

Gender Battles in Thai Ghost Films of *Buppah Rahtree* Sequels: The Transformation of Gender Authority

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Abstract: This academic article intends to demonstrate how the power transforms from men to woman in the film of *Buppah Rahtree*'s sequels. *Buppah Rahtree*'s sequels are the Thai ghost films by dir. Yuhtlert Sippapak. These Thai ghost sequels are different from other Thai ghost films in which they break free from both American and Thai horror films' conventions. The female protagonist, the ghost of Buppah, takes turn to possess her own weapon, the folding shave razor which symbolises the phallic symbol, as the tool to take a revenge on her victims especially men. Her weapon possession is contrasted to the slasher films' norms in which the killers are men and men are the ones who carry the weapons around to kill the female victims. Although the female protagonist has been oppressed for the first half of the film, the authority is in the hand of woman for the rest of the stories. The female major character, hence, appears to have more power than men: Buppah is the ghost and the killer who gains more victory over the victimized men.

Keywords: *Buppah Rahtree*, *Buppah Rahtree*'s Sequels, Gender Battles, Slasher Films, Thai Ghost Films

1. Introduction

Ghosts or spirit has been deeply rooted in Thai belief and way of life for a long time. Wilailoy [1] remarks that people since the Ancient time believed that natural source cannot be used freely. Humans did not own it. People, therefore, conceived that there were spirits inhabit in the nature. If any kinds of strange situations that are beyond the explanation happened, people would be scared and assumed that those phenomena came from the spiritual power. As a result, people tried to approach or paid respect to the spirits to reassure that there would not be any harmful circumstances occur to them [1].

Notably, most of Thai ghosts are women [2]. Exploring women's portrayals in Thai horror films, thus, is interesting issue. Women in Thai horror movies can be divided into two main categories: humans and ghosts. The female protagonists are not always presented as ghost. They are also illustrated in the negative angles. It can be implied that Thai society cannot get rid of Thai patriarchy. This convention has been continuing although Thailand has tremendously transformed from the old way of life to the Digital era. Ghost films are very popular among Thai people. Additionally, women are still the central figures in the ghost story. Female characters are, however, oppressed in many different ways.

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Luiyapong, Himwiman qtd. in Yodhong[2] reassures that ghost in Thai films are always women. Due to the patriarchy, women have to take the maternal role: they have to be mothers, wives; are confined in the same old places and victimized. These kinds of burdens are explicitly lied in the classical Thai film called *Lady Nak of Phra Khanong* (*Mae Nak Phra Khanong*) in which the female ghost is loyally waiting for her husband to return even though she passes away because of child bearing. *Lady Nak* is a role model for female ghost that will wait for her lover no matter what happens: whether dead or alive, whether he still loves her or not. She will follow her lover everywhere with her true love, jealousy (possessiveness) and revenge. Besides, female ghosts might be betrayed and heartbroken before they die. As a result, they aim to return and take a revenge.

Ironically, women in the ancient time reflected the agricultural society of Thailand in which it used to be the matriarchal society. Women as mother and wife were the leader of the sacred ceremonies. In South East Asia before the time of any religions, Animism- the worship of the nature due to the belief that all the creatures have spirits and had the great impact on humans' rituals- had women as the leaders of the rituals and ceremonies. Women, thus, had power and became the center of the community. People believed that these female leaders were capable of healing the illness. Additionally, they were believed to be the mediums who could connect to the spiritual world. Moreover, people thought they had the mystical power inside themselves. The Cultural feminist were, however, satisfied with these female characteristics since they could beat the male dominant world where women would interfere with men's power [2].

Despite the powerful women through the female spiritual leaders above, Thai ghost films represent female ghosts as women who are confined to the restricted places such as the house, the cave, under the treasures, possessing in the trees or even in the utensils like the pot and any other restricted tools. Women portrayals in Thai ghost films are, thus, inevitably under men's empowerment. Female ghosts also illustrate as silly and illogical ones who cannot control their emotions and are invisible in the world. As seen in many Thai ghost films, female ghosts' power is overcome by male characters such as the exorcists or the monks [2]. Consequently, patriarchy cannot separated from Thai ghost films according to its ideology.

Thai people's everyday lives are inevitably related to ghosts in different ways. Thai ceremonies are often associated with ghosts or spirits. As the country whose most people worship Buddhism, the Buddhist ceremonies that cannot be separated from ghosts or spirits are seen everywhere around the nation such as "offering aims to monks, making merit and funeral rites". Brahman ceremonies which are tied to Buddhist ceremonies also include the belief of ghosts and spirits in their rituals such as in the ceremonies of "establishing a spirit house, offering rice and summoning one's spirit to stay in and protect one's body (*baay sii-suu-khwan*), house-blessing and ghost-feeding" [3].

