

**A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVE
STRUCTURE BETWEEN SELECTED FOREIGN
AND LOCAL FILMS IN THE CONTEXT OF FILM
TOURISM OF THAILAND**

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by

PAPRACH THAPTHER

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

TAT	Tourism Authority of Thailand
TOT	Tourist Organisation of Thailand (old name of TAT)
GDCI	Global Destination Cities Index

**ANALISIS PERBANDINGAN STRUKTUR NARATIF ANTARA FILEM
LUAR DAN TEMPATAN YANG TERPILIH DALAM KONTEKS
PELANCONGAN FILEM THAILAND**

ABSTRAK

Mengikuti impak ketara filem *The Beach* terhadap pelancongan Thailand, konsep "pelancongan filem" telah diadopsi sebagai sebahagian daripada dasar kerajaan Thailand dalam rangka kerja "ekonomi kreatif". Namun, dasar ini lebih menekankan daya tarik Thailand sebagai lokasi untuk pengeluaran filem antarabangsa, dengan kejayaan diukur melalui pendapatan yang dihasilkan daripada pengeluaran asing tersebut. Sebaliknya, dasar ini mengabaikan peranan filem tempatan dalam mempromosikan pelancongan Thailand, dengan pengeluaran tempatan jarang dibincangkan dalam konteks "Pelancongan Filem Thailand". Selain itu, terdapat jurang besar dalam penyelidikan yang meneroka hubungan antara filem asing yang dirakam di Thailand, filem tempatan, dan pengaruhnya terhadap pelancongan Thailand. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menangani jurang ini dengan menganalisis struktur naratif filem yang menyumbang kepada pelancongan Thailand, dengan menonjolkan cara unik kedua-dua pembuat filem asing dan tempatan menggambarkan negara ini. Pemahaman yang lebih mendalam tentang bagaimana filem yang berjaya—sama ada asing atau tempatan—membina naratif mereka dan membentuk imej destinasi boleh memberikan wawasan berharga untuk membangunkan projek pelancongan filem pada masa akan datang. Kajian ini menggunakan dua metodologi penyelidikan yang berbeza: analisis kandungan dan analisis teks. Analisis ini berpandukan kepada definisi "struktur naratif," yang merangkumi empat elemen

utama: struktur plot, ciri genre, oposisi binari, dan ruang destinasi. Penyelidikan ini memfokuskan kepada dua kumpulan filem: empat filem asing yang dirakam di Thailand (*The Beach*, *The Hangover Part II*, *Go Lala Go*, dan *Lost in Thailand*) dan empat filem tempatan (*Nang Nak*, *Pee Mak*, *Ong Bak: Muay Thai Warrior*, dan *Tom Yum Goong*). Penemuan menunjukkan bahawa kedua-dua kumpulan filem menggunakan struktur plot "Hero's Journey", mengidentifikasi dengan genre hibrid, dan menunjukkan dominasi melodrama sebagai mod estetik yang meluas dalam sinema arus perdana. Konsep oposisi binari (Thainess versus non-Thainess) adalah sangat berkesan dalam pengeluaran filem tempatan, selari dengan matlamat promosi Pihak Berkuasa Pelancongan Thailand jika dibandingkan dengan filem asing yang dirakam di negara tersebut. Selain itu, perwakilan "Ruang Destinasi" dalam filem-filem ini menawarkan pandangan kepada penonton tentang lokasi filem yang boleh dimanfaatkan sebagai bahan imaginasi untuk mempromosikan pelancongan filem.

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ABSTRACT

Following the notable impact of the film *The Beach* on Thai tourism, the concept of "film tourism" was adopted as part of Thailand's governmental policy within the framework of the "creative economy." However, this policy primarily emphasizes Thailand's appeal as a location for international film productions, with success measured by the revenue generated from these foreign productions. In contrast, the policy overlooks the role of domestic films in promoting Thai tourism, with local productions largely absent from discussions on "Thai Film Tourism." Moreover, there is a significant gap in research exploring the relationship between foreign films shot in Thailand, local films, and their influence on Thai tourism. This study aims to address this gap by analyzing the narrative structures of films that contribute to Thai tourism, highlighting the unique ways in which both foreign and domestic filmmakers portray the country. A deeper understanding of how successful films—whether foreign or local—construct their narratives and shape destination images can provide valuable insights for developing future film tourism projects. This study employs two distinct research methodologies: content analysis and textual analysis. The analysis is grounded in the definition of "narrative structure," which includes four key elements: plot structure, genre characteristics, binary opposition, and destination space. The research focuses on two groups of films: four foreign films shot in Thailand (*The Beach*, *The Hangover Part II*, *Go Lala Go*, and *Lost in Thailand*) and

