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The Representation of Muay Thai in Prachya Pinkaew's *Tom Yum Goong* (2005)

Mr. Qian Wang

จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย
CHULALONGKORN UNIVERSITY

An Independent Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Arts in Thai Studies

FACULTY OF ARTS

Chulalongkorn University

Academic Year 2022

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ภาพแทนกีฬามวยไทยในภาพยนตร์เรื่อง ต้มยำกุ้ง (2548) ของปรัชญา ปิ่นแก้ว

นายเฉียน หวัง

จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย
CHULALONGKORN UNIVERSITY

สารนิพนธ์นี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตามหลักสูตรปริญญาอักษรศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต
สาขาวิชาไทยศึกษา ไม่สังกัดภาควิชา/เทียบเท่า
คณะอักษรศาสตร์ จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย
ปีการศึกษา 2565

ลิขสิทธิ์ของจุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

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By	Mr. Qian Wang
Field of Study	Thai Studies
Thesis Advisor	Assistant Professor TUL ISRANGURA NA AYUDHYA, Ph.D.

Accepted by the FACULTY OF ARTS, Chulalongkorn University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Master of Arts

INDEPENDENT STUDY COMMITTEE

..... Chairman

(Assistant Professor NAMPHUENG PADAMALANGULA, Ph.D.)

..... Advisor

(Assistant Professor TUL ISRANGURA NA AYUDHYA, Ph.D.)

..... Examiner

(Associate Professor SIRIPORN SRIWARAKAN, Ph.D.)

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เฉียน หวัง : ภาพแทนกีฬามวยไทยในภาพยนตร์เรื่อง ต้มยำกุ้ง (2548) ของปรัชญา ปิ่นแก้ว. (The Representation of Muay Thai in Prachya Pinkaew's *Tom Yum Goong* (2005)) อ.ที่ปรึกษาหลัก : ผศ. ดร.ตุลย์ อิศรางกูร ณ อยุธยา

จากการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลจากภาพยนตร์ เรื่อง ต้มยำกุ้ง (2548) พบว่าปรัชญา ปิ่นแก้ว ผู้กำกับภาพยนตร์ เรื่อง ต้มยำกุ้ง ได้แสดงออกถึงความเป็นชาตินิยมและท้องถิ่นนิยมของผู้กำกับ โดยอาศัยตำนานของพระเอกที่ใช้มวยไทยสามารถเอาชนะตัวร้ายเพื่อที่จะปกป้องช้าง โดยที่ช้างเป็นสัญลักษณ์ที่เปรียบถึงประเทศไทย หากพิจารณาบริบททางประวัติศาสตร์ของภาพยนตร์ เรื่อง ต้มยำกุ้ง พบว่าภาพยนตร์เรื่องนี้สร้างขึ้นในช่วงยุคสมัยที่มีความเป็นชาตินิยมสมัยใหม่เข้มข้นในประเทศไทย จึงทำให้อนุมานได้ว่ามวยไทยในภาพยนตร์ เรื่อง ต้มยำกุ้ง สะท้อนให้เห็นถึงภูมิปัญญาไทย และชื่อภาพยนตร์เกี่ยวโยงถึงวิกฤตการณ์การเงินในเอเชีย หรือ “วิกฤตต้มยำกุ้ง” พระเอกของภาพยนตร์เป็นสัญลักษณ์ของคนไทยในอุดมคติ จากองค์ประกอบต่าง ๆ ที่กล่าวมาสะท้อนให้เห็นถึงประเทศไทยและการสนับสนุนอัตลักษณ์ความเป็นไทย เพื่อกระตุ้นความรู้สึกชาตินิยม ปรัชญา ปิ่นแก้วจึงได้ตีความ “ความเป็นไทย” และ “ความไม่ไทย” ผ่านการสร้างภาพแทนอัตลักษณ์ของประเทศไทยให้เห็นถึงความแตกต่างกับระหว่างประเทศไทยกับประเทศต่างชาติ กระบวนการนี้ทำให้ผู้ชมได้รับรู้ถึงอัตลักษณ์ของชาติทั้งในทางที่ดีและทางที่ไม่ดี อีกทั้งความคิดสำคัญภาพยนตร์เรื่องต้มยำกุ้งสอดคล้องกับแนวคิดท้องถิ่นนิยมของสุลักษณ์ ศิวรักษ์ที่ว่าคนไทยจะต้องหวนกลับสู่จารีตประเพณีและวัฒนธรรมดั้งเดิม กล่าวคือพุทธอัตลักษณ์เพื่อต่อต้านทุนนิยม

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สาขาวิชา	ไทยศึกษา	ลายมือชื่อนิสิต .....
ปีการศึกษา	2565	ลายมือชื่อ อ.ที่ปรึกษาหลัก .....

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KEYWORD: Muay Thai, Nationalism, Localism, Sulak Sivaraksa, Thainess

Through a textual analysis of the popular Thai film *Tom Yum Goong* (2005), this paper explores how the director, Prachya Pinkaew, expresses his own nationalistic and localistic argument by creating a myth of a hero that uses Muay Thai to defeat the villains in order to save his elephant, which symbolizes (as the allegory of) Thailand. Considering the historical context of this film where a strong sense of modern nationalism was prevailing in the Thai society; it is reasonable to further infer that Muay Thai in this film represents the Thai intellect, the film title Tom Yum Goong refers to the Asian Financial Crisis and the hero of the film is a symbol of the ideal Thai citizen. The elements above are closely linked to the country and reinforce the national identity of the Thais. To further provoke nationalist sentiment, the director interprets Thainess and un-Thainess through the portrayal of the identity of the Thai nation associated with the contrast between the Thai nation and the others. This enables the audience to gain both positive and negative identification through the viewing process. The main idea of this film is in line with Sulak Siwarak's localist idea where Thais must return to tradition and recover their cultural, that is, Buddhist-identity to resist capitalism.

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Field of Study:	Thai Studies	Student's Signature .....
Academic Year:	2022	Advisor's Signature .....

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As the old Chinese saying goes, "Good articles are naturally formed, and they are obtained by accident by highly skilled people". I dare not say that this article is a good one, let alone that I am a skilled writer. But the completion of it is indeed inseparable from the continuous help of a highly skilled person behind my back, that is my advisor Ajarn Tul Israngura Na Ayudhya. I can't imagine how he put up with my poor English, patiently answered my stupid questions, read and found the bright spots from the first draft of my article.

