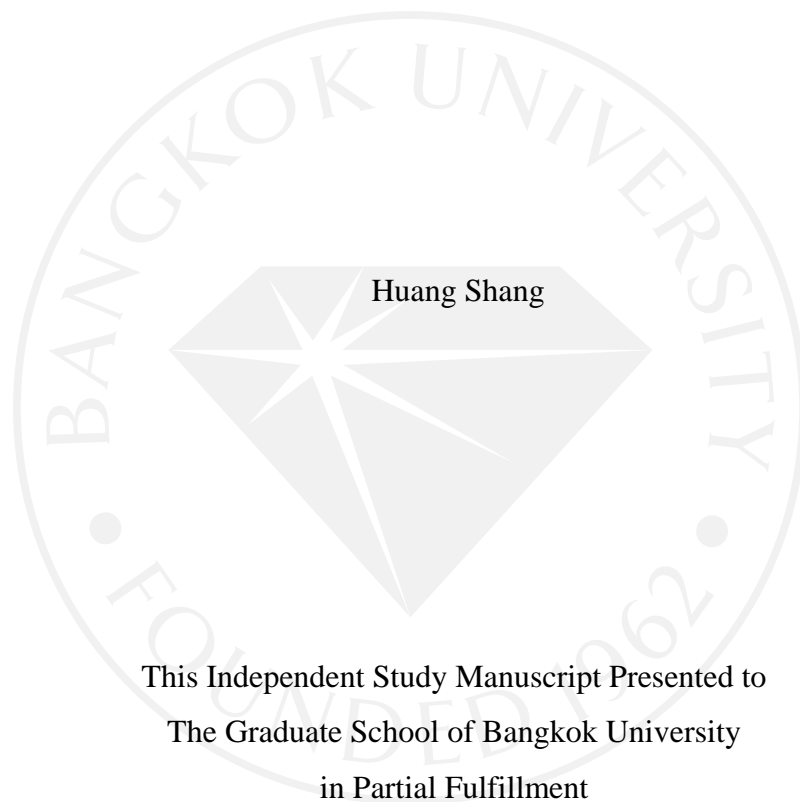


PORTRAYAL OF THAILAND: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF AMERICAN AND
CHINESE FILMS



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CHINESE FILMS



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ABSTRACT

This study evolved from the question of how Thailand was portrayed by foreign films. A primary objective of this study is to specifically examine how Thailand was characterized and portrayed in American films as well as a control comparison with Chinese films. To this end, a comparative textual analysis of 8 films - from the period of 2000 to 2015 was performed. The study identified the stereotypes of Thailand in foreign films, and tabulated the semiotics was used to portray Thailand in different films.

The portrayal of Thailand in American films is abundant and complicated. It is not only portrayed as a beautiful country, but also a chaotic place. Thai people have no exception; they are portrayed as poor, smart, friendly.

The portrayal of Thailand in Chinese films is relatively small and simple. Thailand is portrayed as a beautiful travel destination. Thai people are portrayed as friendly.

Keywords: Portrayal, Thailand, American film, Chinese film, Semiotic, Stereotyping

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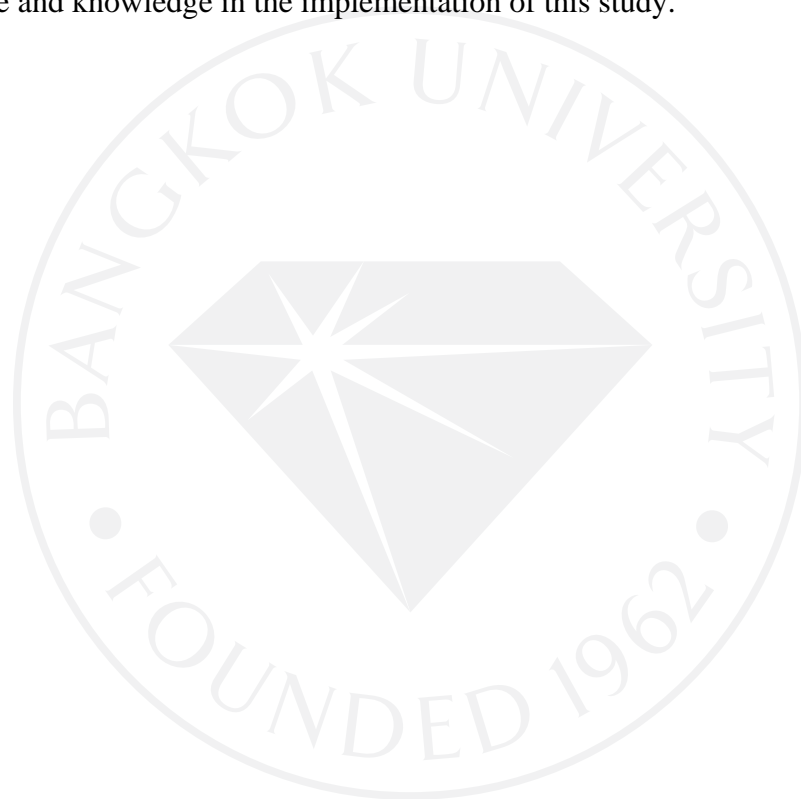


TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	v
LIST OF TABLES.....	viii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	ix
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Rationale and Statement of Problem.....	2
Scope of study.....	2
Research Questions.....	3
Research Objectives.....	3
Significance of the Study.....	3
Definition of Terms.....	4
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	7
Films.....	7
Media Portrayal.....	8
Portrayal of Thailand in Films.....	8
Cultural Dimensions.....	10
Culture of Thailand, U.S., and China.....	15
Stereotyping in Films.....	16
Semiotic Analysis of Films.....	17
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.....	20
Research Design.....	20
Data and Coded Films.....	20
Procedure.....	21
Measurement.....	22
Data Analysis.....	24
Reliability and Validity of the Study.....	24
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS.....	26
The semiotics and stereotypes of Thailand in films.....	26

TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

	Page
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS (Continued)	
General Comparison between American and Chinese Films.....	44
Cultural Comparison between American and Chinese Films.....	47
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION.....	52
Results Summary.....	52
Discussions.....	53
Limitations.....	55
Implications for Filmmakers.....	56
Implications for Government.....	56
Suggestions for Future Research.....	57
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	58
APPENDIX.....	62
BIODATA.....	65
LICENSE AGREEMENT.....	66

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 3.1 : A 2 by 2 Factorial Design/ Catalogue of Thai Cultural Elements.....	23
Table 4.1 : Visual/Scene Elements.....	26
Table 4.2 : Audible/Scene Elements.....	35
Table 4.3 : Visual/Character Elements.....	36
Table 4.4 : Audible/Character Elements.....	43



LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 2.1 : The Comparison of Thai, American and Chinese Culture through the Lens of the 6-D Model ©.....	15
Figure 4.1 : The view from Lebua's Sirocco restaurant.....	28
Figure 4.2 : The view of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha.....	29
Figure 4.3 : Loi Krathong.....	30
Figure 4.4 : The coup scene.....	31
Figure 4.5 : Riding elephant scene.....	32
Figure 4.6 : Boat scene in <i>Bangkok Dangerous</i>	32
Figure 4.7 : Boat scene in <i>Death Trip</i>	33
Figure 4.8 : Alan drinks soda from a plastic bag.....	34
Figure 4.9 : Fruit shop.....	34
Figure 4.10 : Thai band.....	35
Figure 4.11 : Joe and Rain are feeding elephant.....	37
Figure 4.12 : William plays with the dog Lele.....	38
Figure 4.13 : Richard visit the Pho Temple.....	39
Figure4.14 : Buddhist temple in <i>Death Trip</i>	39
Figure 4.15 : Rain is performing Thai dance in a traditional Thai dress.	41
Figure 4.16 : Thai monks in Chinese monk robe.	41
Figure 4.17 : Wang Bao and a lady-boy.	42
Figure 4.18 : Rambo stands in the rain.	44
Figure 4.19 : Go Go club.	46
Figure 4.20 : Lala and David stand in front of the sea.....	46
Figure 4.21 : Traditional Thai pavilion behind a modern pool.....	50
Figure 4.22 : Monkey is delivering drugs.	51

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides background of Thailand as a popular film destination, rationale and statement of problem, scope of the study, research questions, research objectives, significances of the study, and definition of terms.

1.1 Introduction

The relationship between film portrayal and one country's national image has always been a thriving academic pursuit. Vösu & Joosepson (2005) pointed out film serves as public and popular forums for reflecting, discussing and interpreting national identity by communal creation and reception. On one hand, film has the power to shape individual and group identities as well as has power to transmit cultural values to wide audiences. On the other hand, Film is an especially vivid way in which cues may be both audible and visual and be relayed to large and potentially global audiences (Walter, 2011). Through the presentation of rich insights into the cultures, Film helps to constitute the viewers' inner, private lives, public selves and identities (Lawless, 2014).

In Thailand, local films are the main source to promote Thailand for international audiences. However, other foreign films portray Thailand from a different perspective and offer a different angle to discourse Thailand, they are important as well. That is why The Tourism Authority of Thailand appointed Thailand Film Office to assist foreign filmmakers in finding the right local services and produce films in Thailand. They want to promote Thailand in the global stage further and deeper.

With beautiful nature, Thailand can provide the backgrounds to bring a fantasy to movie screen. According to Thailand Film Office (2015), Thailand has been presented in many American and Chinese films. Famous directors including Werner Herzog, Danny Boyle, Oliver Stone, Xu Zheng, and Xu Jinglei shot their films in Thailand.

1.2 Rationale and Statement of Problem

As a tourism-dependent country, the benefits of international film production for Thailand are obvious. Jewell and McKinnon (2008) proved that film tourism can contribute to the country's economy. It could further be perceived that film is connected to nostalgia and identity of the destination country. A yearning for what life was or should be like, creating identities within historical settings, imaginary and/or factual. In fact, *Lost in Thailand*, megahit Chinese film, has been inspiring a large amount of cash-carrying Chinese travelers to visit Chiang Mai (Mahtani, 2013). However, how these foreign films portray Thailand and which elements of the film can represent Thailand are hardly studied.

Film is one special source of information about Thailand and Thai People in both visual and audible dimensions. Analyzing film contents allows us to see thematic representation concerning Thailand. Although film has become very popular mass medium worldwide, when cross-cultural contacts and interactions take place, and when message sender and message receiver are from different cultures, it becomes more complicated and interesting (Gao, 2006). The analysis of film contents is the interpretation of how filmmakers might think about Thailand. In other words, what kind of stereotypes they hold about Thailand.

Due to the inequality of global communication flow, Thailand receives relatively less attention from the Chinese media than American media. Recently, Chinese film industry has become more involved in Thai cinema through co-productions and distribution deals. The past research involved investigations of western films, especially American film representations of Thailand and Thai people. However, one missing puzzle piece remains regarding how non-western films, such as Asian media, perceive Thailand and Thai people and what the major differences between these two kinds of portrayal really are. Thus, finding out how an Asian country sees and portrays another Asian world country is important for the advancement of cross-cultural communication field.

1.3 Scope of study

This qualitative research is limited to an intercultural communication study of the eight selected films and its scope is semiotic analysis and stereotyping analysis.

One of the aims of this independent study is to describe how the popular films can reflect the identity of one country, which is Thailand in particular. Hence, the films must be related to Thai culture or/and shot in Thailand. Then, a textual analysis of four American and four Chinese films produced during 2000 and 2015 will be conducted. A 2 by 2 factorial design will be used to examine the Thai cultural elements in these films.

1.4 Research Questions

To examine the portrayals of Thailand in Chinese and American films, the first two research questions are developed as follows:

Research Question # 1: How do American films portray Thailand?

Research Question # 2: How do Chinese films portray Thailand?