four local films (*Nang Nak*, *Pee Mak*, *Ong Bak: Muay Thai Warrior*, and *Tom Yum Goong*). The findings suggest that both groups of films employ the "Hero's Journey" plot structure, identify with hybrid genres, and demonstrate the dominance of melodrama as a pervasive aesthetic mode in mainstream cinema. The concept of binary opposition (Thainess versus non-Thainess) is particularly effective in local film productions, aligning well with the promotional goals of the Tourism Authority of Thailand when compared to foreign films shot in the country. Additionally, the representation of "Destination Space" in these films offers viewers a perspective on film locations that can be harnessed as a material sense of imagination for promoting film tourism.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Films are powerful storytelling mediums, designed to captivate and engage viewers through their narratives (Carmona, 2017). One particularly fascinating aspect of film narratives is their ability to inspire wanderlust in audiences, a phenomenon known as "film tourism." While this concept is not new, as highlighted by Kim and Reijnders (2018), it has been explored in various scholarly works under different terms, including "Movie-induced Tourism" (Gjorgievski & Trpkova, 2012; Riley et al., 1998), "Cinematic Tourism" (Tzanelli, 2004), "Film-Induced Tourism" (Beeton, 2005; Rewtrakunphaiboon, 2021; Tonsaithong, 2022), "Media Pilgrimage" (Couldry, 2007; Reijnders, 2010), and "Screen Tourism" (Bengesser & Waade, 2022).

These studies emphasize the influence films can have on tourism, closely aligning with Urry's (2002) concept of the "tourist gaze." Urry's notion of "virtual travel" suggests that through film, viewers engage in a form of virtual gazing, allowing them to experience and imagine distant locations without being physically present. This idea is further supported by the concept of "narrative transportation," where an engaging film narrative can immerse viewers, altering their attitudes, beliefs, and even motivating them to travel (Irimias, Mitev, & Michalko, 2021).

Recognizing the potential of film tourism, many countries have strategically leveraged films to attract tourists. For instance, Visit Scotland capitalized on the success of *Braveheart* (1995) to promote the Wallace Monument, while the *Harry Potter* series significantly increased tourism to various UK locations featured in the

films (Hudson & Ritchie, 2006). Similarly, New Zealand's marketing campaign, which associates the country with "Middle-earth" and *The Lord of the Rings* series, has become an iconic example of film tourism (Jones & Smith, 2005). These examples demonstrate how films can highlight a destination's most appealing aspects, turning them into compelling tourist attractions (Azcue et al., 2021). As Tuclea and Nistoreanu (2011) noted, one of the significant benefits of film tourism is its ability to enhance the cultural value of the film and its associated locations.

However, as Kim and Reijnders (2018) pointed out, there are still gaps and challenges in understanding why some films lead to tourism booms while others do not. Ferrando (2020) highlighted the importance of tourist destination placement within films, arguing that the interaction between characters and their environment shapes the narrative and, consequently, the destination's appeal. Macionis (2004) emphasized that the imagined story of a place as portrayed in a film can become a powerful tool for expressing a destination's unique and meaningful experiences. These narrative elements, when effectively integrated, communicate the core values and attractions of a location in a way that resonates with audiences (Mossberg et al., 2010).

The success of film tourism is often linked to mainstream film productions, which have the power to influence viewers' perceptions and drive tourism-related decisions (Kumar & Dung, 2017). To maximize this success, films designed to promote tourism may adopt the characteristics of mainstream cinema. Cutting (2016) argued that popular films often follow formulaic structures, such as the "Arch plot" or "Aristotle Model," which have been effective in engaging audiences for centuries. This formula, rooted in Aristotle's analysis of dramatic structures, was further refined by

Freytag (1904, cited in Tan, 2015) into the well-known Freytag's Pyramid, which outlines the five dramatic elements: Exposition, Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action, and Resolution. Syd Field's *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting* (2005) popularized the three-act structure, a linear narrative form familiar to most audiences. However, recent trends in filmmaking have seen a shift towards more episodic and nonlinear narratives, which, while originally associated with independent and art house films, have now gained traction in mainstream culture (Brunett, 2022).

Bordwell (1985) provides a foundational framework for understanding film narratives through the concepts of 'Fabula,' 'Syuzhet,' and 'Style' or 'Forma.' These three elements work in tandem to create the narrative experience within a film. The 'Fabula,' or story, is the chronological sequence of events that unfold in a cause-and-effect manner. It forms the backbone of the narrative, providing the basis for the plot. The 'Syuzhet,' or plot, is the artistic arrangement of these events, incorporating elements such as actions, scenes, turning points, and plot twists that contribute to the film's dramatic structure. Finally, 'Style' or 'Forma' refers to the systematic use of cinematic devices, often categorized into genres like action, horror, or comedy.

Rahman, Dawan, and Chan (2019) argue that romantic or love stories, in particular, can evoke strong emotions that enhance audience engagement with a film's destination. A compelling film narrative is deeply rooted in story and character development, and the recurrence of emotionally resonant narratives often correlates with successful film-induced tourism (Olsberg SPI, 2007).

