

**REFLECTIONS OF A MODERNIZING THAI SOCIETY IN  
THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY  
THAI HORROR FILMS**

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**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts Program in Thai Studies**

**Department of Thai Studies**

**Faculty of Arts**

**Chulalongkorn University**

**Academic Year 2012**

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บทคัดย่อและแฟ้มข้อมูลฉบับเต็มของวิทยานิพนธ์ตั้งแต่ปีการศึกษา 2554 ที่ให้บริการในคลังปัญญาจุฬาฯ (CUIR)

เป็นแฟ้มข้อมูลของนิสิตเจ้าของวิทยานิพนธ์ที่ส่งผ่านทางบัณฑิตวิทยาลัย

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ภาพสะท้อนสังคมไทยที่กำลังเปลี่ยนแปลงเป็นสังคมสมัยใหม่  
ในภาพยนตร์สยองขวัญไทยในคริสต์ศตวรรษที่ 21

นายศิลา แซ่เตียว

วิทยานิพนธ์นี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตามหลักสูตรปริญญาอักษรศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต

สาขาวิชาไทยศึกษา

คณะอักษรศาสตร์ จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

ปีการศึกษา 2555

ลิขสิทธิ์ของจุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

Thesis Title REFLECTIONS OF A MODERNIZING THAI SOCIETY IN THE  
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY THAI HORROR FILMS  
By Mr. Sila Saetieo  
Field of Study Thai Studies  
Thesis Advisor Associate Professor Suchitra Chongstitvatana, Ph.D.

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ศิลา แซ่เตี่ยว : ภาพสะท้อนสังคมไทยที่กำลังเปลี่ยนเป็นสังคมสมัยใหม่ในภาพยนตร์สยองขวัญไทย ในคริสต์ศตวรรษที่ 21 (REFLECTIONS OF A MODERNIZING THAI SOCIETY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY THAI HORROR FILMS) อ.ที่ปรึกษา  
วิทยานิพนธ์หลัก : รศ.ดร.สุจิตรา จงสถิตย์วัฒนา, 117 หน้า

วิทยานิพนธ์ฉบับนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อวิเคราะห์ภาพสะท้อนที่หลากหลายของสังคมไทยที่กำลังเปลี่ยนผ่านไปสู่ความทันสมัยในคริสต์ศตวรรษที่ 21 ผ่านภาพยนตร์ไทยสยองขวัญและเพื่อให้เห็นมุมมองภาพสะท้อนของสังคมและวัฒนธรรมที่เปลี่ยนแปลงผ่านภาพยนตร์เหล่านี้ การศึกษานี้เป็นการศึกษาเชิงคุณภาพ ด้วยวิธีการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลหลักจากภาพยนตร์ไทยสยองขวัญ 9 เรื่อง ที่สร้างขึ้นในปีคริสต์ศักราช 1999 – 2011 ได้แก่ นางนาก บุปผาราตรี ชัตเตอร์กดติดวิญญาณ เด็กหอ เป็นชู้กับผี แผลด สีแพร่ง นางไม้ และลัดดาแลนด์ นอกจากนี้ยังมีภาพยนตร์ไทยสยองขวัญบางส่วน ที่มีส่วนสนับสนุนข้อสันนิษฐานหลักของงานวิจัยนี้

งานวิจัยฉบับนี้อภิปรายใน 3 ประเด็น คือ ประเด็นแรกอภิปรายถึงลักษณะเฉพาะที่พบได้มากในภาพยนตร์ไทยสยองขวัญ ได้แก่ รักโรแมนติก โศกนาฏกรรม และแนวประโลมโลก บทบาทและการแสดงออกทางเพศ พระพุทธศาสนาและความเชื่อเรื่องกฎแห่งกรรม และสิ่งลึกลับเหนือธรรมชาติ เพื่อสร้างความเข้าใจพื้นฐานเกี่ยวกับภาพยนตร์ไทยความแตกต่างระหว่างภาพยนตร์ไทยสยองขวัญกับภาพยนตร์ฮอลลีวูดสยองขวัญ และภาพยนตร์ไทยแนวอื่น ประเด็นที่สองให้ความสำคัญกับภาพสะท้อน ความวิตกกังวล และความรู้สึกไม่มั่นคงของคนไทยที่มาจากการเปลี่ยนผ่านไปสู่สังคมแห่งความทันสมัยที่รวดเร็ว ดังปรากฏในภาพยนตร์เหล่านี้ ซึ่งผู้ชมภาพยนตร์มีความเข้าใจเกี่ยวกับการเปลี่ยนไปสู่สังคมแห่งความทันสมัย แสดงถึงมุมมองในเชิงลบ และมีมุมมองว่าสังคมที่เปลี่ยนไปสู่ความทันสมัยจะทำลายขนบธรรมเนียมและวัฒนธรรมไทยอันดีงาม อาทิ ค่านิยมความเชื่อเกี่ยวกับหลักธรรมคำสอนทางพระพุทธศาสนา และประเด็นสุดท้ายของงานวิจัยมุ่งศึกษาเกี่ยวกับนัยของความเกี่ยวข้องระหว่างสังคม วัฒนธรรม และมุมมองในเชิงลบเกี่ยวกับสังคมไทยที่เปลี่ยนสู่ความทันสมัย อาทิ จำนวนประชากรที่มากเกินไป ปัญหาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างบุคคล ความโดดเดี่ยว และเทคโนโลยี ที่ถูกนำเสนอในภาพยนตร์

จากข้อมูลที่ได้จากการศึกษา งานวิจัยนี้พบว่าภาพยนตร์ไทยสยองขวัญทั้ง 9 เรื่อง สะท้อนถึงสังคมไทยอันทันสมัยควบคู่ไปกับการเปลี่ยนแปลงในเชิงลบของสภาพสังคมและวัฒนธรรม ซึ่งมีผลมาจากการเปลี่ยนแปลงสู่ความทันสมัยอย่างรวดเร็ว รวมไปถึงจำนวนประชากรที่มากเกินไป ปัญหาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างบุคคล ความโดดเดี่ยว เทคโนโลยี และความวิตกกังวลที่แสดงให้เห็นผ่านภาพยนตร์เหล่านี้

สาขาวิชา.....ไทยศึกษา.....ลายมือชื่อนิสิต.....

ปีการศึกษา.....2555.....ลายมือชื่อ อ.ที่ปรึกษาวิทยานิพนธ์หลัก.....

## 5280318322 : MAJOR THAI STUDIES

KEYWORDS : THAI HORROR FILM / THAI FILM / MODERN THAI SOCIETY / THAI CULTURE / THAI MODERNIZATION

SILA SAETIEO : REFLECTIONS OF A MODERNIZING THAI SOCIETY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY THAI HORROR FILMS. ADVISOR ASSOC. PROF. SUCHITRA CHONGSTITVATANA, Ph.D, 117 pp.

This thesis aims to analyze the various reflections of a modernizing Thai society in the twenty-first century Thai horror films in order to see the Thai social and cultural changes as reflected in these films. This study is a qualitative research that utilizes major data from nine Thai horror films produced in the years during 1999-2011; *Nang Nak*, *Buppah Rahtree*, *Shutter*, *Dorm*, *The Unseeable*, *Alone*, *4bia*, *Nymph*, and *Ladda Land*, but other Thai horror film examples will be mentioned in order to support the data and major argument of this research.

This research is divided into three main topics. The first topic discusses the common characteristics found in most Thai horror films; romance and tragedy, melodrama, sexual roles, Buddhism and karma, and the supernatural in order to provide a small foundation and basic understanding of the Thai horror films and what differentiates them from Hollywood horror films, and Thai films of other genres. The second topic highlights the portrayal of anxieties and uncertainties of Thai people due to the rapid pace of modernization as reflected in the films. The audience will recognize that a modern society presented in the films are shown in a negative light and that Thai modernization is adversely affecting aspects of traditional Thai culture, such as the values learned from the teachings of the Buddha. The third topic of this research will focus on the social and cultural implications linked to various negative aspects of Thai modernization such as overpopulation, personal relationships, isolation, and technology as represented in these films.

From the data, this research finds that these nine Thai horror films portray a modernizing Thailand with negative social and cultural changes. These negative changes are due in part to the rapid pace of Thai modernization which is poignantly reflected in the films. The negative social and cultural aspects of Thai modernization presented in the films include forms of overpopulation, personal relationships, isolation, and technology anxiety.

Field of Study ..... Thai Studies ..... Student's Signature .....

Academic Year ..... 2012 ..... Advisor's Signature .....

## Acknowledgements

Above all else I would like to thank my parents, Panboon and Yanee who gave me life, taught me right from wrong, and allowed me to follow my dreams. Despite my brother and I being born and raised in the United States, my parents constantly spoke Thai with us and tried to teach us to be good people, in the Thai way. This allowed unique Thai traits such as ‘kwarm greng jai’ and ‘nam jai’ to be a part of our attitude which is more or less uncommon in the American culture. I would also like to thank my brother, Jeep. With my studies taking me to California and Thailand, I have been away from home for five long years. During this time, he had to be the man of the house and take care of my parents, their business stores, as well as continue his own undergraduate studies. When I left he was 19 years old and now he’s grown into an intelligent and mature individual. No matter what he’s always going to be my little bro.

I would like to thank my advisors, Dr. Suchitra Chongstitvatana, as well as Dr. Suradech Chotiudompant for helping me advance my knowledge and guiding my studies. I would like to extend my sincere appreciation for the kindness and advice given to me by Dr. Siraporn Nathalang and Dr. Suchitra Chongstitvatana who graciously open their arms and treated me like their nephew. They always offered me tea, treats, and made me feel welcome even though I was 10,000 miles away from home. Thanks for worrying about me, and I’ll never forget the opportunities and kindness you have both shown me for the rest of my life.

Even though I came here mainly to learn about Thai culture and society in an academic setting, it was also the actual experiences of living here that opened my eyes into seeing the world in a different light. For that I would like to thank my friends and family that have been on this long journey with me including; Ama, Lung Kia and Pah Wun, K’ Keh, Pah Bee for taking time off work to help me with my Maechi essay and giving me life advice, P’Peung and Music for helping me with this thesis, and also P’Peung for helping me to learn to read and write Thai. I would also like to mention very special people including Namthip & Amm, Kwang, and my aunts and uncles, Jae & Kaew, Pom, and Uan, Ja and Cha, Gob and Dong, Kung and Noo, and Ethum. Also mentioning my little cousins: Manoon, Gene, Kam, I hope this inspires you to keep doing your best in school. Lastly, I would like to thank all of my professors as well as the entire Thai Studies Department.

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

*“Films and society have a more or less mutually reflective relationship; that is film is seen as a reflection of the dominant beliefs and values of its society.” - Tudor [1974]<sup>1</sup>*

*“Motion picture producers recognize the high trust and confidence which have been placed upon them by the people of the world and which have made motion pictures a universal form of entertainment. They recognize their responsibility to the public because of this trust and because entertainment and art are important influences in the life of a nation. Hence, though regarding motion pictures primarily as entertainment without any explicit purpose of teaching or propaganda, they know that the motion picture within its own field of entertainment may be directly responsible for spiritual progress, for higher types of social life, and for much correct thinking.” - Preamble of The Motion Picture Production Code [1930]*

Films can be considered as visual stories representing the struggle for social and cultural identity. Films also represent stories of people from a particular place and time, who are dealing with the legacies and traditions of other places and other times. It could be stated that these are stories of modernization, yet they seem much more personal than the issues usually addressed around that popular term. Many films are stories of culture, of the realm of meaning, tradition, and experience; of the frameworks through which people make sense of their lives and how family, friends, and the community attempt to shape that framework. Thai horror films are stories of society and culture in a modern time. Tantamount to films, Thai culture and society are

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<sup>1</sup> Tudor, Andrew. Image and Influence: Studies in the Sociology of Film. London ,UK : George Allen & Unwin,1974

constantly changing and through contemporary Thai horror films we can see how these socio-cultural changes are represented.

Over the past few decades, Thailand has experienced major upheavals in its social and cultural norms due to modernization. The shift in cultural values and the rapid pace of modernization have instilled fears and anxieties in Thai people, poignantly captured in contemporary Thai horror films of the 21st century. Through the investigation and analyses of these contemporary Thai horror films, this thesis aims to investigate the negative dimensions of Thai society and culture reflected in the films. Furthermore, this research will attempt to illustrate social and cultural implications and how they are akin to the shift in Thai socio-cultural norms, identity, and modernization.

### **1.1 Rationale for the study**

In the past few decades Thailand has undergone many political and economic changes. However, changes to this landscape in the social and cultural context might not be as transparent. In a modernizing Thailand, various forms of art are showing changes in interpretation, execution, and meaning. Through the visual art form of Thai cinema, especially in the horror movies of the twenty-first century, it is possible to gather numerous examples from which to discern social and cultural changes and its implications.

During the period between 1999 and 2013 there have been approximately 100 Thai horror films released. Movies such as *Ladda Land*, *Shutter*, *Nang Nak*, *4bia* and *4bia 2* have been among the top three grossing Thai-produced films from their respective years. The story of Mae Nak has been remade time and time again in movies such as the *Ghost of Mae Nak*, and *Mae Nak 3D*. The film *Shutter* was remade into a Hollywood picture with a Japanese director and American actors. Thai horror film is not merely a B-grade genre, but rather holds its own against other Thai film genres. Additionally, the dark themes represented in these films open up

discussion concerning the interpretation and allegorical meaning of the characters and situations presented.

## 1.2 Film and Literature Review

The films examined include a total of nine contemporary Thai horror films: *Dorm*, *Buppah Rahtree*, *Nymph*, *Alone*, *Shutter*, *Nang Nak*, *The Unseeable*, *4bia*, and *Ladda Land*. Much of the research deals with the viewing and analyzing of these films. It was necessary to watch these films over and over again to see how society and culture was portrayed. The character arcs, plot lines, hidden themes had to be closely studied in order to truly discern reliable patterns in the form of characteristics as seen in these films.

This study does not prominently focus on theories of horror film, but rather observes, analyzes, and interprets the meaning of the themes in the films. However, texts that have been used in this study include books dealing with cultural globalization, film, horror, Thai society, Thai culture, and Thai identity. Some of these examples include:

*Understanding Cultural Globalization*, by Paul Hopper [2007], gives insight to the histories of globalization. He introduces that globalizations are initiated in phases and categorize them as the premodern (the period prior to 1500), modern (1500-1945) and contemporary (1945 onwards). Hopper categorizes premodern: early human migration, the emergence of world religions, the early imperial systems, and the development of trans-regional trade networks. The modern: European imperialism, an emerging international economy, international migration and developments outside of the west, the spread of modernity, the rise of the nation-state, and industrialization. The contemporary phases: Global communication, media and technology, global culture, national culture, cultural conflict, and cosmopolitanism. In each chapter he sheds light on how each epoch has had an influence on changing and spreading culture. This allows an understanding of the cultural flows that may have had an impact on Thais in the first place.

Perhaps it delves deeper than this research paper to try to locate and pinpoint the causes of these cultural globalizations, but it offers good evidence to back up knowledge of cultural globalization's underpinnings.

*Cultural Globalization: A User's Guide* by J. Macgregor Wise presents a new perspective through which to raise questions about globalization. He uses a framework surrounding the concepts of territory, identity, and culture. His main ideas surround culture at home, global culture, global youth, global music, and territories of cultural globalization. In one of his conclusions he talks about crises and transformation, and the everyday construction of identity. He states that identity is conjunctive, but that broader cultural and social structures force identity to be disjunctive. He believes that choice should not be about false dichotomies, one or the other. This relates to choices made by character in the Thai movies, such as Ananda's character in the movie *Shutter* [2004], where he decides to let his girlfriend get raped by his friends. In moral character and choice, one has a decision and it affects the identity of the being and in this particular scene, he makes the fateful decision and is portrayed as heartless wimp that gives in to his friends' whims despite seeming to recognize the errors of his actions displayed by his facial expression. He will later receive the horrific ramifications and his approach to deal with this problem will also reveal how his identity has evolved.

V. Lee Hamilton's *Identification as a Challenge to Dual-Process Theories of Persuasion* creates a chart of Herbert C. Kelman's theory of attitude change which was observed in certain arguments in this research. Kelman's theory splits the process into three distinct parts: compliance, identification, and internalization. Going back to the example of *Shutter*, there was a link to the discussion of attitude change utilizing an aspect of Kelman's theory. With regards to his definition, compliance can be said to occur when an individual accepts influence from another person or from a group to attain a favorable reaction from the other, that is, to gain a specific reward or avoid a specific punishment controlled by the other, or to gain approval or disapproval from him. Ananda's character, as stated earlier, let his friends rape his girlfriend, perhaps to

comply with his friends, because it was not his choice, nor would he choose to have it happen. He just did not stop it because he wanted to avoid disapproval from his gang of friends. When he decides to take a picture of the act of rape this gives the analyst evidence of his reflective identification. He individually accepts influence from another person or group and maintained a satisfying and self-defining relationship to the other.

One quote from Stuart Hall's *The Work of Representation* is "To say that two people belong to the same culture is to say that they interpret the world in roughly the same ways and can express themselves, their thoughts, and feelings about the world, in ways which will be understood by each other. Thus, culture depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is happening around them, and 'making sense' of the world, in broadly similar ways." This quote resonated quite well and was considered in analyses when dealing with one character of the supposedly same culture, yet having different reactions to a certain life-changing event. This was exemplary in deconstructing the differences between a more traditional-based and more modernized Thai in a socio-cultural aspect.

Hoang Trinh's *Economic growth, social progress and happiness of man (a view from Asia)*, targets economics as a major player in possibly having adverse affects on culture. For example, development and growth are mainly expressed by satisfaction of higher-level consumption needs of a number of groups with high income in society, which means that economy, science, and technology are the decisive factors. In this sense elements in culture, such as traditions, ways of life, ethics, literature and the arts, are considered as "non-economic" and are not contributing directly to development. Furthermore, things such as modern technology permeate in all aspects of human life as it changes life in fundamental ways and creates a kind of man having a profession, but is socially and culturally alienated, having no capability of being conscious of the existence of inner assets and of common development. This argument ties into many aspects of the modernity versus tradition section of this thesis which will be discussed in the third chapter.

*Value conflicts in Thai Society* by Suvanna Kriengkraipetch with collaboration of William Klausner and Godwin Chu, gives evidence of Thailand's modernization in terms of technological developments. Some of these include roads, electrification, and telecommunications. It states that the government in particular did not pay sufficient attention to the cultural aspects of Thai society in dealing with modernization. There seemed to be little or no realization that changing the economic foundation of Thai society would inevitably set in motion a wide range of value conflicts for which the people were not well prepared and to which they did not know how to adjust. "Responding to a host of new economic opportunities, many Thais are now adopting a set of values which is more self-centered and competitive, in contrast to the traditional values which express concern for other people and accentuate accommodation and community spirit [Suntharee Komin 1985]." Some questions that are posed tie into this thesis topic, such as "Is it possible for Thais to live a modern life and, at the same time, maintain their cultural identity?" and "Does the ideological confusion contribute to a feeling of alienation, initially in urban areas perhaps, but possibly spreading to the rural countryside later?"

Gary Krug's *Communication, Technology and Cultural Change* elicits a discussion regarding how film can change social life. This fact is not new and by the 1930s, the two largest film production and distribution agencies in the US adopted The Motion Picture Production Code. It took approximately four more years before 'a cabal of religious, civic, and industry groups coerced the studios into expanding and enforcing it' [Morris 1996]. The preamble of the 1930 code states: "Motion picture producers recognize the high trust and confidence which have been placed in them by the people of the world and which have made motion pictures a universal form of entertainment. They recognize their responsibility to the public because of this trust and because entertainment and art are important influences in the life of a nation. Hence, though regarding motion pictures primarily as entertainment without any explicit purpose of teaching or propaganda, they know that the motion picture within its own field of entertainment may be directly responsible for spiritual progress, for higher types of social life, and for much correct

thinking.” This provided more scholarly evidence stating the importance of the role of film as an instigator of social change.

There has been academic research related to film studies undertaken by at least three students at the Thai Studies Center at Chulalongkorn University as of September 2010; *Influences of Hollywood Movies on Contemporary Thai films: Case Studies of Action-Thriller and Horror Genres* by Parichat Phromyothi [2000]. She explores the identity of Thai horror film, which is different from Hollywood and sheds light on the influences of Hollywood movies on Thai films. Parichat argues that various political changes in Thailand encouraged its film directors to express their social viewpoints through their films and Thai filmmakers, especially those who went to study abroad or gained higher education, took this opportunity to produce films with social awareness themes. In conclusion, while the Thai film industry has made a move towards upgrading the quality of films by inserting Hollywood elements, other forms of visual entertainment such as TV drama series still hold on to the traditional formula, i.e. ‘nam nao’ or ‘stagnant water’ in their scripts. This is a term used coin recurring melodramatic plots and characters. Finally, since Thai films target mostly teenagers, the films heavily correspond to their particular lifestyles.

Ji Eun Lee, a doctoral student focused on how the social and cultural contexts are projected in Thai horror film. Her dissertation, *Monsters in contemporary Thai Horror Film: Image, Representation and Meaning*, illustrates how the images of monsters are projected in Thai horror film and examines the allegorical meaning of monsters with regard to Thai cultural tradition. Her concluding arguments notions that while Hollywood’s horror film is mainly related to Christian beliefs, the images of the monsters in Thai horror film are created upon the basis of Thai cultural tradition and beliefs such as Buddhism and Thai animism. Finally, Lee states that horror films usually imply social, political, or cultural problems and that society as well as natural calamities in Thai history that have had deep impact are assumed to be projected in Thai horror film through metaphoric representation.



Another MA student by the name of Hyunjung Yoon wrote the 2003 thesis, *Thai Films made in the 1970s as Social Commentary on Migration-Related Social Issues*, which deals with migration-related social issues of that period. She hypothesized that socio-political changes in Thailand were created by the political liberalization of the 1970s, leading to the emergence of Social Realism Films, which dealt with significant social problems by presenting more realistic subject matter. She concludes that it was during this period that Thai society began to recognize the grave impact of a capital-centered development and urban migration on Thailand's future. Furthermore, it is mentioned that in the 1970s Thai society finally turned its eyes toward the lower classes, most of which were poor peasants and laborers, eager to make their lives better. The consequent social movements towards freedom and greater opportunities generated more liberated ideas and ways of expression in many areas of society, including music, literature, and films.