This study will investigate if Thailand is viewed positively or negatively in different films. The past findings support the notion that the American films often create negative stereotypes rather than promoting positive perceptions of Thailand. On the other hand, whether Chinese films portray Thailand more positively or neutrally is unknown. Based on this standpoint, one can argue that maybe Thailand in Chinese directors' eye is different from American directors' perception. Due to lack of empirical research addressing this phenomena, a third research question is posed:

Research Question # 3: What are the differences and similarities between American films' and Chinese films' portrayal of Thailand?

1.5 Research Objectives

This study is fundamentally intended to examine the intercultural communication and stereotyping in films. The specific objectives are:

- a. To examine the semiotics of Thailand in American and Chinese films.
- b. To explore the stereotyping of Thailand in American and Chinese films.
- c. To compare the portrayal of Thailand in American and Chinese films.

1.6 Significance of the Study

Firstly, this paper presents an elementary comparison between Chinese and American films' discourse on Thailand. It would help to discover and understand the

intercultural communication characteristics of western country and non-western country. The findings could help to identify both the positive and negative of Thai image from an intercultural perspective as well.

Secondly, this study attempts to seek for a better way to build a smoother and more active communication between film-makers and viewers. It would help audience to see the hidden meanings of films which are revealed by particular semiotics and stereotypes.

Thirdly, it highlights the importance of international cooperation and cultural diversity for the film sector in Thailand and in other partner countries. At the same time, it would strengthen the global outreach of Thailand's film industry.

In a nutshell, this research of intercultural communication will not merely study Thailand image in American and Chinese Film, but also provide a basic comparison between them.

1.7 Definition of Terms

1.7.1 Film: According to Merriam Webster (2015), film means a series of pictures projected on a screen in rapid succession with objects shown in successive positions slightly changed in order to produce the optical effect of a continuous picture in which the objects move.

1.7.2 American film: This term refers to the film produced by American company, rather than by American film directors.

1.7.3 Chinese film: This term refers to the film produced by Chinese company, rather than by Chinese film directors.

1.7.4 Scene: In this paper, scene means a complete unit of film narration. A series of shots, or a single shot, that takes place in a particular location and that deals with a specific action. Sometimes used interchangeably with sequence. For example, a love scene at one of the beach in Phuket tells a romantic relationship between a young male and a young female protagonist in *The Beach*. This kind of scene includes lots of elements regarding Thailand such as beautiful beach, warm weather, Thai people and their collectivistic culture.

1.7.5 Culture: According to Merriam Webster (2015), culture is the beliefs, customs, arts, etc., of a particular society. In this paper, Thai culture refers to religion,

customs, norms, cuisine, art, music, architecture and traditional holidays.

1.7.6 Character: In this paper, Character has two dimensions of meanings. First, it is a person in a movie. Like the leading actor and supporting actor. Second, it is the mental and moral qualities distinctive to an individual, which refers to the different personalities among Thai, American and Chinese actors.

1.7.7 Country image: According to the World Tourism Organization's definition, country image is "a set of emotional and traditional perceptions arising from the comparison of all country's features, its own experience and rumors affecting the creation of a certain image" (as cited in Nurtazina, Zhumashov, & Tomanova, 2014, p.486). This paper focuses on the image of Thailand in foreign films, in terms of intercultural context.

1.7.8 Media portrayal: This term refers to the act of showing or describing Thailand or Thai people especially in American and Chinese films.

1.7.9 Stereotyping: According to Merriam Webster (2015), stereotyping is defined as a fixed conventional conception or notion of group of people or an individual, held by other people. Media stereotypes can be basic or complex generalizations which filmmakers portray Thailand based on culture, environment, people's appearance, and behavior.

1.7.10 Semiotics: According to Merriam Webster (2015), Semiotics is a general philosophical study of the relationship between a sign, a symbol, and a meaning. These cultural semiotics are the basic coded variables for this study. In this paper, semiotics are words, gestures, pictures, or objects that carry a particular meaning related to Thai culture, such as elephant, Thai greeting gesture called "wai," Thai food and music.

1.7.11 Cultural dimensions: This term refers to six dimensions of national culture proposed by Geert Hofstede. Representing independent preferences for one state of affairs over another that distinguish countries from each other, these six dimensions consist of 1) power distance index 2) masculinity versus femininity, 3) individualism versus collectivism, 4) long-term orientation versus short-term normative orientation, 5) uncertainty avoidance index, and 6) indulgence versus restraint (The Hofstede Center, 2015).

1.7.11.1 Power Distance Index (PDI): Hofstede defines "power distance

index” as the degree to which the minority people of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally (The Hofstede Centre, 2015).

1.7.11.2 Individualism: It can be defined as everyone is independent and individuals are expected to take care of themselves and immediate families only.

1.7.11.3 Collectivism: This term attempts to see a group of people as having a single identity similar to a person. It is a preference that the group is more important than the individual (The Hofstede Centre, 2015).

1.7.11.4 Masculinity: It represents a preference on values such as money, success, and dominance in society. Society is more competitive.

1.7.11.5 Femininity: This term stands for conventional traits, such as being supportive, modesty, caring for the weak and quality of life (The Hofstede Centre, 2015).

1.7.11.6 Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI): This term indicates the degree to which a society is tolerant for ambiguity and uncertainty. Countries exhibiting strong UAI are less comfortable with uncertainty and attempt through laws and regulations to reduce or manage ambiguity whereas countries exhibiting weak UAI are typically more open to change and are more tolerant of risk taking (The Hofstede Centre, 2015).

1.7.11.7 Short-Term Normative Orientation: This kind of society prefers to respect traditions and norms while saving a relatively small propensity for the future.

1.7.11.8 Long-Term Orientation: This kind of society encourages thrift and efforts in modern education as a way to prepare for the future. They have the ability to adapt traditions to changed conditions (The Hofstede Centre, 2015).

1.7.11.9 Indulgence: This term stands for the freedom of satisfy basic needs and behaviors, people can enjoy life and have fun.

1.7.11.10 Restraint: This term stands for strict social norms are followed and gratification suppressed in the society (The Hofstede Centre, 2015).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews various literature regarding films, media portrayal, portrayal of Thailand in films, cultural dimensions, culture of Thailand, the U.S. and China, stereotyping in films, and semiotic analysis of films.

2.1 Films

As an art form with an aesthetic and a language all its own, film is a powerful force for entertainment and socio-cultural identity formation. In France, Lumiere Brothers created one of the earliest movies in 1895. The first film lasted 5-8 minutes, and were a collection of these short scenes: a train arriving at a station, workers leaving the Lumière factory. In the United States, at the same time, Thomas A. Edison was producing similar short shows (Bordwell, Thompson, & Ashton, 1997).

In 1912, the first official film-studio opened in Hollywood, called Nestor Studio. Since then, American film has had a profound effect across the world. From “James Bond island” to “the perfect beach” and from Bangkok’s five star hotels to the beautiful floating market, Thailand has appeared in many American films.

With the advent of globalization, movie production has been clustered in China since twenty-first century. According to Forbes, from 2001 to 2007, annual revenue in China cinema increased at a 34% compound annual rate (as measured in US dollars); from 2008 to 2014 the pace quickened to 40% per year, and there’s no sign of a slowdown (Cain, 2015). Hollywood has been navigating the Chinese film industry in creative ways, including by producing more movies with different countries and by casting more foreign actors. China is learning to make global products, and Chinese movies starting to shot overseas and use foreign actors, such as Thai film star Mario Maurer in Chinese movie *Love on That Day*.

American movie industry has big impacts around the world and Chinese movie industry is the fastest growing one. These two kinds of movies can represent the modern film industry. This is the reason why they are selected out for this study.

2.2 Media Portrayal

Media portrayal refers to the ways in which the mass media portray particular persons, groups, communities, experiences, ideas, or topics from a particular ideological perspective. Media content is constructed in the form of messages and interpreted within the context of those messages. The Meaning Theory of Media Portrayal proposed by Melvin DeFleur and Timothy Plax (1980) in their research study “Human Communication as a Bio-Social Process”. They point out that communication is a tool that is used to process meanings. People create, interpret and retain a sense of meaning via the media content. The content of the mass media can shape meaning or establish similar meanings among large audiences. Meaning resides with in people and we relate it with the media content.

This theory states that how humans behave is a product of inner understandings. That understanding is formed based on how an audience constructs meanings for the semiotics that they see through media and this happens only when the viewer’s culture gives shared interpretations to the media portrayal. Meaning in communication refers to the link between readers and messages (DeFleur & Plax, 1980). Similarly, in this paper, meaning in communication refers to the link between viewers and films. Through participation in a variety of communication process, new meanings of Thailand are shaped, reshaped and stabilized by filmmakers and audiences.

2.3 Portrayal of Thailand in Films

The past empirical study provided insight into the way in which foreign films, portray Thailand, particularly under the intercultural context. Several related communication theories are placed to analyze the different portrayal and the reasons behind. The image of Thailand in films has been understudied by lots of scholars and film historians. The majority studies focused on how Thai films portray Thailand. *The Legend of Suriyothai* (Yukol, 2001) is the representation of Thai /national identity. It is about how Thai people think of their own history. Interestingly, Chatrichalerm Yukol, the director of *The Legend of Suriyothai* chose to tell the story of the Ayutthaya queen from the eyes of a Portuguese mercenary. In the sense, the director

tried to portray Thailand in this film through foreigner's perspectives (Jirattikorn, 2003; Lewis, 2003). Because in the globalizing postmodern world, national identity in its own turn should be considered within the pattern of other cultural and personal identities (Võsu & Joosepson, 2005).

Thailand has been presented in many foreign films, such as *Anna and the King* (Tennant, 1999), *The Hangover Part III* (Phillips, 2013) and *Lost in Thailand*. These films emphasize the how other people understand Thailand. For instance, *Anna and the King* is a film about his Majesty King Rama IV or King Mongkut of Siam. It was filmed in Malaysia and played by a Chinese film star, Chow Yun-Fat, who played the king role. This film operates in a space where the struggle for national identity jostles with the desire to affirm Thailand's place in an intercultural context.

Unfortunately, the intercultural understanding of film is not always going smoothly and well. *Anna and the King* has been banned from Thailand because of "several inappropriate scenes" in its portrayal of the king and the Thai dynasty (BBC, 1999). The famous Thai director Chatrichalerm Yukol even said, "Everybody knows that film *Anna and the King* is just a joke" (as cited in Jirattikorn, 2003, p. 302).

In the case of *Anna and the King*, when Thai viewers watched this film, they disagree with how foreign filmmakers portray Thailand. That is why the film is banned from the Thailand National Film Board.

Besides western films, Chinese film industry has become more involved with Thai cinema nowadays. The communication between China and Thailand has been long and intimate. Like religious journey and goods trade, mass media communication, especially film, plays a role in shaping the identity and maintaining the relationship between China and Thailand. For instance, *Lost in Thailand* (Xu, 2012), a comedy film, is the highest-grossing Chinese film ever in the Chinese history. Besides *Lost in Thailand*, more and more Chinese films were shot in Thailand, and can be watched in Thai cinema nowadays.

China's influences on Thailand in the cultural dimension can be seen in the advent of the Chinese media (Tungkeunkunt, 2013). As director Peter Chan said, 'If Chinese film-makers can make films in Hollywood ... why can't Asians jump out of their local markets and make films for each other?' (as cited in *Hunt*, 2005, p. 74).

Different speakers use different discourses to speak the same idea in different domains (Tsz& Fong, 2010). For Thai film-makers, historical film is the best way to stage national identity, such as *The Legend of Suriyothai*. However, portrayal of Thai identity for foreigner can be realized in various genres, such as comedy *Lost in Thailand* (Xu, 2012), action, *The Man with the Golden Gun* or romance *Go lala Go* (Xu, 2010). Compared with Thai local film, like *The legend of Suriyothai* and American film, such as *Anna and the King*, Chinese film does not portray Thailand directly. Normally, the theme in Chinese films has no content about Thailand, thanks to the great success of *Lost in Thailand*, there are many Thai elements embedded in the recent Chinese movies, importantly speaking, more scholars begin to understand and research how Chinese film associate with Thailand now.