The concepts of 'Place' and 'Destination' in film are crucial, as they work together to establish a connection between the narrative and the audience's perception of reality and space. Bruno (2002) and Metz (1974) discuss how the spaces within which film plots unfold shape the audience's mental images of these places. This mental mapping can later serve as a blueprint for the physical reconstruction of these spaces, transforming them into actual tourist destinations (Hao & Ryan, 2013). The portrayal of people and cultures within these spaces is also significant, as it contributes to the narrative language that conveys knowledge about the film's setting. Consequently, the image of a destination as portrayed through film becomes a critical area of study within the context of film tourism (Araujo, 2012; Juskelyte, 2016; Michopoulou et al., 2022).

Beeton (2010b) introduced a pyramid structure model to represent the knowledge development within film tourism studies (refer to Figure 1.1). This model illustrates how research in film-induced tourism has evolved from initial, speculative studies to more complex, multi-disciplinary approaches. The progression of research has led to more sophisticated analyses, particularly in business-related contexts. From a postmodern perspective, the intersection of media studies and film-induced tourism research offers a roadmap for future inquiry, identifying gaps in both theoretical and practical knowledge. The pyramid model underscores the essential connection between theory development and practical application, highlighting the importance of integrating these aspects to advance the field.

This introduction sets the stage for an in-depth exploration of how film narratives, particularly their structure and genre, influence the representation of destinations in both local and international films. By examining these elements, the research aims to contribute to the understanding of film tourism and its impact on Thai tourism, filling existing gaps in the literature and offering practical insights for future applications in the industry.

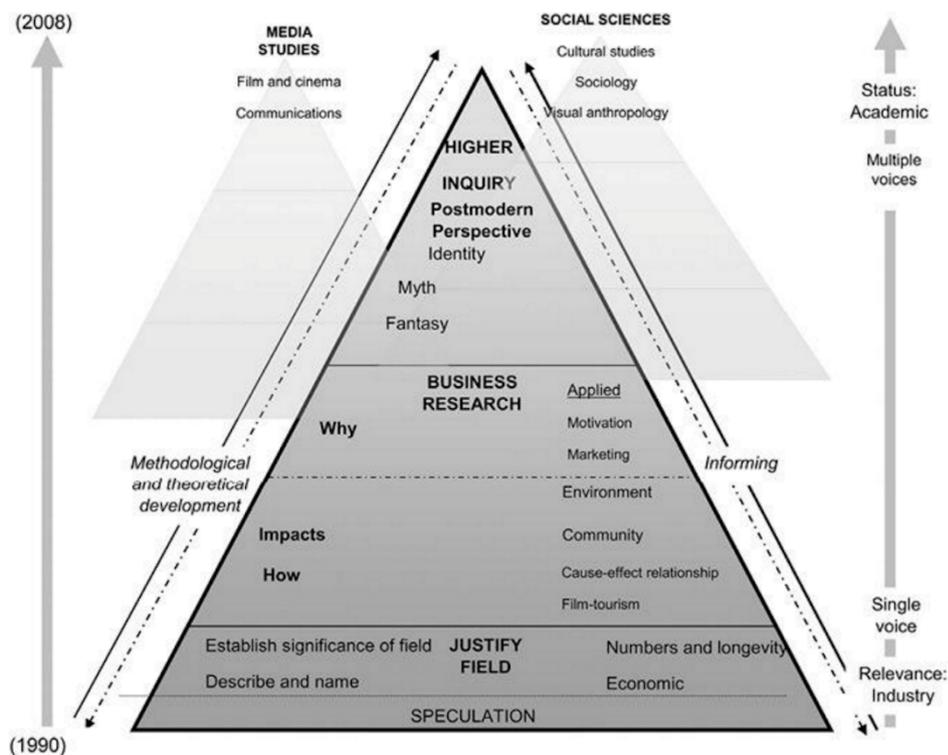


Figure 1.1 The Pyramid Structure of the Model of Film Tourism Knowledge Development
(Beeton, 2010b)

1.2. Problem Statement

The film *The Beach* (2000) is a significant case study in film-induced tourism, marking a pivotal moment in the history of contemporary Thai film tourism on an international scale. *The Beach* follows the story of a young American in search of adventure in Thailand, and its release had a substantial impact on the Thai tourism

industry. According to Siriangkul (2005), the number of visitors to Thailand increased by 25.7%, while visits to the filming location in Krabi province rose by 5.1% in the year 2000. The film, shot on Thailand's picturesque islands such as Phi Phi Island and Maya Bay, turned these locations into major tourist destinations (Forsyth, 2001; Law et al., 2007). Notably, *The Beach* was not created with the explicit intention of promoting these locations, yet the surge in tourism following its release is what Gjorgjievski and Trpkova (2012) term an 'incidental phenomenon.' However, it is worth noting that the natural features of the filming location were altered by the production crew to achieve the desired image of a tropical paradise (Forsyth, 2001).

In response to the mixed impacts of *The Beach*, the concept of 'film tourism' has been integrated into Thailand's 'creative economy' strategy to enhance its tourism sector. The Thai government established the Thailand Film Office in 2003 under the Department of Tourism to support international film productions, boost national revenue, and promote tourism, culture, and art. This office is also responsible for evaluating and approving location filming permits for international film productions (Klemm, 2016).

