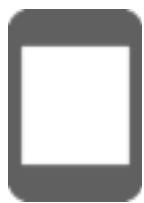


Thailand as a Foreign Film Production Destination: Developments and Challenges from 2016 to 2018



Alexander J. Klemm

King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang
alexander.kl@kmitl.ac.th

ABSTRACT

Foreign film production is a vital source of revenue for Thailand, a job creator and a stimulator of tourism. This article seeks to outline and assess the developments and challenges of Thailand as a foreign film production destination from 2016 to 2018. To this end, it analyzes statistics of annual revenue, production types and the nationalities connected to foreign film projects and discusses the Thailand Film Office's marketing strategy and activities. Within the context of film-induced tourism, the article also contextualizes the temporary closure of Maya Bay. The results show that (1) the TFO's promotional strategy is effective as it includes the dissemination of marketing materials and the organization of an annual film festival, competitions and other events that foster international cooperation; (2) Japanese, Indian and continental European productions are the most numerous; (3) the intensity of foreign filmmaking activity in Thailand fluctuates year by year but has stabilized at a high level during the 2016-2018-period; and (4) the high 2018-revenue figures can be attributed in part to the new tax incentives.

Keywords: film-induced tourism, film production destination, Maya Bay, tax incentive scheme, Thailand Film Office, Thailand International Film Destination Festival

ALEXANDER J. KLEMM is an Assistant Professor at King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang, Thailand. He holds a PhD in Media and Communications (European Graduate School), a Licentiate/MA in English Studies and Film Studies (University of Zurich) and a TESL certificate (UC Berkeley Extension). He has been teaching at universities and conducting research in Bangkok for over a decade and has published extensively on the representation of Thailand in western fiction films, documentaries, travel photography, and novels.

INTRODUCTION

Foreign film production is a vital source of revenue for the Thai economy and a creator of jobs in its media, hospitality, and logistics industries. In fact, Thailand is the leading host of foreign film and visual media production in Southeast Asia, with Malaysia as its biggest competitor. In 2018 the total revenue from foreign films made in Thailand was THB 3.14 b (USD 97.9 m), which came close to equaling the record revenue in 2015, when THB 3.16 b (USD 98.5 m) were earned. The creative products include fiction films, documentaries, TV programs, advertisements, PR visual materials, and music videos. The years 2016 to 2018 saw an annual average of 767.7 productions. (See Appendix 1 for a list of selected feature films completed during this period.)

A support system for visiting filmmakers is provided by government institutions, particularly by the Thailand Film Office (TFO), which operates under the Department of Tourism. The TFO assists filmmakers in matters regarding work permits, labor laws, and film script approvals. There are also hundreds of Thai film production service enterprises that can facilitate all stages of the production process and several professional filmmaker associations that provide expertise and connect people in the industry. A central goal of the TFO and the Thai government is to promote foreign filmmaking in Thailand so that it stimulates the national economy and that the film products induce foreign viewers to choose Thailand as their next travel destination. Thus, the TFO stands at the forefront of a complex system that includes filmmaking, finance, international relations, policies, cultural representations, and marketing geared toward film-induced tourism.

The concept of film-induced tourism holds that some tourists make the conscious decision to visit countries, cities and particular sites which they have previously seen in feature films, documentaries and television programs (Hudson and Ritchie 2006). According to Busby and Klug, people are film-induced tourists when they seek out specific destinations and sights they saw on a screen (2001). The TFO's promotional efforts are evidence of its awareness that film-induced tourism has the potential to bring tourists to all parts of the country.

This article is a follow-up to and expansion of the author's previous research publication on foreign film production in Thailand from 2003 to 2015 (Klemm 2017). It aims to pinpoint and contextualize salient developments in and challenges to foreign film production in Thailand from 2016 to 2018, so as to foster the reader's understanding of the mechanics of a vital film production industry in Southeast Asia.

The years 2016 to 2018 are of particular interest because they saw a significant rise in the number of foreign film productions and increased efforts by the TFO to promote central as well as remote regions of Thailand as shooting locations for visiting filmmakers. Thus, the article is a contribution to the rather small body of knowledge of foreign filmmaking in Thailand and bridges insights into the film industry, tourism promotion, and policy making.

Regarding national developments and challenges, the years 2016 to 2018 mark a turbulent phase before the beginning of a transitional period to more democracy in Thailand since early 2019. It saw the consolidation of long-term military influence via a new and nationwide approved constitution in August 2016, and there was much controversy surrounding ousted Prime Minister

Yingluck Shinawatra's escape from Thailand into self-exile in August 2017. In January 2019 the military junta announced general elections, which were held the following March and restored parliamentary politics in the country. Moreover, following the passing of King Bhumibol Adulyadej in October 2016 – he was the world's longest reigning monarch at the time and highly revered by all Thais – a nationwide one-year-long mourning period was observed and crown-prince Vajiralongkorn became the new king in December 2016.

Also important was the international rescue operation of twelve football juniors and their coach from a flooded cave near the northern city of Chiang Rai in July 2018, generally referred to as the 'Tham Luang Cave rescue'. For two weeks the dramatic operation catapulted Thailand to the forefront of international media coverage. After the rescue, Thai authorities strove to ensure that a Thai rather than a foreign company would produce a feature film about it. Bui has suggested that up to six foreign film projects about the real-life drama were possible, including one by Hollywood (2018). Finally, Thailand's De Warrenne Pictures, headed by Thai-Irish filmmaker Tom Waller, made the film *The Cave*, which premiered at the 2019 international film festivals in Busan and Vancouver.

Abovementioned events peaked international media interest in Thailand regularly and may have influenced foreign filmmakers either to pass on or to pick Thailand as a shooting location.

METHODS AND LITERATURE

The article discusses recent developments in foreign film production in Thailand and selected aspects of the filmmaking industry with the focus on the years 2016 to 2018. Thus, it includes a statistical analysis of quantitative data of annual revenues and the number of productions by country and genre as tabulated by the Thailand Film Office. To establish long-term trajectories, statistical data analysis from 2010 to 2015 is also included. This is followed by a qualitative data analysis of the promotional strategy of the Thailand Film Office and its key marketing tools, particularly the ASEAN-ROK Film Leaders Incubator and the Thailand International Film Destination Festival, as well as discussions of the newly implemented financial incentive measures and the challenges posed by film-induced tourism, illustrated by the example of *The Beach* (USA 2000) and the 2018-closure of Maya Bay.

