

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this research was to explore a transitional change of Isaan characters in Thai films during the year 2003-2007. This study was conducted based on the qualitative approach in which the life, filmography and success of selected Isaan actors were explored and examined socially, culturally and economically. It also aimed to outline the factors influencing such a transition.

Research Method

This qualitative research was based on a research model employed by anthropologists and sociologists whose studies rely on human powers of observation rather than on measurement instruments. It was a research seeking to understand a phenomenon by focusing on the total picture rather than breaking it down into variables. The goal was a holistic picture and depth of understanding, rather than a numeric analysis of data. It looked not only at what people do but also at how they think and feel and how they are influenced by their experiences. Since the research did not know in advance how the analysis would unfold or what variables may be important, the study began without a hypothesis. The result, thus, was a narrative report.

Scope of the Research

The study intended to examine the popularity of two Isaan descent characters namely Panom Yeerum and Petchtai Wongkumlaio, who have prominently emerged as

the renowned characters in Thai entertainment industry and find out factors contributing to such a success. For the sake of clarity and better understanding, Panom Yeerum's and Petchtai Wongkumlao's entertainment names 'Jaa Panom' and 'Mum Jokmok' will be used throughout the research.

Jaa Panom is the internationally-recognized martial artist who was cast the leading role in two Thai box-office hit films, *Ong Bak* (2003) and *Tom Yum Goong* (2005). Jaa Panom has enjoyed international appraisal for his outstanding Thai-styled martial arts and is currently concentrating on his project of *Ong Bak 2* film production. Mum Jokmok is acclaimed Thailand's most successful comedian-turn-millionaire with his versatile abilities which can be witnessed not only through his roles in several Thai films but also in his film production and involvement in other media fields. The instant and emerging fame and favor in these two Isaan descent characters by Thai people is, therefore, worth the analysis.

The films selected to be analyzed and studied in this research were shown in the theatre between 2003 and 2007 and have either Mum Jokmok or Jaa Panom cast in the leading roles. They include *Ong Bak* (2003), *The Bodyguard* (2004), *Tom Yum Goong* (2005), *Cherm, Midnight My Love* (2005), *Yam Yasothorn* (2005) and *The Bodyguard 2* (2007). The study concentrated on this period because it is the period during which the transitional change of Isaan characters from minor to major roles is most prominent. The presentation and characteristics of Jaa Panom and Mum Jokmok as the leading characters of the selected films were explored along with the films' success in terms of revenue and popularity of the films in comparison with other domestic films launched in the same years.

The influential factors that encourage both Jaa Panom and Mum Jokmok to be chosen as the protagonist of these selected films were then analyzed in order to understand the transitional change. The analysis method employed was based on the qualitative approach, especially the media discourse techniques. In media discourse approach, all elements involved, verbal and non-verbal, were explored and the discourse analysis was an interdisciplinary one, including linguistics, anthropology and sociology. The in-depth discourse described the film's plot, the films' success in terms of revenue, and their ranks in Thai annual box office chart, all of which were obtained from reliable news and report sources. The analysis on factors influencing on this transitional change were largely based on media discourse as well. In the analysis of influencing factors, theories concerning social identity and social assimilation were partly employed to describe the transitional change.