According to Hengsuwan and Prasithrathsingt [3], they propose that there are various kinds of ghosts in Thai belief and it can be divided into forty-nine types both in positive and negative meaning. Moreover, Thai ghosts can be categorized into two main different types according to Thai concepts : ghost and spirit. It is interesting that some types of Thai ghost and spirits are identified as women such as "female spirit of a tree" (*naaη-máay*), "mermaid ghost" (*phĩ-ηwák*), "female ghost dying during the pregnancy" (*phĩ-taay-thán-klom* or *phĩ-taay-thoo*).

Women always play the important roles in Thai ghost films or become the causes of the chaos in the story. Thai ghosts are often demonstrated as the wicked women in different forms and appear to haunt people throughout the story. Poonyaprapha and Ratanayongpiroj [4] claim that among various types of ghosts, most ghosts turn out to be the female ones. Besides, they are presented as mothers and wives who have to suffer from womanhood such as dying mother from child bearing in *Mother Nak* in America (*Mae Nak Nai America*), *Mother Nak*; young mother who needs to have an abortion in *Buppha Rahtree* and *Kra Sue Valentine*; and wife role in *The Haunting House* (*Baan Phi Sing*). These women who take mother and wife roles reflect the social problems that women are the victims in the society where they return to take a revenge on those bad people.

Thai ghost film, *Buppah Rahtree*, is so popular that it continues into three more sequels. As a result, *Buppah Rahtree* becomes the Thai ghost films sequels which consist of four parts: *Buppha Rah Tree: The Flower of the Night* (2003), *Buppah Rahtree Phase2: Rahtree Returns* (2005), *Rahtree Reborn (Buppah Rahtree 3.1)* (2009) and *Rahtree Revenge (Buppah Rahtree 3.2)* (2009). All sequels are directed by Yuthlert Sippapak. Although the plots may not be brilliant and also confusing sometimes, the issues of women and men cannot be overlooked since all the stories are about the fight between *Buppah* and her male oppressors. Superficially, *Buppah* has been oppressed. In fact, she is not a passive girl throughout the story. She returns to take a revenge. Apart from the mixture of horrific and funny presentation, there are some gender issues and tensions underlying these Thai ghost film sequels. As seen, these film sequels are the battle of two genders: male and female. This academic article, therefore, will clarify the battle between women and men in *Buppah* sequels. Before the discussion of the representation of woman in *Buppah Rahtree's* sequels, the theoretical framework employed to analyse this film will be shown respectively.

2. Theoretical Framework

Psychoanalysis and gender have been related to each other for a long time. Gender inequality is very sensitive issues and mostly there is some underlying messages of the creative works presenting in the gender issues. The hidden information is often associated with human's psyche. One of the inventive forms that demonstrates gender and human's mind well is film. This article will, therefore, illustrate the theories and concepts connected with gender and film. The topics will be categorized in two main types respectively: psychoanalysis related to gender and film and film theory related to gender.

2.1 Psychoanalysis Related to Gender and Film

2.1.1 The Return of the Repressed

Due to Freud's the Pleasure Principle, every human long for pleasure. Their desire arrives from their unconscious mind. "It is part of the mind that determines what we do and feel, although we cannot access it directly-otherwise it would [not be] unconscious". If humans commit everything without restraints, society will be in chaos. As a result, their desire has to be repressed. However, the repressed desire does not disappear. It still deeply roots inside people's mind. It would attempt to emerge in different forms such as "forms of dreams, jokes, slips of the tongue, hallucinations and even physical symptoms". The return of the repressed becomes the main feature of horror films especially the slasher ones such as "*Halloween* (1978), *A Nightmare On Elm Street* (1984) and *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997)". In slasher films, the crime has occurred in the past and "has been forgotten by the community; many years later someone comes back to seek revenge, usually on nubile young teenagers" [5].

2.2 Film Theory Related to Gender

2.2.1 Representation of Women in Film

Traditionally, women do not have many spaces in the film industry. They have always been stereotyped in films since film industry is regarded as men sphere. Women are given a few roles in the films such as "angelic mothers, castrating mothers, crones, victims, girlfriends, whores and femmes fatales". Moreover, they do not have the major roles and mostly have the negative roles that have the impact on the storyline in the unpleasant ways. The femme-fatale is the outstanding women's representations in film. It portrays women who are self-confident and influential and can drastically change the male protagonist's life. The outstanding characteristics of femme-fatale are self-confident, influential, indifferent and dispassionate. They are also sexually objectified by male characters. These portrayals can be seen in "film noirs of the 1940s and 1950s, and made a return in 1990s neo noirs. The recognizable films that demonstrate women as the femme-fatale are *Red Rock West* (1992), *The Last Seduction* (1993), *A Life Less Ordinary* (1997), *Very Bad Things* (1998) [5].

