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The Study on the Possibility of Establishing the Stuntmen Network for the Film Industry and Tourism in Tha Phra Community, Khon Kaen Province

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Abstract

The article entitled The Study on the Possibility of Establishing the Stuntmen Network for the Film Industry and Tourism in Tha Phra Community, Khon Kaen Province has the following objectives: 1. To study the history and background of the stuntmen group in Tha Phra Community, Khon Kaen Province, 2. To study the weaknesses and strengths of the stuntmen group in Tha Phra Community, Khon Kaen Province, and 3. To analyze the possibility of the development of a film tourism destination and establishment of the stuntmen group in Tha Phra Community, Khon Kaen Province. From the study of the history and background of the stuntmen group in Tha Phra community, Muang District, Khon Kaen Province, it was found that the history can be divided into three eras. In the Pioneering Era (1981-1984), Panna Rittikerai entered the film industry working as a stuntman and established his stunt team called Stuntman PPN. The Flourishing Era, the Stuntman PPN group's first film called "Born to Fight", was considered the golden era for the stuntman career. The Current Era (2013-Present), after Panna Rittikerai passed away, the stuntmen network began to scatter, leading to the lack of strength and negotiating power with the film producers. For the study of the possibility of establishing a stuntmen network for the film industry and tourism in Tha Phra Community, Khon Kaen Province, the researcher conducted a SWOT Analysis of people working as stuntmen in Tha Phra Community, Muang District, Khon Kaen Province, and found that the weaknesses started after the death of Panna Rittikerai. The stuntmen group started to scatter, leading to a lack of strength and the loss of opportunities. The strength is that the Stuntman PPN group still exists and Khon Kaen is still considered the center of Tourism in Isaan with various projects related to films, such as Khon Kaen Film City, Kaen International Film Festival, Film Camps, and Kaen Film Academy. For the analysis of the possibility of developing the area into a film tourism destination and establishing a Stuntmen Network in Tha Phra Community, Muang District, Khon Kaen Province, the result shows that it is possible to establish the Stuntmen Network since Tha Phra Sub-district, Muang District, Khon Kaen Province, is ready in terms of the potential since it had been used as a location in over 30 films, the center of film producers, and a training site for quality stuntmen. If the network is created, the stuntmen group will gain strength and can support the area in being established as a film industry zone or film city. However, to succeed, there needs to be collaboration from all related parties which will help provide support for community tourism and attract the audiences to be part of the film tourism aspect that will help generate income for the country or the film locations, as well as becoming a film tourism destination and a place that produces stuntmen for the global film industry.

Keywords: network establishment, stuntmen career, film industry, community tourism, Panna Rittikerai.

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1. Introduction

The development of the entertainment industry, both television film and tourism greatly contributes to film tourism. The offering of tourism experience is significant to the success of tourism destinations in the highly competitive tourism market (Petchsena & Dabphet, 2022).

The Thai film industry is categorized as the “creative industry” since it is considered a large-scale industry that produces quality products with cultural values. The production of these cultural products is what many countries are placing their focus on and are using it as an economic tool due to its ability to generate jobs and income for the country’s economy (Hinwiman et al., 2013). Additionally, the film industry in each area in Thailand is also interesting in terms of the different cultures, causing many agencies to become aware and try to drive the film industry in their area forward. Apart from the push for the film’s success, the result also includes the income from film tourism, urging the agencies to put more emphasis, including Khon Kaen, who was trying to push the film industry forward and created “Khon Kaen Film City”.

Khon Kaen is a center of tourism in Isaan. The Khon Kaen Film City project is a project established to develop the film industry in Khon Kaen into a global film city, in conjunction with media production by the new generation. The project also emphasizes the development of Khon Kaen Province into a film location area for both domestic and international producers. Some projects have been implemented continuously, such as the Kaen Film Festival, Film Camps, and Kaen Film Academy. The Thai Film Director Association believes that Khon Kaen is ready in all aspects to become the center for film producers.

Action films are a genre of film with the main content related to the use of martial arts and are considered a type of film that can generate a lot of income for the producers. Especially in 2003, the Thai action film, *Ong Bak*, generated over 665 million baht. The film was directed by Prachya Pinkaew and the action scenes were directed by Panna Rittikrai, Tony Jaa, the lead actor, received an award for best actor. The Stuntman PPN group established and trained by Panna Rittikrai, played a role in helping the film receive the Best Actor Award through excellent martial arts choreography and was praised by an international website on film for its action and fight scenes. Panna Rittikrai received an award for action and fight scene choreography (beating Jackie Chan, Tom Cruise, Jey Li, Keanu Reeves, and Donny Yen). Additionally, the film “*The Protector*”, created a history for Thai films by being the first Thai film that received major success globally and brought pride to the Thai people with a global income of 27,165,581 U.S. Dollars (or around over 800 million Thai baht. There are still many action films that generated huge income and helped push the Thai film industry to the forefront. Bunyo, N. & Kosalawat, B. (2022) stated that the person behind the stuntmen and the design of the fight scenes in the movies mentioned above was the person who established the Stuntman PPN group from Tha Phra Community and had been constantly involved in the film industry, Panna Rittikrai.