### **1.3 Objectives**

1. To analyze various reflections of a modernizing Thai society in the twenty-first century Thai horror films.
2. To investigate Thai social and cultural changes as reflected in these films

### **1.4 Hypothesis**

1. Many films in the Thai horror genre portray the anxieties and uncertainties of Thai people due to the rapid pace of modernization.
2. Critical analyses of the twenty-first century Thai horror films give us social and cultural implications linked to the various aspects of Thai modernization such as overpopulation, personal relationships, isolation, and technology as represented in the films.

### 1.5 Research questions

1. How is Thai society and culture reflected in these films?
2. What issues are portrayed in Thai horror films from a traditional culture struggling in a modernizing world as represented in the films studied?
3. What are some examples of social or cultural context represented in Thai horror film?

### 1.6 Research Methodology

This study mainly utilizes a close-reading of horror films, but also contains books and online articles dealing with social studies, cultural studies, and film studies. Since this research relies greatly on academic analysis and interpretation of the movies, the watching and reading of these particular films are where the bulk of the research was obtained.

The scope of this research contains only Thai films of the horror genre released between the years 2000 to 2012. More specifically, this thesis research will only focus on eight Thai horror films produced in this period. Additionally, this research also includes an analysis of the movie *Nang Nak* which was produced in the year 1999. Although this movie is not produced in the 21st century, it gives rather clear insight into traditional if not nostalgic way of life of many Thais before the modern age. This in turn produces many examples of traditional society and cultural values which can be compared to changes portrayed in the modern horror films. In accordance with this research, films were chosen in order to examine the social and cultural implications. Furthermore, an attempt was made to obtain films from different years and from different directors. It was almost possible, but there were two movies selected from the year 2006 by different directors and two movies from different years directed by the same duo. The rest of the

movies however, are from different years and with different directors in order to span out the range of the films and visions of the directors while trying to find the commonality in each of the films. The list of Thai horror films to be used in this study:

No.	English Title	Thai Title	Director(s)	Year
1	Nang Nak	นางนาก	Nonzee Nimibutr	1999
2	Buppah Rahtree	บุปผาราตรี	Yuthlert Sippapak	2003
3	Shutter	ชัตเตอร์ กดติดวิญญาณ	Banjong Pisanthanakun, Parkpoom Wongpoom	2004
4	Dorm	เด็กหอ	Songyos Sugmakanan	2006
5	The Unseeable	เป็นชู้กับผี	Wisit Sasanatieng	2006
6	Alone	แฝด	Banjong Pisanthanakun, Parkpoom Wongpoom	2007
7	4bia	สี่แพร่ง	Youngyooth Thongkothon	2008
8	Nymph	นางไม้	Pen-ek Ratanaruang	2009
9	Ladda Land	ลัดดาแลนด์	Sopon Sukdapisit	2011

### **1.7 Scope of study**

This study is limited to a selection of 8 Thai horror films produced in the period between 2000 and 2012. The movies included are *Dek Hor*, *Buppah Rahtree*, *Nang Mai*, *Fad*, *Shutter*, *Pen Chu Gub Phi*, *4bia*, and *Ladda Land*. Additionally, this research also includes an analysis of the movie *Nang Nak* which was produced in the year 1999. These particular films have been chosen to represent the Thai horror films of the 21st century due to the adequate examples they provide for this research. Obviously due to the scope of a master's thesis not all of the movies of this period could be included in this study as there have been over 100 Thai horror films produced. However, these films provided sufficient evidence in regards to the objectives and research questions. Further effort was used in order to choose different directors and different years of production in an attempt to diversify the sample of the movies used.

### **1.8 Significance of Research**

1. To pave the way for other researches in film studies that focus on the social and cultural aspects in Thai cinema.
2. To provide academic analyses of various contemporary Thai horror films in order to discern social and cultural changes represented in these films and their impact on Thai traditional norms.

If in fact, Thai culture and society are portrayed in Thai horror films, what exactly is being revealed in these films? Perhaps, similar to other forms of art, films are a visual revelation. They are created to inspire, to warn, to teach, and to be observed. Furthermore, if Thai horror films portray Thai society and culture, then perhaps in a way, we as viewers are given a medium in which to inspire, warn, teach, and observe ourselves. It might be wise start off this study by

attempting to distinguish why Thai horror movies are unique to not only western versions of horror movies, but all other genres of Thai movies. Thus, in the next chapter this study will begin by exploring the particular characteristics of Thai horror films of the 21st century.

## Chapter II

### Characteristics of Thai Horror Films

During the process of researching Thai horror films, it seemed instinctual as well as necessary to compare and contrast these films with other horror films society most likely has been exposed to, namely western or Hollywood horror films. Despite Thai and other Asian horror films gaining ground in terms of exposure to movie watchers around the world, it is very likely that the world's perception of the definition of horror movies have come more or less from western or Hollywood influences. This is partly due to Hollywood being one of the biggest movie-making capitals of the world. As a consequence, products from this particular region garner more attention due to its cherished history, famous actors, and better quality relative to films produced in other countries. Therefore, in order to discern characteristics that make Thai horror films unique, it would seem beneficial to begin by briefly familiarizing the reader with the plots and themes of the accepted and established standards of the "Hollywood horror film".

The term horror film as established by western standards provokes thoughts of films such as Mario Caiano's *Nightmare Castle*, Erie Kenton's *House of Frankenstein*, or Tod Browning's *Dracula*. These gothic horror films comprised to form the early beginnings of what has come to be known as the horror film genre. Many of these so-called horror films displayed certain cliches such as mad scientists, dark castles, or the return of the dead to haunt and terrorize the living. As horror movies evolved, gothic settings were replaced by more modern locations, and the characters and the monsters in the films changed along with it. Settings such as gothic castles in Europe became suburban neighborhoods in America, and undead man bat creatures such as *Dracula* transitioned into chainsaw-wielding freaks from Texas. Furthermore, horror cliches have also evolved over time and during the last twenty-five years there have been recurring plots that center around the lives of teenagers and suburbia, with victims being tortured or murdered. Examples of these horror cliches can be found in films such as Wes Craven's *Scream*, Kevin

Williamson's *I know what you did last summer*, and James Wong's *Final Destination* to name a few.

In the late 20th century, relatively well-known horror films include movies such as Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), *The Exorcist* (1973), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), *Halloween* (1978), *Friday the 13th* (1980), *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), *The Fly* (1986), *Child's Play* (1988), *Silence of the Lambs* (1991), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1992), Wes Craven's *Scream* (1996), *I know what you did last summer* (1997), and *Final Destination* (2000). Many of these films may be quite familiar to avid horror movie fans. However, it is not until the 21st century, or after 2000 A.C.E, that Asian horror films started to emerge and gain traction with western audiences.

During the early period of the 21st century, there has been a wave of successful Asian horror films in international markets. This group mainly consists of Japanese, Korean, and Thai horror movies. One of the most successful international Asian horror films is *The Ring* (2002), which is a Hollywood adaptation of the Japanese film *Ringu*. This film broke western conventions of horror, and introduced a different kind of monster, the Yurei. In Asia, this type of ghost is familiar with movie audiences. Yurei can be described as usually female (though males do exist), traditionally shown as wearing all white with black hair that hangs in front of their face. Yurei have been featured in such movies as *The Grudge*, *The Ring*, and *Silent Hill* in the U.S., and western audiences are becoming more familiar with this type of monster. *The Ring* went on to make just shy of a quarter billion dollars at the global box office, which solidifies its as the most successful horror remake in history, well ahead of movies remakes such as *The Haunting*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Friday the 13th*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Dawn of the Dead*, *Halloween*, *The Hills Have Eyes*, etc. The second most successful horror remake of all time is *The Grudge*, which also features the Japanese Yurei style monster. Both *The Ring* and *The Grudge* enjoyed great commercial success as well as spawning sequels. The film *Shutter* (2008) is a Hollywood remake of a Thai horror movie of the same name, and is the most successful Thai

movie remake ever. This horror film successfully made over \$47 million dollars worldwide, placing it ahead of all other genres including The Thai action movies Bangkok Dangerous starring Nicholas Cage, and The Protector starring Tony Jaa, which grossed \$42 million, and \$27 million, respectively. The examples above not only suggest that horror movies are a popular genre in general, but more significantly, they validate the horror genre as the most commercially successful film genre coming out of Asia.

The horror genre in Thai language translates into ‘papayon sayong kwan’. The literal translation of ‘sayong kwan’ means to be horrified, terrified, or frightened, while ‘papayon’, literally means moving pictures. When these words come together, they form horrific movie, or horror movie. However, there has been another name that has been more widely used as a pastime in Thailand. The term ‘nang phi’ is very common among Thai audiences who describe horror films. ‘Nang phi’ literally translates into ghost movie and audiences still refer to horror movies in general as ‘nang phi’ because the origin of this genre in Thailand is often centered around supernatural and animistic stories, which regularly include spirits, black magic, and especially Thai ghosts.

Animism is the attribution of a soul to plants, inanimate objects, and natural phenomena as stated by the Oxford dictionary. Therefore, in a sense it is the foundational thread of peoples’ spiritual or supernatural perspectives, especially widespread among indigenous tribes-peoples’ prior to the development and/or infiltration of civilization and organized religion ). However, unlike Western religions such as Christianity and Catholicism, Eastern religions such Hinduism and Buddhism run alongside animistic beliefs. Perhaps, before Buddhism was established as the main religion of Thailand, animistic beliefs played a role in helping people perceive their reality. Today, over 95% of Thais are Buddhists and many still believe in ghosts, spirits, and black magic. They can be commonly seen as spirit houses in front of a mall, flowers hanging from a rearview mirror in a taxi, or invisible oil tattoos on a persons body to name a few. Furthermore, when Thais perform the ‘wai’, which is a sign of respect, it can seen in action when Thais are



greeting people, praying in temples, and when paying respect to spirits of their home, in the forest, or alongside a river bank. Due to the close relationship of animism in the daily lives of Thai people, perhaps it can be said that ghosts and spirits in Thai horror movies are more plausible to a Thai audience than werewolves and vampires are to western audiences.

In the early period of western horror films, monsters such as vampires and werewolves were the terrorizers that brought fear to the audience. It is hard to know for sure whether the audiences went home believing that werewolves and the like actually existed. Although, it seems rather unlikely that developed nations with established religions and scientific communities would believe in them without the ability to prove the existence of these creatures. However, in developing countries such as Thailand where Buddhism runs alongside a tradition of Animism, ghost in Thai horror movies seemed real enough to frighten people even after the movie. Furthermore, older generations believe in paying homage to spirits and as a child growing up it would seem plausible to believe in the horror of these movies. Contrastingly, western audiences do not preach to their kids of the validity of Frankenstein or Dracula. At the same time, if young Thai children ask their parents or friends about ghost and spirits, they will walk away with a feeling that they do exist in some way, shape, or form.

Thais are familiar with many ghost tales, stories, and legends. Furthermore, Thai ghosts come in all shapes and sizes, they have different routines, and come about in different ways. The figure below lists a few examples of movies that feature Thai ghosts or spirits.

**Figure 2.1: Thai Ghosts in Thai Horror Films**

Type of Ghost / Spirit	Movie
กระสือ ( Kraseu )	กระสือวาเลนไทน์ ( Ghost of Valentine )
เปรต ( Praet )	ห้าแพร่ง ( Phobia 2 )
ผีตายทั้งกลม ( Phi Tai Thang Klom )	นางนาก ( Nang Nak )
ผีตายโหง ( Phi Tai Hong )	บุปผาราตรี ( Buppah Rahtree )
ผีปอบ ( Phi Pob )	บ้านผีปอบ ( Reformation )
ผีต้นไม้ ( Phi Ton Mai ) / นางตะเคียน ( Nang Thakien )/ นางตานี / ( Nang Thanee )	นางไม้ ( Nymph )

The ‘phi kraseu’ ( ผีกระสือ ) is not only one of the most feared Thai ghosts, but also one of the most recognizable of all Thai spirits. The ‘phi kraseu’ perhaps is the best known Thai ghost among Westerners, due mainly to the widespread exposure of Thai ghost movies which featuring this ghost. ‘Kraseu’ are always female. During the day they live as ordinary women in their villages but tend to prefer a solitary and quiet existence. Frequently, these women are unwell, suffering from aches and pains, coughing and have difficulty sleeping but when night falls everything changes. At night time the ghost awakens and rips the head from the body with the entrails hanging underneath. They go around eating the intestines of other animals.

‘Phi Praet’ ( เปรต ) is another famous Thai ghost. It is believed by some that it is possible through karma to become reincarnated as a ‘praet’ if disrespectful to one’s own parents. ‘Praet’ can be as tall as a palm tree with hands as large as boat paddles.

The interesting feature about this ghost is that it has a mouth the size of a pin and therefore remains permanently hungry, thirsty, and wandering for food. It can only receive sustenance

when someone gives food to a monk and asks for it to be sent to the ghost. People who become this ghost have also been known to commit perjury. ‘Phi tai thang klom’ (ผีตายทั้งกลม) is another type of ghost that is very popular due to the story of Mae Nak. There is even a shrine that can be visited today, known as the shrine of Mae Nak, which is next to Wat Mahabut, along the Phra Khanong canal near Sukhumvit Soi 77. This story has been remade over and over again throughout Thai film history. Some of these films include *Mae Nak Pra Kanong* (1959), *Mae Nak Khanong Rak* (1968), *Mae Nak Amerika* (1975), *Sannya Chai Mae Nak Phra Khanong* (1992), *Nang Nak* (1999), *Ghost of Mae Nak* (2005), *Mae Nak 3D* (2012) and *Pee Mak Phra Khanong* (2013).

The list of ghosts and spirits in Thailand are too long to list in this paper. However, the table presented above offers a glimpse into the connection of ghost legends appearing in horror films in Thailand. Historically, Thai horror movies frequently contain elements of black magic, spirits, and ghosts. For this reason, Thai audiences simply have been referring to these films as, ‘nang phi’, or ghost movies.

## 2.1 Romance and Tragedy

Almost all of the Thai horror films this study observes have themes of romance and tragedy. Tragedy almost always occurs with the protagonist or the lead female character. In many western horror films, there are characters engaged in relationships, but in Thai horror films the romance and tragedy of those relationships are part of the central theme. For example, in the Thai film (เป็นชู้กับผี), aka the *Unseeable*, the lead female character Nuanjun is a pregnant rural girl who is forced to stay home because her husband left for the city and did not return. After months of waiting she decides to pack up to go find her missing husband. She travels alone and ends up in this community where a mysterious lady resides. It turns out that this mysterious lady known as Runjuan is the one who stole Nuanjun’s husband away from her. It is partly coincidence and

partly tragic. The romantic aspect seems to be the notion of Nuanjun, the good wife who is constantly and patiently awaiting her husband's return. Furthermore, despite the weeks and months that passed, she would never lose hope or faith in him.

Unfortunately, her husband did cheat on her with Runjuan. Despite his adultery, he still had the intention of returning to his rural housewife. However, Runjuan's failed attempts to convince and plead him to stay forced her to commit murder. Now he remains as a ghost doomed to be the sex slave of this mysterious woman forever. When Nuanjun finds out the truth, she commits suicide by hanging herself from a tree. The ending of the movie shows her repeating the whole process of waiting for her husband's return, searching, and finding out the truth again and again. The tragedy aspect is that her unconditional love, or 'rak metta' and blind faith does not allow her to give up or remember the truth, which is her husband left her and will never come back to her ever again.

Mae Nak is one of the most popular and well known ghost stories in Thailand. It has been remade countless times in art, theatre, and movies. Some versions depict Mae Nak as a horrific monster, but in 1999's adaptation by director Yuthalert Sippapak, romance was the main theme. Nak and her husband Mak are deeply in love when he gets called on to protect his village. He goes off to fight while his pregnant wife patiently awaits his return. While he is away she goes through labor and dies along with her child. However, when Mak returns, he finds his wife and newborn son alive, healthy, happy, and waiting for him. In actuality, Nak has died and become a ghost. Amazingly, she is able to defy the laws of physics and nature for the sake of her love. At first, Mak is unaware and unassuming of his wife despite his neighbors protests, but then he starts to realize certain things are affray and the neighbors were able to prove she was no longer alive. The movie soon arrives at a turning point where Nak gives into the teachings of the Buddha and allows herself to be vanquished from the living world where her true love resides. Even though she has hurt people, and caused havoc, she has tragically chosen to accept her punishment while vowing to wait for Mak until one day when they can be reunited together again.

In Buppah Rahtree, a young female university student isolates herself from family, friends, and neighbors. She was molested by her step-father and her attitude reflects that of a social outcast. She meets a man who desperately tries to charm her. It works to no avail until his last attempt. She knows he has already lied about not being rich or not having a girlfriend, but decides to give him a chance anyway. They end up taking a trip together and they engage in sexual activity. Consequently, he videotaped this sex session and screened it to his friends who are revealed to have lost a bet. The bet was to get Buppah in bed. Buppah is revealed to be pregnant and seeks advice from Ake, the only man she trusts. Ake however has a future elsewhere, but lies to love, be faithful, and take care of her. He vows they will get married after they both finish school. All that he asks is for her to trust him. Buppah is obviously in love and goes along with Ake's suggestion of getting an abortion performed. When he brings Buppah back to her apartment, he gets up and says he will be right back. Buppah is in pain, but she says she loves him. He leaves, drives home, and the next day is on a flight out of the country. Tragically, she is alone and ends up dying from complications of her abortion and a loss of blood. When Ake returns, he will find only Buppah's ghost.

In the 2007 Thai horror film *Alone*, the main characters are a pair of identical sisters who are conjoined by the stomach. They live at an orphanage where they are taken care of with other disabled kids. The reason that they did not get separated surgically was due to the possibility of a complication. They enjoyed each others company growing up and playing together, however things change when a boy comes into the picture. The slightly older sister Ploy is in love with the boy, but he shows affect for her sister Pim. Ploy has to keep her feelings inside, but cannot hold it back because she always has to witness them flirting and being happy together, while Ploy is attached and in close proximity. The boy draws a picture of he and Pim together alone without Ploy. Since it is not possible for Pim and Ploy to separate, it seemed as though she is nothing but a third wheel to her love and her sister. She attempts to poison herself to no avail, and tragically has to live like this. Very soon the sisters get into an argument with Ploy strangling her younger

sister Pim. After this struggle, Pim dies at the hands of Ploy. Now that there is only one person left, the surgery was performed. Otherwise, there would have been a dead corpse, conjoined to Ploy's body. During this time the boy had already been discharged from the facility. One day when he returned, only one sister was there. It was Ploy, however, she decided to pose as Pim in order to get the affection of the boy. Since they are completely identical, the boy does not know and they have started their lives together. After years passed and they live together as a couple, the boy finds out that he had actually been living with Ploy. Feeling betrayed, he decides to leave Ploy and confesses his love for her sister. Ploy then decides to hold him captive. This story is tragic for Pim, who was strangled, Ploy who was never loved and has always been in the shadow of Pim, and the boy who spent his life believing a lie.

## **2.2 Melodrama**

Melodramas and slapstick comedies usually combine to form Thai horror-comedies, and it is more about the way characters' emotions are portrayed as well as the plot itself which contains elements of romance, tragedy, and comedy.

The Oxford dictionary defines melodrama as a sensational dramatic piece with exaggerated characters and exciting events intended to appeal to the emotions: he gloated like a villain in a Victorian melodrama. It also states that the abandonment of melodrama is realism. Melodrama in Thai words can be loosely translated in the phrase, 'nam nao' or 'stagnant water'. Thai audiences that watch 'lakorns' or TV miniseries, know this phrase. It describes the way the characters go out of their way to portray emotions. Very rarely is this how people act in real life. However, for Thai audiences this is very entertaining. This style makes more or less easy to understand what the characters are thinking or feeling.

A classic example of a scene in a typical lakorn can be when a female antagonist attempts to foil the love of the leading characters. If her attempts work and she is alone, the camera focuses

on her face in a medium and close up shot with her smiling in a very long and exaggerated manner. Usually, her eyes will open as very wide during the close up shot. If however, her attempts fail, she might get over upset and screams, sighs heavily, and throw things around in a temper tantrum. Furthermore, when the antagonist and protagonist share a scene, the antagonist usually talks trash with confidence, smirks and looks down at the protagonist. After she is done talking, she will often finish up with an exaggerated sarcastic laugh. This laugh is sometimes shared with the antagonist's friends.

In Thai horror movies, the melodramatic characters primarily occur in the horror-comedy sub genre. For example, in *Buppah Rahtree*, there is one scene when they are searching the room for the ghost and are unable to find her. Then she suddenly appears. The editing style which makes her instantly pop up on the screen frightens the audience. However, when the camera turns back to focus on the other characters in the room, they do not appear to be scared. Then this is followed by a sarcastic line or joke, and then the scene ends with a delayed scared action such as running away or screaming.

Another melodramatic editing technique seen in these types of films is to speed up the action such as when characters are running away. Humans do not move at such a fast pace, but when editors use this technique in films, it makes the characters seem silly and exaggerated. Although, the audience gets a heightened comical sense that characters are scared and want to get out as quickly as possible.

### **2.3 Sexual roles**

Many typical Thai horror drama films feature a female ghost, with plots such as a male character leaving their girlfriends or wives, and oftentimes start a relationship with another female. Furthermore, women are often shown as objects of desire. There always seems to be a

juxtaposition of what is old, with a long history, trying to prove it is not broken versus what is new, exciting, and unconquered or unattained.

Horror movies and sexuality have coincided together throughout history and aspects of sexuality have become a universal theme that appears in western and Asian horror films alike. There is difficulty in refuting that sexuality is a powerful force of nature that can take over rational thoughts and replace them with primal instincts. It is common to witness horror movies that involve plots of a girl who is raped or molested. In other circumstances a male character maybe drawn to a female's aura and gives into her every whim. In both circumstances mentioned above, the power of sexual desire is at work and it could be inferred that sexuality has been a characteristic of Thai horror movies past and present.

Thai films also feature scenes involving forced sex. Such an example can be found in the film Long Kong in which a teacher rapes his students. In Buppah Rahtree, the step father attempts to have sex with his step daughter. In the case of Buppah, she became pregnant with another man and this is a consequence of unprotected sex. In Thai horror movies, females victims usually survive the assault but suffer symptoms of trauma. In other cases, if they are killed or die from other causes, they may come back as vengeful ghosts to wreak havoc on the ones that once terrorized or betrayed them.