The representation of women's inequality in film is obviously seen. Women only exist as a part of men's lives rather than stand alone as themselves. They are often shown as men's properties: "they are the properties of their fathers until they marry, when they become property of their husbands". Women's interests are considered as unimportant, "too provincial or too domestic to be of interest in a film". Besides, the narratives usually belong to the hero or male characters whereas female characters just only appear in the background. However, when women are the narrators, they mostly cause the troubles that they cannot solve. Apparently, men will be the ones who cope with those problems. Yet, the active and capable women would be presented as "monster[s]". Women are always unequal to men in the workplace as well. The female protagonist in *Working Girl* (1988) furthers her career by sleeping with her worker, for instance [5],[6].

2.2.2 Male Gaze

Woman usually becomes the prey for sexual objectification. Sexual objectification is "the act of treating a person as an instrument of sexual pleasure". Objectification signifies the practice of treating someone as the tool for sexual pleasure regardless of her "personality or dignity". Here, "the portrayal of women is dehumanised as a tool for sexual pleasure". Women are believed to be treated to entertain and give men pleasure. Women's "worth or role" is reduced to be only "a tool for the fulfilment of lust. Her intellect, abilities are of no worth in his sense". Feminist theorists are upset with the idea that women are always related to body whereas "men are related with mind". It demonstrates "the deeply rooted stereotype that men are rationale beings while women are irrational beings". As a result, women are "characterised in terms of their boy and bodily functions" [7].

Sexual objectification is also emphasised in mass media especially in advertisements and media. Women are presented "as weak or subjugated through pornography. Men enjoy looking at women sexually and aesthetically". Laura Mulvey wrote the essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" in 1975 to announce the theory of male gaze. Her concept reinforces how women are objectified and expands to the realm of visual culture. This article reveals "the voyeuristic and fetishistic responses of male viewers to the images of women". Women are sexually depicted to the male viewers both inside and outside the film. "Female characters function as erotic objects both for characters within the story and for the viewers [7]. Furthermore, Mulvey (qtd. in Clover 8)[8], declares that filmic gaze is not "gender free but is structured by male or masculine perceptions". As a result, women are presented as an object to be gazed by men. She adds that male gazers gain pleasure from looking at a woman or female character for "sadistic voyeuristic look and a fetishtistic-scopophillic look".

Apart from Laura Melvey's theory about male gaze, Linda Williams (qtd. in Jancovich)[9] furthers on that besides being considered inferior to men in the patriarchal society, women are also regarded as "Other" in the sense that they are different from men: "deviant and even monstrous". For film viewing, "the act of looking" belongs to men as it is correlated with "both masculine and desiring". Additionally, "the gaze is associated with activity and control". Women's images are also "distorted" from what they are like in reality. Moreover, "both the women and monster therefore prove deeply 'threatening to male power and must be violently punished'". As a result, women do not want to look at the distorted images of themselves on the screen [7].

In Mulvey's theory, she clarifies that the director focuses on the male spectator. The director focuses on the male spectator. The director wants the male audience to be able to identify themselves with "filmic hero as a kind of ego ideal". Furthermore, they gain gratification from following female characters throughout the story and perceive them as the object of desire. Women, are, hence, demonstrated as the object of desire and their roles are lessened to "the Other". As a result, the audience" take on the role of male voyeur who imitates the voyeurism of the camera and the male actor within the film. She also adds that "this gaze causes the woman to be fetishized as a passive object to be looked at, while the man is active subject who looks at the woman. Female characters are, therefore, presented as the object for both the male characters and the spectator"[10] .

3. Results and Discussion

To elaborate the gender battle in *Buppah Rahtree*, the transformation of authority from male characters to female protagonist, Buppah, will be clarified into six topics: presentation of the female protagonist, Buppah Rahtree, what is wrong with the male gaze: transformation from male gaze to female gaze, Buppah Rahtree as the slasher film: transformation of slasher film's conventions, comedy within horror film: power transformation from powerful male characters to the pathetic ones, Buppah's weapon and the phallic symbol: phallic symbol in woman's hand, and the battle between Buppha and the exorcists respectively. Each topic aims to indicate how male dominance is reversed to the unwilling submission and how the female protagonist takes turn to gain the authority instead. The discussion will begin with the presentation of how Buppah is oppressed and then how she stands up for herself and decides to regain the victory over male supremacy.

