived in term of a collapse of values, which once provided the unity of human relations, knowledge and personal experience’ (Turner, 1987 cited in Chan Sui Hung 2000, 268).

The films Bang Rajan (dir. Thanit Jitnukun, 2000) and Suriyothai (dir. Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, 2000) are two Thai nostalgia films that consequently present the history of the struggle of Thai people and the monarchy against Burmese troops in the Ayutthaya Period. The films present a homogenous image of the Thai community of the Ayutthaya Kingdom that was governed by a monarchy, which is harmonious and prosperous. These films also present a high-spirited Thai people and the willingness of the monarchy to make sacrifices to protect the homeland. Thus the films bring the audiences back to the ‘golden age’ of contentment and pride in the Thai nation. These
films were released soon after Thailand suffered the economic crisis of 1997 and when a sense of Thailand’s independence was threatened by America forcing the Thai government to reveal the parlous state of its foreign reserves and the true extent of lending through the Financial Institutions Development Fund (FIDF) as preconditions for assistance from the IMF in early August 1997 (Phongpaichit and Baker 2000, 3).

*Bang Rajan* (dir Thanit Jitnukun, 2000) is the one of the initial Thai nostalgia films that remakes the story of the struggle of Thai villagers in the Bang Rajan village against the Burmese troops. *Bang Rajan* reconstructs the details of the historical past, nostalgic dialogue and costume. Moreover the film cuts down the role of the monarchy in protecting the homeland, which is typical of Thai historical films. Compared with the story of Bang Rajan villagers in the film *Seuk Bang Rajan* (dir. Supan Prampan, 1965) the monarch was presented at the end of the story as the leader who united Thai people to fight back against the Burmese troops. The appearance of the monarch in the film *Seuk Bang Rajan* supported the political atmosphere in the cold war period that uses the monarchy as the centre of the Thai nation. Contrastively, the first version was the film *Kai Bang Rajan* (dir. Joungjan Jankana, 1938), which was produced after the absolute monarchy was overthrown thus the monarchy did not appear in the film. The protagonists are ordinary people who have a role to protect the homeland. On the other hand the film lessened the importance of the monarchy. The appearance of monarchical characters depends on the political atmosphere, however no Thai film present the monarchy in a negative manner.

*Suriyothai* (dir. Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, 2000) is another nostalgia film that presents the roles of Thai monarchy in Ayutthaya Period (1350-1767). The film does
not only remake dialogue, costume, or the spelling of the name of Queen Suriyothai, but also presents the dark side of the monarchy in Ayutthaya period such as the execution of a young crown prince after the new king had overthrown the previous king, the king’s concubine poisoning the king, and in general the film includes unattractive depictions of the kings. However, the main character of the film is the good queen who sacrifices her life to protect the king and the Ayutthaya Kingdom. The film emphasized the importance of the monarchical institution to be the centre of the Thai nation.

The late 1990s saw a down turn in the local film business. In this time young filmmakers released nostalgic films to recall the golden age of Thai cinema from the previous decades. There was a yearning for simple times.

Seven (dir. John Sturges, 1960) and pays respect to the senior actor Somchai Asanajinda who played the hero in these old films.

The new film directors used Thai film from the previous decades as a store of knowledge. They do not only pay homage to old Thai films but also use these old films for intertextuality, since they refer to the relation between two or more texts (Hayward 2000, 279). Thai nostalgia films refer to the old films as texts worthy of respect, to construct the new text, and also for parody. For example the film *Kaow Pra Kum Krong (Where is Tong?)* dir. Theerathon Siripanwarapon 2001 shows some scenes from the film *Sao Ha* (dir. Winith Pakdeeijit, 1976) that mention the heroes who have a sacred Buddha image locket to protect them from villains. The young characters begin their adventure by buying a fake sacred Buddha image locket and believe that the locket can protect them from the gangster. The film also reconstructs the image of heroes as strong men with sacred Buddha image lockets who have an important mission to protect the Thai nation from an enemy, popular in action film in the 1970s, or a group of young boys and girls with fake lockets with a mission to find a son of a poor crazy woman.