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Qian Wang

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Introduction

The 1997 financial crisis ruthlessly shattered the so-called "East Asian miracle" painted by the IFIs (international financial institutions),[1] along with the "borderless world" dreamed by countless ambitious politicians, businessmen, investors and other globalisers for more than 30 years.[2] On one hand, globalisation had brought economic prosperity to Thailand, the country in the eye of the financial storm.[3] Before the 40-year hypergrowth pulled to a halt, Thailand was at heels of the "Four Asian Tigers",[4] and held high hopes from Thais and foreign investors on becoming a member of NICs (newly industrialized country). During this period, the material life of Thais had also significantly improved along with the high-speed economic development. While on the other hand, globalisation also damaged Thai people's national pride, which was manifested in IMF (International Monetary Fund)'s challenge to the Thais' nationalist sentiment. Before Prime Minister Thaksin came to power, the weak Thai government yielded much of the country's national economic independence under the "iron-clad" of the IMF. According to Reynolds, this parallels with the previous threats to Thailand's sovereignty in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,[5] Therefore, some scholars believed that Thais had been misled to becoming "slaves" of financially

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[1] J. D. Schmidt. From Thaksin's social capitalism to self-sufficiency economics in Thailand. 2007, p.5.

[2] K. Hewison. Resisting globalization: a study of localism in Thailand. The Pacific Review, 2000, p. 282.

[3] The crisis started in Thailand and was known as the "Tom Yum Goong Crisis".

[4] The "Four Asian Tigers" is an old term of the four developed East Asian economies, which are Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan, from the early 1960s to 1990s.

[5] C J. Reynolds. Globalisers vs communitarians: Public intellectuals debate Thailand's futures. Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography, 2001, pp. 262-266; Phitthaya Wongkun (ed.) Thai yuk watthanatham that [Thailand in the Age of Its Cultural Enslavement], Bangkok: Witthithat Project. 1998, p.49; Hewison K. Resisting globalization: a study of localism in Thailand. The Pacific Review, 2000, p.288.

strong countries, and globalisation was a new form of colonialism.[6] After the 1997 financial crisis, the sense of loss was exacerbated by the strict but unhelpful control from the IMF and a spate of hostile takeovers of domestic companies by foreign capital. Finally, the "Father of the Thai Nation", King Bhumibol Adulyadej could not sit still any longer, he stood out against capitalism and consumerism publicly, and attempted to get the country back on track.

Monarchy in the 2000s held special importance in Thailand. According to Schmidt, King Bhumibol held great symbolic and actual power through his cultural reverence. In his birthday speech in the same year of the financial crisis, the "Farmer King" reiterated his "new theory", that is, the "poor man's" method of administration he had been preaching since 1980,[7] but this time it was rather targeted towards the IMF and the incompetent government,

> "Being a tiger is not important. What is important is to have enough to eat and to live; and to. have an economy which provides enough to eat and live…We have to live carefully and we have to go back to do things which are not complicated and which do not use elaborate, expensive equipment. We need to move backwards in order to move forwards. If we don't do like this, the solution to this crisis will be difficult."[8]

In this speech, the king mentioned a key word—"self-sufficiency", which expressed his localist philosophy in line with the Thai Buddhist doctrine. In the beginning, it was simply a practical

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[6] C. Baker, Phongpaichit P. A history of Thailand. Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 260; Hewison K. Resisting globalization: a study of localism in Thailand. The Pacific Review, 2000, pp. 287-288.

[7] J. D. Schmidt. From Thaksin's social capitalism to self-sufficiency economics in Thailand. 2007, p.1, 19.

[8] C. Baker, P. Phongpaichit. A history of Thailand. Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 260.

advice to combat the crisis, which called on Thais to focus more on agriculture and stop relying too much on the outside. As time went by, the concept has been adjusted and extended from "self-sufficient mode of farming" to everything else, such as anti-materialism, anti-consumerism, anti-Occidentalism, anti-capitalism etc., and it also embraces the simplicity of life. Thus, many scholars such as Reynolds, Hewison and Schmidt, all regarded the king's fateful speech as a return to Buddhist tradition and localism.[9] As it turns out, the economic concept of this crucial "opinion leader" among Thais had had the full support from the public, and deeply influenced the whole society.

Another key person who roused a tide of nationalist sentiment after the financial crisis was the Former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who openly supported the king's concept of self-sufficiency yet essentially practiced the opposite for his own self-interest. Thaksin seemingly echoed King Bhumibol's words supporting his "self-sufficient economy" and introduced policies to help rural development. However, according to Schmidt, Thaksin's populist policies became a device that hijacked segments of the population in order to amass his personal fortunes and satisfy his kleptocratic tendencies.[10] Moreover, for political purposes, Thaksin insisted Thailand's IMF loans were to be repaid ahead of schedule in July 2003, which lifted the country's national financial

[9] C. J. Reynolds. Globalisers vs communitarians: Public intellectuals debate Thailand's futures. Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography, 2001; K. Hewison. Resisting globalization: a study of localism in Thailand. The Pacific Review, 2000, 13(2): 279-296; J. D. Schmidt. From Thaksin's social capitalism to self-sufficiency economics in Thailand. 2007.

[10] J. D. Schmidt. From Thaksin's social capitalism to self-sufficiency economics in Thailand. 2007.

burden.[11] All in all, to quote King Bhumibol's phrase in 1997, Thaksin has "passed the burden back to the villages.[12] The more nationalistic and protectionist economic policy did not change Thailand for the better, but reinforced larger regional income disparities and increased the poverty level of the poor.[13]

Swearer notes, "religious or utopian visions of a new and different social order often stem from dissatisfaction and disappointment with the status quo."[14] The same applies to Thai society at the time. After facing the situation where golf courses replaced farmlands, temples turned into department stores, but life did not improve,[15] a mass of peasants, unemployed workers, street vendors, and frustrated non-elites belatedly came to a conclusion that they were being instrumentalized by the government over and over again, some radicals believed that the present situation was caused by foreign investors, and blamed globalisation, capitalism and consumerism for all the country's calamities. They tried to fight against it by initiating localism movements to "substantially dismantle the neo-liberal edifice", as noted by Brecher and Costello,[16] and revive the forgotten "Thainess" based on localist ideas, although their vision was just a "romantic construction

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[11] T. Ito. Asian currency crisis and the International Monetary Fund, 10 years later: Overview. Asian Economic Policy Review, 2007, pp. 42-43.