3.1 Presentation of the Female Protagonist, Buppah Rahtree

Buppah is presented in three different ways: Buppah as the mysterious girl, Buppah as the unhappy and abused girl and Buppah as the vengeful ghost.

3.1.1 *Buppha as the Mysterious Girl*

Buppha Rahtree opens the first scene with the close up shot of the bookshelves full of various kinds of textbooks along with the male voice narrator. Next, the camera slowly pans left to reveal the audience to see the blurring shot of the girl sitting in the distance. He introduces the freshmen girl who is sitting alone in the library trying to concentrate on memorizing something. This male narrator introduces that her first name is Bupphah and her last name is Ratree but she does not have the nickname. She is the smartest first year student in the Faculty of Medicine. Moreover, he describes her as the mysterious girl who hardly talks to anyone nor surrenders to the most popular boy, the narrator's close friend, who falls for her. He even compares her to the book that has not been read by men. He furthers on that there might not be so many women in this world who has not been read by men.

The gender inequality clearly shows in the first scene. The comparison of women with the books gives the underlined meaning that men still find the virgin women more challenging and exciting to discover and to overcome. While he is describing Buppah, the close up shot of Bupphah closing her eyes attempting to remember her study is shown. However, this shot switches back and forth between she and the narrator who is standing near the bookshelf in the distance. It demonstrates that her story is in the hand of this man who tells the audience her story. This story is in the narrator control. He acts as the real stalker who follows Buppah everywhere and exactly knows her routines. Yet, when Bupphah finally talks to him and asks him to give her a pleasure riding, he is a little bit disappointed to realize that this girl is not different from others since she likes the luxurious car as well. The narrator judges her very quickly without trying to get to know her. Actually, she is not interested in his car but she wants to be away from her dull life. At first, the narrator seems to adore her due to her mysterious appearance but after all this, the story unfolds that he wants to win over the bet he has with his friends. And it also shows that when men refer to women as being mysterious and want to discover them, it signifies that they see women as the sexual object that they cannot wait to sexually explore their bodies.

3.1.2 *Bupphah as the Unhappy and Abused Girl*

Buppah appears as the unhappy girl who has never smiled since the beginning of the story. Yet, the audience does not have any clues why she is like that. The story, however, reveals later on that she has been sexually abused by her uncle. Nevertheless, the story does not give the audience many clues about her uncle. We do not know whether he is her real uncle. What we learn is that he abuses her and might be doing this for many years since the flashback of Buppha's childhood while she is screaming in pain is shown. From this scene, the audience can assume that Buppah has been sexually abused by her uncle since she was young. As a result, it makes her become a quiet and distressed girl. There is a

foreshadowing saying from her when she tells Ake that she wants to get out of here. Additionally, she is deceived by Ake who follows her everywhere to win her love. Ake has sexual intercourse with Buppah several times during their stay at the resort in Bangsaen district but Buppah does not seem to gain any sexual pleasure with him. Her face expresses the disgusting feeling without any response of pleasure. Yet, she is lying there to let Ake gain the pleasure from her body. The sexual intercourse scenes will be discussed more in terms of male gaze later on. Ake does not seem to care about her feelings at all. This action reveals how selfish he is. Yet, it still cannot be called the real abusing until the audience discovers that Ake has been following Buppah because he wants to win the bet that he has with his friends. The narrator says that he feels guilty for betraying her but we do not know for sure whether he really feels that way. His cruel intention, however, brings sorrow to the female protagonist. The narrator commits even more cruel thing by advising and taking Buppa to have the abortion even though she asks him if there are any other ways. Ake is not a totally bad man since he does not let Buppah face with the abortion alone. He takes her to the illegal clinic and brings her back to her apartment. Here, the director does not portray Ake as the worst man by letting him commit a few good deeds and making him feel guilty for his misdeeds after winning over the bet with his friends.

3.1.3 *Buppah as the Vengeful Ghost: “the Female Victim-Hero”*

The presentation of the female victim turns to be the avenger is not new in American horror film. The female avenger is outstanding in *Carrie*, one of the classic American horror films. Carrie, the female protagonist is a high school girl who is shy and introverted. Unfortunately, she is the victim of “monstrous schoolmates and a monstrous mother”. Her return as a devilish girl to take a revenge on those monstrous people is gone too far. As a result, she becomes the monster instead. She is, therefore, called “the female victim-hero” which refers to the hero who used to be the victims before gaining his/her victory. Besides *Carrie*, *Ms 45* and *I Spit on Your Grave* are also popular for “the female victim hero” [8]. This American pattern can be seen in Thai ghost films as well. According to Sukanan[11], even though female ghost comes back as “the female victim-hero” to take a revenge on bad people, they will only be able to use “their limited power” to destroy, haunt and kill them.