Due to lack of studies in this topic, investigating how other foreign films portray Thailand would expand knowledge on portrayal of Thai identity by foreign films.

2.4 Cultural Dimensions

To better understand the portrayal of Thailand in foreign film, it is also important to understand cultures of Thailand and foreign countries. American and Chinese movies are selected based on two cultural reasons; the first reason is that they are highly different based on cultural dimensions proposed by Hofstede; and the second reason is that they represent the western and eastern culture.

It is proposed that Thai culture and identity in foreign film is connected with the relationship between that producing country and Thailand. This study uses Hofstede's Culture Dimension Index Model to explain the differences among Thai, American and Chinese cultures.

Based on the findings collected within IBM Company from 1967 to 1973, Hofstede defines culture as “the collective programming of the mind distinguishing the members of one group or category of people from others.” He emphasizes that culture can be only used meaningfully by comparison, and the scores of different countries on the dimensions are relative. The following six dimensions are used to identify cultural values and explain their differences (The Hofstede Centre, 2015).

2.4.1 Power Distance Index (PDI)

As the first cultural dimension proposed by Hofstede, Power Distance Index (PDI) is defined as the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a state accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. High score refers to a hierarchical order is accepted in society and everybody has a place and which needs no further justification. Low score refers to people demand justification for inequalities of power and strive to equalize the distribution of power.

Thailand scores 64 on PDI index, slightly lower than other Asian countries, such as China. Thai people accept inequalities easily. China scores 80, it sits in the higher rankings of PDI. In traditional Chinese culture, the subordinate-superior relationship tends to be polarized and there is almost no defense against power abuse by seniors and superiors. For the United States of America, the quite low score of 40 reflects that subordinates see their superiors as approachable and their orders as negotiable (The Hofstede Centre, 2015).

2.4.2 Individualism versus Collectivism

The second cultural dimension is called “individualism versus collectivism.” Here, the fundamental issue is the degree of interdependence a society maintains among the members. It can be defined whether people’s self-image is related to “We” or “I”. Individuals are supposed to take care of only themselves and their families in individualistic culture. Its opposite, collectivism, represents that individuals can expect their friends or members of a particular in-group to look after them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.

Both Thailand and China scores 20 for this index, Thailand is a highly collectivist country. Thai people are not confrontational and a “yes” may not mean an agreement or acceptance in their communication. An offense leads to loss of face and Thai people avoid feeling shameful in front of others. Similar to Thailand, China is a highly collectivist country where individuals act in the interests of the group but not necessarily of themselves. With a high score 91, individualism is the core value of American culture. Americans perhaps are the best joiners around the world; however, it is very difficult, especially for male, to develop deep friendships (The Hofstede Centre, 2015). Hence, in *Bangkok Dangerous*, the American killer Joe takes a long time to make friends with local Thai people.

2.4.3 Masculinity versus Femininity

The third cultural dimension called “masculinity versus femininity” focuses on how extent to which a society stress achievement or nurture. Gender roles are very different in masculine society. Men are supposed to be tough and assertive, ambitious as well as successful. Women are supposed to be tender, helpful and more modest. On the contrary, social gender roles overlap in femininity society: Both men and women are equal (The Hofstede Centre, 2015).

A high score (masculinity) indicates that this society will be driven by competition and achievement, with success being defined by the winner in this area– a value system that starts from birth to death. A low score (femininity) stands for a preference for modesty, cooperation, caring for the weak and caring the quality of life.

The world average score on this dimension is 50. Thailand scores 34 and is thus considered a feminine society. Compared with the average Asian countries’ score 53, Thailand has the lowest masculinity ranking. For Thai people, the main priorities in life are relationship, family and living standard. Sexual roles are not strictly fix, men and women have equal social roles. Therefore, transgender become a semiotic of Thai character in foreign films.

The score of the China on masculinity is high at 66. China is a Masculine society indeed. The need to ensure success can be proved by the truth that Chinese people will sacrifice family and leisure activities to study and work. Leisure time is not so important. Success is the top priority. One example is that in *Lost in Thailand*, the two Chinese businessmen come to Thailand not for a vacation but for a business contract.

The score of the United States of America is 62, lower than China. And this can be seen in the typical American behavioral patterns. Masculine cultures show more confidence. Americans show their masculine drive individually. Behaviors in school or office are based on the shared values that everyone should try their best and that the winner takes all. Thus, Americans prefer to display and express freely their achievements in daily life (The Hofstede Centre, 2015).

2.4.4 Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)

Uncertainty Avoidance Index, as the fourth cultural dimension, the core idea is the cultural perceptions about the future. Should we try to manage the future or just let

it happen? This uncertainty brings with it anxiety and different countries have learnt to deal with it in diverse ways. The extent to which the members of a particular culture feel threatened by unknown situations and have created norms and institutions that try to avoid ambiguity is reflected in the score on Uncertainty Avoidance Index.

On this dimension, Thailand scores an intermediate 64, and it slightly indicating a preference for avoiding uncertainty. Because of this high Uncertainty Avoidance personality, Thai people do not readily accept changes and is very risk adverse. Only in-group change is acceptable for the greater good of the future.

China has a low score 30 on this dimension. Adherence to laws and regulations may be flexible to suit the different situation and pragmatism is a fact everywhere. Usually, Chinese are entrepreneurial and adaptable. Chinese are comfortable with ambiguity. For example, Chinese language is difficult for foreigner to follow because it is full of ambiguous meanings. Therefore, Chinese characters do not speak Chinese when they need to communicate with Thais in films.

With a low score of 46, the United States of America scores below Thailand but higher than China. Americans find themselves being impacted to a larger extent than if the other culture scored either higher or lower. Consequently, American tends to be more tolerant of new ideas or different opinions from others and respects the freedom of expression. Americans do not require many rules and are less emotionally expressive than higher-scored culture, such as Thai culture (The Hofstede Centre, 2015).

2.4.5 Long Term Orientation versus Short Term Orientation

This fifth cultural dimension describes how every society has to maintain some connections with its own past while coping with the challenges of the future, and societies prioritize these two existential goals differently. Low score means that society prefers to maintain traditions and norms while viewing societal change with suspicion. High score means that society encourages thrift and efforts in modern education as a way to prepare for the future.

Thai culture is more normative than pragmatic. A low score of 32 indicates that Thai people are normative and they have a strong concern upon establishing the absolute truth in their mind. They have great respect for traditions, a relatively small tendency to save for the future, and a focus on achieving quick results.

China has a very pragmatic culture. With a high score of 87, people believe that the truth depends very much on time, context and situation. Chinese people tend to value the perseverance, patience and frugality. At the same time, they have an ability to adapt traditions easily to ever-changing conditions.

With a low score of 26, American culture is more normative than pragmatic. For one thing, Americans are likely to check whether new information is true. For another, Americans are very practical, they have the “can-do” attitude. Many Americans have very strong sense about what is “good” or “bad”. Hence, there is a big interest in sensitive issues, such as world peace (The Hofstede Centre, 2015). In addition, this is the reason why there are so many superheroes in American films.

2.4.6 Indulgence versus Restraint

This last dimension has not yet been widely adopted within the intercultural communication field because it is still relatively new. It can be defined as the extent to which people try to control their desires and impulses based on the social norm. Relatively strong control is called “restraint” whereas relatively weak control is called “indulgence.” Therefore, culture can be described as either indulgent or restrained.

With an intermediate score of 45, Thailand is neither indulgent nor restrained. However, China is a restrained society as can be seen in its low score of 24. Chinese has a tendency to pessimism and cynicism. People with this orientation have the perception that their actions are restraint by social norms and feel that indulging themselves is unhealthy or wrong. Chinese do not highly emphasize leisure activities and attempt to control the gratification of desires.

On the contrary, with a high score of 68, the United States of America can be determined as an indulgent society. In combination with a normative score, this can be seen in the “play hard behavior” and “work hard attitude” (The Hofstede Centre, 2015). Hence, drugs and prostitutions appear frequently in American movies.

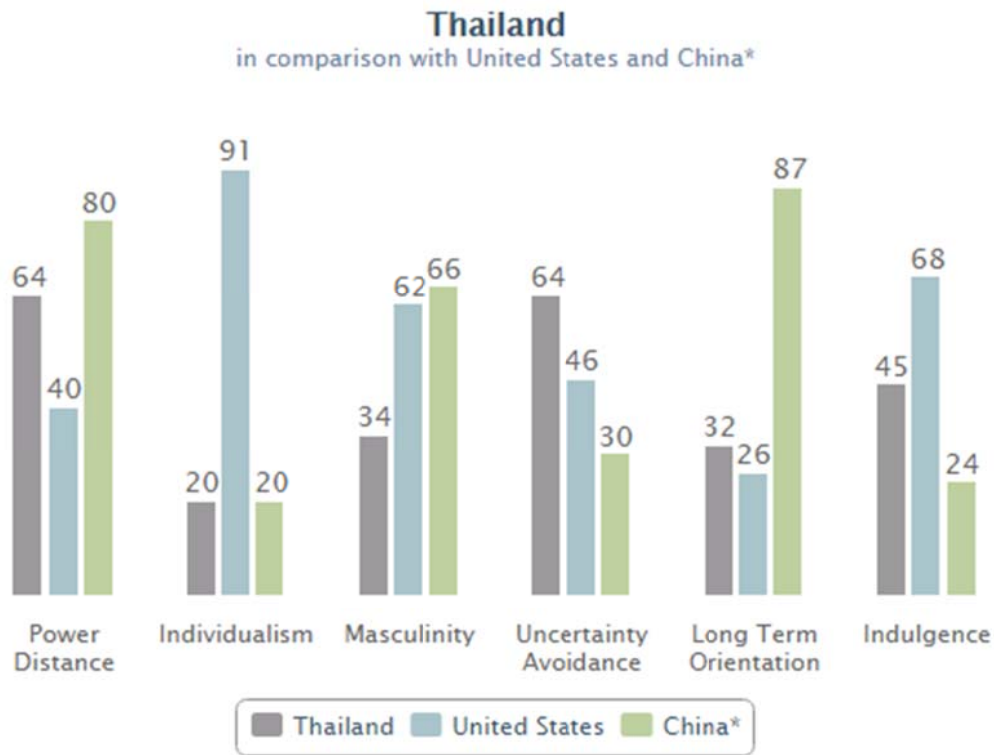


Figure 2.1: The Comparison of Thai, American and Chinese Culture through the Lens of the 6-D Model ©

Source: The Hofstede Centre. (2015). *Thailand in comparison with US and China*.

Retrieved from <http://geert-hofstede.com/thailand.html>

2.5 Culture of Thailand, U.S., and China

Through the lens of the 6-D Model, Figure 2.1 clearly shows the differences between Thai culture, American culture and Chinese culture. According to this model, a western filmmaker would not understand Thailand as the same way as an Asian does because of his/her cultural background is totally different. This theory can also explain why *Anna and the King* was banned in Thailand. As Thai culture is different from western culture, the intercultural misunderstanding will appear accordingly.

Due to the historical and geographical factors, people may think over Chinese culture and Thai culture is very similar. However, there is only one indicator - - individualism, which Thailand and China have the same score. With a score of 20,

Both Thailand and China are considered highly collectivist countries. The other indexes are different as well. As a result, the misrepresentation could also happen.

As discussed before, there are many differences between American cultures and Chinese cultures. These differences may sometimes lead to confusions in understanding the messages from another culture, like Thai culture. For example, Leslie Chen, a representative from American film distributor IM Global (as cited in Wang, 2014, p.3) described his perception of Chinese films as follows:

"Chinese movies aren't films that would appeal to everybody because they tend to be artistic rather than commercial and don't have a lot of buyers. It's not because they don't like Chinese movies but it's that they don't understand them."