Not to be mistaken as pornographic, but many Thai horror movies depict scenes of nudity, or having consensual, or forced sex. The difference between pornography and sexual scenes in Thai horror films is that the sexual acts are almost always a key in the plot, or character transformation, rather than just included for the sake of promoting sexual arousal in the viewer. Sex usually represents a man's desire and his ability to get what he wants, even if the object is a human being. Females become the objects of desire and their sexuality appeals universally to Asian and western audiences.

It is common practice that women in Thai society do not publicly display affection as westerners do. It may be a normal sight to see foreigners touching or kissing each other in a



public setting, but is not common practice for Thais, and even when it occasionally happens, adults and other members of society frown upon it. Thai people on the other hand may just think to themselves or whisper to their friends, “What has happened to society, they are too young, or why do they have to do this in public?” Thai men often seem to be made out as the instigators of affection while the women just smile, or politely say stop, but many females may actually enjoy this physical sign of affection as a form of innocent flirtation.

However, when it comes to Thai horror films, it can be taken to another level and the men can go as far as to rape their female victims for love, lust, or sport. For example, in the movie *Rahtree Returns*, a doctor helps a blind girl by performing an eye surgery for free supposedly out of the kindness of his heart. Unfortunately, he helps her into her apartment and tells her to take post surgery medication to help with the healing process, but it turns out that they are sleeping pills that render her unconscious. He then proceeds to undress and grope her with the intention of having sex without her consent. In the movie *Shutter*, a young university girl is raped by a group of male students in a lab while she was working alone. Another example is in the movie *Art of the Devil 2*. A high school fitness teacher and soccer coach forces a female student to perform felacio while holding her at gunpoint. In western horror films, it is very common to see a shower scene with a female alone and suddenly a serial killer enters and attempts to kill her. In Thai horror films, the male often rapes her and she has to deal with it and the story goes on. Usually, if she is raped and then killed, she may seek vengeance as a ghost. Rape is commonly used as a theme in horror movies because the victimizers do not only want to emotionally scare the victim, but often end up emotionally scarring the victim through acts of physical harm or sexual abuse.

Another aspect of sexuality that makes its way into Thai horror movies are scenes of sex and nudity. In western films, nudity is more common. However, in Thai horror films nudity is often less seen which may partly be due to censorship, and partly due to nudity not being typical for a mainstream Thai film. However in the erotic genre, there are plenty of films with nudity and

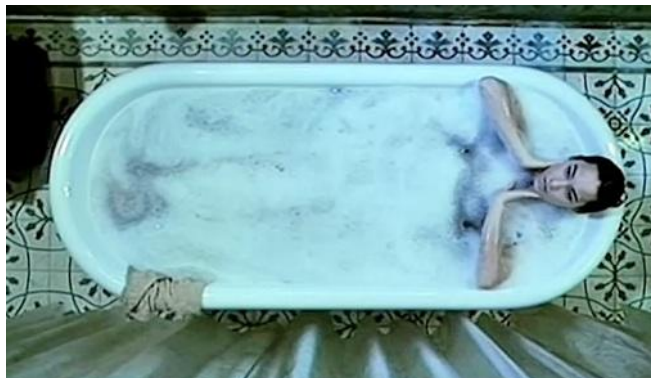
a theme of horror, comedy or action. For intensive purposes, this study does not consider Thai erotic horror to be mainstream horror, but rather an erotic film with scary moments. It should not be misunderstood. Sexuality is very common in Thai horror films, but scenes of actual nudity are kept to a minimum, if they can be found at all. It would seem that females in Asian society are somewhat sexually repressed when it comes to able able to display sexuality publicly.

In many Thai horror films, the audiences get to witness a fictional scene where the camera becomes a translucent wall into the repressed sexuality of a female. It can be tolerated because the female is alone in her room and away from public eyes. No one is supposed to see her or witness her body. In the real world and Asian culture, ideally only a married woman's husband should be allowed to see her unclothed. It should not be her son, her brother, her father, uncle, neighbor, stranger, or anyone else. However, in horror movies, it is often the case that these other people will see her unclothed.

A female's body is precious, beautiful, and sacred. Therefore, it is desirable and the ability to see her nude in a natural element such as showering by herself, or in her room allows horror films an acceptable way of depicting repressed female sexuality. It is acceptable, because there would be no other way possible to see a woman's naked body without her consent. In many cases, audiences are participating in voyeurism and the female character is not judged negatively for being nude when she is portrayed as alone in a natural everyday routine such as bathing or changing clothes. It is however, a unique characteristic of horror films to often include scenes of sexuality.

**Figure 2.2: Sexual Scenes Thai Horror Films**

From Top: *Buppah Rahtree*, *Art of the Devil 2*, *Alone*, *Rahtree Returns*



Many Thai horror films depict women as sexual objects of desire. Additionally, women are often portrayed as victims when it comes to sex. Buppah was always just a bet for Ake and his gang of friends to see who could deflower this girl. She was always an object of desire and the reward Ake received for being the first guy to sleep with her was a bottle of Johnnie Walker whisky. In *Rahtree Returns*, a disturbed doctor takes advantage of a blind female patient by giving her sleeping pills. He fondled her breasts and would have had his way with her if it were not for a ghost trying to protect her by scaring the doctor off. In *Art of the Devil 2*, the female teacher is the object of desire for the male coach of the school as well as young male students. Thai women can also be portrayed as using their sex appeal towards men to their advantage. Sexual roles of males and females often have a distinct place in Thai horror films. It is usually what drives the attraction and the subsequent action which may lead the story to unfold for better or worse.

#### **2.4 Buddhism and Karma**

Buddhism plays a major role in the lives of Thai people and is widely represented in Thai films. Buddhism, which is the main religion of Thailand, is part of the three pillars of Thai unity.<sup>2</sup> The three pillars consist of Nation, Religion and the Monarchy. Consequently, they are tied together even further because the Thai king is a Buddhist King and has ordained as a monk in the past. Furthermore, as a former monk, and a King, he assumes the duty of protecting and guiding the nation and country to the extent that it is possible under the constitutional monarchy's form of government. Unlike the American form of government where the judiciary, legislative, and executive branch are often at odds with one another, the religion, nation, and king form a strong bond together. Buddhism has played a vital role in shaping and guiding the lives of Thai people ranging from a typical Thai lay man all the way to the Thai king. It is a testament to the

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<sup>2</sup> Mulder, Niels. *Inside Thai Society: Religion, Everyday Life, Change*. Bangkok: Silkworm, 2000

withstanding nature through time as well as social class. Therefore, when Thai characters are portrayed in horror movies they often display respect for Buddhist values. Furthermore, if the cinema censorship board finds that movies are offensive to the religion, king, or nation, they may be ordered to censor the film before being allowed to be screened in public legally. Censorship has occurred in movies that seem to ridicule the religion or contain overly sexual scenes that do not promote Buddhist values. For each and every film that is screened in Thai theaters, it must go through the censorship board and thus, many films scenes of violence or sexuality may be taken out of the Thai screened version.

Foreign audiences may also become aware that Thai horror films often include Buddhist monks as characters. They can be seen wearing saffron robes, walking barefoot in forests, praying in temples, meditating together, and often assumes the role of attempting to help people solve problems. The monks always seem quite knowledgeable about how to help people repel or get rid of ghosts. Monks believe that Buddhist virtues govern the world and therefore know the rules of the game. It can be assumed that ghosts became ghosts in Thai movies were once alive and more than likely as Buddhists. Therefore, in the end of many Thai horror movies, they ultimately heed the monks preaching and are set on a better path.

A powerful, if not the most governing component of Buddhism is karma. This never ending cycle of cause and effect forces characters to receive their punishment or reward by the end of the horror film. Without closure that Buddhism and Karma are the ultimate determinants of the ending of a story, it is hard to justify to Buddhist audiences that the evil go unpunished and the innocent suffer unwarranted, or tragic fates. Perhaps it may seem tame and confusing to a western audience that a murderous ghost goes on a rampage killing many people through the entirety of the film only to give up so easily to a Buddhist monk in the end. An example of this is in the film *Nang Nak*. Despite having many powers and seemingly the ability to go on living this way, the monk convinces her of her wrong doing and that this is not the Buddhist way. Her love got in the way of the virtues that governed peoples' lives and cause irreparable damage to society,

her husband, and her own soul. It may seem tame to some that a murderous ghost could give up so quickly and easily to a monk that could not have defeated her otherwise. However, to a Thai audience it is just the opposite. This scene is powerful. Not only does it satisfy our beliefs of karma, it attempts to visually conceptualize the seemingly incomparable and infinite love a Thai woman has for her man once her heart chooses him. She was able to move heaven and earth by defying the boundaries of life and death in order to be with her true love. Her love is what made her powerful, and in the end her devotion to Buddhism's teachings is what set her free from her suffering.

Another example of Buddhism and karma at work can be seen in the Thai horror movie *Novice*, which is one of five short films that collectively form the theatrical release of *4bia 2*. This movie centers around a young boy up to no good. Apart from not concentrating on school and hurting people, he ends up causing a car crash that ultimately kills his own father. He is sent to become a novice monk. In society novice monks serve the role of educating young men about Buddhism in hope to put them on a more enlightened path. Traditionally, Buddhist men will ordain as a novice monk or monk in their lifetime as a standard practice. In this particular case, it is to keep him out of trouble. Unfortunately, he is unable to control his appetite. Monks do not have the luxury of eating at any time they please. This boy continues to break the rules of a novice monk, which compounds over his past sins and ultimately, he becomes a tall 'praet' spirit that walks the forest and has the mouth opening the size of a needle, so he will never satisfy his hunger and thirst.

When it comes to horror-comedies, such as *Buppah Rahtree*, despite having many moments of slapstick comedy, karma plays a major role in determining characters' fates. In terms of *Ake*, the love interest, he is strapped to the wheelchair unable to leave Buppah's apartment. This is the consequence of getting Buppah to fall in love with him, and abandoning that love. Additionally, he comes back only to lie and cheat on her after they reaffirm their vows to one another. He is also responsible for not only impregnating her, but to bring her to a shady street

doctor who performed an abortion that ends up killing her due to complications. Buppah ends up haunting the entire apartment complex and finally ends up with Ake being trapped alongside her for eternity. She wanted to be with him and she died from giving everything to Ake. Now she can take everything from him at will and is an example of karma at work. Another example of a karmic storyline may have a girl terrorizing a guy and cuts off his limbs and the ending to the story may have her falling in love with a man who ends up leaving her to die and be lonely forever. This is the same storyline, as depicted in Buppah Rahtree, but in reverse. In both of these examples karma is at work and there is a Thai saying that 'tum dee dai dee, tum chua dai chua', which translates into good things happen to people who do good deeds, and bad things happen to people to do bad deeds. In other words, good virtue is rewarded while bad virtues are punished in some way or form.

Even though karma is a powerful, yet simple concept to understand, it runs alongside another belief to give it greater meaning. This belief is known as the cycle of suffering, and it is another important aspect of Buddhism. It consists of birth, growing old, suffering, and dying as a never ending cycle of rebirth and suffering. The cycle of suffering paired with the notion of karma allow them to have great effect together. Karma in simple terms can be understood as cause and effect. However, lets suppose a Buddhist is nearing the end of his life. If he decides to murder or torture one hundred people and then die the next day due to natural causes, how then can karma catch up with him if that is the definite end to his life? According to Thai horror movies and Buddhism there seem to be two popular ways that this is shown onscreen. On one hand, they may end up losing what they wanted most, or end up becoming what it is they fear, or dying. On the other hand, if many unfortunate events happen to someone throughout the movie, there will usually be something new revealed to the audience towards the end of the movie that warrants them, perhaps due to acts they have committed earlier or in their past lives. This is often known in movies as the twist, or the big reveal. Without an explanation of why a bad occurrence happens to a seemingly innocent person, the movie as a whole is less satisfying. Humans innately

like to hear the truth, especially if it correlates to their beliefs. Even Thai movie goers would not leave the movie believing that justice has been served, or will be served for the character in a future life. They would walk away feeling unsatisfied, confused, and maybe dislike the movie itself. They expect to see cause and effect displayed in a movie, because otherwise there will always be a lingering of uncertainty of the unknown, which can trigger fear, anxiety, disbelief, and overall dissatisfaction.

It stands to reason that as long as Thai people follow the three pillars of Nation, the Monarchy, and Religion, Buddhism will always be a major presence in their lives. Furthermore, as long as there are Thai horror movies with Thai characters and traditional plots, recurring elements of Buddhism such as karma will play a role in determining the fate of the characters and their actions.

## **2.5 Supernatural**

By Western standards, supernatural films have included box office hits such as *The Sixth Sense*, *The Exorcist*, and *The Ring* to name a few. The commonality with many of these movies is the appearance of ghosts, spirits, and unexplainable events. One difference between Western horror films and Thai horror films is that many of those unexplainable occurrences are able to be made sense of in Thai belief. Whether ghosts, spirits, or black magic, Thai horror movies almost always provide a sense of why certain events happen. Also, Thailand is a culture that has a tradition rooted in animistic beliefs so Thai audiences generally have a prior understanding or familiarity with ghost stories and folklore that are represented in the films beforehand. It is perhaps this prior knowledge that keeps western audiences from understanding and accepting the Thai horror movie as completely and convincingly as Thais do.

In the Thai fantasy horror film, 'Nang Mai', aka Nymph, a Thai couple's marriage is lost in the thicket of dysfunction with the male protagonist falling for a tree. Set in modern Bangkok,



a young couple endure a troubled relationship. May is an office worker, while her husband Nop is a photographer. They are both dissatisfied with their lives, and appear passionless and disconnected. May has turned to her boss for comfort and gets entangled in an affair. Nop believes that a trip together will benefit their bond. However, during their camping trip in the forest, he wanders off to take photos and becomes magically attached to a mysterious tree. When taking pictures of this particular tree, he begins to hug and embrace it and does not return to his wife that evening. Nop makes love with a tree nymph in the forest and when he returns to the city, he is forever changed. Thais have a belief in animism and spirits of all things in nature. A powerful symbol of nature is the forest, and it is here that he encounters this supernatural being. The tree nymph is the personification of nature and protector of the forest. The opening scene in the movie shows a girl being chased by two men who assault her deep in the forest. Then there are footsteps walking towards them. The next scene shows the men dead in the water. It is assumed that this is the work of the forest nymph. Nature spirits are powerful and feared, and Thais pay respect to tree spirits when they trek out into the forest. It seems as though nature has always been at odds with man.

The movie '5 praeng', aka 4bia 2 is Thai horror film comprised of 5 short films. The first short film titled Novice centers around a young boy name Pey, who has committed a crime. He throws rocks at oncoming cars at night when it is difficult to see the road. One of the vehicles crashes killing the driver, and Pey attempts to flee the punishment of the crime by ordaining as a novice monk. Monks are not usually arrested. At first he is unnoticed as a criminal by the law. However his actions at the sanctuary disturbs a ceremony which was performed in order to feed the ghosts of the punished youth. Furthermore, he has flashbacks of the night he caused the accident and it is revealed that the driver was his own father. Pey was very disobedient to the monks and he attempted to eat food which was not intended for him. He is haunted by an invisible presence that throws rocks at him. In the end he transforms into a 'praet', which is a ghost that has a mouth the size of a needle and cannot be fully free from thirst and hunger. He

becomes this type of ghost as a punishment for his crimes. In Thailand there is a temple in Suphanburi known as 'Wat Phai Rong Wua' (Hell on Earth), where parents can bring their children to a museum of monsters that features sculptures of various ghosts including 'praet'. Many Thai parents have been known to use this as a tactic to teach and scare their children into being better behaved and warning them to fear sin.

One unique Thai horror film that does feature a ghost is *Art of the Devil*. This movie deals with more superstitious elements of black magic. The victim of this stories is a young pregnant women who is gang raped and dumped by her lover who is already a father and a husband. The man attempts to cover up this problem by getting rid of her, although she narrowly escapes her death. She vows to take revenge on her victimizers and with the help of a spirit doctor, she is granted with magical powers. Spirit doctors often make appearances in Thai horror films as a means to help and hurt people, depending on which side utilizes his services. In this case, he helps the woman by creating a 'luk krok', which is a sort of voodoo doll that is made from the fetus of her unborn baby and protects her from enemies. She casts spells on the entire family and they become subjugated to her black magic. This causes each of the family members to die one by one. There have been two sequels to this movie, *Art of the Devil 2* and *Art of the Devil 3*. All three of these movies show the devastating use of black magic and Thai superstitious beliefs. These movies do not focus on Thai ghosts or traditional spirits, but rather highlight the use of magic and superstition through uncanny powers.

Many Thai horror films contain references to Thai legends, folklore, and widely held beliefs of animism. In the films mentioned above, there were examples of ghosts, spirits, and black magic. All of these elements sit within the definition of supernatural. Therefore, because the majority of all Thai horror films contain one or more of these elements, it can be said that supernaturalism is a common characteristic of Thai horror films. There are inherent social implications to many films based of traditional Thai folklore, and they all fit within Thai beliefs of karma, rebirth, suffering, superstition, and practically all have morals to the story. Thai movies

in this regard also functions as devices for reassuring that Thais still relate to tragic stories of romance, practice the values of Buddhism, carry on the belief in the supernatural, and succumb to certain portrayal of sexual roles.

## **2.6 Hybrid Genres**

Thai cuisine is marked by a mixture of flavors such as sweet, sour, salty, and spicy. Usually when eating at local Thai restaurants, you will see cups with various condiments inside. They are usually composed of sugar for sweetness, lemon juice or vinegar for sourness, fish sauce for saltiness, and crushed red pepper for spiciness. Thai horror films are similar in that they also can be made up of different elements. Very seldom will a movie play through without utilizing the elements of other themes such as romance, tragedy, comedy, suspense, etc. However, when these elements are combined together they become hybrid genres. Examples of hybrid horror genres include horror-comedy, horror-romance, horror-fantasy, and horror-suspense. The main hybrid genres in Thailand are horror-comedy, horror-suspense.

**Figure 2.3: Examples of Hybrid Horror Movies**

Name	Genre 1	Genre 2
Shutter	Horror	Thriller
Nymph	Horror	Fantasy
Buppah Rahtree	Horror	Comedy
Alone	Horror	Drama
Graseu Valentine	Horror	Romance
Body #19	Horror	Thriller
Phobia	Horror	Action
Nang Nak	Horror	Drama

### 2.7 Box Office of Thai Horror Films: 2004 to 2012

This section gives a listing of the highest box office hits that have come from the Thai horror genre from the years 2004 through 2012. The source used to obtain these figures is box office mojo. This site provides box office receipts and this gives valuable insight to how well a movie does. This particular source tracks Hollywood movies primarily, but is expanding to cover other countries such as Thailand. Box office mojo did not have the box office sales figures for the years prior to 2004 and thus, were unable to be obtained for this study. However, for all subsequent years, the tables have been provided below.

**Figure 2.4: Thai horror film box office index 2004<sup>3</sup>**

Rank	Title	Total Gross (US \$)
1	Shutter Kot Tit Winyan	2,584,600
2	Khon Hen Phi 2	521,900
3	Phi Chong Air	487,200
4	Khon Len Khong	454,500
5	Athap Kae Bon Phi	308,900
6	Six Hok Tai Tha Tai	278,800
7	Tukae Phi	246,900
8	Khon Phi Pisat	204,000
9	Khun Krabi Phi Rabat	121,100

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<sup>3</sup> Box Office Mojo. Thai Horror Film Box Office 2004-2012 [Online] Available from : <http://boxofficemojo.com/intl/thailand/yearly/> [2013, January]

**Figure 2.5: Thai horror film box office index 2005**

Rank	Title	Total Gross (US \$)
1	Buppha Ratre 2	1,708,500
2	Chomkhamangwet	879,300
3	Variety Phi Calui	834,200
4	The Eye Infinity	730,800
5	Long Khong	730,200
6	Narok	512,900
7	Rab Nong Sayongkwan	485,200
8	Nak Rakthae Winyan Kwamtai	116,800
9	Khon Ratuek Chat	77,700

**Figure 2.6: Thai horror film box office index 2006**

Rank	Title	Total Gross (US \$)
1	Koi Toe Yom	1,609,247
2	Dek Hor	1,186,500
3	La Tha Phi	929,728
4	Phi Khon Pen	908,435
5	Sop aka Acharn Yai	603,082
6	Pen Chu Gub Phi	527,537
7	Grasue Valentine	347,800
8	Dek Hen Phi	277,435
9	Game Sayong 13	121,100
10	The Letters Song Khon Tai	164,166
11	Phi Yak Klab Ma Koet	120,000
12	Lang Lok Lon	104,423

**Figure 2.7: Thai horror film box office index 2007**

Rank	Title	Total Gross (US \$)
1	Faet	2,040,003
2	Ban Phi Sing	1,346,634
3	Body #19	928,176
4	Phi Mai Chim Fan	629,759
5	Koi Thoe Gay	620,876
6	Poeng Mang Klong Phi Nang Manue	426,623
7	Sui Lak Sai	384,135
8	Phi Chang Nang Athap Namkamkamechnot	373,713
9	Phi Liang Luk Khon	354,786
10	Vinyan Lok Khontai	244,512
11	Chumthang Rotfai Phi	180,797



**Figure 2.8: Thai horror film box office index 2008**

Rank	Title	Total Gross (US \$)
1	4 Praeng	2,435,026
2	Long Khong 2	1,483,738
3	Program Na	1,394,256
4	Long To Tai	890,499
5	Phi Tawan kab Achan Tabo	545,216
6	Ban Phi Pob	408,288
7	Thot Rahat Winyan	319,301
8	Ban Phi Pob 2008	290,463
9	Patihan Rak Tang Phan	237,402
10	Saphai Brue... aw aw	139,062

**Figure 2.9: Thai horror film box office index 2009**

Rank	Title	Total Gross (US \$)
1	Ha praeng	3,329,253
2	Hor Taew Tak Hake kra jerng	1,685,783
3	Fan Kao	1,415,217
4	Buppah Rahtree 3.1	1,039,707
5	Mahalai Sayongkwan	892,591
6	Buppah Rahtree 3.2	518,044
7	6:66 Tai Maidai Tai (Death Happnes)	470,103
8	Chuaed Kon Chim (Meat Grinder)	378,963
9	Chuan (Slice)	190,776
10	Tok Tra Phee (The Fatality)	182,256
11	Nang Mai (Nymph)	174,835

**Figure 2.10: Thai horror film box office index 2010**

Rank	Title	Total Gross (US \$)
1	Tai Hong	958,573
2	Fan Mai	729,143
3	Krai Nai Hong	695,135
4	Nam Phee Nong Sayong Kwan	638,582
5	Tai Tong Klom (The Snow White)	289,687
6	Nang Takian	117,157

**Figure 2.11: Table Thai horror film box office index 2011**

Rank	Title	Total Gross (US \$)
1	Hor Taew Tak Hake Kra Jerng 2 (Oh my ghosts 2)	1,131,346
2	Lud See Lud	438,804
3	Sobdek (The unborn child)	392,234
4	Kan Kor Kad (Dead Bite)	360,414

**Figure 2.12: Table Thai horror film box office index 2012**

Rank	Title	Total Gross (US \$)
1	Rak Chan Yakitungchan (I miss you)	1,308,698
2	407 Dark Flight	1,133,343
3	Hor Taew Tak Hake Mak Mak (Oh my ghosts)	858,219
4	Mae Nak 3D	437,222
5	Wong Jorn Pid (Heaven and Hell)	335,642
6	Khon Loke Jit (Distortion)	153,485
7	Gang Tob Phee (Ghost Day)	79,292

## **Chapter III**

### **Investigation of Thai Social and Cultural Changes in Thai Horror Films**

Modernization theorists often see traditions as obstacles to economic growth. Furthermore, while modernization might deliver violent, radical change for traditional societies it is thought to be worth the price. Critics insist that traditional societies were often destroyed without ever gaining promised advantages if, among other things, the economic gap between advanced societies and such societies actually increased. The net effect of modernization for some societies was therefore the replacement of traditional poverty by a more modern form of misery. Others may point to improvements in living standards, physical infrastructure, education and economic opportunity to refute such criticisms.<sup>4</sup>

#### **3.1 Social Changes**

It seems as though in a typical modern society, it is not uncommon for parents to want their kids to have a good life. Many parents are known to send their kids to school for an education and invest in their extracurricular activities such as music, sports, or English as a second language. In Thai society it is quite similar and parents also want their kids to be happy even to the point that they are spoiled such as buying them expensive phones, cars, or an apartment in Bangkok at a young age. Many Thai parents expectations for their children are to do well in school, be a good kid, find a good job, and have a happy life. In America, many kids learn to work at a young age to learn the value of a dollar. It is somewhat well known that kids in America learn to work at a young age and sometimes move out at the age of 18 years old, which

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<sup>4</sup> Rahnama, Majid. Quand la misère chasse la pauvreté, Arles: Actes Sud [Online] 2003. Quoted from wikipedia: Modernization Theory. Available from : [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modernization\\_theory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modernization_theory) [2013, January]

is the legal age of an adult and the parents are no longer legally responsible for them. This is quite different in Thailand because the most of the young Thais who do work are usually kids from rural areas of the country and are relatively poor. Also, many of those particular young working class Thais are helping their parents out with money and are in Bangkok to work, rather than go to school as a main focus. It is not uncommon in the west, and especially in America to work and go to college at the same time. At an early age, modern societies preach to the new generations of the value of an education and the opportunities they provide. However, in Thailand the gaps between the very poor, the middle class, and the rich are so wide making it hard for the poorer kids to keep up with the richer kids.