Thailand's film tourism strategy highlights the country's skilled professionals, cost-effective production and living expenses, logistical support, advanced technological infrastructure, and diverse filming locations, positioning Thailand as a prime destination for cinematic projects. In 2018 alone, Thailand hosted 714 film projects, contributing a budget of US\$ 98.10 million (Thailand Film Office, 2018).

Despite this, only a few international films shot in Thailand have successfully captured the essence of film tourism. This gap can be attributed to the absence of a robust policy framework that fully nurtures the concept of ‘film tourism’ (Roesch, 2009; Beeton, 2005). Films play a crucial role in shaping the image of tourist destinations and inspiring viewers to visit these locations (Siripis, 2011). However, the Thailand Film Office's approach has been limited to encouraging foreign filmmakers to include Thailand in their scripts without influencing the narrative to effectively promote the country. This lack of influence often results in films that depict the darker aspects of Thailand, such as *Bangkok Dangerous* (2008), which portrays an assassin in Bangkok; *Only God Forgives* (2013), which connects a drug business with a Thai boxing club; and *The Hangover Part II* (2011), which presents Thailand’s nightlife as filled with drugs, violence, and prostitution. A similar issue was observed in Brazil with the film *City of God* (2002), where negative portrayals decreased the desire to visit the country despite its stunning landscapes (Araujo, 2013).

Thailand’s tourism strategy for 2017-2021 (scbeic.com, 2016) focuses on attracting international productions for film tourism but does not emphasize collaboration with local filmmakers to promote the national image. This raises the question of why local films are not integrated into government policies on ‘Thai Film Tourism.’ A film that positively impacts tourism should either inspire viewers to visit the filming locations or provide informative insights into aspects of Thailand, such as its culture and people, influencing their decision to explore the country. Panyasophon (2012) identified characteristics of Thai movies that have succeeded internationally, including films that depict Thai culture and exotic elements (Cultural Film) and those that prominently feature Thai ghost stories, horror, or action genres. *Nang Nak* (1999),

a Thai horror film that reimagines a well-known Thai ghost story, gained international popularity around the same time as *The Beach* and had a significant impact on Thai tourism. The film's portrayal of 19th-century Thailand, with its emphasis on traditional ways of life and Buddhist beliefs, contributed to the growing popularity of locations like Amphawa's floating market (Suntikul, 2017). *Nang Nak* captivated international audiences by encapsulating elements of 'Thainess,' showcasing authentic Thai culture (Panyasopon, 2012).

Another example of local film influencing Thai film tourism is *Ong-Bak: Muay Thai Warrior* (2003), which introduced traditional Muay Thai to international audiences. The film's success, with a worldwide box office gross of \$20,235,426 (IMDb, 2022), led to its adaptation into a live stage production, 'Ong Bak Live,' demonstrating the concept of 'off-location film tourism' (Show DC, 2016).

In contrast, South Korea has successfully promoted its tourism through domestically-produced films and TV series, which are integral to its cultural tourism strategy (Jung, 2007; Phomsiri, 2015; Rewtrakunphaiboon, 2009). South Korean films not only attract visitors to filming locations but also positively shape the national brand by emphasizing traditional and cultural values. Similarly, Japan has developed 'Contents Tourism,' where travel is motivated by narratives, characters, and locations from popular culture (Yamamura, 2014).

Local films, created from the perspective of Thai filmmakers, offer a unique portrayal of Thai culture that differs significantly from international productions. These films provide audiences with rare insights into Thai traditions, ways of life, and

Buddhist beliefs, contributing to the formation of positive attitudes towards the country and encouraging international visitors. The narrative structure of these films plays a crucial role in promoting Thai tourism through concepts like ‘Cultural Tourism’ and ‘Contents Tourism.’

In conclusion, the success of tourism can be significantly influenced by the quality of storytelling in films. This study aims to investigate how the narrative structure of successful films promoting Thai tourism contributes to effective communication, emphasizing the importance of storytelling in shaping tourism strategies.

1.3 Research Questions

This study intends to investigate the entire narrative of both groups of films and their dominant characteristics. Specifically, the following questions are addressed:

1. How does the narrative structure in foreign films shot in Thailand contribute to Thai tourism?
2. How does the narrative structure in local films contribute to Thai tourism?
3. What are the differences and similarities between the narrative structure of foreign films shot in Thailand and local films that contribute to Thai tourism?

1.4 Research Objectives

The conduct of this study in its attempt is to explore the narrative structure built upon the following research objectives:

1. To study the narrative structure in foreign films shot in Thailand that contributes to Thai tourism.

2. To study the narrative structure in local films that contributes to Thai tourism.
3. To compare the narrative structure between foreign and local films that are shot in Thailand and contribute to Thai tourism.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The current Thai film tourism policy reveals a disconnect between the number of foreign films shot in Thailand and the true essence of film tourism. Sustainable success should be measured by the tourism impact rather than merely the volume of international film productions or the revenue generated from location fees. Therefore, this study aims to provide actionable and practical recommendations to the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) on how to integrate Thailand into film scripts without harming the destination's image. Additionally, there is a notable lack of research exploring the relationship between foreign films shot in Thailand, local films, and their collective impact on Thai tourism (Paprach & Hashim, 2018). This study seeks to fill this gap by offering significant contributions to academic discourse. Understanding how successful films, whether foreign or local, shape their narratives to influence destination image will facilitate the development of future projects, such as studio theme parks and commercial ventures, as well as on-site development.