[12] C. Baker. Pluto-populism: Thaksin and popular politics. Thailand beyond the crisis. Routledge, 2005, p. 115.

[13] K. Tejapira. Toppling Thaksin, New Left Review, 39 May/June, 2006;

[14] D. Swearer. Sulak Sivaraksa's Buddhist vision for renewing society. Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia, 1996, p. 208.

[15] Just like Siwarak has mentioned in his work, "The great department stores or shopping complexes have now replaced our Wat (Buddhist temple) which used to be our schools, museums, art galleries, recreation centres and cultural centres as well as our hospitals and spiritual theaters. The rich have become immensely rich, while the poor remain poor or even become much poorer... Not only our traditional culture, but our natural environment, too, is in crisis." See S. Sivaraksa. Crisis of Siamese Identity. Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Development, 1989, p. 5.

[16] B. Jeremy and T. Costello. End of the Global Gilded Age, ZNet Commentary, November 28, 2001.

of an imagined past", according to Hewison.[17]

According to Winichakul, Thainess is generally thought to be an ancient traditional virtue preserved from Siam to Thailand, which has never been and will never be clearly defined.[18] Scholars of different periods and ideological positions have different definitions for "Thainess", and it is impossible for them to reach a consensus on this issue. During the period of absolute monarchy, from the reign of King Rama V to King Rama VI, the construction of Thainess aimed to justify and sustain the political structure of centralized power and the social structure.[19] After the 1932 revolution, the highly influential definition of Thainess by Kukrit Pramoj was invented mainly for providing an ideological base for the ruling military dictatorship.[20] Although Pramoj's Thainess had changed in response to changing social situations at that time, he still presented elitist ideas as the intellectuals under absolute monarchy did.

According to Reynolds, Thainess was no longer something to be defended in the interests of national security but to be consumed in the interests of boosting the economy during the boom years from the late 1970s to the early 1980s, which was also a time when the globalisers were indulging in Thailand's "fake prosperity" as mentioned earlier. According to the state's directive, economic development was to take precedent over all other matters, including the meaning of

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[17] K. Hewison. Nationalism, populism, dependency: Southeast Asia and responses to the Asian crisis. Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography, 2001, p. 13&15.

[18] T. Winichakul. Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-body of a Nation. University of Hawaii Press, 1997, p. 4.

[19] S. Sattayanurak. The construction of mainstream thought on "Thainess" and the "truth" constructed by "Thainess" [translated by Sarinee Achavanuntakul]. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation. Chiang Mai University [cite 25 July 2018]. Available from http://www.fringer.org/wpcontent/writings/thainesseng. pdf, 2005, pp. 4-8.

[20] Ibid., pp. 8-13.

"Thai", as noted by Reynolds.[21] Hence, consumerism became the key defining factor of Thainess, until the 1990s, where a more recent and influential definition of Thainess emerged by Sulak Siwarak, which is a radical grassroot interpretation based on his localist ideas, thus, in sharp contrast from all of the above mentioned. Like Siwarak, this paper argues that it was a response targeted to the commodification of Thainess during that turbulent time.

Unlike any other moderate localists,[22] Siwarak's critique of westernism or capitalism is fiercer and stronger. As the "conservative radical" that was identified by Winichakul, Siwarak maintains that Thainess consists of indigenous principles of Thai Buddhist culture, which have been distorted and misrepresented by the elite-manipulated orthodoxies of the state. Besides, his view of Thainess is predicated upon a sense of western threat, a feeling that Thai identity is endangered by the pervasive dominance of western culture.[23] If King Mongkut altered the Siamese "outer identity", that is, learning English and Western technology, but preserved the essential core that was rooted in Buddhism,[24] the "greed" globalization, capitalism and consumerism which came from the west have fundamentally destroyed their "inner identity", implying that the western lifestyle has eroded

[21] C. J. Reynolds. Globalisers vs communitarians: Public intellectuals debate Thailand's futures. Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography, 2001, pp. 253-254.

[22] The attitude of Thai moderate localists towards capitalism is not to deny it completely, but to hope for its localization reform. For example, Saneh Chamarik proposes a reformed national capitalism that pays due respect to local economies and creates linkages that benefit both the local and national. Besides, another famous localist Prawet Wasi argues for the need to develop local capital in Thailand in a manner consonant with the local culture and wisdom of the people. See M. K. Connors. Democracy and the mainstreaming of localism in Thailand. Southeast Asian responses to globalization: Restructuring governance and deepening democracy, 2005, pp. 269-273.

[23] D. McCargo. Buddhism, democracy and identity in Thailand. Democratization, 2004, pp. 161-162

[24] D. Swearer. Sulak Sivaraksa's Buddhist vision for renewing society. Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia, 1996, p. 208.

traditional Thai values,[25] and reduced Thais into "desire-driven beings".[26] Thus, to resist capitalism, Thais must return to tradition and recover their cultural identity, which is, Buddhism.[27] The above is a succinct summary of Siwarak's analysis of modern Thai history.

Moreover, those who hold similar claims also argue that Thainess is deeply rooted in the countryside and is reflected more in Thai peasantry than in Thai urban elites.[28] This radical localist idea has created a schism between rural and urban, Thai nation and other nations, traditional Thai moral system and western materialism, and successfully gained traction in the post-1997 financial crisis era when nationalism and localism was prevailing in Thai society.

Although, in my view, Siwarak's reading of the past was rooted in his localist idea, which is somewhat tendentious and may oversimplify the history into a "good versus evil dichotomy", he attracts large fans and supporters due to his accessible writing style and the nationalist sentiment contained in the work.[29] Siwarak's historical analysis followed artistic conventions, with both protagonist and antagonist. The antagonist, in this case, were both Thais and foreigners who have undermined Siamese religious and cultural identity, while the protagonist or heroes, both classical

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[25] According to Swearer's analysis on Sulak Siwarak's important essay, *Crisis of Siamese Identity*: 1) an erosion of traditional cultural, religious, and social values and 2) a wholesale appropriation of a western lifestyle are two complementary challenges to Siamese identity. See Ibid., p. 209. Besides, Wongkun also asserts that, "Thai society is becoming so thoroughly Westernized that it is losing its Thai identity…and *farang* (western) values are spreading at the expense of Thai values. See P. Wongkun (ed.) Thai yuk watthanatham that [Thailand in the Age of Its Cultural Enslavement], Bangkok: Witthithat Project. 1998.