In terms of education, the parents want their kids to go to the best schools for the best education, job opportunities, and hopefully lifestyle. When kids prepare to go to college, it becomes a very difficult race. Admittance into the very best universities is limited and since rural kids have a poorer education, it is relatively harder for them to get the scores needed to attend those prestigious institutions. Thai kids are relatively obedient to their parents and this may be due to a society that places much emphasis on respect for their elders. Thai kids seem to truly depend on their parents and family more than westerners do.

Thai Horror films show many aspects of a modern Thai society such as alienation, overpopulation, and in personal relationships. Living standards, economic opportunity, and education are some of the themes that are thought to be improved due to modernization. However, there can also be downsides to these so-called improvements.

### **3.1.1 Dorm**

One example of education gone awry can be found in the movie '*Dek Hor*' aka *Dorm*. In this Thai Horror movie, the son, Ton is pressured by his father to go to a school he does not want to go into. The school is noted for being a well known prep school, but the child does not want to

be sent away. Ton had been watching a lot of television, and had been warned. One very late night, he snuck downstairs to watch television when he hears someone coming. Ton is very scared so quickly he turns off the television and hides under a couch. He witnesses his father having an affair with a woman. He now has a hatred for his father's actions and assumes that he is sent away only for his father to cover up what he did. Ton arrives at this school and does not like it at all.

Despite the school having many kids his age, he feels like an outcast. That is, until he meets Vichien, also an outcast and they become companions. As Vichien shows Ton the ropes and how to get around. They both have a lot in common with being lonely and feeling homesick. Occasionally, Ton's father would call, but Ton would never speak to him. This brings the father great pain. At night Ton becomes scared with all the ghost stories the kids are spreading around and he starts to hear noises. They say that a young boy died in the swimming pool and a young woman committed suicide. One day Ton and Vichien go to that swimming pool. It is in this swimming pool that it is revealed to Ton that Vichien is actually dead. At first Ton is very scared, but then realizes that dead or not they have become friends and care for one another. Ton goes back to the swimming pool and realizes that Vichien's death repeats itself every night. Ton also finds out that Vichien's father was in the newspaper for committing some bad deeds and that made Vichien an outcast. One day long ago Vichien was playing in the pool and was playing a prank that he could not swim. It turns out that he got the cramps and was unable to swim. However, the bell rang for the kids to go back to their dorms and all the kids went back, leaving Vichien behind thinking that it was still a prank. That day Vichien drowned and when the headmistress did a head count, she knew he was missing.

She asked all of the kids if they saw him and was told about the swimming pool. When she arrives at the pool, she sees a boy's corpse floating on the water. She feels responsible and has never been the same. She also is a victim of being an alienated. She remains here at the school and has a reputation for being extra strict when it comes to discipline of the kids. There are

rumors of her being a ghost and all of the kids wonder why she always goes to her room at the end of the day to look into a drawer and cry. Ton sneaks into her room one day to see how all of the events unfolded and was able to help the ghost of Vichien as well as the headmistress find peace. At the end of the term he is reunited with his father and seems to want to come back to this boarding school next year.

In this movie there are three main outcasts in the form of Ton, Vichien, and the headmistress. Each of them has a reason for being that way. Ton feels betrayed by his father when he is sent to boarding school. Vichien feels as though, his father's actions put him in a position to be cast aside by his peers, and the headmistress feels responsible for the death of a student. When Ton realizes the events that occurred, leading up to Vichien's untimely death, he realizes that hating his father does not help the situation. He is lucky to have a father that cares for him. Furthermore, Vichien's father was in a similar situation because he did some bad deeds and it was publicized and ostracized. Ton did not want to put his father through that even though he may have deserved it. Ton also helped the headmistress by explaining that it was not her fault and some things just happen out of her control, and she later understands that always trying to be strict and in control only adds to her becoming more alienated from the students. She understands Vichien's message to her given by Ton and now feels that she can move on from this tragic event in her life. Alienation was represented in this film from slightly different aspects and in different situations portrayed by a dead ghost, a betrayed boy, and a female headmaster.

### **3.1.2 Buppah Rahtree**

Another Thai Horror movie that deals with isolation and alienation is *Buppah Rahtree*. Despite being one of the most intelligent university students, Buppah is socially alienated. She is experiencing alienation from three social groups; 1) Parents & Family, 2) Peers and Friends (Boyfriends), 3) the community. In this film, Buppah is a university student who is very



intelligent, but does not socialize much due to numerous reasons. It seems that what she is experiencing is alienation. The three essential groups are tarnished and include her absent mother, dead father, child molesting stepfather, her two-faced boyfriend, schoolmates, and the community in the apartment complex all play a role in this social exile. At her apartment, she does not speak to anyone unless necessary, and at school she sits alone and exhibits no emotion. Her personality seems on track to be a soulless ghost even before her actual death. Her stepfather has taken advantage of her sexually ever since she was an adolescent and those occurrences attribute to her social isolation.

Buppah Rahtree is perhaps experiencing a loss of identity in which the self seems unreal. In psychiatry, this is thought to be caused by difficulties in relating to society and the resulting prolonged inhibition of emotion, which Buppah clearly exhibits due to an understanding of the traumatic experiences she has gone through.

In sociology and critical social theory, alienation is widely defined as an individual's estrangement from traditional community and others in general. In relation to globalization, it is considered by many that the atomism of modern society means that individuals have shallower relations with other people than they would normally in a traditional society in the past.

Karl Marx's theory of alienation leads us to examine the works in relation to Buppah Rahtree and the Bourgeois Society (capitalism). This social formation in which the commodity relation (the relation of buying and selling) has spread into every corner of life. The family and the state still exists, but the family is successively broken down and atomized more and more resembling a relationship of commercial contract, rather than one genuinely expressing kinship and the care of one generation for the other.

The relationship of Buppah Rahtree and her boyfriend Ake, was more like a commercial contract in many ways. Firstly, when they were together and she became pregnant, he told her to get an abortion and promised that after he returned from his studies abroad they would be together. He had no intention other than to escape the situation for him and his family. He entered

into a fake contract with Buppah Rahtree and insured her of his sincerity. She was most likely expecting not to be abandoned and to be taken care of by Ake, which did not happen. The pain, suffering, and subsequent death of Buppah Rahtree is arguably initiated by the event of abortion as advised by Ake. He does not truly care about Buppah Rahtree, as shown by his wager with his university peers, leaving Buppah Rahtree in the wake of his child's inception, and having a sexual encounter with a girl down the street. This leads us to believe that the initial contract of love between him and Buppah Rahtree was not only fake, but even if it were real and he did everything he promised, it would not be for love, but perhaps guilt and obligation revealing that the contract resembled more of a commercial one, rather than a genuine expression of love and interest.

**Figure 3.1: Alienated vs Social**

Alienation	Social
Crowdedness	Part of the group
Loneliness	Togetherness
Loveless	Loved
Anxiety	Parties and social activities to ease tensions
Socially inactive	Alive, well, and interactive
Self Destructive	Productive
Selfish	Unselfish and helpful
Predator	Victim

The tables above are examples of the binary oppositions of alienation versus being social. Crowdedness is displayed very distinctly in Buppah Rahtree. If Buppah was alone the whole time, her alienation would be less emphasized. However, this movie puts her in a variety of situations to highlight that she is alienated from everybody in a host of situations. She is undoubtedly lonely, and this is proved to be true when she accepts Ake into her life. When she accepts him, she is totally devoted to him and is willing to give him what he desires. She merely asks for his care, love, and attention in return. She mentions that all she wants is honesty, and unfortunately that is the only thing that Ake refuses to accommodate her with. Buppah Rahtree is shown no real love from her parents or her boyfriend. This is because men in her life view her as an object and therefore dehumanize her essence even further. Anxiety is felt by Buppah Rahtree as she makes the transition from complete solitude to allowing some emotional penetration from Ake. She is unsure about him, her situation, and the outcome. All she can do is ask for the advice of the man who she loves. Despite her fear, she has an abortion performed on her.

Abortion is a modern issue and it occurs more often these days. It even makes its way into public policy when leaders are elected. How leaders deal with this touchy issue remains unclear. They want to say what they believe yet they do not want to disappoint either side. On a basic moral level, it is wrong to take a life, especially in Buddhism. The fact that this movie uses Buddhism as a way to portray comedy, shows that modern people take Buddhism more or less seriously when portrayed in Thai horror film. Furthermore, any astute Buddhist should know how heavy the karma weighs to actually take a life. By this token, it can be assumed that the step-father, Buppah Rahtree, Ake, and his mother are not the ideal Buddhists. The main argument to shed light on is that they made the choice to have Buppah go through the abortion procedure despite against the teachings of the Buddha, in order to conform to their modernized socially acceptable standards. As we look in retrospect we see that the decision to end a life is wrong, yet just they (mom, Ake, Buppah Rahtree) did it to ensure a brighter future for Ake. Performing an abortion and dying for Ake was the last unselfish thing she would do for anyone. Now as a ghost,

she would take revenge upon anyone who obstructed her will and desires. This is proved when she fights back against her father and when she saws off Ake's legs. She used to be a victim and now instead has become the predator. In contrast to *Nang Mai* in which Nop reverts back to nature, Buppah continues down a destructive path and continues the cycle of victimizing other people as she once was due to the negative social consequences linked to the socio-cultural evolution of modernization.

### **3.1.3 Nymph**

In the film *Nang Mai*, aka Nymph, there are aspects of modernization being represented ecologically. Despite Thailand being a tropical developing country, it is quickly modernizing. Minus the abrupt halt due to the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997, and the recent political events that subdued the economy, Thailand has been experiencing steady growth. Export growth in particular has been on the rise, but this growth also impacts the agriculture industry in a negative way. Thailand was the world's leading exporter of rice and with goods and services export equivalent to over 70% of GDP in 2008. This indicates that the growth is due to modernization and foreign demand that has caused us to be export-dependent. This in turn means that in order to grow as the world demand, Thailand must keep up with it. The land from a capitalistic standpoint have not been fully utilized and Thailand has been experiencing a rapid deforestation rate despite governmental organizations such as the Royal Forest Department and the Forest Industry Organization. Between 1945 and 1975 forest cover in Thailand dropped from 61% to 34% of the country's land area. From 1975 to 1986 forest cover dropped another 28%. As of 1986 only 25% of Thailand was forest-covered. From 1990 to 2005 another 10% of forest was lost. Thailand's recent economic development has been achieved at the expense of the environment and the

country's natural resources. Despite regulations that prohibit logging, the effects of erosion on the soil are remain a remnant of past deforestation<sup>5</sup>

In *Nang Mai* there is a juxtaposition of the forest and the city. These two subjects are symbolic in that they represent nature and modernization, respectively. May is a city woman who arguably has a ordinary life in terms of average middle class income. She is married and has a decent job. In addition to being beautiful, her boss is courting her and she has an affair with him. She becomes distant from her husband and disengaged with her life and we start to see where the effects of a pressured modern life can lead. She takes pills everyday, and she is torn between two men, both of which are married. She is married to Nop, yet she has an affair with her boss who is also married. When Nop, who is a photographer ventures into the forest for a photo shoot to document the wildlife, he brings May along with him and this experience changes everything. Nop is a man who looks through a lens for a living, whether by the lens of his camera or his glasses. These windows of glass which are supposed to make us see better actually hold us back from seeing clearly or so it appears in the movie. When he disappears into the forest and returns we see that he has changed. The tree nymph he makes contact with is the personification of the forest or nature itself, and he learns to understand and love it. He no longer needs his glasses to see clearly and stops using his photographic equipment.

The first thing we notice is how distant the modern woman (May) is to the forest (nature). A modern person going camping is the allusion of going back to nature as if humans and nature are separable. However, humans are a part of nature, therefore if humans are destroying nature, they are effectively destroying a part of ourselves.

In *Nang Mai*, there are a number of different aspects of humans (modern civilization) in terms of cultural society that gets contrasted with a negative light versus nature.

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<sup>5</sup> Thailand Environment Monitor 2006. *Executive Summary: Blue Waters in Peril*. The World Bank. [Online]. 2006. Available from : [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTTHAILAND/Resources/Environment-Monitor/2006\\_term-executive-summary.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTTHAILAND/Resources/Environment-Monitor/2006_term-executive-summary.pdf) [2011, October]

**Figure 3.2: Civilization vs Nature**

Civilization	Nature
Reasoned	Animistic, Mysterious
Dull	Seductive & Intriguing
Dry and Passionless	Sensual
Uncommunicative & Detached	Communicated & Connected
Barren	Fruitful & Fertile
Destructive	Productive
Taking	Giving
Destroyer	Victim

In this movie, the two lead characters embody the nature versus civilization argument. Nop and the naked forest spirit represent the coming back of nature and nature itself, respectively. May and her boss represent the new modern civilization, although it is many times portrayed in a darker shade in the movie.

In the film, there are essentially two women. On one hand there is the mystical forest nymph, which is uncivilized and untamed. On the other hand there is May, who seems to serve as the embodiment of modern civilization. She is portrayed as a modern average middle income woman who just happens to eat take-out food and takes pills to help her fall asleep. When May is with her husband they rarely talk or communicate. Even when the two are put together in a car ride for hours, all May does is talk on the phone and sleep, leaving Nop to drive in silence. When

they get to the forest where they are completely alone together May would not spend time with her husband and is constantly on the phone with her friends. She insists on taking sleeping pills to help her sleep even though Nop argues that they are on vacation and she does not need the pills if she does not have to get up early for work. May and Nop's relationship can be seen as dry and passionless. When her husband wants to make love to her, May refuses. From this, the movie uses May to imply that people who are shaped in a modern civilization are often passionless, cold, unconnected, uncommunicative, and also unproductive. The movie shows that May is having an affair with her boss; Korn who is also married. The fact that Korn and May, as representatives of civilization, are unfaithful to their respective spouses, infers that civilization seems to be taking advantage of people without regarding the consequences or considering the argument of right versus wrong. When May feels that the tree in the woods steals her husband away, she slashes the tree with a knife, thus killing the forest spirit disregarding her own mistakes. May takes Korn away from his wife just like the forest spirit did to her and Nop. Therefore, she is in no way entitled to be angry at the tree. May's actions show that the civilization she embodies is considerate only of itself and does not care if certain actions have dire consequences for others.

In *Taboo on Virginity*, Sigmund Freud states:

*“Whenever primitive man institutes a taboo, there he fears a danger; and it cannot be disputed that the general principle underlying all of these regulations and avoidances is a dread of women. Perhaps the fear is founded on the difference of woman from man, on her eternally inexplicable, mysterious, strange nature, which thus seems hostile. Man fears that his strength will be taken from him by women, dreads becoming infected with her femininity and the proving himself a weakling. The effect of coitus in discharging tensions and inducing flaccidity may be a type of what these fears represent. ... In any event, the taboos described are*

*evidence of the existence of a force which, by regarding women as strange and hostile, sets itself against love.”*

In Nang Mai, nature (woman) has the power. Instead of fearing it, Nop embraces it. Power is different in this sense because it is tied to nature, and nature is being destroyed by something else. Modern civilization would be that culprit, and it is personified through Nop's wife, who is the embodiment of civilization. She is also another woman of power. Nature is portrayed as something unfamiliar to the urbanized characters. Indeed nature is not something new that the characters have never seen before. It is something that has always been a part of their lives, but urban culture and modernization have pushed nature away or altered it in such a form that it is no longer wild or untamed. Some examples of this are gardens, parks, architectural landscaping, or zoos. Animals and trees are the most common representations of nature. Humans in civilized environments have tried to control nature by putting it in order, thus, when they come across authentic, untamed, out of order nature, it is not completely familiar to them or what they prefer. Humans can also re-enact the uncanny in an ambiguous way. Nop and May's reactions to the forest combined, is an excellent example of how people respond to something uncanny. People usually feel drawn to and somewhat fascinated by the object of the uncanny, but at the same time they feel threatened by it.

Freud explains that people are drawn to the uncanny because it is a part of them, something that they used to have. However, they are repulsed and threatened because it is the part of them that they tried to push away and forget. Nature in this movie returns to haunt humans who are becoming more and more developed (modernized). These people try to destroy and push nature and its mystic power away from their daily lives. However, nature does not go away, and is waiting for the right opportunity to take back its rightful place in the world and in the human's lives as the mystical influence in every aspect of their daily lives.



The movie sets up the two binary oppositions and creates completely different atmospheres between nature and civilization to place emphasis that humans push nature away into a hidden place. Nature and civilization are completely separated in this movie and they are fighting each other for the respect of humans. The climax results in Nop isolating himself from society and proceeding to live alongside the forest spirit. This act suggests that the first round of the fight is over and nature has won. Nop has now returned to nature completely and this gives hope that more humans can be won over to the side of nature.

### **3.2 Cultural Changes**

Social changes and cultural changes oftentimes go hand in hand. If enough members of society share a common ideal or change their way of thinking as a whole the culture of that group of people will start to change along with it.

There are many Thai horror films that pit the argument of modernization versus tradition against one another. Banjong Pisanthanakul and Parkpoom Wongpoom's second movie; *Fad* aka *Alone*, presents the story of Pim and Ploy; two conjoined twin sisters who underwent an operation to separate their bodies. Pim did not survive the surgery and Ploy chooses to leave Thailand to start a new life in Korea with her boyfriend by posing as Pim. She had to face her past in Thailand again when her mother had a serious accident. Once she enters her old house, Ploy is immediately reminded of her twin sister and feels the presence of Pim everywhere. On the surface level, this movie is a horror movie about two twin sisters, however, *Fad* can also be interpreted as a story of a woman who tries to live a happy life in the modern world and struggles to escape her past (traditional world).

### 3.2.1 Alone

This Thai horror movie is separated into two oppositional cores using Thailand and Korea as the signifiers of the two cores. The two oppositions symbolize modernity and tradition. The setting and the atmosphere of the two locations help contribute to the construction of the characteristics of modernity and tradition the movie portrays. The binary oppositions between the modern and traditional world are as follows;

**Figure 3.3: Modernity vs Tradition**

Modernity	Tradition
Urban Korea	Rural Thailand
Ploy ( Posing as Pim )	The ghost of Pim/ past Pim
Apartment Complex	Wooden House
Developed	Retrospective
Fast-paced	Unaltered
New	Old
Warm	Gloomy
Detached	Conjoined
Private	Shared

Instead of any other country in the world, the directors chose to have Ploy move and start her new life with Vee in Korea. Compared to Thailand, Korea is more developed and more modern and the two directors portray Korea accordingly. Therefore, it can be said that in this movie Korea is the signifier of modernity. At the beginning of the movie, Pim lives a perfectly normal and happy life with her boyfriend. They have many friends and there seems to be nothing wrong with the couple. Pim and Vee live in a modern apartment with minimalistic decorations. Modern lifestyle can be clearly illustrated by the way people live in apartments. Even though the apartment tenants share so many things together from the building, the garden, the elevators, and even the walls of their rooms, the tenants rarely know one another. The structure of most apartment; identical closed doors connected by deserted hallways, does not encourage tenants to connect with their neighbors at all. Neither do the countless identical doors help in distinguishing one tenant from the other. On the contrary, it encourages us to think that all the tenants are the same, and that no one is interesting enough to get to know. The closed doors also make the tenants of the rooms seem unreachable to others. Pim and Vee's relationship is no different from the modern lifestyle they are living. They live together under the same roof, share their bed and know few details about one another, but as the movie will point out, they don't really know one another. Vee does not know that his girlfriend is, in fact, her twin sister posing as Pim so that she can be with him, the man she secretly loves. Vee should have known the woman he loves but he cannot tell the difference and does not suspect anything. Ploy (posing as Pim) loves Vee so much that she can "not so accidentally" kill her own sister, whom she also loves. Ploy knows that she can never tell Vee the truth because she is certain that he will surely leave her. In other words, the modern lifestyle makes people detached from one another. They may physically be closer to each other more than ever, but they may know absolutely nothing about the next person and most of the time they do not bother to find out. Furthermore, it can also signify the understanding of a mistake. When one knows they have made a mistake and accept it, it would be the best first step because some people do not acknowledge their mistakes in the first place. However, from that

mistake they must move on. The way in which she moved on was a mistake. For example she knew that killing her sister was wrong and there was nothing she could do about it now, yet posing as her dead sister to be with the man she loves could be considered morally wrong. It is similar to murdering your sister to be with her boyfriend. You may acknowledge that what has been done, has been done, but to proceed on a morally negative path demonstrates that modernized people make poorer, more selfish, less considerate choices.