The above information helped provide a clearer picture of Khon Kaen as a film city. Apart from being the center the tourism in Isaan, Khon Kaen’s film staff are also full of potential, especially in terms of action films. They got together as a group and came out with many films shot in the Tha Phra community, Muang District, Khon Kaen Province, which also encouraged tourism and boosted the economy of both Khon Kaen and Thailand.

Therefore, this research is significant in terms of studying the history and background of the stuntmen group in the Tha Phra community, Khon Kaen Province to identify the weaknesses

and strengths of the group, as well as analyze the possibility of developing the area into a film tourism destination and establishing the network of stuntmen in the Tha Phra community, Khon Kaen Province. Panna Rittikrai's ideology and history will be used in creating the connection within the network to create strength to create stuntmen for the film industry and cultural tourism in the area as a means of creating jobs within the community sustainably.

2. Objectives

- 1) To study the history and background of the stuntmen group in the Tha Phra community, Khon Kaen Province
- 2) To study the weaknesses and strengths of the stuntmen group in the Tha Phra community, Khon Kaen Province
- 3) To analyze the possibility of developing the area into a film tourism destination and establishing the stuntmen network in the Tha Phra community, Khon Kaen Province

3. Research Methodology

The research chose the concept of internal and external factor analysis or the SWOT Analysis as a tool in the study that would lead to the analysis of the possibility by collecting the data from the interviews of relevant people in the research area and the stuntmen group within Tha Phra community, Khon Kaen Province. The research focused on the target group of 18 people who are related to the stuntmen career and the stuntmen network in the Tha Phra community, Khon Kaen Province, as well as people related to tourism. The target group can be divided into three following groups:

- 1) Key Informant consisted of three people who can provide information related to the establishment of the stuntmen group in the Tha Phra community, Khon Kaen Province, including the Tha Phra community leader, the mayor of the Tha Phra Sub-district Administrative Organization, Ministry of Tourism and Sports, Khon Kaen Province, and the stuntmen group in Tha Phra community
- 2) Casual Information consisted of 9 people who can provide information related to stuntmen as a career in Tha Phra community, Khon Kaen Province, including people who used to work and are currently working as stuntmen living in Tha Phra community, Khon Kaen Province
- 3) General Informant consisted of 6 people involved in the implementation of the cultural tourism activities, including villagers, community leaders, and tourists in Tha Phra community, Khon Kaen Province.

The research method consisted of participant and non-participant observation, structured and non-structured interviews, group discussions, and survey forms for surveying the environment within Tha Phra community, Khon Kaen Province, as well as research and data from documents to analyze the data from the study, comparative analysis to provide description, tables, and images for the presentation of data.

4. Research Conclusion

The concluded research result based on the objectives and the indicators of the project can be categorized into three parts.

Part 1. The History and background of the stuntmen group in Tha Phra community, Khon Kaen Province.

From the study, the history and background of the stuntmen group in the Tha Phra community, Khon Kaen Province can be divided into three eras, consisting of the pioneering era, the flourishing era, and the current era. It was found that in the pioneering era (1981-1984), the stuntmen group in the Tha Phra community, Khon Kaen Province was established by “Panna Rittikrai”, who was known as the pioneer master of action choreography of Thailand. Panna was born and raised in Tha Phra District. He lived at 138/1, Tha Phra District, Muang District, Khon Kaen Province. Many people in the area knew him as Krittiya Ladpanna. In the past, people in the community would often see this group of people get together to jump, punch, and do flips. At the time, stuntmen, or what people called them at the time, risky scene actors, were not well-known among the general public (We Love Tha Phra, 2018).