Cultural differences reshape and develop an idea of the movie's themes. It will be interesting to see whether American films and Chinese films portray Thailand differently. This paper aims to examine how foreign filmmakers who come from different culture portray Thailand in both American and Chinese films.

2.6 Stereotyping in Films

Usually, stereotypes are considered to be detrimental to intercultural communication. Stereotypes can be positive as well as negative. Scholars criticize about how western media portray third world country or developing country, which are on the flip side of how they portray themselves. For instance, Wang (2013) found out that stereotype about Eastern women in Hollywood films has not changed over time. Lawless (2014) pointed out that the integrity of Russian male characters is undermined by their liaisons with murderers and smugglers in James Bond films. In addition, Oscar winning director Danny Boyle set the *Slumdog Millionaire* (2011) in Mumbai, India - scenes depicting negative images, such as begging syndicates and abusive cops (Bardhan, 2011). These kinds of stereotyping in films repeat again and again.

Ngampornchai (2007) found that Americans' stereotypes about Thailand and Thai people are fairly deep. In American's perception, Thailand is a beautiful country,

mainly associated with spicy food and exquisite temple. Nonetheless, there were also negative images such as poverty and prostitution.

On the other side, research in this field is very rare since few researchers care about how developing countries see and portray each other. Accordingly, one can argue that, the developing countries portray each other more friendly and more neutrally.

For instance, in the western press, *Lost in Thailand* has frequently been likened to *The Hangover II*. The two comedy films share similar plot in some setting, such as the buddy vibe (Brzeski, 2013). In social media, *The Hangover II* offended many Thais because of its portrayal of the country as the world's capital of vice. On Bangkok Post, Fernquest (2011) called *The Hangover II* "vulgar and stupid." Film reviewer, Kong Rithee, says that *Hangover II* is one of the worst sequels he has ever seen. By contrast, former Thai PM Yingluck Shinawatra met director Xu Zheng personally because of the wildly successful movie *Lost in Thailand*.

Aside from third gender character, Thailand was simply not represented for many years in Chinese films. In the twenty-first century, China film industry is booming, more and more Chinese films have been filmed in Thailand. They offered a different angle to discourse Thailand. This new phenomenon challenged the stereotypical portrayal of Thailand in western films.

The analysis of the movies has been used to underline the fact that there are cultural differences between countries. Then finding out what kind of stereotypes of Thailand in foreign films would fill in the knowledge gap.

2.7 Semiotic Analysis of Films

To understand the portrayal of Thai in films, this paper draws upon the semiotic theory. Symbols become meaningful in discourse. Semiotics analysis has been applied, with interesting results, to film for a long time. The filmmaker has a lot of options and possibilities to communicate messages and meanings through symbols and semiotics. Hence film analysis always means to interpret these decisions, find the intentions of the filmmaker and judge them (Biemann, 2015).

Chandler (2000) mentioned that signs are organized into meaningful systems

according to certain conventions that semioticians refer to as codes and mass media codes including filmic, photographic, televisual, newspaper and magazine codes. The genre, rhetorical and stylistic codes include narrative such as character, action, dialogue and setting. Social codes include physical orientation, appearance, fashions, clothing and cars (p.122). These kinds of codes which can be used to transport a meaning are most widely mentioned in the context of media and communication studies.

The use of available signs and symbols in cultural encoding and decoding is an issue of a filmmaker's competence. The contrasts between American/Chinese and Thai culture depicted through differences in language, food, clothing, religion and etc. In order to enter the international market, American and Chinese films have been incorporating more exotic cultural elements that are acceptable and appealing to global viewers. In Thailand, These elements include using local film stars and filmmakers, involving diverse cultures, traditional customs, language accommodation and other symbols or semiotics.

According to the Royal Thai Embassy (2015), national symbols of Thailand include the Thai pavilion and elephant. The Thai pavilion or “Sala” is the country’s architectural symbol and represents the skills of Thai craftsmen. Thai elephant is a symbol historically and traditionally associated with Thailand. At the same time, any ordinary audience can easily find Thai pavilion or elephant appears in foreign films related to Thailand. This is not coincident, this is how the filmmakers use semiotics to convey his/her ideology about Thailand. The Hangover Part II" line producer Chris Lowenstein told CNN (as cited in Hsiao & Kay, 2011):

"Bangkok is essentially one of the characters in the movie.

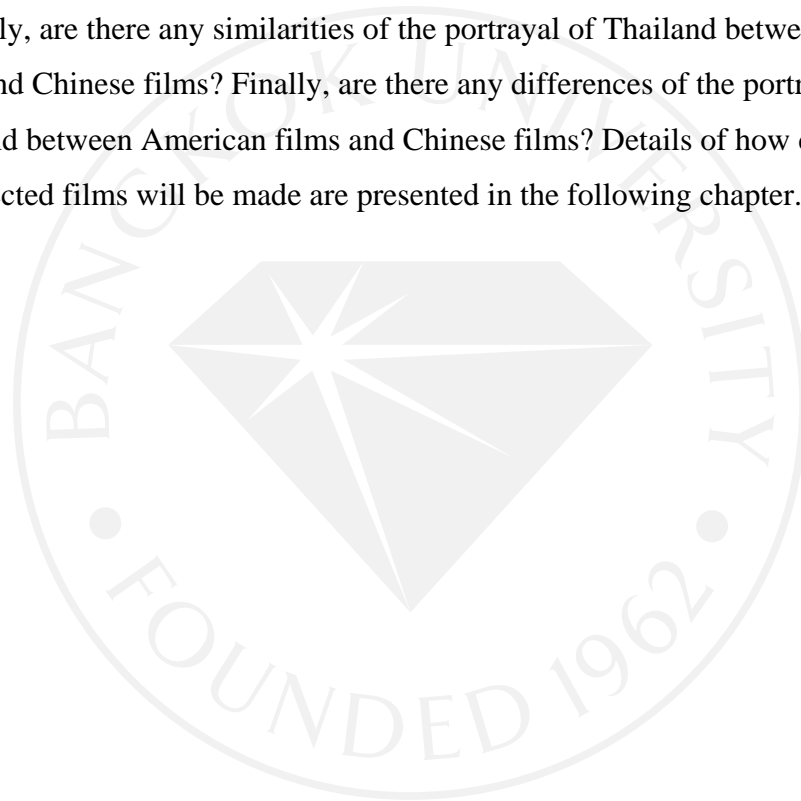
The different locations provide an interesting cross-section of the city, we're trying to show how rich of a tapestry it is."

This paper attempts to reveal some of the secrets with the instruments of semiotic film analysis. For example, signs have both denotative and connotative meanings. Elephant is a symbol of Thailand in foreigners’ eyes. In *Bangkok Dangerous*, when a picture of elephant, which at first was nothing but animal, is being placed on the wall in a killers’ house, the message of the sign changed. The denotation

“elephant” changes from “an animal” into a connotation or cultural meaning “bad luck.”

Film involves both audible and visual symbols. In this study, ten visual semiotics -- environment, location, festival, transportation, animal, religion, social status, costuming, food, gender; and two audible semiotics -- music and language -- are assessed to examine the portrayal of Thailand in films.

Based on the review of literature described above, three research questions are developed. Firstly, how do American films and Chinese films portray Thailand? Secondly, are there any similarities of the portrayal of Thailand between American films and Chinese films? Finally, are there any differences of the portrayal of Thailand between American films and Chinese films? Details of how comparison of the selected films will be made are presented in the following chapter.



CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the research design in detail. A brief explanation has been given about the criteria and methods of selecting sampled films. This chapter also describes research procedure, its rationale, and how data were coded. Data analysis is explained at the end of the chapter.

3.1 Research Design

This research design adopts qualitative approach and textual analysis to find out the underlying assumption for the selected American and Chinese films. The coding scheme was developed from the past researches by Landucci, Supadiloke, & Punnahitanond (2013, April), Pham & Punnahitanond (2013, May), and Ramasubramanian (2003, May).

As the cultural identities are not predominantly determined by the past, they are undergoing a constant transformation (Võsu & Joosepson, 2005). This research focuses on the 21st century. The time period of film considered for this study is from 2000 to 2015.

Both primary and secondary data are used in this research paper. Primary data are eight selected films. Secondary data are movie review articles. Due to the tight time schedule, the duration of data processing, textual analysis, and presenting research findings is approximately three months.

3.2 Data and Coded Films

The target population of this study is the selected American and Chinese films that portray Thailand in their story. These samples have been selected based on the two parameters: the essentialities of Thailand elements and the worldwide influence of production. Among those films released during 2000 and 2015, there are at least 15 films that meet this qualifications. More specifically, according to the grossing and the user rating in IMDb and Mtime, eight films of which story involve Thailand are purposively selected as samples of the study. They include four American films -- *The*

Beach, Bangkok Dangerous, Rambo, and The Hangover Part II -- and four Chinese films -- *Go lala go, Bring Happiness Home, Lost in Thailand, and Death Trip*. Appendix 1 lists details of the films examined in this study.

3.3 Procedure

This study consists of three steps. The first step aims to create a film list about Thai/Thailand through reviewing the ranking and comments in movie websites. The next step is concerned with textual analysis of the selected films to find general stereotypes. All relegated dialogues and images are examined and all cultural semiotics are organized in the second step. The last step involves comparing the American and Chinese films based on the Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions 6-D Model©.

Firstly, a list of motion pictures produced in the United States of America and the Republic of China that involves Thailand as one of the primary locales of the plot of the narrative and/or mention Thai characters in their plot was created. As such a list was non-existent, it was created by using secondary sources of information: one is the American's most authoritative website of movie-www.IMDb.com and the other one is the most popular Chinese movie forum- www.mtime.com.

This study takes a new direction to explore the Thai image in foreign films, as there are uncountable numbers of such films, a few case studies will illustrate the way might work. Overall, foreign films which include Thai elements and Thai identity could be divided into two categories:

Group A: The movies are filmed in Thailand and with Thai filmmakers. A good example is *Lost in Thailand* and *Bangkok dangerous*. Group B: The movies are not filmed in Thailand but Thai filmmakers or Thai film stars are involved in the film production. A good example is *Fast and Furious 7* and *Love on that Day*. One of the aims of this paper is to suggest how the popular films are also reflective of identity of Thailand. Accordingly, the movies must be related to Thai culture or/and shot in Thailand. For some movies where the theme has nothing of Thai content but where a minor Thai character could easily be noticed by audiences, these kinds of films are not the perfect material for this study. Take *Fast and Furious 7* as example, Tony Jaa

is not the leading actor of this film, but the audience may still recognize him as Thai because of his accent and Thai boxing actions. Except this tiny role of a Thai character, the whole story is not related to Thailand. This cannot be considered as the proper material as well. Therefore, this study only focuses on films in Group A, which the films were shot in Thailand and with Thai filmmakers involved in the production. Based on these selection criteria, the final list includes eight films, composing of four American films and four Chinese films.

The most crucial stage in the process was textual analysis of the films. The key point is how to determine the choice of signs and codes which refer to the image of Thailand. In the selected films, a variety of signs have been employed to construct the preferred meaning. These signs include visual signs, environment, gestures, color, costuming, and audio signs, local language and music. For the purpose of grouping and convenience, only important semiotics are chosen for investigation. Based on Ramasubramanian (2003), two dimensions of the films -- visual/audible and scene/character were examined.

3.4 Measurement

A 2 by 2 factorial design was used to create the coding scheme for examining 12 cultural elements in both American and Chinese films. These elements include environment, location, event, transportation, food, animal, religion, social status, costuming, gender, music, and language.

In the following table, those cultural elements are divided into four groups.

3.4.1 Visual/scene: five elements are coded to get the overall impression of Thailand. Those elements are environment, location, event, transportation and food.

3.4.2 Visual/character: Characters were coded in terms of religion, social status, costume and gender. Both Thai and foreigner characters were coded to get a comparative picture. Animal is also considered as a role.