The opening scene features the two lovers' Korean friends that appear to be close and have come to genuinely celebrate Ploy's birthday. However, it was revealed later that they know very little about the couple. They do not know that Vee cannot have too much dessert because he is diabetic. They know very little about Ploy's past and she has no intention to tell them anything even when one of them says that Ploy may be keeping some secrets and she should share them with friends so that they can help.

Thailand in the film *Fad* is portrayed in such light that makes the country represent the idea of old traditional values. When Ploy and Vee return to Thailand, the atmosphere of the movie changes drastically. Even though the only scene in Korea is set at nighttime and indoors, the room is warmly lit with candlelight creating a cozy feel to the apartment. The atmosphere of Thailand, on the contrary, is dark, gloomy, and worn down. All rooms are dimly lit, whether it is at the hospital, in Ploy's house, at the psychiatrist's office, or at the beach house. Even when there is daylight the atmosphere is still gloomy. The most significant setting in the movie is Ploy's house. Not only does the house represent Ploy's past, it also stands for the characteristic of Thailand in the movie. The house is decorated with antique furniture and is filled with old pictures. The only source of entertainment is an old phonograph and old gramophone records. The house is filled with old memories of people who have passed away or those who no longer live there. Contrary to an apartment, the nature of a house encourages residents to mingle and connect more because they have to share more common areas instead of staying in their own bedrooms. Thus, it is harder to keep a secret in a house where you have less privacy. The gloomy

atmosphere of the house and Thailand, combined with the old and antique decorations of the house, the hospital, and even the old car, suggest that the country remains the place of the bitter past. Ploy chooses to leave this house because she cannot live with what she has done and she cannot stand being judged by her own mother. A house does not connote a sense of isolation in comparison to an apartment, because a house is a bubble while the apartment is a bubble within a bubble. Therefore a house is relatively less isolated in terms of people physically around you actually being acknowledged.

Considering the portrayal of both Korea and Thailand, it can be said that the characteristics of Korea which stands for modernity enable Ploy to be able to live and keep her secrets, while Thailand, which represents her past will not allow her secrets to remain buried. Modernity, helps Ploy escape her problematic past, as it is a bubble that keeps Ploy's secrets hidden from others. However Ploy's bubble bursts the minute she enters her old house. Without the bubble of modernity Ploy cannot escape her past and has to face her wrongdoings and suffer the consequences. She goes on to attempt to destroy her twin's clothes, burn down the house, and kill the mother in order to erase proof of the past.

Ploy has to run away from Thailand and the old traditional values that the country represents because the old world would not allow her to love the same man as her sister and it does not accept anyone who is different. Being conjoined twins is a form of difference that Thai society does not fully accept as normal. Ploy kills her own twin sister both literally and metaphorically and may think that she has left her past behind, but the past never goes away. Her past guilt has been repressed and put away but it is still waiting for the right moment to come back and haunt her. Her past has taken the form of the ghost of her twin sister and the longer she suppresses her past, the more haunting and furious the ghost becomes. However, it is important to note that the ghost is no one other than Ploy's own conjoined twin. This means that what has haunted her was once a part of her that she tried to get rid off.

Sigmund Freud talks about his theory of the uncanny that “This uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old -- established in the mind that has been only by the process of repression... [Everything that is uncanny] ought to have been kept concealed which has nevertheless come to light” (The Uncanny) In this sense, the ghost of Pim is Ploy’s uncanny. Pim and Ploy used to be connected, they were the other half of one another, but Ploy tried to forget Pim after her death. However, it is impossible for her to forget what happened no matter how hard she tries to repress it. The past has always been waiting for her. In order to apply this theory we must consider these two in a psychoanalytical light. Perhaps, they were not only physically linked, but their minds were consciously linked too. If this is put in consideration, it could be argued that the real Pim is the representation of Ploy’s unconscious to try and repress not only that her sister is dead, but in order to justify that she is not who she really is. The turning point seems to be when she asked her husband why he loved her sister more than her when they seem the same. It is powerful how much the unconscious plays a role in mitigating the repressed thoughts we have in order to sustain order. Once the cat came out of the bag, and she revealed who she was, only onslaught occurred. She was fighting with her unconscious the whole movie and finally, the truth was set free. In essence, the unconscious is tradition (the past) that was continually being repressed, but one finds that we cannot escape who we are and must not forget what we once were, or we will be lost in what we have become.

Even worse, it turns out that Pim, who the viewers see throughout the movie is actually Ploy. Ploy strangles her sister then she pretends to be Pim so that she can love Vee and he would love her back. In this sense, it means that when Ploy killed and posed as Pim, she also killed her own identity along with Pim who stands for old traditional values. If the ghost is the signifier of the old world, then Ploy, who does not have her own identity now, has to represent the old world as well. Thus, her new life in Korea can be seen as a lie she made up to trick herself into believing that the new world is a better place for her when in fact she cannot escape her past. What seems at first to be binary opposition is later destroyed when the truth is revealed. The ghost of Pim in

Ploy's imagination is the uncanny that exists on the thin line between all oppositions. When it is revealed that Pim is actually Ploy and that she has been pretending to be her sister the whole time, the line that divides the two sides of opposition is therefore blurred. The twins cannot be separated, the past cannot be forgotten or escaped and modernity cannot exist without a lurking fear that one day their haunting abandoned past will catch up with them.

In the end, Ploy still does not want to accept her own past and tries to destroy it once and for all by burning all of her conjoined clothes and old photographs so that there will be no traces of the fact that she was once a twin left to remind her. Moreover, she goes to the extent of burning down her own house. Not only does her house represent the old traditional values, it is also the symbol of Ploy's identity. Her burning down the house is the attempt to get rid of her old self and of the past at the same time. However, Ploy is trapped in the house and does not survive the fire. The movie seems to suggest that it is impossible to get rid of your past and your identity because it is a part of you. Living in a modern and detached society may make it possible to repress your past or to be a different person, but this pretense does not solve the problem. In the end Ploy dies in the fire and is once again reunited with the twin sister, which can be interpreted that she has to finally come to terms with the past and has received her punishment.

Pim tries to run away from her past (tradition) and uses a new modernized lifestyle to create a bubble of protection for her secrets. She can have a perfectly normal life inside the bubble, but once she does not have this bubble (modern world) to cover up her wrongdoings, the old traditional values come back to haunt her. It is impossible for Pim to escape the ghost of her twin sister because they are parts of each other. Modernization is the culprit in that it serves as a plaster to cover a wound. Instead of building on tradition, modernization it is more like wet concrete that has not cured and therefore is a rocky and unstable foundation to begin building upon. Even though it may support a structure, internally it is imperfect and it is difficult to form something stable on an unstable foundation.

### 3.2.2 Shutter

In the Thai horror film *Shutter*, we investigate the social and cultural aspects of prejudice as well as modern social conventions. In this movie, prejudice plays a major social and cultural role in the portrayal of a modern Thai couple. This prejudice stems from the mounting assault social aspects of modernization have etched on the human canvas. Furthermore, the fact that the movie employs a variety of cameras and finishes with a Polaroid suggest that we are not only moving backward in terms of cultural progress, but the clearest picture may be achieved through the oldest (most traditional) of lenses (windows of reflection).

The Thai horror film *Shutter* starts out in a wedding. A wedding could represent a new beginning, or the continuation of a lifelong commitment. For our main character it represents both. As we will find out later, his ghostly ex-girlfriend will show her lifelong or rather after-lifelong commitment to him, while he tries to move on to something and someone new. His evolution could be tracked in the cameras he uses. Firstly, he was using film which is supposed to give a great image quality, yet there is something in his life he is not seeing, something he forgot. His life seems to be perfect until his girlfriend hits a woman in the street. This is the first test of his character and his decision was very similar to Ake in the movie *Buppah Rahtree* in that he convinced the girl to run away from the problem. Had he gone out to check on her, the story perhaps would have progressed differently. In comparison to *Fad*, he will choose to run away from the problem until he is forced back into it. Also, similar to *Fad*, he will come more or less face to face with his past (tradition). However, unlike *Fad*, he calls out to his past in the end instead of running away. Perhaps, accepting the past and the action he committed was the reason why he did not die in the end. However, he is left living life as a vegetable in an insane asylum with a ghost sitting on the back of his neck as a constant reminder of what he did.

The social issue of this movie mainly deals with the way in which he lets his friends rape his girlfriend. He wants to be socially accepted by his gang of guys. Perhaps this alludes to the



quality of a modern man in this modern time. It can be debated that it would have turned out differently if she were not in the wrong place at the wrong time, but that argument could be the same for him or his friends. His friends were always harassing her and although he got there with enough time save her, instead he showed fear in standing up to what was happening.

V. Lee Hamilton's *Identification as a Challenge to Dual-Process Theories of Persuasion* creates a chart of Herbert C. Kelman's theory of attitude of change. Kelman's theory splits the processes into three distinct parts: compliance, identification, and internalization. Kelman's definition of compliance can be linked to the attitude change of Thun, the main character in the gang rape scene. With regards to his definition, compliance can be said to occur when an individual accepts influence from another person or from a group to attain a favorable reaction from the other, that is to gain a specific reward or avoid a specific punishment controlled by the other, or to gain approval or disapproval from him. Ananda's character, Thun, let his friends rape his girlfriend, perhaps to comply with his friends, because it was not his choice, nor would he choose to have it happen. Despite seeing his girl in pain and terror, he did not stop his friends because he wanted to avoid disapproval from them. When they tell him to take a picture of her in this moment of sexual crime and he decides to take the picture, this gives the analyst evidence of his reflective identification. He individually accepts influence from another person or group and maintained a satisfying and self-defining relationship with the other.

This film's main character exhibits prejudice towards his actions mainly directed at his ex-girlfriend. He is with her because she is herself, but that is the same reason why does not want to be seen with her. It could be for his love of his friends, but it is more about not wanting to be a social outcast. He does not fear his friends, but fears not being accepted by his friends. Therefore to retain his relationship with his gang, he humiliates the girl by taking pictures of her while she is being raped. The ghost goes on to kill all of his friends, but not him, perhaps because at the end he tried to face her, even though he was scared out of his mind.

At this point, a common theme in these Thai horror movies analyzed thus far is that Thai women are portrayed very attached to their male lovers, and the males almost always have another woman on the side whether it is a twin sister, a tree nymph, second serious relationship, or even a one night stand. This female attachment to their lover is how personal relationships are often portrayed in these horror movies. The decisions the men make in the movie are not unheard of and also definitely occur in modern society.

*Shutter* is Parkpoom Wongpoom and Banjong Pisanthanakun's first work. The movie is successful at shocking the audiences with scary ghosts and twisted ending. Not only that, *Shutter's* script is detailed and carefully thought of. The movie is not made only to spook the audience, it has hidden messages about the life of women who has been hurt by men in modern times; physically and emotionally. *Shutter* tell's the story of Thun, a photographer, who takes pictures and finds images of something or someone that should not be in the picture. Later on, he discovers that the ghost who has been showing up on his pictures is Nade, his college girlfriend who seems to be holding a grudge against him and his friends because they raped her and he did not help her even though he could. This movie portrays a modern repressed woman who avenges herself after she dies through the narrative of her boyfriend.

Nade, the female ghost in this movie is the victim of prejudice and social discrimination numerous times by many men. First, and most obviously, Nade is raped by Thun's friends. Thun's friends always pick on Nade just because she is timid and does not know how to socialize. They try to help Thun break up with Nade by raping and threatening her to leave their friend alone. Not only is raping a violence against women physically, it also emotionally violates their rights over their own bodies. Secondly and most cruelly, Nade was tricked and betrayed by her own boyfriend. Thun starts his relationship with Nade knowing that he does not love her, but only feels sorry for her. Thun might not do it to hurt Nade on purpose, but his action hurts her nonetheless because in the end he can not make himself love her and has to eventually break up with Nade when she has already fallen in love with him. Thun's pity and his dishonesty to his

own feelings end up hurting Nade regardless. Thun is also ashamed of Nade by attempting to keep their relationship a secret. This shows that even though he has good intentions, he cares about himself and his image more than his pity for the timid girl. Moreover, Thun does not try to help Nade from being raped by his own friends because he is too weak to stand up to his friends. Instead of helping her, Thun makes matters worse by obeying his friends and taking pictures of Nade being raped so that they could threaten her to keep her mouth shut. Even though Thun does not take part in raping her and has good intentions towards her, he still hurts her emotionally. The emotional violation that Thun caused Nade may even be more painful than being physically raped because it means that someone she loves betrayed her.

Sometimes people unknowingly choose to go down the wrong path, but what is it that causes people to choose the wrong path, when they see the right path is also an option they may choose? In this instance it is the social acceptance, of prejudiced friends towards an alienated girl in a modernized society whose standards are below traditional social and cultural standards.

Further into the movie, the ghost of Nade starts to appear. One by one, Thun's friends (rapists) start to commit suicide by jumping off a building in the same manner she did. Moreover, she starts appearing to Thun and Jane as a reminder to never be forgotten. Nade's revenge is portrayed in the movie as evil. Even though viewers eventually learn that Nade fell victim to the men, some people today can easily sympathize with Thun and think that the ghost is too cruel. At the end of the movie before Thun finds out why his neck hurts, Thun says to the ghost, "Come out! Show yourself! You said you love me, didn't you? Didn't you want to be with me forever? Now you've chased her (his new girlfriend) away, come out then!" Thun's words clearly show that he thinks of himself as the victim of Nade, that it is the ghost who has hurt him without thinking that he is the one who hurt her first.

The way the movie is made encourages the audiences to identify with Thun more than with Nade. Viewers most likely will feel sorry for what happens to Nade, but they can also sympathize with Thun because they might feel that the ghost has harassed him and his friends too

cruelly. Nade killed many people and attempted to take Thun's life. The movie directly explains that Nade "Just wanted to be as close to the person she loves as possible." However, the tone of the movie still suggests that the ghost is too vindictive. The movie portrays Thun as innocent by saying that he feels sorry for the girl so he decides to have a relationship with her and that he hopes that he will be able to love her one day. The movie uses the common belief that love cannot be forced or controlled in order to justify Thun's decision to leave Nade. Accordingly, the audience may believe that Thun may have made a mistake, yet identify with him and still feel sorry for him. As for Nade, although she is a victim, viewers cannot understand why she has to kill and hurt so many people.

If the story is to be examined closely, ruling out the elements of emotion and love, raping and getting into a relationship with someone without loving that person is perhaps below moral human standards. These are crimes of violence and treachery. Rape is wrong in any circumstance and forcing that person to keep quiet by blackmailing her makes it almost impossible for the woman to ask for justice. She has to seek justice out on her own because she cannot tell anyone and no one can help her. If she wants the rapists to pay the same price she has, it is more or less understandable. Instead, the movie makes it so that the ghost is the evil one and the "hero" is the one viewers relate to. Even though *Shutter* is telling the story of a repressed woman, its perspective on the matter begs the question; Who is the real victim? *Shutter* makes it seem like Thun is the ultimate victim while Nade seems to be the evil hunter. The movie makes it easy for viewers to forget that Nade is actually the first victim of the whole story. They are both victims however and the decisions and actions leading to that are due to the societal norms and standards we live by today.

It is interesting that the movie chooses to tell the story using photographs as a medium. The unique characteristic of photographs is that they record the past, both good and bad. Once the photographer presses the shutter, the moment will be imprinted on the film and cannot be erased. The film may not be developed but it still exists. This characteristic is like a person's action. Once

you do something it cannot be undone, you can try to hide it but you cannot erase that from your conscience.

Moreover, photographs only capture specific moments in time, but not the whole truth. The point of view from which the photos are taken, has to be considered. This implies that what one sees may not be what it really is because the whole story is not present. Even if the whole story can be acquired, like looking at sequences of photos from the same event, the photos are still taken through the eye of the photographer. In this case, the photographer is Thun. Therefore, it is understandable why it is easy for viewers to side with him. We see the story through Thun's eyes while Nade never has the chance to tell her own side of the story.

Even though *Shutter* tells a story of a repressed woman in a detailed and logically way she has never been told before in Thai horror movies, the story is still told from the point of view of a man who hurt her most cruelly. The movie does not really help viewers understand the ghost's reasons for killing her rapists and hurting Thun. On the contrary, it makes viewers sympathize with Thun and thinks that the ghost is excessively vindictive. In this sense, we are led to sympathize with the true culprit of the movie, which also happens to be a victim.

Another message in the movie is that he must face the bad choices he makes in the past. The movie highlights which of the characters forgets where we comes from and what he has done. It seems to show that is not so simple to just start over once you have done something very bad and regrettable. Perhaps it alludes that life is karmic and every action taken is "recorded" like in a photo. Things are not what they always seem. A snapshot can show what was, but also what is. It shows it because all photos are of a time before a particular instant. Therefore, a photograph will always be a snapshot of the past. If the photograph taken is observed as a symbol of the past, it can then be compared to how things are presently. As Thun's photographs develop in the darkroom more dimensionality in his character is revealed. Unfortunately, it is already too late for him to be saved, just as it is too late for the girl to be saved. However, is it too late for our society to be saved from the negative social aspects of modernization? Is tradition even better than

modernization? This study will attempt to examine a more traditional time by looking at the movie *Nang Nak*.

### 3.2.3 Nang Nak

This study will investigate and look at a movie set in a past and made before the year 2000. Perhaps looking into the past, will give more insight into the present. The famous box office hit *Nang Nak* is not only a commercial success, but portrays aspects of culture and traditions in its nostalgic characters and situations.

*Nang Nak* is set in a small village on the outskirts of Bangkok during the reign of King Rama IV, approximately 150 years ago. This movie is mostly based on the legend, adding only minor details like props and camera techniques to make the movie more realistic or entertaining for the audience. Therefore, in terms of setting, village layout and neighbor interaction, it could be said that this movie in and of itself reflects the social conventions and values of the past. Moreover, the community shown in *Nang Nak* is smaller and more close-knit than the present day Thailand and this affects how the story plays out in a crucial way.

With her husband away during the war, Nak tries to take care of the house and her husband's rice field, despite her worries for her husband's fate in the battlefield. This perhaps indicates that Thai women of the past could have been good and loving wives while and at the same time, able take charge when their husband is not around. It could be assumed that pregnancy is not the most comfortable situation to be in, especially when the woman is left alone to take care of herself. Yet, it is clear that Nak does the best she can to care for the baby and seems as though it is Nak's one and only choice. The thought of not having the baby anymore because life is too difficult without anyone to take care of her never crosses her mind. She would not give up on life or the baby. Even after she dies giving birth to her son and becomes a ghost, Nak continues to

raise and take care of her son perhaps indicating that Thai women of the past had a very strong maternal instinct.

Moreover, Nak's love for her husband, Mak, is so overwhelming by the standards today that she could not move on to the next life. She still wants to be with him as long as she possibly could. This level of love represents her defiance of the nature of living things and could be interpreted as a magnified portrait of the concept of monogamy in Thai society in the past. The movie tries to portray the social conventions of that time regarding love and marriage. The movie seems to idealize this particular period in Thai history when a couple was married and remained together "forever". If one died, the norm was not for the other to move on and find a new spouse or lover. Nak becoming a ghost can mainly be attributed to the love she has for her husband. It is not her primary intention to hurt or scare her neighbors. Her only desire is to continue being Mak's dutiful wife and be a loving mother as if she was still alive. Perhaps it can be discerned that if the neighbors had left Nak and Mak alone, Nak would not be as inclined to resort to haunting and killing of her neighbors.

The movie begins with Mak's departure to serve the country as a soldier, having to leave his pregnant wife alone to take care of herself and to work in the rice field. It is considered a great honor for men to be able to defend their country, therefore, this type of departure is seen as necessary and honorable as opposed to a man leaving his wife for a less noble cause as they do in present day. It is a man's duty to defend his country in the time of war and military service in this movie stands for the duty of men as members of a country or a community. However, the war is portrayed from a negative viewpoint with death, misery, and severely injured soldiers of which, one is his friend. In a way, it could be said that the movie is presenting the downside of serving one's nation in the context of war. The nation or community is signified by the war and the army is thus portrayed as a negative force that separates loved ones, kills and injures innocent bystanders, and also interferes with the people's peaceful way of life. This portrayal could be seen as the movie's attempt to make the society a dystopia in contradiction to Nak's illusion created

for Mak in her home. Nak's ability to create this illusion and blind Mak from reality could be understood as symbolism. Nak was capable of blinding Mak and concurrently was unable to blind the neighbors. This could be because Mak gives her that power. Mak's love for Nak enables her to create the imaginary reality of their perfect home and life. Thus, Mak is blinded by love as represented through Nak's power over him. However, even though Mak is the sole reason Nak refuses to move on, his role is rather limited. The movie retells the legend of Mae Nak and produces it from the point of view of Nak; therefore, Mak mainly serves to highlight Nak as a loving and dutiful wife. Mak's character is rather flat and unclear therefore it leaves many interpretations to his actions. This leaves little viable evidence in order to come to concrete findings. For example, throughout the movie, it is shown that Nak has an everlasting love for Mak and vice versa. However at the end of the movie, Mak chooses to be ordained and separates himself from all worldly issues after Nak has moved on. Mak's decision to become a monk is not clear-cut and it could be interpreted in many ways. Firstly, he may think that by becoming a monk, his merit would help his dead wife if she were suffering in the life after death. Secondly, judging from his facial expression at the end of the movie, Mak appears stoic and may not be happy with his life as a monk at all. Perhaps, being a monk was a sacrifice he made, just as Nak had to give in to Buddhism in the end. It might seem that Mak does not feel that his life has purpose anymore because he has lost his family and now he is all alone. This indicates that Nak moved on without moving on, while Mak also moved on without moving on.