Figure 1: Panna Rittikrai (17 February 1961 – 20 July 2014) While Doing Stunt Training with His Team

The starting point was when Panna Rittikrai went to Bangkok for a film in 1982 as a stuntman. The first movie he was involved in was called *Ai Phang R.F.T.* At the same time, Panna came back to Khon Kaen to establish his team of stuntmen by recruiting those interested in Muay Thai and other martial arts. The team started with 20 trainees and called themselves “Stuntman PPN Group”. The training took off intensively with different types of martial arts and Panna himself was the trainer during his time off from films. During the flourishing era (1984-2013), the stuntmen team at Tha Phra community Khon Kaen started their first film in 1984 called *Born to Fight* which aired on 2 August 1986. It was the era in which the group received positive criticism and success. It was a new type of Thai action film presenting real actions without stand-ins, allowing the audiences to feel the authenticity and a feeling of exotic when viewing. After *Born to Fight* was aired, Panna Rittikrai and his Stuntman PPN Group became well-known for stunts within the Thai film industry (“Action Director,” 2014) and reached its peak in 2013 with the movie *Vengeance of an Assassin* before starting to decline. The current era (2013 - Present) has been the period when the Tha Phra stuntmen group produced highly skilled stuntmen and was always behind the scenes at both Thai and international levels, generating huge income for the country. Panna Rittikrai directed the action scenes for over 30 films and acted and performed stunts in over 120 films. The film that made Panna Rittikrai famous in the international action film industry was when he directed the action scenes for *Ong-Bak* and *Tom-Yum-Goong*, directed by Prachya Pinkaew, making Thai martial arts famous until today.



Figure 2: Poster for *Ong-Bak* (2003) and *Tom-Yum-Goong* (2005).

The Tha Phra stuntmen group had a strong network and continuing success. However, after Panna Rittikrai passed away on 20 July 2014, the stuntmen network started to scatter apart leading to its lack of strength and power of negotiation with the film producers both within the country and at the international level, causing the group to lose its income and opportunity in entering the film industry.

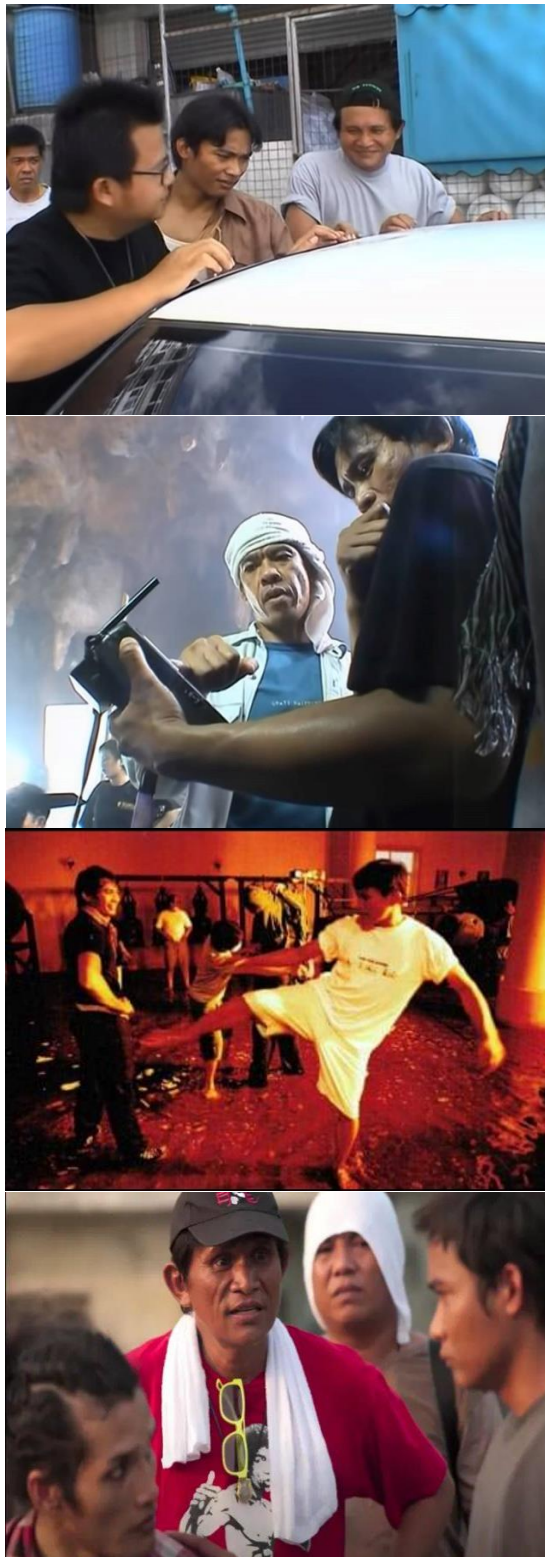


Figure 3: Panna Rittikrai Working on the Set of Ong-Bak and Tom-Yum-Koong.