[26] S. Sivaraksa. Global Healing: Essays and Interviews on Structural Violence, Social Development and Spiritual Transformation. 1999, pp. 71-79.

[27] I. Hung-yok. Sulak Sivaraksa and Buddhism Activism: Translating Nativist Resistance in the Age of Transnational Capital. Journal of Global Buddhism, 2007, p. 34.

[28] A. Thongyoo. Culture and local community: an alternative for development works. [In Thai]. 1997.

[29] Siwarak himself, though, believes that the "buddhism with a small 'b'" he promotes is not nationalistic. See S. Sivaraksa. Buddhism with a Small "b". Fellowship, 1999, 65(1-2): 9.

and contemporary, where the ones who had protected the country.[30]

Prachya Pinkaew, a famous Thai film director, is one of the followers of Siwarak's localist idea. His two Muay Thai film productions, *Ong Bak: Muay Thai Warrior* (2003) and *Tom Yum Goong* (2005), were both in line with Siwarak's historical analysis, creating a myth of a hero defeating villains to save the country. These two films had made him achieved both international box office success while strengthening nationalism among the Thais. Two years after Prachya's film *Ong Bak* became a big hit at the global box office, he and his best partner—Tony Jaa, staged a comeback with their new film *Tom Yum Goong* and once again set the box office record for the Muay Thai action film.[31] Just like in *Ong Bak*, Tony Jaa once again creates a Muay Thai myth, brings a distinct personality to the role by displaying his spectacular physical prowess and the image of a masculine, down to earth protector from the countryside.

The film tells a myth of a rural Muay Thai hero fighting to save the country. The hero, *Kham*, lives in a small village of northeast Thailand with his father and two elephants. One day, his beloved elephants are stolen by a group of bad people including the mayor and his son, who are mixed up with a Chinese gang in Sydney. According to them, the chief plotter of this incident is in Sydney, and he occupies a local Thai restaurant which named "Tom Yum Goong". In order to recover the elephants, *Kham* flies to Sydney on his own, finds the restaurant, fights against enemies from different countries and uses Muay Thai skills taught by his dad to save both his elephants and

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[30] D. Swearer. Sulak Sivaraksa's Buddhist vision for renewing society. Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia, 1996, p.211.

[31] *Tom Yum Goong* (2005) is the first Thai film in history to reach the fourth place on the Hollywood box office chart in 3 days, with a worldwide gross of $25,715,096, making it the most successful Thai film released in the United States to date.

Thai citizens who have been bullied abroad. It is worth noting that, the elephant here is not just referring to a gigantic animal, an extraordinary pet or a powerful livestock in agrarian society. It has been given special meaning by the Thais, which is the national symbol of Thailand. Therefore, the theft of the elephant in the film implies that Thailand is threatened by foreign enemies. Thus, *Kham*'s heroic act of saving elephants naturally becomes a feat of protecting the honor and dignity of the Thai nation. This part will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

I believe, however, that Prachya has more ambitions than merely gaining box-office success. According to Vail's argument, the mythology of Muay Thai is indeed the stories which Thai men tell themselves about themselves.[32] While McLuhan argues that the "collective art form" (film media), creates an illusion for the audiences, which can persuade those who share the same beliefs as the filmmaker to accept certain values and certain practices.[33] In view of the two arguments above, this article's main argument is that the Muay Thai myth represented in the *Tom Yum Goong* is an artificial tool for the director to convey his personal ideology, beyond material gain. For the foreign audience, he intends to attract them by adding multiple elements which can help foreigners identify Thailand, such as Muay Thai, elephant, Songkran festival, long-tail boat and so on. For the Thai audience, his purpose is to express his personal interpretation of Thainess and nationalism to them.

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[32] P. T. Vail. Modern "Muai Thai" Mythology. Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, 1998, pp. 75-95.

[33] M. McLuhan. Understanding media: The extensions of man. MIT press, 1994.

Prachya tells a story of nationalism, anti-capitalism and anti-westernism from a local perspective. This is in line with the traditional Thai values system as Siwarak depicts. It offers Thai audiences an opportunity to weave themselves into the popular historical imagination, follow the Muay Thai myth to resist the provocation of foreign invaders, defend the dignity and honor of the nation, so that they themselves can experience this sense of belonging in a crisis. Just like what the "new nationalist" group of academics and businesspeople did to rescue Thailand after the crisis, that is, they hoped to "plant the love of country in every person in every corner of the country".[34] To achieve this goal, Prachya has evoked a strong sense of nationhood and national identity of Thai people by demonstrating the positive portrayals of Thainess and the negative ones of otherness (or un-Thainess) in the film. This two-way identification reinforces national identity of the Thai audience from two different perspectives. In other words, the director expresses his own nationalist ideology, which is in line with Siwarak's, through the vivid Muay Thai myth.

This article aims to explore the following questions through the study of the film *Tom Yum Goong*: What Muay Thai myth does the film tell? What meaning does the film give to Muay Thai? How does the film reinforce national identity through cinematic means? In order to answer these questions, the following article will use the method of textual analysis to study on the identity of the Thai nation and the contrast between Thai nation and the others, which two aspects also correspond to the director's positive portrayals of Thainess and negative ones of otherness in the film.

[34] N. Petchprasoet. *Kham prakat chatniyom mai* [Declaration of New Nationalism], Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Political Economy Centre, 2000, pp. 13–29.

The Identity of the Thai Nation

How does the film forge the identity of the Thai nation and the sense of unity? The answer may lie in the analysis of the film language including storyline, scenes, dialogues, music scores, shooting angles, and picture compositions.

The film starts with a dialogue between a father and his son.

Father: "The *Chaturongkhabat* (four elephant-foot guardians) vow to protect the royal. elephant with their lives."[35]

Son: "Why does the elephant need protection? It's huge, who can do anything to harm it?"

Father: "As the king is sitting on the elephant, the guardsmen must be on guard below."

Son: "Be on guard against what, dad?"

Father: "Once the guardsmen lose their weapons, they have to fight with bare. hands by throwing, pressing, grabbing and breaking."

Son: "Be on guard against what, dad?"

Father: "I can't tell you yet."

Son: "I'll be the *Chaturongkhabat*, and I'll know it for sure."

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[35] On ancient battlefields, the Thai king sat on the back of the war elephant, and there were four guardians under it to protect the four elephant feet from being hurt by the enemy.