Research about foreign filmmaking in Thailand is very limited. Beside Klemm (2017), a study of interest was conducted by Paprach and Hashim (2018), in which they give a brief historical overview and discuss the current situation of film tourism to Thailand. A useful report has been given by Thai filmmaker Abishek Bajaj who wrote about his experience shooting a low-budget feature film and his first-hand insights into foreign film production in Thailand (2017). Further insights are provided in a video interview with Thailand-based producer and director Chris Lowenstein (ThaiLawForum 2017). A brief overview of noteworthy fiction films and commercial ads produced in Thailand has been put forth by Tansakul (2018). The Thailand Film Office's website is also a key source of information (2019a). Apart from statistics of foreign filmmaking, it features promotional e-books in English, Chinese, and Japanese, as well as promotional videos of "The True Sense of Thailand's Film Destination" series (Thailand Film Office 2018c – 2018g) that introduce the viewer to production facilities, local cultures, locations around Thailand, and work behind the

films. Furthermore, national and international newspaper articles outline the tax rebate scheme and promote the Thailand International Film Destination Festival.

LIMITATIONS

The connections between foreign filmmaking in Thailand and the mechanics of film-induced tourism are important but can be explored only to some extent here because this phenomenon requires extensive data collection and analysis. In order to stay within a suitable scope, the article refrains from offering an audience study or an in-depth discussion of the overlaps between filmmaking, law, finance, and art.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Statistics of Foreign Film Production in Thailand

The tables below are adapted from similar ones from the official Thailand Film Office (2019) website. Table 1 shows the number of productions per category and the annual revenue from 2010 to 2018. The author has divided the years into three three-year periods: 2010-12 is Period I (P1), 2013-15 is Period 2 (P2), and 2016-18 is Period 3 (P3). This helps to make comparisons and to pinpoint certain trends.

Year	Advertising	Documentaries	Music Videos	TV Programs	Sensitive Content TV Programs	Game / Reality Shows	TV Dramas	TV Series	Feature Films	Others	Total	Revenue (THB million)	Revenue (USD million)
2010	255	178	50	34	4	0	6	2	49	0	578	1,869.15	58.41
2011	296	155	34	67	8	0	4	7	35	0	606	1,226.45	38.33
2012	314	122	41	80	8	3	6	9	53	0	636	1,781.93	55.69
Average Period 1: 2010-12	288.3	151.7	41.7	60.3	6.7	1	5.3	6	45.7	0	606.6	1,625.84	50.81
2013	346	150	47	86	6	0	7	8	67	0	717	2,173.35	67.92
2014	294	159	44	74	6	1	1	7	41	4	631	1,934.18	60.44
2015	329	176	57	62	8	9	1	16	63	3	724	3,164.30	98.88
Average Period 2: 2013-15	323	161.7	49.3	74	6.7	3.3	3.3	10.3	57	2.3	690.7	2,423.94	75.75
2016	376	155	47	80	14	3	3	16	50	35	779	2,371.10	74.10
2017	371	156	54	93	35	0	2	15	84	0	810	3,074.11	96.07
2018	335	120	46	72	12	32	5	16	74	2	714	3,139.29	98.10
Average Period 3: 2016-18	360.7	143.7	49	81.7	20.3	11.7	3.3	15.7	69.3	12.3	767.7	2,861.33	89.42

Table 1: Number of Foreign Productions, Categories and Revenue in Thailand 2010-2018 (Source: Adapted from *Foreign Productions in Thailand*, Thailand Film Office, 2019b).

From P1 to P3, there were increases in the number of productions in the categories of Advertising / Public Relations, TV Programs, Sensitive Content TV Programs, Game Shows /

Reality, TV Series, Feature Films, and Others. The most significant increase was seen in Advertising / Public Relations from an average of 288.3 productions in P1 to 360.7 in P3, but the number of Documentaries had a downward trend over nine years from 178 productions in 2010 to a record low of 120 in 2018. While the production numbers for Music Videos and TV Dramas remained stable, the category of Game Shows / Reality fluctuated notably with zero productions in some years and as many as 32 productions in 2018.

The total annual revenue increased from THB 1.869 b (USD 61.75 m) in 2010 to THB 3.139 b (USD 103.70 m) in 2018. The THB 3 billion mark was also broken in the record-setting year of 2015 with THB 3.164 b (USD 104.52 m) and in 2017 with a revenue of THB 3.074 b (USD 101.55 m). P3 averaged THB 2.861 b (USD 94.52 m). This could have been higher, if it were not for a drop in the 2016 revenue to THB 2.371 b (USD 78.32 m). This drop may be attributed to political uncertainty preceding the passing of King Bhumibol Adulyadej in October 2016 and the nation-wide mourning period that followed. On the other hand, it is conceivable that some foreign film projects were put on hold until the new tax rebate scheme would become effective in 2017.

Table 2 shows the countries and number of foreign film productions (i.e. all types) in Thailand from 2010 to 2018. Again, the division in three periods helps to rank the countries and to pinpoint noteworthy trends.

Average + Period	Japan	India	China	Korea	Hong Kong	Taiwan	Europe	UK	USA	Australia	Others	Total
2010	123	128	22	41	24	16	79	12	22	8	103	578
2011	113	107	33	47	24	9	97	22	35	15	104	606
2012	149	125	24	33	37	1	73	32	27	6	129	636
Average Period 1: 2010-12	128.3	120	26.3	40.3	28.3	8.7	83	22	28	9.7	112	606.7
2013	140	150	29	29	38	7	71	41	34	22	156	717
2014	133	107	37	22	28	2	85	37	26	18	136	631
2015	119	125	48	34	29	7	108	45	42	19	148	724
Average Period 2: 2013-15	130.7	127.3	38	28.3	31.7	5.3	88	41	34	19.7	146.7	690.7
2016	117	124	65	42	21	5	96	40	47	36	186	779
2017	141	110	75	40	24	7	117	60	53	16	167	810
2018	112	111	57	35	16	4	113	57	46	19	144	714
Average Period 3: 2016-18	123.3	115	65.7	39	20.3	5.3	108.7	52.3	48.7	23.7	165.7	767.7

Table 2: Countries and Number of Foreign Productions Filmed in Thailand, 2010-2018 (Source: Adapted from *Foreign Productions in Thailand*, Thailand Film Office, 2019b).