The movie emphasizes the fact that Mak and Nak could not stay together despite how much she loved him because she is no longer human. It is interesting to note that Nak may have kept her death a secret and stayed with her husband for a very long time, had her neighbors not stepped in and revealed the truth. The movie makes a statement that it is unacceptable for humans and ghosts to live together. The situation actually concerned only two people because it is family matter but the community could not allow that to happen. Social conventions are stronger in small communities because all members of the community usually know one another. On one hand,



small communities are closely-knit and neighbors help one another in times of trouble. For instance, they came to an untimely and unfortunate rescue when Nak's neighbors helped her deliver her baby, which resulted misfortunately. On the other hand, small communities tend to leave their members very little privacy because everyone knows what the other neighbors are doing. Furthermore, it is not considered rude to pry into others' businesses although that business is personal and does not concern anyone else.

The architecture of traditional Thai house also enables connectivity between one another. In the past, Thai people usually settle down by the river for the convenience of transportation and food gathering, which in turn becomes a social meeting ground for human interaction. Moreover, the river acts as a path that links one home to all of the other homes. Houses in the past were built by the owners, and usually with the help of their neighbors. House constructing did not only build homes, but also built relationships and created strong bonds amongst neighbors. Houses in the past did not look as homogenous as the houses in the modern era.

In modern times houses are built by faceless and nameless construction workers from housing development companies that build as a job for money. In the past each house is unique in its own way and gives an impression that the people living in there are also unique. In other words, architecture gives characteristic to the people and indirectly encourages bonding in the communities.

Before Mak returns, the ghost of Nak scares people and causes many to move away. People are scared not because Nak tries to hurt anyone but purely because of the fact that she was supposed to be dead. The fear of Nak's neighbors and even Mak, later on in the movie, could be explained with Julia Kristeva's theory of Abjection.

Elizabeth Gross explained in her article *The Body of Signification* that

*“The abject is undecidedly inside and outside the body (like the skin of milk), dead and alive (like the corpse), [...] It is what disturbs identity, system, and order,*

*disrupting the social boundaries demanded by the symbolic. It respects no definite positions, or rules, boundaries, or socially imposed limits. [...] For Kristeva, the most horrifying example of waste is the corpse, which is almost universally surrounded by taboos and rituals to prevent 'Contamination' of the living. [...] The corpse is intolerable; it exists at the very borders of life. It shifts the border into the heart of life itself. The corpse signifies the super valence of the body, the body's recalcitrance to consciousness, reason or would." [90-92]<sup>6</sup>*

The neighbors fear Nak because they do not know where to place her. She is not alive, nor is she dead. Her existence has disrupted the order of life as they understand it. The neighbors choose to leave her Nak alone until they find out that Mak has returned and is living with the ghost in the house. Tolerating the existence of Nak is one thing, but to let another human being coexist with a ghost without warning him seems unthinkable to the neighbors.

Nak starts to haunt and kill people because she feels her rights have been violated. Nak thinks that it is her business if she wants to live with her husband because it does affect anyone else. Therefore, the neighbors's telling Mak the truth is deemed unacceptable by her. Nak believes that harm only comes to those who try to harm her first. As for the neighbors, they cast Nak out of their community the instant she is dead and she has not moved on since then. Nak remains a threat to the community and the people feel obligated to save Mak because they still count Mak is one of them. Nak suffers from the oppression of social conventions that do not allow living beings to coexist with ghosts. Furthermore, her family matters were made into a public affair.

In the end, Nak accepts that she can not be with Mak and has to move on. However, the measures the people take to make Nak realize could be seen as violent. First, the people burn down Nak's house and arrange for her body to be dug up so that they can cast spells on her.

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<sup>6</sup>Gross, Elizabeth. *The Body of Signification. Abjection, Melancholia, And Love: The Work of Julia Kristeva*. London and New York: Routledge, 1990.

However, it is not the physical violence that changes her mind. What finally persuades Nak to move on is Buddhism. One representation is the famous monk that overcomes her. Also, popular Thai Buddhism is represented by the conversations between Nak and Mak about being born together in the next life that help calm her down. The movie relies on religion to overcome supernatural beings because it is the normative belief of Thai society that ghosts fear monks. Nevertheless, there are two types of monks in the movie; the comic ones from the temple near Mak's house and the noble one from Bangkok who saved Mak's life. The comic monks are inefficient and poor-mannered. Most importantly they are afraid of ghosts. They rely on amulets and holy strings to guard them from the undead instead of trying to sensibly convince the ghost to accept her death. The venerable Somdej Wat Rakang<sup>7</sup>, on the contrary, has an authoritative appearance. He is well-mannered and more powerful than Nak and all of the monks of the local temple combined. His intimidating presence makes Nak understand what she already knows but refuses to admit; she must move on. Somdej Wat Rakang could be seen as the figure of state's authority that overcomes the rebellious Nak with ideologies that have governed Thai society for a long time. Nak is once part of that society and despite being a ghost now, she had already internalized that ideology as a Buddhist Thai woman so she knows she has to follow this conventional path.

These past conventions and attitudes that appear in the period of Nang Nak differ in many aspects when juxtaposed with the previous movies. It allows us to see our present when we compare it to the past. We see who actually wins and loses. Perhaps the final seen of Mak donned now in a monk's robe and looking sad is a foreshadowing of things to come in the future.

### **3.2.4 The Unseeable**

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<sup>7</sup> The Venerable Somdej Wat Rakang actually existed and is revered by Thais.

In the Thai horror movie, *Pen Chu Gub Phi*, aka the *Unseeable*, there are cultural aspects of modernization and tradition which can be observed. Wisit Sasanatieng's third work, *The Unseeable* is set in Bangkok during a period where the city of Bangkok has been quickly westernizing. Even though the time period is not explicitly mentioned, we can use knowledge of Thai history to see that these changes came about during the changes implemented around the reign of King Chulalongkorn. Another source says this occurred around Siam in the 1930s. In this time period, western culture is slowly becoming intertwined with Thai traditions. Western music is being played, women start to abandon their sarongs for western-style dresses with hats and gloves and it could be said that Bangkok at this time is in its transition from the old life styles to the era of modernity in terms of technology and western culture. We can see a contrast represented through the two main characters Nuanjun and Runjuan. Both women are in very similar situations but there are two major differences between them that make their predicaments turn out differently in the end. The two differences are their social class and their place of birth. Nuanjun is a working class woman who grows up outside of Bangkok while Runjuan is a daughter of a rich noble who has lived in the capital all her life. It could be interpreted that Nuanjun is the representation of old traditional values while Runjuan stands for the new era of modernity. Not only is their birthplace a determinant factor, but their classes also play a big part in giving characteristics to the traditional period and the modernizing period.

Nuanjun lives a very traditional working class woman life; falling in love, marrying, and becoming a housewife with children. Her ordinary but peaceful existence is disrupted when her husband leaves for Bangkok and never returns. Chonburi, Nuanjun's home, could be seen as a signifier of the traditional Thai world while Bangkok stands for the modern era. Therefore, Nuanjun's journey into Bangkok could be seen as her journey from the old ways of life into the westernized ways. The movie is set mostly in Bangkok, therefore, it could be interpreted that it wants to focus on how Thai people adjust and handle modernized ways of living. Runjuan is an upper-class woman who has lived in Bangkok all her life, she has gone through the processes of

westernization long before Nuanjun arrives. She wears skirts and dresses up, drinks tea, and is rumored to have been keeping a man in her house to satisfy her sexually. Runjuan's house is big, as houses of noble families usually are, but it is also full of strange things, starting with the owner. Runjuan is a beautiful and sophisticated lady but there is always something mysterious about her that Nuanjun could not understand. If Nuanjun stands for the old times, then Runjuan should be the representation of modernity that is still threatening and confusing to Nuanjun.

The two women face the same situation in four aspects; being a wife, longing for their missing husbands, discovering that their husband has been unfaithful, and finding out that they are both dead. However, the two women had different upbringings and their decisions reflect the mindset in which they have been raised. Both women are loving wives but Runjuan is said to be self-centered and demanding while Nuanjun is giving and fully devoted to taking care of her husband. It could be interpreted here that modern women tend to be more independent. They still want to get married and have family, but the focus of their attention is no longer the husband. Traditional Thai women, however, still construct their lives around their husband. Runjuan chooses to stay home and wait for her husband to return while Nuanjun decides to look for him even though she has no idea where he is.

On the one hand, it seems that upper-class modern women are more passive than lower class traditional women because they have to wait for their husband's return while lower class women could take charge just like Nang Nak. On the other hand, it could also be interpreted that Runjuan does not look for Chob, the husband, because she is confident that the man would eventually come back to her while Nuanjun fears that he may not return so she has to look for him. Runjuan is able to sit and wait for Chob to return because she is confident of her love for him and moreover, she has money. It is apparent that Runjuan occupies a higher position than Chob, financially, because traditionally, Thai women usually marry out to live in her husband's house and with his family. In her case, Chob is the one who moves in with her. This maybe

because she has a bigger and better house than her husband so it would be nonsensical to move out to live in a smaller house.

While Nuanjun is portrayed as a faithful and caring wife, Runjuan is rumored to have had a secret affair with another man. The man was kept inside the house after her husband had died and uses him to satiate her sexual desires. This view encourages the viewers to infer that Runjuan has an abnormal sexual appetite. Runjuan as a modern woman is not restrained in the convention of a woman having only one husband in her lifetime. Even though he is dead, by traditional convention she should never remarry. She is powerful enough to make a man stay with her and do what she tells him to do. However, modern women could still be criticized by their neighbors. It is apparent that when a woman has a sexual relationship with a man she is not married to, she has to keep it a secret because it is unacceptable to others, even though it is a known fact that her husband is dead. Men, on the other hand, have been known to have girlfriends or minor wives and do not have to bother to conceal the truth because it was a common convention in Thai society of the past.

When the two women find out that Chob has been unfaithful to them, they deal with the truth differently. Runjuan could not bear to be abandoned so she makes sure that her husband stays forever by killing him. Nuanjun, however, does not blame Chob at all, she chooses to believe that the other woman is holding her husband against his will. This implies that modern women are not subjected to be submissive to men anymore. They could choose not to accept the decision their husband makes for their marriage. They could take action while traditionally the internalized convention is that husbands must be respected. Thus, they believe the men without considering all the evidence and choose not to believe that they have been betrayed. Traditional women are dependent on their husband to provide them stability. Therefore, if Nuanjun admits that her husband has been unfaithful, then she would be lost and has nothing to hold on to because Chob is the core of her life. Furthermore, Runjuan has the power to kill her husband while Nuanjun could not do anything but kill herself in the end. This signifies that traditional

women have no authority over anything else other than her own body. At the end of the movie, it is shown that Runjuan has known all along that she is dead while Nuanjun could not accept that fact and keeps trying to relive her life by searching for her husband again and again.

This could be seen that modern women are more capable to cope with the cruel reality as opposed to traditional ones who refuse to see the situation as it is but keep looking back at the past. It seems that Runjuan is the representation of modernity, however, the house that she owns, which should also be the space of modernity, gives away a hint that Bangkok and Runjuan's life have not completely transformed into a modern one. Ghosts from different times in the past often appear around Nuanjun. She may not see them but she could feel their presence. The ghosts could be seen as the past, which is pushed away or suppressed in order for some to move forward. Somjit the housekeeper, and one of the ghosts, said that ghosts and spirits were real and that they live among humans. At first Nuanjun refuses to believe in the existence of ghosts. If ghosts are a personification of past suppression, then it could be inferred that Nuanjun does not believe that they are ghosts at first because she herself is still part of the old world. She does not see all of the ghosts because she has yet to leave her traditional life behind and step into the new era. Gradually, she starts to see and realized that she too has become a ghost in the modern world.

Furthermore, the world kept modernizing and those who could not catch up get left behind in the form of spirits. All of the ghosts in the house have to relive their past because they have failed to move past their unfinished business due to love, loss, betrayal, and other duties. Runjuan could not accept that her husband is dead by her own hands and that he would never come back to her. Nuanjun could not accept that she is dead and would never see her husband again. Chob wants to leave Runjuan, but she kills him so that he would have to be with her for good and he could not cope with the fact that he could not see his wife again so he has to dig his own body up every night trying to get away from Runjuan's house. Somjit perhaps knows better than the others but she is still stuck because of her duty as a servant.

The ghosts in the house who appear to haunt the neighborhood may not actually be real ghosts at all. They may stand for the attempts of those who fail to catch up with modernity to let people know that they still exist. The movie also shows the result of what would happen to those who refuse to go with the flow of modernity, in the case of Chob. He is sick of the busy Bangkok so he leaves for the countryside and makes a small traditional life for himself. However, he could not stay for long because he has to go back and deal with his unfinished business in Bangkok. His modernized wife could not stand the fact that he would rather live a modest life in Chonburi with a peasant woman than living an luxurious life with her in Bangkok. Those who want to leave and return to the old ways of life could not survive for long because modernity attempts to lose the past and move forward to the future.

It seems that the movie sends a message about modernity, using ghosts and spirits as its metaphor. Modernity is presented negatively, as a threatening and scary force that causes people to move on and abandon their pasts. Those who fail to move forward would get stuck as ghosts who have to relive their lives and could not go anywhere. This is why other characters keep telling Nuanjun to leave the house and never come back. The house that seems to be the space of the modern era at the beginning of the movie turns out to be just another deserted place that fails to evolve with time. In this movie, modernity is always evolving. Not only does it leave Nuanjun's traditional world of the past, in the end it also leaves Runjuan's seemingly westernized house as a house of haunted spirits.

In this movie we see the break from the traditional into the modern. The analysis of this film could be acknowledged as a transitional period of Thailand into the modern age. The good and the bad of the traditional as well as the modern can be seen in this film. Furthermore, as stated earlier, the ghosts in the film who appear to haunt the neighborhood may not actually be real ghosts at all. On a deeper level they may represent the failed attempts of those who tries to catch up with modernization and are now struggling to let people know they still exist.



This chapter concludes that through the investigation of the social and cultural changes reflected in Thai horror films, many examples reveal the fight between modernity and tradition that is taking place. This fight is not only the fight for the future, it is the also fight for the past to remain relevant. In *Nymph*, the tree spirit represented the forest and nature as a whole that is fighting against the urban civilization that is trying to destroy it. Modernization is not only destroying nature, but it is metaphorically destroying the people living in the urban areas too. Modernization is poisoning their thinking and clouding their judgment as exemplified by May cheating on her husband with her boss.

Movies such as *Buppah Rahtree* show that even though you may be gifted academically, you still may be socially alienated. In *Shutter* however, it is revealed that wanting to be socially accepted can lead you onto a dark path. Wanting to be socially accepted results in Ploy trying to get rid of Pim, her conjoined sister in the movie *Alone*. Even though it was a risky procedure, she wanted to get it done. She even steals her dead twin sister's identity in order to win a boy over. Perhaps being socially accepted works in your favor and sometimes it hurts your identity when you try to maintain a social aspect to please other people.

Thai culture can sometimes be portrayed more or less as a form of nostalgia. At the present time, Thailand is undergoing many developments and changes. These changes might cause anxiety and uncertainty within the minds and emotions of Thai people. Perhaps, this is why the older generation seems to have a sense of longing for the past when times were simpler, people were nicer, and there was more certainty in the way of life and the perseverance of Thai culture and values. Many Thai horror films seem to be about the struggles of the past versus the present. Portrayals of a changing Thai society and culture reflected in Thai horror films of the 21st century provide many examples and interpretations that can lead us to believe that the future is going in a different direction than the past. Furthermore, not all Thai people will agree that this new direction is the right way to go. This is further represented by the clashing characters in the films

## **Chapter IV**

### **Reflections of a Modernizing Thai Society in the 21st Century Thai Horror Films**

As Thailand enters the 21st century, Thai horror films continue to adapt and develop alongside it. Consequently, as Thailand modernizes and globalization takes place, the inherent problems come with it. Some of these problems are portrayed in Thai horror films of the twenty-first century. This chapter will focus on the growing concern of the negative aspects of Thai modernization portrayed in Thai horror films including technology, personal relationships, isolation, and overpopulation. It is important to note that not all of the effects of modernization are negative. On the positive side, advancements in modern medicine have increased the lifespan of the average human being over the last century. Unfortunately, this increased lifespan contributes to the problem of overpopulation.

Overpopulation occurs in conjunction with the limited resources available to humans and animals on Earth. There are limited natural resources such as food, water, and land to go around and at our current world rate of consumption, many countries will have shortages of jobs, food, and overall quality of life. Thailand itself is the 20th most populous country in the world.<sup>8</sup> The country also attracts many expatriates and foreign visitors because it is a tourist country, much like Spain and France. Out of the Asia and Pacific region, Thailand had the fourth highest number of international tourist arrivals with over 15 million in 2010, besting countries such as Australia, India, Japan, Korea, and Singapore.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The World Fact book. Country Comparison: Population [Online]. 2009. Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, Available from : <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2119rank.html> [2013, January]

<sup>9</sup> World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). International tourism – key to development, prosperity and well-being [Online] Available from : <http://mkt.unwto.org/sites/all/files/docpdf/unwtohighlights11enlr.pdf> [2013, February]

Thais, unlike other Southeast Asian countries were not colonized by the French, English, or any other European powers. In a sense the country was isolated due to its seclusion and remaining relatively untouched, culturally speaking. Thailand's geographic neighbors, Burma, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Malaysia, had a history of invasion and colonization in which the European powers imposed their religion, culture, and traditions upon the indigenous people. Although colonized countries still retain some aspects of its traditional culture, it can be argued that many aspects of life ultimately changed after being colonized. Whether it is a good or bad is up to debate. However, being taken from a traditional upbringing and being forced into a new way of life has never been easy, but colonization and war remain a part of Southeast Asian history.

Now that the world is rapidly becoming modernized and globalized, southeast Asia is a region of interest for expansion. During this time, Thais are being forced to modernize their lifestyle or be left behind. There will always be advocates for change for the sake of the future and advocates who side with older traditions, which value the rich culture and history that is uniquely Thai above all else. These traditional values are embedded in the hearts and minds of the older generation, but as the world turns and they gradually disappear into the past, it becomes more apparent that the future is in the hands of the new generations, and if the new generations do not have a true sense of those traditional values and their importance, then everything that being Thai once stood for will be lost. Many Thai horror films pit tradition versus modernity against one another as if they were enemies. However, in Thai society they more or less exists together as one.

It can sometimes be unfortunate that the future is sometimes valued greater than the past. In a case of a traditional rural child coming to Bangkok for study, she may find that she is not like her new peers in terms of thinking and attitude. It is during this time of transition that she becomes more like them to fit in, or perhaps remains quiet and becomes somewhat isolated. A side effect of isolation is loneliness or alienation. It is fair to assume that people prefer not to be

left behind or alienated. Therefore, many adolescents will give into peer pressure and be less likely to carry on all the traditional values they have been taught in order to survive the emotional and mental pressure of the modernizing world. This problem is not merely a material issue, but rather a cultural attitude in which the new generation adopts. Adolescents often jokingly use derogatory slang words like ‘baan nork’ (บ้านนอก) or ‘choey’ (เชย). Its quite interesting that many urban adolescent kids look down upon farmers, uneducated, or poor people, when it is a statistical fact at least 38% of Thai workers are still rural farmers with only modest income and lack formal education.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, even the children of farmers have very little interest of continuing in their parents footsteps, such as in the case of Malinee Khammon.<sup>11</sup> These stereotypical adolescents are portrayed in Thai horror movies and there is often an isolated character displaying the traits of a ‘baan nork’ or ‘choey’ in these films that is unable to conform with the conventions of modern society and is treated unfairly.

One of the proponents of modernizing Thai society is technology. The new generation arguably is the most technologically advance group of any of the past generations. Technology is similar to a modernizing Thai society in that, technology at its core is something that becomes outdated quickly. Every year there is something bigger and better for people to buy and get excited about. Items that were once greatly valued become nothing more than boring and undesirable. Cultural traditions in a sense can be represented by technology for the newer generation of kids. Newer is understood as better. Hence, modern attitudes may have more acceptance when it comes to the new generation. Older is perceived as boring, not as good, and undesirable. Consequently, long-held Thai traditional values become outdated and antiquated. There also

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<sup>10</sup> Roonaphai, Nareenat, Deputy Secretary General of the Office of Agricultural Economics. 2010. Quoted in Karen J. Coates, *Changing Seasons on the Thai Farm*. Global Post. [Online] 2010. Available from : <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/thailand/100415/farming-agriculture-decline> [2013, January]

<sup>11</sup> Fuller, Thomas. *Thai Youth Seek A Fortune Away From the Farm*. New York Times. [Online] 2012. Available from : <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/05/world/asia/thai-youth-seek-a-fortune-off-the-farm.html> [2013, January]

seems to be a different group of forward Thai generations that look past even modern Thai culture and prefer to adopt Korean, Japanese, or western culture instead. These particular kids do not like many aspects of Thai culture and prefer to practice something different, and in their minds, something more desirable.

Even though the youth are the new generation that will shape the future, they are not the only important age group. The middle-aged citizens of Thailand are caught in the center between unable to adjust to the new trends while the other portion is doing everything to still remain relevant. It is quite interesting to investigate the effects that Thai modernization has on its people not only in terms of lifestyle, but personal relationships of which many are reflected in Thai horror films of the 21st century.

In this chapter, there will be an investigation of these modern issues on Thai society and analyses of 21st century Thai horror films in order to yield social and cultural implications linked to various aspects of Thai modernization such as overpopulation, personal relationships, isolation, and technology as represented in the films.

#### **4.1 Technology Anxiety and Isolation**

*“ The history of the horror film is essentially a history of anxiety in the twentieth century.”* Paul Wells (2000)<sup>12</sup>

*Understanding Cultural Globalization*, by Paul Hopper [2007], provides insight to the histories of globalization. He introduces that globalizations are initiated in phases and categorize them as premodern (the period prior to 1500), modern (1500-1945), and contemporary (1945 onwards). The contemporary phase consists of global communication, media and technology,

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<sup>12</sup> Lee, Ji Eun. *Monsters in Contemporary Thai Horror Film: Image, Representation, and Meaning*. Doctoral dissertation, Department of Thai Studies, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, 2010.

global culture, national culture, cultural conflict, and cosmopolitanism. This first section will highlight the rise of technology in at least a few sectors. Some of the most widely used technologies today include personal computers and mobile communication devices. Both of these devices are able to access the internet and are used to connect people to one another in order to communicate without actually talking or physically seeing one another.