Father: "[Laugh] not ready yet, *Kham*, one day you will know."[36]

It can be seen that this father is telling a story to his son while the picture focuses on a page-turning old picture book, which depicts a mythology of Siamese soldiers accompanying war elephants to fight against foreign enemies on an ancient battlefield. The yellowish pages evokes a sense of reminiscence amongst the audience.[37] This significant prologue neatly draws out three important messages that the director wants to convey to the audience through the film: the importance of the king and royal war elephants to Thais; Muay Thai, an ancient martial art, whose origins can be traced back to the time when war elephants were still in use in ancient battlefields; and *Chaturongkhabat*'s barehand Muay Thai skills were used as replacement of weapons to protect the royal war elephant (i.e., the king). In the opening scene, Prachya links Muay Thai to the monarchy and created a time-honored but unverifiable legend for it.[38] Such similar dialogues appear several times again in the rest of the film, and each time they carry a meaningful connotation.

In the previous plots, the director uses many scenes to emphasize the inseparable relations between the *Chaturongkhabat*, the elephant and the king. In one scene, after *Por Yai,* the adult male elephant of *Kham'*s family walks slowly towards the audience in the fog, the camera turns to the portrait of the King Rama IX, which is hanging on the wall, as well as a photo of him holding an elephant trunk in a ceremony. At this point, the father's voice is audible once again, "If one day I have the opportunity to dedicate *Por Yai* to the king, it will be the greatest honor of my life, at least

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[36] Pracchya Pinkaew (director), *Tom Yum Goong* [Action Film], (Thailand, Pracchya Pinkaew, 2005), 01:12-01:52 min.

[37] Ibid., 01:10-01:52 min.

[38] Vail argues that the chronicle fragments constituting the history of Muay Thai are few and relatively brief. See P. T. Vail. Modern "Muai Thai" Mythology. Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, 1998, p. 92.

worthy of the fact that there was *Chaturongkhabat's blood in my veins*".[39] This sentence shows the special origin of *Kham*'s father and his lifelong desire to dedicate *Por Yai* to the king. This behavior is a tradition in Thailand and can be regarded as a great honor for the owner of the elephant.[40] The director connects *Por Yai* with the king, which emphasizes its immense relevance. This dialogue also paves the way for *Kham*'s desperate attempt to rescue *Por Yai* after it was stolen by the villains.

Then, the camera jumps to another scene. *Kham* first trains Muay Thai, moves to and fro under *Por Yai*'s body while his father sits aside and watch him. Then, he expertly raises himself with *Por Yai*'s tusks, jumps onto its back and picks some fruit from the tree for the baby elephant which is named *Khorn*.[41] Although this scene lasts for less than one minute, we can still capture important information from it. Firstly, the relationship between *Kham*'s family and the elephants is so intimate that it has already far transcended the relationship between the herd and the herd owner. Next, *Kham* has inherited his father's Muay Thai skills which were powerful forces to protect the elephant. This scene also echoes *Kham*'s memories of his father's instruction in the latter plot: "The king is on the top of the elephant and the important point is below it. All the four guardians protect the important part of the elephant feet when facing enemy's attacks."[42] It can be seen that the Muay

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[39] Pracchya Pinkaew (director), *Tom Yum Goong* [Action Film], (Thailand, Pracchya Pinkaew, 2005), 07:50-08:20 min.

[40] N. Wootvatansa, K. Kanjanapimai, K. Ariyatugun, et al. "White Elephant" the King's Auspicious Animal. Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Surin Rajabhat University, 2018, p. 364.

[41] Pracchya Pinkaew (director), *Tom Yum Goong* [Action Film], (Thailand, Pracchya Pinkaew, 2005), 08:20-08:54 min.

[42] Ibid., 50:50-51:48 min.

Thai skill that *Kham* trains is probably not for competitions in the ring, but specially for protecting the elephant, just like what *Chaturongkhabat* had done on the ancient battlefields.

Lastly, the plain dresses of *Kham*'s family and their lives in the jungle suggest that *Kham* comes from a lower-class background. Thus, he is deprived of "intellect" in terms of elite education. However, comparing with well-educated elite, he possesses a specific intellectual quality, that is, Muay Thai which is specific to lower-class people in Thailand. It can perfectly utilize the Thais' small but agile body as a sharp weapon to punch above their weight. *Kham* inherits this fortune from his father and their ancestor who served as one of the four guardians of the war elephant. In the film, whenever there is a crisis, the hero can always take advantage of this intellect to resolve it smartly. For instance, when he finds himself unable to use conventional Muay Thai skills against wrestlers who are much stronger than him, he recalls his father's instruction, "The important point of the elephant is its hamstring. Once destroyed, it will fall down."[43] Kham finally wins the fight by cutting off his enemies' hamstrings, which is pretty a wise method to beat multiple stronger opponents. For lower-class Thais, Muay Thai is a sort of local intellect and passed down as a national way of protection against foreign enemies by generations.

In a scene that takes place at the market, *Kham* and his father learn that during the upcoming Songkran festival, there will be an elephant selection event, which is a good opportunity to dedicate the elephant to the country. The next scene is shot from above, with the camera rising all the way from the bottom of the valley to the top of the cliff. In the picture, we can see the vast forest area

[43] Ibid., 01:41:34-01:41:39 min.

in northeastern Thailand, and the hero kneeling to the elephant on the cliff. By contrasting the mountains and jungles, with the elephant and the hero, the audience can clearly feel the vastness of the Thai territory and the individual's smallness relative to the entire country. Accompanied by majestic background music, a sense of awe arises spontaneously. However, this wonderful vision of the *Kham*'s family is soon shattered by the new mayor, who holds the tryout and colludes with the police chief of Sydney and the Chinese gang, and plans to secretly abduct *Por Yai* and *Khorn* to be trafficked and sent to Sydney. Facing the unwavering resistance of *Kham*'s father, the distraught mayor shoots him. Under such circumstance, *Kham* is left with no choice but to chase them all the way from the mayor's villa to Sydney and battle with the local police and Chinese gangs.

In the final showdown scene, *Kham* falls heavily to the ground with the fleeing villain Madame *Rose*, after knocking her down from a helicopter with a typical Muay Thai skill—flying knee. Then, the camera moves up from the dying villain on the ground, and focuses on the hero lying on the tusks. He caresses *Por Yai*, which has been already made into an elephant bone sculpture, with his hand, just as he always did since he was a child. Here, the director uses repeated flashbacks between reality and memory, and successfully creates a tragic atmosphere. A remarkable detail here is *Mark*'s internal monologue which appears as a voice-over when Kham lies on the tusks.