In the first sequel of these film series, the story traces back to let the audience see how Buppah becomes the ghost. She dies after having the abortion. When the owner of the apartment finds out that she is dead, she calls the rescuers to take away her dead body. Unfortunately, they immediately run away after being haunted by Buppah. Now, she changes from the passive girl to the vengeful ghost. As seen, the exorcists from different religions and belief have come to defeat her but have to suddenly retreat after Buppah’s haunting. Notably, all the exorcists here are men. Men as the exorcists attempt to use their power to control over her as the wicked woman here. She was not born to be wicked but she is forced by men to be evil. Her anger arises after becoming the ghost may cause from the repression that she has kept since she was young. The hatred for men Men in this story, however, do not realize the cause of her wickedness. Women and the confined place have been appeared in the literary world for so long. This issue is outstanding in Buppah’s sequels as well. The presentation of female restricted area, however, is slightly different from what is often seen in the concept of confinement and women in literature.

Although Buppah has power in the limited area, her power is not restricted only in her room. She still has the capability to haunt people outside her room. Her haunting ability is still limited within *Oscar* apartment. Her restricted authority is, however, enough to scare people especially the *Oscar* residents. Nevertheless, she does not want to harm anyone at first until the other people invade her room and attempts to hurt her. Her haunting makes Madam See, the owner of *Oscar* apartment, worry because most of the renters move out of her apartment. Buppah’s power is presented in the negative ways. To emphasise her superiority, the director makes Ake return to Thailand after failing to study abroad.

As seen here, Ake is not portrayed as the hero nor the successful man. His return to Buppah causes him his lifetime suffering. Her desire for vengeance increases after discovering that Ake cheats on her.

She starts to be more aggressive by tying him with the bed pole and pouring the hot porridge on his private parts. Her anger for being cheated grows more by cutting off both of Ake's legs. The story is twisted at the end by revealing that Ake has died for a month. Although the audience is aware of him being the ghost later on, we learn that he is not as powerful as Buppah.

This time he becomes the oppressed whereas Buppah is the oppressor. She takes a completely revenge on Ake when she becomes the ghost. Ake as a cripple is under Buppah's control. Notably, despite being physically oppressed by Buppah, Ake does not escape from her. He reappears in front of her room again after being rescued by the girl he sleeps with. The scene of him sitting on the floor without any legs, looking at Buppah and asking her for forgiveness while she is opening the door is very pathetic. The true reason for returning to Buppah has never disclosed. He probably feels guilty for oppressing her. In the end of the first sequel, Ake is hugging Buppah while he is on the wheelchair. Her hatred for men has gradually grown since she has never met any nice men in her life.

Unfortunately, she cannot escape from male superiority and all the oppression. As a result, she cannot hide her repression anymore. It emerges when it comes to the most terrible times in her life. There is nothing left to lose after having the abortion, and being deserted by her boyfriend. She has restricted freedom since her childhood so she deeply longs for being free from the patriarchy throughout her life. When Ake takes her to Bangsaen (the district in Chonburi province in the East of Thailand), it makes her think that her wish becomes true without realizing that he is the one who makes her life even worse. Her revenge is shown in the form of haunting those men who hurt her before and others who invade her territory.

3.2 What's Wrong with the Male Gaze?: Transformation from Male Gaze to Female Gaze

Male gaze and film viewing seem to be inevitable issue when it comes to analyse and criticize the films especially in the horror ones. Mostly, the horror films are claimed to be addressed to the male spectators. As a result, most of horror films portray women as the victims and sexual objects.

In Buppah's film sequels, the use of male gaze works is employed for the first half of the story when Buppah is still a submissive girl. After her return, male gaze cannot be employed anymore since the power is changed to woman's hand to serve female audiences. Here, woman looks at men within the cinematic contexts: Buppah's hunting for the male victims. Men reversely become sufferers who attempts to flee from woman's threatening, cries out for fear and help. The helpless and powerless men alternately are the objects. Female audiences totally enjoy female gaze since they would feel satisfy to see men defeated. They would feel that it is women's turn to gain back their freedom and triumph.

There is the male gaze right from the start in the first sequel. The male gaze within the film text when Akkapol, the male narrator, takes the control of the narration in which Buppah has no right to defend or tell her own stories. Ake looks directly at her in a distance. He is like a stalker who follows her everywhere. He even knows her routines very well. She unwillingly and unknowingly becomes the object of male gaze. The male audiences automatically look at her and follow what the male character narrates. Here, they would gain pleasure looking at Buppah's body particularly when Ake has had sexual intercourse with her in the bungalow at Bangsaen throughout the three days they spend there.