Many negative aspects of Thai modernization are portrayed in Thai horror films. One of these aspects is social isolation, which refers to a complete or near-complete lack of contact with society from members of a social species. The Oxford dictionary also states that isolation from family or friends may also contribute to alienation. It is most commonly involuntary, but can be self-imposed, or due to a historical lifelong isolation cycle that has not been broken. Social isolation can lead to staying home for days or weeks at a time and having no communication with anyone including family or friends. Oftentimes, when opportunities arise, they willfully avoid that contact. Social Isolation occurs mainly during early adulthood. During this time of development, a person may become more preoccupied with feelings and thoughts of their individuality that are not easy to share with other individuals. This can be a result from feelings of shame, guilt, or alienation during childhood experiences.<sup>13</sup>

Another contested topic among sociologists is the debate of whether technology such as mobile phones and internet exacerbates social isolation. Technology advancements and product shipments have been on the rise. Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2 observe mobile handset shipment data obtained from various sources, it can be seen that entering the 21st century yielded double digit year after year growth. Technology has been on the rise and has taken a foothold in our everyday lives now more than ever.

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<sup>13</sup> Newman, Barbara M.; Newman, Philip R. "Isolation" Development Through Life: Psychosocial Approach. Wadsworth. p. 469, 2011

Figure 4.1: Rise of Technology A (in thousands)

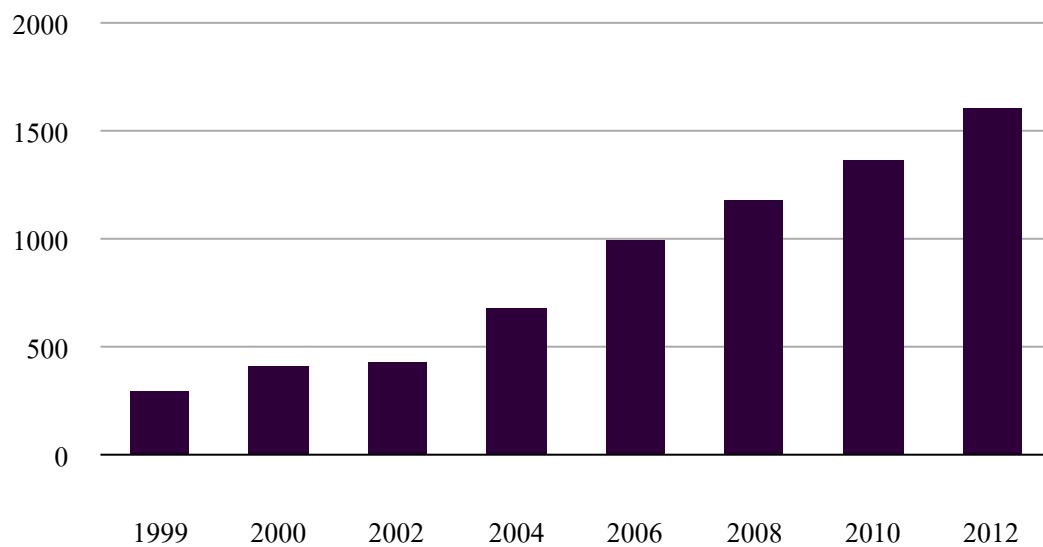


Figure 4.2: Rise of Technology B (in thousands)

Year	Global Mobile Handset Shipments (Units)
1999	283,000,000
2000	412,000,000
2002	423,000,000
2004	680,000,000
2006	991,000,000
2008	117,800,000
2010	1,360,000,000
2012	1,600,000,000

In 1999, global mobile handsets had shipments of 283 million units and enjoyed an increasing trend in sales and shipments year after year. In 2012 alone, the total shipments amounted to a staggering 1.6 billion units. The world's population as of 2012 is just above 7 billion. Mobile handsets, along with other mobile devices such as ipads have also gained popularity throughout the world. There has been double digit growth of these technology products as well. However, it is not only the hardware of the technology, but software as well that plays a role in social relations. Online social networks have played a tremendous role in affecting how people interact with one another. Social networks combined with mobile give people access to almost anyone, anytime, anywhere and since many carry these handsets in their pockets, it becomes the most convenient means for contact with the outside world.

In the past there was mail, phone booths, and email. Now there is facebook, Twitter, and Skype. Social media allows us to connect to each other and share information at all times. This can be interpreted as good or bad when it comes to the discussing of social interaction. Even though people can text over the internet with one another, it does not promote face to face contact. Without that physical contact, humans are socially isolating themselves. Although some see social media as a solution, other may see it as a growing problem. As evidence of Thailand's growing acceptance in social media, statistics gathered state that in the year 2009 to 2010, Thailand was the 2nd highest at 240% ranking only behind Brazil in terms of Facebook user growth in the world.<sup>14</sup>

#### **4.1.1 Lonely**

In the Thai horror movie 'Ngao', aka Lonely, there are some great examples of technology anxiety and isolation, and we see the other side of this form of social connection as

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<sup>14</sup> Russell, Jon. Thailand, Southeast Asia lead global Facebook growth. Asian Correspondent.[Online]. 2011. Available from : <http://asiancorrespondent.com/45532/thailand-southeast-asia-lead-facebook-growth/> [2013, February]



technology helps the main character and gradually starts to terrify her. This particular example is from the Thai horror film 4bia. It is actually a horror film comprised of four short films. The first of the short films 'Ngao' or Lonely portrays a female in her late twenties who is confined to her condo due to a leg brace. The only contact she seems to have with the outside world is through the internet and her Motorola Razr cellular phone. The setting actually portrays her as lonely and in seclusion as can be seen when she looks down from her balcony on the high-rise condominium. Furthermore, she stays alone and has to take care of herself with no friends or family coming to pay her a visit. It seems as though metropolitan Bangkok life can be one of such solitude even though the building must be full of hundreds of other people. The doors, walls, and windows seem to represent man-made structures people build to create physical as well as social walls that serves to protect us as well as confine us from society. When the electricity in her apartment is cut off, the internet is no longer working and her only means of social communication comes from her cell phone. Being confined to her room in her condominium keeps her isolated from the world. In a way it would seem as though this technology is there to help cure her loneliness.

However, at the pinnacle of her loneliness she starts to receive text messages from an anonymous sender. Despite the old notion that you should never talk to strangers, she is apparently very bored and lonely due to her isolation and she starts to communicate with him. She seems to know at first that she should not talk to him, but maybe she thinks its just texting. What could be the harm in that?

Technology connects us with people we want to connect with as well as to complete strangers. As they keep exchanging texts he mentions that he wants to see her again and that he wants to come over to her condo. She is shocked because she thought he was a stranger and did not know where she lived and becomes terrified. Once she realizes that this man could be dangerous, she attempts to stop communicating with him. She probably feels threatened because she texts back to him to stop. He keeps on sending her SMS text messages and she does not know

what to do. She decides to stop texting with everybody all together. Since the stranger is persistently trying to contact her she decides to put the ringer on silent. That is not enough and she attempts to place the cellular phone far from her. This portrays her as an individual who, despite not wanting to communicate with a stranger, still refused to completely disconnect herself from technology, until it is too late. She could have turned the phone off from the start instead of just halting her texting with him only, or silencing the ringer and putting it on vibrate mode.

Finally she manages to turn off her phone and in essence cuts herself off from the rest of the world. The peace she feels only lasts for a moment. Suddenly, the phone turns back on and starts ringing. This is a representation that no matter what she does, she can never truly disconnect from her technology. The ghost is the personification of technology and forces her into a position that does not allow her to escape its immense grasp. The ghost in this story eventually forces itself to her room and pushes her off the balcony. It is revealed that this is the ghost of the man who she was inadvertently involved in killing. The man was hit by the taxi the girl was riding in a few weeks ago. This taxi accident is the reason that contributed to her leg being in a brace and her confinement in the condo. The eyes of the dead man were left open staring at her and some Thai people believe that when this happens, the dead person's ghost or spirit will haunt you.

This particular ghost haunts her through a device of technology. In the end it portrays a Thai traditional belief of a dead man's open eyes staring at you with the true-life context of technology in that, once it has a strong connection, it is hard to separate oneself from it.

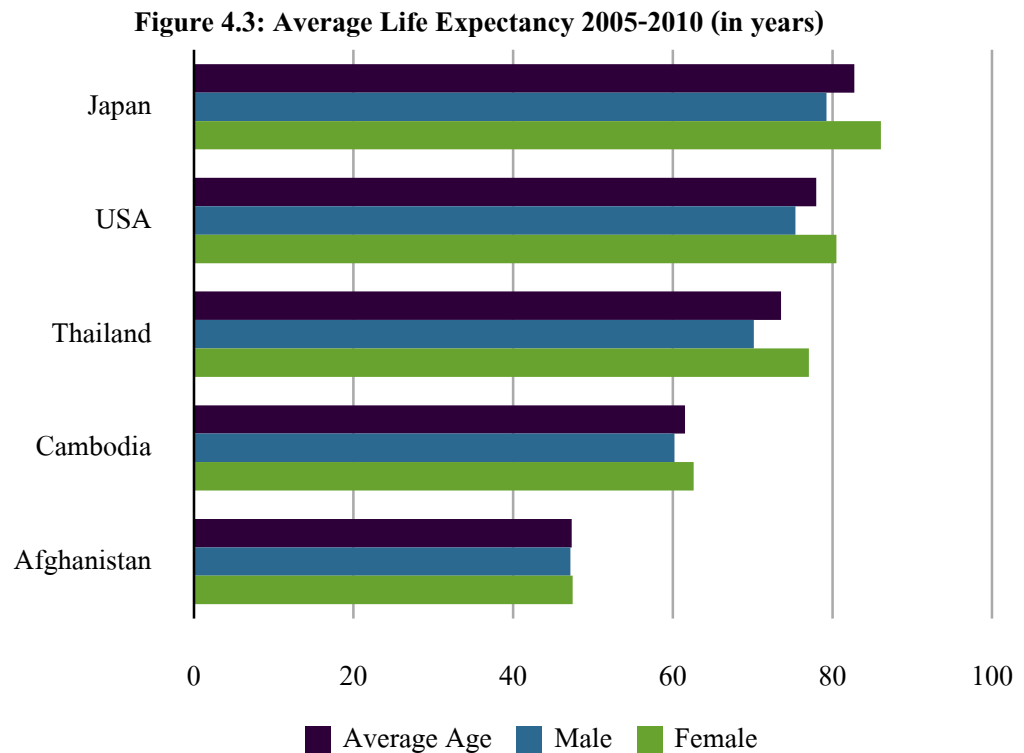
Hoang Trinh's Economic growth, social progress and happiness of man (a view from Asia), targets economics as a major player in possibly having adverse affects on culture. For example, development and growth are mainly expressed by satisfaction of higher-level consumption needs of a number of groups with high income in society, which means that economy, science, and technology are the decisive factors. In this sense elements in culture, such as traditional ways of life, ethics, literature, and the arts, are considered as "non-economic" and

are not contributing directly to development. Furthermore, things such as modern technology permeate in all aspects of human life as it changes life in fundamental ways and creates a kind of man having a profession, but is socially and culturally alienated, having no capability of being conscious of the existence of inner assets and of common development.

Value Conflicts in Thai Society by Suvanna Kriengkraipetch with collaboration of William Klausner and Godwin Chu gives evidence of Thailand's modernization in terms of technological developments. Some of these include roads, electrification, and telecommunications. However, this work notions that the government in particular has not paid sufficient attention to the cultural aspects of Thai society in dealing with modernization. There seems to be little or no realization that changing the economic foundation of Thai society would inevitably set in motion a wide range of value conflicts for which the people were not well prepared and to which they did not know how to adjust. "Responding to a host of new economic opportunities, many Thais are now adopting a set of values which is more self-centered and competitive, in contrast to the traditional values which express concern for other people and accentuate accommodation and community spirit [Suntharee Komin 1985]. Some questions that are posed include "Is it possible for Thais to live a modern life and, at the same time, maintain their cultural identity?" and "Does the ideological confusion contribute to a feeling of alienation initially in urban areas perhaps, but possibly spreading to the rural countryside later?"

Technology is a main driver of modernization, but its benefits are not without its shortcomings. A loss of identity may occur or change because of this rapid pace adjustment. Furthermore, not all people will understand how to adjust or want to. The traditional values represented by the older generations, and the new ideas and identity formed in the new generations are constantly clashing. This is because trends always readily emerge year by year and the willingness of modern Thai society to adopt to the newer and better leaves the older generation stuck in the past. With the older generations living longer, these traditional values embedded in them will remain in society for a while longer too. Now that people are living longer

there are more people living in the same space in the same time using the same resources. This brings us to another negative phenomenon of modernization, which is overpopulation.



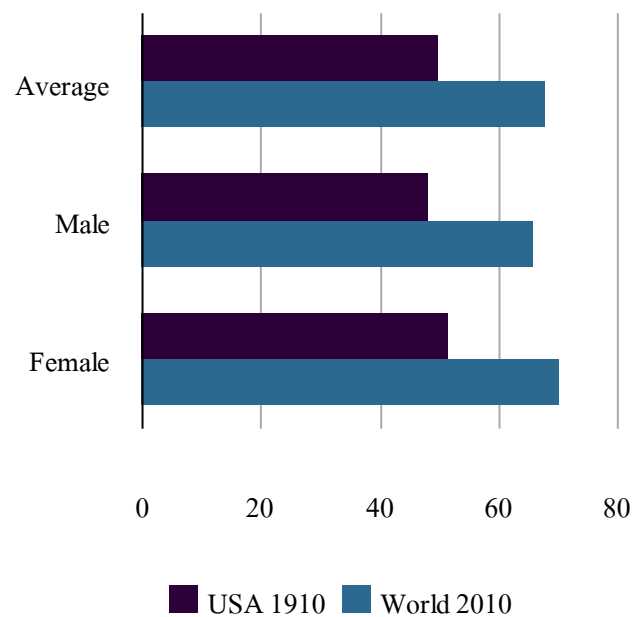
## 4.2 Overpopulation

With advancements in medicine and technology it is evident that humans are living well into old age longer than their ancestors. Figure 4.3 below shows the average life expectancy of 5 out of 198 countries for the years 2005-2010<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2011). World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision, Highlights and Advance Tables. Working Paper No. ESA/P/WP.220. [Online] Available from : [http://esa.un.org/wpp/Documentation/pdf/WPP2010\\_Highlights.pdf](http://esa.un.org/wpp/Documentation/pdf/WPP2010_Highlights.pdf)

Additionally, Figure 4.4 reveals that in the year 1910, the United States had a life expectancy average of 50.1 years.<sup>16</sup> By 2010 it had jumped to 77.97 years. That is an increase of almost 28 years in life expectancy due to improvements in the environmental and health sectors such as clean drinking water, and modern medicine. Longer life expectancy is great in terms of personal benefit. It would give us more time which could be spent with loved ones, trying a new career, or traveling the world. However, one of modernization's biggest problems is overpopulation, which is due in part to longer life expectancy. The chart below shows the number of people on Earth during various periods of time.

**Figure 4.4: Average age of population A 1910 vs 2010 (in years)**



<sup>16</sup> Noymer, Andrew. Life Expectancy in the USA 1900-1998. Department of Demography, UC Berkeley. [Online]. Available from : <http://demog.berkeley.edu/~andrew/1918/figure2.html> [2013, January]

**Figure 4.5: Average age of population B 1910 vs 2010 (in years)**

Year	Male	Female	Average
USA in 1910	48.4	51.8	50.1
World in 2010	65.71	70.14	67.88

In a 2010 census of over 200 countries, Thailand ranks 20th in population, which is greater than 90% of all countries in the world including developed nations such as the United Kingdom, France, South Korea, Spain, Canada, and Australia. In 1989 Thailand's population was 55.2 million according to the CIA World Factbook. In 2010 the population was 65.4 million, but despite official figures, the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs suggests that if unregistered individuals were added to the final total, Thailand's population in 2012 would be closer to 70 million.

With the world population on the rise, humans have to worry about sustainability of food, jobs, and the environment. Since there are limited natural resources as well as jobs, there will always be competition to secure ones fair share of the pie. In a relatively poor country, there will be fight for food and water. In a more modern country there is a fight for a decent job and fair wage to improve their lifestyle. Some of these overpopulation problems can be found in Thai horror films such as Ladda Land.

Ladda Land is a film with numerous examples of modern social problems. This section will analyze and discuss in detail the various social problems represented. The family in this film consists of four members: The father, the mother, the daughter, and the son. The father has worked at an air conditioning factory for approximately 20 years. He has recently found new work in sales with a company that has paid him well over the last few months. The wife has been a secretary, but now is a stay-at-home mother. The daughter is a teenage student who has been

living with her grandmother and now is forced back to live with her family in a new city due to the move to Chiang Mai the father wants to make. The son is a carefree child that has been well cared for.

### **4.3 Unemployment**

Upon researching Thai unemployment online, it may be surprising to see that Thailand is one of the worlds lowest unemployment rates. This perhaps infers that the Thai economy is in better shape than the United States, and other developed countries. Unfortunately, the way unemployment is measured, is based on the current skilled labor force actively searching for a job in the labor market and cannot find one. In Thailand things are run differently. Labor like other economic factors will follow the law of supply and demand when not hindered by regulation. Thailand has an informal economy and few government rules which inhibit the market from working. If a person wants to find work in Thailand, it is quite easy. Many people even switch jobs often because they are bored or want to try something new. Due to the inherent nature of this economy, it seems there is low unemployment. There are many people who can open a food stand, get part time work, or even go back to their family's rural provinces to help out. Even though labor is not really needed, this surplus is soaked up by all the part time jobs of economic downturn. However, the problem of underemployment, unpaid wages, and low wages is still a concern. This is perhaps why the facts make it appear as though Thailand has a really low unemployment rate. Alternatively, in the skilled market that requires experience, a college degree, and connections, the game is different. Furthermore, the race to the top of securing a high paying and respectable job is apparent in developed as well as modernizing countries such as Thailand. One of the movies that deals with the the negative aspects of losing a job is Ladda Land.

### 4.3.1 Ladda Land

Jobs is one of the major issues in this movie. The father has provided for the family with modest means, but unfortunately it is not enough to provide them with the perceived optimal life society places on its members. The problem with this is the expectation of what a comfortable and well-provided life means. For this particular Thai family, the father feels that as the leader of the household, he is not performing particularly well and he feels that some changes need to be made. With his current income, he is not able to provide the kind of lifestyle he feels his family deserves. There is also pressure to perform better from his mother-in-law who has never liked him in the first place. This is due to him impregnating her daughter before they were ready and she felt as though her daughter could have found a better man or a more suitable provider. This is one reason why she takes in the granddaughter and raises her, She insists that she could do a better job than her son-in-law.

Unfortunately, this means that the father had to find a job with a better wage, so he goes into sales of another company and seems to be making exceptionally more money. After only a few months he quickly uses that money to put a down payment on a new house in Chiang Mai. He has rushed into this purchase because he really wants to get his family on what he thinks is the right track, but just as with the birth of his daughter, the action happened way too prematurely. The new job in sales proves to be a scam and he is left without pay and is forced to quickly find another job so that he could make the mortgage payments on his new home.

Despite his experience, it is his age that was a limiting factor in acquiring a second job. He then resorts to working at a convenience store similar to a family mart. When he loses his job and starts working here, he keeps it all a secret from his wife and children. His wife even offers to help out with the family income by becoming a secretary again. However, the father wants to carry this burden on his own and is also jealous of his wife's former boss. He felt that her boss was possibly crossing some sort of professional line of relationship and does not want to lose his



wife, children, or house. The father even resorts to stealing money from his daughter's savings accounts because he is starting to get behind on the house payments. This shows that even though these three jobs are different, none of them present him with the real solution. The first job was steady for many years, but it was not enough for him to put a down payment on a new house for his family. His second job in sales provided him with lots of money upfront, which was enough for him to put a down payment on a house, but the shady and corrupt company proved to be a scam. This left the father and other employees out of a job. The third job at the convenient store was more of a last resort to show that he is not willing to just stay home, do nothing, and lose everything.

The income from this job however, is not enough therefore, is still not a solution to the problem. There are jobs and opportunities out there, but how many jobs will give you the opportunity to improve your lifestyle. In other words, not just get by, but enable you to buy a home instead of renting, purchasing expensive new electronics and furniture for the family, or having your spouse stay at home instead of working? There are many jobs, but they are not high paying enough. The fact of not having enough money pays tribute to another fundamental problem in the movie.

#### **4.4 Overconsumption**

In today's modern world, there are many options in which to pay for products and services. A problem around the world and featured in this movie is credit. Credit is much more dangerous than cash in that, cash limits your ability to buy, and credit artificially extends that limit. Credit is your perceived ability to repay in the future. The thing about the future is that it is not always predictable. This is why people go to college to get degrees. The graduates use them to get relatively stable jobs and higher wages than people who do not have degrees. Nevertheless, whether one has a degree or not, it is always advisable to attempt to live within ones means.

Living by this creed will enable some people to avoid the disastrous problems many individuals and even national governments are facing.

In this movie, the main character does exactly the opposite. He does not live within his means, or rather under sustainable means. He does make quite a lot of money for a short period of time, but unfortunately it is not sustainable and he has already committed a big portion of his unearned income to pay off the debt and interest for the items he purchased on credit. Some of these examples include a flat screen television, furniture, and the mortgage. Other examples include monthly cell phone bills for the daughter's Blackberry, which is relatively minor but is still a factor.

Overspending is a major problem in this movie. If the main character stayed within his means then he would not have had the anxieties of finding new ways to pay off his debt, finding a new job, having his wife go back to work, having his daughter see him working at a convenience store, getting scammed by a corrupt company, etc. All of these mistakes were led on by another emotion, which was the father's pride and fear of being a failure as a provider, a father, and husband.

Overconsumption can also extend to mean that a person wants to much. That they are not stopping at the point of sufficiency, but rather decide to consume more than they need, or need more than necessary. In the film *Nymph*, May's boss is engaged to be married. However, he uses his position of power to entice his secretary into an affair. In a way this can be viewed as overconsumption. He is consuming more than he should, and the consequences are dire when he loses May. In the scene when May breaks up with him, he expresses his displeasure. This shows the fact that he has been accustomed to overconsumption. May breaking up with him and keeping quiet about the affair should have balanced out, and perhaps both of the parties' other lovers would have never found out. He, however, does not want this and ends up canceling the marriage while losing May in the meantime.

May is definitely not a perfect character in the movie, as she is also carrying on with an affair with her boss. Instead of trying to work it out with her husband, she decides to obtain her pleasure and happiness from someone else. She and her husband become strangers in their own home and show little signs of love and affection.