A comprehensive understanding of the film narratives that boost Thai tourism will be invaluable for stakeholders using films as a promotional tool, including the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, Thailand Film Office, and Thai film studios. These organizations are well-positioned to act on insights from this research, using them to enhance Thai tourism through strategic collaboration and destination development, ultimately strengthening the foundation for further research in this domain within Thailand.

1.6 Definition of Terms

The following definitions outline key terms used throughout this research, providing a framework for the study and the underlying theoretical constructs:

Films Contributing to Thai Tourism refer to those that serve as primary motivators for travel to Thailand and are documented to boost inbound tourism among international audiences. A film must be compelling enough to inspire viewers to visit the filming locations or to serve as a source of information on various aspects of Thailand, such as its culture and people, thereby influencing the decision to visit the country. This category includes both foreign films shot in Thailand and those locally produced by Thai filmmakers.

Narrative Structure refers to the sequential portrayal of interconnected events in films, analyzed with two key components:

- **Syntagmatic:** This aspect focuses on the organization of plot events, providing a framework for narrative progression and development (Stam et al., 1992).
- **Paradigmatic:** This aspect explores the connections between the signs and messages conveyed through the narrative and the broader cultural system that gives them meaning.

Wells (2011) identifies three approaches to narrative structure analysis:

1. Surface structure analysis.
2. Examination of how narratives are constructed and their potential meanings.
3. A combined focus on both the surface and deep structure of narratives.

This research adopts Wells' (2011) approach to analyze narrative structure in four stages:

- **Syntagmatic:**

1. Breakdown of the plot structure using the concept of the Hero's Journey (Vogler, 2007).
2. Identification of the genre as a system of codes, conventions, and styles that enables the audience to quickly determine the type of narrative being viewed (Geraghty & Jancovich, 2008).

- **Paradigmatic:**

3. Analysis of binary oppositions—pairs of related concepts that are opposite in meaning (Strauss, 1958).
4. Interpretation of the theme as it relates to the concept of 'Destination Space' (Paprach & Hashim, 2022).

Hero's Journey is an archetypal plot structure that symbolizes a metaphorical journey of transformation shared by heroes across time and cultures. The twelve stages of the Hero's Journey (Vogler, 2007) align with Syd Field's (2005) Three-Act structure.

Melodrama refers to a subgenre that engages extreme audience emotions through sensational narrative modes. Melodrama is particularly effective in mainstream movies and is characterized by suspense, which is also a key element in horror, action films, and comedy. The genre involves five key elements: pathos, overwrought emotion, moral polarization, non-classical narrative structure, and sensationalism, classifying it as a 'cluster concept' (Singer, 2001).

Binary Opposition is a concept proposed by Levi-Strauss (1958), which suggests that narrative tensions are organized around ‘binarism,’ often more compelling than the plot details. In films, binary oppositions represent concepts or objects that shape the narrative structure, such as good vs. evil in drama, human vs. supernatural in horror, or peace vs. violence in action films. Identifying as many binary oppositions as possible is crucial for in-depth film analysis.

Thainess (*Kwampenthai*) is a distinctive characteristic central to the national and cultural identity of the Thai people. The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) defines Kwampenthai in seven areas promoted in foreign target markets: (1) Thai food, (2) Thai arts, (3) Thai ways of life, (4) Thai wisdom, (5) Thai wellness, (6) Thai festivity, and (7) Thai fun (Chattan, 2015). This term represents a crucial element in film narratives, illustrating the concepts of Kwampenthai and non-Kwampenthai, and creating an immersive experience that sparks curiosity about Thailand. Cinematic depictions of Thai heritage and hospitality significantly contribute to shaping a positive image of Thailand as a culturally rich and welcoming destination.

Destination Space refers to the cognitive impact of destinations portrayed in films, which merge the physical filming location with its associated spatial attributes. These elements provide vital information that influences travel decisions related to Thailand (Paprach & Hashim, 2022). This concept reflects the thematic outcome of understanding cinematic destinations through narrative, aligning with the broader theme of how films contribute to Thai tourism.