> "The elephant has long been the national animal of the Thai people. Thai people respect elephants, treat them like relatives, brothers and sisters, parents and

family members, and hate people who hurt them. Thais love peace, but dislike people who get on their nerves."[44]

On the surface, *Mark*'s words express the special bond between elephants and the Thais, and the respect that the Thais have for this animal over others, but here the "elephant" is in fact a symbol of Thailand.

Since the reign of Rama II to Rama VI, the image of the elephant had been at the very center of the Thai national flag in three different patterns for over 100 years.[45] This glorious tradition has been preserved on the flag of the Royal Thai Navy (RTN), which are still in use today. Besides, the elephant's connection to kingship has also long surpassed that of other animals since ancient times. Charney argues that, there is no animal more closely identified with kingship in Southeast Asia than the elephant, numerous ways were found by courts to identify the ruler with the elephant.[46] The same is true in Thailand, in Thai Buddhism, where the elephant is also closely related to kingship.[47] So, it can be concluded that the elephant in the film can be equated with Thailand. Thus, for most Thais who share the same cultural background, *Kham*'s choice to risk death to save his motherland is relatable. Although in this film, *Kham*'s acts of fighting against the entire gang by himself may seem too idealistic, this near-suicidal act has its purity, since it is selfless patriotism and totally devoid of self-interest and can be considered as the ultimate sacrifice. At the end of the

[44] Pracchya Pinkaew (director), *Tom Yum Goong* [Action Film], (Thailand, Pracchya Pinkaew, 2005), 01:45:20-01:45:44 min.

[45] Rama IX Art Museum's Web (accessed on Oct 9, 2022). Available at http://www.rama9art.org/thaiflag/body3.html.

[46] M. Charney. Southeast Asian Warfare, 1300-1900. Brill, 2018, pp. 132-133.

[47] J. Choskyi. Symbolism of animals in Buddhism. Buddhist Himalaya, 1988, 1(1).

film, when *Kham* defeats all the villains, walks forward and falls to his knees in exhaustion, the trumpeting baby elephant *Khorn* runs to him. *Kham* embraces *Khorn*, and the whole film ends. The final scene tells the audience that the hero has completed the rescue of the country in the end, re-emphasizes the necessity and legitimacy of this fight, and points to a bright vision of Thailand's future.

During the process of watching the film, non-Thai audiences can be touched by the fascinating storyline, while the Thai ones can feel it much more deeply. When they think of the elements with Thai characteristics in the film, such as Muay Thai, the elephant or the Thai hero, what come to their mind spontaneously are not only their superficial natural attributes, but also the deep symbolic meaning behind it. For example, in the film, the elephant is no longer an ordinary animal, but the symbol of the country, which is stolen by the west; Muay Thai, lower-class Thais' national protection to against the threaten of foreign enemies, can represent Thai intellect or "phum panya";[48] and the hero, *Kham*, who is a descendant of the elephant-foot guardian, "The Protector" of the country,[49] is then the ideal Thai citizen. The symbolic representation in the film is consistent with Sulak Siwarak's idea that Thainess, which core characteristic is localism, is being harmed by the west, and the only way to retrieve it is using the local wisdom. Hence, the Thai people's national identities are naturally reinforced upon experiencing the rescue of Thainess in the film. In other words, with the help of the modern Muay Thai myth created by the director, they are all naturally

[48] Reynolds argues that this term is a recent coinage with a decidedly rural bias which can be translated as local knowledge, native wisdom, local genius or ingenuity. See C. J. Reynolds. Globalisers vs communitarians: Public intellectuals debate Thailand's futures. Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography, 2001, pp. 263-264.

[49] The film *Tom Yum Goong* was distributed as *The Protector* in the United States.

invited into Anderson Benedict's "imagined community" and get the chance to sense "the beauty of gemeinschaft".[50]

The Contrast between Thai Nation and the Others

After the robbery of elephants, the film goes to great lengths to portray the contrast between the Thai nation and other ethnic groups (which also includes the Thais who have lost their Thainess under the influence of capitalism and Occidentalism) and this is emphasized more than the identity of the Thai nation as mentioned above. In other words, rather than directly defining what Thainess is, the director is more concerned with showing what un-Thainess is. Just as Winichakul argues, "the existence of otherness, un-Thainess, is as necessary as the positive definition of Thainess. Perhaps we can say that the former is indispensable to the latter."[51] In fact, the director is still in the process of defining Thainess in a reverse way. Because this negative identification is more easily recognised and can directly stimulate the nationalist sentiments of the Thais.

This kind of contrast in the film exists between the lower classes and the elite of Thai society, as well as the Thai nation and the other ethnic groups (especially the westerners), where the former ones are considered "Thainess", while the latter ones are not. What the director wants to do is to deepen this contrast and threat, so as to enhance the dramatic conflict, so that the audience can identify with the hero and the lower-class Thais he represents, thereby agreeing with the

[50] B. Anderson. Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. London: Verso, 1983, p. 134.

[51] T. Winichakul. Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-body of a Nation. University of Hawaii Press, 1997, p. 6.

interpretation of Thainess from the perspective of localism. The contrast starts from the portrayal of two different values between the lower-class Thais and Thai elites. The former characters follow King Rama IX's idea and live simple, self-sufficient life, while the latter's lives are materialistic and they never hide their lust for affluence and excess material needs.

The first half of the film depicts a group of villagers, represented by *Kham* and his father, logging, picking bananas, eating and playing with elephants in the forest. Besides, some details show that *Kham*'s family makes a living by supplying fruits to vendors at the market;[52] *Kham'*s red scarf is worn from its first appearance at 3:01 until the end of the film; the seat on the elephant to carry people and goods is hand-made out of wood by *Kham*'s father.[53] The above implies that the source of income of *Kham*'s family comes from the forest, they and other villagers are content with their current material life and have been living self-sufficiently, thriftily and simply. It is no coincidence that this way of life is in line with King Rama IX's idea of "self-sufficiency economy". And Siwarak also echoes this concept in his localism,

> "…they should be content with a simple life with adequate supplies of food, clothing, shelter and medicine…the non-elite, especially the poor, must fight their own thirst for capitalist affluence, which always accompanies their group-based consciousness as the underprivileged."[54]

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[52] Pracchya Pinkaew (director), Tom Yum Goong [Action Film], (Thailand, Pracchya Pinkaew, 2005), 09:08 min.

