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Spectatorship of Film Address and Ideology: A Case Study of Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives

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FACULTÉ DES SCIENCES SOCIALES ET POLITIQUES
INSTITUT DES SCIENCES SOCIALES (ISS)

**Spectatorship of Film Address and Ideology:
A Case Study of *Uncle Boonmee
Who Can Recall His Past Lives***

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Docteur en sciences sociales

par

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Lausanne
2024



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Faculté des sciences
sociales et politiques

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" Spectatorship of Film Address and Ideology : A Case Study of Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives "

Nicky LE FEUVRE
Doyenne

Lausanne, le 9 février 2024

Résumé

Cette thèse est une étude empirique du film *Oncle Boonmee qui se souvient de ses vies passées* d'Apichatpong Weerasethakul, premier film thaïlandais à remporter la Palme d'Or en 2010. La question de recherche est *quels ont été les accueils et réactions des spectateurs face au film ?* Ensuite, elle émet l'hypothèse que *l'accueil et les réactions des spectateurs révèlent différents messages connotatifs et idéologiques du film*. Les principaux objectifs de l'étude sont premièrement d'examiner la réception par le spectateur du langage, des images, des signes et des sons du film et deuxièmement d'explorer le message connotatif et l'idéologie cinématographique. Par ailleurs, elle envisage une possible motivation pour la construction du film et observe une influence sur la réception du spectateur. La théorie du spectateur, selon le livre *Inside the Gaze* de Francesco Casetti, est appliquée comme approche principale. Une méthodologie qualitative est employée, basée sur les critiques de films de spectateurs thaïlandais et non-thaïlandais provenant de diverses sources telles que des journaux professionnels, des blogs personnels, des forums de discussion et des articles académiques. L'étude des critiques de films est divisée en deux chapitres : la politique dans le film et la connotation symbolique du film. Les résultats montrent les réactions des spectateurs à travers la forme narrative et les réceptions en termes de quatre significations : idéologie et politique, relation de genre et transformation, nature et non-humain, et lutte des classes. Les critiques reconnaissent que le film montre l'idéologie de l'État et déconstruit simultanément l'idéologie en ouvrant un nouvel espace pour le spectateur du film. En outre, ils ont constaté que le film dépeint les relations entre les sexes et les rôles des hommes et des femmes dans les institutions sociales et religieuses, un fantôme et un singe comme représentations de la nature, ainsi que les relations de classe et la lutte pour le bien-être. Les spectateurs ont pu interpréter les messages connotés du film tout au long de l'histoire plutôt que de les décoder à partir du titre. L'examen démontre en outre la réception de ces critiques à travers la géographie du spectateur de Casetti.

Abstract

This thesis is an empirical study of the film *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* by Apichatpong Weerasethakul, the first Thai film to win the Palm d'Or Award in 2010. The research question is *what were the spectators' receptions and reactions to the film?* Then, it hypothesizes that *the spectators' reception and reactions reveal different connotative messages and ideology of the film*. The study's primary objectives are firstly to examine the spectator's reception of the film language, images, signs, and sounds and secondly to explore the connotative message and film ideology. In addition, it considers a possible motivation for the film's construction and observes an influence on the spectator's reception. The spectatorship theory, according to the book *Inside the Gaze* by Francesco Casetti, is applied as the principal approach. The qualitative methodology is employed, based on the film critiques of Thai and non-Thai spectators from various sources such as professional newspapers, personal blogs, discussion boards, and academic articles. The investigation of the film critiques is divided into two chapters: the politics in the film, and symbolic film connotation. The results show spectators' reactions through narrative form and receptions in terms of four meanings: ideology and politics, gender relation and transformation, nature and the non-human, and class struggle. The critiques recognized that the film shows the state ideology and simultaneously deconstructs the ideology by opening a new space of the film spectatorship. Furthermore, they found that the film portrays gender relations and gender roles in social and religious institutions, a ghost and a monkey as representations of nature, and relationships of class and the struggle for welfare. The spectators were able to interpret the film's connotative messages throughout the story rather than decoding them from the title. The examination further demonstrates the reception of these critiques through Casetti's geography of the spectator.

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Last but not least, this thesis is dedicated to my late father. The long journey of all the studies I have been through is to make you proud because you have always been a great model.

I certify that the work presented in this thesis is an original version of the author.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	3
1. General Introduction	3
2. From a Folklore to World Cinema	11
<i>Inspiration and Memory.....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Who is Uncle Boonmee?</i>	<i>15</i>
3. Structure of the Thesis.....	20
 CHAPTER 1	
CULTURE AND INFLUENCE OF BUDDHISM IN ISAN	29
<i>Re-Defining Culture</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>Fundamental of Theravada Buddhism.....</i>	<i>30</i>
1.1 Thailand's Largest Region: What has the region Encountered?	38
1.2 Buddhism and Northeastern Thailand:	
Reincarnation and Other Beliefs	51
1.3 Summary of the Chapter	60
 CHAPTER 2	
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY	63
2.1 Research Methodology and Implementation.....	63
2.2 Inside Casetti, Inside the Spectatorship.....	69
2.3 Summary of the Chapter	83
 CHAPTER 3	
OUTSIDE CASETTI: WHAT OTHERS DISCUSSED?	85
3.1 Early Film Studies.....	85
3.2 Spectatorship and Film.....	88
3.3 Perception versus Reception	92
3.4 Language and Cinema	97

3.5 Summary of the Chapter	99
CHAPTER 4	
WHAT IS THE POLITICS IN THE FILM:	
THE STATE IDEOLOGY AND THE FILM SPECTATORSHIP?	101
4.1 Ideology Inside the Film: What is the State Ideology in the Film?	104
4.2 The Film Spectatorship: How the Film Opens a New Space?	117
4.3 Summary of the Chapter	141
CHAPTER 5	
HOW IS THE FILM CONNOTATION SYMBOLICALLY READ?	149
5.1 How are Gender Roles and Gender Identity Portrayed	
Through the Film?	151
5.2 Nature: A Belief of Non-Human Amateurs in The Film and	
Thai Society	169
5.3 Class Struggle in The Film	198
5.4 Summary of the Chapter	221
CONCLUSION	228
1. Finding and Result	228
2. Limitation	245
3. Recommendation	246
BIBLIOGRAPHY	248
APPENDIX	280
List of Image	280
List of Table	310
List of Diagram	312
List of Common Arguments from Two Categories of Critiques	315

INTRODUCTION

1. General Introduction

I regularly preferred to watch comedy films that can recover exhausting time; accordingly, I did not realize an existence of *Uncle Boonmee* film. Not only I do not prefer this type of film, but I did not appreciate the story after reading the film summary. Despite my background in mass media study, I first time realized about this film in International Relations class of 2010 when one of my professors persuaded an entire class to view. However, I still overlooked the film because of the reviews that indicated a complexity of the film as well as a limited distribution in Thai cinema. The film returns to my attention when I was searching for a case study that I planned to analyse a Thai film. *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* was the first name appearing in my thought because I preferred to study the film that are internationally recognized and accepted. Additionally, I primarily learned that the film is unique as it presents a story of religion, spirit and history. Thai ghost films tend to be the most popular kind among others, but they are perhaps relatively similar for the plot. I realized that *Uncle Boonmee* film should not be considered as a horror genre because it does not rely on fear which involves ghosts promptly show up to scare audience. In the beginning, I did not understand the Isan dialect that are mainly used in the film and some scenes that are ambiguous. In addition, according to the film title, I only focused on reincarnation and religion, thus, I did not witness other aspects. As a result, I could not completely have learned any message and meaning of the story. Then, I examined the film reviews from Pantip discussion website (further discourse in ‘Methodology’), which revealed complicated and implicit messages about politics, history and culture. Later, I decided to see the film with a peer who is from Isan. The film review and the advice from the friend led me to improve my comprehension and prepared me to the following steps of this research.

What I was surprised by when watching the film first time is the appearance of ghost and the sexual scene between a princess and a fish. I did not discern a relation of the ghost to the film narration; therefore, I overlooked the meaning of ghost. Meanwhile, I could not have finished witnessing an entire intercourse between the princess and the catfish. Subsequently, I was also surprised to learn from off-the-record discussion with a film lecturer in Thailand, that the red-eyed monkey in the film was taken from the *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). Moreover, some film critics compared the presentation of still pictures in the film to a series of photos in *La jetée* (1962). While other critics realized that Apichatpong could have applied the Western film techniques, but the others discovered *Uncle Boonmee* film original and real. Owing to the interview and the primary film reviews, I assumed that the film gathered anecdotes of the country's fact and represents it in an aesthetic image of Boonmee's life. In other words, the film story could have been structured by the data of a macro level (historical events) and is presented at a personal level (Boonmee). I personally believe that to appreciate this film, the audience does not need to be a Buddhist who believes in ghosts and understands Thai history. Nevertheless, they can depend on their imagination throughout the storytelling including image and conversation. However, I discovered that I must follow every scene because each scene is correlative and interdependent which requires further engagement and interpretation.

After preliminary learning about the film, I began intensive investigation on diverse film synopses and reviews from other websites (rather than Pantip), and data from the website called Kick the Machine. Kick the Machine explained fundamental information about Apichatpong and his intention, while the other online references, which are written by Thai and non-Thai critics, provided other perspectives of film meaning. It is reaffirmed that Apichatpong's films can be further considered as optional for Thai audience and international industry.¹ From my point of view, Thai spectators mostly discussed different Boonmee's incarnation such as the princess,

¹ Adadol Ingawanij and Richard Lowell McDonald, "Blissfully Whose? Jungle Pleasures, Ultra-modernist Cinema and the Cosmopolitan Thai Auteur," in *The Ambiguous Allure of The West: Traces of The Colonial Thailand*, ed. Rachel Harrison and Peter Jackson, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 127.

and the farmer as well as related political scenes in the history of Thailand to the film events. Many viewers declared that they did not clearly understand the film and searched for assistance. As a result, there have been more discussants writing detailed comments on some particular scenes through distinct platforms e.g., personal blog, discussion board, and journals. But many foreign spectators analysed unique, interesting, and strange features of the film. Some critics such as journalists apparently showed their eagerness and astonishment in watching the film. Meanwhile, other professions demonstrated more about spirit and dimension aspects. Nonetheless, these various film critiques from Thailand and abroad tend to have common arguments and opinions. I learned from Apichatpong's interviews and college lectures in Youtube that he grew up in hospital area and witnessed the condition of Thailand's Northeast or Isan. He has stated in every interview that he has combined his childhood experience, and personal interest and opinion to develop his films. I was overwhelmed that he is greatly engaged with his live background and ideology because he has attempted to share all of his experience with the followers. However, I found that some aspects in the films are not appropriately connected and explained. Besides, I sometimes noticed that the titles of his films may not be thoroughly related to the narration. Another surprising aspect that I later uncovered is that Apichatpong is further well-known for linking his films and characters. In this film, he again included Jenjira Pongprapas (Jen) and Sakda Kaewbuadee (Tong) who regularly appear in his films. The spectator can recognize another signature of Apichatpong by seeing these two actors. In other words, Jenjira and Sakda leave traces in Boonmee's previous films.² Jen formerly appeared in *Blissfully Yours* (2002) under the same name, while Tong was Min, an illegal immigrant from Burma living in Thailand's border town. Jen acted as an old lady who, together with the government officers, corrupted by trying to help and hide Min.³ Nevertheless, Jen's legs were equal and normal. Meanwhile, Tong played Tong in *Tropical Malady* (2004) who was in love with another man. In one

² Film Sick, "Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (Apichatpong Weerasethakul/2010/Thai) a transformation of memory to history ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ (อภิชาติพงศ์ วีระเศรษฐกุล/ 2010 / ไทย) การเปลี่ยนความทรงจำให้เป็นประวัติศาสตร์," *Film Sick* (blog), April 15, 2019, <https://filmsick.wordpress.com/2012/01/08/uncleboonme/>.

³ "Sud sanaeha," IMDB, October 7, 2022, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0317171/>.

scene, Tong informed his boyfriend that he was going to visit his sick cousin somewhere.⁴ Later in 2010, Tong re-appeared in *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, as a nephew from another city. Therefore, this influenced me to explore his other films such as *Blissfully Yours* (2002), *Tropical Malady* (2004), and *Syndromes and a Century* (2006). Subsequently, I understood *Uncle Boonmee* film in a more obvious direction and meaning i.e., why the film is produced this way and what could have motivated the film director. I re-watched *Uncle Boonmee* film and focused on those specific elements. I found that Jen portrays a natural characteristic than other characters. She behaves as a senior family member or friend who is respected and trusted by other characters. Moreover, her legs genuinely describe the disparity of border town and city. On the contrary, Tong looks like an innocent character who most of the time follow Jen's instruction. Tong as Min in *Blissfully Yours* reveals a recognition of his status and suffer that cause his escape from Myanmar. But Tong in *Uncle Boonmee* film and *Tropical Malada* can reflect different belief in Thai society. In *Syndrome and a Century*, Tong also appears as a monk playing guitar which is antagonistic to the Buddhist belief. This scene has been extensively criticized and eliminated from the original version. Therefore, Tong can be a representative of controversial issue in Apichatpong's movies. This means that he probably symbolizes a non-traditional belief that Apichatpong might attempt to suggest to the society.

The film reception, in this study, is an analysis and a discourse of film critiques. In other words, it concerns an understanding on how the spectators interpret the film. The reception is the process of how the film is received by the spectator. In this case, the process can then refer to the viewing (gazing) as well as the interpretation of the film discourse in form of written reviews. The critiques demonstrate that the spectators can create the film meaning regarding their experience. The data further convinced me that *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* rather defines a political history of Thailand than a life anecdote of one man. Besides, the film obtains implicit messages, causing the spectators to interpret the meaning dissimilarly. The analysis should rely only on visual understanding, but reflective reception. Thus, I cannot rely my analysis only on the perception theory, but

⁴ "Sud pralard," IMDB, October 7, 2022, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0381668/>.

interpretation and reception (the reception will be intensively argued in *Chapter 2*). I suppose that *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* should be under the spectator's responsibility in receiving and interpreting. Even though it is not a film for everyone, but it can infinitely capture the audience's attention who once watched it because the film is an artistic piece that is probably visually impressive and amusing.⁵ Apichatpong insisted that his film is an artwork, he did not intend to implant any connotative information in his work. "I'm not really sure [*sic*] what the audience will get because normally I don't like to have a message of my work. I think film is more than that. It should be more open to many different interpretations because we approach it from so many different backgrounds."⁶ The film functions as a 'time machine', which travels through the past, the present and the future. Boonmee is a machine driver who visits his past, lives the present, and foresees the future, meanwhile, this machine is represented by memory, imagination and dream. *Uncle Boonmee* film is illustrated in an artistic and narrative style with an 'ordinary of unusual'.⁷ From my perspective, the ordinary means nature and life in rural, while the unusual refers to ghosts that appear in the film. The ordinary of the unusual ghosts may be the normal conversation between human and ghost which destroys a boundary of human world and another world, and reality and imagination.

Uncle Boonmee film is significant to be examined owing to three principal reasons namely, an explicit presentation of the film, a complexity of aesthetic message, and the director's personal interests. Additionally, an international reputation of the film and a prize from the Palm d'Or can motivate an advanced analysis. I found the film instantaneously provocative and mysterious to research because I realized depicts numbers of connotative features after reviewing the film reviews and

⁵ Mark Adams, "Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives," *Screen Daily*, May 21, 2010, <https://www.screendaily.com/uncle-boonmee-who-can-recall-his-past-lives/5014254.article>.

⁶ "Q&A: Apichatpong Weerasethakul His Uncle Boonmee is up for Cannes' Palme d'Or," *The Hollywood Reporter*, May 18, 2010, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/business/business-news/qampa-apichatpong-weerasethakul-23765/>.

⁷ Kenneth Turan, "Movie review: Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives", *LA Times*, March 4, 2011, <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/la-xpm-2011-mar-04-la-et-uncle-boonmee-review-20110304-story.html>.

Apichatpong's data as well as seeing the film several times. The following four common points, which are initially observed, encouraged me to take *Uncle Boonmee* film as the case study. Firstly, some comments from Pantip wrote that political message is subtly included during the film events. Boonmee mentions the government and the Communist in the past, while the film image includes soldiers and a monkey ghost who is arrested by a group of soldiers. On the contrary, other critiques found that the Communist in the film connotatively refers to the Communist Party of 1965 who disguised in the forest around the North-eastern Thailand. Meanwhile, "Boonsong is another representation of the Communist because he migrates to the forest".⁸ Secondly, the reviews in Pantip indicated that the film further portrays social hierarchy and inequality in multiple contexts through Thai employer and Lao employees, Aunt Jen's unequal legs, the government and anti-government, local and urban people, and medical welfare. It demonstrates that Thais create positive relationship with Laotians along the border, nonetheless, Laotian is generally perceived as inferior who needs to seek an employment in Thailand. Moreover, Boonmee perceives the Thai government as superior because they can remove people who cannot clearly identify their identity. Boonmee's sickness and Jai's assistance can also indicate that the medical welfare is not accessible for every citizen. Besides, "the ending music named *Afraid of the Height* can further obviously emphasize the inequality in Thai society".⁹

Thirdly, the film silently communicates the concept of 'crossing' in various forms. The first form is the 'border crossing' through Mae Khong River between Thais and Laotians. The second form is the crossing between human and non-human worlds which refers to a departure from a human world to an after-death world and a return from the after-death world to the human world, and an arrival of animal in human area. The third form is the 'time crossing' from the present into the past and

⁸ "Who watched and understood the movie Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (movie review) ใครดูหนังเรื่องลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติแล้วเข้าใจบ้างคะ? (สปอยล์)", Pantip, April 17, 2019, <https://pantip.com/topic/31854178>.

⁹ "Who watched and understood the movie Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (movie review) ใครดูหนังเรื่องลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติแล้วเข้าใจบ้างคะ? (สปอยล์)", Pantip, April 17, 2019, <https://pantip.com/topic/31854178>.

future i.e., Boonmee's passage through recall and dream. The fourth form is the 'crossing of class' e.g., affair between a princess, a slave, and a catfish. The fifth form is the 'crossing of dimension' which is around the end of the film when Tong sees his and Jen's duplicate. And the final form is the 'crossing of status' that is a transformation from human into animal, and from human into ghost. Lastly, the film relatively suggests several contradictions, such as Huay and Jen, whose names are entirely non-compatible though they are sisters. Huay is likely to be rural while Jen appears to be modern.¹⁰ Furthermore, Boonmee renamed 'Krungthep-Mahanakhon' or Bangkok, which refers to a great city of god, into 'Krungthep-Mahanarok'. Krungthep means the city of god, while Mahanarok is a deep hell. The two words construct a sarcasm that although Krungthep is sufficiently developed, it is not perhaps a pleasant place for living.

In sum, politics, society, religion (crossing), and culture (paradox) in the film; Apichatpong's directing style; the world award can further show that the film is influential for the society and prominent to be researched. Throughout the history, the Thai state generally perceived North-east region as a site of numerous rebellion and political resistance.¹¹ The confrontation between the state and the Communist Party generated a wound for local people as well as Thai history. Due to the data about political history and the Thai state, I considered that the history was written to make the anti-government people being perceived as terrorists or outlaws.¹² Thus, I recognized that *Uncle Boonmee* film can be a record of previous events in society and a future prediction of the country. It particularly addresses Thai political history and social issues in North-east (Isan) which I am assured that other media and films might fail to mention even though Thai film industry has been succeeded for decades.

¹⁰ "Who watched and understood the movie Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (movie review) ใครดูหนังเรื่องลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติแล้วเข้าใจบ้างคะ? (สปอยล์)", Pantip, April 17, 2019, <https://pantip.com/topic/31854178>.

¹¹ Duncan McCargo and Krisadawan Hongladarom (ed.), "Contesting Isan-ness: Discourses of Politics and Identity in Northeast Thailand," *Asian Ethnicity*, 5, no. 2, (June 2004): 221.

¹² McCargo and Hongladarom, "Contesting Isan-ness: Discourses of Politics and Identity in Northeast Thailand," 115.

There have been around 40-50 Thai films produced and released each year in a variety of film genres including action, comedy, horror, porn, noir, animation cartoon, homosexual, history, drama, and science-fiction.¹³ As a result, Thai films have been more well-accepted and viewed, and Thai people have been more confident to purchase because of a variety of genre. The year 1997 signified a success revenue of the highest grossing Thai film industry which was over 70 million Thai Baht. The most-earned revenue film received over one billion Baht called *Pee Mak Phra Khanong*, which is distributed in 2013.¹⁴ But the film presents a common ghost story that is amusing, frightening and thrilling.¹⁵ Further from the national achievement, Thai films obtains international recognition through the world well-known movie website. IMDB listed 40 best Thai films during the 20th century, which is recorded concerning plots, characters, production studios and proposed audience. The examples on the list are *Tears of the Black Tiger* (2000), *Satree Lek* or *The Iron Ladies* (2000), and *The Overture* (2004).¹⁶ *Tears of the Black Tiger* or *Fah Ta Lai Jone* by Wisit Sasanatieng marked an accomplishment and outstanding capacity of Thai cinema in the world stage because it is the first Thai film ever won the Dragons and Tigers Award for the Best New Director at Vancouver International Film Festival.¹⁷ The film offers a melodramatic story set from the 1950s to 1960s and based on the contexts of complicated love, power, and a betrayal of friendship.¹⁸ Furthermore, it was the first Thai film in the past two decades that was selected to enter and subsequently shown at the 2001 Cannes Film Festival, and later re-distributed in USA in 2007. In addition to the IMDB list, *Shutter* from 2005 further highlighted greater competence of the Thai movie

¹³ The National Federation of Motion Pictures and Contents Associations, March 10, 2016, <http://www.mpc.or.th/main/>).