Buppah is demonstrated as the sexual objects. These objectified scenes are displayed in the close-up shot when Akkapol climbs over Buppah's body under the cover and kisses her from the stomach to her nipples. The camera switches back to the close up shot of Buppah's face that reveals the disgusting expression rather than the pleasure ones. Then the camera switches back to the medium shot revealing that Ake is on the top of her. Next, the camera moves back to the close up shot of Buppah's face again. In this shot, Buppah is closing her eyes in pain signifying that she does not like having sex with Ake. But for this point, the audience has no clues for her reaction. We, as the audience, probably wonder why she does not enjoy sex with him since she is not forced to do so until later on that we learn that Buppah has been sexually abused by her stepfather. The objectification is even worse when the camera is slowly

zoomed out from Ake's body. Here, the evil action is revealed when the camera finally unfolds that Ake blackmails Buppah by recording their sexual activities and show them to his friends.

The female audiences seem to have the emotion engagement since they would sympathize with Buppah for being oppressed especially when she cannot possess the maternal authority after unwillingly having the abortion. The sexual oppression is reinforced again when they learn that Buppah is deceived and blackmailed. Female audiences, thus, would get angry with Ake for making Buppah having the abortion. The emotional involvement of the female gazers would agree to take a revenge.

The voice over saying that Buppah Rahtree is the flower of the night and a person who has never been slept would be able to touch it. This male narration emphasizes that hunting for the mysterious girl like Buppah is absolutely challenging. It is even more sensitive for the female viewers when they realize that there are some men sitting around watching the blackmailing tape happily. Ake, however, seems to feel guilty for his evil action. He feels sorry for accepting his friends' bet just for a bottle of Johnnie Walker.

Since having sex with Buppah shows that Ake is superior to her: Ake does not seem to care if Buppah satisfies the sexual pleasure with him. He only wants to please himself. The male gazer is even clearer when the camera gradually zooms out of the television screen which demonstrates that Ake is on top of Buppah to control the sex act. Here, the camera discloses that Ake makes a record of him making love with Buppah and proudly shows it to a group of his friends. Ake's group of friends emphasizes the male gazer and how they enjoy watching woman's body for their scopophilia voyeuristic gaze.

There are often some naked or sex scenes in the movies to please the male viewers. In Buppah Rahtree's sequels, this assumption and the male gaze might not work very well because male audience may not be able to bear with the violence against men, the passivity male character becomes, the power of the female ghosts that has rapidly grown. At first, male spectators may enjoy the story since the male power is still obviously seen as the hunter who wants to win over the mysterious girl. While male audience is gaining some pleasure for the male character, Akkapol, becomes successful in being a woman hunter, female viewers are disconcerted for the female protagonist being the prey. Those female audiences would feel uneasy to watch the innocent girl being victimized for the silly reasons and finally lead her to death.

Female viewers' agitation would even increase for the sympathy they have for Buppah. Nevertheless, the director seems to compromise between male and female audience. Sippapak as the director does not let female audience in dismay for the entire movie. He allows female viewers to gain pleasure back after Buppah's death. Buppah returns as the haunted ghost in Oscar apartment. Her power of haunting is so strong that everyone is afraid of her. There are, thus, many scenes of chasing and escaping throughout the movie. Buppah's return is not only Buppah's revenge but it is also female audience's revenge for being depressed in the pathetic female protagonist's bad fortune for the first half of the movie. Consequently, it is like the female audience's turn to gain the pleasure back for watching this movie. In order to gather both audience, the male exorcists are, however, introduced to visit the Oscar apartment to eliminate Buppah. It is implied that men cannot really accept women's growing potential in the patriarchal society like Thailand. Several kinds of exorcists are invited to terminate Buppah's haunting power but it turns out that there are no kinds of exorcists that can eradicate her. As seen, women's power is still increasing and spreading. The battle between men and women is quite obvious especially the fighting scene between Buppah's ghost and the male exorcists.

Buppah's intention of wanting to kill men is clearly stated in *Buppah Rahtree: Reborn*. The little girl named Pla is claimed herself to as reborn Buppah. She says that she could recall her past. In Buppah's reborn, her power as the little girl getting stronger and stronger and even becomes extreme. The little girl carries the folding shave razor around. It is even worse when she uses it as the weapon to kill the

men. The folding shave razor here usually belongs to men for shaving purpose. On the contrary, the little girl steals it from her stepfather and stabs him before leaving for *Oscar* apartment in which she used to live in her last life. This signifies that woman is trying to take over men's authority and it seems like woman can achieve her goal in these movies. Buppah as a little girl keeps haunting and killing every man she sees. She clearly announces that she would kill every man since all men are bad and sinful. She even compares men as the male animals.