In P3, Japan averaged 123.3 film productions annually, making it the most active country. However, this was a slight decline from the annual average in P1 with 128.3 and P2 with 130.7 productions per annum. India has been the second most important client of the Thai film service industry for a long time. In 2013 Indian productions reached a peak with 150. Since then, the numbers declined but still saw a respectable average of 115 productions in P3. In 2016, the 124 Indian productions even surpassed the 117 Japanese productions.

Chinese productions saw a steady increase over the last nine years, going from 22 in 2010 to a record high of 75 in 2017. In P3, China averaged 65.7 productions per year, moving the country into third place. Obviously, China's foreign film productions in Thailand are on an upward trend. Considering Thailand's efforts put into attracting Chinese tourists and the strengthening of economic ties between the two nations, one can predict that the number of Chinese film-related productions will continue to be substantial. Korean productions averaged 40.3 in P1, had a dip to 28.3 productions in P2, and a recovery to an average of 39 productions in P3. Thus, Korea has slipped to fourth place among individual Asian countries producing films in Thailand.

The categories of Hong Kong and Taiwan complete the production figures with regards to Asian countries. The annual average of Hong Kong productions decreased by a significant 50 percent from 28.3 productions in P1 and 31.7 in P2 to 20.3 in P3. 2018 saw only 16 Hong Kong productions in Thailand altogether. This striking decline may be attributed to more Thai-Hong Kong co-productions and/or to internal struggles in the Hong Kong media industry. Rather interestingly, the TFO has been using a separate category for Taiwanese productions (probably because China and Hong Kong also have separate categories), even though the production numbers have been very low, with P2 and P3 averaging only 5.3 films per year.

Continental European productions (i.e. without the UK) make up a single category. The European output saw a steady increase over the years and reached record highs with 117 productions in 2017 and 113 in 2018. Since the continental European category is so significant, the TFO should divide it by country to allow for a more accurate analysis. The Nation confirmed that historically German companies have been the most active European film producers in Thailand (2018). In fact, German state and private TV networks and independent filmmakers produced a substantial number of TV movies, episodes, and Thailand-related documentaries that have reached millions of viewers in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria (see Appendix 2 for a list of key German productions). French, Danish, and Swedish companies also produce films and documentaries in Thailand to cater to their domestic audiences who have an interest in Thailand as a setting. Furthermore, productions from the UK more than doubled over a nine-year period. They saw an increase from annual averages of 22 in P1 to 41 in P2, and to 52 in P3. Thus, the UK is the most film-active European country in Thailand, even surpassing the US.

USA productions had a notable increase from annual averages of 28 in P1 to 34 in P2, and to 48.7 in P3. According to the Royal Thai Embassy, Washington D.C., film companies from the US and the UK are among the key spenders in Thailand (2017). This was confirmed by Bolliger and Company: "United States is the country's top investor, followed by the United Kingdom" (2017). Australian productions are moderate and inconsistent in number. In 2016 there were 36 productions but in 2017 only 16 and in 2018 only 19. These figures are low, considering that Thailand is a popular tourist destination for Australians. However, they may be attributed to Australia's financial support of film projects completed in Australia.

The TFO should consider breaking up the category Others because it is needlessly vague. It probably includes many Asian and Middle Eastern countries and averaged a significant 112 productions in P1, 146.7 in P2, and 165.7 in P3.

All in all, the years 2010 to 2018 saw an increase in the total number of foreign productions from 606.7 in P1 to 690.7 in P2 (+ 84 productions), and to 767.7 (+ 77 productions) in P3. The record years were 2016 with 779 and 2017 with 810 productions, respectively. The upward trend is apparent, but caution is advised. In 2018 there were 714 productions, slightly less than the 717 productions in 2013 and 724 in 2015. Furthermore, regarding revenue, the budget size of each project is more relevant than the total number of productions. Thailand's political situation, currency exchange rates, the quality of work provided by Thai film service companies, domestic audience expectations, and the financial incentive measures (discussed below) are all key factors that will continue to impact the number of foreign film productions completed in Thailand.

The Role of the Thailand Film Office

The Thailand Film Office is a wing of the Department of Tourism. Its mission is to promote and facilitate foreign filmmaking in Thailand and to convince foreign filmmakers to choose Thailand for the production – and possibly the pre- and post-production – of their projects. It does this by providing comprehensive information about all aspects of foreign filmmaking and by marketing Thailand domestically and abroad as a filmmaker's top destination. It highlights the country's qualities as a film shooting location, for instance the low production costs, the skilled Thai crews, the diverse landscapes, and the well-developed logistics. Central aspects of the TFO's marketing and promotional campaigns are the collaborations with international entities, the organization of film-related events, and the communication with their international partners in tourism and film production (Thailand Film Office 2019a).

Note that the TFO is not alone in the efforts to promote foreign filmmaking. There is also the Foreign Film Production Services Association (FSA), but the organization only runs a Facebook page. The president of FSA is Kulthep Narula, Chief Operations Officer of the foreign film service company Benetone Films (Benetone Films 2019). It is speculative to what extent FSA is organized and useful for its member companies beyond basic networking.

The role of the TFO saw important developments from 2016 to 2018. For instance, the organization made some changes to its marketing strategy. It discontinued its online magazine, overhauled and expanded its website, and solidified the annual Thailand International Film Destination Festival – started in 2013 – as a showcase of foreign films made in Thailand. It uses social media extensively – Facebook in particular – and regularly launches promotional clips on its website, for instance, the series “The True Sense of Thailand's Film Destination” (Thailand Film Office 2018c to 2018g). Moreover, a new financial rebate system became effective in 2017 and features prominently in all TFO communications.