¹⁴ The National Federation of Motion Pictures and Contents Associations, March 10, 2016, <http://www.mpc.or.th/main/>).

¹⁵ See Appendix, List of Image

¹⁶ “Top 40 Best Thai Movies”, IMDB, May 29, 2016, <https://www.imdb.com/list/ls052285995/>.

¹⁷ “Tears of the Black Tiger (Fah Talai Jone),” Internet Archive Wayback Machine, August 25, 2021, https://web.archive.org/web/20050323041429/http://www.festivalcannes.fr/films/fiche_film.php?langue=6002&id_film=2001147.

¹⁸ See Appendix, List of Image

industry because it won the Best Asian Film from the Fantasia Film Festival in Canada as well as the Best Fantasy Film from Festival du Film Fantastique de Gérardmer in France. The film was also re-distributed in the other 30 countries around the world and remains a classic horror plot in which the ghost instantaneously emerges to scare the audience.¹⁹ But *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* is the most challenging in my opinion among other international-award-winner films from Thailand and other films in recommended list. The examples of these Thai films can further proclaim that Apichatpong's *Uncle Boonmee* film is dissimilar to other stories. It possibly offers new knowledge of Thai society or another direction of learning history. Therefore, it is engaging to continue studying this film rather than selecting other award-winning films which create similar narrative.

The following sections highlights background of *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*; methodology; and a complete structure of the thesis. The methodology will include what is going to be researched, how the study will be implemented, the statement of the problem, hypothesis and objective. Meanwhile, the format of each chapter will be entirely expanded in the structure part.

2. From a Folklore to World Cinema

Inspiration and Memory

Uncle Boonmee film may have been recognized only after receiving the Palm d'or award at the 2010 Cannes Film Festival. It is a film in Apichatpong's collection called Primitive which includes *A Letter to Uncle Boonmee* (2009), *Phantoms of Nabua* (2009), *Primitive Installation* (2009), and *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010).²⁰ "The project is principally shot in Nabua and presents story of the past situations through groups of people."²¹ Apichatpong initiated the

¹⁹ See Appendix, List of Image

²⁰ See Appendix, List of Image

²¹ "Primitive," Animate Project Archive, May 5, 2023, https://animateprojectsarchive.org/films/by_project/primitive/primitive.

Primitive project in 2009, but the project became well-known after he released *Uncle Boonmee* and the film won an award. Meanwhile, his other previous films, which also won other international awards, are *Tropical Malady*, *Blissfully Yours*, *Syndromes and a Century*, and *Cemetery of Splendour*.²² Primitive or ‘Duek Dam Ban’ in Thai can further refer to an intention of waking up ghost of Nabua by communicating through characters, such as young men, military men, Jen and Boonmee.²³ Instead of showing a history of Nabua, Apichatpong used these characters to reflect some situations that possibly simulate reality. In general, Apichatpong believes in ghost and spirits, and the transmigration of souls as he stated in his speech at the Palm d’Or awarding moment as well as in various interviews and statements. *Uncle Boonmee* film offers an attachment between man, animal, and spirits, which further eliminates the border between each dimension and world.²⁴ The films in Primitive can be expected to fall on a genre of documentary and fiction that refers to some circumstances in the history of Thailand and Isan. It is a presentation of real situations through an allegory which derived from Apichatpong’s childhood experience and memory of Isan region, and historical facts that genuinely happened. Nevertheless, the film is possibly a fiction because it is related to dream, imagination, and reincarnation, which can be complicated to verify. This may reaffirm a combination of art and reality in the film.

However, the award that *Uncle Boonmee* film received might have surprised some international audiences. O’Hara commented that “the film is a dark horse”,²⁵ whereas Sicinski found that “it is challenging to explain how the success of the film

²² See Appendix, List of Image

²³ Chairat Polmuk, “Return to Isan: A Haunted Dream and Violence of Bangkok in Film,” *Journal of Letter* 44, no. 2 (2015): 55.

²⁴ Robert Beeson, “UNCLE BOONMEE WHO CAN RECALL HIS PAST LIVES (LUNG BOONMEE RALUEK CHAT) ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ a film by Apichatpong Weerasethakul Winner Palme d’Or Cannes Film Festival 2010,” New Wave Films, October 7, 2022, http://www.newwavefilms.co.uk/assets/467/uncle_boonmee_pressbook_.pdf.

²⁵ Angela O’Hara, “Mysterious Object of Desire: The Haunted Cinema of Apichatpong Weerasethakul,” in *The Reel Asian Exchange; Transnational Asian Identities in Pan Pacific Cinemas*, ed. Philipa Gates and Lisa Funnell (New York, Routledge, 2010), 177-190.

can affect the viewer”.²⁶ While the film is internationally famous among foreign spectators, it perhaps fails to impress Thai people “because its story telling is relatively complicated and hopeless to Thai audiences; and some scenes are long and colourless”. It does not really allow the audience to enjoy the ambient and characters, and hardly gives a smile and a positive mood to viewer.²⁷ Furthermore, the film had limited distribution in certain areas in Thailand.²⁸ The film is co-produced by France, Spain, the United Kingdom, Germany, Netherlands and Thailand.²⁹

James Quandt wrote in his book named *Apichatpong Weerasethakul* that “the film was inspired by a monk whom Apichatpong met during his exploration in Isan.”³⁰ He offered Apichatpong a book called *A Man Who Can Recall His Past Lives* which is about Boonmee. Boonmee came to the temple and recalled his previous lives that he was reborn several times in the same area.” Besides, Apichatpong received another book called *Terry Glavin’s Waiting for the Macaws* from another Western monk when he went to Los Angeles in 2007. He then connected a common feature, which is ‘extinction’, of these two books. The books generated his curiosity about North-eastern Thailand or Isan, a dry land that cause numbers of people migrating to Bangkok. Apichatpong later started his journey along with his assistances and Jenjira, who is always his actress, in search of more information about the region and Boonmee story. More remarkably, his crew and him are coincidentally from Isan. During their trip, they stopped at Jenjira’s house and interviewed her father, who discussed about the 60s when he worked for the government in controlling the Communist. Jenjira also informed them that once the government paid unexpected visit their house to investigate for a red book. Her

²⁶ Michael Sicinski, “Dreaming in Cinema: Capturing the Imagination of Apichatpong Weerasethakul,” *Cinéaste* 36, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 26-29.

²⁷ See details in Chapter 5 How is The Film Connotation Symbolically Read?

²⁸ “Review Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives,” Thai Cinema, November 21, 2010, <http://www.thaicinema.org/kits229lung.php>.

²⁹ Philip French, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives – Review,” The Guardian, November 21, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2010/nov/21/uncle-boonmee-recall-past-lives>.

³⁰ See Appendix, List of Image

father later told her that he burned a red book that Jen received from her friends but did not read it. The red book could have symbolized an anti-government or Communism at that time.

Apichatpong and his team visited several villages along Mekong River and Nabua. *Nabua* is in Nakhon Phanom and is known for being occupied by the Thai army during the 1960s until the early 1980s. In the 1960s, the soldiers selected the village as their administrative base to regulate the local people. The villagers were physically and mentally injured, leading some of them to flee away because they were accused of being the Communist without realizing the meaning of *Communism*. Nabua became even more famous when the first gun battle between the totalitarian government and the farmer communist exploded on 7th August 1965.³¹ This incident arose for around two decades until the US-Soviet Union Cold War reconciled. Besides, two teens at Nabua shown Apichatpong the place where the gunshot and the fight might have appeared.

Later, when he was developing his films, he obtained more data from one of Boonmee's sons who lived not far from Nabua. The son reaffirmed a story of his father, who was sometimes Boonmee and sometimes Boonma, with the most important piece of information which is his father's photo. This fact was matched with the anecdote that Apichatpong learned before. He, therefore, believed the man named *Boonmee* is 'real'. Nonetheless, a spectator found that "as a whole, the movie generously, gloriously concurs: it's all beyond our control."³² In other

³¹ The Communist Party of Thailand entered the local forest to escape and fight against the Thai Government. The first and remarkable attack toward the Thai government was on August 7, 1965, at Nabua – Nakhon Phanom, which is in the North-eastern Thailand. The day is specifically named 'Gunshot Day, ' marking a painful memory for local people because the incidence killed civilians and discharged some family members who were working and hiding in their properties. The Gunshot Day is also known as the Communist Insurgency in Thailand, which was an irregular war from 1965 to 1983 between the Communist Party of Thailand and the Thai Government. (*see more detail in Chapter 1*)

³² Wesley Morris, "Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives 'Uncle' embraces this life — and the others," *The Boston Globe*, April 6, 2011, http://archive.boston.com/ae/movies/articles/2011/04/06/uncle_embraces_this_life_and_the_others/.

words, the film can be unexpected or the spectator do not directly experience what Apichatpong discovered. Therefore, they cannot regulate the direction of the storytelling. Furthermore, Apichatpong has repeatedly expressed in his interview that he has always been motivated by his personal experience that he grew up in Isan and around hospital (his parents were doctors). Correspondingly, *Uncle Boonmee* film can be seen as a combination of his memory and the recollection of North-eastern region.³³ “It’s about going back to the roots of things, what we have in our bodies, the primitive energy,” said Apichatpong, the Guardian.³⁴

Who is Uncle Boonmee?

Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives principally focuses on an old man named Boonmee who is reaching the final stage of his life and recalling his past incarnations. He possesses a bee and tamarind farm, situated in the North-east region of Thailand.³⁵ Boonmee’s pain might influence him to recall the past incarnation and dream about future. His family members then converge at his house for the last time before Boonmee’s soul is taken. The reunion starts at the house terrace and shows a solid attachment although the ghost and the monkey ghost are likely scary at the beginning. However, the film is not only about ‘reincarnation’, but it is further related to numerous directions of past, present, and future.³⁶ Besides, the film is assumed to reveal message about politics in history as well as inequality in Thai society. “This is Weerasethakul’s world, a perfectly balanced *mélange* of real people, intense encounters, political references, and ghosts and

³³ Film Sick, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (Apichatpong Weerasethakul/2010/Thai) a transformation of memory to history ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ (อภิชาติพงศ์ วีระเศรษฐกุล/ 2010 / ไทย) การเปลี่ยนความทรงจำให้เป็นประวัติศาสตร์,” *Film Sick* (blog), April 15, 2019, <https://filmsick.wordpress.com/2012/01/08/uncleboonme/>.

³⁴ Philip French, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives – Review,” *The Guardian*, November 21, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2010/nov/21/uncle-boonmee-recall-past-lives>.

³⁵ See Appendix, List of Image

³⁶ Chuck Stephens, “Review: Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives,” *Film Comment*, accessed April 15, 2011, <https://www.filmcomment.com/article/uncle-boonmee-who-can-recall-his-past-lives-review/>.

reincarnations, none of them casually addressed.”³⁷ The characters in this film can be classified as follows, owing to their appearance in the film.

Main-Appearance Character	Lesser-Appearance Character	Single-Appearance Character
Uncle Boonmee Aunt Jen Tong	Jai Huay Monkey ghost	Buffalo Farmer The farmer’s family Boonsong Princess Slave Catfish Rung A group of soldiers A group of young men A group of people at a temple People in a restaurant

Table 1 Characters in Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives

Boonmee: the main character who can realize his past incarnations and foresee the future.

Jen: Boonmee’s sister-in-law who comes from Bangkok to visit and nurse him.

Tong: a young cousin who takes care of food for Boonmee.

Huay: Boonmee’s deceased wife who arrives at a dining table and shows her concern.

³⁷ Howard Feinstein, “Past Tense,” Film Maker Magazine, Jan 24, 2011, https://filmmakermagazine.com/19141-past-tense/#.Yz_4MnZBy5c.

Jai: Boonmee's Lao employee who takes care of his farm and his kidney dialysis.
Monkey ghost: a red-eyed and black monkey appears at dining table, claiming to be Boonsong, Boonmee's long lost son. He turns into a monkey after entering the forest.

Buffalo and farmer and his family: the first's scene characters with vague purpose of appearing.

Boonsong: Boonmee's son, appears as a flashback of the monkey ghost. He is obsessed with taking photo.

Princess: a superior class and a royal family member who wishes for a beauty look.

Slave: a princess's servant and (rather) a lover.

Catfish: a fish character who tried to comfort the princess.

Rung: a young cousin at the end of the film, helping Aunt Jen to count merit money.

A group of soldiers: characters in Boonmee's dream of the future.

A group of people at a temple: attendants at Boonmee's funeral night ritual.

People in a restaurant: extra characters in the last scene when Jen and Tong are out for dinner.

Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives is an extended film of around two hours, but it does not consist of many scenes because each scene is long. "Especially for this film, which has six reels, each one different in location and style. With me, there's a lot of talk about life as nonsense. It just goes on," said Apichatpong in an interview with Hollywood Reporter.³⁸ One of Boonmee's incarnation might appear in the first scene. It describes the relationship between a farmer and a buffalo.³⁹ However, the director does not indicate the relation of this

³⁸ "Q&A: Apichatpong Weerasethakul His Uncle Boonmee is up for Cannes' Palme d'Or," The Hollywood Reporter, May 18, 2010, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/business/business-news/qampa-apichatpong-weerasethakul-23765/>.

³⁹ Film Sick, "Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (Apichatpong Weerasethakul/2010/Thai) a transformation of memory to history ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ (อภิชาติพงศ์ วีระเศรษฐกุล/2010 / ไทย) การเปลี่ยนความทรงจำให้เป็นประวัติศาสตร์," *Film Sick* (blog), April 15, 2019, <https://filmsick.wordpress.com/2012/01/08/uncleboonme/>. Further detail in Chapter 3

scene to Boonmee.⁴⁰ Another possible incarnation is the scene of a princess, a slave and a catfish. Nonetheless, it is not clearly stated that Boonmee was born as the princess, the slave, or the catfish. The critics however analyzed that the princess can be a myth of the forest in the previous incarnation of Boonmee.⁴¹ “The recall is not common in every person”,⁴² therefore, Boonmee is considered special since he can remember what others forget. Furthermore, the reincarnation concept involves Boonmee to think about his past actions called ‘Kamma’. The Kamma concept refers to ‘what goes around comes around’⁴³ (the concept will be elaborated in the following chapter). In the film, Boonmee completely believes that his discomfort is caused by the past performances of murdering. On the contrary, Jen, his sister-in-law, finds the previous actions legitimate because Boonmee intended to protect the nation.⁴⁴

At the end, Boonmee, Jen, Tong, and ghost Huay walk into the deep forest and arrive in a cave. A few minutes before dying, Boonmee demonstrates his dream about the future to Jen and ghost Huay. “In the future, the government has the technology to make people disappear if they cannot identify their identities,” said Boonmee. Meanwhile, Boonmee feels that the cave is his mother’s womb, where he formerly resided and was born from. Furthermore, his last moment is further observed by a group of red-eyed monkeys. The film ends by displaying Boonmee’s death ritual, which Tong becomes a monk while Jen and Rung help to manage the

⁴⁰ Kallapapruek, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives, a soulmate which cannot be apart ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ” *กุ่มแล้วลิบแคแล้วบ่กลาคกันดอออกบ่อ*,” Arts, April 6, 2012,

<http://www.arts.su.ac.th/thaicritic/?p=754>. Further explanation in Chapter 3

⁴¹ Film Sick, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Live (Apichatpong Weerasethakul/2010/Thai) a transformation of memory to history ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ (อภิชาติพงศ์ วีระเศรษฐกุล/ 2010 / ไทย) การเปลี่ยนความทรงจำให้เป็นประวัติศาสตร์,” *Film Sick* (blog), April 15, 2019, <https://filmsick.wordpress.com/2012/01/08/uncleboonme/>. Further detail in Chapter 3

⁴² Usa Wongsangkul, “Rebirth in Theravada Buddhism and Dr. Ian Stevenson’s Research Study,” *The Journal of International Buddhist Studies College* 7, no. 1, (June 23, 2021): 38.

⁴³ Charles Keyes, “Buddhist Politics and Their Revolutionary Origins in Thailand,” *International Political Science Review* 10, no. 2, (April 1989): 122.

⁴⁴ Mark Adams, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives,” *Screen Daily*, May 21, 2010, <https://www.screendaily.com/uncle-boonmee-who-can-recall-his-past-lives/5014254.article>.

ceremony. The finale further suggests several controversies for religious practices; firstly, Monk Tong's escaping from the temple at night; secondly, Monk Tong's arrival at a hotel room in a monk uniform; Tong's conversation with two women in a private place; and lastly, Monk Tong's desire for food and convenience.

The actors and actresses are unknown, making the film natural and reasonable. They are not acting but living their normal life in recorded events. In addition to the routine dialogue and infamous actors, the film is displayed through Isan dialect (some call North-eastern language, others call Lao-Isan dialect),⁴⁵ which is consistent with the story location. Apichatpong's other previous movies similarly obtain scenes and story which are situated in forests, remote, poor and North-eastern Thailand with numerous human and non-human characters assembling in the film.⁴⁶ Though the film revolves around natural and straightforward routine conversation, it is analyzed as strangely presented because it composes of interactions between humans, a ghost, and a monkey ghost. But it does not rely on fear, while the audience does not need to be a Buddhist to understand and believe in ghost.

Moreover, Apichatpong applied ta day-for-night technique when Uncle Boonmee, Aunt Jen, Tong, and Huay walk through the forest. This extended scene does not look completely dark but looks like the dawn. An appearance of ghost Huay at dining table also applied a different technique The director placed a transparent glass in front of the character and turned on the light, then ghost Huay image slightly occurs like a ghost. It is an old-style Hollywood technique which is more expensive than the blue screen computer graphic.⁴⁷ The representation of ghosts in this film is an absolute opposition to an advanced art performance for example, Huay, in form of human look-alike, looks unreal and outrageous.

⁴⁵ Charles Keyes, "The Politics of Languages in Thailand and Laos," in *Fighting Words: Language Policy and Ethnic Relations in Asia*, ed. Michael E. Brown and Šumit Ganguly (Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2003), 183. Further detail in Section 3 Culture and Influence of Buddhism in Isan.

⁴⁶ James Hoberman, "Spirits in the Material World in Uncle Boonmee," Village Voice, March 2, 2011, <https://www.villagevoice.com/2011/03/02/spirits-in-the-material-world-in-uncle-boonmee/>.

⁴⁷ Howard Feinstein, "Past Tense," Film Maker Magazine, Jan 24, 2011, https://filmmakermagazine.com/19141-past-tense/#.Yz_4MnZBy5c.



Image 1 day for night technique and mirror-ghost technique

3. Structure of the Thesis

The direction of this thesis can be briefly summarized as the following. *Chapter 1* refers to background of Isan, and the influence of Thai culture and Buddhism to this region. *Chapter 2* draws attention on methodology that is an elaborated explanation of research method and operation, as well as Casetti's spectatorship theory. *Chapter 3* is a literature review, focusing on what were discovered in other studies relating to film, spectatorship, reception and cinematic language. *Chapter 4* engages film critiques and Althusser's studies on ideology. The chapter addresses the state ideology and the film spectatorship that Apichatpong portrayed in the film in relation to the political incidents in Thailand's history. *Chapter 5* focuses on film critiques from both non-Thai and Thai contexts, collected from general reviews, professional journalists, and academic authors. The last section of this thesis is

Conclusion stating thesis findings and results as well as limitation and recommendation. The following paragraphs are extending details of each chapter.

Chapter 1 entitled *Culture and Influence of Buddhism in Isan*, discusses Thai culture and Buddhist culture in Thailand's North-east or Isan. The chapter is generally divided into three parts that are definition of culture and fundamental of Theravada Buddhism; Thailand's largest region (what has the region encountered?); and Buddhism and North-eastern Thailand (reincarnation and other beliefs). The first part reveals the generality of culture in this thesis, which is not only about ideology and religion. However, it is re-defined as a collection of ideas, language, and symbols, as such. Later in this part, it introduces principal knowledge about Theravada Buddhism and a reference of Buddhism presenting in *Uncle Boonmee*. The section narrates a history of the religion referring to its origin, the founder Buddha, Buddhahood, and religious doctrines. On the other hand, a significance of Buddhism in Thailand is stressed by showing a statistic of the fiscal allocation for the Buddhist department based on previous research. Then, it refers to Uncle Boonmee with examples of Buddhist beliefs, tradition and culture. It describes how might the other characters be related to Boonmee and what may the phrase 'can recall his past lives' implicitly mean.