Part 2. Weaknesses and strengths of the stuntmen in Tha Phra community, Khon Kaen Province

From the study of the weaknesses and strengths of the stuntmen in Tha Phra community, Khon Kaen Province, the research used the concept of a SWOT analysis and found the weaknesses, strengths, opportunities, and threats, and used the SWOT Matrix to analyze the possibility in developing the area into the film tourism destination and establishing the stuntmen network in Tha Phra community, Khon Kaen Province. From the target group of 18 people related to the stuntmen network in Tha Phra community, Khon Kaen Province, and tourism, the analysis results are as follows.

Table 1 The SWOT Analysis Results for the Possibility of Developing the Area into a Film Tourism Destination and Establishing the Stuntmen Network of tha Phra Community, Khon Kaen Province.

Strengths - S	Weaknesses - W
S1. Khon Kaen is the center of tourism in the Isaan region. S2. the hometown of Panna Rittikrai S3. the stuntmen village S4. the Khon Kaen Film City project S5. continuing activities such as the Kaen Film Festival, Film Camp, and Kaen Film Academy S6. the Stuntman PPN Group	W1. the stuntmen group started to scatter W2. the lack of strength led to the loss of opportunities W3. Panna Rittikrai passed away W5. the community lacks the knowledge to manage community tourism
Opportunities - O	Threats -Ts
O1. No one had carried out a Stuntmen Live Show yet. O2. The community leader collaborated in the establishment of the stuntmen network of Tha Phra community, Khon Kaen Province. O3. A Stuntmen career is needed in the market	T1. Reestablishing the network T2. Lack of development fund
SO Strategy	WO Strategy
1. The establishment of the stuntmen network in the Tha Phra community, Khon Kaen Province 2. Promote as a well-known film tourism destination for both Thai and international tourists	1. Relevant agencies help coordinate in finding the funding for the development of the stuntmen in Tha Phra Community, Province from both the state and private sector in Khon Kaen. 2. Coordinate with the relevant government agencies in facilitating travel for the tourists.
ST Strategy	WT Strategy
1. Use marketing strategies to persuade tourists 2. Create economic allies 3. Create both government and private allies	1. Create motivation for the entrepreneurs to see the importance of stuntmen in Tha Phra community, Khon Kaen Province. Create a development plan for film tourism and the establishment of the stuntmen network in the Tha Phra community, Khon Kaen Province.

Part 3 The possibility of developing into a film tourism destination and establishing the stuntmen network in the Tha Phra community, Khon Kaen Province

From the study, the possibility of developing into a film tourism destination and establishing the stuntmen network in the Tha Phra community, Khon Kaen Province. From the 18 people in the target group related to the stuntmen and the stuntmen network in Tha Phra community, Khon Kaen Province, it was found that the stuntmen in Tha Phra community, Khon Kaen Province have the history and background of Panna Rittikrai, who was both the director and the founder of the Stuntman PPN group. Most of the stuntmen trainers still live in the Tha

Phra community, which is not far from Khon Kaen City. In addition, Khon Kaen City is the center of tourism in Isaan and has various projects related to films, such as the Khon Kaen Film City Project, a project established for the development of the film industry in Khon Kaen to become a global film city. Many activities are being carried out continuously, such as the Kaen Film Festival, Film Camp, and Kaen Film Academy. Khon Kaen is also an area with readiness in many potential aspects and the center for film producers. The community also benefits from the area being developed into a film tourism destination and the ability to produce stuntmen for both the Thai and International film industries. For the tourism aspect, an important history in the community is Panna Rittikrai, which is a strength that can be used to develop tourism patterns and activities in various dimensions to support tourism. The area within the community of the stuntmen can be turned into homestays with live performances from the stuntmen, as well as a learning center between the community and the tourists to support the learning of martial arts. The researcher believes that the natural resources, culture, beliefs, martial arts, and Thai traditions can be managed in the form of a film industry zone or film city, and should be located in an area with all the basic infrastructures, hotels, restaurants, airport, and convenient travel to support the professional teams from abroad. For the direction in establishing the network of stuntmen in Tha Phra community, Khon Kaen Province for the film industry and tourism can be made into a reality, which will lead to the drive in the creative industry sector and the concept of Khon Kaen Film City. In addition, tourism can also generate a lot of income and improve Thailand's economy. There are currently many types of tourism in Thailand to support and attract both Thai and international tourists to different areas. Films are one of the industries that can be developed, preserved, and pass on the culture and attract audiences to become part of the tourists who come for film tourism and help bring income to the country or the filming locations. The area can also produce stuntmen to feed the global film industry, and export Thai culture and martial arts in the future, support tourism activities to help generate income for the community and society. The development of the activities and network of stuntmen in the Tha Phra community, Khon Kaen Province can promote the image of tourism and form long-term relationships in the area for the benefit of the communities and the stuntmen group.