3.4.3 Audible/scene: The only element to be coded is music, especially Thai music.

3.4.4 Audible/character: The only element to be coded is the language spoken by characters appeared in the films.

Table 3.1: A 2 by 2 Factorial Design/ Catalogue of Thai Cultural Elements

	Scene	Character
Visual	Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The climate and weather Location <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Nature area or urban area Event <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Traditional Thai holiday or western wedding or political event Transportation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Modern transportation or unique transportation like tuk tuk Food <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Thai cuisine 	Animal role <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Aggressive animal or adorable animal Religion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The religion of Thai people and foreigner Social status <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Thai character's occupation Costuming <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Traditional Thai dress or western style dress Gender <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Male, female or third gender
Audible	Music <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Whether Thai music appears 	Language <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Whether foreigner speaks Thai, or Thai speak other language

These coded variables also reflect the cultural dimensions proposed by Hofstede (2015). The relationship among the foreign character and Thai character is linked with power distance. The social status of Thai character can be further explained as equality and power distance too. Some behaviors of character are

associated with their individualistic or collectivistic culture. Character's gender and costume can tell whether Thai society is masculine or feminine society. The particular event such as wedding and Songkran festival can reflect the society is short-term oriented or long-term oriented. Some vice, such as drug abuse is related to indulgence or restraint. And a military coup can test the uncertainty avoidance index of the country. Hofstede 6-D Model© is used to test the relationship between cultural background and the stereotypes in intercultural communication.

3.5 Data Analysis

Based on the coding scheme presented above, diverse elements and similar patterns about Thai image in different movies were textually analyzed. The approaches are:

- a) Observing the details of every relevant scene and character in each of these selected films carefully.
- b) Recording the semiotics systematically.
- c) Categorizing the semiotics into appropriate group based on the coding scheme indicated previously.
- d) Discoursing the meaning behind the semiotics.
- e) Comparing the results from American and Chinese films.

In addition, quotes of any relevant images and dialogues that would further enrich the descriptive account of the portrayals such as Thai massage were analyzed as well.

3.6 Reliability and Validity of the Study

To achieve the reliability of this study, four films -- two American films, *No Escape*, *The Hangover Part II* and two Chinese films, *Forever Young*, *Lost in Thailand* -- were coded by the second coder with the same coding scheme used by the key investigator. The inter-coder reliability of this study is 91 percent.

In order to ensure the validity of this research, secondary data from the third sources such as movie review articles in *Empire* magazine are also used to analyze the selected films and cross check the textual analysis findings. As the biggest selling film

magazine in the United Kingdom, *Empire* is influential in the film industry worldwide. As the source is from another country beyond Thailand, China and The U.S., its standpoint is considered much more impartial. In addition, *No Escape* and *Forever Young* are the latest films released this year. As the newest materials, they are considered valid content for the data analysis.



CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter presented detailed results of the textual analysis of how eight selected American and Chinese films portray Thailand. Research findings in terms of similarities and differences of the country portrayal in films produced by the two countries based on Hofstede's cultural dimension model are presented in the following three sections.

4.1 The Semiotics and Stereotypes of Thailand in Films

Separated textual analyses were performed on the selected four American and four Chinese films. Results regarding the visual/scene elements are tabulated in Table 4.1; those regarding the visual/character elements are tabulated in Table 4.2; those regarding the audible/scene elements are tabulated in Table 4.3; and those regarding the audible/character elements are tabulated in Table 4.4.

In terms of visual/scene elements, textual analyses of selected films reveal five distinguish elements – environment, location, event, transportation, and food.

Table 4.1: Visual/Scene Elements

Visual/Scene Elements	American Films	Chinese Films
Environment	The climate is extremely hot and unpredictable.	The climate is extremely hot and unpredictable.
Location	The geographic range is more diverse, vary from jungle, island, and beach to luxurious hotel.	The geographic range is narrow, focus on beach, urban, temple, and China town.

Table 4.1(Continued): Visual/Scene Elements

Visual/Scene Elements	American Films	Chinese Films
Event	Prefer to present some political situations.	Prefer to present some popular Thai festivals.
Transportation	Diverse types of transportations: Airplane, boat, and motorcycle.	Diverse types of transportations: Airplane, train, motorcycle, tuk-tuk taxi, and boat.
Food	Exotic food	Delicious food

4.1.1 Environment

In reality, there are three seasons in Thailand and a range of temperature in different areas. However, Thailand has always been portrayed as hot and rainy in films. Generally, Western ego-centrism is a facet of American movies. Therefore, Thailand is portrayed as a different place. In *The Beach*, Richard, a young American tells his family via telephone “Here is different.” The first obvious difference lies on the weather such that the majority of scenes related to Thailand is tropical and humid throughout all the films. In Chinese films, the climate of Thailand is portrayed as hot and extremely as well.

The east wind across the ocean and sea generates abundant rain in Thailand. In American and Chinese films, the exciting or romantic things always happen in the rain. In *Lost in Thailand*, after a big fight, Wang Bo and Xu Lang hug each other in the rain, and they trust each other again. In *Rambo*, every time a guest visits his shelter hut, there is rain.

4.1.2 Location

It is not surprising to discover that Bangkok is the most-frequent location among American and Chinese films.



Figure 4.1: The view from Lebua's Sirocco restaurant

Source: Phillips, T. (2013). *The Hangover Part II* [Motion picture]. USA: Green Hat Films& Legendary Pictures.

The Thai elements in American films are always the key tourist destinations and the most luxurious accommodations. For example, the wedding of Stu in *The Hangover Part II* takes place at a five star resort in Krabi province, southern Thailand. The stunning waterfall in *The Beach* extends unforgettable scenery in the film. The most memorable sequences of *The Man with The Golden Gun* take place at a beautiful island with the needle-shape rock, Khoa Phing Kan. The island is closely associated with James Bond.

Compared with American films, Chinese films focus on temple, palace and China town particularly. *Lost in Thailand* is essentially a road movie about two Chinese people trying to get from Bangkok to Chiang Mai. On the flight, Xu Lang met Wang Bao. During their journey, the two men visited temples, markets and local villages, when their car broke down, they eventually found themselves lost in the jungle. *Bring Happiness Home* started with a long cast of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha. Another Chinese comedy film *Detective Chin Tang* (2015), which will be released this December is set in China town as well.



Figure 4.2: The view of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha

Source: Fu, H. (2013). *Bring Happiness Home* [Motion picture]. China: Bona Film Group Limited.

4.1.3 Event

As Thailand is a neighbor of China, the Chinese media pay lots of attention to the country for major news or noteworthy phenomena. Traditional Thai festival events are displayed frequently in Chinese films. According to *Lost in Thailand*, Xu Lang and Wang Bao celebrated the Songkran Festival with local Thai people. In *Go Lala go*, Lala made a wish during the Loi Krathong Festival.

For American films, they are more interested in political events. As evident in films, a lot of American films mentioned Thailand or even Asia's political situation. In *Rambo*, Stallone lived in Northern Thailand. The film describes Myanmar as a chaotic country whereas Thailand is a peaceful one. At the beginning, Rambo said that he enjoyed the simple life in Thailand, but he still took an adventure to Burma, and rescued some Christian aid workers who were kidnapped by local people. On his risk-taking way, beyond the display of brutal power, strength and destructive modern weaponry, a political message was conveyed in this film: What is the best way to solve political problems around the world? Rambo understand the global political situation and said, "Burma is a warzone." Then Sarah answered "we need to go and help these people, we're here to make a difference." The implicit message is: the world needs Rambo, the world needs the Americans. Rambo is not a monosyllabic

utterer and snake trapper, but a true hero.

No Escape, which was shown in movie theater one month prior to the data collection. The film was shot in Thailand, and the sensitive story is about an American family caught in the coup in a Southeast Asian country. The American filmmaker tried to make sure that the setting of the film is not obviously identified as Thailand. They use Cambodian letters on the riot police shields instead of Thai language. Although other scenes in the film are still associated with Thailand, the Royal Thai government approved this film in order to increase the number of film shooting in Thailand.



Figure 4.3: Loi Krathong

Source: Xu, J. L. (2010). *Go Lala go* [Motion picture]. China: DMG Entertainment.



Figure 4.4: The coup scene

Source: Dowdle, J.(2015). *No Escape* [Motion picture]. USA: Bold Films.

4.1.4 Transportation

Transportation in these films can be divided into modern transportation, such as train, subway, car, bus, boat, and traditional Thai transportation, such as elephant, and tuk-tuk. The presence of traditional transportation undermines Thailand's underdeveloped infrastructure. The presence of boat undermines Thailand's geographical feature.

Transportation commonly shown in Chinese films about Thailand is tuk-tuk, a three-wheeled taxi. Both in film and in reality, Chinese visitors travel by tuk-tuk to explore Thailand's markets, temples and roads. This unique transportation brings out the true excitement, mystery and beauty of Thailand. Similarly, these films indicate that Thai people are used to riding elephants. Boat appears often in both American and Chinese films. For example, in *Bangkok dangerous*, Joe and Kong took a boat in one mission. The beautiful surroundings around Chao Phraya river were presented through their eyes. In the end of *The Hangover Part II*, Phil, Alan and Teddy jumped into a speedboat to rush back to the wedding place and got his "perfect life" back. In film *Rambo*, main characters crossed the Thai border to Myanmar by boat. In *Death Trip*, An and Lin took many types of transportations -- tuk-tuk, boat, and train -- to travel in Bangkok.



Figure 4.5: Riding elephant scene

Source: Xu, Z. (2012). *Lost in Thailand* [Motion picture]. China: Enlight Media Group.



Figure 4.6: Boat scene in American film

Source: Chun, O., & Chun, D. (2008). *Bangkok Dangerous* [Motion picture]. USA: IEG Virtual Studios.



Figure 4.7: Boat scene in Chinese film

Source: Liu, C. (2014). *Death Trip* [Motion picture]. China: Beijing Anshi Yingna Entertainment Co.,Ltd.

4.1.5 Food

American films indicate that Thai people are used to eating insects and drinking snake blood. In American films, food is used in the movie to show cultural difference. From the movie *The Beach* - Richard tried snake blood for the first time. In *Bangkok dangerous*, Joe and the deaf girl had their dinner date, then Joe learned that Thai food can be very spicy. Thai people put drinks in a plastic bag to takeaway. Therefore, it is an odd sight for foreign viewers to see Alan sipped a carbonated drink from a plastic bag in *The Hangover Part II*. These films emphasize the unique way of food packaging to show the different food culture between the United States of America and Thailand.

In Chinese films, Thai food is portrayed as delicious food. The variety of fruits, Thai-style fried rice, and Tom Yam Kung (hot and sour shrimp soup) are most common representatives of Thai food in Chinese films. Food also symbolizes The Sino-Thai relationship among characters. Food unites people leading to the development of relationship. For example, drinking beer together is the fastest way to

improve relationship in Chinese culture. In *Bring happiness home*, William and Harry pretended to make friends with the thieves and put them drunk, then saved the dog. This seems to be resulted from the fact that Chinese culture is collectivistic culture.



Figure 4.8: Alan drinks soda from a plastic bag

Source: Phillips, T. (2013). *The Hangover Part II* [Motion picture]. USA: Green Hat Films& Legendary Pictures.



Figure 4.9: Fruit shop

Source: Xu, Z. (2012). *Lost in Thailand* [Motion picture]. China: Enlight Media Group.

In terms of audible/scene elements, textual analyses of selected films show only one different element – music.

Table 4.2: Audible/Scene Elements

Audible/Scene Element	American Films	Chinese Films
Music	Include modern Thai music	Include traditional Thai music

4.1.6 Music

In *The Hangover Part II*, The wedding band- Ska Rangers is a quirky Thai band based in Chiang Mai. Two of their songs are included in the movie soundtrack. However, the Thai band played an English song in the wedding scene. For the similar situation in Chinese movie, the traditional Thai music was presented. For instance, In *Go, Lala, Go!*, a female Thai singer in the celebration party sang a Thai song.