The second part, Thailand's largest region: what has the region encountered? clarifies how the region emerged, who are Isan people, and what language they speak. Afterward, the description goes further to particular culture, such as their house, career and costume with examples of pictures. This part also explains why Isan is economically abandoned and ignored by the government. However, the region gained attention around 1960s when Nabua village encountered physical attack against the government as they were accused of participating with the Communist Party. *Uncle Boonmee* film engages in this section by illustrating its location in Isan, which is believed to be Nabua; soldier and monkey; and the communist symbol.

The final part, Buddhism and North-eastern Thailand: reincarnation and other beliefs, signifies an influence of Buddhism to the region. Firstly, it provides an example from other research about particular village, and general practices and

rituals of Isan. Nonetheless, the religious rituals are mainly related to praying for dead people and reincarnation belief. Two examples of ceremony given in this part revolves around previous incarnations of the Buddha. The entire section is revealed in a relation to the film because the film title and a part of film message refer to Buddhism with obvious examples concerning ghost, making merit, and becoming monk. Then, it points out how male's and female's roles are differentiated due to religious belief. The information for this chapter is from academic papers, news websites, and journal articles. The author inserted pictures from different academic and non-academic sources to build concrete understanding among readers about Isan culture. Besides, some pictures from the film are provided throughout the text to create precise comprehension of life in Isan.

Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework and Methodology, enlarges methodology and thesis tasks, research question and hypothesis, and indicates an advantage of employing Casetti as well as how the theory will be mobilized. The chapter is also separated into two consecutive parts. First is research methodology and implementation, in which the qualitative method is employed in this study. Therefore, this chapter specifies how I gather the data, type of data and how I apply the information to the examination. The research collects data from google scholar search engine with two principal keywords which are *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives review* and *Apichatpong Weerasethakul*. The first keyword is the most important because it can bring the author to the spectator's reception, while the second keyword is related to the film director anecdote and possible influence for the film. Respectively, the collected data will be employed in two empirical chapters including chapter 4 and chapter 5. Chapter 4 discusses the state ideology in the film and the film spectatorship, while chapter 5 studies other film connotative messages such as gender relation, nature, and class struggle.

Secondly, the chapter explains how Casetti worked on the reception theory and how he viewed the spectatorship. The part primarily highlights the most prominent concept of Casetti's spectatorship, which I will employ in my empirical analysis, called geography of the spectator, concerning Point of View i.e., seeing, knowing, and believing. The spectatorship conceptualizes how the spectator's reception should be focused and analyzed through the geography of the spectator. It can later

lead to an understanding of different spectator's reception. Seeing, knowing, and believing of the geography of the spectator engages different modes of configuration namely objective, impossible objective, interpellation, and subjective. Then, this part demonstrates how Casetti explained the film spectatorship by describing numerous phrases that are the act of showing; subjectivity of language; and cinematographic enunciation, for instance. The section will also offer examples of some films from Casetti's finding, such as *Wind from the East*, *the Great Train Robbery*, and *Chronicle of a Love Affair*. The end of this part specifies the reasons that *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* must be studied under Casetti's spectatorship. These reasons highlight the prominence of the spectatorship as it is the most suitable theory for the film analysis. The information of this part mainly derives from the book named *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, which is a translated version of an original Italian manuscript.

Chapter 3 entitles *Outside Casetti: What Others Discussed?*, exhibits a review of other literatures, which particularly disclose how the cinema, the spectatorship, and the reception were distinctively examined. It is prominent to study these theorists because Casetti is not the only theorist who investigated the spectatorship, but there are various researchers from numerous fields of expertise who also worked on the theory and other related approaches. Precisely, dissimilar conclusion of each study can broaden my knowledge toward Casetti's spectatorship, and a comparison on what is restricted to use in my thesis and why.

This chapter is divided into four parts. The first part focuses on a simple background and early film studies, and improvement of film style. The theorists are originally from different areas of study who observed motion picture, use of film, and realistic and formalistic film e.g. The part concludes arguments from Robert Stam, Marc Fourstenau, David Bordwell, Noel Carroll, Leo Baudry, Marshall Cohen, Tim Bywater, Thomas Sobchack, and Louis Gainnetti. The second part discloses dissimilar perspectives of the spectatorship, referring to the spectatorship and film, and summarizing cinematic institution and visual system. The divergent findings are from Judith Mayne, Christopher Olsen, CarrieLynn Reinhard, and Andrew Tudor, who are, nonetheless, connected to Casetti. The third

part concerns a study of Timothy Corrigan toward film perception and reception. The part is called perception versus reception, citing a research result on three diverse dimensions of film experience, which are psychological, perceptual, and social. The last part is language and cinema which is a review of Christian Metz study. Metz is interested in Casetti's study of spectatorship, and, most significantly, he is a scholar from another theoretical scope who introduced dissimilar ideas. Therefore, it is essential to know how Metz's view toward the film is interrelated or disconnected to Casetti.

Even though, these debates in Chapter 3 obtain some similar keywords and a few related ideas to Casetti, they are restricted for my analysis. Therefore, the end of each section in this chapter as well as the chapter summary express limitations of those theories and criticism that the theorists experienced. These two points can advise the readers on why I am not using them as the main theory in this thesis and broaden the reader's knowledge toward the uniqueness of Casetti. In sum, the studies mostly employed a term 'cinema' instead of film which refers to a communication tool or a medium rather than a work of art. In my opinion, *Uncle Boonmee* is a film that consists of dynamic message, which functions more than a communication process. Besides, these theorists did not offer a specific tool that I can use for an analysis.

The following chapters are the empirical chapters which refer particularly to an analysis of the spectator's reception based on the data of film critiques (general reviews, professional critiques and academic research). However, Chapter 4 focuses on ideology and politics, while Chapter 5 centralizes on other connotative messages.

Chapter 4 entitles What is the Politics in the Film: the State Ideology and the Film Spectatorship?, demonstrates two principal aspects which are: first, how Apichatpong recognized the state ideology and how he expressed it in the film; and second, how the film spectatorship is created and offered and how the film might deconstruct the state ideology. In other words, this chapter presents that Apichatpong simultaneously perceived the state ideology in Thailand and opened a new space in his film. Meanwhile, the relation between Casetti's spectatorship

and Althusser's ISAs, and the ISAs and *Uncle Boonmee* film will be further prolonged at the beginning of this chapter. The first section called, *Ideology Inside the film: What is the State Ideology in the Film*, describes the state ideology or the state interpellation which may be subtly communicated through some characters and sequences. The section further discusses the correlation between the film events and the political situations that occurred in the history of Thailand. The state ideology can be explained by Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) that the state apparatus (the state or the government in the film) employs politics (or political ideology) to exercise its power. An example of Indonesian documentary film called *The Act of Killing* from 2012, which is related to political insurgency in 1960s, will be explained in this part. The film refers to a massacre in Indonesia and is similar to anti-government people eradication process in *Uncle Boonmee* film. In contrast, the second section named, *the Film Spectatorship: How the Film Opens a New Space?*, illustrates an artistic beauty of the film. Apichatpong implies the film spectatorship and deconstruct the state ideology in a more subtle and moderate pattern. He does not attack the government in a violent manner, but he introduces the spectatorship which is more open than ideology. The film offers a new space for the spectator to understand the film in more diverse meaning rather than a specific definition offered by the state interpellation. The spectators can interpret the politics in the film depending on their reception, i.e., the film suggests the spectatorship for the spectators to interpret the film in another possibility. The film provides the spectatorship through the characters and scenes as they view the state ideology or the government differently. The summary of this chapter concludes the representation of the state ideology and the destruction toward the state ideology. It is found that the film simulates the political situations in 1960s through different points of view and sequences. It is, however, produced in an art form to allow distinct spectator's reception and imagination. Rather than remembering the historical events, Boonmee reflects the past by recalling his previous incarnations. He may symbolize Apichatpong in opposing the state and deconstructing the state interpellation.

Chapter 5 entitles *How is the Film Connotative Message Read?* focuses on the spectator's reception on the film connotative messages. It principally involves two group of critiques namely Thai and non-Thai spectators that are from personal

blogs, discussion boards, online journals and academic sources, such as Rotten Tomatoes, Pantip, Telegraph, New York Times, and Research Gate. The analysis secondarily sorts the critiques, according to their common statements and reception, into three main groups who are professional critique; discussion board and personal blog; and scholar research. The film critiques reveal three possible aspects of connotative meanings, that are the portrayal of gender, a remark of nature, and class. Correspondingly, this chapter is separated in three parts including, gender role and gender identity portrayed through the film; nature (a belief of non-human amateurs in the film and Thai society); and class struggle in the film. The message about gender relation will be supported by gender study with feminist film theorists named Laura Mulvey, Kaja Silverman, Teresa de Lauretis, Babara Creed, and Ann Kaplan. The message about nature and non-human characters are viewed based on feminist film studies and Theravada Buddhism. And the message about class struggle is reviewed according to Marxist's class model.

Moreover, there are further examples of some scenes, which create doubt among spectators and controversy in Thai society, during the chapter analysis. An association between these supportive approaches (gender studies, Theravada Buddhism, and class) and Casetti will be explained at an introduction of the chapter, while the spectator's reception through the geography of the spectator will be concluded at the end of the chapter. The chapter finally summarizes film connotative message or implicit meaning that are commonly shared by diverse groups of spectators.

Conclusion uncovers *finding and result* and *limitation and recommendation*. The first section, the finding and result summarizes the spectator's reception and reaction that are researched through the film critiques in four principal orders including ideology and politics, gender relation and transformation, nature, and class struggle. Though the spectator's reception revealed similar and dissimilar messages, there are more common keywords found in every category of film critiques. These shared terms include strange, symbolic, imagination, the Communist, boundary, Isan, Nabua, unusual, ordinary, fantastic, mystical, history, politics, ideology, forest, nature, mysterious, original, reflection, ambiguous,

recall, representative, and work of art, for instance. Moreover, the film is presented as an art piece and a combination of natural (reality) and supernatural (mystery) characteristics owing to the director's background and notion. The shared features might be discovered through the main characters, their concern, and their physical appearance. The section primarily divided the spectator's reception by origin and culture which are Thai and non-Thai critiques. But the investigation reaffirmed that the spectators can be re-categorized based on purpose of the critiques and career which are professional, personal, and academic. Therefore, the section provided new categories of the spectators. Category 1, Thai and non-Thai spectators mainly discovered message about ghost, memory, and dream; Isan; transformation and time; and Apichatpong. In opposition, Category 2, professional, personal and academic spectators mainly revealed the message about ghost, dream, memory, mystical; Isan; Apichatpong; the princess and transformation; and time. The summary of the spectator's reception from two categories can be repeated because they are the same spectators who are grouped in two sorts. Besides, the spectator can influence one another.

Limitation and recommendation explain what are the drawbacks of this research that should be improved and what should be doing in the following study. The limitation concludes the problems that are discovered in the study. A principal restriction is that a repetitiveness of the spectator's reception can derive from reading others' critiques. In other words, the common connotative film messages and ideology by these film critiques can be originally from earlier critiques or same critics, causing frequency of the same film messages and ideology. This can show that the spectator's reception is an uncontrollable variable. Their critiques may not have derived from their genuine understanding of the film. The other limitation is a deficient comparison with other films or other directors. The thesis focuses only on one film which can be insufficient to generalize the spectator's reception.

The third section, recommendation for future research suggests that subsequent study might focus on a comparison of other films from the same genre, or other Apichatpong's films. Films from various directors or the same director can introduce a broader study. Besides, the future research can study the spectator's reception through a focus group which can bring out an original reception.

In this thesis, the film critiques are also known as the spectator's reception and is sometimes called review, comment or critique. The film *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* will also be referred to as *Uncle Boonmee* film in this thesis. Meanwhile, the film director will be called Apichatpong Weerasethakul for the first reference. Later, his complete name will be abbreviated to Apichatpong. Nevertheless, some critics also refer to him as Weerasethakul, while some may apply Joe which well-known in the Western world. On the other hand, an analysis of the gender role, gender identity and transformation in Chapter 5 will be sometimes referred to as gender relation and transformation, or gender relation. Furthermore, the data of film critiques is also classified in bullet points in Appendix.

CHAPTER 1

CULTURE AND INFLUENCE OF BUDDHISM IN ISAN

This chapter principally discusses Thai culture in the Northeast, also known as Isan, and the impact of Buddhism in the region. The following part suggests the definition of culture and religion, Buddhism in Thailand, and examples of Buddhist practice in the film. Then, the first section clarifies the background of Isan revolving around political history and particular culture and observes the possible influence of the previous political circumstances that may affect social well-being and belief. The latter section describes the influence of Buddhism in Isan. Examples from *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* will be engaged in the explanation because its title refers to Buddhist reincarnation. At the same time, its story occurs in the region, and the verbal dialogue is in the Isan dialect.

Re-Defining Culture

This thesis does not define *culture* as ideology and religion. “Culture is not a practice; [*sic*] nor is it simply the descriptive sum of the mores and folkways of societies.”⁴⁸ Thus, culture in this thesis introduces *a collection of ideas, language, symbols, customs, beliefs, religious practices, and ideology* that people express within a society. Besides, humans created, accepted, and repeatedly practised norms over a long time and then perceived them as culture. These norms may appear according to human behaviour, thoughts, beliefs, values, and attitudes, which may later lead civilization to society.⁴⁹ This chapter will explore the culture of the Isan region, including background, language usage, way of living, religious beliefs, and ideology. Moreover, the political background of the region can also be a branch of culture because previous political situations may disturb the region’s

⁴⁸ Stuart Hall, “Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms,” *Media, Culture and Society* 2, issue 1 (January 1980): 60. doi: 10.1177/016344378000200106

⁴⁹ Kanjana Damjutti and Yuttana Praneet, “Thai Political Culture and Buddhism Approach to Democracy Development,” *Journal of MCU Social Science Review* 7, no. 2 (May 30, 2018): 370.

development and prosperity. *Uncle Boonmee* film refers to Nabua as well as its earlier political events. It is, therefore, prominent to specify these facets of culture as they can later produce Isan identity and cultural value.

Fundamental of Theravada Buddhism

“Wherever the Theravada Buddhism (small vehicle) implanted itself in Asia, it is due to the fact that it became the State religion.”⁵⁰ Buddhism began in North-east India around the fifth century B.C.E.⁵¹ Brahmanical customs can initially affect the religion because their practice appears in many Buddhist rituals.⁵² One example in Thailand is the *Royal Ploughing Ceremony*, an important day for Thai peasants, taking place annually and relying upon Brahmanical practices and traditions.⁵³ The ceremony is composed of the royal Brahman astrologer, a forecasting for the country plow and conch shells, for instance. The Ploughing Ceremony could have occurred since the pre-Buddha period.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Francois Houtart, “Theravada Buddhism and Political Power – Construction and Deconstruction of its Ideological Function,” *Social Compass* 24, no. 2-3 (December 1977): 208.

⁵¹ Cathy Cantwell, *Buddhism: The Basics*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), 3.

⁵² Cantwell, *Buddhism: The Basics*, 54.

⁵³ “Royal Ploughing Ceremony พระราชพิธีพืชมงคลจรดพระนังคัลแรกนาขวัญ,” Public Relations Department, September 14, 2022, <https://www.prd.go.th/th/content/category/detail/id/9/iid/93619#:~:text=%E0%B8%9E%E0%B8%A3%E0%B8%B0%E0%B8%A3%E0%B8%B2%E0%B8%8A%E0%B8%9E%E0%B8%B4%E0%B8%98%E0%B8%B5%E0%B8%88%E0%B8%A3%E0%B8%94%E0%B8%9E%E0%B8%A3%E0%B8%B0%E0%B8%99%E0%B8%B1%E0%B8%87%E0%B8%84%E0%B8%B1%E0%B8%A5%E0%B9%81%E0%B8%A3%E0%B8%81%E0%B8%99%E0%B8%B2%E0%B8%82%E0%B8%A7%E0%B8%B1%E0%B8%8D,%E0%B8%82%E0%B8%B6%E0%B9%89%E0%B8%99%20%E0%B8%93%20%E0%B8%A1%E0%B8%93%E0%B8%91%E0%B8%A5%E0%B8%9E%E0%B8%B4%E0%B8%98%E0%B8%B5%E0%B8%AA%E0%B8%99%E0%B8%B2%E0%B8%A1%E0%B8%AB%E0%B8%A5%E0%B8%A7%E0%B8%87>.

⁵⁴ “ถ้าพิพที่วันพืชมงคลภาษาอังกฤษ (Royal Ploughing Ceremony),” Wall Street English, September 2022, <https://www.wallstreetenglish.in.th/%E0%B9%80%E0%B8%A3%E0%B8%B5%E0%B8%A2%E0%B8%99%E0%B8%A0%E0%B8%B2%E0%B8%A9%E0%B8%B2%E0%B8%AD%E0%B8%B1%E0%B8%87%E0%B8%81%E0%B8%A4%E0%B8%A9/%E0%B8%84%E0%B8%B3%E0%B8%A8%E0%B8%B1%E0%B8%9E%E0%B8%97%E0%B9%8C%E0%B8%A7%E0%B8%B1%E0%B8%99%E0%B8%9E%E0%B8%B7%E0%B8%8A%E0%B8%A1%E0%B8%87%E0%B8%84%E0%B8%A5/>.



Image 2 Royal Ploughing Ceremony⁵⁵

Buddha, who lived during the fifth century B.C.E., found Buddhism and developed the religion during his practice.⁵⁶ Before the Buddha's Enlightenment, the study reveals that Buddha signified his final birth when he was born with the ability to stand up and walk seven steps.⁵⁷ It might emphasize that the Buddha was an exceptional child, though he was born ordinary. He was born a prince but disinterested in living such a royal life. He discarded his family and status and entered the forest, searching for a middle path to living. "..., the brahman clarify [*sic*] that the choice to aim for Buddhahood will only arise if the prince (in later versions) encounters four signs: an old and a sick man, a corpse, and an ascetic renouncer."⁵⁸ In other words, to become a Buddha, the prince (a born-with status) must have experienced sickness, ageing time, a dead body, and renunciation. While exploring Buddhahood, he witnessed death, sadness, and illness, e.g., leading him to misery and ambition to solve these incidents. During his self-training for a resolution, he experimented with various ways of practice, such as torturing himself. Nonetheless, he realized that following the regular routines, such as consuming to live, praying, and teaching others, could have been the most preferable options for human beings. Buddha then discovered the *Four Truths of the Noble Ones*: the truth of suffering, the truth of the cause of suffering, the truth of the cessation of suffering, and the truth of the way to the cessation of suffering

⁵⁵ "The Result of the Royal Ploughing Ceremony: Plenty of Water and Food พระราชพิธีไถ่กรนาขวัญ ผลเสด็จ ทาย " น้ำมาก - ัญญาอาหารอุดมสมบูรณ์," Thai Public Broadcasting Service, October 4, 2022, <https://news.thaipbs.or.th/content/1524>.

⁵⁶ Cathy Cantwell, *Buddhism: The Basics*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), 19

⁵⁷ Cantwell, *Buddhism: The Basics*, 27.

⁵⁸ Cantwell, *Buddhism: The Basics*, 29.

(eightfold path).⁵⁹ His findings and meditation practice ultimately led to *the Enlightenment* when he meditated under the Bodhgaya tree.⁶⁰ “A Buddha is one who has fully awakened to the truth of the cycle of life and death, whose Enlightenment has brought final release from that cycle, and who can illuminate the spiritual path he had rediscovered to bring others to the same realization [*sic*].”⁶¹ One day, the Buddha drank a bowl of milk and placed the bowl in the Neranjara River, praying that the bowl would float in the wrong direction. Then, the bowl went upstream, symbolizing his success and Enlightenment, called *truth magic*.⁶²

The Buddha’s birth event and enlightenment magic can further convince people that he is discrete. This supernatural tale may attract more followers to the religion. After his Enlightenment, the Buddha continually distributed findings and doctrines over the Buddhahood to his students. “In developed Buddhist doctrine, turning the wheel of the teachings (*Dharma*) is one of the main roles of a fully enlightened buddha [*sic*],...”⁶³ He officially declared a Buddhist religion on a day that has Buddha (Pra Put), Dharma (Pra Dharm), and a monk (Pra Song).⁶⁴ After several years of instruction, the Buddha died under the same tree, witnessed by his successors. The successors later transferred the religious Dharma (some wrote *dhamma*) through eras and generations. “The Dharma is thus the Buddhist teachings, the spiritual path, and the truths indicated by that path.”⁶⁵ The Four Truths of the Noble Ones is thus far the most prominent and the principal teaching that people have widely practised until today.

⁵⁹ Cathy Cantwell, *Buddhism: The Basics*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), 61.

⁶⁰ Cantwell, *Buddhism: The Basics*, 34.

⁶¹ Cantwell, *Buddhism: The Basics*, 24.

⁶² Cantwell, *Buddhism: The Basics*, 34.

⁶³ Cantwell, *Buddhism: The Basics*, 37.

⁶⁴ “Asalha Puja Day วันอาสาฬหบูชา,” National Office of Buddhism, September 15, 2022, <https://www.onab.go.th/th/content/category/detail/id/73/iid/3397>.

⁶⁵ Cantwell, *Buddhism: The Basics*, 56.