Among the TFO's key marketing instruments are annual events for aspiring filmmakers. For example, in 2013 the TFO launched the ASEAN-ROK Film Leaders Incubator (FLY2013), which takes place in a different ASEAN country every year. In 2018, it was a “[c]o-operation project and a filmmaking workshop co-organized by Busan Film Commission, Busan Asian Film School (AFiS), Singapore Film Commission, Singapore International Film Festival and Asian Film Commissions Network (AFCNet)” and was held in Singapore. “FLY2018 [sought] to nurture the future leaders of

Asian film industry by discovering young, aspiring film talents from the 10 ASEAN countries and Korea, as well as to establish a stable filmmaking infrastructure in the region, which can contribute to future productions of diverse films in Asia” (Thailand Film Office 2018a). The event included a pre-production period, a workshop, mentoring by experienced filmmakers, and the production of two short films.

The overall purpose of this event is to generate publicity, familiarize young filmmakers with Thailand’s film industry and to promote remote cities and provinces as viable shooting locations. The last objective has become crucial in recent years. Mr. Anan Wongbenjarat, Director General of the Department of Tourism, stated in the Thai English-language newspaper *The Nation*:

Thailand continues to be a popular location for international film productions which help generate jobs and income for the country. They also stimulate the local economy and income distribution which is in line with the government policy. [...] Our secondary provinces also have many unique scenery [sic] and beautiful settings to offer to foreign film crews. If international productions showcase their beauty to the world, they will bring more visitors to Thailand as their viewers will want to see the places with their own eyes. (2018)

Thus, the Department of Tourism encourages film production in remote areas of Thailand, hoping the visual products will promote them to foreign and domestic tourists. Organized annually since 2013, the Thailand International Film Destination Festival (TIFDF) is another key marketing tool. It generates much attention in the national and international print and online press. The format of the TIFDF is unique, as it aims to showcase new, fairly recent, and older foreign movies made in Thailand, while also to promote Thailand as a prime destination for filmmakers. The festival is held at Siam Paragon, a high-end shopping mall in central Bangkok. Tickets are free and promotional materials are available in Thai and English; thus, the festival attracts Thais and expats alike.

The 2016-festival has been outlined by the Ministry of Tourism and Sport (2016). The program of the 2017-edition of the festival has been discussed by Pajee (2017) and Stickboy BKK (2017). TIFDF 2018 has been reviewed by the Ministry of Tourism and Sport (2018). (See Appendix 2 for the TIFDF programs 2013 to 2019.)

The festival screens fiction films only. The number of selected films fluctuates significantly year by year. Most chosen western films are from the US (Hollywood) and some from the UK and continental Europe. The complete absence of German productions is curious because, as has been outlined above, German TV and independent companies produce regularly in Thailand. Asian films shown at the festival are predominantly from India, Japan, and China. The low number of Hong Kong productions featured in the festival is also striking. Many of the films are multi-national co-productions, and selected movies are followed by a Q/A-session with directors, producers, and actors. Most recently, the March-2019 edition of the festival ended with the premiere of *Changeland* (USA 2019) and a discussion with Hollywood actor and director Seth Green, the film’s producer, and the heads of Living Films, which has emerged as Hollywood’s preferred production service company in Thailand (Living Films 2019).

The festival has not been without controversy. Four films were removed from the 2016-program for various reasons – most likely censorship-related issues regarding international relations as well as sensitive representations of religion and culture. According to Itthipongmaetee, the Austrian TV film *Twilight over Burma* (At 2015) was removed, as were *Pattaya* (Fr 2016), *Detective Chinatown* (Ch 2015), and *Happy Hour in Paradise* (Sw 2015), and even two days before the start of the festival the final schedule could not yet be announced (2016). Regarding *Twilight Over Burma*, *The Nation* speculated the reason for the removal could be concerns over the relationship between Thailand and Myanmar (2016).

In January 2017, Thailand introduced a financial incentive scheme for foreign film productions. The scheme features prominently on the TFO website (Thailand Film Office 2018b), and it was widely announced and discussed in online and print media, for instance, by Banks (2016), Arunmas (2017), Royal Thai Embassy, Washington D.C. (2017) and the Bangkok Post (2019). The TFO oversees the application process for the incentives and facilitates all phases of the film production process. The incentive scheme includes three types of expenditure-based rebates: International film and television productions that exceed THB 50 m (USD 1.65 m) in local expenses are eligible for a 15-percent rebate; a project that qualifies for this rebate may get an additional 3-percent rebate if it has used a certain number of key Thai personnel (cast and/or crew); and an additional 2-percent-rebate may be awarded to films that promote Thai culture, portray Thailand positively, and are thus likely to influence potential tourists' decision to visit Thailand (Thailand Film Office 2019a). In 2017, Bolliger and Company stated it was “forecast that the incentives will further drive revenue to 5 billion baht in 2018” (2017, original source unknown). With a revenue of THB 3,139 m (USD 103.69 m), 2018 was the most profitable year; however, it fell considerably short of the forecast. Nevertheless, the THB 5-billion mark may be reached in 2019 (see conclusion).

According to Thailand's Department of International Trade Promotion, *Changeland* (USA 2019) was the first international film that benefited from the new tax rebate (2017). Chris Lowenstein of Living Films confirmed that *Changeland* was the first film to go through the application process for the incentive measures and that the rebates were essential to the financing (7th Thailand International Film Destination Festival 2019).

Thailand implemented the incentive scheme because Malaysia is a strong regional challenger in the foreign film service market. It has been the shooting location for American, European, and Asian productions and started the “Film in Malaysia Incentive” rebate scheme (FIMI) some years ago, as is explained in a promotional video (Film in Malaysia Office 2019). Malaysian and foreign filmmakers can get up to a 30-percent-rebate on their film, television, or other screen production. This incentive scheme is overseen by the Film in Malaysia Office (FIMO), a division of the National Film Development Corporation Malaysia. Pinewood Iskandar Malaysia Studios in Johor, with its state-of-the-art infrastructure in film production, is FIMO's strong selling point.