Figure 4.10: Thai band

Source: Xu, J. L. (2010). *Go Lala go* [Motion picture]. China: DMG Entertainment.

In terms of visual/character elements, textual analyses of selected films yield five different elements – animal role, religion, social status, costume, and gender.

Table 4.3: Visual/Character Elements

Visual/Character Elements	American Films	Chinese Films
Animal role	Elephant and aggressive animals (e.g., shark, monkey, snake)	Elephant and adorable animals (e.g., dog and pigeon)
Religion	Temple appears a lot, showing the contrast atmosphere.	Temple exists everywhere. Thai characters are full of Buddhist practices.
Social Status	Western characters play the main role whereas Thai characters play the supporting role such as drug dealer, pole dancer and robber.	Chinese characters play the main role whereas Thai characters play the extra role such as street vendor, driver and monk.
Costume	Western characters wear suit and shirt. Traditional Thai dress is included.	Chinese characters wear traditional Thai dress.
Gender	Emphasize the third gender.	Emphasize the third gender.

4.1.7 Animal Role

Both American and Chinese films use Thai animals for entertainment purposes. Elephant is an important metaphor for Thai culture. Elephant appears in both American and Chinese films. In *Bangkok Dangerous*, one touching scene is where Joe and Rain fall in love while rubbing their hands together on an elephant. There is a scene in which an elephant drawing which hanging trunk-up in Joe's house, Kong told Joe that it was bad luck otherwise. When Rain stopped talking to him, Joe broke the frame and burned the elephant picture. This is pretty much like the way he destroyed the photos of all previous victims.

In addition, Thailand is shown in American films with aggressive animals such as shark and snake. In *Rambo*, John Rambo works at the snake farm and catches snakes in the jungles. In *The Beach*, the shark attacks and kills people. In *The Hangover Part II*, a cute, monkey clad in a denim jacket is the real stars. In *Bring happiness home*, a white dog is the symbol of happiness. In American movie, the gangsters use the monkey for drug-dealing. In Chinese movie, the owner sends the dog to the world dog champion contest.

In Chinese films, Thailand is related to cute animals such as dog. Animals play an important role as well. However, they are unlike American film. They do not endow a special meaning on these animals. In *Bring Happiness Home*, a wealthy Thai girl has a dog named Le Le-Happiness and she wants to win a dog competition. She then hires Asia's renowned dog trainer, William and Harry, to help her. This movie explores the relationship between humans and animals. In *Death Trip*, An and Lin play with pigeons. It should be noted that Chinese films do not offer further symbolic meaning beyond this.



Figure 4.11: Joe and Rain are feeding elephant

Source: Chun, O., & Chun, D. (2008). *Bangkok Dangerous* [Motion picture]. USA: IEG Virtual Studios.



Figure 4.12: William plays with the dog Lele

Source: Fu, H. (2013). *Bring Happiness Home* [Motion picture]. China: Bona Film Group Limited.

4.1.8 Religion

Buddhism is the national religion of Thailand. Nearly 95% of Thai people are Theravada Buddhist. As far as religion is concerned, both American and Chinese filmmakers show that three entities -- temple, Buddha statue and monk -- were embedded in the films. The Pho Temple housing the largest and oldest reclining Buddha statue in Bangkok is shown with Buddha images to a larger extent than any other Thai temples.

In *The Beach*, Richard visited temples when he arrived Bangkok. In *Rambo*, John Rambo gave fish to monks. In *Lost in Thailand*, Scientist Xu Lang developed a new super gas. To sell this formula, he needed a letter of attorney signed by the company shareholder Zhou. The key stakeholder is on a meditation trip in a Thai temple. *Death Trip* is a film about a magic Buddha amulet. Two girls -- Lin and An -- encountered an accident on their business trip in Thailand. An was dead but Lin survived. Unfortunately, Lin lost her memory and the odd things happened to her frequently. A Buddha amulet she found in Thailand is the answer to the whole tragedy. She traveled to Thailand again and returned the Buddha amulet. When the nightmare

ended, Lin faced her death in the hospital. As Chinese people believe the magical power of the Buddha, Chinese filmmakers are likely to select lots of Thailand sceneries and Buddha amulet to tell this scary story.

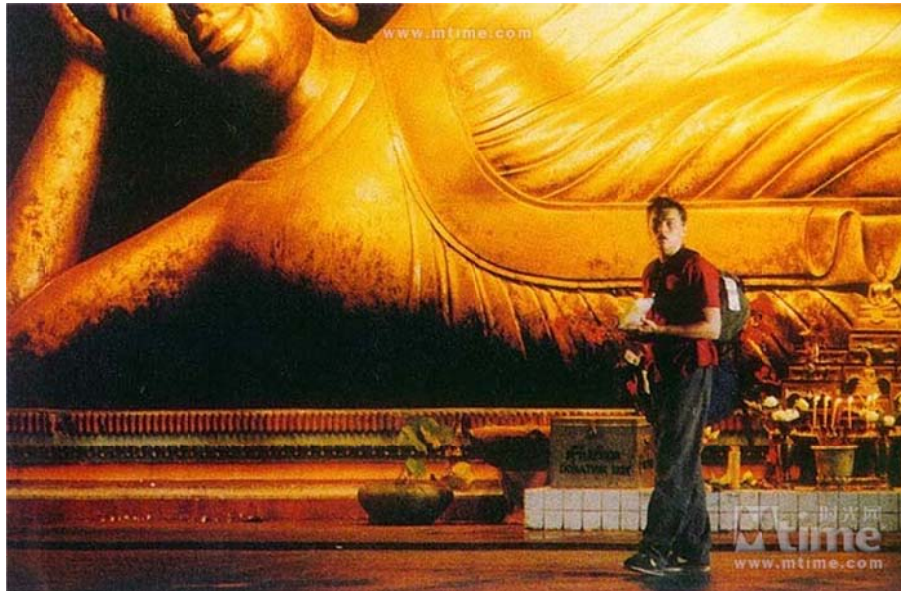


Figure 4.13: Richard visit the Pho Temple

Source: Boyle, D. (2000). *The Beach* [Motion picture]. USA: Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation.



Figure4.14: Buddhist temple

Source: Liu, C. (2014). *Death Trip* [Motion picture]. China: Beijing Anshi Yingna Entertainment Co.,Ltd.

4.1.9 Social Status

These examples indicate that the role of Thai actors is less important in Chinese movies than in American movies.

All the Thai characters in American movie are secondary. They are portrayed as the “follower of American”. In *Bangkok Dangerous*, the young Thai male, Kong, called Joe “boss,” but Joe asked him to call “teacher” instead of “boss”. In *The Hangover Part II*, Phil, Stu and Allen needed to bring the Thai kid, Teddy, and looked after him. Actually, Teddy is a pre-medical student at Stanford University. He is the symbol of young generation of Thailand. Although his father thought he is a prodigy, he still needed to be taken care by Americans.

On the contrary, all the Thai characters in Chinese films are extra. They are just street vendors, drivers and passengers. Perhaps their occupations are more neutral, but only a few Thai characters had former interaction with the main Chinese characters. In most conversations, they were silent.

4.1.10 Costume

Clothing is used to show cultural identity, as well as the clashing of different cultures. Traditional customs offer occasions to understand Thai culture. Traditional Thai dress is presented in both American and Chinese films.

In *Death Trip*, the female Chinese fashion designer used Thai elements in her new spring season clothes. Her inspiration is Buddhism, and she believed that religion can change people’s fashion tastes. She also indicated that her target consumers are people who have strong passion for travelling in the Buddhist country like Thailand.

In *The Hangover Part II*, there are many offensive scenes related to religious costume. One example is that a monkey sucked the pretended erection of an old monk. American filmmaker showed the Chinese monk robe instead of the orange robe that Thai monks wear to avoid the censorship by the Religious Affairs Department of Thailand.

Dress is also used to show characters’ traits. In *Bangkok Dangerous*, Joe wore an expensive silk shirt together with an oversized American jacket. Rain wore a traditional Thai dress to dance in front of Joe. This scene refers to Thai people’s showing their culture to the Americans, and Joe’s smile means that the Americans like this exotic culture. In the romantic Chinese film *Go Lala Go!*, Lala’s cloth was shown

in a vivid Thai style pattern.



Figure 4.15: Rain is performing Thai dance in a traditional Thai dress

Source: Chun, O., & Chun, D. (2008). *Bangkok Dangerous* [Motion picture]. USA: IEG Virtual Studios.



Figure 4.16 Thai monks in Chinese monk robe

Source: Phillips, T. (2013). *The Hangover Part II* [Motion picture]. USA: Green Hat Films & Legendary Pictures.

4.1.11 Gender

Both American and Chinese films depict stereotyping toward the gender role in Thailand. These films present condensed norms of gender relations, with males typically shown as dominant and active, and females shown as dependent and passive.

Every role has its stereotype in the cultural aspect, and the gender has no exception. It is difficult to judge whether the portrayal in films is accurate or exaggerated. However, the consequence of misconceptions can be detrimental. For example, only few Thai female characters are in these films. And those Thai girls are always associated with prostitution. One girl in *Bangkok Dangerous* who is not related to sex trade is a disable person. The distorting pictures create stereotypes for the others. It is more likely that people will pose this stereotype on any Thai women they encounter in reality. Take *Lost in Thailand* as another example, Xu Lang told Wang Bao that every pretty Thai girl is transgender male.



Figure 4.17: Wang Bao and a lady-boy

Source: Xu, Z. (2012). *Lost in Thailand* [Motion picture]. China: Enlight Media Group.

In terms of audible/character elements, textual analyses of the selected films reveal language as the only one different element.

Table 4.4: Audible/Character Elements

Audible/Character Element	American Films	Chinese Films
Language	Most Western characters usually do not speak Thai. Most Thai characters speak accented English	Chinese characters speak basic Thai. Few Thai characters speak basic Chinese

4.1.12 Language

In films, Thai people can speak foreign languages. Broken English with heavy accent is a label for Thai people in both American and Chinese films.

Chinese believes that learning a few key phrases in Thai makes a great impression and could also make travels much smoother. In entire movies, few Thai characters can speak Chinese, but the Chinese characters always try to speak basic Thai words, such as “sawasdee,” or “khobkhun.” Besides local Thai language, English is a third language for Chinese and Thai characters. In *Go Lala Go!*, the background company is an international company, language were switched between Mandarin Chinese and English in social conversation. Accordingly, Chinese characters tried to speak Thai and English during their trip on Thailand.

In *Death Trip*, Chinese characters and Thai characters respected one another, and tried to use conversation partners’ language to communicate. For example, in a small shop, a young Thai guy spoke Korean and Japanese to Lin, after he realized she is Chinese, he tried to speak Chinese with Lin.

The Americans always expect that other people can speak their language. Hence, in the American films, Thai people speak English. Even in *Bangkok Dangerous*, the leading Thai character is deaf, and her communication relies on gestures and notes, but even in the notes, she writes only in English. In *No Escape*, the scene after the tank collided the building, the person who were on the microphone speaking Cambodian clearly at that moment, but in other scenes, local people spoke Thai. However, In *Rambo*, local people talked with Rambo in Thai, he did not answer, but it seems that he can understand Thai language.

4.2 General Comparison between American and Chinese Films

The findings reveal that American films and Chinese films' descriptions of Thailand overlap in three aspects:

- a) Thailand as a hot and rainy country

Thailand is described as humid and tropical region most of the year in all films.



Figure 4.18: Rambo stands in the rain

Source: Stallone, S. (2008) *Rambo* [Motion picture]. USA: Lionsgate.