The map below illustrates three branches of Buddhism divided by country.⁶⁶ First is Vajrayana, developed mainly in India and later in Tibet, but also a sub-affiliation under Mahayana.⁶⁷ Second is Mahayana, established during the first century B.C.E. and the first century C.E., with a belief and goal that becoming Buddha is possible for everyone. In India, monks following Mahayana traditions might be within the monasteries of the early Buddhist orders, for instance.⁶⁸ The third is Theravada, which is related to a direct progression of the earliest Buddhist community, i.e., it is a subsidiary of ancient Buddhism.⁶⁹

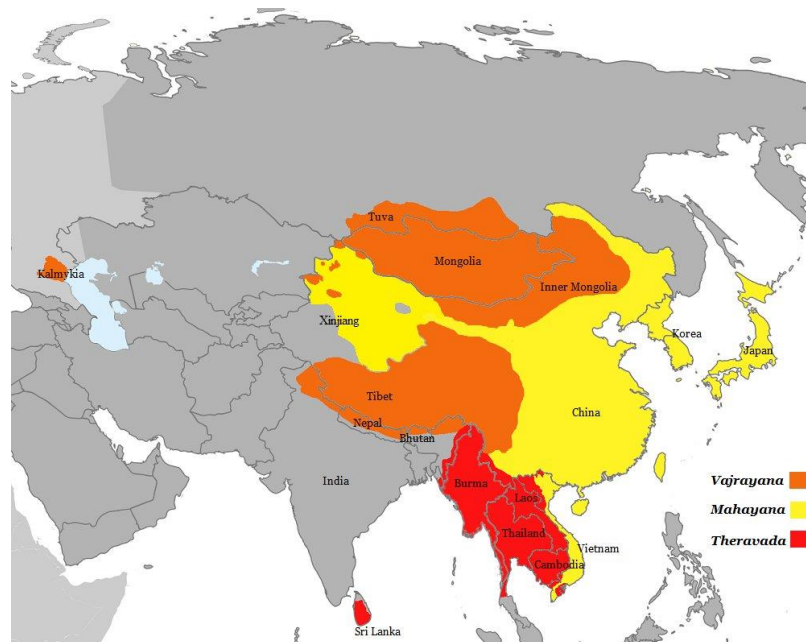


Image 3 Map of Buddhism⁷⁰

Nonetheless, the Buddhist tradition has expanded, while the doctrine of different Buddhas has arisen in different ages and world systems. Thus, the previous Buddhas could have trained the present Buddhas in our world. Buddhism came to

⁶⁶ The chosen map is from a non-academic source but is the most compatible with the book *Buddhism: The Basics* (2010). However, the book placed the map on two pages; thus, it is problematic for a scan.

⁶⁷ “Vajrayana Buddhism,” *Britannica*, September 14, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Vajrayana>.

⁶⁸ Cantwell, *Buddhism: The Basics*, 3.

⁶⁹ Cantwell, *Buddhism: The Basics*, 5.

⁷⁰ Twitter, August 31, 2022, twitter.com.

Southeast Asia, particularly Thailand, around 236 B.C. when King Asoka of Sri Lanka assigned nine groups of *bhikkhus* to other countries to propagate the Buddha's instruction.⁷¹ Religion can be a crucial institution in Thailand, which Thailand and the Government have always supported.⁷² The research demonstrated that the democratic Government has allocated fiscal resources to the religious bureaucracy, and the budget allowance has dramatically increased from 1991 to 2004 and 2006 to 2015.⁷³ Prime Minister Sarit Thanarat considered Buddhism a significant factor in developing the country and forbidding communism.⁷⁴ Moreover, the elected Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj (1975-1976), Chatchai Choonhavan (1988-1991), and Chuan Leekpai (1992-1995, 1997-2001) were perceived as the most patronage prime ministers to the religious bureaucracy as they exceptionally treated Buddhism.⁷⁵ Former Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai is well-known for his story of staying in a temple as a '*temple boy*' or '*dek wat*' for several years.⁷⁶ The government budget data for Buddhist institutions and the prime minister's story may emphasize that Buddhism can be influential in politics and perhaps vice versa, i.e., Buddhism and politics are inseparable.

On the other hand, in schools, students must pray to the nation, religion, and king in the morning before entering the classroom, for example. The majority of Thai schools in Thailand perform their morning ceremonies based on Buddhism, even though there can be non-Buddhist students attending.⁷⁷ It may represent that Thai people always address and generalize other Thais as Buddhists. Furthermore, the temple can be a holy place for Buddhists. "Buddhist monasteries as the centre [*sic*]

⁷¹ Barend J. Terwiel, *Buddhism and Society in Thailand*, (India: Catholic Press, 1984), 2.

⁷² Terwiel, *Buddhism and Society in Thailand*, 4.

⁷³ Tomas Larsson, "The Political Economy of State Patronage of Religion: Evidence from Thailand," *International Political Science Review* 4, no. 4 (2019): 581.

⁷⁴ Houtart, "Theravada Buddhism and Political Power – Construction and Deconstruction of its Ideological Function," 234.

⁷⁵ Houtart, "Theravada Buddhism and Political Power – Construction and Deconstruction of its Ideological Function," 582.

⁷⁶ Houtart, "Theravada Buddhism and Political Power – Construction and Deconstruction of its Ideological Function," 583.

⁷⁷ Author.

for Thai social life.”⁷⁸ Besides, some rituals involve the monastic codes, such as standard practice, Buddhist scriptures, and holy worship.⁷⁹ Meanwhile, Sangha or monk can be another religious code because he must follow moral and proper practices. Officially, the Sangha or monk preserves Dharma and acts as a centre for the monastic community and Buddhist practice.⁸⁰ The religious regulations do not permit monks to be employed because the monastic community depends on the believer or supporter.⁸¹ The laypeople can make merit by providing necessary items and food for monks' ordination or routine livelihood. The laypeople are also known as ‘donors.’⁸² Thus, the monk can utterly concentrate on performing religious rituals and meditation for their improvement, monastic community, and service to lay supporters.⁸³ More precisely, monks can always connect themselves with the Thai people's way of living. From birth, a monk can give a baby's name and complete the first haircut. Children must always show respect to monks and attend temple ceremonies, according to their elderly ancestors. During adulthood, men are supposed to become monks and stay at the monastery. In the end, Buddhists carry and burn the dead human body at the temple.⁸⁴ However, the monk must not be attached to the rewards that will appear in the future.⁸⁵ This reward can refer to money or valuable items, such as gold and a house, as well as a position or title in the Buddhist bureaucracy.

This thesis primarily examines Theravada Buddhism because the affiliation has existed for a long time in Thailand. “The Theravada (the 'Tradition of the Elders') developed from one of the principal ancient Buddhist orders and sees itself as in direct continuity from the earliest Buddhist community.”⁸⁶ The Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia is known as Southern Buddhism, which occurs in

⁷⁸ Terwiel, *Buddhism and Society in Thailand*, 1.

⁷⁹ Cantwell, *Buddhism: The Basics*, 85.

⁸⁰ Cantwell, *Buddhism: The Basics*, 118.

⁸¹ Cantwell, *Buddhism: The Basics*, 107.

⁸² Berkwitz and Thompson, *Routledge Handbook of Theravada Buddhism*, 117.

⁸³ Cantwell, *Buddhism: The Basics*, 114.

⁸⁴ Terwiel, *Buddhism and Society in Thailand*, 8.

⁸⁵ Berkwitz and Thompson, *Routledge Handbook of Theravada Buddhism*, 116.

⁸⁶ Cantwell, *Buddhism: The Basics*, 5

numerous countries, including Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos.⁸⁷ Thailand has followed and patronized the Theravada discipline since the Ayudhaya period in the following centuries. An invitation for Thai monks to Sri Lanka to re-introduce ordination lineage in the eighteenth century can reaffirm the patronage of Theravada in Thailand.⁸⁸ In Theravada, death and rebirth are two common conditions in cycle existence or *samsara* that can generate problems, dissatisfaction, and attachment to all human beings.⁸⁹ Samsara informs that Buddhists have a chance to be reborn (which is the leading form of most Indian religions). One person dies to return to another being, similar to the flame of a finishing candle that we can use again to light another flame.⁹⁰ The *kamma* or *karma* (Sanskrit) can cause the resurrection.⁹¹ “*When the ancestors of the modern Thai adopted Theravada Buddhism as a popular religion, they adopted the Buddhist dogma of karma (kam in Thai) as a fundamental truth.*”⁹² *Kamma* refers to *what goes around comes around* or intentional actions, which can be a determination of a person’s suffering or contentment during a lifetime or a future incarnation or life after death.⁹³ In other words, it is the moral consequences of human acts in Hinduism and Buddhism.⁹⁴ The people can be reborn with good karma that depends on an ethical action in the previous incarnation. For instance, intentional positive performances can result in a pleasant state of rebirth. In contrast, intentional destructive acts can lead to an unpleasant state as Potter supported that “one's actions in previous existences condition one's birth, length of life and type of experiences and are conditioned by one's actions in previous existences and are outcomes of one's past actions and no one else.”⁹⁵ On the other

⁸⁷ Cantwell, *Buddhism: The Basics*, 6.

⁸⁸ Cantwell, *Buddhism: The Basics*, 149.

⁸⁹ Wongsangkul, “Rebirth in Theravada Buddhism and Dr. Ian Stevenson’s Research Study,” 38.

⁹⁰ Wongsangkul, “Rebirth in Theravada Buddhism and Dr. Ian Stevenson’s Research Study,” 39.

⁹¹ Wongsangkul, “Rebirth in Theravada Buddhism and Dr. Ian Stevenson’s Research Study,” 41.

⁹² Charles Keyes, “Buddhist Politics and Their Revolutionary Origins in Thailand,” *International Political Science Review* 10, no. 2, (April 1989): 122.

⁹³ Wongsangkul, “Rebirth in Theravada Buddhism and Dr. Ian Stevenson’s Research Study,” 39.

⁹⁴ Keyes, “Buddhist Politics and Their Revolutionary Origins in Thailand,” 122.

⁹⁵ Ronald W. Neufeldt, *In Karma and Rebirth Post Classical Developments*, (New York, and Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 110.

hand, unintentional acts can bring about karmic outcomes only when a person is irresponsible.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, the karmic theory states, “One never knows when the effects of one's karma may emerge, [*sic*] it is unpredictable.”⁹⁷ It means a Buddhist cannot realize whether karma will occur in the current incarnation or later lives.

Uncle Boonmee film first presents a farmer and a buffalo and then shows a princess, an enslaved person, and a catfish. Nevertheless, the audience cannot predict the order of incarnation. It is unknown whether the first-appear image is an incarnation before the last-appear image. More significantly, when Uncle Boonmee foresees the future, it is vague to tell whether the future is his dream or his upcoming incarnation. Conversely, recognizing past lives can be a memory, reminding Boonmee of his brutal and murdering actions, which may cause physical suffering in this current incarnation. Besides, this karma can further make him concerned about his upcoming incarnation. On the contrary, Jen considers Boonmee's past behaviour a reasonable intention for the nation, so his kidney diagnosis should not derive from those murderous manners. Nevertheless, the rebirth cases and other beliefs will be further elaborated in Chapter 5 owing to the film critiques.

The phrase ‘can recall his past lives’ refers not only to previous incarnations but also means ‘nation.’ Since the words ‘live or incarnation’ and ‘nation’ in Thai are ‘chat’ (or some sources write ‘jati’), they are similarly written and pronounced. Therefore, this recall might define a recognition of the nation that perhaps symbolizes nationalism.⁹⁸ In other words, Boonmee's recall could have happened due to his loyalty to the country and the Government. The film further leads the audience to find a meaning and a memory of Isan, which some Isan people tend to forget because the local villagers are thoroughly traumatized. Nonetheless, Uncle Boonmee opposes the local people, who can retrieve the memory of the Gunshot

⁹⁶ Wongsangkul, “Rebirth in Theravada Buddhism and Dr. Ian Stevenson’s Research Study,” 41.

⁹⁷ Charles Keyes, “Millennialism, Theravada Buddhism, and Thai Society,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 36, no. 2, (February 1977): 287.

⁹⁸ “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives is Difficult to Understand ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ ใจัว หนังสืออุบากจิ้งจก????,” *Terk Movie*, March 10, 2011, http://terkmovie.blogspot.com/2011/04/blog-post_10.html.

Day at Nabua and the Communist Party in 1965.⁹⁹ The characters naturally speak the local Isan dialect, equivalent to the Lao language rather than Thai. The normality of verbal conversation and a continuation of the story can easily convince the audience of the film's authenticity. Moreover, this region is considered an arid area where welfare and technology can rarely approach people.

1.1 Thailand's Largest Region: What has the region Encountered?

The word *Isan* (some sources write Isaan, Isarn, Isann, Esarn, and Esan) is a derivative from Pali, meaning the north-east. It first came into existence as a name for a Monthon in January 1900. Monthon Isan, or North-east Monthon, was divided into Monthon Ubon Ratchathani and Monthon Roiet in 1912. The word Monthon later disappeared and was re-established as a geographical name called Phak Isan or Isan region in August 1922,¹⁰⁰ while the Monthon system was dismissed in 1933.¹⁰¹ On the other hand, Isan inhabitants of Lao ethnic are called Khon Isan (an Isan person), and the local dialect that is more compatible with the Lao language is called Phasa Isan (phasa means language).¹⁰² The research examines that in the late 19th century, many people spoke Lao (or Lao-Isan dialect) and Kammuang (Northeastern dialect) in Northeastern Thailand, Laos, and Northern Thailand as 55% of the languages spoken in the Siamese Empire.¹⁰³ It further illustrates that

⁹⁹ Film Sick, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (Apichatpong Weerasethakul/2010/Thai) a transformation of memory to history ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ (อภิชาติพงศ์ วีระเศรษฐกุล/ 2010 / ไทย) การเปลี่ยนความทรงจำให้เป็นประวัติศาสตร์,” *Film Sick* (blog), April 15, 2019, <https://filmsick.wordpress.com/2012/01/08/uncleboonme/>.

¹⁰⁰ Akiko Iijima, “The Invention of Isan History,” *Journal of the Siam Society* 106, (November 28, 2018): 189-190.

¹⁰¹ Charles Keyes, *Isan: Regionalism in Northeastern Thailand*, (New York: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1967), 24.

¹⁰² Jacob I. Ricks, “Proud to be Thai: The Puzzling Absence of Ethnicity-Based Political Cleavages in Northeastern Thailand,” *Pacific Affairs* 92, no. 2, (June 2019): 258.

¹⁰³ Charles Keyes, “The Politics of Languages in Thailand and Laos,” in *Fighting Words: Language Policy and Ethnic Relations in Asia*, ed. Michael E. Brown and Sumit Ganguly (Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 2003), 181.

the Lao language in Thailand is composed of different dialects, such as Vientiane Lao and Luang Prabang Lao.¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless, the number of people speaking Lao has significantly decreased to 22.9 % in contemporary Thailand because Thai people have adopted and developed the standard Thai language as a national language. Meanwhile, other languages have surged among Thais and other ethnicities living in Thailand.¹⁰⁵

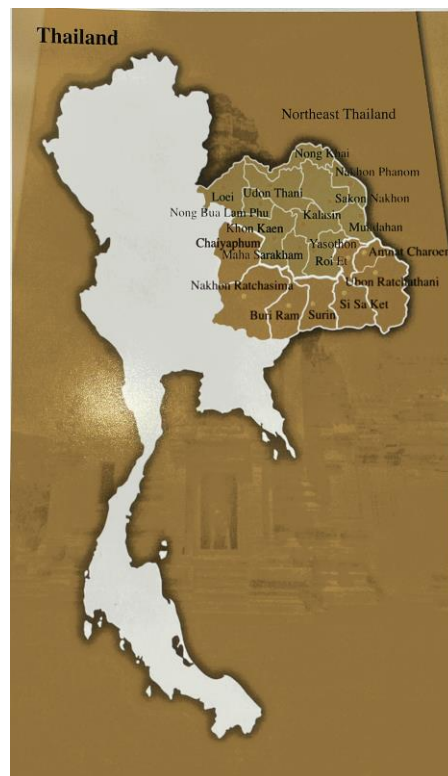


Image 4 Map of Isan¹⁰⁶

In addition, most traditional houses in Isan are built with high basements that air can go through and narrow windows. In comparison, traditional clothes might be wide-leg pants, t-shirts, and loincloths for men, and typical sarong and long-sleeved t-shirts for women. Furthermore, common food can be Plara (fermented fish sauce),

¹⁰⁴ Keyes, “The Politics of Languages in Thailand and Laos,” 183.

¹⁰⁵ Keyes, “The Politics of Languages in Thailand and Laos,” 193.

¹⁰⁶ Simon Bonython, *Discovering Isaan: The Beauty of Thailand's Northeast*, (Thailand: Amarin Printing and Publishing, 2007), 151.

Som-Tam (spicy papaya salad), Larb-Koi (spicy minced pork/beef or other local salamanders), and Jaew (Thai spicy sauce).¹⁰⁷

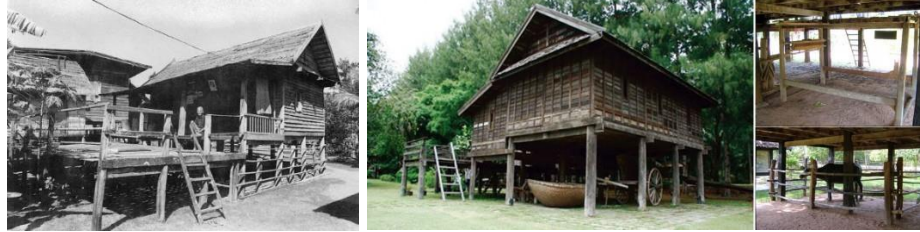


Image 5 (left) 'Heun Koey' Sakon Nakhon (right) House with Beneath-Storage¹⁰⁸



Image 6 Example of A House and Neighbourhood in Uncle Boonmee Film



Image 7 Traditional Costume in Isan¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Kamol Tongtammachat, *Basic Course of Social, Religion and Culture Textbook by Basic Study Central Curriculum*, (Bangkok: Aksorn, 2010), 59.

¹⁰⁸ "Isan House เือนอีสาน (บ้านคนอีสาน)," Isan Gate, August 21, 2021, <https://www.isangate.com/new/31-art-culture/tradition/653-huen-isan.html>.

¹⁰⁹ (left) "Making Traditional Isan Incense Sticks, Ban Pao Local Wisdom การทำธูปหอมและรูปปั้นแบบโบราณอีสาน ภูมิปัญญาท้องถิ่นบ้านเป่า," Esan Pedia, August 25, 2017, <http://www.esanpedia.oar.ubu.ac.th/esaninfo/?p=2835>. (right) "A Garden of Father Liam สวนออนซอน พ่อเล็กขอม," B.C.C. Channel, September 27, 2022, http://www.bccchannel.com/V121EP02_%E0%B8%AA%E0%B8%A7%E0%B8%99%E0%B8%AD%E0%B8%AD%E0%B8%99%E0%B8%8B%E0%B8%AD%E0%B8%99%E0%B8%9E%E0%B9%88%E0%B8%AD%E0%B9%80%E0%B8%A5%E0%B8%B5%E0%B9%88%E0%B8%A2%E0%B8%A1.



*Image 8 Som Tam*¹¹⁰



*Image 9 Larb-Koi (left) pork (right) beef*¹¹¹

More significantly, the central authority has always ignored the region, and other Thais have constantly insulted the Isan people. Isan consists of shortage, drought, lack of literacy, power for resources, and suffering from rights. Besides, other Thais view people of Isan origin as servants, jokers, and labourers.¹¹² On the one hand, local Isan people generally have a disparity in language and culture with the majority Thai. On the other hand, several political events have continually driven

¹¹⁰ (left) “Thai-Papayasalat – Som Tam Thai,” Asia Street Food, September 27, 2022, <https://asiastreetfood.com/rezept/thai-papaya-salat/>. (right) “Foto von : Som Tum Pu Plara version,” Trip Advisor, September 27, 2022), https://www.tripadvisor.ch/LocationPhotoDirectLink-g186338-d2330387-i271429214-Suda_Thai_Cafe_Restaurant-London_England.html.

¹¹¹ (left) “Thai-Papayasalat – Som Tam Thai,” Asia Street Food, September 27, 2022, <https://asiastreetfood.com/rezept/thai-papaya-salat/>. (right) “Thai spicy minced beef meat food in the southeast of thailand or isan 'laab beef'with cucumber slices top,” Free Pik, September 27, 2022, https://www.freepik.com/premium-photo/thai-spicy-minced-beef-meat-food-southeast-thailand-isan-laab-beef-with-cucumber-slices-top-view_30269896.htm#page=2&query=thai%20beef%20salad&position=26&from_view=keyword.