The film 7 Prajanban (*Heaven Seven*, dir. Chalerm Wongpim, 2003) remakes the theme of the seven heroes’ mission to suppress the villains from the old version and keep the iconography and motif of the 7 heroes’ characters such as the wearing of red shorts when engaged in gun fight, good at Thai boxing, and good at gambling. The film uses the period of the Vietnam War as a background, thus the atmosphere of anti-war protests in the 1970s and *plaeng pear chewit* (music for life) are used for parody. The film parodies the film *Bang Rajan* (dir. Thanit Jitnukun, 2000) where the hero travels in time back to the ancient time and meets the warriors of Bang Rajan village and brings...
back the artillery to fight against the American soldiers. 7 Prajanban reconstructs the image of American soldiers, who were always presented as good persons who supported the Thai heroes to suppress communists in the films of the 1970s, to be villains in this film. The other Thai films in the 21st century also presented American and foreigners (Westerner) as villains such as Meao Pean Lok Prajan (Killer Tattoo, dir. Yuthaleart Sipapak, 2000) and Ong Bak (dir. Pradya Pinkaew, 2003). The villains of Thai cinema vary through social context.

The Three Pillars in Postmodern Thai films

The cinematic representation of ideals of nation, religion and monarchy are still present in postmodern Thai films. However, the roles of these three pillars appear different from those of previous decades.

The nation is presented as homeland, which is protected by the monarchy in the film Suriyothai (dir. Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, 2000) and the ordinary people in the film Bang Rajan (dir. Thanit Jitnukun, 2000). The role of the Thai military to protect the country is not present in Thai films as it was in the previous period. The nation in this postmodern text is also presented as nostalgic homeland. In the film Koumphapan (February, dir. Yuthlert Sippapak, 2003) the hero works as an illegal labourer in New York, Thailand is a nostalgic homeland that he dreams of returning to.

The Buddhist monks in postmodern Thai films have roles similar to Thai films from the previous decades such as a centre of spirit in the film Meou Pearn Lok Prajan (Killer Tattoo, dir. Yuthlert Sippapak, 2001), to provide spiritual support to the people and the
monarchy and to protect the nation from its enemies in the film *Bang Rajan* and *Suriyothai*. The appearance of Buddhist monks and Buddha images in Thai films in every decade are the symbol of goodness and peacefulness. This is a result of the faith of Thai filmmakers to Buddhism and the power of the film censorship law. However some of the postmodern Thai films subtly parody the role of the Buddhist monk such as in the film *7 Prajanban* when a new Buddhist monk cannot control himself and cries like a child at his mother’s funeral and chases his friends when he is angry. This is an example that illustrates the beginning of the decline of the role of Buddhist monk as sacred and unchallengeable.

Some postmodern Thai films present the role of the monarchical institution differently from Thai films in previous decades. In the film *Suriyothai* the monarchs from ancient times are presented as human beings who can experience love, greed, and betrayal and are subject to disfiguring sickness. However the image of the present king, King Bhumibol, is not different from the Thai film in the previous decades, in which he is presented as a sacred person. In the diaster film *Talumpuk* (dir. Piti Chaturapath, 2002) the film presents a diaster event in the 1950s when a big storm ruined a small village in the south of Thailand. In this film the persons who carry King Bhumibol’s picture and those who carry an image of the Buddha survive the storm. This confirms the monarchy as a respected institution.

The three pillars of Thai society, nation, religion, and the monarchy, are still held as institutions worthy of high respect in Thai postmodern films. Although some films present the kings of the past as possessing human failing, they are contained historically as the kings from the ancient period. The Buddhist monk though parodied in the film *7
Prajanban is still presented as a good warrior and a good son. Also, the nation in Thai postmodern films is presented as a land to protect and as a nostalgic homeland.

Since the beginning of Thai film history until the present (2004), Thailand has changed in many aspects. However the three pillars, which are represented in Thai cinema remain as respected institutions and present national identity in Thai national cinema. At the same time Thai national cinema has a role to reinforce the importance of the three pillars.

**Direction for future research**

This thesis ends with the beginning of Thai film postmodern style in the late 1990s and this style becomes a new trend of Thai cinema in the 21st century. Obviously there is further need to study of Thai postmodern Film style in detail with regard to content, style, and film market. Even at this stage I contend that the direction and role of the three pillars, nation, religion, and the monarchy in the Thai film postmodern style can still account for the development and direction of Thai national identity.
Filmography

Thai Film in the 1920s

Chok Song Chan (Double Lucky produced by Krung Thep Movie Company, 1927)