With the incentive measures and an elaborate marketing strategy, Thailand hopes to keep a competitive edge over its neighbor in the south and to advance in several areas. The expectations are that (1) the incentives will attract more film projects every year, particularly big-budget feature films, and that (2) the annual revenue from foreign filmmaking in the country will increase steadily. (3) Thailand also hopes that its measures support related service industries, such as catering, car rentals, and location shooting, as well as film exhibition in cinemas and the lending of film equipment. (4)

Other goals are to improve human resources in the film industry and (5) to solidify copyright and intellectual property laws.

The principal long-term objectives of the TFO and the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT, an organization operating under the Ministry of Tourism and Sports and promoting Thailand's tourism industry) are (1) to promote Thai film brands, (2) to strengthen and expand Thailand's position as a Southeast Asian hub for film production and post-production, (3) to boost the country's international image, and of course (4) to increase tourism, not only to already famous locations, such as 'James Bond Island', popularized by *The Man with the Golden Gun* (UK 1974), but also to secondary destinations, i.e. remote provinces and cities.

Film-induced Tourism and the Closure of Maya Bay

The work of the TFO relates directly to film-induced tourism and builds on business connections with China, India, Japan, Germany, USA, etc. Some examples follow:

China: Ming, citing the Department of Tourism and *The Nation*, states: "In 2014, 4.6 million Chinese visitors travelled to Thailand. [...]. In 2015, Chinese tourists numbered 7.9 million or 27 percent of all international tourist arrivals, 29.8 million; 8.75 million Chinese tourists visited Thailand in 2016. According to the Tourism Authority of Thailand, the number of Chinese tourists rose by 93 percent in the first quarter of 2013, an increase that was attributed to the popularity of the Chinese film *Lost in Thailand* (Cn 2012) that was filmed in the northern province of Chiang Mai." (2018, 1). Monthly updated statistics of international tourist arrivals in Thailand are provided by the Association of Thai Travel Agents (2019).

India: Thailand is a destination for well over one million tourists from India annually. They visit major cities around the country and are important spenders. Moreover, after Japan, India has the second highest number of film productions in Thailand. Thus, Thailand is keen on being recognized by India as a viable destination for all Indians. For instance, TAT News reported that "Thailand won the 'Best Foreign Destination 2019' Award at the South Asia Tours and Travels Exhibition (SATTE) 2019, one of India's most important travel trade shows organized annually in New Delhi." Just two months earlier, Bangkok had won first prize as Best City at the India's Best Awards (2019a). Also, according to TAT News, the Royal Thai Embassy and the Tourism Authority of Thailand co-organized the event "Thailand-India Cine Connect: Exploring Potential to Bridge Our Film Industries." High-ranking delegates from India's film industry visited Thailand and were welcomed by their Thai counterparts who gave them a tour to main shooting locations around the country. The goal was to strengthen business ties and cooperation between the two film industries, so that Indian businesses would see the benefits of choosing Thailand as a film shooting location and that the delivery of Thai-content productions to the Indian market would be facilitated (2016).

Europe: The UK is Thailand's most important European source market for tourists. Essential are also the German-speaking countries Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. TAT News reported that, "Thailand was voted the 'Best Asian Destination' in the annual GoAsia Awards 2019 presented at the Internationale Tourismus Börse (ITB) 2019 [set in Germany], the world's leading travel trade

show” (2019b). Also based on a TAT News report, almost 890,000 German tourists visited Thailand in 2018. The generated tourism revenue was THB 57.643 b (USD 1.8829 b). Over 207,000 tourists came from Switzerland and spent THB 17.508 b (USD 578.36 m), and almost 117,000 visitors from Austria generated a revenue of THB 9.096 b (USD 300.48 m) (2019a). Every year, Germany produces several television films and documentaries for the German speaking market. These films contribute to the film-induced tourism and to the decision of many Germans, Austrians, and Swiss to move to Thailand permanently.

Challenges: In the south of Thailand near Phuket lies Ko Phi Phi Lee. The Island’s Maya Bay featured prominently in the Hollywood film *The Beach* (USA 2000) with actor Leonardo DiCaprio. It is considered a classic of foreign filmmaking in Thailand and an ideal vehicle to promote the beauty of Thailand’s beaches and the alluring dangers of Bangkok, despite the environmental controversies it is linked to. It was screened at the inaugural Thailand International Film Destination Festival in 2013.

Since the success of the film, the bay saw a rapid increase in tourist visits and commercial activities, such as diving and snorkeling. Thai authorities decided to close Maya Bay as of 1 June 2018 over concerns about long-term damage to coral reefs due to overtourism. According to Ellis-Petersen from *The Guardian*, Maya Bay had “sustained extensive environmental damage in recent years, receiving up to 5,000 tourists and 200 boats a day” (2018). The closure was meant to last for four months but in October 2018 it was extended indefinitely to give the coral reefs more time to heal. In May 2019, it was announced that the closure would last for another two years. However, the surroundings of the bay are still open and visited by thousands of tourists every day.

The closure of Maya Bay has received extensive national and international media attention. Most article titles connected it with *The Beach* and actor DiCaprio, for instance, Cripps’ “Thailand bay made popular by ‘The Beach’ closes indefinitely” in *CNN Online Edition* (2018), the *NZ Herald*’s “Thai authorities still don’t know when they’ll reopen Maya Bay, made famous by The Beach” (2019), or “Thailand closes famous DiCaprio beach, Maya Bay” in *Perth Now* (2018).

Two points are of particular interest here. First, the movie *The Beach* is an adaptation of the novel *The Beach* (1996) by English novelist and screenwriter Alex Garland. The novel criticizes mass-tourism and backpacker mentality, as it explains how arduous it has become for adventurous tourists and travelers to ‘discover’ new places and enjoy the bliss of solitude. Once a secluded place has been ‘found’, the secret will never last for long. The discoverers will tell their friends who will also visit this place, and inevitably it will be recommended in travel books such as the *Lonely Planet* – effectively sealing its fate. The irony lies in the fact that even though the Hollywood film incorporated the novel’s critique, it drove Maya Bay’s increase in popularity and therefore has played a role in its eventual closure.