¹¹² Charin Mangkhang, “Isan People Discourse through the Ideal Space in Thailand’s Contemporary Social Studies Textbooks,” *Thai Studies & Thai-ization* 29, no. 1 (2017): 181.

the region into scepticism, i.e., domestic and border politics have produced some impacts on Isan through many generations. Currently, Isan is the most populous and the poorest region, with over 20 million inhabitants, surrounded by Laos and Cambodia. The region combines different ethnicities: Lao (the majority), Khmer Suay, Phu Thai, Vietnamese, local Thais from other parts, and Chinese descendants.¹¹³ Additionally, the Isan dialect, culture, and way of living are more coherent to Laos, while Thai and Lao people are independent in crossing the river border to the other side. *The Isan region is closer to Laos, and people are of Laos ethnic origin; thus, they are more attached to Laos.*¹¹⁴ When Thai Isans go to Laos, they share similarities with the Lao through food, music, language, and sensitivity.¹¹⁵ “Isans and Laotians on the left of Khong River are people from the same cultural origin throughout history. Thai state has not paid enough attention to these people because it has been named an arid land.”¹¹⁶ Research confirms that some Isan people believe Lao migrants have occupied the region. More essentially, they admire Bangkokians and central Thais as ‘phu di’ or ‘gentlefolk’ in a higher class of society. The same research found that Bangkokians tentatively despise Isan villagers as second-class residents.¹¹⁷

“The Lao-speaking people of Northeast Thailand, [*sic*] referred to as *Khon Isan* (Isan person), have long been subject to discrimination and exclusion from developmental benefits that accrued to Thailand’s central plains and Bangkok.”¹¹⁸ The difference in language can further create a discrepancy between the majority

¹¹³ McCargo and Hongladarom, “Contesting Isan-ness: Discourses of Politics and Identity in Northeast Thailand,” 220-221.

¹¹⁴ “Isan House เอิ๋อ น อี สาน (บ้านคนอีสาน),” Isan Gate, August 21, 2021, <https://www.isangate.com/new/31-art-culture/tradition/653-huen-isan.html>.

¹¹⁵ McCargo and Hongladarom, “Contesting Isan-ness: Discourses of Politics and Identity in Northeast Thailand,” 231.

¹¹⁶ “Isan House เอิ๋อ น อี สาน (บ้านคนอีสาน),” Isan Gate, August 21, 2021, <https://www.isangate.com/new/31-art-culture/tradition/653-huen-isan.html>.

¹¹⁷ McCargo and Hongladarom, “Contesting Isan-ness: Discourses of Politics and Identity in Northeast Thailand,” 232.

¹¹⁸ Jacob I. Ricks, “Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia,” May 20, 2022, <https://kyotoreview.org/issue-27/integration-despite-exclusion-thai-national-identity-among-isan-people/>.

of Thai and Isan people. Consequently, the people of Isan origin are unlikely to communicate in the Isan dialect because they are unpleasant to be addressed as 'ban nok' or 'provincial' (I would prefer translating it as 'countryside').¹¹⁹ An informant in Duncan McCargo's and Krisadawan Hongladaro's research stated that "the new generation of urban youth was reluctant to speak Lao, even his own nephews and nieces refused to speak it at home, something that pained him greatly."¹²⁰ More prominently, when other Thai people address Isan as 'Lao,' it dissatisfies the Isans because they prefer to be called 'khon Isan' rather than 'khon Lao.' Lao can define that they are Laotian citizens from Laos. Furthermore, this Lao identity for Isan can further suggest that they obtain lower education than Thai people.¹²¹ On the contrary, Isan people appear optimistic about their Thai identity and notice their Thai-ness and presence in the Thai nation and other regions. The ethnic identity and mobilization, as well as the feeling of 'otherness,' can be overtaken by Thai nationalism.¹²² An example reveals that the newer generations learn Thai rather than Isan due to national pride. "In my family, between husband and wife, we use phasa Isan, but with our children we try to promote Thai," said a respondent from Jacob Rick's study.¹²³ In sum, the national identity of local Thai Isan can be relatively incompatible with Thai people from other regions. Isan language has been employed mainly at the interpersonal level, but Thai has always been formal. So, the other urban people from the central part do not accept the use of dialect.¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ McCargo and Hongladarom, "Contesting Isan-ness: Discourses of Politics and Identity in Northeast Thailand," 226.

¹²⁰ McCargo and Hongladarom, "Contesting Isan-ness: Discourses of Politics and Identity in Northeast Thailand," 225.

¹²¹ McCargo and Hongladarom, "Contesting Isan-ness: Discourses of Politics and Identity in Northeast Thailand," 228-229.

¹²² Ricks, "Proud to be Thai: The Puzzling Absence of Ethnicity-Based Political Cleavages in Northeastern Thailand," 259.

¹²³ Ricks, "Proud to be Thai: The Puzzling Absence of Ethnicity-Based Political Cleavages in Northeastern Thailand," 273.

¹²⁴ McCargo and Hongladarom, "Contesting Isan-ness: Discourses of Politics and Identity in Northeast Thailand," 227.

A school social class textbook also presents Isan people as 'others' and constructs them as 'poor.'¹²⁵ The region has been deficient after other regions, and the central authority excludes them from economic and social development. Though the region has plenty of land, it is not prosperous in agriculture and farming because of its discrete geography and weather. 'Tung Kula Ronghai,' or a flat land in Isan, flourishing in growing food, is repeatedly referred to in the textbook. However, the book never defines Kula as an ethnic from Burma who travelled across the land and cried because they experienced an obstacle to walking on dry soil.¹²⁶ This example symbolizes that the textbook always conveys 'poverty' and 'otherness' for the region but needs to clarify what Kula can accurately mean. It may compare Isan as a region of discouragement and sorrow that the residents groan for their careers. "It can be said that a prejudice in the textbook guides society to a constructed image of Isan as people who possess outdated cultural basis."¹²⁷ On the contrary, the Thai Government has attempted to persuade other Thais to include Lao Isan in society. Perhaps, in doing so, Isan is forced further away from the border and is placed on the ethnic issue. However, Isan people continue to integrate their identity and Thai-ness into Thai hierarchical society, in which their mobility will remain loyal to the Thai nation and create harmony with other Thai nationals.¹²⁸ Isan people are honoured for their Isan-ness and Thai-ness; they find themselves appropriate along the border and do not threaten the state or national stability. Uncle Boonmee film reflects the ethnic discrimination through a separation between the 'Laos' and 'Isan' people and some historical facts.¹²⁹ Therefore, showing the Isan dialect conversation does not make the film look unnatural, but it accentuates the nature of the film story. Nonetheless, racism is further emphasized by Aunt Jen when she

¹²⁵ Mangkhang, "Isan People Discourse through the Ideal Space in Thailand's Contemporary Social Studies Textbooks," 175-177.

¹²⁶ Mangkhang, "Isan People Discourse through the Ideal Space in Thailand's Contemporary Social Studies Textbooks," 175-177.

¹²⁷ Mangkhang, "Isan People Discourse through the Ideal Space in Thailand's Contemporary Social Studies Textbooks," 178.

¹²⁸ Ricks, "Proud to be Thai: The Puzzling Absence of Ethnicity-Based Political Cleavages in Northeastern Thailand," 277.

¹²⁹ Chairat Polmuk, "Return to Isan: A Haunted Dream and Violence of Bangkok in Film," *Journal of Letter* 44, no. 2 (2015): 59.

tells Tong that Jai speaks the Lao language, but Isan does not. Jen also mentioned that Boonmee's farm has only 'ghosts' and 'foreigners' from Laos, and she cannot live with these strangers.¹³⁰

Meanwhile, the disappearance of Boonsong in a forest can generate an analogy of 'entering a forest,' which is a hiding place of the Communist Party, who trained and defended themselves from the Government.¹³¹ Though the Isan region and people continually obtain economic and political drawbacks, they have not decided to organize either a regional movement or an ethnic party, which may cause expanded hostility against the state. However, actively recognizing the Isan people for their Thai national identity might decrease pressure on their inferiority.¹³²



Image 10 Living in Isan and Connection with Lao People

¹³⁰ Polmuk, "Return to Isan: A Haunted Dream and Violence of Bangkok in Film," 60.

¹³¹ Adadol Ingawanij, "Animism and the Performative Realist Cinema of Apichatpong Weerasethakul," in *Screening Nature: Cinema Beyond the Human*, ed. Anat Pick and Guinevere Narraway (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 102–103.

¹³² Jacob Ricks, "Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia," May 20, 2022, <https://kyotoreview.org/issue-27/integration-despite-exclusion-thai-national-identity-among-isan-people/>.

On the other hand, Isan identity can be challenging because the region has a history of political controversy, provoking complications for the Isan people to present their identity and understanding of the country's principal culture.¹³³ Politics has been another essential factor forcing the North-east region distant from the central authority. After being excessively disregarded by the Government, Isan captured the attention of the Thai state owing to the fear of colonization.¹³⁴ King Rama V (1868-1910) was anxious about a threat from the Western colonization that entered through the left border, the Khong River. Isan, a land on the right of Khong, became a sensitive region for being colonized. Additionally, the Government re-focused the region after the transformation from an absolute monarchy to a democracy, after the murder of the four ministers from Isan, and after the dissolution of the People's Party of 1932. The region became a suspected area where the Communist Party and the revolutionists lived. In 1961, the Thai State Committee on Development of the Northeast (The Planning Office, The National Economic Development Board, Office of Prime Minister) launched a plan aiming at economic and political goals to raise the standard of living of the Northeastern residents to be comparable with the other regions and convey more welfare and contentment to the region; to establish economic and social infrastructures for future stability and development; and to ensure that the region is an integral part which is inseparable from the nation, and the Thai nationals living in Isan obtain Thai identity and citizenship.¹³⁵ In 1963, the Government further implemented security and development policies in the area.¹³⁶

Ban Nabua is one of various Isan villages which was politically affected. Some critics found Nabua as a location that *Uncle Boonmee film refers to for Boonmee's*

¹³³ McCargo and Hongladarom, "Contesting Isan-ness: Discourses of Politics and Identity in Northeast Thailand," 219.

¹³⁴ "Isan House เอิ้น อี สาน (บ้านคนอีสาน)," Isan Gate, August 21, 2021, <https://www.isangate.com/new/31-art-culture/tradition/653-huen-isan.html>.

¹³⁵ Charles Keyes, "Fieldwork as History: Letters between Two Researchers in Northeastern Thailand in 1963," in *Four Decades of Anthropological and Sociological Studies in Thailand*, ed. Chumchon Sitkao and Thomas Kirsch (Chiang Mai: Chiang Mai University, 2001), 14.

¹³⁶ Keyes, "Fieldwork as History: Letters between Two Researchers in Northeastern Thailand in 1963," 15.

farm and house. In general, Nabua is as distant from civilization and isolated as other villages in an entire region; e.g., it could have taken a day to correspond with the government affiliations.¹³⁷ During the political turmoil, local people decided to fight against a misunderstanding and prejudiced attitude against the town.¹³⁸ However, the incidence caused mental injury to the community as the village experienced physical encounters and an adaptation to social change.



*Image 11 (left) Phu Thai Ethnic Costume and Local Food
(middle and right) Simulation of the 1965 Incident¹³⁹*

Ban Nabua or Nabua Village is Phu Thai ethnic, descending from ancestors in the People's Democratic Republic of Laos who immigrated to Northeastern Thailand in the 1750s.¹⁴⁰ “Nabua stood out because of the history, and especially how the local teenagers live with a political situation of the past and what they're [*sic*] doing now, because some of them are still activists.”¹⁴¹ The 'Gunshot Day' signifies a painful memory for local people as it massacred numerous civilians. The Gunshot Day, or the Communist Insurgency, was an irregular war from 1965 to 1983

¹³⁷ Tikamphorn Singtomas, “A Village of Gun Shot: History, Political Movement and Local Identity Building of Ban Nabua หมู่บ้านเสียงปืนแตก: ประวัติศาสตร์ การเคลื่อนไหวทางการเมือง และการสร้างอัตลักษณ์ของท้องถิ่นบ้านนาบัว,” *Thammasat Journal* 36, no. 3 (2017): 123.

¹³⁸ Singtomas, “A Village of Gun Shot: History, Political Movement and Local Identity Building of Ban Nabua หมู่บ้านเสียงปืนแตก: ประวัติศาสตร์ การเคลื่อนไหวทางการเมือง และการสร้างอัตลักษณ์ของท้องถิ่นบ้านนาบัว,” 141.

¹³⁹ “Nabua, historical Village, Gunshot Day, Observe the Phuthai’s Culture บ้านนาบัว หมู่บ้านประวัติศาสตร์ วันเสียงปืนแตก เบื้องต้น วัฒนธรรมเผ่าภูไท,” Ban Muang, October 5, 2022, <https://www.banmuang.co.th/news/region/130775>.

¹⁴⁰ Singtomas, “A Village of Gun Shot: History, Political Movement and Local Identity Building of Ban Nabua หมู่บ้านเสียงปืนแตก: ประวัติศาสตร์ การเคลื่อนไหวทางการเมือง และการสร้างอัตลักษณ์ของท้องถิ่นบ้านนาบัว,” 115.

¹⁴¹ “The Late Great Apichatpong,” Nation Multi Media, September 9, 2022, <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/home/2010/04/20/life/The-late-great-Apichatpong-30127420.html>.

between the Communist Party of Thailand and the Thai Government that occurred primarily in the Northeast. According to a local villager, he can thoroughly remember the 1965 Gunshot Day because the situation lasted from the morning until the evening. “Around 5 a.m. of August 7, a group of officers arrived and surrounded a group of villagers under a tree. The officers constructed a human barrier in a half-moon shape to impede and shoot them”.¹⁴² Due to this condition, some families lost their leaders and children who knew nothing about the leftist and rightist. Although some academic studies provided different sources of information attempting to explain the causes and effects of the dispute, they did not relieve the villager’s hallucinations.¹⁴³ They were not aware of these matters; they only preferred peaceful moments for their careers and families, i.e., Gunshot Day was an undesired situation for the border people (along the Thai-Laos border). Nabua was stigmatized as a completely Communist village and became a ‘red zone’ that the state must have been cautious of those villagers. The Government also sent troops and civilians to live in Nabua and neighbouring areas. Bua Khao temple, precisely a religious ritual place, became a detention and interrogation centre.¹⁴⁴ The battle severely disturbed the social life of the Nabua people and almost destroyed the community.¹⁴⁵ Nabua area is a distant suburb, which is antagonistic to the country's supervision that the Government (as well as the communists) was not concerned about injured civilians and missing people.

Three conditions possibly caused the uprising of Nabua villagers against the Government from 1957 to 1977. First, Nabua people maintained their Lao identity through contact with their relatives living in Laos, dialect, costumes, beliefs, and routine culture. In this case, the people may need to realize themselves as a part of

¹⁴² Singtomas, “A Village of Gun Shot: History, Political Movement and Local Identity Building of Ban Nabua หมู่บ้านเสียงป็นแตก: ประวัติศาสตร์ การเคลื่อนไหวทางการเมือง และการสร้างอัตลักษณ์ของท้องถิ่นบ้านนาบัว,” 128.

¹⁴³ Tanwa Jaitaing, “The Gunshot Day at Nakhon Panom วันเสียงป็นแตก ณ นครพนม,” Prachatai, February 28, 2010, <https://prachatai.com/journal/2010/02/27898>.

¹⁴⁴ Singtomas, “A Village of Gun Shot: History, Political Movement and Local Identity Building of Ban Nabua หมู่บ้านเสียงป็นแตก: ประวัติศาสตร์ การเคลื่อนไหวทางการเมือง และการสร้างอัตลักษณ์ของท้องถิ่นบ้านนาบัว,” 128.

¹⁴⁵ Singtomas, “A Village of Gun Shot: History, Political Movement and Local Identity Building of Ban Nabua หมู่บ้านเสียงป็นแตก: ประวัติศาสตร์ การเคลื่อนไหวทางการเมือง และการสร้างอัตลักษณ์ของท้องถิ่นบ้านนาบัว,” 129.

the nation, which might also obstruct the construction of Thai nationals. Second, the influence of France in the Indochina region led to a failure in regulating people entering and exiting the Thai-Laos border. As a result, the relationship between Thailand and Laos and the transfer of Laos's identity have continued. Third, a delay of the Thai state in providing assistance and constructing Thai-ness for Nabua contributed to a restriction in composing Thai and combined identity.¹⁴⁶ The Thai Government established a school to create Thai-ness for the first time in 1938. However, the language created problems in learning because local Nabua people generally communicated in the Lao dialect. Besides, daily situations, e.g., news about the attack between Thailand and France in 1940, acknowledged the villagers for the first time about the existence of the Thai-Laos border. In other words, they may have previously realized that Laos and Isan are the same country.

Meanwhile, the local people are instead affected by a history informed by former generations rather than the one written by the Thai state. Moreover, local people primarily rely on the non-state history.¹⁴⁷ The verbal history by locals is perhaps owing to their experience, while the formal history in the state document can correspond to the Government's preference. It might cause a fragmented nation and a disharmonious relationship between the Government and the people. One of Lao workers on Boonmee's farm swam across the river during the country's political turbulence. It can further emphasize that Thailand and Laos are adjacent, while Lao people and local Isan understand each other through language and culture. Thus, they can work together and befriend each other. The Lao people in Isan became Thais over several decades but maintained a regional identity.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Singtomas, "A Village of Gun Shot: History, Political Movement and Local Identity Building of Ban Nabua หมู่บ้านเสียงป็นแตก: ประวัติศาสตร์ การเคลื่อนไหวทางการเมือง และการสร้างอัตลักษณ์ของท้องถิ่นบ้านนาบัว," 125.

¹⁴⁷ Singtomas, "A Village of Gun Shot: History, Political Mouvemente and Local Identity Building of Ban Nabua หมู่บ้านเสียงป็นแตก: ประวัติศาสตร์ การเคลื่อนไหวทางการเมือง และการสร้างอัตลักษณ์ของท้องถิ่นบ้านนาบัว," 123.

¹⁴⁸ Jacob I. Ricks, "Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia," May 20, 2022, <https://kyotoreview.org/issue-27/integration-despite-exclusion-thai-national-identity-among-isan-people/>.

In contrast, the monkey ghost in *Uncle Boonmee* film represents October people who encountered the 1965 political chaos and escaped to the forest.¹⁴⁹ He may be a regular citizen who later follows the Communist group (monkey tribe) because he is fascinated with political ideology (photography). Later, when he is a part of the group, he must change himself to be equivalent to the Communist Party, i.e., the monkey family. In addition, he must live in a forest because he is discrete from other ordinary citizens. Comparing the Communist Party of Thailand to the monkey ghost is a dreadful pain because the ghost is outrageous while the monkey is antiquated from the Government's perspective.¹⁵⁰ In other words, it is perhaps a parody that the Communist monkey ghost is a monster who can oppose the Government and disturb its stability. Boonsong's ideology, way of living, and physical appearance can be problematic for the current human society. Furthermore, these Nabua peers in the forest experienced an obstacle in enrolling in a Thai National Association because they were outraged living in a jungle for decades. Once they marry and adopt some professional lessons, it is more complex to return to their family, expecting to develop and relieve their home village.¹⁵¹ In opposition, the monkey ghost can also be another incarnation that Boonmee can recall.¹⁵²

Since Theravada Buddhism essentially influences Thailand and Isan, the film might solidly reveal class in various aspects.¹⁵³ First is the Communist and the

¹⁴⁹ “Analyze-Criticize Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives Vol. 1 destroying the invisible wall to return (movie review) วิเคราะห์-วิจารณ์ <<< *** อุญญูมีระลึกชาติ *** Vol. 1: การทำลายกำแพงที่มองไม่เห็น เพื่อกลับ >>> (เปิดเผยเนื้อหาสำคัญ) ,” Pantip, April 17, 2019, <http://topicstock.pantip.com/chalermthai/topicstock/2010/08/A9589007/A9589007.html>.

¹⁵⁰ See also Chapter 5, 5.2 Nature: A Belief of Non-Human Amateur in The Film and Thai Society.

¹⁵¹ Singtomas, “A Village of Gun Shot: History, Political Movement and Local Identity Building of Ban Nabua หมู่บ้านเสียงปืนแตก: ประวัติศาสตร์ การเคลื่อนไหวทางการเมือง และการสร้างอัตลักษณ์ของท้องถิ่นบ้านนาบัว,” 131.

¹⁵² October People refers to a group in the well-known uprising of Thailand's October 14, 1973 insurgency. It is also known as the Day of Great Sorrow and resulted in the end of the military dictatorship (anti-communist). The event marked the growing influence of university students in politics and a massive massacre.

¹⁵³ See more in Chapter 5, 5.3 Class Struggle in the Film.

Government, in which the Communist is local Isan who were farmers but escaped the government invasion of the forest. Second is the soldiers and the monkey ghost, who carry different ideologies, and the monkey ghost can be a Communist. Furthermore, humans and non-humans might have different social roles (regarding the uniform) and responsibilities (owing to their actions). In sum, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* implicitly shows a history of the Isan region, which obtained political violence, villagers, and particular community, and portrays a story of ‘returning’ to Isan origin through the film characters, e.g., Tong, Jen, Huay and monkey ghost. Moreover, it employs *ghosts* and *animals* to symbolize the Government’s brutality and border people.¹⁵⁴

1.2 Buddhism and Northeastern Thailand: Reincarnation and Other Beliefs

Charles Keyes studied the case of Ban Nong Teun and discovered that the villagers are interrelated through three activities: belief in religion, belief about ghosts, and school. Isan people respect Buddhism, while a temple is a holy centre for inhabitants. It is a principal sacred place for every farmer and an area for religious rituals and transferring ethics to locals.¹⁵⁵ Religious belief is also a consequence of an activity between individual citizens and between the Government and citizens. The past events, cultural impact from the neighbouring country, negative attitude against the local Isan, and historical political circumstances can affect and modify Isan beliefs and ideology. Though the region is distant from the central Government, it relies on religion and other Buddhist rituals. Buddhism, Brahma, and ghosts are fundamental beliefs of Isan.