[53] Ibid., 08:55 min.

[54] S. Sivaraksa. Seeds of Peace A Buddhist Vision for Renewing Society. 1992, p.48; Sulak S. Global Healing: Essays and Interviews on Structural Violence, Social Development and Spiritual Transformation. 1999, p. 120.

It can be seen that, Prachya's portrayal of the villagers' lives is a utopian vision in its most localist form, that is, people can live a self-sufficient life by farming and without any external dependence.

This ideal community was soon shattered by the "forces of greed" represented by the collaboration of unscrupulous private investors, politicians, and public officials, as the king put it.[55] The shooting of *Kham*'s father at 13:39 min is like a watershed that divides the characters into two parts, that is, good and evil or self and the other. The opposition between the poor and the elite in the film begins after *Kham*'s father gets shot by the son of the mayor since he tries to stop them from taking away *Por Yai*. The director first shows the traditional worship ritual performed by villagers before *Kham*'s adventure to rescue the elephants. The camera then immediately moves to the side of the local government official, who are holding a party in his mansion after snatching the two elephants from Kham's family. By comparing the facial expressions, clothes, singing, dancing, musical instruments and behaviors of villagers and officials, the director fully demonstrates the simplicity of the villagers and their devotion to the Buddha, in opposition to the extravagant lives of the local officials. For example, the villagers wear national costumes made of coarse cloth, while the officials are wearing fashionable clothes and luxurious accessories; the villagers play traditional Thai instruments and perform local dances, while on the other side, pop songs played by western instruments fill the whole party room; the villagers perform a solemn ritual of worship, while the officials are enjoying their extravagant and dissipated lives in the villa.[56] In this shot, it shows that

[55] B. Adulyadej. *King Bhumibol Adulyadej: Thailand's Guiding Light*. Post Pub., 1996.

[56] Pracchya Pinkaew (director), *Tom Yum Goong* [Action Film], (Thailand, Pracchya Pinkaew, 2005), 16:52-19:11 min.

everything of the villagers who represent the lower classes comes from Thai tradition, while the Thai officials represent the elite who have been completely westernized. The director wants to use this scene to represent today's Thai society under the "western threat", according to his vision.

In addition, at 00: 48: 11 min, there is a news report about banning elephants from downtown Bangkok, "The Thai government says it is trying to resolve the issue of elephants wandering around on Bangkok streets, ordering the regulation of the elephants out of the capital." This scene shows the suffering of the rural Thais under the system of transnational capital. The economic elite has unleashed deterritorialized economic forces which, by crossing the boundaries of the nation-states, intrude into the local peoples' life worlds.[57] And according to Siwarak's historical narrative, this is due to the elite's intellectual-emotional subjugation to the West.[58] Thus, in a highly westernized city like Bangkok, there is no place for elephants which in the "progressive" Thai elite's mind represent the "backward" Thailand. All of the above scenes in the film are clear manifestations of the gradually deepening opposition between the rich and the poor, the urban and the rural, in the process of westernization in Thailand.

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The following plots depict the real harm that other ethnic groups have done to the Thai nation. It starts from the moment *Kham* sets foot in Sydney. The director deliberately places the hero from rural Thailand into a multi-cultural cosmopolis—Sydney, to create a strong contrast between extreme traditional Thai and extreme westernized characters. Here, the three pillars of

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[57] I. Hung-yok. Sulak Sivaraksa and Buddhism Activism: Translating Nativist Resistance in the Age of Transnational Capital. Journal of Global Buddhism, 2007, p.27.

[58] Ibid., p. 6.

Thailand, the nation, the religion and the monarchy, are all trampled by evil foreign forces, but each time can be refused by *Kham*'s local intellect, that is Muay Thai.

Prachya uses the overseas Thais as the representative of Thai nation, and shows the threats that foreigners pose to Thais, such as stereotype, discrimination, humiliation, and physical torture. Such plots in the film have evoked strong emotions from the audience. There is one scene where a Thai student who is forced to be a prostitute, is beaten by local gangsters in the bathroom, and is humiliated like this, "Thai students are only allowed to do two jobs here, a waitress or a call-girl. What else can you do?"[59] The extent of harm on the Thais in the subsequent plots gradually intensify, Thai waitresses are kidnapped, Thai policeman Mark is beaten, hung and imprisoned with a group of trafficked Thai prostitutes in a small, dimly lit room, just like the wild animals in cages next door to them which are waiting to be killed. All of this is done by the Chinese gangsters and Sydney's corrupted cops. According to Baker, as a sort of reaction to the crisis, "Some now pictured globalization as a malign force that had 'enslaved' Thailand and undermined its stability."[60] The director of this film has vividly expressed this metaphor through the means of film.

Normally, it might be hard to associate Thai Buddhism with a western city like Sydney, but the director cleverly arranges a scene in which a Thai Buddhist temple in Sydney is burned down by foreign killers. This can perhaps remind the Thai people of the collective memory of the fall of

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[59] Pracchya Pinkaew (director), Tom Yum Goong [Action Film], (Thailand, Pracchya Pinkaew, 2005), 16:52-19:11 min, 29:21-30:07 min.

[60] C. Baker, P. Phongpaichit. A history of Thailand. Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 260.

Ayutthaya in 1767.[61] After escaping from a Chinese gang, *Kham* and *Mark* take refuge in a Buddhist temple, and prostrate themselves before the white monk, which emphasizes their cultural identities. Later, the temple is ransacked by the gangsters, the images such as a dying monk, crying Thais, overturned candlesticks, and burning Buddha statues come next to uncover the "scars" of the Thais. Such national sentiment is later unleashed when *Kham* uses Muay Thai to fight against the capoeira fighter,[62] the martial artist and the wrestler. There is the strong possibility that Prachya reenacted the tragedy of Ayutthaya purposefully by creating a Buddhist temple (which represents Thai cultural identity) that is burned down by a Sydney criminal gang (which represents otherness), in an attempt to awaken the national sentiment of the Thais.

It is mentioned at the beginning of the film that *Kham* is descended from an elephant-foot guardian. Under the influence of his father, *Kham* also wishes to be a guardian to protect the elephant since he was a kid. The ingenious story plots make his seemingly impossible dream come true. When he sees *Por Yai*, "the gift to the king" is killed and defiled by the Chinese villain, he's determined to defeat the enemy and preserve the dignity of the Thai monarchy even if it involves sacrificing his life. Muay Thai, which is a protection of the country, becomes a tool to protect the monarchy, which is an important part of Thailand. And the greatly support for the kingship, which can, in turn, confirm *Kham*'s identity as an ideal Thai citizen.