There always seem to be characters in Thai horror films that want or need more than they should. When they attempt to get it something always seems to go awry. Perhaps this can be taken as a lesson to teach people that more is not always better. The fates of over-consuming characters include Ake, which cheats on Buppah and gets his legs sawed off. In Nymph, Nop leaves May for a tree spirit because she wanted more than Nop was giving her.

The idea of enough or sufficient is a well-known concept in Thailand. The Thai king is well known for his philosophy of a sufficiency economy. This philosophy notions the middle path as an overriding principle for appropriate conduct by people at all levels. If everyone can follow this path, no one will live too extravagantly or too thriftily. In other words, this philosophy encourages people to live a lifestyle in which they only consume what they need.<sup>17</sup>

#### **4.5 Lack of Self-esteem**

In today's global world, modernization for some involves doing things that go against the grain of basic human values, seeking relationships without true commitment or responsibility, and deriving momentary pleasure without thinking of the long term effects. Some the causes come from peer pressure, lack of self esteem, loss of values, and limitless desires.

If one loses their dignity or self-respect, one may suffer and become frustrated, feel guilty, and fall further in self-esteem. Self-esteem is a term in psychology to reflect a person's overall evaluation or appraisal of his or her own worth. Self-esteem encompasses beliefs (for

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<sup>17</sup> Boonkam, Somsak. The Sufficiency Economy: a Thai Solution to Economic Sustainability. Presidio Economics. [Online]. Available from : <http://www.triplepundit.com/2011/05/sufficiency-economy-thai-solution-economic-sustainability/> [2013, January]

example, “I am competent”, “I am worthy”) and emotions such as triumph, despair, pride and shame. Self-esteem is how one feels about what one thinks about oneself. For example, if one views himself as worthy, then one might have high self-esteem because worthiness is a good feeling.

Thee, the main character in *Ladda Land*, could be said to have low self-esteem. He viewed himself as unworthy of being a good provider, husband, and father. As a failed provider, he is unable to get out of the life of just renting an apartment. He could not afford to move into a home that could comfortably house his wife and two children. This is one reason that forces him into taking action of finding a new job. He believes that as a failed husband, he has not provided his wife with all the things he thinks she deserves. She even has to get a job as a secretary to help supplement the income of the household and Thee does not think that it should be this way.

As a failed father, he feels that ever since he impregnated his wife, he has been unable to secure a good life for his daughter. His mother-in-law even went to the liberty of taking her grandchild in and providing for her. During this time, the father had been blessed with his second child. He seems to be providing sufficiently for his wife and newborn son during this time. As for his daughter, things would not be perfect unless she returned to the nuclear family. Shortly after their move to Chiang Mai, he and his daughter get into an argument. His daughter then overlooks his authority and complains directly to her grandmother.

Her grandmother subsequently allows her to leave and stay with her friends at their house instead of with her own family. This brings his self-esteem even lower and he knows that he is failing to keep his family together. He tried to cover up his failure, but ultimately can not keep his family together in the house because everything is falling apart and the daughter, wife, and son all feel that their previous situation back in Bangkok is better than it is in Ladda Land, Chiang Mai. The father however, let his fears of failing get the best of him and puts himself and his feelings over the family member’s feelings. This is his undoing and why he will remain with low self-esteem and hurts his personal relationships with the ones closest to him.

#### 4.6 Personal Relationships

All three of the above problems create issues with the personal relationship between family members. Continuing with *Ladda Land*, Thee, the father has low self-esteem, but has to be the leader of the family, he tries to find quick and temporary fixes to long withstanding problems that are shown to fail in the end. Examples of problems between characters include the husband and wife. They fight over her decision to return to working, on budget and overspending, and on moving back to Bangkok.

The father and daughter have a fight over trust and honesty. Even though he commands the presence of a father figure, he is the one who is not trustworthy as he steals money from his daughter's savings account without her knowledge or consent. He never listens to her and he seems to think that adequately providing for her now would make her forgive his neglect of her in the past, which is not the case.

He has issues with his mother-in-law as stated before. This is due to his lack of the ability to provide for the family. He even imagines killing his wife with a gun over an argument. He drags his daughter into a haunted house that has just reported a murder, but not before driving dangerously fast behind the wheel with his daughter's safety at stake. Upon forcing her in this house and refusing to let her leave in order to prove a point, she ends up accidentally cutting herself with a piece of shattered glass. As for his son, the father imagines a ghost is hiding in the closet and shoots at it with his gun. He later finds out that it is his son that he apparently shot. He cannot live with himself and selfishly takes his own life. Closely dealing with the issue of personal relationships is the issue of domestic violence, which is portrayed by the various neighbors.

The relationship of May and Nop in the movie *Nymph* is an example of how both partners learn to deal with the world and with each other. May is an office worker and secretary who has an affair with her boss despite being married to Nop. May's boss is engaged, but still has

an affair with his secretary. Nop has a sexual encounter with a tree spirit. It is quite a dysfunctional pairing of relationships.

In the film *Alone*, Ploy and Pim are two conjoined sisters who have to learn to live with one another. However, when a boy comes into the picture and chooses Pim over Ploy, Ploy becomes jealous and hostile. The relationship between the sisters is affected and Pim dies from Ploy's actions. Ploy later disguises herself as Pim and attempts to pose as Ploy in order to win the affection of the boy and carry on a lie. In *Shutter*, Thun two main relationships are centered around a girl he used to date named Nade, and his group of friends from university. He never fully connects with Nade, although they hang out and have sex, he does not seem to be fully engaged with her. When they are alone, he seems to have a good time with her and she obviously enjoys his company. However, when his friends are around, he tries to avoid her and plays down the relationship. During the pivotal gang-rape scene, he shows that his relationship is skewed towards pleasing his friends, even more so than helping an innocent female victim who was also his friend. This portrays that men sometimes choose their male friends' approval over traditional values of right versus wrong.

Another example of choosing male friends is Ake in the movie *Buppah Rahtree*. In fact, Ake hooks up with Buppah just to win a bet between his friends that he could score a chance in bed with her. This relationship that Buppah shares with him is a sham. It is filled with lies and deceit. He gets her pregnant and seems only to be interested in his future and his well-being. This is proved when he convinces her to get an abortion. He is not thinking about the future of his baby or of her health, but rather how these two people would be a hindrance to his future. Buppah dies from abortion complications and the ghost of Buppah and the ghost of Ake continue a relationship. This relationship is also broken once again, when the Ake the ghost, has sexual relations with a female noodle vendor down the street.

There are many types of personal relationships on display in Thai horror films. However, most of these films seem to reveal the negative side of people. Characters are often portrayed as

tragically flawed and unable to commit to one person. In the film *Dorm* Vichien's father brings a woman home who is not his mother. In *Buppah Rahtree* Ake has a relationship with multiple partners. In *Nymph*, all three of the main characters have sexual relationships with someone other than their partner. In *Shutter*, Thun does not stop his friends from raping his girlfriend, and he tries to forget it and move onto another girlfriend. In *The Unseeable*, a man has a woman in both Chonburi and Bangkok. All of these relationships have their intricacies but reveal how complex and unsatisfying modern personal relationships can be as portrayed in the films.

#### 4.7 Domestic Violence

In July of 2012, the issue of domestic violence flooded the Thai news the Nation. The story grabbing the headlines was of a woman killing her grandson over an argument of 500 baht.<sup>18</sup> She confessed to killing the Bangkok schoolboy and said that she struck him on the head while he was sleeping. This tragic death of a 13 year old boy in a dysfunctional family is just one example of the growing history of domestic violence starting to become public.

On television and the internet, repeated scenes of violence and sexual assault in soap operas and the like, can have a negative influence on the viewers, many of which are children. Furthermore, seeing this occur often on TV gives the children an impression that this is normal and occurs everyday life, which they tend to copy in their own lives. In Thailand, domestic violence is not often addressed publicly due to the perceived and actual embarrassment they will receive by sharing private family matters. Even if some neighbors witness something, they do not report it because the Thai way is not to meddle in the affairs of others. It is not deemed to be their business. From rural town to even Thai legislators, violence occurs everywhere. In the case of government protesters, many have been known to resort to violence instead of talking it out. This

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<sup>18</sup> Editorial. [Time to Open the Door on Domestic Abuse in Thailand](http://www.nationmultimedia.com/opinion/Time-to-open-the-door-on-domestic-abuse-in-Thailand-30186653.html). *The Nation*. [Online]. 2012. Available from : <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/opinion/Time-to-open-the-door-on-domestic-abuse-in-Thailand-30186653.html>[2013, January]

violence includes burning of buildings and killings of people which are very much in the public and global eye.

Thee from *Ladda Land* is another great example of the portrayal of domestic violence in Thai horror film. Thee manages to hurt everyone near him, including himself. During a scene in the movie, Thee drags his daughter into a haunted house and cuts her hand with a piece of glass. There is a scene where he imagines shooting his wife in cold blood because of his jealousy towards his wife's former boss. During the climax of the movie he shoots his son with his gun as he aims it towards the closet. When it is revealed that he shot his own son, he turns the weapon onto himself and commits suicide. Thee's neighbor also beats his wife and children which is another example of domestic violence. There is also a scene early in the movie where a Burmese maid's corpse was stuffed in a refrigerator.

#### **4.8 Murder/ Suicide**

Murders and/or suicides are commonplace in western horror films as well as Thai horror films. These acts often set the stage for the rest of the movie. Examples of murder and suicide in Thai horror film include Ploy's killing of Pim and attempted killing of her boyfriend in *Alone*. Thun in *Shutter* kills his ex-girlfriend emotionally as well as literally crashing into her with his car. *Buppah Ratre* and *Nang Nak* both have their main characters die from pregnancy complications. In the movie *Dorm*, Vichien drowns in the pool by himself. In *The Unseeable* the character of Runjuan murders her lover because she does not want him to return to his other lover who happens to be pregnant with his son.

It is interesting to note that in *Ladda Land*, although many people die, none of the deaths comes directly from the ghost. People are the only ones that actually hurt each other and it is illustrated in this film. The examples that can be witnessed in this film are shown by a Burmese woman being trapped to death in a refrigerator, the main character Thee shooting his son, and



then committing suicide himself, and the neighbor's father murders his family and also commits suicide himself.

Murders in Thailand and around the world are not uncommon in the modern society. In 2012 there was news of teachers being targeted and killed in their schools, during the day, in front of their students, with assault weapons. The attacks on school teachers by Muslim insurgents in southern Thailand have escalated. The problems in the south of Thailand have been well documented and continue to persist. It is not uncommon to hear of assassinations by car bombs or homemade grenades in that region. Over 157 teachers have been murdered. Most of the victims were Buddhist.

Teachers along the Thai-Malaysian border areas have asked for security cameras to be installed at their school and demand increased hazard pay. The Post reported that teachers get monthly bonuses between \$82 and \$115 for working in the south, with the families of the murdered teachers eligible for death benefits of \$32,600.<sup>19</sup>

A famous homicide case in 2012 involved Vorayuth Yoovidya, a grandson of late Red Bull founder Chaleo Yoovidhaya was found to be guilty of striking and killing a policeman in his Ferrari.<sup>20</sup> It was found that he continued to drive away to flee the scene and dragged the officer's body down a Bangkok street in a hit-and-run accident. Not only did a police officer trace the trail to their gated neighborhood, but a house worker lied and insisted that he was the one driving the vehicle. It shows the power and control of the rich over the poor as well as the protection rich and privileged people receive in Thai society.

A lower ranking police officer assigned with the case, went to investigate and brought the suspect in. This officer was immediately suspended by Lt. Gen. Comronwit Toopgrajank for trying to cover up the crime by turning in a bogus suspect. Officer Comronwit took charge of the

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<sup>19</sup> McDonald, Mark. Teachers being Targeted and Murdered in Thailand. *New York Times*. [Online]. 2012. Available from : <http://rendezvous.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/12/16/teachers-being-targeted-and-murdered-in-thailand/> [2013, January]

<sup>20</sup> National Post. Red Bull heir pays \$97,000 to family of man he is alleged to have killed with a \$1M Ferrari. *Associated Press*. [Online]. 2012. Available from : <http://news.nationalpost.com/2012/09/26/red> [2013, January]

investigation and traced the oil streaks straight to the mansion of the Red Bull creator. They found the million dollar Ferrari with the busted windshield and took the correct suspect in.

Vorayuth, the grandson, was charged with death by reckless driving and escaping an arrest by police, but was released on a 500,000 bath (\$15,900) bail. His family is the 4th richest in Thailand as rated by Forbes magazine with an estimated net worth of \$5.4 billion. Thai police often fear powerful and influential people, and oftentimes allow them to break the law. This is not referenced, but it is not uncommon for those in the know. In the end, the Red Bull heir paid \$97,000 to the family of the man he killed while driving his \$1MM Ferrari. After a few months the newspapers stop publishing and the story gets washed away in the public eye. This is very common in Thailand.

In terms of suicides in Thailand, The Thai Health Ministry reports that suicide rates are climbing. Chiang Rai Times reported that Deputy Director-General of the Mental Health Department, Dr. Tavee Tangseree concluded that the suicide rate has been climbing constantly, from 5.98 of 100,000 population to 6.03 of 100,000 population, which is equivalent to 3,873 persons in 2011. Dr. Tavee stated that the main cause of suicide in Thailand has been depression caused by natural disaster, economic, and political crises that they are unable to cope with.

According to this study, the biggest number of suicides came from those aged between 20-30 years, followed by the elderly and the youth of 15-19 years of age.<sup>21</sup> Dr. Tavee added that he is most worried about the teen population as their rate of suicide has risen the most, with an average of 170 killing themselves successfully during 2007 and 2011.

This chapter included many examples of social issues found in Thai horror films that can be linked with real world contexts. It could be said that Thai horror films reflect lingering social problems Thai society faces as a whole. Examples such as in the horror movie *Ladda Land* portray the anxieties of a modern Thai family which struggles to improve their lifestyle. There is

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<sup>21</sup> Chiangrai Times. [Health Ministry Reports Thai suicide Rate Climbing](http://www.chiangraitimes.com/news/10746.html). *Chiangrai Times* [Online]. 2012. Available from : <http://www.chiangraitimes.com/news/10746.html> [2013, January]

little doubt that the adversities presented in this film are heavy issues that a modernizing society faces. When the movie is not frightening people with sudden appearances of ghosts, they are concentrating on a plot that reveals many real world problems people are facing and that is quite horrific in itself.

The Thai horror films explored in this chapter reveal how technology is changing the way people communicate and interact. Furthermore, this affects their personal relationships. People are more isolated, and thus may become stressed and feel the affects of anxiety among other disorders. Other negative aspects of modernization covered in this chapter include overpopulation which occurs partly because people are living longer, but also because people are moving into the city for jobs and a chance for a better life and better opportunities. This creates crowdedness and as people move into condos, they become more isolated. Due to migration of people into the city there is higher unemployment due to the fierce competition to try and secure a good job.

Due to the limitation of a thesis, this chapter was unable to cover all of the social problems revealed in every Thai horror film of the 21st century. However, there are other Thai horror movies that further expose negative effects of a modernizing society. For instance, Buppah Rahtree contains social issues such as abortion, incest, and violence that is not covered in the study. Additionally, the film *Nymph* adds the discussion of environmental degradation, deforestation, and sexual discrimination in the workplace through allegory. The Thai horror film *Alone* contains themes of identity theft, as well as discrimination of peers.

The investigation of these modern issues on Thai society and analyses of 21st century Thai horror films in yields social and cultural implications linked to various aspects of Thai modernization such as overpopulation, personal relationships, isolation, and technology as represented in the films.

## Chapter V

### Conclusion

This particular study was conducted to analyze the various reflections of a modernizing Thai society as portrayed in the twenty-first century Thai horror films. The secondary objective aimed to investigate Thai social and cultural changes as reflected in these films.

This thesis provided a small foundation and basic understanding of Thai horror films by discussing the common characteristics found in most Thai horror films; romance and tragedy, melodrama, sexual roles, Buddhism and karma, and the supernatural. Through the nine films, most of these characteristics were apparent and accounted for which is not to say that other characteristics are not prevalent. However, this research yields the results that the characteristics discussed are found the most often in the movies researched. Further evidence can be found in the works of Ji Eun Lee, a PhD student who also discusses many of these characteristics in the second chapter of her dissertation.<sup>22</sup>

The final decision in the scope of the study limited the number of films to these nine; *Nang Nak*, *Buppah Rahtree*, *Shutter*, *Dorm*, *The Unseeable*, *Alone*, *4bia*, *Nymph*, and *Ladda Land*. The films chosen to represent the research were made on the basis of trying to choose different directors and released in different years, in order to diversify the content and direction of the films from being one particular style or produced in the same relative time period. This study was able to accomplish that, with only two exceptions. These two exceptions had to be made because in 2006, there were two great examples from different directors and they both offered great insight. The other exception was created by the same team of two directors, Bangjong Pisanthanakun and Parkpoom Wongpoom. The films *Shutter*, and *Alone* were produced in

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<sup>22</sup> Lee, Ji Eun. Monsters in Contemporary Thai Horror Film: Image, Representation, and Meaning. Doctoral dissertation, Department of Thai Studies, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, 2010.

different years but by the same team. The films also offered great examples and are therefore included in this study.

Besides the observation and close study of the various aspects of the films chosen, research and reading of academic literature dealing with the subjects of Thai identity, culture, globalization. These various academic works give the researcher a deeper understanding into the background necessary to analyze the Thai horror films. Further analyses of these films has yielded social and cultural implications which are linked with various aspects of Thai modernization such as overpopulation, personal relationships, isolation, and increasing role of technology as represented in these films.

Thai horror films of the twenty-first century continue to adapt and develop alongside a modernizing Thailand. Among these developments are the recurring themes of anxiety and uncertainty of Thai people due to the rapid pace of modernization. Many examples of these negative aspects are poignantly reflected in these films which have been explored throughout the thesis. Tudor states that “Films and society have a more or less mutually reflective relationship; that film is seen as a reflection of the dominant beliefs and values of its society.”<sup>23</sup> If this is to be believed, then perhaps a close observation of these Thai horror films yields some truth about Thai society and culture.

If Tudor’s quote is not to be believed, does that mean that films do not reflect beliefs and values of its society? This strangely seems rather hard to believe, because even though movies are sometimes the stories of fictional people, or sometimes based on true events, they always come from the mind of a real person. Every person is a part of society to an extent, perhaps as an active social member promoting the current status quo or fighting for change, or even as a social outcast. Regardless of where an individual stands, they must recognize the entity of society, whether they are thriving in it, or alienated by it. Therefore, because society forms the largest group of people that share beliefs and common values with one another, they are ultimately the dominant group.

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<sup>25</sup> Tudor, Andrew. *Image and Influence: Studies in the Sociology of Film*. London, UK : George Allen & Unwin, 1974

Quoting Stuart Hall in *The Work of Representation*, “To say that two people belong to the same culture is to say that they interpret the world in roughly the same ways and can express themselves, their thoughts and feelings about the world, in broadly similar ways.” Thus culture depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is happening around them, and ‘making sense’ of the world.

Audiences do not necessarily go to the theatre to watch a movie about themselves, they go to the movies for entertainment, to escape from the mundane everyday routine. In this sense, most movies cannot be about real life, or it will fall under the category of reality or documentary. As far as Thai horror movies are concerned, yes they are fictional. However, the characters and the situations in the movie fit in the context of that movie. In other words, everything must fit together and the audience must agree to it, whether it contains talking cartoons in an animation or Thai ghosts coming back to terrorize and take revenge on the living.

James Cameron, the director of the two highest grossing films of all time *Avatar*, and *Titanic*, talks about a concept known as the uncanny valley. He notions that the characters in a film have to be relatable to the audience as emotional creatures. It doesn’t matter if they are nine-foot tall blue creatures running through the forest. What matters is that they can make a connection with the audience because the characters react similarly to how a human would. In the case of this study, the characters and the situation reveal something about Thai society and culture because the audience accepts it. If they are unwilling to accept it, then they cannot bare to watch the movie, or will finish the movie without feeling emotions and learning absolutely nothing. For the ones that watch a movie and feel happy, scared, sad, or experience any emotional connection, it shows that they believed in the situation or the character’s emotions. They might not always like it, but they accept it for what it is.

This study reveals an insight that film is ultimately art. Like all forms of art, it is open to interpretation. Art evokes emotion, and oftentimes teaches us something about life and reveals something about ourselves. Through this research’s interpretation, it would seem that perhaps

Thai horror films are warning us that moving forward without regard for our traditional values may ultimately lead us down a path that causes anxiety and uncertainty. On a simple level, maybe these films are reminding Thais to be kind and respectful to one another. Some may argue that Thai horror films are just for entertainment and have no meaning beyond that.

However, this thesis concludes that these horror films represent a form of Thai art. At the same time, it is also a form of entertainment. Art can be entertainment and similarly, entertainment can be art. The Thai arts are regularly reflective of Thai society and Thai culture. As a consequence, Thai horror films are no different.

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## BIOGRAPHY

Mr. Sila Van Saetieo was born on April 5th, 1987 in Houston, Texas. He attended Humble High School and went on to graduate with a Bachelor's degree in Finance and Accounting from the University of Houston (UH) in 2008. After his undergraduate studies he went to Hollywood, California to attend the Los Angeles Film School in the fall of 2008. In the spring of 2009 after film school, he reflected that he had not had a break from academics since high school and decided to take a trip to visit his relatives back in Thailand. During this 3 week trip he became enlightened, interested, and enchanted by Thai culture and society. Prior to this vacation he had only visited Thailand as a young teen, unable to speak Thai very well or socialize with anyone other than his family members. Needless to say, this was a very foreign country to him.

He thought to himself, "When I'm back home, Americans view me as Thai. When I'm in Thailand people view me as American. It's quite a strange phenomenon how I'm always foreign more or less."

He then wondered, that since his father, mother, grandfathers, and grandmothers all hailed from Thailand, why, similar to many Thai-Americans was he so disconnected and ignorant of the traditions and customs to the birthplace of his ancestors? Upon arriving back in the states, he had an epiphany. He wanted learn and live in Thailand and understand the culture and society. Thus began the search of graduate schools with Thai related majors. The only Thai university he knew of was Ramkhamhaeng University where his father graduated from with a law degree. Upon researching online he initially considered another Thai university. Interestingly, he ended up on a page listing their professors, all of whom graduated from the United States, United Kingdom, or Chulalongkorn University. After careful consideration he decided the best choice for him was to attend the Thai Studies Program in the Faculty of Arts at Chulalongkorn University.