Bun Phra Wet is one of the Theravada Buddhist celebrations in the North-east. Bun means merit-making, while Phra Wet refers to Prince Wetsandon. It is a festival to make merit for Prince Wetsandon or Vessantara, who accomplished the most precious karma. With repeated merit-making and good karma, he was reborn as

¹⁵⁴ Polmuk, “Return to Isan: A Haunted Dream and Violence of Bangkok in Film,” 54.

¹⁵⁵ Rattana Tosakul, “Isan Peasants, Thai Nation and Modernization,” *Journal of Southeast Sociology, Anthropology and Charles Keyes* 19, no. 1 (2010): 87.

Siddhartha, who later became the Enlightened Buddha in the following incarnation.¹⁵⁶ In other words, Prince Wetsandon was the last incarnation before the Enlightenment of the Buddha. The celebration occurs annually before Thai New Year or Songkran (Water Festival in April), the region's most relevant and largest celebration. Bun Phra Wet can represent relationships between Northerners and Theravada rituals and between the communities of monks and believers.¹⁵⁷ Besides, tradition can refer to three other meanings relating to the participants who came to celebrate. First, people gathered as a community and made it into a kingdom. Second, Phra Wet is a prince who continually and passionately donated various forms of property, including his children. Third, Phra Wet's donations are people's prosperity and livelihood, encouraging people to follow.¹⁵⁸ In opposition, this religious merit-making might symbolize that Northeasterners are independent of central politics, economy, and society.¹⁵⁹ It means that a collection of merit can result in recovery from political trauma, non-poverty, and social offence. Additionally, the story of Phra Wet can reveal two facts. On the one hand, Isans engage every tale of the religion with their customs and communities. Although Phra Wet is a former life of Buddha, he is the Buddha who should receive merit and respect. On the other hand, a connection between Phra Wet and Buddha can reaffirm the existence of reincarnation. "Most Theravada Buddhists believe in rebirth, be it as humans, animals, deities or ghosts."¹⁶⁰ In *Uncle Boonmee* film, several images appear without narration of how it is associated with Uncle Boonmee and his other family members. Nevertheless, those images can be Boonmee's other incarnations, which might derive from his mental recognition. Images could be a person's dreams, memories, and ideas.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁶ Leedom Lefferts, "Northeast Thai-Lao Theravada Buddhism Peripheral, Central or Varietal?," *Journal of Global South Studies* 34, No. 2 (2017): 226.

¹⁵⁷ Lefferts, "Northeast Thai-Lao Theravada Buddhism Peripheral, Central or Varietal?," 238.

¹⁵⁸ Lefferts, "Northeast Thai-Lao Theravada Buddhism Peripheral, Central or Varietal?," 236.

¹⁵⁹ Lefferts, "Northeast Thai-Lao Theravada Buddhism Peripheral, Central or Varietal?," 226.

¹⁶⁰ Stephen C. Berkowitz and Ashley Thompson, *Routledge Handbook of Theravada Buddhism*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2022), 194.

¹⁶¹ William Mitchel, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 10.

“In Buddhism, one's present life is seen as one of a countless number of lives stretching back into the past, with no discernible beginning to the series.”¹⁶² It means that when people are born, they are not permitted to know how many times they were born before or what the live number of the present incarnation is. The beginning of the first life is unidentified to Buddhists, while the end of reincarnation is mysterious. Uncle Boonmee might see different images claiming to be his previous incarnations; however, he cannot predict which image is the first and which is the following. It is a reason that the film confuses the spectators without presenting chronological order and anecdotes, for example, a buffalo and a farmer; a princess, an enslaved person, and a catfish; and a group of soldiers. More significantly, when Uncle Boonmee foresees the future, it is vague to specify whether the future is his dream or his upcoming incarnation.

People believe rebirth depends on a positive merit; they wish to reincarnate and see the future. If they morally act, pray, make merit, and often go to a temple, they can be confident of being reborn. Besides, reincarnation can depend on how much money people donate to the temple. The Buddhists perceive that large amounts of money can make them wealthy, pleasant, and attractive in the next life. “Giving meals and other requisites is not the only kind of donation practices [*sic*] by Theravada Buddhists. They donate money for various activities of the monastery and for [*sic*] the needs of the monks, such as the construction of new buildings and new pagodas, renovation of old buildings, and other requisites of the monks.”¹⁶³ The film illustrates that Jen makes merit for the deceased Huay in exchange for her sister's pleasure, i.e., she wishes Huay to receive food and positive praying. As a result, Huay should be blessed and secured in the after-death world. “The lever which facilitates this contact is the acquisition of merit (*dai bun*), or the making of merit (*tham bun*).”¹⁶⁴ In this case, Jen *tham bun* for Huay, and Huay *dai bun*. On the other hand, some people give merit money at Uncle Boonmee's death ceremony

¹⁶² Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundation, Values and Issues*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 34.

¹⁶³ Berkwitz and Thompson, *Routledge Handbook of Theravada Buddhism*, 173.

¹⁶⁴ James B. Pruess, “Merit-Seeking in Public: Buddhist Pilgrimage in Northeastern Thailand,” *Journal of the Siam Society* 64, no. 1 (1976): 171.

with the expectation that they will receive decent merit in return. The money at the ritual can further signify their benevolence and regard for Boonmee. This merit-making manner can be a way of exchange for Buddhists to receive something they anticipate.



Image 12 Receiving Money and Counting Money

A 20-year-old man is eligible to become ordained of Sangha Buddhism called *phigsu* (Thailand), *bhiksu* (Sanskrit), or *phigkhu* (Pali). A son is supposed to be a *phigsu* at least once during his lifetime; however, it must be voluntarily.¹⁶⁵ “According to the religious value, the son can become a monk for a certain period to pray and make merits for their parents.”¹⁶⁶ Many men in Thailand become *phigsu* for diverse reasons, such as avoiding military conscription, escaping from poverty, saving money, fulfilling a promise by taking an oath and gaining knowledge.¹⁶⁷ Nevertheless, another purpose of being a *phigsu* is praying and transferring merit to the dead one. ‘*Boud Nah Fai*’ refers to entering a temporary monkhood before a burning fire. It is a common practice in Buddhism that when a family member is dead, other male family members or relatives, e.g., son and grandson, can intentionally become monks for a cremation. Sometimes, they can be other people or friends who respect the dead one. The cremation occurs on the last day of all rituals, in which the family members deliver the dead body to the crematory house in a temple. “Across the Theravada Buddhist world, funerals are

¹⁶⁵ Terwiel, *Buddhism and Society in Thailand*, 97.

¹⁶⁶ Tosakul, “Isan Peasants, Thai Nation and Modernization,” 90.

¹⁶⁷ Terwiel, *Buddhism and Society in Thailand*, 103.

often described as the most important of the life cycle rituals.”¹⁶⁸ In *Uncle Boonmee* film, Tong becomes a monk when Boonmee is dead. Although the film does not show Tong performing any ritual in front of the dead body or cremation, monk Tong (with a monk uniform and shaved head) aims to pray and make merit for Boonmee. In addition, a scene further reveals a night praying ritual with monks and villagers, which discloses that the villagers reminisce about Boonmee. Moreover, the participants at the ceremony wear black costumes as a symbol of mournfulness and respect and offer merit money at the ceremony.

The monk uniform may function as a filter to protect the holy monk and the Buddhist institution because *phigsu* should follow the religious rules in Vinaya Pitaka (227 rules in Patimokkha), e.g.¹⁶⁹ Thai monk institutions identify specific manners of controlling monks. A monk can lose his status if he completes sexual intercourse, steals any object, intentionally kills others (including humans and animals), and lies about his magical powers.¹⁷⁰ More practically, a *phigsu* may only have two meals between sunrise and noon, but he can only drink after midday. However, if he is sick, the *phigsu* can consume regular meals.¹⁷¹ Meanwhile, another prominent regulation is remaining physically distant from women, i.e., monks must avoid physical contact with women. In contrast, women are not allowed to have a conversation with monks in a private place. It must, however, engage the third person; for example, when a woman wants to provide medicine or food, she cannot transfer it directly from her hand.¹⁷² Tong’s appearance in front of Aunt Jen’s and Rung’s room at a hotel suggests the prohibited behavior of a Buddhist monk. The other two female characters may be reluctant to talk to Tong and permit him to enter the room because Tong’s social status is that of a monk. In this case, he disrespects the religious rules by secretly departing the temple at night, arriving at the hotel room, and approaching women. Furthermore, he desires to go

¹⁶⁸ Berkwitz and Thompson, *Routledge Handbook of Theravada Buddhism*, 194.

¹⁶⁹ Terwiel, *Buddhism and Society in Thailand*, 111.

¹⁷⁰ Terwiel, *Buddhism and Society in Thailand*, 112.

¹⁷¹ Terwiel, *Buddhism and Society in Thailand*, 114.

¹⁷² Terwiel, *Buddhism and Society in Thailand*, 115.

for dinner, which the religion forbids because monks are not supposed to eat in the evening.¹⁷³

The former section mentioned that Apichatpong produced *Uncle Boonmee* film with inspiration from a monk who informed him of a story of a man who can recall past lives. Moreover, his investigation in the Isan region reassured him that Boonmee lived in the past. He also visited other locals who introduced him to other religious and ghost beliefs, which is an impact of Buddhism and an effect of Laos along border provinces. “For social re-disciplining, Nabua people have obtained a code of conduct system through a combination of Buddhism and ghost belief for their daily practice.”¹⁷⁴

The story of Buddha's life and Enlightenment can nevertheless define the Buddha as ‘unordinary.’ Therefore, Buddhism and local culture can simultaneously influence unusual features such as ghosts. In this case, Buddhist reincarnation, kamma, samsara and ghosts can affect local Isan residents. Ghost or *phi* in Thai profoundly correlates to various aspects of the human world, though it is considered non-human from another dimension. “Yet, there is no doubt that the various cults of phi are related intimately to many critical social institutions, beginning with the family household and then extending to private or commonly held village fields, the village *vat*.¹⁷⁵ (monastery), the village itself, collections of villages (*Muang*), regional chiefdoms, kingdoms, and even the institution of Theravada Buddhism itself.”¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Wimal Hewamanage, “Buddhist Notion of Food and Its Implication with Hygiene,” *International Research Journal of Human Resources and Social Sciences* 3, no. 5 (2016): 22.

¹⁷⁴ Singtomas, “A Village of Gun Shot: History, Political Movement and Local Identity Building of Ban Nabua หมู่บ้านเสียงปืนแตก: ประวัติศาสตร์ การเคลื่อนไหวทางการเมือง และการสร้างอัตลักษณ์ของท้องถิ่นบ้านนาบัว,” 119.

¹⁷⁵ Some sources write ‘wat,’ I prefer using ‘wat’ in this thesis because it is more relevant to Thai pronunciation.

¹⁷⁶ Berkwitz and Thompson, *Routledge Handbook of Theravada Buddhism*, 349.



*Image 13 Wat and Community*¹⁷⁷

The story of *phi* is also confirmed by Kampon Boontawee, the first Thai-Isan author ever to receive the S.E.A. Write Award in 1979 from a book 'Luk Isan' or 'An Isan Child,' who referred to ghost legend in Isan regarding his experience. The book 'Lao Kahn Tam Nan Phi Phak Isan' or 'Telling A Myth of Ghost in Isan Region' tells a story of several ghosts that Isan people believe. His book reaffirms that *phi* in Isan and religious rituals and customs are interconnected.¹⁷⁸ In addition, local people have associated *phi* with the health culture, in which violation of ghosts and spirits or being disturbed by spirits can engender health issues. For example, some villagers believe that *phi* causes death. Then, they will go to older people recognized as obtaining extraordinary power for fighting against *phi*. *Moh Yao*, a senior medical master, will treat patients with lyrics, magic, or spells and perform art with a combination of a musical instrument, local herbs, and religious rituals.¹⁷⁹

However, *phi* can be spiritual energy humans often engage in ritual ceremonies. Humans do not genuinely generate Phi powers; thus, this energy can be

¹⁷⁷ Itthiporn Khamprasert, "Temples along Damneon-sadouk Canal: primary observation ศาสนสถานสำคัญริมสองฝั่งคลองดำเนินสะดวก : การสำรวจเบื้องต้น," Research Gate, October 5, 2022, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326802143_sassthansakhayrimsxngfangkhlxngdaneinsadwk_karsarwcbeuxngtn.

¹⁷⁸ Kampon Boontawee, *Lao Kahn Tam Nan Phi Phak Isan (Telling A Myth of Ghost in Isan Region)*, (Nonthaburi: Poey Sian, 1999), 13.

¹⁷⁹ Singtomas, "A Village of Gun Shot: History, Political Movement and Local Identity Building of Ban Nabua หมู่บ้านเสียงปืนแตก: ประวัติศาสตร์ การเคลื่อนไหวทางการเมือง และการสร้างอัตลักษณ์ของท้องถิ่นบ้านนาบัว," 120.

uncontrollable. Therefore, to communicate with *phi*, we require a practitioner who is an expert in ritual and praying, such as a monk.¹⁸⁰ In other words, an expert in a Buddhist ceremony can function as a medium to connect ghost and human dimensions, i.e., ghost and human. Without a professional or monk, the ghost cannot express its influence and capability and cannot convince humans that the ghost exists. Huay once mentions at the dining table that the ghost cannot be attached to a place but is committed to a person or people. Perhaps the ghost is not chained in a house or a temple, but it prefers to correspond with the human who is the ritual practitioner. In Laos, *phi* remains an active power in their daily lives that requires thorough attention and respect.¹⁸¹ It means that human should show their regard toward *phi* by providing food during the Buddhist rituals, e.g., merit-making. People from Laos can transfer this belief to Northeastern Thailand because of the region's location and Lao language, which is a panel for passing on this idea.

*“For Phu Thai people, phi means the holy spirit of an ancestor or an ethical person who was dead. The deceased ancestor can be around to defend and bless their following descendants or to punish them for immoral actions. Phi is another mechanism for immaterial and solid social orders. A grandfather Phi is like a village leader ghost or administrative officer ghost who manages his family’s performance.”*¹⁸²

Tong's duplicate in the final scenes can be *phi* because he does not realize the existence of other people behind him. Owing to the phrase, '*phi* as a spiritual energy,' the sitting Tong can be only a body without a soul because the genuine Tong is standing behind him. This duplicate may be a detectable energy that other humans cannot physically contact. Nevertheless, a group of soldiers in Boonmee's dream can be ghosts because these characters can be metaphysical animations around Boonmee's mind.

¹⁸⁰ Berkwitz and Thompson, *Routledge Handbook of Theravada Buddhism*, 350.

¹⁸¹ John C. Holt, *Spirits of The Place: Buddhism and Lao Religious Culture*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), 232-258.

¹⁸² Singtomas, “A Village of Gun Shot: History, Political Movement and Local Identity Building of Ban Nabua หมู่บ้านเสียงปืนแตก: ประวัติศาสตร์ การเคลื่อนไหวทางการเมือง และการสร้างอัตลักษณ์ของท้องถิ่นบ้านนาบัว,” 119.



Image 14 Soldiers as Metaphysical Animations

Apichatpong's reference to *phi* in *Uncle Boonmee* film might not be only about the ghost and spirit of the region; otherwise, it can be a political turmoil and the Government's oppressive regime that the local people have undergone. In other words, *phi* is an interconnection of religion and politics. "It is clear that in Thailand, Buddhism has been an important factor of political stabilization and national sentiment."¹⁸³ The film *allows Phi* or the Communist Party to revisit and appeal for justice.¹⁸⁴ Apichatpong, however, transformed a simulation of violence into a 'play with memory' through human and non-human characters. More precisely, *phi* in Isan may not genuinely be a deadly human. Nonetheless, this *phi* can symbolize a red political zone in Isan, where the Communists concealed themselves from the Government in the 1960s.¹⁸⁵ Thus, *phi* can be a mystical sign of politics. A group of soldiers and a monkey, who is arrested and chained, can also accentuate the political aspect of the film.¹⁸⁶ Nevertheless, Apichatpong argued that his film is not prejudiced; he only intends to communicate facts. "After discussing with the locals, I realized villagers did not receive justice. I was not

¹⁸³ Houtart, "Theravada Buddhism and Political Power – Construction and Deconstruction of its Ideological Function," 230.

¹⁸⁴ Polmuk, "Return to Isan: A Haunted Dream and Violence of Bangkok in Film," 56.

¹⁸⁵ "Phi Nabua ผีนาบัว," M.G.R. Online, September 13, 2022, <https://mgronline.com/celebonline/detail/9530000040542>.

¹⁸⁶ Film Sick, "Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (Apichatpong Weerasethakul/2010/Thai) a transformation of memory to history ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ (อภิชาติพงศ์ วีระเศรษฐกุล/2010 / ไทย) การเปลี่ยนความทรงจำให้เป็นประวัติศาสตร์," *Film Sick* (blog), April 15, 2019, <https://filmsick.wordpress.com/2012/01/08/uncleboonme/>.

taking sides, but I just wanted to record and disseminate the story,” mentioned Apichatpong in an interview with M.G.R. Online.¹⁸⁷

1.3 Summary of the Chapter

Theravada Buddhism is Thailand's main religion, which arrived around 236 BCE after King Asoka decided to propagate Buddhism in South Asian countries. The Buddha was born as a usual human being, but he departed being extraordinary. His practices, Enlightenment, nobles, and dhamma, have been accepted and performed through generations. Keyes concluded that Theravada Buddhism (with numerous rituals and beliefs) could affect peasants' economic behaviour and social life in Isan. Most farmers, i.e., farmworkers and labourers, live their everyday lives on a non-complex basis, depending on customs, tradition, and social institutions that can conduct social relations of all residents. Consequently, the religious followers can accomplish an ethical peasant community.¹⁸⁸ The most apparent Theravada rituals and beliefs in *Uncle Boonmee* film are 'making merit,' 'buad nah fai,' 'reincarnation,' and 'ghost.' Furthermore, Boonmee illustrates that he dramatically believes in Kamma and his past actions. However, the kamma message from *Uncle Boonmee's* film might encourage people to behave ethically to avoid immoral kamma, i.e., depraved actions, which can cause negative consequences.

Even though Isan is Thailand's largest region with a large population, the Government has always discarded it economically and socially. The region is related to a few duplicated keywords: Isan identity, abandonment, poverty, countryside, political insurgency, Laotian ethnicity, and Laos language. In sum, social and political factors drive Isan as a peripheral and suspicious region. First, a solid connection between Thai and Lao people along the border preserves ethnicity and family relations, Lao identity transfer, and language usage. Moreover, the

¹⁸⁷ “Phi Nabua ฝึ น า บ้ ว ,” M.G.R. Online, September 13, 2022, <https://mgronline.com/celebonline/detail/9530000040542>.

¹⁸⁸ Tosakul, “Isan Peasants, Thai Nation and Modernization,” 92.

language and cultural identity accentuate an obstacle in bringing this region closer to other parts of Thailand. However, Isan people attempt to integrate themselves by speaking Thai and expressing Thai-ness. The region also received delayed education, administrative services, and other welfare from the Thai state. Second, the delayed attention from the national Government caused the region to distance itself from improvement and harmony with central Thailand. Third, the region is sceptical of the Government regarding the entry of migrants from neighbouring countries who were suspicious of bringing the Communist ideology to Thailand. The incident has denounced many Isan people as communists antagonistic to the Thai Government. Significantly, historical political riots that revolved around Isan villagers and the Thai military have also marked some trauma to the people and the community.

*In his interview, Apichatpong referred to Thai political turmoils: “People always undertake to abandon an error in life, similar to the Thai Government attempting to neglect the political history. In our home, meaning Thailand, we like forgetting stories. Therefore, the same situation repeatedly takes place.”*¹⁸⁹ Apichatpong later engaged these turbulences in *Uncle Boonmee* film throughout the film's story and characters. “In 2010, a memory of Nabua was awakened again in a different form, called 'Pluk Phi' or 'waking up the ghost' through Apichatpong's Primitive Project.”¹⁹⁰ He is interested in 'waking up the ghost' or 'pluk phi' by producing a short film called *Phantoms of Nabua* and a film called *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*. These art films use a belief in ghosts and their horror to present a political chronicle in the form of memory rather than a simulation of actual events.¹⁹¹

Though *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* involves simple and natural routine conversation and interactions between humans and non-humans, it

¹⁸⁹ “Phi Nabua ฝึ น า บัว ,” M.G.R. Online, September 13, 2022, <https://mgronline.com/celebonline/detail/9530000040542>.