Secondly, already in 1999 the film came under attack in reports that claimed the production had damaged Maya Bay. The crew had uprooted and removed bushes, planted dozens of palm trees, and altered sand dunes to achieve the desired cinematic landscape (Vidal 1999). The case was taken to the Thai courts where it was ruled that the film production team was at fault and that Fox Studio had to pay damages (The Nation 2006).

The case of Maya Bay shows that films have the power to induce tourism, that such tourism needs to be controlled, and that domestic and visiting film crews, Thai authorities, tourists, and tour operators share the responsibility in taking care of the environment. Even though the TFO has been quiet about the Maya Bay controversy, it is aware of its own role in the preservation of the nation's beautiful destinations. Thus, the theme of the 2019 short-film competition was *Living Eco Living Thailand* (Royal Thai Embassy, Copenhagen, Denmark 2019). The Thai authorities have an opportunity to promote environmentally friendly film-shoots and tourist activities, but how long this awareness will last and to what extent it will be enforced remains to be seen.

CONCLUSION

The main results of the discussion show that (1) Japanese, Indian, and continental European (particularly German) film productions in Thailand are by far the most numerous, followed by productions commissioned by Chinese, American, and British film companies. (2) The intensity of foreign filmmaking activity in Thailand fluctuates year by year but has stabilized in 2017 and 2018. (3) The impressive 2018-revenue of THB 3,14 m (USD 97.9 m) can be attributed in part to the tax rebate measures implemented in 2017. (4) The Thailand Film Office's strategy to promote the country as a film production destination has been effective. It includes the dissemination of marketing materials that familiarize potential foreign film producers with Thai arts, cultures, festivals, and the unique charm of each region, as well as the staging of the annual Thailand International Film Destination Festival in tandem with various competitions for young filmmakers. (5) The long-term objective of these efforts is to encourage a positive portrayal of Thailand in foreign film products with the potential to boost the number of visitors to the kingdom.

Also of note are the following: (1) From January to October 2019, Thailand has achieved a foreign filmmaking revenue of THB 4.933 b (USD 162.95 m) and seen the completion of 610 projects (Thailand Film Office 2019b). Thus, 2019 is already a record-breaking year and one can predict a total revenue of over THB 5 b (USD 165 m) with around 700 to 750 completed projects by the year's end. The high revenue is somewhat surprising, considering the strong Thai Baht; however, filmmakers are attracted by the lucrative financial incentive scheme. (2) Based on a report by the *Bangkok Post*, Netflix has applied with the TFO to shoot a movie in Thailand with expected expenses of THB 350 m (USD 11.56 m) (2019). This project may prove to be a boon to the Thai filmmaking economy. The same can be expected of *Fast & Furious 9*, shot in Phuket, Phang Nga, Krabi, and Surat Thani in July 2019 (Sikhawat 2019). The later film may also turn out to be a source of encouragement of film-induced tourism to these locations in the south of Thailand. (3) In March 2019, the people of Thailand elected a new government, and in May 2019, the coronation of King Vajiralongkorn took place. It will have to be seen to what extent the developments in Thailand's political arena will affect the ways by which foreign filmmakers can be attracted.

Research beyond the scope of this article could focus on film-induced tourism to Thailand based on a selection of financially successful foreign films and the influences they have had on decision-making processes of tourists to visit Thailand.

REFERENCES

- 7th Thailand International Film Destination Festival. 2019. "Q/A on *Changeland*." March 31, 2019. Siam Paragon.
- Arunmas, Phusadee. 2017. "State Working to Boost Film Industry." *Bangkok Post*, May 17, 2017. <http://www.bangkokpost.com/business/news/1250794/state-working-to-boost-film-industry>
- Association of Thai Travel Agents. 2019. "Statistics: International Tourists Arriving in Thailand." <http://www.atta.or.th/?p=4019>
- Bajaj, Abishek. 2017. "The Challenges of Shooting M.I.A. A Greater Evil in Thailand." *Film Inquiry*, Sept. 22, 2017. <https://www.filminquiry.com/challenges-shooting-thailand/>
- Bangkok Post*. 2019. "Foreign Films Catching on to Tax Rebate." Feb. 27, 2019. <https://www.bangkokpost.com/business/news/1635794/foreign-films-catching-on-to-tax-rebate>
- Banks, Larry. 2016. "Thailand Launches 20% Production Incentive for Film Productions." *eThailand*, May 16, 2016. <https://ethailand.com/breaking-news/thailand-film-television-incentive/2597/>
- Benetone Films*. 2019. "About Benetone Films." <https://benetonefilms.com/about/>
- Bolliger and Company. 2017. "20% Film Production Incentives Bring in 900M Baht during Q1." *Trade Digest* 4, no. 10 (May 25). <http://www.bolliger-company.com/seminar/data/tradedigest/Bolliger-Thailand-Investment-Policy.pdf>
- Bui, Hoai-Tran. 2018. "Thai Cave Rescue Movie 'The Cave' to be Directed by Tom Waller." Sept. 9, 2018. <https://www.slashfilm.com/the-cave-tom-waller-thai-rescue/>
- Busby, Graham, and Julia Klug. 2001. "Movie-induced tourism: The challenge of measurement and other issues." *Journal of Vacation Marketing* 7, no. 4: 316–332.
- Cripps, Karla. 2018. "Thailand Bay Made Popular by 'The Beach' Closes Indefinitely." *CNN Online Edition*, Oct. 3, 2018. <https://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/maya-bay-closure-thailand/index.html>
- Department of International Trade Promotion. 2017. "Thai Night AFM 2017 Showcases the Talent at the Heart of the Thai Film Industry." Nov. 6, 2017. <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/thai-night-afm-2017-showcases-the-talent-at-the-heart-of-the-thai-film-industry-300549855.html>
- Ellis-Petersen, Hannah. 2018. "Thailand Bay Made Famous by The Beach Closed Indefinitely." *The Guardian*, Oct. 3, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/03/thailand-bay-made-famous-by-the-beach-closed-indefinitely>