Therefore, the study of the possibility of establishing a stuntmen network for the film industry and tourism in the Tha Phra community, Khon Kaen Province can be achieved since the area is ready in terms of the potential, as well as being the center of film producers. Since Panna Rittikrai, an actor and an action scene director had established the stuntmen group, many people within the network are still connected. The Tha Phra area is also the location for filming over 30 films, and therefore, is an appropriate area to be turned into a film industry zone, or film city. Additionally, the transition will also support community tourism since different locations in the Tha Phra community were used in many films. Films are considered an industry that can be developed, preserved, and passed on to the culture to attract audiences to be part of the tourists who come to visit the area for film tourism and help generate income for the country or the film location. Apart from being a film tourism area, the area can also produce stuntmen to feed the global film industry and pass on Thai culture and martial arts at the international level in the future.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

From the study of the history and background of the stuntmen in the Tha Phra community, Khon Kaen Province, it was found that the stuntmen group in the area was established in 1982.

The stuntmen group in the Tha Phra community was founded by Panna Rittikrai, which aligns with Rittikrai (2011) who stated that the fight choreography for both Ong-Bak and Tom-Yum-Koong was designed by Panna Rittikrai, in working with Tony Jaa. This statement also aligns with Rittikrai (2005) who stated that the two determined to create uniqueness in the fight scene of the new era, which led to the study of different branches of Muay Thai and eventually found a record for the Muay Boran, which talked about the postures that are different from what can be seen today. The principles of Muay Boran included throwing, pressing, grabbing, breaking, and high jump when attacking opponents. Panna and Jaa felt the challenge of including this ancient martial art as the main martial art for the main character (*We Love Tha Phra*, 2018). Panna presented martial arts in the form of real fights and real pain with no stand-in. This decision created a feeling of exotic for audiences even before seeing the film. After the film *Born to Fight* aired, Panna Rittikrai, or the Stuntman PPN group became famous within the Thai film industry, causing Panna Rittikrai and his Stuntman PPN group, currently, Stuntman Tha Phra group, to end up behind many Thai and International action films, generating much income to the country. However, after Panna Rittikrai passed away on 20 July 2014, the Thai Health Promotion Foundation Art and Cultural Media Team (2017) stated that Tha Phra is the birthplace of Panna Rittikrai. Even though Panna already passed away, the things that Panna had built are being continued by others. The youths in Tha Phra Sub-district who have Panna Rittikrai as their inspiration have been continuing to work on the network with their friends. However, the stuntmen network started to scatter, losing its strength and power of negotiation with the film producers both within the country and abroad, leading to the loss of income and opportunity to gain access to the film industry. From the study of the weaknesses and strengths of the stuntmen in the Tha Phra community, Khon Kaen Province, it was found that the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, and the Analysis Matrix arrived at the same conclusion as Bangmo (2009), who stated that the SWOT analysis is a tool used for analyzing situations for the administrators to know the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of an organization, helping to confirm that the organization is on the right track. Moreover, the analysis result also revealed whether the organization has enough drive to reach its goal, how to make sure that the organization's system still works efficiently, and what weaknesses need to be fixed. The SWOT analysis analyzed the possibility of developing the area into a film tourism destination and establishing the stuntmen network in the Tha Phra community, Khon Kaen Province. From the study of the possibility, it was found that the stuntmen in the Tha Phra community, Khon Kaen Province still maintain the history of Panna Rittikrai, the director and founder of the Stuntman PPN group and the trainers are still living in the community. Khon Kaen is an area with potential and the center for film producers. In addition, the community will also benefit from the development of a film tourism destination and can continue to produce stuntmen for both the Thai and International film industry. In terms of tourism, the history of Panna Rittikrai plays a crucial role in the development of tourism patterns and activities in support of tourism. This finding is in line with Ponsri, S. (2004) who stated that community development requires trust in people's potential. The existence or the fall of the community depends on its people. Therefore, community development requires people to be the center of development, such as developing the area into homestays to present the live show of stuntmen and creating a learning center between the community and tourists. These findings are also in line with Rogers Anthea & Slinn (1993) who stated that the unity in tourist sites needs to come from the needs of the tourists, local people, and the tourist site. Martial arts learning needs to be supported, which will lead to the drive in the creative industry sector, along with the concept of Khon Kaen Film City. Films are an industry that can be developed, preserved, and can pass on the culture to attract audiences to become tourists visiting the film

tourism destination, which will help generate income for the country and the filming location. In conclusion, the area can be developed into a film tourism destination and a place that produces stuntmen to feed the global film industry.

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