3.3 *Buppah and Slasher Movie: Woman's Revenge*

Slasher film is the subgenre in the horror film. This type of movie is often seen in the Hollywood horror genre such as *Friday the 13th*, *Halloween*, *I Know What You Did Last Summer*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. In this type of films, the murderers appear to be all men. Those male murderers seem to have the power over the female characters who happen to be the victims throughout the story. The *Buppah's* films are the mixture of the ghost and slasher films. These films, however, reverse the roles of murderers and victims. Buppah as a woman takes the role of the murderer and male characters take the role of the victims instead. The norms of slasher movies are totally twisted in these sequels. Female character is the one who carries the fold shave razor around and chasing other characters especially the male ones throughout the story. In these *Buppah's* sequels, the gender superiority is exchanged from male to female one. Buppah has the authority to control the game: she can choose who she wants to haunt or kill since she has the special power to be invisible and reappear wherever she wants. The ability of haunting makes the ones who are haunted incapable of controlling the situations. Consequently, male characters which mostly seen as the victims are seen as the helpless men with the scaring expression on their faces. Notably, the folding shave razor should belong to men but it turns out to be the female protagonist's weapon to kill the male characters instead. This folding shave blade, hence, signifies that power is not in the hand of men anymore. She takes up the male superiority by carrying the razor around.

At the beginning, Buppah seems to be passive girl. Although she tells Akkapol she does not like a liar, she is deceived by him who is not sincere to her. She is demonstrated as the sexual objects. These objectified scenes are displayed in close-up shot when Akkapol claims over her body under the cover and kisses her from the stomach to her nipples. The camera switches back to the close up shot of Buppah's face that reveals the disgusting expression rather than the pleasure ones then the camera switches back to the medium shot revealing that Akkapol is on the top of Buppah's then the camera moves back to the close up shot of Buppah's face again. In this shot, Buppah is closing her eyes in pain signifying that she does not like having sex with Ake.

The audience, however, has no clue for her reaction. We as the audiences, probably wonder why she does not enjoy sex with him since she is not forced to do it until later on that we learn that Buppah has been sexually abused by a man she calls her uncle. Nevertheless, the audiences do not know whether he is her real uncle. The objectification is even more prominent when the camera is slowly zoomed out of Ak's body while on the top of Buppah's.

Here, the evil action is revealed when the camera finally unfolds that Ake blackmails her by recording their sexual activities and show them to his friends. The voice over says that Buppah is the flower of the night and a person who has always wide awake will be able to see its beauty. This male narration emphasizes that hunting for the mysterious girl like Buppah is absolutely challenging. It is even more sensitive for the female viewers when they realize that there are some other men sitting around watching the blackmailing tape of Buppah. Ake, however, seems to feel guilty for his evil action. He feels sorry for destroying the innocent girl and trade it for a bottle of alcohol.

3.4 *Comedy within Horror Film: Lessening Buppah's Power Only?*

Buppah's haunted power seems to rapidly grow and tends to be excessive. Female spectator may like the way she returns and also have the feeling that those male victims totally deserve their karma.

Yet, these situations stir men's power and male audiences. This is not what male viewers expect to see from the horror films. The director seems to realize about this issue. He, therefore, reduces this tension by lessening her power. To lessen Buppah's power, the comedy is inserted in the haunting scenes. For example, when Buppah haunts and tries to kill her victims especially men, there would be some funny moments: her victims would scream and not be able to move at all. At the same time, Buppah is also standing and staring at them instead of stabbing them immediately. The distortedness of Buppah's figures make the scenes ridiculous rather than scaring. Her neck is growing longer to haunt the victims, for instance.

3.5 Buppah's Weapon and the Phallic Symbols

Actually, weapon goes hand in hand with the killers in the horror film particularly slasher films. The audience see Jason in *Friday the Thirteenth* and Michael Myers in *Halloween*, using the knife, the male killer in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* using his chain saw, the male killer in *I Know what You Did Last Summer* using the hook to kill all their victims. As seen, most American slasher films are acquainted with male killers and different kinds of their weapons. As seen above, most killers that employ various kinds of weapons as their tools for murdering are mostly men. On the contrary, most of Thai female ghosts will only employ their "limited special power" to haunt and kill their victims. They have never used any kinds of weapons to help them eliminate their victims. The female central character in Buppah's sequels, however, breaks away those norms both in American slasher films and Thai horror films.