¹⁹⁰ Singtomas, “A Village of Gun Shot: History, Political Movement and Local Identity Building of Ban Nabua หมู่บ้านเสียงปืนแตก: ประวัติศาสตร์ การเคลื่อนไหวทางการเมือง และการสร้างอัตลักษณ์ของท้องถิ่นบ้านนาบัว,” 138.

¹⁹¹ Polmuk, “Return to Isan: A Haunted Dream and Violence of Bangkok in Film,” 55.

discloses non-human characters, including *phi* and *phi Ling* (monkey ghost), in which the analysis will appear in the empirical chapters.¹⁹² In addition, Huay can symbolize merit-making in Buddhism as she looks delighted and healthy because her sister is praying. Meanwhile, Boonmee's regard toward Boonsong after his absence can also be considered merit-making. On the other hand, the monkey ghost may simplify that *phi* can emerge in any other form than in the human body. Thus, he occurs in an animal structure.

¹⁹² See also Chapters 4 and 5.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter elaborates on the research methodology and Casetti's significant findings and terms. As indicated in the Introduction (structure of the thesis), this research will be carried out under the *qualitative* methodology with a specific research question and hypothesis, and the first section of this chapter clarifies the qualitative tools that I will employ and how I will gather data. This research will further explain the keywords used in a search engine, the types and sources of data, and the film spectators. In this regard, the data will be collected from film critiques from different categories of sources. The study divides the empirical chapters into two sections, employing film critiques for analysis under the theoretical framework. Additionally, the author will expand a narration on tasks and expected results.

Later, the second part will focus on detailed information about the spectatorship theory, enlarging what Casetti found during his study and the prominent features of his theory. Thus, the author will describe the geography of the spectator with details of each point of view and examples of the spectator's reception. Furthermore, the section will describe related phrases and examples of films from *Inside the Gaze* book. The researcher will use scenes from *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* for a broader clarification.

2.1 Research Methodology and Implementation

As the study progressed, it became increasingly apparent that understanding the film acquires a reception feature. Casetti indicated that “it is no longer discussed only a work that producer wishes to deliver to the spectator. Perhaps, it is text and

message that is interactive between film and spectator”.¹⁹³ In this respect, *Uncle Boonmee*'s film is more obscure than what the film title and apparent image reveal. The title presents reincarnation that refers to the past and the present, but the storytelling further attributes to, e.g., political history and social aspects. In addition, various versions of the film poster communicate dissimilar meanings; for example, one displays Boonmee, another shows a red-eyed monkey, and the other illustrates the princess. These three distinct designs may imply that the film is not only about the recall and Boonmee but also the red-eyed monkey and the princess, who may be spiritual belief in each reincarnation.



Image 15 Different Designs of Film Poster¹⁹⁴

Therefore, this thesis asks: *What were the spectators' receptions and reactions to the film?* This question can lead the researcher to see different and familiar reception from Thai and non-Thai spectators. Then, it may permit us to figure out what can motivate the film production (what can be the film director's inspiration and reasons) and what may influence the spectator to interpret the film message in this direction. A study of the spectator's reception could later guide us to re-group them owing to the dissimilarity and similarity of their reception and interpretation.

¹⁹³ Francesco Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1998), 126.

¹⁹⁴ (left) Amazon, November 16, 2022, <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Boonmee-Recall-Poster-French-Inches/dp/B0046OVEME>, (middle) Author. (right) “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (C.E.)” Bol, November 23, 2022, <https://www.bol.com/nl/nl/p/uncle-boonmee-who-can-recall-his-past-lives/1002004011244616/>.

The research proposes the hypothesis that *the spectator's reception and reactions reveal different connotative messages and ideologies of the film*. It means that the spectator might decode or interpret connotative messages in various aspects such as culture, history, society, ideology, and politics. The assumption derives from a preliminary study of the film review and critiques from various sources. The research question and hypothesis suggest that the primary purposes of this thesis are to *examine the spectator's reception of the film language, image, sign, and sound* and to *explore the film's connotative messages and film ideology*. However, the secondary objective is to view a possible stimulus of the film construction and to observe an influence on the spectator's reception.

The *Introduction* indicates that this thesis employs qualitative methodology through a case study of the film *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* and a critical analysis of the film critique. Firstly, the author will review the film to understand the entire story and to learn about each character. Therefore, we will consider possible denotations and connotations of the film through, e.g., its title, story, image, and character. This qualitative design relies on the existing data of film critiques already written or studied by journalists (or professional critics), individual viewers, and experts. The researcher will primarily explore these critiques via Google search engine and Google Scholar with a keyword, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* review, both in Thai and English. The search language can influence the researcher to categorize the film viewers into Thai and non-Thai spectators. Thai spectator refers to the critiques written in Thai, whereas non-Thai spectators are the reviews written in English and other languages. On the other hand, the examination categorizes the data into four groups, owing to the origin or type of viewers, namely, Pantip, Research Gate, Rotten Tomatoes, and online newspapers. Pantip contains movie discussions in Thai and some in English, while Rotten Tomatoes gathers critiques from international audiences who are both professional journalists and individual writers. Meanwhile, online newspaper websites can present various critics who published their articles in different journals, such as Telegraph, Screen Daily, The Guardian, France 24, and Indie Wire. However, the Research Gate is an academic platform which collects diverse scholarly papers from many countries under common keywords. The main keyword can lead to a list of related articles from

different research areas. These critiques discuss the film and refer to the film director, Apichatpong Weerasethakul because his film stories and characters are correlated. Therefore, the author aims to employ another keyword, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, to find more information about his background and motive for the film. This keyword leads us to Apichatpong's interviews with journalists, speeches at international stages, and lectures at universities in Europe and the United States of America. All discovered data further provide a list of references at the end of the work that can recommend other film information and analyses. An initial data review shows a repetition of the film critiques (similarity and dissimilarity). In other words, there are some common findings and comments on the film from numerous critiques. Therefore, the author will sort similar arguments of the critiques according to the critics' background and purpose. The three primary categories are professional critics, discussion boards/ personal blogs, and academic analysts. These three categories of critiques primarily discuss memory, dream and imagination, and world and time dimensions. However, the author must consider the similarity of film critiques because the same sources of information might cause the repetition of critiques, i.e., the critiques that offered the same messages and findings can derive from equivalent authors.

After viewing the film and learning the critiques, the research will implement the empirical analysis in two chapters. The first empirical chapter will focus on how the film demonstrates the typical ideology and introduces a new possibility for interpreting film ideology and politics. It observes ideology inside the film, portraying how Apichatpong views the state ideology and how the film might express the non-traditional ideology. This part involves Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses to explain the state interpellation and ideological state apparatus that might appear in the film. Althusser found ideology a problem and explained the reproduction of power concerning ideology. Generally, if people abide by ideology, they do not find the problem of ideology. The approach is related to Casetti's spectatorship that ideology may exist in the film, social engagement can influence the emergence of ideology in the film, and ideology can make the film a subject which can later generate direct communication with the spectator. On the other hand, it analyzes ideology outside the film, showing how Apichatpong perhaps includes the non-state ideology in his film. In this case, Apichatpong may

suggest a new space for interpreting the ideology and provide a new opportunity for the spectator to interpret the film. Meanwhile, he may attempt to offer a non-state ideology to criticize the government. Later, the chapter will employ film critiques to investigate how Apichatpong illustrates the non-state ideology through Boonmee's dream, recall and imagination. The film critiques will be involved to view how the spectator received the state ideology in the film and how they interpreted the non-state ideology. Moreover, it can further clarify how they relate the film story to historical political events. This chapter will concentrate on Thai and non-Thai critiques and professional, individual, and scholarly spectators.

On the contrary, the second empirical chapter will focus on other film connotative messages from distinct spectators' interpretations and receptions. In other words, the researcher reviews the film critiques on how the spectator received and analyzed the profound film messages. It concerns other aspects rather than politics, such as society, history, religion, and nation. The initial findings show that the film critiques discovered three aspects of connotative messages, which are gender role and relation, nature and non-human, and class struggle. Firstly, we will examine how gender roles and identity relate to social status. Secondly, the chapter will discuss non-human characters who can be a 'nature' of the film, such as ghosts, a belief in reincarnation in Buddhism, and transformation. Besides, we will also analyze Thai Buddhist culture and how the transformation connects to religious reincarnation. Lastly, we will address examples of inequality, welfare problems, and class in Thai society in the film.

Subsequently, the first and principal task is to understand *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* by repeatedly watching the film with assistance from an Isan native speaker. Then, all relevant data from two keywords and further references from Pantip, Rotten Tomatoes, journal websites, and Research Gate. After considering the film, the author must select the main theoretical framework for this thesis and review different literature. Since the question concerns the spectator's reception and reaction, we must discover a theory about reception, perception, and film. Therefore, the researcher selected Casetti's spectatorship theory as it involves the study of reception and scope of seeing, knowing and believing. Meanwhile, the literature review must be related to spectatorship and a few other keywords:

reception, perception, film and background, and cinematic language. Later, we will find some information about the background of the northeast of Thailand (or Isan) because *Uncle Boonmee* film sets its location in Isan and refers to a specific village around Nabua and historical circumstances. Besides, it shows the Isan dialect and Lao language through verbal dialogues. More importantly, the project will analyze the data of film critiques and convey the potential film messages and ideology in a descriptive written pattern. During the explanation, the author will provide examples of the scenes from *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*. Finally, the findings will be evaluated and concluded. This thesis expects to contribute different spectators' receptions and reactions, studied through the film critiques. The results may show that the spectator interpreted the message about, e.g., ideology, politics, social inequality, religion, transformation, non-human, and the northeast of Thailand. The critiques may further reveal a comparison of the film story and the political insurgency in the history of Thailand. In addition, the outcome may disclose the probable reason(s) for diverse reception and factors that can influence the film's production. The expected results can prove whether the hypothesis is accurate or imprecise. Later, the final section will draw out the limitations and disadvantages of this research. It also suggests the future study of what should be studied and what can be advantageous.

An implementation of the qualitative methodology will be functioned under the spectatorship theory. Casetti stated, "I put my money on the conjunction of reception studies and textual analysis, comparing what the film does to the spectator and what the spectator does to the film".¹⁹⁵ In sum, the spectatorship theory explains a cross-level interaction between the film and the spectator that can remarkably result from film signs, symbols, representations, and connotations and is further engaged to gaze. Moreover, Christian Metz noted in an introduction of *Inside the Gaze* book that the spectatorship theory has an all-encompassing aspect which does not focus only on the spectator and their film perception but also on other elements, such as an enunciation through image and message, abstraction like

¹⁹⁵ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, xvii.

signs and symbols, and realistic situations.¹⁹⁶ The following part will elaborate on the details and essential terms.

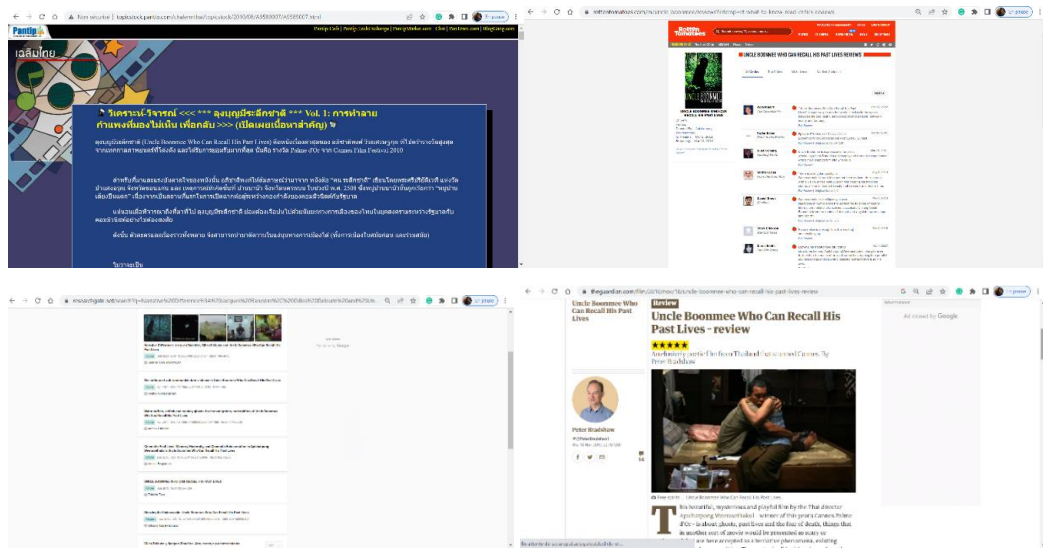


Image 16 Example of Film Critiques from Blog and Website

2.2 Inside Casetti, Inside the Spectatorship

First, Casetti indicated that film can be a constitution of reality which offers a perceptive point and a receptive gaze to the spectator.¹⁹⁷ The spectator becomes engaged in the act of gazing, responding to the availability of the screen's world by assuming specific responsibilities according to the demands of interest, e.g.¹⁹⁸ The spectator is involved in the visualizing system and analyzing process when they face film on the screen. However, they can be visible only when witnessing film images and hearing film sounds.¹⁹⁹ For instance, they can further predict film events and messages owing to their familiarity with the situation and career preferences. This argument shows that the spectator does not take a dominant role.

¹⁹⁶ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, xiv. (Christian Metz noted in an introduction in *Inside the Gaze* that the book is scientific because Casetti did not rest on one point, e.g., enunciation, abstraction and pragmatics.)

¹⁹⁷ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 64.

¹⁹⁸ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 9.

¹⁹⁹ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 19.

In film, gaze refers to a consequence of comprehension and realization after the film distribution. It happens when the spectator can recognize important events and situations in the film and understand film storytelling even though they make a different interpretation.²⁰⁰ Additionally, different actors who construct the gaze include the producer, character, and spectator; therefore, it is a subjective view of each player. In other words, subjective gaze varies among participants who use their distinctive circumstances in composing gaze and comprehending the film.²⁰¹ “On the one hand, the spectator can be thought of as a decoder: that is, as someone who deciphers an ensemble of images and sound... On the other hand, the spectator can be understood as an interlocutor: that is, as someone to whom one can address the propositional structure and who can be expected to show signs of understanding...”²⁰² The former idea shows that the spectator has no engagement in the invention of the message. In contrast, the latter idea displays that the spectator is related to an interaction with the film. The spectator can be at the periphery of the communication because they are the recipients.²⁰³ The film and the spectator are at different stages of the process because the spectator is gazing outside the film.²⁰⁴ The film offers a message, image and meaning, while the spectator offers their gaze and becomes a message receiver or a witness.

Film is a two-way communication process in which the producer may enclose personal messages by delivering them to the spectator through components, e.g., characters, narration and mise-en-scène. Casetti built an analogy that “the interaction of the role and the body implies a two-way circulation as opposed to a single prescribed trajectory, and two distinct spaces rather than incompatible characters.”²⁰⁵ As various organs circulate in two ways (intake and outtake, for instance), film communication also flows in a two-way direction. Its message and image are conveyed to the spectator while the spectator can respond to the film's

²⁰⁰ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 23.

²⁰¹ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 49.

²⁰² Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 5.

²⁰³ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 7.

²⁰⁴ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 8.

²⁰⁵ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 43.

meaning.²⁰⁶ The interaction of film communication requires two parties, each playing a different role in the process. The spectator is at the end of the communication process; they can witness the film incidences and engage by reflecting and responding but cannot place any message into the film. The individual is instead a witness rather than a subject of consensus, an object who can propose questions rather than a source, a puzzle but a completed construction.²⁰⁷ However, the spectator is a part of a film event and can complete the communication circle. At the end of the communication process, the spectator has no power to negotiate with the film and to provide instant feedback to the film.

A film can attract many spectators; thus, there are distinct messages after exposure to a film, depending on each spectator's reception. *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* invites Thai and non-Thai spectators who puzzle around the film situations. Owing to the critiques, distinct groups of spectators provide several comments from their reception. For example, the scene with a ghost appearing at the dining table causes different interpretations, such as the unclear boundary between the human and non-human world; Huay can be a construction in Boonmee's memory; difference in gender identity and role; and an incredible presentation when Huay sees photos of her funeral. On the other hand, some spectators found Boonmee's dream of the future as his imagination or upcoming incarnation. Meanwhile, Tong's escape from the temple and private conversation with women earn excessive attention from the spectator. However, some found Tong's behaviour immoral, creating controversy in Buddhist society. Otherwise, others discovered this concerning another Apichatpong film called *Syndrome and A Century* (2006), when a monk (same actor) plays the guitar. For film communication, the spectator can only witness *Uncle Boonmee* through the visual system and respond by decoding the message in a passive position. The two-way communication process means the film is an interactive medium that realizes the destination's existence, where the spectator awaits to decode signs and language and provides reactions. Therefore, we can observe the spectatorship through, for

²⁰⁶ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 43.

²⁰⁷ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 1.

instance, film image and narrative, camera viewpoint, and the spectator's comprehension.

Casetti stated that “the film, in sum, offers itself to sight: it establishes its destination – and its destiny – as both an ultimate goal and a surface from which to spring.”²⁰⁸ It means that the film can provide its image for the spectator to view and establish the target spectator and the prospecting group. The term *its destiny* can suggest that the film suits itself with the appropriate spectator group, i.e., the spectator's desire should be consistent with the director's proposed message. Though *Uncle Boonmee* film offers itself to Thai and international spectators, it only corresponds with specific types of spectators, according to one reason among many, the uniqueness of storytelling and the director. The investigation found that the Thai cinema business distributed the film in certain theatres in Thailand within a limited period.²⁰⁹ It may inform us that the film director destined the film for the spectators who are genuinely interested in Apichatpong's work or are open to another film genre (rather than original Thai comedy and romantic movies). For example, the film genre must depend on the spectator's favour and life background.

It is apparent that the film is an artificial production; however, it has been brought to life by its storytelling, dynamic images, and sound.²¹⁰ Though the film does not seem natural through its recorded image and sound, it becomes independent and natural after its distribution. Relatively, *the act of showing* and *the act of seeing* are phenomena that can also cause the film image to be brought to life.²¹¹ This film image brought to life may disregard that the film image and sound are video-recorded and the characters are constructed. In other words, the film avoids being composed; it creates its natural characteristics during the relation and engagement with the spectator. The naturalistic can occur when the spectator is overwhelmed with their imagination and forgets that the film is constructed, prepared, edited and

²⁰⁸ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 9.

²⁰⁹ “Review Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives,” Thai Cinema, November 21, 2010, <http://www.thaicinema.org/kits229lung.php>.

²¹⁰ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 20.

²¹¹ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 20.

performed. This process can organize the film as a subject of enunciation as Casetti argued that “the subject of the enunciation can also exhibit itself openly, appearing as an explicit *guide* to the images and sounds.”²¹² *Uncle Boonmee's* film illustrates its quality as an art piece by allowing the flow of images and avoiding recorded events. The original location and background throughout the film scenes bring the image to life. The film can cause an ordinary visual to a specific group of spectators, and the spectator can perceive the film as everyday life events rather than a cinema production. In this regard, *Uncle Boonmee* film portrays the Isan dialect, routine of local villagers, careers, and way of living in the Isan region, as such. In brief, the construction of the film can be the act of showing, which is when the presentation of the film is at the spectator’s perception and reception. In other words, the film reveals its image and message to the spectator.²¹³ Meanwhile, the act of seeing defines that the spectator revolves around the communication sphere by seeing the image and learning the meaning. The film consists of moving images and sound; thus, it allows the spectator to witness film elements.²¹⁴ Body movement, facial expression, and gesture gain more substantial attention from the spectator than simple dialogue. The beauty of an image can attract large numbers of viewers, while the character is an essential part of making the image come to life.²¹⁵ Film seeing is not only visualization but rather mentality in the interactive communication process because people witness and further consider the film message. The meaning or message may not end within the scene or at the end of the story, while the spectator can afterwards imagine and decode implicit verbal and non-verbal messages.

Nevertheless, between film text (which can also include image and character activity) and its spectator, there are two problems to consider: the subjectivity of language and the methodology the recipient will adopt for understanding.²¹⁶ The subjectivity of language can refer to a sign offered to the decoder. On one hand,

²¹² Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 20.

²¹³ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 20.

²¹⁴ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 20.

²¹⁵ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 20.

²¹⁶ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 10-12.

the recipient is a partner of the text who brings a sign to life or outlines the text. It might show that the spectator can influence the construction of film and its texts or the so-called creature of the origin. On the other hand, they may engage in a symbolic phenomenon that reaffirms that reading and perception are complex.²¹⁷ This symbolic phenomenon can reveal that film does not contain only simple meaning; otherwise, it consists of signs and symbols, causing difficulty in understanding and interpreting its definition. *Uncle Boonmee* film can be a subjectivity of language that creates symbolic phenomenon, consisting of explicit meaning and signs and symbols represented through images and verbal and non-verbal language. Two possible signs and symbols that some critics discovered are monkey ghosts and the cave. The monkey ghost might represent the communists, while the cave can refer to the origin of a human or a woman's womb where a human is born. Besides, we can see the most apparent sign at almost the film's end. It is a group of teenagers who write a sign of 'sickle' and 'hammer' on the soil. The sickle and hammer sign generally symbolizes the unity of agricultural and industrial workers. In this regard, the spectator can later select a method to comprehend the text. The first method is a generative approach in which it constructs the text, and the recipient's performance can define the existence of the text, i.e., their response can generate the visibility and expression of the text.²¹⁸ Moreover, the second method is an interpretative approach, focusing on the receiver's act, who can disclose the meaning when accessing the text.²¹⁹ It means that the recipient may react to interpret the text and reveal its idea. Nonetheless, these two approaches tend to oppose each other as the former shows how the text can generate its interlocutor (as an influence of the text construction). In contrast, the latter approach presents how the interlocutor can re-formulate the text (as a decoder of the text).²²⁰ In other words, it is how the sender aims the text at its receiver versus how the receiver re-defines or interprets the meaning of the text. Casetti further argued that "...reading and visual perception are complex activities and not simply mirrors of what has been already said, written, or shown. However,

²¹⁷ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 10.