- b) Thailand as a popular “travel destination”

This result indicates that both American and Chinese films associate Thailand with tourism. All 8 films regard Thailand as travel destination. In *The Beach*, a young American backpacker arrived in Thailand to find a mystical paradise. In *Go Lala Go!*, her first trip in Thailand was a rewarding from her company. Foreigners often come to Thailand for vacation.

- c) Thai men as “transgender” or “lady boy”

In both Chinese and American films, transgender characters are the unique icon of Thailand. In *The Hangover Part II*, Stu slept with a transsexual man. In *Go*

Lala Go!, there is no a transgender character, but Lala questioned whether David is gay or not.

On the contrary, the findings reveal that American and Chinese films' descriptions of Thailand differ in three aspects:

a) The Tone of Portrayal toward Thailand

The tone of Chinese films' portrayal toward Thailand remains neutral and positive, while American films portray Thailand in perhaps a more negative light. Chinese characters often hold positive stereotyping toward Thailand. American characters often hold negative stereotyping. In *Go Lala Go!*, Eva said the water in Thailand is good. It refers to the sea is beautiful. In *Bangkok Dangerous*, Joe describes Bangkok as "corrupted, dirty and dense," which also reflects the title of the film.

b) The Perception of Thailand

In Chinese films, Thailand is "land of smile" while in American films, Thailand is "city of sin." Chinese films portray Thailand as a romantic destination, while American films portray Thailand as an adventurous destination. In *Go Lala Go!*, the romantic relationship occurred in Thailand. The touching moments in the movie include catching firefly on the beach of Pattaya and kissing in a temple. At the end of the film, Lala and David met each other again in Thailand. Their love story has a happy ending. At the beginning of *The Beach*, Richard crossed the ocean and cut himself loose. He looked for something more beautiful, more exciting and more dangerous. He finally came to Bangkok. On his journey, he fell in love with a French girl. One romantic moment is similar to the Chinese film, kissing on the beach. However, at the end, Richard left Thailand alone as his trip was for adventure but not for finding love. In *Bangkok Dangerous*, Joe came to Thailand for a killing mission. He loved one deaf Thai girl, but she left him after finding out he was a killer. Finally, Joe killed himself. Bangkok became a grave for him.



Figure 4.19: Go Go club

Source: Chun, O., & Chun, D. (2008). *Bangkok Dangerous* [Motion picture]. USA: IEG Virtual Studios.



Figure 4.20: Lala and David stand in front of the sea

Source: Xu, J. L. (2010). *Go Lala go* [Motion picture]. China: DMG Entertainment.

c) Complexity of the Image

The portrayal of Thailand in Chinese films is relatively simple and monotonous, while that of American films is more complicated and more diverse.

In *The Hangover Part II*, after a nasty incident, Phil walked out of a clinic and said, that costs like \$6. Thailand is known for its high-quality medical care with low cost. Throughout the American films, western and Thai characters are put in compromising positions. In *Bangkok Dangerous*, Joe and Kong are teacher and apprentice. In *The Beach*, local Thai people and foreigners live in the same island but separately, they barely communicate each other. In *No Escape*, local Asian people try to kill the foreign tourists. In Chinese films, local Thai people are friendly, and the relationship between Thai and Chinese is good.

The finding suggests that the Americans are fairly knowledgeable about Thailand to a higher extent than the Chinese. One possible reason is that American films were shot in Thailand for a long time, but Chinese films began to shoot in Thailand few years ago. Here are two examples.

In *The Hangover Part II*, Alan reads his cards. He introduces some fun facts about Thailand, such as the population, the size, the economy and even the car accident rate. Amazingly, the information he provides is totally correct. However, at the end of the film, they take a speedboat from Bangkok to Phuket, it is impossible in reality according to geographic condition.

In *Lost in Thailand*, Wang Bao has a wish list for his vacation, but one of his wishes is visiting Taj Mahal in Thailand even if it is actually in India. As the pronunciation of Taj Mahal and Thai is similar in Chinese, Wang Bao made a mistake. In spite of the unfair and frustrated use of Taj Mahal as a symbol of Thailand, there is a knowledge gap about Thailand amongst the Chinese people.

4.3 Cultural Comparison between American and Chinese Films

To provide a cultural comparison regarding the portrayal of Thailand in American and Chinese films, six cultural dimensions proposed by Hofstede were used to analyze the selected films as presented below.

4.3.1 Power Distance Index (PDI)

The power distance index in Thailand is 64, which signifies that a hierarchical order exists in Thai society. In *Bring Happiness Home*, the power distance was reflected in various ways. Firstly, there is a gap between the rich and the poor. Miss Guai Guai and Mr. Ba Song are from upper class, they are rich and powerful. They could spend 5,000,000 Thai Baht to find a dog. On the contrary, William and Harry who belongs to the lower class cannot even pay the rent. Secondly, Asian people can accept the social gap easily. For example, the chamberlain is fully loyal to Miss Guai Guai. However, social gap is less acceptable among the Americans due to the low power distance index in the U.S.

4.3.2 Individualism versus Collectivism

Both Thailand and China are highly collectivist country whereas the U.S. is individualist country. In the U.S., individuals are supposed to take care of only themselves and their families as social orientation and family do not exist as independent constructs in an individualistic culture. Hence, in films, Americans always travel alone or live alone. Rambo lives alone in northern Thailand. Both Joe and Richard come to Bangkok alone. They come to Thailand with their assumptions and expectations, and they look for something different from their home country. They look for fun, they see Thailand as a place full of drugs and call girls, just because this is what they want from this country.

In China, a country with collectivistic culture, social orientation or family are narrowly defined and exist as dependent units. Lala and David has a happy ending in *Go Lala Go!*. Xu Lang did not sign the divorce contract with his wife at the Chinese embassy in Thailand. He saved his marriage. He was not lost in Thailand but found himself through this journey.

4.3.3 Masculinity versus Femininity

Both American and Chinese films focus on the third gender in terms of portraying Thai people.

American films depict Thailand as feminine society, caring the quality of life while at the same time they show that American culture is masculine. In *Bangkok Dangerous*, the American leading actor is a tough and rough killer and he rescued two Thai supporting actors at the end of the movie. These kinds of stories are indicative of

Thailand with less competitiveness and assertiveness.

In Chinese films, Thai people are patient, and they accept the circumstances that life brings easily. In a culture that places great importance on relationships, feelings and social harmony, cultivating jai-yen is highly valued. In *Lost in Thailand*, a taxi driver told Xu Lang to “Jai yen yen,” which literally means “clam down” and “cool heart.” It is the conceptualization of conflict-avoidance. Jai yen yen is the heart of the Thai culture but it might not always be understood by foreigners. Deep inside, jai-yen means “it does not matter,” “take it easy” and so on, reflecting a penchant to go with the flow of other things with inner peace. Thai people always say “Jai yen yen” with a positive attitude. That taxi driver also thinks that Chinese people are “jai rohn,” which is the opposite of jai yen, meaning “hot temper,” impatience and anger.

4.3.4 Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)

The Beach is the best evidence to show the different degree of uncertainty avoidance among Thai and American people. The story starts from a mysterious map. The island in the map is a paradise for foreigners and an opium-producing place for Thai people. The Americans tend to take risk and try to search for this island in the film. However, the Thai people do not want to take any risks and they would kill any invaders in this island. Different Uncertainty Avoidance level leads to conflict. Thus the adventure of the Americans become very dangerous. At least three of them were killed by the local Thai people.

Another example is *No Escape*, Jack Dwyer and his family were relocated to Southeast Asia, and then Jack found himself caught in the middle of a military coup. As he walked to get a newspaper, he was literally trapped in the center of a battle between policemen and protesters. The scene plainly declares that foreigners are in danger. Jack must find a way to save his family from the violence erupting all around them. For local people, the coup is a disaster, but Jack Dwyer still has to be cool and calm in order to find a way to save his family.

4.3.5 Long Term Orientation versus Short Term Orientation

China has a very pragmatic culture in which people always plan for the future. Take *Go Lala Go!* as an example, it talks about how Lala moved from an office rookie into an HR director. And in this film, we can see Lala and her colleagues dance in front of a traditional Thai pavilion and threw one person into a modern swimming

pool. In contrast, Thai culture is more normative than pragmatic. They respect traditions while looking for the future. That is the reason why we can see the modern and traditional architecture appears at the same time.



Figure 4.21: Traditional Thai pavilion behind a modern pool

Source: Xu, J. L. (2010). *Go Lala go* [Motion picture]. China: DMG Entertainment.

4.3.6 Indulgence versus Restraint

In this dimension, Thailand is in the middle, China is a restrained society but the U.S. can be determined as an indulgent society. As mentioned above, drug addiction in America is higher than that in Thailand and China. Films reflect this social problem in many ways, drugs and prostitutions appear frequently in American films. The most interesting supporting character in *The Hangover Part II* is the drug-dealing Monkey. Chow gave a reason why the gangsters used a monkey to deliver drug is that a monkey has never been arrested. The drug abuse scene shows the indulgence degree in Thai and American societies.



Figure 4.22: Monkey is delivering drugs

Source: Phillips, T. (2013). *The Hangover Part II* [Motion picture]. USA: Green Hat Films&Legendary Pictures.

In terms of intercultural understanding, the results are supported by Hofstede 6-D Model©. There is a potential correlation between cultural background and the stereotypes in intercultural communication context. By using different semiotics, American films portray Thailand as an exotic place. Put it differently, Chinese which have the same collectivist culture as Thailand tend to have less negative stereotypes in films. Nevertheless, there are still some similarities in the portrayal of Thailand in the films produced by the two countries.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the practical and theoretical implications of the study as well as the limitations and suggestions for the future researches. Based on this study of 8 films, here comes a reasonable qualitative answer to the research question, such as, how Thailand being portrayed and characterized by two types of films, and whether the portrayal was negative, neutral or positive, and whether they were similar or different. Thailand, as the setting of both American and Chinese films, has been transformed in many ways. There is a significant difference regarding how American and Chinese films portray Thailand.

5.1 Results Summary

A three level analysis- the semiotics, stereotypes and cultural dimensions was conducted. Four tables are created to compare the similarities or differences between films produced by two countries. The findings uncover many interesting points regarding portrayal of Thailand in foreign films.

Research Question # 1: How do American films portray Thailand?

The portrayal of Thailand in American films is abundant and complicated. For American films, Thailand is another place different from their own country, thus, the films emphasize distinguished points. Thailand is a far away adventurous travel destination. It is not only portrayed as a beautiful country, but also a chaotic place. What is worse, even the animals in Thailand are treated as a sort of brutal and aggressive entities for the people.

Thai people have no exception; they are portrayed as poor, smart, and friendly. However, they have taken strange occupations, such as drug dealer and thief, wearing both western and traditional Thai costumes, believing in Buddhism, and speaking accented English.

Research Question # 2: How do Chinese films portray Thailand?

The portrayal of Thailand in Chinese films is relatively small and simple. For Chinese films, neighborhood is the best and proper word to say about the relationship for the Sino-Thai. And importantly, they share some common values and common

sense; thus the films from both countries mainly emphasize the similarities.

Therefore, Thailand is portrayed as a beautiful travel destination.

Thai people are portrayed as friendly. They having traditional occupations, such as street vendor and driver, wearing both western and traditional Thai clothes, believing in Buddhism, speaking accented Chinese. And the animals in Thailand are also cute.

Research Question # 3: What are the differences and similarities between American films' and Chinese films' portrayal of Thailand?

The semiotic analysis provides astounding evidences that an unambiguous pattern of stereotypical portrayal of Thailand and Thai people appears in American and Chinese films. There is a huge gap between how American and Chinese films portray Thailand. Most Chinese films hold positive stereotypes about Thailand whereas most American films emphasize the dark side of Thailand. For instance, In Chinese movies, people who visit Thailand are shocked by yummy seafood, pure water, and gorgeous temples. By contrast, there were plenty of negative images of Thailand such as poverty and prostitution in American movies.