- Film in Malaysia Office. 2019. "Promo FIMI." [video file]. <http://www.filminmalaysia.com/overview/>
- Hudson, Simon. and J. R. Brent Ritchie. 2006. "Promoting Destination via Film Tourism: An Empirical Identification of Supporting Marketing Initiatives." *Journal of Travel Research* 44, no. 4 (May): 387–96.
- Itthipongmataetee, Chayanit. 2016. "Film Fest Promoting Thailand in Disarray After Censors Pull Entries." *Khaosod English*, July 4, 2016. <http://www.khaosodenglish.com/life/events/2016/07/04/film-fest-promoting-thailand-disarray-censors-pull-entries/>
- Klemm, Alexander J. 2017. "Foreign Film Production in Thailand from 2003 to 2015." *International Journal of Cultural and Creative Industries* 5, no.1: 58–69. <http://www.ijcci.net/index.php?option=module&lang=en&task=pageinfo&id=248&index=6>
- Living Films*. 2019. "Living Films Features." <https://www.livingfilms.com/projects/feature-films/>
- Ming, Huang. 2018. "Cross-cultural Differences and Cultural Stereotypes in Tourism: Chinese Tourists in Thailand." *Journal of Hotel and Business Management* 7, no. 1: 1–5.
- Ministry of Tourism and Sport. 2016. "Thailand International Film Destination Festival 2016: TIFDF 2016." July 13, 2016. https://www.mots.go.th/mots_en57/ewt_news.php?nid=3383&filename=index
- Ministry of Tourism and Sport. 2018. "Press Conference on the 6th Thailand International Film Destination Festival." June 20, 2018. https://www.mots.go.th/mots_en57/ewt_news.php?nid=3576&filename=index
- NZ Herald*. 2019. "Thai Authorities Still Don't Know When They'll Reopen Maya Bay, Made Famous by *The Beach*." Feb. 22, 2019. https://www.nzherald.co.nz/travel/news/article.cfm?c_id=7&objectid=12206335
- Pajee, Parinyaporn. 2017. "Destination Thailand." *The Nation*, July 11, 2017. <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/detail/movie/30320384>
- Paprach, Thapthep, and Rohani Hashim. 2018. "A Study of Historical Overview and Current Situation of Thailand Film Tourism." *The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities Conference Proceedings*: 199–214. http://papers.iafor.org/wp-content/uploads/conference-proceedings/ACAH/ACAH2018_proceedings.pdf
- Perth Now*. 2018. "Thailand Closes Famous DiCaprio Beach, Maya Bay." Oct. 3, 2018. <https://www.perthnow.com.au/news/tourism/thailand-closes-famous-dicaprio-beach-maya-bay-ng-b88980667z>

- Royal Thai Embassy, Copenhagen, Denmark. 2019. “Living Eco Living Thainess.” Jan. 23, 2019. <http://www.thaiembassy.org/copenhagen/en/news/4299/98733-THAILAND-SHORT-FILM-COMPETITION:--%E2%80%9CLiving-Eco-Livi.html>
- Royal Thai Embassy, Washington D.C. 2017. “Thai Incentives Drawing More Foreign Film Productions.” May 1, 2017. <http://thaiembdc.org/2017/05/01/thai-incentives-drawing-more-foreign-film-productions/>
- Sikhawat, Sitthichai. 2019. “Fast and Furious to Be Filmed in Thailand.” *The Nation*, June 13, 2019. <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/detail/breakingnews/30371065>
- Stickboy BKK. 2017. “The Thailand International Film Destination Festival.” July 9, 2017. <https://www.stickboybkk.com/lifestyle/thailand-international-film-destination-festival-2017/>
- Tansakul, Pasavat. 2018. “Thailand in Film: Movies and Commercials Shot on Location in the Land of Smiles.” *Bangkok Post*, July 27, 2018. <https://www.bangkokpost.com/lifestyle/film/1511030/thailand-in-film>
- TAT News*. 2016. “Thailand-India Cine Connect: Exploring Potentials to Bridge Our Film Industries.” June 28, 2016. <https://www.tatnews.org/2016/06/thailand-india-cine-connect-exploring-potentials-to-bridge-our-film-industries/>
- TAT News*. 2019a. “Thailand wins ‘Best Foreign Destination 2019’ at SATTE Awards in New Delhi.” Jan. 24, 2019. <https://www.tatnews.org/2019/01/thailand-wins-best-foreign-destination-2019-at-satte-awards-in-new-delhi/>
- TAT News*. 2019b. “Thailand wins Best Asian Destination Award by German marketing website GoAsia.” Mar. 12, 2019. <https://www.tatnews.org/2019/03/thailand-wins-best-asian-destination-award-by-german-marketing-website-goasia/>
- ThaiLawForum*. 2017. “Chris Lowenstein on Making Movies in Thailand.” [video file]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JmeGSvTBreA>
- Thailand Film Office. 2018a. “ASEAN-ROK Film Leaders Incubator: FLY 2018.” June 7, 2018. http://thailandfilmoffice.org/ewt_news.php?nid=1140&filename=default
- Thailand Film Office. 2018b. “Incentive Measures.” http://www.thailandfilmoffice.org/ewt_news.php?nid=718
- Thailand Film Office. 2018c. “The True Sense of Thailand’s Film Destination – Behind the Films.” [video file]. http://thailandfilmoffice.org/vdo_player.php?vdo=NjA=&filename=default
- Thailand Film Office. 2018d. “The True Sense of Thailand’s Film Destination – Culture.” [video file]. http://thailandfilmoffice.org/vdo_player.php?vdo=NTg=&filename=default