In Buppah's sequels, the folding shave razor appears to be Buppah's significant weapon to kill people. In fact, this kind of knife is supposed to belong to men for shaving their beard. Apparently, Buppah uses it as her tool to kill people. Her razor is obviously seen in *Rahtree Reborn* and *Rahtree Revenge*, both with the little girl named Pla who claims herself to be Buppah in her past life and adult Buppah. The folding shave razor here is regarded as the phallic symbol signifies the power transformation from man to woman. Both little Buppah and adult Buppah carry the sing-edged knife around as if to announce to men that the power is in her hand now. She can do the brutal acts to eradicate men and change the role to be superior to those victimized men. Men audiences would be more irritated when watching Buppah using the men's shaving tool to cut male victims' throats with the blood splattering all over. For the submissive female protagonist to get even is not easy for male audiences to accept it because they cannot have the sadistic voyeuristic gaze upon men being tortured.

3.6 The Battle between Buppah and the Exorcists

The exorcists are the representative of men's dominance who desires to get rid of Buppah's wicked power. On the other hand, Buppah is the exemplary of rebellious woman who no longer succumbs to male superiority. There are various kinds of exorcists visiting Oscar apartment in order to eradicate the ghost of Buppah. Notably, all the exorcists are men: the false shaman, the false shaman's mentor, exorcist Khong, the young monk and the priests. Firstly, the false shaman is urged by the landlady, Jae See, to expel Buppah out of her residence. The false shaman is very scared to enter her room.

He is haunted by Buppah and has to run away from her room immediately. Then he asks his mentor, the exorcist Khong to help him banish Buppah's ghost. The exorcist Khong seems to be afraid of Buppah as well since his hands are shivering while asking for the false shaman to hand him his bag full of the holy objects used for banishing ghosts. He pulls out the roll of holy thread (in Thai belief, the holy thread is one of the most important tool to protect ones from the devil spirits) and orders his disciples to put the holy thread around the corpse of Buppah. Ridiculously, nobody obeys his order so the exorcist Khong has to do it himself. When he walks into the room and is about to put the holy thread on Buppah's corpse, he is so scared with the shaking corpse that he curses and jumps out of the room promptly.

After that light goes out and he stabs her corpse with his knife. Buppah jumps out of the bed crawling in pain for a little while then using the same knife to stab the exorcist Khong back in the back. A few minutes later on after seeing him being stabbed in the dark, he cries out in pain and runs away from Buppah's room with the great suffering. These scenes imply that Buppah does not surrender to men's authority anymore. As a result, men have to be the one who has to accept woman's victory of gaining the liberation.

The fight between Buppah and the exorcist Khong does not end there. The exorcist Khong returns to eradicate Buppah once again just like Buppah who returns and is ready to fight with him in *Buppah Rahtree Phase 2: Rahtree Return*. The gender battle continues in the revisiting scenes of the exorcist Khong. Buppah pulls him into the mirror. Then the camera reveals the rooms with the blood running down the wall. Khong is trying to figure out where the blood comes from. Then the camera switches back to her sitting and screaming in agony while the blood keeps running from her womb. The exorcist Khong seems to disgust her blood and he is saying to himself whether his magic would be ineffective. Here, the director seems to follow the norms of American slashing movies in which blood is one of the crucial features that comes out from women's bodies (Jancovich 74). This time the exorcist Khong uses the sword he received from Myanmar to stab Buppah. She screams in pain. Then the flood of blood is gradually reducing and she finally disappears. The exorcist Khong keeps her soul in the small pot and has her corpse burn eventually.

Apart from the exorcist Khong, the young monk in *Rahtree Reborn* (Buppah Rahtree 3.1) is begged by his uncle to help him get rid of Buppah's ghost. He is very scared but he has no choice. He is, thus, chanting but run away suddenly after being haunted by Buppah. Additionally, two priests come to expel her but quickly escape at the end as well. These fighting shows that men cannot gain back their superiority since woman are so determined in her freedom.

4. Conclusion

Obviously, Buppah's sequels are the combination of the ghost and the slashing film. These film series do not follow the norms of the American slashing movies in which the female protagonist is the one who possess the weapon to kill people. The killer is no longer man. The victims are mostly men. The screaming is not heard from the female victims but from the female killer. The female killer, however, screams both for pain and power. The female protagonist becomes visible and her agony reveals to the world. Buppah's subversiveness may please male audiences since it gives them the sense of superiority and pleasure to look at. Nevertheless, men's authority does not exist for the entire story. Buppah comes back as the monster who can scare men to death or using her power as the spirit to haunt or hurt the residents, especially men, in the Oscar apartment. Even though male power is rapidly reduced for the most parts of the films, they are still superior to women in their male dominant world for the first half of the movie. As a result, the director seems to compromise between men and women's authorities. The power takes turn in both men and women's hands. Nevertheless, Buppah as the representative of women can liberate herself from being restrained.

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