1.7 Organisation of the Research

The research is organized into five chapters. Chapter I collects and reviews documentary data in English and Thai, defines key concepts, and establishes research questions. Chapter II conducts a literature review from academic sources, websites, articles, and films to build a theoretical framework. Chapter III details the methodology, focusing on films related to Thai tourism, and proposes the research framework. Chapter IV analyzes the films' narrative structures, examining plot structure using Vogler's (2007) Hero's Journey, genre conventions, Binary Opposition, and themes through the Destination Space concept. Chapter V summarizes the findings, discussing their implications for structuring successful films and enhancing tourism promotion in Thailand.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a literature review to gain more profound perspective on the study topic. The content separates into six parts which comprises of; (i) the context of tourism promotion of Thailand, (ii) foreign film shots in Thailand and Thai tourism, (iii) local Thai film and Thai tourism, (iv) gap in previous studies, (v) narrative structure, and (vi) diagram of theoretical framework which is presented at the end of chapter.

2.1 The Context of Tourism Promotion of Thailand

Thailand is renowned for its rich tourism resources, including stunning natural landscapes, beautiful coastlines, and vibrant cultural identities. Situated in Southeast Asia with an area of approximately 514,000 square kilometers, Thailand is bordered by Myanmar to the northwest, Laos to the northeast, Cambodia to the east, and Malaysia to the south. According to the seventh annual Mastercard Global Destination Cities Index (GDCI), Bangkok, Pattaya, and Phuket are consistently ranked among the top global destination cities (The Nation, 2018). Most tourists come from the Asia-Pacific region, with 31.2 million visitors in 2020, followed by 5.7 million European tourists (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017). Maitreesophon (2012) notes that the term "Land of Smiles" reflects Thailand's reputation and is widely recognized among foreign tourists.

To promote Thailand as a tourist destination, the Tourism Organization of Thailand (TOT) was established in 1959. Kayoko (2010) explains that Thai tourism grew significantly during the Vietnam War era when U.S. soldiers were stationed in

Thailand. Pongajarn (2017) outlines the evolution of Thai tourism, highlighting its early focus on cultural, natural, and historical attractions from the 1960s to the 2000s. Promotional efforts during this period included advertisements and documentary films showcasing Thailand's landmarks and lifestyle, such as the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, Wat Arun, and Wat Pho, along with its vibrant nightlife and festivals. These efforts established Thailand's image as a center of Buddhism and an exotic, hospitable destination.

Thailand's image as an "exotic" destination was reinforced by travel literature, such as Philip Cornwell-Smith's "Very Thai" (2006), which depicted unique aspects of Thai life that fascinated Western tourists. The TOT's slogan, "Thailand - the Most Exotic Country in Asia," helped cement this image, which was later adopted by the renamed Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) in 1979 (TAT History, 2022). Over time, tourism trends shifted from Western visitors to those from neighboring Asian countries, such as Malaysia and Singapore. From 2000 to 2017, Thailand's tourism strategies aimed to position the country as a global tourism hub. By 2007, Thailand had attracted 14.46 million international tourists, generating substantial revenue (Sookmark, 2011).

In recent years, Thailand has expanded its tourism offerings through initiatives such as the National Tourism Development Plan 2012-2016 (Sharafuddin, 2015), promoting niche markets like adventure, medical, ecotourism, cultural, health and wellness, MICE, cruise, and sports tourism (Inpongpan et al., 2021; Na Ranong & Na Ranong, 2011; Nitikasetsoontorn, 2015; Sopha et al., 2020; Kongtaveesawas et al.,

2022; Chaobanpho et al., 2018; Esichaikul et al., 2019; Hengpoom & Weerasophon, 2019).

The influx of tourists from China has significantly boosted Thailand's tourism, with Chinese visitors reaching 9,846,818 in 2017, making up 27.66% of total arrivals (Ministry of Tourism & Sport, 2018). However, this surge has also led to negative attitudes among Thais toward Chinese tourists due to perceived poor behavior (Parasakul, 2019).

The latest national tourism development plan (2017-2021) emphasizes cultural tourism and the promotion of 'Thainess' as a key element in enhancing Thailand's image as a high-quality leisure destination. The 'Thainess' campaign focuses on seven aspects: Thai food, arts, way of life, wellness, festivals, wisdom, and fun, highlighting the cultural richness of Thailand (Chattan, 2015; Janvatanavit, 2015). While Thailand has seen significant growth in tourist numbers, the concept of 'Thainess' remains somewhat ambiguous. As globalization and World Cinema gain prominence, the film industry's portrayal of Thai culture becomes increasingly important in shaping the country's tourism image (Böhler, 2010).

2.1.1 Thainess (*Kwampenthai*) and the Discourse of Otherness

The concept of Thainess, or *kwampenthai*, represents a crucial aspect of Thailand's tourism strategy and national identity. Historically, this concept evolved significantly over time. Jocuns (2020) explains that *kwampenthai* first emerged as a form of national identity during the reign of King Rama IV (1851–1868). By the era of King Rama V (1868–1910), it had become an official ideology closely tied to

nationalism. The concept was used strategically to resist Western imperialism and colonialism from neighboring powers such as France and Britain (Jocuns, 2020). Initially, *kwampenthai* emphasized the distinction between 'ourselves' and foreign 'otherness,' affecting perceptions and treatment of foreign elements. For instance, King Rama VI perceived the increasing Chinese presence in Siam as a threat to Thai national identity and *kwampenthai* (Sattayanurak, 2020). However, this binary division between self and otherness was not always clear-cut. During King Rama V's reign, foreigners were viewed as both a threat of colonialism and a model of modernity, illustrating the complex relationship between *kwampenthai* and foreign influences. The interplay between adopting and resisting foreign norms highlighted the nuanced dynamics of *kwampenthai* (Chachavalpongpun, 2010).