Thai Film in the 1930s

Long Thang (produced by Srikroung Sound Film Company, 1931)
Pou Som Fao Sap (dir. Khun Wijitmattr, 1933)
Khun Chang Khun Paen (produced by NN Papayon, 1934)
Khun Chang Khun Paen version Khun Chang present a petition to a king (produced by NN Papayon, 1935)
Leard Tahan Thai (Thai Soldier Blood produced by Srikroung Sound Film Company, dir. Khun Wijitmattr, 1935)
Leard Chao Na (dir. Srisuk Wasuwat and Cheo Kannasu, 1936)
Leard Supan (dir. Chaim Sukhumanchan, 1936)
Plaeng Warn Jai (His Sweet Melody dir. Khun Wijitmartra, 1937)
Kai Bangrajan (produced by Manit Wasuwat, dir. Joungian Jankana, 1938)
Khun Chang Khun Paen version Ghost Wanthon (produced by NN Papayon, 1939)

Thai Film in the 1940s

Ban Rai Na Rao (Produced by Air force, 1942)
Thai Film in the 1950s

Swan Meard (dir. Rat Pestanyee, 1958)
Mae Nak Prakanong (dir. Rangsir Tasanapayak, 1959)

Thai Film in the 1960s

Chumtang Hadyai (dir. Somchai Asanajinda, 1960)
Luksao Pra Arthit (Sun’s Daughter dir. Sonchai Ardsanajinda, produced in the late 1960s)
Pim Pilalai (dir. Dokdin Kanyaman, around the 1960s)
Pra Apai Manee (dir. Rangsri Tasanapayak, around the 1960s)
Prai Rak (dir. Wijan Pakdeevijit, around the 1960s)
Nok Noi (dir. Dokdin Kanyaman, 1964)
Ngen Ngen Ngen (Money Money Money dir. Prince Anson Mongkhonkarn, 1965)
Seuk Bangrajan (dir. Supan Prampan and Anumas Bunnak, 1965)
Daw Pra Suk (dir. Somkoun Krajangsd, 1966)
Jom Prajanban (dir. Somchai Asanajinda, 1966)
Rak Aey (dir. Naeramitre, 1968)
16 Pee Kaeng Kwam Lang (dir. Anmad Bunnak, 1969)
Thai Noi (dir. Dokdin Kanyaman, 1969)
Thai Film in the 1970s

*Fon Nearn* (dir. Chalong Pakdeevijit, 1970)


*Khao Yai* (dir. Rangsri Tasanapayak, produced around 1970s)

*Lakorn Re* (dir. Prince Panupan Yukon, produced in the early 1970s)

*Mae Nak Prakanong* (dir. Saree Paopradit, produced around 1970s)

*Mon Rak Luk Toung* (dir. Rangsri Tasanapayak, 1970)

*Thai Yai* (dir. Dokdin Kanyaman, 1970)

*Thon* (dir. Somboonsuk Niyomsiri, 1970)

*Yark Dang* (dir. Houn Ratanangum, 1970)

*Ai Tui* (dir. Dokdin Kanyaman, 1971)

*Ban Sao Sod* (dir. Adisorn, 1971)

*Knon Jai Bord* (*Blind Heart People* dir. Cheard Songsri, 1971)

*Mae Eye Saearn* (dir. Chutima Suwanrat, 1972)

*Chu Chok, Kanha, Chalee* (dir. Rat Seatpakdee, 1973)

*Sud Hoajai* (dir. Pairat Kasiwat, 1973)

*Kanghan Sawart* (dir. Naeramitre, 1974)

*Theptida Rong Rame* (*Hotel Angel* dir. Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, 1974)

*Tong* (dir. Chalong Pakdeevijit, 1974)

*Tong Prakaysaed* (dir. Ruth Ronnaphob, 1974)

*Kwam Rak Krung Sut Tai* (*The Last Love* dir Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, 1975)

*Man* (dir. Peak Meekhunsuth, 1975)

*Tong Pan* (produced by Isan Group, 1975)

*Karn Tor Su Khong Kamkorn Ying Rong Ngan Hara* (*The Women Labourers Struggle*...
Koung Nang (dir. Dokdin Kanyaman, 1976)

Khun Suek (The Lord of Warrior dir. Sakka Jarujinda, 1976)

Por Ta Pean Hod (dir. Rangsri Tasanapayak, 1977)

Tongpoon Kokpoo Rasadorn Tem Khan (The Citizen dir. Prince Chatree Chalerms Yukon, 1977)

Sing Sam Oil (The Finicky Lion dir. Dokdin Kanyaman, 1977)

Chum Pae (dir. Charan Promrangsri, 1976)

Sao Ha (dir. Winith Pakdeevijit, 1976)

Koung Nang (dir. Dokdin Kanyaman, 1976)