However, there are some similarities as well. Both American and Chinese films use some similar semiotics to portray Thailand: The hot weather, the third gender, the beautiful nature. For example, both Chinese and American movies emphasize the third gender male. Another example is weather, lots of scenes were set in rain, thus rain is a symbolic element to portray Thailand's climate in all these films.

5.2 Discussions

Generally speaking, the visual representation of Thailand as a magic place can be mapped in the scenes from five star hotels to red lights districts, from the beach to the jungle, from the animal to the people. American films display the different layers of Thailand. The portrayal of Thailand in American films is associated with extreme climate, exotic food, beautiful nature, strange animal, and vice. American films portray Thailand as a third world country, but there are other countries worse than Thailand. For example, some Cambodian words appear during the coup in *No Escape*. Rambo lives in a shack in Thailand, but he still thinks he has a good life, because the neighboring country Myanmar is a warzone. Therefore, American still prefer Thailand

to other Southeast Asian countries. The portrayal of Thailand in Chinese films is associated with hot weather, delicious food, gorgeous scenery, cute animal and little chaos. Because of the fascinating portrayal of Thailand in Chinese films, more and more tourists travel to Thailand. This new trends enhance the relationship between China and Thailand.

Undoubtedly, these different portrayals are related to the culture. Through the lens of Hofstede Cultural Dimension Model, common values are found in all Thai, American and Chinese cultures, differences exist in the scores and the degree of importance.

In American individualistic culture, social orientation and family do not exist as independent constructs. Hence, in films, Americans always travel alone or live alone. Rambo lives in northern Thailand alone. Both Joe and Richard come to Bangkok alone. They come to Thailand with their assumptions and expectations; they look for something different than their motherland. They look for fun; they see Thailand as a place full of drugs and call girls, just because this is what they want from this country. In Chinese collectivistic culture, social orientation or family are narrowly defined and exist as independent units. Lala and David have a happy ending in *Go Lala Go*. Xu Lang does not sign the divorce contract with his wife at the Chinese embassy in Thailand. He saves his marriage. He does not lose himself in Thailand but knows more about himself through this journey.

Another reason is speculated to be responsible for these differences: the industry's maturity degree. American films and Chinese films are in the different stages. American film has a long history of international cooperation. However, Chinese film industry just begins to enter into the Thai market. Dozens of American films have been shot in Thailand before 2000. For example, not just *Rambo* (2008), but *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985) and *Rambo III* (1988) also partially shot in Thailand. For Chinese film, the industry just starts to grow fast, begin to foster and develop the international audience. Crack this dilemma, Chinese films start to build common values through localizing landscape and using exotic symbolic method to reduce the deep essence of culture and enter the oversea film market. There are only few Chinese films shot in other countries before 2000, but there are more and more films shot in Thailand nowadays.

The U.S. is the dominant superpower country in the world. The stereotypes in American film not just become their domestic public opinion but international opinion as well. For people who have never been in Thailand, its portrayal in Hollywood films might be their first impression toward Thailand. Unfortunately, this portrayal is always associated with negative stereotypes. For instance, the film *Rambo* is a reiteration of the white man saving the Asian people from an uncivilized world. Under this context, Chinese films provided an option for international audiences to access less negative stereotypical portrayal of Thailand.

In the years ahead, the cultural differences may become less distinct with the advent of global communication. By then, how American and Chinese films portray Thailand need to be analyzed again.

5.3 Limitations

Although series of meaningful conclusions are found, this study also has some limitations. Firstly, not all external reasons are analyzed deeply. For example, government manipulation also plays a vital role in shaping the image of Thailand in American and Chinese films. *Anna and the King* is banned, but *No Escape* can be shown.

Secondly, some performances and reasons of cultural difference were not examined. This study only uses Hofstede's model to analyze how culture influence the stereotyping in films, but Edward T. Hall's "high- context and low-context culture" theory is very important as well. Besides Hofstede's six dimensions: Power Distance Index, Individualism versus Collectivism, Masculinity versus Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance Index, Long Term Orientation versus Short Term Normative Orientation and Indulgence versus Restraint, another key factor is "High- Context versus Low-Context". Both Thai culture and Chinese culture are low-context culture, American culture is high-context culture. In high-context culture, words are not as important as the context. For example, in Chinese films, the character's facial expression, gestures, posture, and tone of voice, should be much more important than their dialog. Due to lack of time, this factor has not been studied. To get more convincing result on the role that culture may play in the shaping of portray of Thailand in films, future studies may consider using different theories or frameworks

to test all relevant variables.

Another obvious limitation concerns sampling and the film selecting process. The elementary characteristics in this descriptive paper are validity and reliability. Although the samplings of American films are from a vast population, the samplings of Chinese films are merely from a small amount of films. Significantly speaking, this study just covers limited number of samples, it is a small scale research.

5.4 Implications for Filmmakers

Differences in cultural dimension among the three countries provide very interesting implications for international cooperation in film industry. For foreign filmmakers, respecting cultural differences which is the top priority must be noticed. It is very difficult to test the historical or cultural accuracy in films, but directors and producers should stand on a new perspective and employ the advanced methodology to portray and discourse Thailand. For instance, directors could look for more common and positive themes to construct Thai image.

In global film market, international co-production is the latest trend. Collaboration between two or more film producers from different countries can increase production budgets and double-win a large number of consumers at the same time. What is more, by learning culture from each other's filmmakers could ensure the quality of their films. In the future, it will be interesting to see whether a more positive Thai image will erase cultural stereotypes in global discourse. By then, cultural differences might not be cultural barriers in intercultural communication anymore.

5.5 Implications for Government

Freedom of expression in film industry is important, especially in country which has high score in Power Distance Index. High power distance means authority. Authority means censorship in film industry. Culture Hierarchy is what dictates authority in Thai and Chinese cultures. Due to the government censorship, political issue is barely talked in Chinese films, but in many American films, political issue is favorable topic. In American culture, challenging the authority is encouraged, everyone can be the hero. In Thailand, the government censorship system is clearer

and better than before. *Anna and the King* was banned 15 years ago, but *No Escape* can be seen in cinema today. Such kind of change is a good piece of news, which can attract more foreign films being shot in Thailand. Both Thai and Chinese government should devote attention to promote film industry, gain the soft power in global communication era.

5.6 Suggestions for Future Research

Since this research is based on limited analysis of selected films within 15 years, the conclusions should be viewed as preliminary in need of future data as new films continues. What remains unknown from the scope of this study is whether Thai people agree or disagree with the portrayal of Thailand in foreign films. According to the communication theory of identity, or CTI, Michael Hecht breaks identity down beyond simply the personal and ascribed dimensions (as cited in Littlejohn & Foss, 2008, p89.). The subjective dimension of identity is the personal sense of itself. Personal identity is not just for individual, but group, as well. Avowed identity is comprised of the group affiliations that one feels most intensely. The ascribed identity is the set of demographic and role descriptions that others in an interaction assume to hold true for you. It shaped and manifested in communication with others (Hecht, Warren, Jung, & Krieger, 2005, p. 264.). Based on these theories, one can argue that maybe Thai image in American and Chinese films is different from Thai viewers' perception; the personal identity and the ascribed identity are different. In terms of this standpoint, recommendations for further study include the followings: How Thai viewers perceive Thai identity in American and Chinese films? What are the differences and similarities about Thai identity between American and Chinese films' portrayal and Thai viewers' perception?

At the same time, further research could be conducted to examine the portrayal of Thailand from other typical foreign films. For instance, Thailand Films Office once reported that Indian filmmakers shot more movies in Thailand than any other country for past 2 years. Hence, further research could explore how Indian films portray Thailand. Another way to broaden this research is to study how other media, such as TV, newspaper portray Thailand in different ways.

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APPENDIX

Synopsis of Eight Selected Films

Four American films:

1. The Beach, (2000)

Directed by: Danny Boyle

Starring: Leonardo DiCaprio, Guillaume Canet, Virginie Ledoyen, Robert Carlyle, Tilda Swinton

Genres: Adventure, Drama, Thriller

Plot summary: Richard is on vacation in Thailand. One day, a stranger gives him a map and tells him some legendary stories of an island. Richard and his new friends, Françoise and Étienne find this secret island. This island is a paradise for them, Françoise and Richard eventually fall in love there. Unfortunately, other westerner tourists try to go to the island but get killed by the local people. After that tragedy, Richard leaves alone, the island is not the heaven anymore.

2. Bangkok Dangerous, (2008)

Directed by: Danny Pang, Oxide Pang Chun

Starring: Charlie Yeung, Nicolas Cage, Shahkrit Yamnarm, Panward Hemmanee

Genres: Action, Crime, Thriller

Plot summary: Joe is a remorseless hitman. He goes to Bangkok to kill four enemies of a ruthless boss. He hires Kong, a Thai street punk, to help him. Strangely, he falls in love with a local deaf girl Rain. As Joe falls further understand Bangkok's intoxicating beauty and danger, he begins to question his isolated existence and kill himself in the end.

3. Rambo, (2008)

Directed by: Sylvester Stallone

Starring: Graham McTavish, Julie Benz, Sylvester Stallone, Matthew Marsden

Genres: Thriller, Action

Plot summary: Rambo lives a simple life in northern Thailand, where close to Thai-Burma border. Rambo enjoys the peaceful life until human rights missionaries Sarah Miller and Michael Burnett show up asking him to help them. Rambo joins this daring rescue mission and become a soldier and hero again.

4. The Hangover Part II, (2011)

Directed by: Todd Phillips

Starring: Bradley Cooper, Ed Helms, Justin Bartha, Zach Galifianakis

Genres: Comedy

Plot summary: Phil, Stu, Alan, Teddy and Doug travel to Thailand for Stu's wedding. Just like the bachelor party of Teddy's wedding last time, things don't always go as their original plan. Two days before the wedding, Stu, Alan and Phil wake up in a dirty apartment in downtown Bangkok, but Teddy is missing. They find Teddy and unravel their crazy night in exotic Bangkok.

Four Chinese films:

1. Go Lala Go, (2010)

Directed by: Xu Jinglei

Starring: Xu Jinglei Karen Mok, Stanley Huang, Pace Wu, Li Ai

Genres: Romantic comedy

Plot summary: 27-year-old Du Lala works in an international company as an assistant. Through hard working, Lala get promoted quickly. However, she finds it is hard to balance her professional and private lives. She starts to date with her colleague David during a trip to Thailand. But they break up later. At the end, Lala visits Thailand again and she is reunited with David in Pattaya.

2. Lost in Thailand, (2012)

Directed by: Xu Zheng

Directed by:

Starring: Xu Zheng Wang Baoqiang, Huang Bo, Tao Hong

Genres: Comedy

Plot summary: Xu Lang invents a fuel additive which makes petrol expand by 50%, but he needs to get Mr. Zhou's permit to sell this formula. Zhou is on a spiritual meditation course in Chiang Mai. On his flight to Thailand, Xu Lang meet Wang Bao, and they explores Thailand together.

3. Bring Happiness Home, (2013)

Directed by: Huayang Fu

Starring: Wu Xin, Du Hito, Xie Na, He Jiong, Li Weijia

Genres: Comedy

Plot summary: This film explores the relationship between human and animal. A wealthy Thai girl Guai Guai wants to win a dog competition. She hires famous dog trainer William and Harry to help. Right before the contest, the cute dog Le Le gets stolen. They visit every street in Bangkok and find the dog at the end.

4. Death Trip, (2014)

Directed by: Liu Chen

Starring: Van Fan, Li Xinyun, Li Yuan, Xue Cun

Genres: Horror

Plot summary: A pair of Chinese girls Lin and An set off on a business trip in enthralling and exotic Thailand. They buy a Buddha amulet in Thailand. After that, An dies by accident, Lin survives but loses her memory. However, An takes the body of Lin and restarts her life. Lin and An's boyfriend Chen back to Thailand and return the Buddha amulet. And then they realize that everything is a fuzzy dream.

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