The codification of *kwampenthai* continued under General Phibun's dictatorship, where it was formalized through state mandates that regulated various aspects of daily life, from attire to social practices (Sattayanurak, 2002). This period saw attempts to unify Thai identity, disregarding regional distinctions such as Northern Thai or Southern Thai identities. Phibun's government aimed to modernize Thai society while maintaining traditional values, integrating Western customs only if they aligned with his vision of Thai identity (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2014). This approach often involved rejecting practices perceived as unrefined, such as chewing betel nut, which was deemed inconsistent with the image of a civilized nation (Chachavalpongpun, 2010).

Buddhism has always been a central component of *kwampenthai*, reflecting the deep connection between Thai culture and religion. During King Rama

V's reign, Buddhism was integral to the concept of *kwampenthai*, reinforced through public symbols and national representations (Böhler, 2010). This connection extended to the national identity, encapsulated by the maxim "*chat, satsana, phramahakasat*" (nation, religion, monarchy) coined by King Rama VI (1910-1925).

The promotion of *kwampenthai* in the tourism industry became more pronounced during the 2014 military junta's regime. The "Discover Thainess" campaign, launched towards the end of 2014, utilized *kwampenthai* to bolster nationalism and support for the junta's political agenda. Tourism, a significant contributor to Thailand's GDP, was instrumental in gauging the economic performance of the country (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2019, cited in Jocuns, 2020). The junta's use of *kwampenthai* for political purposes reflected a form of appropriation and resemiotisation, continuing the practices of previous regimes (Jocuns, 2020).

Winichakul (1994) discussed the emergence of modern maps and their impact on the discourse of nationalism and *kwampenthai*, identifying key elements such as territory, population, and religion. He also noted the complexities of defining Thai identity, including the ambiguous categorization of non-Thai groups and the concept of 'otherness' within the country (Winichakul, 2000). This 'otherness' extended beyond foreigners to include non-Thai ethnic groups within Thailand, such as the hill tribes and forest peoples.

Kwampenthai encompasses various meanings, including Thai government, Buddhism, traditions, language, literature, art, and manners (Sattayanurak, 2020). These meanings are perpetuated by institutions and media,

shaping national identity and cultural norms (Jatuporn, 2016). In the context of globalization, *kwampenthai* has become a hybrid concept, reflecting a blend of traditional values and modern influences. This hybridity underscores the evolving nature of national identity in a globalized world, highlighting the ongoing interplay between local and global cultural dynamics.

2.2 Foreign Films Shot in Thailand and Thai Tourism

The early days of the Thai film industry began during a time when the country was known as 'Siam'. In 1894, Auguste and Louis Lumière conducted a film exhibition tour in Southeast Asia, including Krungthep (Bangkok), as part of their 'Wonderful Parisian Cinematograph' (Chaiworaporn, 2004). The first Hollywood film shot in Thailand, *Miss Suwanna of Siam* (1923), marked the Siamese Government's initial effort to use film to present a positive image of the country to the world (Southeast Asian History, 2018).

Beeton (2015) explored the influence of moving images on tourism and noted that although Thailand was featured in numerous foreign films, some of these were actually filmed elsewhere. For instance, *Anna and the King of Siam* (1946) was filmed in California and banned in Thailand due to historical inaccuracies and its portrayal of King Rama IV and the royal family (Hays, 2008). Despite the bans, films like these introduced Thailand to the global audience as an exotic destination.

The film *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957) was one of the first films to impact Thai tourism significantly. Although set during World War II in Burma, it was filmed in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) (Smith, 1972; New York Times, 2022). The film's

success, winning Oscars in 1958, drew attention to the actual Death Railway in Thailand, which has since become a notable tourist attraction (Dark-tourism.com, 2018).

Following this, *James Bond: The Man with The Golden Gun* (1974) played a key role in promoting Thailand. Phuket and Phang Nga, previously lesser-known, gained popularity as tourists sought to visit filming locations, such as Ko Tapu, which became known as James Bond Island (Reijnders, 2010; Helene & Huvet, 2019).

The trend of using Thailand as a stand-in for other locations, often for financial reasons, is referred to as 'Runaway Productions' (Beeton, 2005). The popularity of such films, including many action and war genres, rose significantly by the 2000s, though none have matched the public interest generated by *The Man with the Golden Gun*.

Beeton (2015) distinguishes between two types of film tourism: On-Location and Off-Location.