Nak Pain Din (dir. Sombat Maetanee, 1977)

La (dir. Pairat Kasiwat, 1977)

Lui (dir. Ruth Ronnaphop, 1977)

Ka Ma Jak Moung Nakorn (dir. Yotin Thevarath, 1978)

Mea Loung (The Wife dir. Wijit Kunavuth, 1978)

Pai Daeng (The Red Bamboo dir. Permphon Choeiarun, 1979)

Pracha Chon Nok (On the Fringe of Society dir. Manop Udomdej, 1979)

Khon Phu Kao (The Mountaineer dir. Wijit Kunawuth, 1979)

Leard Supan (dir. Cheard Songsri, 1979)

Sudsakorn Phajonpai (Sudsakorn Adventure dir. Prayuth Ngoakrajang, 1979)

Thai Film in the 1980s

Ban Sai Thong (dir. Ruth Ronaphob, 1980)

E-Pring Khon Reang Meoung (dir. Reangsiri Limksorn, 1980)
Kaew (dir. Somboonsuk Niyomsiri, 1980)

Loung Ta (The Abbot dir. Permphon Choei-arun, 1980)

Ngog Pa (dir. Prince Panupan Yukon and Somboonsuk Niyomsiri, 1980)

Pra Rot Maeree or Nang Sib Song (12 sisters dir. Naeramitre, produced around the 1980s)

Pra Wessandon (dir. Bensil, 1980)

Kha Nam Nom (dir. Chao Meekhunsuth, 1981)

Maharaj Dam (dir. Toranong Srichea, 1981)

Sat Songkram (dir. Toranong Srichea, 1981)

Ai Phang Ro Pho Tor (dir. Manu Wannayok, 1982)

Chao Sao Khong Anon (dir. Ruth Ronnaphob, 1982)

Loung Ta 2 (The Abbot 2 dir. Permphon Choei-arun, 1982)

Khun Paen (dir. Naeramitre, 1982)

Luk Isan (Son of the Northeast dir. Wijit Kunawuth, 1982)

Prisana (dir. Ruth Ronaphob, 1982)

Theptida Rong Ngan (Factory Angel dir. Euthana Mukdasanit, 1982)

Mue Pern (dir. Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, 1983)

Ngen Ngen Ngen (Money Money Money dir. Euthana Mukdasanit, 1983)

Nid (dir. Prakorn Promwitak, 1983)

Sao Dad Deaw (Dir. Dokdin Kanyaman, 1983)

Wai Ra Reang (dir. Somboonsuk Niyomsiri, 1983)

Wan Nee Young Mee Thear (Today dir. Supawat Jongsiri, 1983)

Itsarapab Khong Thongpoon Kokpho (The Freedom of Thongpoon Kokpo dir. Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, 1984)

Nakrob Prajanban (dir. Toranong Srichea, 1984)
Kambodia (dir. Toranong Srichea, 1985)

Phuying Khon Nan Cheo Bunrod (Her Name is Bunrod dir. Wijit Kunavuth, 1985)

Kaboun Karn Khon Chai (dir. Chana Kraprayoon, 1986)

Luksao Pra Artith (Her Name is Bunrod dir. Payong Payakun, 1986)

Pheesue Lae Dok Mai (Butterfly and Flower dir. Euthana Mukdasanit, 1986)

Pratana Haeng Houjai (dir. Pisan Arkrasanei, 1986)

Ban (House dir. Chat Kobjitti and Eklack, 1987)

Douy Krao (The Seed dir. Bandit Rittakon, 1987)

Fire Sanaeha (dir. Ruth Ronapheb, 1987)

Kam Man Sanya (dir. Komsan Pongsutham, 1987)

Peak Marn (dir. Pornpoth, 1987)

Rarn Dok Ngew (dir. Panthep Attakraiwanwatee, 1987)

Khu Karm (dir. Ruth Ronaphob, 1988)

Reao Manuth (dir. Watanasith, 1988)

Tong Prakaysaed (dir. Chana Kraprayoon, 1988)

 Ubatihod (Bangkok Emergency dir. Toranong Srichea, 1988)

Ban Phee Pop (Ghoul’s House dir. Srisawat, 1989 to the early 1990s)

Bunchu 2 Nong Mai (dir. Bandit Ritakon, 1989)

Pulakong (dir. Surapon Kornsuvat, 1989)

Thai Film in the 1990s

Kon Karm Haeng Kwam Rak (Twilight Tokyo dir. Toranong Srichea, 1990)

Tong Pron (dir. Chuchai Aungartchayi, 1990)