- Thailand Film Office. 2018e. “The True Sense of Thailand’s Film Destination – Final.” [video file]. http://thailandfilmoffice.org/vdo_player.php?vdo=NTc=&filename=default
- Thailand Film Office. 2018f. “The True Sense of Thailand’s Film Destination – Location.” [video file]. http://thailandfilmoffice.org/vdo_player.php?vdo=NjE=&filename=default
- Thailand Film Office. 2018g. “The True Sense of Thailand’s Film Destination – Production Facilities.” [video file]. http://thailandfilmoffice.org/vdo_player.php?vdo=NTk=&filename=default
- Thailand Film Office. 2019a. <http://www.thailandfilmoffice.org>
- Thailand Film Office. 2019b. “Foreign Productions in Thailand.” <http://thailandfilmoffice.org/ewtnews.php?nid=1146>
- The Nation*. 2006. “Supreme Court Ruling: Filming ‘damaged beach’.” Dec. 1, 2006. http://www.nationmultimedia.com/2006/12/01/national/national_30020443.php
- The Nation*. 2016. “Twilight Over Burma removed from film festival in Thailand.” June 6, 2016. <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/news/breakingnews/aec/30289936>
- The Nation*. 2018. “At a Glance: Bt799m revenue from foreign film producers.” May 1, 2018. <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/detail/Corporate/30344336>
- Vidal, John. 1999. “DiCaprio film-makers face storm over paradise lost.” *The Guardian*, Oct. 29, 1999. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/1999/oct/29/news.johnvidal>
- Wipatayotin, Apinya. 2019. “Maya Bay to remain closed until mid-2021.” *Bangkok Post*, May 9, 2019. <https://www.bangkokpost.com/travel/news-and-pr/1674364/maya-bay-to-remain-closed-until-mid-2021>

Appendix 1

The selected feature films below (excluding German productions) received a wide theatrical release and/or distribution on DVD and Blu-ray between 2016 and 2018:

2016: *All I See Is You* (US 2016), *Bankoku Naitsu* (Th, La, Jp, Fr 2016), *Gold* (US 2016), *Kickboxer: Vengeance* (US 2016), *Mechanic: Resurrection* (US 2016), *Pattaya* (Fr 2016), *Sweetheart* (Bd 2016), *Thailand Dreams* (Se 2016), *Theri* (In 2016), *When Elephants Were Young* (Th, Ca 2016).

2017: *A Prayer Before Dawn* (US 2017), *Chasing the Dragon* (HK, Cn 2017), *Ghost House* (Th, US 2017), *Land of Smiles* (US 2017), *Pop Aye* (Th, Sg 2017), *Present Perfect* (Th, Jp 2017).

2018: *72 Hours in Bangkok* (Cz 2018), *Baaghi 2* (In 2018), *Kickboxer: Retaliation* (US 2018), *Love, Rain* (Vi 2018), *Project Gutenberg* (HK, Cn 2018), *Rangbaaz* (In 2018).

Appendix 2

List of German TV network and independent productions with wide releases in German-speaking countries:

2016: *Die Diplomatin – Entführung in Manila* (De 2016, shot in Berlin and Thailand), *Die Diva, Thailand und wir!* (De 2016), *Happy* (De 2016), *Herr Lenz Reist in den Frühling* (De 2016),

2017: *Am Ballermann von Thailand – Deutsche unter Palmen* (De 2017), *Schwarzbrot in Thailand* (De 2017), *Welcome to Bangkok, Thailand* (De 2017).

2018: *Das Dorf der Vergesslichen* (De 2018), *Fluss des Lebens / River of Life – Kwai* (De 2018), *Homicide Unit Istanbul – Thailand 1* (De 2018), *Homicide Unit Istanbul – Thailand 2* (De 2018), *In aller Freundschaft – Zwei Herzen* (De 2018).

Appendix 3

Film programs of the Thailand International Film Destination Festival from 2013 to 2019:

1st TIFDF (Apr. 2013): *The Hangover Part II* (US 2011), *The Beach* (US 2000), *Elephant White* (US 2011), *The Impossible* (US, Es 2012), *Vinyan* (Fr 2008), *The Lady* (UK, Fr 2012), *Mammoth* (Se, Dk, De 2009), *Teddy Bear* (Dk 2012), *Lost in Thailand* (Cn 2012).

2nd TIFDF (Apr. 2014): *Good Morning, Vietnam* (US 1987), *The Lazarus Papers* (US 2011), *The Scorpion King 3: Battle for Redemption* (US 2012), *Glory Days* (US 2015), *Only God Forgives* (US, Dk, Fr, Se, Be 2013), *Tomorrow Never Dies* (US, UK 1997), *Ninja: Shadow of a Tear* (US, Th 2013), *Street Fighter: The Legend of Chun-Li* (US, Ca, In, Jp, Th 2009), *The Man with The Golden Gun* (UK 1974), *The Killing Fields* (UK 1984), *Secret Sharer* (UK, Pl, Cn, Th 2014), *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* (In 2013), *Trafficker* (Sg, Th 2015), *The White Storm* (HK, Cn 2013), *Out of Inferno* (HK, Cn 2013).

3rd TIFDF (Feb. 2015): *The Prince and Me: The Elephant Adventure* (US 2010), *The Lost Medallion: The Adventures of Billy Stone* (US 2013), *Pernicious* (US 2014), *Zero Tolerance* (US, Th 2015), *The Railway Man* (UK, Au 2013), *Pale Moon* (Jp 2014), *It's Entertainment* (In 2014), *Bikers Kental* (My 2013), *Flight from Hell* (Cn 2014), *Stretch* (Fr, Th 2011).

4th TIFDF (July 2016): *The Man with the Iron Fists 2* (US 2015), *Hacker* (US 2016), *The Asian Connection* (US 2016), *River* (Ca, US 2016), *Sunny and the Elephant* (Fr 2008), *Un nuovo giorno* (It 2016), *Sayonara Itsuka* (Jp 2010), *Fireflies* (In 2013), *Baaghi* (In 2016), *Forever Young* (Cn 2015).

5th TIFDF (July 2017): *Air America* (US 1990), *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (US 2004), *The Deer Hunter* (US 1978), *The Man with the Golden Gun* (UK, US 1974), *The Killing Fields* (UK 1984).

6th TIFDF (July 2018): *All I See Is You* (US 2016), *Kickboxer: Vengeance* (US 2016), *Kickboxer: Retaliation* (US 2018), *The 101-Year-Old Man Who Skipped Out on the Bill and Disappeared* (Se 2016), *Largo Winch* (aka *The Burma Conspiracy*, Fr, Be, De 2011), *Lupin the 3rd* (Jp 2014), *Will You Be There* (Kr 2011).

7th TIFDF (Mar. 2019): *The Hangover Part II* (US 2011), *Gold* (US 2016), *Changeland* (US 2018), *Detective Chinatown* (Cn 2015), *Bounty Hunters* (Cn 2016).