On-Location Film Tourism involves visiting actual filming sites to pay homage to the film (Beeton, 2015, p. 32). *The Beach* (2000), featuring Leonardo DiCaprio, showcased Thailand's allure, leading the Thai Government to establish the Thailand Film Office to attract international film productions and boost national income by facilitating location permits. Following this initiative, international films like Jackie Chan's *The Medallion* (2003), Steven Seagal's *Belly of the Beast* (2003), and Ridley Scott's *American Gangster* (2007) utilized Thailand for various scenes. Other notable films such as *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (2004), *Bangkok Dangerous* (2008), and *Only God Forgives* (2013) further contributed to Thailand's

cinematic reputation, though most Western films often present a foreign perspective that highlights negative aspects of the country. Recently, Bollywood has emerged as a significant contributor to film tourism in Thailand, with films like *Kaho Naa Pyar Hai* (2000) and *Awarapan* (2007) showcasing Thai settings. However, these films rarely mention Thailand explicitly in their narratives, resulting in a limited impact on promoting Thai tourism (Mthai.com, 2015).

The influence of Chinese cinema has also grown, with films such as *Go LaLa Go!* (2010) depicting Thai locales like Pattaya and Chiang Mai. *Lost in Thailand* (2012), a comedy set in Chiang Mai, became a major hit in China, sparking increased tourism to the filming locations (China Daily, 2014; Npr.org, 2013).

Off-Location Film Tourism includes visits to film studios or theme parks that may not feature actual filming (Beeton, 2015, p. 32). In 2013, the Thai government attempted to create film-induced attractions based on *The Man with the Golden Gun* and *Alexander the Great* (2004). However, these projects faced challenges due to administrative inefficiencies and failed to achieve significant success (Thairath online, 2021; Huttasin, 2016).

In 2016, the Thailand International Film Destination Festival aimed to strengthen ties between the film and tourism industries. Yet, political dynamics led to the exclusion of several films due to concerns over censorship and sensitive portrayals (Huttasin, 2016; Klemm, 2019).

Amidst regional competition, countries like Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Vietnam have invested heavily in media infrastructure and incentives to attract foreign filmmakers (Oxford Business Group, 2017; CNA, 2017). As Thailand faces increasing competition, it must continue to innovate to maintain its status as a leading film destination.

2.3 Local Film and Thai Tourism

In the early stages of the Thai film industry, local films were embraced by Thai audiences as a novel form of entertainment. Over time, the ‘Conventional Film’ genre gained significant popularity, with local filmmakers and viewers expressing satisfaction with its appeal (Sungsri, 2004). Sukwong (2001, cited in Sungsi, 2004) described Thai films as ‘*krob took rot*,’ akin to a rich Thai meal infused with elements of melancholy, excitement, arousal, and romance. This narrative style, reminiscent of traditional performances like lakorn and likay, featured archetypal heroes, heroines, and villains.

International recognition for Thai films was seen as a way to enhance film tourism. Rattana Pestonji's ‘Santi-Vina’ became the first Thai film to compete internationally at the 1954 Asia Pacific Film Festival in Tokyo (Thaifilmjournal, 2008). Similarly, Pestonji's ‘Black Silk’ was showcased at the Berlin International Film Festival in 1961 (Chaiworaporn, 2004). Despite these achievements, domestic studios continued to cater to Thai audiences with melodramatic content. The rise of television dramas and videotapes led to a decline in movie theater attendance, as audiences preferred the convenience and affordability of home viewing (Sungsri, 2004). The introduction of teen movies in multiplex theaters marked a shift from

traditional cinemas to modern shopping mall complexes, though these films primarily served local viewers and had limited impact on film-induced tourism.

Local Thai films, while not always directly linked to tourism promotion, have significantly shaped societal perspectives and cultural values, influencing global audiences (Kongdee & Soontaratta, 2015). These films act as indirect marketing tools, highlighting aspects of Thai culture such as Muay Thai and Thai cuisine, thereby enhancing Thailand's global tourism appeal (Thairath Online, 2014).

After 2000, studies by Somboonkerd (2009) and Panyasopon (2012) categorized Thai films into two groups: those associated with film festivals and art houses, and those in the mainstream genre business, particularly horror and action. Independent films like *'Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives'* (2010) by Apichatpong Weerasethakul received international acclaim for their unique style but appealed to niche audiences. In contrast, mainstream films such as *'Nang Nak'* (1999) incorporated elements of 'Thainess' and resonated with broader audiences (Ainslie & Ancuta, 2018). The release of *'Ong Bak: Muay Thai Warrior'* in 2003 marked a new era for Thai action cinema. Designed for both domestic and international markets, the film showcased Muay Thai in a manner influenced by Hong Kong cinema's Kung Fu tradition. Its success led to *'Tom Yum Goong'* (2005), which further popularized Muay Thai and demonstrated Thai cinema's potential for global appeal (Show DC, 2016). The 2013 film *'Pee Mak Prakanong,'* directed by Pisanthanakun, modernized the classic Thai ghost legend 'Mae Nak Phrakanong' with a comedy-horror twist, capturing contemporary audiences and aligning with global marketing trends (Sookkasikon, 2018). Thai horror films, including *'Pee Mak,'* have inspired off-