Nai Zee-aui Zae-eng (dir. Banjong Kosanyawat, 1991)
Land of Laugh (dir. Manit Sriwanitphum, 1992)

Rong Ta Lain Prab (dir. Pradya Pinkaew, 1992)

Just Game (dir. Koumron Khunadirok, 1993)

Top Boot on My Head (dir. Wasan Sittikhet, 1993)

Lam Pleang plaeng Rak (dir. Sak Morakoth, 1993)

Pee Neoung Pearn Kan Lae Wan Mahasajan Khong phom (The Wonder Year dir. Somjing Srisupab, 1993)

Rak Arai Pumpoung Dounzhian (dir. Reaung Samrith, 1993)

Daw Pra Suk (dir. Somyoth Pumsuwan, 1994)

Mearn and Rid (dir. Cheard Songsri, 1994)

Plaeng Rak Kong Che Moon (dir. Chinmate Prasathporn, 1994)

Khu Karm (dir. Euthana Mukdasanit, 1995)

Kor Keb Hoa Jai Thear Wai Khon Deaw (dir. Jazz Siam, 1995)

Num Na Khao Sao Lam Nam Moon (dir. Sak Morakoth, 1995)

Ku Karm II (dir. Banjong Kosanyawat, 1996)

2499 Antapan Klong Meung (Daeng Bailey and Gangster dir. Nonzee Nimibuth, 1997)

Kok Tee Veerabututh Aram Boy (dir. Tounthon Kammeesri, 1998)

Seo Jone Pan Seo (dir. Tanit Jitnukun, 1998)

Kampaeng (TheWall dir. Thakonkeit Weerawan, 1999)

Nang Nak (dir. Nonzee Nimibuth, 1999)

Sawadee Ban Nok (dir. Tanit Jitnukun, 1999)

**Thai Film in the 2000s**

Ang Yee (dir. Nopporn Watin, 2000)
Bangrajan (dir. Thanit Jinukun, 2000)
Fah Talai Jone (Tear of the Black Tiger dir. Wisit Sasanatieng, 2000)
Mue Pean Lok Pra Jan (Killer Tattoo dir. Yuthalert Sipapak, 2000)
Satree Lek (Iron Ladies dir. Yongyuth Thongkongthun, 2000)
14 Tula Songkram Prachachon (The Moon Hunter dir Bandit Rittakon, 2001)
Jan Dara (dir. Nonzee Nimibuth, 2001)
Kaow Pra Kum Krong (Where is Tong? dir. Theerathon Siripanwarapon, 2001)
Khun Paen (dir. Tanit Jitnukun, 2001)
Pop Weed Sayong (Body Jumper dir. Haeman Chatemee, 2001)
Pra Apai Manee (dir. Chalath Sriwanna, 2001)
Suriyothai (dir. Prince Chatree Chalerm Yukon, 2001)
Ong Bak (dir. Pradya Pinkaew, 2002)
Prang Choumpu (Saving Private Tootsie dir. Kittikorn Reawsirikun, 2002)
Taloompuk (dir. Piti Jaturapath, 2002)
7 Prajanban (Heaven Seven dir. Chalerm Womgpim, 2003)
Angulimala (dir. Sutape Tunnirut, 2003)
Beautiful Boxer (dir. Ekachai Uekrongthan, 2003)
Changat 77 Los Angeles (Province 77 Los Angeles dir. Smith Tinsawat, 2003)
Kumphapan (February dir. Yuthalert Sippapak, 2003)
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1. **Scholars**

   Dome Sukwong  Interview 7 February 2001, at National Film Archives, Nakornpathom

   Gérard Fouquet  Interview 23 March 2001 at Mahidol University, Nakornpathom

   Pinyo Kongthong  Interview 23 January 2001, and 9 February 2001 at Pinyo’s house, Bangkok

2. **A member of the Film censorship committee**

   Suthat Buriphakdee  Interview 20 December 2000 at Rajamangala Institute of Technology, Prathumtani

3. **Film Directors**

   Adirek Watleela  Interview 28 March 2001, at Film Bangkok Company, Bangkok
Apichat Phopairath  Interview 2 February 2003, at Thai Film Federation, Bangkok
Dokdin Kanyaman  Interview 23 April 2001, at Dokdin’s house, Bangkok
Euthana Mukdasanit  Interview 15 March 2001, at Euthana’s house, Bangkok
Nopporn Watin  Interview 10 February 2003, at Nopporn’s house, Bangkok