[61] The city of Ayutthaya was burned by the Burmese invaders in April 1767, which is recognized as a humiliating event in Thai history.

[62] Capoeira is a traditional Brazilian martial art.

By portraying how the hero protects the three pillars of Thailand, the director shows the audience an intelligent side of Muay Thai. As known as "the art of eight limbs", it develops the user's eight parts of body into weapons.[63] Thus, when fighting, it allows fighters to rely solely on their own bodies without the help of any weapons. This sort of local wisdom is derived from the agrarian era of Thailand, which enables the lower-class Thai people to own their own "weapons" to protect the country even though they are lack of elite education and have to face the shortage of necessities. Indeed, *Kham* never uses a weapon once in the film, although the enemies he faces are always armed with knives, whips, pistols, etc. The only three times he uses items that could be called "weapon" are the bell on *Khorn*'s neck,[64] a pair of drumsticks,[65] and *Por Yai*'s leg bones.[66] They are all common items that can be obtained easily or things of his own. The director tries hard here to reflect the self-sufficiency, regionalism, anti-materialism and anti-industrialization characteristics of Muay Thai.

Moreover, it's noteworthy that the title of the movie and the name of the Thai restaurant are both "Tom Yum Goong", which I think the director did on purpose. For foreign audiences, Tom Yum Goong is one of the most famous Thai cuisines, hence using it as the film title can definitely catch their eyes. But for Thai audiences, besides the name of the dish, it also symbolizes the financial crisis of the same name. I argue that the director uses the title to evoke Thais' memories

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[63] The eight body parts are two fists, two elbows, two knees and two feet.

[64] Pracchya Pinkaew (director), Tom Yum Goong [Action Film], (Thailand, Pracchya Pinkaew, 2005), 16:52-19:11 min, 01:07:37 min.

[65] Ibid., 01:23:06 min.

[66] Ibid., 01:40:03 min.

of the national crisis, reminds them that the country is still under the threat of the west, such as capitalism, materialism and consumerism, and likely to be in crisis again. It can be confirmed by the plots of the film that the Thai former owner of this restaurant named *Wittaya Thammarat* has been killed by the local Chinese gang for the reason of business conflict.[67] This plot echoes the tragedies happened in Thailand during the financial crisis that local capital was replaced by more advanced international capital.

Besides, another scene shows that local NGOs protest on the street, after learning that an elephant from Thailand has been illegally transported to Sydney. One of the participants shouts to the camera, "... (the elephant) belongs to Thailand. The best way to enrich this elephant environment is putting it with other elephants, so that it can live with its family, in its herds."[68] The demand of the NGO in the film is line with Siwarak's localism idea that Thais should return back to their tradition, resist materialism, consumerism, capitalism and Occidentalism. These values originated from the west but nowadays have already occupied Thais' value system. This idea is more directly reflected in the words of the character *Mark*, who is an ethnic Thai in Sydney with a strong Thai national identity. When he sees the restaurant has changed a Vietnamese manager, he mutters angrily: "The name of the restaurant is Thai, the food Tom Yum Goong is also Thai, why hire a Vietnamese manager?"[69] Clearly, here the director wants to convey that anything "un-Thai" does not belong or fit for this country. At the end of the film, *Kham* uses Muay Thai to defeat the foreign

[67] Ibid., 23:34-23:55 min.

[68] Ibid., 23:28-24:19 min.

[69] Ibid., 38:35-39:00 min.

enemies who occupy the restaurant, which hints at the director's call for the Thais to use local wisdom to fight against the damage of globalization.

By comparing the cruel images of the Chinese, the mean images of the Vietnamese, and the greedy images of the westerners, this part of film draws the ideal images of the Thais in the director's mind: A Buddhist, royalist, ruralist and anti-capitalist who seems small, but has a big heart; who has a simple exterior, but a rich interior; who sometimes makes mistakes, but remains irrevocably likable; who masters mysterious skills to heroically defeat strong enemies, but meanwhile, stays peace-loving, humble, gentle, pay more attention to inner spiritual strength and never uses force easily. In *Tom Yum Goong*, the hero *Kham* acts as a carrier of Thainess, who has all the traditional Thai virtues in one, struggles between sticking to tradition and accepting westernization, yet ultimately chooses the former. Through *Kham*'s adventurous journey, which is also a modern Muay Thai myth, Prachya sends his localist idea as core value of Thainess to the audience that, even in today's highly westernized world, Thainess still has timeless universal value.

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Conclusion

The article argues that despite modern film technology, the *Tom Yum Goong* remains inside-the-box of those classical Muay Thai myths, whose heroes are ordinary Thai citizens, but with Muay Thai skills, a kind of "local wisdom" unique to lower-class Thais, they are able to defeat powerful foreign forces trying to invade Thailand. The similarities between these heroes are clear, they are the protectors of and the nation, and they possess the purest form of Thainess. It is

commendable that, even under the influence of western consumerism, the Thainess of *Kham* has never been discarded. Just as the red scarf which was worn by him from a boy to a man, from rural Thailand to Sydney, throughout in the entire film has never changed, so hasn't his fierce loyalty to his country. It exactly fits with the localist idea that the film hopes to promote.

As for Muay Thai, it is a sharp weapon which helps the hero resist the foreign enemy and protect the country from the crisis all the way. It conforms to the "self-sufficiency" concept of King Rama IX and Siwarak's localism, hence can further magnify the charming Thainess of the hero. Although *Kham* possesses a powerful force, he is by no means a killing machine. His fighting motive is always to protect the three pillars of Thai nation. This pure love for the motherland can easily move the audience, create unity among them and reinforce their national identity, especially for the Thais.

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Chulalongkorn University

VITA

NAME	Wang Qian
DATE OF BIRTH	05 DEC 1994
PLACE OF BIRTH	MUDANJIANG, HEILONGJIANG PROVINCE, CHINA
INSTITUTIONS ATTENDED	- College of Life Science and Technology, Honghe University, China. - Institute of Environment and Sustainable Development in Agriculture, Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, China.
HOME ADDRESS	610/7 ถ.รถไฟตะวันตก ตำบลพระปฐมเจดีย์ Mueang Nakhon Pathom District, Nakhon Pathom 73000

จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย
CHULALONGKORN UNIVERSITY