²¹⁸ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 12.

²¹⁹ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 12.

²²⁰ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 13.

even here something else exists – indeed must exist”.²²¹ This argument can refer to other unseen meanings rather than clear messages that subtly emerge in the film. It reaffirms that something else means implicit meaning, which develops throughout the film.

On the contrary, language can be a social force since film imitates reality.²²² It can define the significance of communication: the verbal and non-verbal are equally essential because they allow humans to interact. The producer's screenplay, the character's conversation, and the spectators' interpretation may transfer the film language. It might shape people's imagination and prediction, which can result in achieving the purpose of communication. In this case, film language and meaning, as well as other elements, can be constructed by cinematography. Casetti signified that *cinematographic enunciation* is “an appropriation of the expressive possibilities of the cinema which give body and consistency to a film”.²²³ There are various representatives from the cinematographic team during the film's construction, distribution, and communication. Meanwhile, the *enunciation* involves interactions between characters and the film's setting, characters, and situations.²²⁴ He expanded that it is a “conversion of language into a discourse, a passage from an ensemble of simple virtuality to a concrete and specific object.”²²⁵ A conversion of language is when the film is produced based on everyday reality and presented in images and sound. Also, enunciation is “the setting to work of language through an individual act of utilization.”²²⁶ An enunciation is an act of expressing language and message, which can guide the emergence of image and sound, i.e., the film enunciation provides the power to stimulate images and sound and to deliver its message to the spectator. Enunciation relates person (who), place (where), and time (when),²²⁷ which are critical features of the film. A person is a

²²¹ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 10.

²²² Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 78.

²²³ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 18.

²²⁴ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 18.

²²⁵ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 18.

²²⁶ Émile Benveniste was a French semiotic and structural linguist. He served as the first president of the International Association for Semiotic Studies from 1969-1972.

²²⁷ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 18.

character, the place is a scene or setting, and time is a time in the film when the situation or event occurs. *Uncle Boonmee's* film revolves around three prominent people, namely Boonmee, Jen, and Tong, who are in Isan village during the present time. Nevertheless, the story is also related to time in the past and future and time of the non-human world. In addition, enunciation concerns two actors: enunciator and enunciatee. The enunciator or narrator is a person controlling an entire narrative.²²⁸ There are different narrators at two levels; one organizes images and sound, but the other one is an origin of representation (an indication of the story) which does not involve an organization of text. In other words, the person is a narrator of enunciatee.²²⁹ Accordingly, the enunciator of *Uncle Boonmee* film can be the film director at one level and the film characters at another level. On the other hand, “the enunciatee must assume the position of witness,” which correlates to the *spectator and interpellation*.²³⁰ According to Casetti, interpellation may refer to someone who gazes outside the film and recognizes the existence of the film.²³¹ The film then directly addresses 'you' as an aside actor. It can further show that the spectator is only an object of the film communication process. Meanwhile, the spectators for *Uncle Boonmee* film can be Thai and non-Thai journalists, general viewers, and scholars. As the author previously gathered, these critics can only observe the film and provide non-immediate feedback through critiques or discussion boards. Casetti pointed out that the spectator participates in the ‘wish to tell’ and then ‘make to understand’ processes as a spy and a film witness.²³² Moreover, other creations within the story, such as the play of characters, decoration, and other aspects of the *mise-en-scène*, can be a part of interpellation.²³³

Casetti further clarified *the point of view* or *POV* that the spectator must align their view to the camera view. In other words, the spectator’s point of view should follow the camera view that shows images on the screen because film correlates with motion pictures. The point of view is the gaze that constructs situations in the

²²⁸ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 33.

²²⁹ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 35.

²³⁰ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 47.

²³¹ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 8

²³² Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 10.

²³³ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 29.

scene,²³⁴ which may also refer to a camera location during the shooting process or can be the spectator position during the film screening. More simply, it is a point where the spectator observes and perceives and a converging point for the character and the spectator.²³⁵ Prominently, this converging point might define a moment when the character appears at the spectator's gaze.

This spectator's POV is further explicitly related to a *geometric point of view* or the *geography of the spectator*. In formal terms, the spectator has three complex steps in seeing the film. "It is simultaneously a geometric point from which the world is seen, the point from which things are apprehended, and a point from which one decides whether or not to believe what one is facing. We have not just one, but three realities: the first concerns scopic activity in the strict sense (*perceptive point of view*), the second is the cognitive process (*informational point of view*), and the third is the degree of faith (*epistemic or emotive point of view*)".²³⁶ In other words, the geography of the spectator refers to seeing, knowing and believing.²³⁷ "Point of view thus joins together seeing, knowing, and the relation between what is seen and what is known."²³⁸ Seeing is when the spectator sees the film's action and sign or gesture, which the message sender or producer can significantly stimulate.²³⁹ It is related to the perceptive process of eyes and ears. Meanwhile, knowing is when the spectator perceives a new message by ignoring prior knowledge they may obtain.²⁴⁰ This area is related to the mental perception the spectator creates knowing through the synthesis process of adopting the film message. The knowing can be stimulated by, e.g. personal perspective and previous experience. Knowing may or may not change a person's attitudes and thoughts, depending on the spectator's openness and judgment. Moreover, believing is revealed when the spectator decides whether or not to believe in other engaged people's verbal and

²³⁴ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 19.

²³⁵ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 19.

²³⁶ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 70.

²³⁷ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 66.

²³⁸ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 70.

²³⁹ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 70.

²⁴⁰ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 70.

non-verbal actions.²⁴¹ The spectator can believe in words, conversations, and behaviour in the film, which can be principally forced by the spectators' existing beliefs (beliefs) and ideologies (ideologies) as well as value(s). This step might rely on the spectator's emotion and other possible impacts. Later, we will expand the details of the table of *the geography of the spectator*.

	Seeing	Knowing	Believing
Objective	Exhaustive	Diegetic	Solid
Impossible Objective	Total	Metadiscursive	Absolute
Interpellation	Partial	Discursive	Relative
Subjective	Limited	Intradiegetic	Transitory

Table 2 *The Geography of The Spectator*²⁴²

Casetti summarized that different conditions can bring distinct results in the spectator's reception. It further depends on the spectators themselves as to which gazing act they want to engage.²⁴³ *The objective* includes *exhausting seeing*, which involves minor details; *diegetic knowing*, which is about information directly derived from the film story; and *solid believing*, which refers to undoubted belief in facts. Meanwhile, the *impossible objective* explains that *total seeing* is the camera placement over the limits of the image. However, *metadiscursive knowing* concerns what the image shows and what the message reveals, while *absolute believing* is an ability to consider the certainty of facts.²⁴⁴ On the other hand, *interpellation* suggests *partial seeing* led by guidance from gaze, the *discursive knowing* which defines relations between addressor and addressee, and the *relative believing* that is committed to a confirmation shown on the screen. However, *the subjective* concept appeals to the *limited seeing* related to a character's vision (only one party's point of view, e.g.). The *intradiegetic knowing* is slightly based on a character's lived experience, whereas the *transitory believing* depends principally

²⁴¹ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 70.

²⁴² Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 71.

²⁴³ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 9.

²⁴⁴ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 70.

on the character's credibility.²⁴⁵ For example, the subjective point of view may represent how well the character can manage to persuade the spectator, given that the viewers are only partially open to new information. Since the seeing is limited from the subjective point of view, the knowing and believing might also be inapparent. The author wants to act as a spectator to draw an example from *Uncle Boonmee's* film. After watching the film for the first time, the researcher obtained a *subjective* point of view because of an unclear understanding of the story and some important messages. The author carried limited seeing by following the character's movement, but verbal conversation because the dialogue is in Isan dialect. So, the author had intradiegetic knowing based on what the character was doing and showing on the screen. The researcher could not have imagined a possible message rather than an evident performance. Last, the author took transitory belief because the characters are unknown actors who are more credible in performing the roles of ordinary people in the film. However, after learning the film critiques and seeking help from an Isan dialect speaker, the researcher might have gained impossible objectives with a total seeing of how the director shot the scenes and how he possibly placed the camera. Moreover, the author had metadiscursive knowing to better understand the film's image and message, partly due to language comprehension. Furthermore, finally, the researcher received absolute believing because the researcher could analyze some information and facts of the film according to the critiques. Casetti's *Inside the Gaze* book further describes the geography of the spectator through a few examples of films, which we will review in succeeding paragraphs.

The films which manifest reality bases are *The Great Train Robbery*,²⁴⁶ *Wind from The East*,²⁴⁷ and *Chronicle of a Love Affair*.²⁴⁸ *The Great Train Robbery* and *Wind from The East* oppose excellent and evil, right and wrong, and truth and lie. From these opposition aspects, the two films present reality and enable the spectator's analysis of the storytelling. Besides, the films place some values that can influence

²⁴⁵ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 71.

²⁴⁶ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 25.

²⁴⁷ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 25.

²⁴⁸ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 97.

and allow the spectator's imagination and independent interpretation. Correspondingly, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* promotes the daily routine of rural people, careers, dialect and reality of Thai society through, e.g., the character's conversation, location, and unknown actors. It also opposes the government and the anti-government, human and non-human, and rural and urban. In addition, the film discloses the unknown background of some messages to allow the spectator's imagination and personal reception. On the contrary, *Chronicle of a Love Affair* demonstrates a story that is not a history but a diary. Nonetheless, an assumption on the meaning of the film message arises from the spectator's judgment; therefore, the spectator's decoding can derive from facts observed through the film. Some critiques discovered *Uncle Boonmee* film as a childhood experience of the film director Apichatpong, i.e., life history. This experience is, therefore, recorded in his memory and reflected through the film story. In brief, these three examples may accentuate that the film can imitate everyday events and offer itself as dynamic images. Meanwhile, *Uncle Boonmee* film is a simulation of Apichatpong's life, Boonmee's recollection, and the nation's previous political events.

Casetti further described other concepts relating to POV, gaze and cinematographic enunciation. These concepts are *who is showing* and *who is being shown*; *les yeux dans les yeux*; *you are affirmed in the face of an I*, and *I vs you*. Who is showing can refer to the producer who can show the film. Producers delegate power to speak through films and characters, which is considered self-construction. Meanwhile, who is being shown may refer to the film and the producer's message offered to the spectator as self-offering.²⁴⁹ *Les yeux dans les yeux* discusses *I am here*, and *I am seeing*,²⁵⁰ *there is someone who sees along with you*²⁵¹, and *your seeing no longer sees itself*.²⁵² Casetti described these terms through an example of the movie *El* (1952) by Luis Buñuel. The film provides an objective camera angle, presenting the film events without showing these as recorded images. It causes the spectator

²⁴⁹ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 46.

²⁵⁰ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 76.

²⁵¹ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 77.

²⁵² Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 77.

to view what is happening in the film as it is in front of him.²⁵³ I am here, and I am seeing can reveal the expression of departure and arrival of the character in the film as well as an impossible objective view.²⁵⁴ Departure means when the character leaves the camera frame, while arrival means the character arrives in front of the camera. After playing the role in front of a camera (which defines a point of arrival), the character in *El* can move to the side and act in silence (the move refers to a point of departure). Ghost Huay's appearance at a dining table can define a point of arrival, whereas the point of departure is absence but replaced by the termination of the scene. Otherwise, Tong's motion to stand can signify a point of departure, and Tong's return to his seat may define a point of arrival. Therefore, I am here and I am seeing can refer to other characters at the dining table who are seeing Huay and Tong's movement. In contrast, there is someone who sees along with you, and your seeing no longer sees itself, which may define the camera's movement and the appearance and disappearance of the film character. A character in *El* reveals that he is seeing a woman he falls in love with at first sight, but the woman may not realize it. Thus, his seeing is not apparent because his eyes and love are not accepted. In this case, when Boonmee talks about his dream, other people are listening and discussing with him. Nonetheless, Boonmee's seeing (his story of dream) may not be recognized as those other characters may not believe in his story.

A *you* can be affirmed in the face of an *I*, as in the objective view. Casetti indicated this concept in the movie called *The Kid from Spain* (1932).²⁵⁵ The film's beginning offers a composition of full-face framing, illustrating an immediate recording of the facts.²⁵⁶ In this case, the female characters exchange a conversation, whereas the spectator cannot witness their gaze. It can explain why *you* in the face of the *I* (women facing each other) is an objective view because the characters might express a slight detail of the message that the spectator can partially understand. Moreover, we can describe *I* and *You* under different

²⁵³ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 74.

²⁵⁴ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 76.

²⁵⁵ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 51.

²⁵⁶ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 47.

geographies of the spectator.²⁵⁷ If an I outside the film indicates a you in the film, and a he character appears, it is called interpellation. Otherwise, if a character you and he face an I, it is called a subjective view, which depends on the characters' vision. Nevertheless, a camera showing *you* blending with an I can signify an impossible objective view within a limited frame and degree of specific facts.²⁵⁸

Casetti devoted his time and budget to studying the reception and expressed the results in his book, *Inside the Gaze*. He compared the film communication process to the body structure because the film communication and the body rely on a two-way circulation with two discrete parties consistent in operation. The spectatorship, therefore, refers to the reception approach, which engages the examination of a recipient and a sender. The recipient perhaps acts as a decoder who receives and interprets the film's meaning, whereas the sender can perform an interlocutor or an encoder role. In other words, Casetti named the sender the enunciator and the recipient the enunciatee. In conclusion, the author will employ the spectatorship theory to analyze the spectators' reception as the thesis inspects *their reception and reactions to the film*. Regarding Casetti's primary finding, different spectators may offer dissimilar and ordinary arguments. Film critiques revealed that the spectator carries numerous concerns and considerations on *Uncle Boonmee* film. Since the hypothesis shows that *the spectator's reception and reactions reveal different connotative messages and ideology of the film*, the author will apply the geography of the spectator to assess the spectator's reception point of view (or reception position), e.g., how and what they can see, how they might perceive the new message and generate meaning, and whether they believe or whether the message can convince them. Besides, these various points of view allow us to explore the motivation driving divergent spectator's reception and interpretation.

²⁵⁷ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 51.

²⁵⁸ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 51.

2.3 Summary of the Chapter

The chapter mainly indicates research methodology and implementation. It explains how the researcher collected the data, conducted the empirical, examined the case study, and applied the theoretical framework to the case. In conclusion, this study will be implemented under the qualitative method with tools of the case study and secondary data. The research will fundamentally gather data through the Google search engine and Google Scholar. In particular, the information is generally about the film critiques from the discussion and personal boards, online newspaper websites, and research articles. The primary tasks for this project are to review the case of *Uncle Boonmee* film, to collect data, to review the principal theory and other related works of literature such as Althusser and feminist film theorists, to apply the theory and the data to the case study, and to establish the conclusion. Ultimately, the research can provide the film connotations and ideology as formerly inquired in the research question and predicted in the hypothesis. In addition, it can offer the influences of different spectators' reception and the criteria for the film's production and its meaning.

Briefly, Casetti's arguments, such as film is a two-way communication process, are advantageous to this thesis. In contrast, *Uncle Boonmee's* film corresponds to Casetti's spectatorship theory for the following reasons. First, establishing reality can inspire this film, develop the production, and present it uncomplicated. It shows a true story of a man who can recall his past lives and the political background of the Isan region through conventional lifestyle and dialect. Moreover, the film is assumed to contain connotative messages and meaning; thus, it can be imprecise to consider only the film title verbal conversation without referring to non-verbal signs, movement, and representation, for instance. Casetti's spectatorship concerns a reception approach which observes different participants in the film communication process. Secondly, Casetti's spectatorship provides a tool to analyze the spectator's reception, which is the geography of the spectator. It can permit a critical analysis of the film spectator from dissimilar cultures and provide a summary of the position of their reception. Thirdly, Casetti interpreted that the spectator is passive, acting as a witness or object of the film communication process. The film communication process consists of enunciator and enunciatee

(cinematographic enunciation). Thus, Casetti's theory is relevant for analyzing all engaged parties in the film reception. Fourthly, Casetti's spectatorship requires gaze and cognition in the film communication process; it is then appropriate to analyze *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* because the film story does not only present what is in the film title. It requires the spectator's visual arrangement as well as cognitive comprehension. Fifthly, Casetti proposed that film is a two-way communication process in which the spectator can later provide feedback. Thus, this is applicable in observing an encoder (sender at one pole), the film, a decoder (receiver at another pole), and the spectator. And lastly, the monkey ghost character and an off-the-record interview mentioned that some scenes are taken from *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968),²⁵⁹ which is also consistent with the information written by Glenn Kenny.²⁶⁰ Meanwhile, some critiques found a connection between Uncle Boonmee's dream images and *La jetée* (1962), which presents the story through non-moving photos. In contrast, some critiques related the love story of the princess and a catfish in *Uncle Boonmee* to the film *Max mon amour* (1986).²⁶¹ It can reaffirm that it is sufficient to analyze the film by the Western theory of spectatorship.

²⁵⁹ Off-the-record interview with Assoc.Prof. Jakrawal Nilthamrong, film lecturer at Thammasat University's Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, conducted in 2016.

²⁶⁰ Glen Kenny, "NYFF 2010: Some Brief Notes Toward Constructing A User's Manual For "Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives," *Some Came Running*, September 21, 2010, https://somecamerunning.typepad.com/some_came_running/2010/09/nyff-2010-some-brief-notes-toward-constructing-a-users-manual-for-uncle-boonmee-who-can-recall-his-p.html.

²⁶¹ Further discussion in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 3

OUTSIDE CASETTI: WHAT OTHERS DISCUSSED?

The previous chapter presented a broader detail of the research method, how the author will conduct this empirical research and the leading theory of the study. It also includes sources of film critiques, the category of film critiques, narration of tasks, anticipated results of the thesis, and a scheme for empirical chapters. Moreover, the chapter thoroughly described Casetti's spectatorship theory, referring to theoretical mechanisms and other significant concepts, e.g., gaze, the geography of the spectator, Point of View, and cinematographic enunciation. Significantly, the chapter shows how the researcher will organize Casetti's spectatorship to the case study, why the theory suits the case study and vice versa, and what Casetti's findings can apply to the examination.

This chapter studies pieces of literature other than Casetti called *Outside Casetti*. There are four discussion points: first is early film study, second is spectatorship and film, third is perception and reception, and fourth is language and cinema. Diverse scholars from dissimilar fields of expertise examine these topics of interest. The chapter will extend the author's knowledge of Casetti, the spectatorship, and the reception theory. Besides, it can demonstrate how Casetti is discrete from others and further lead the readers to a more transparent comprehension of related and similar approaches.

3.1 Early Film Studies

The film is an ageing medium over a hundred years old, while the film industry began around 1800-1914.²⁶² Even though film began in Western countries like the

²⁶² Robert Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction*, (Oxford and Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 19.

United States of America, France and Britain, its emergence and popularity have rapidly grown through other parts of the world with numbers of films produced across centuries. The reputation and modernization of Hollywood caused rise to an imitation of various film industries in China, Japan, and India, e.g.²⁶³ Precisely, the Indian Bollywood film industry portrays Indian culture and maintains the uniqueness of culture through image, performance, and narration.²⁶⁴

Different studies reaffirmed that film is more than a medium; it is also an entertainment tool, an imitation of reality, an illusion or imagination, and a reference to a particular message. Fourstenu proposed that film can further create the impression of reality and naturalness through motion pictures.²⁶⁵ It can mean that film may provide realistic and natural feelings to the spectator, i.e. a combination of ordinariness and world facts. Though the film involves realistic effects of society, it offers imaginative and physiological aspects to the spectator. The spectator might engage their physical visual and personal perspective to see the film. Besides, facts or actual events of society can impact the film production and message. It means the reality or historical situations can influence the film story and its meaning. On the other hand, Bordwell and Carroll discussed that film can be realistic and illusionistic at the same time.²⁶⁶ The film may create an illusion of reality, which can systematically create false beliefs among viewers. For example, film audiences believe that Oasis always exists in every desert by watching and receiving information from different films. What is realistic in this case is that the Oases are possibly in deserts and arid areas, but what can be illusionistic is that we cannot simply find the Oasis, as shown in every film. The film can exaggerate or distort the facts to persuade viewers and create imagination among them. Furthermore, the audience can visualize similar film images. However, the image can be decoded distinctively according to the audience's point of view. It reveals

²⁶³ Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction*, 21.

²⁶⁴ Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction*, 21.

²⁶⁵ Marc Fourstenu, *The Film Theory Reader: Debates and Arguments*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 266.

²⁶⁶ David Bordwell and Noel Carroll, *Post-theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 325.

that although some audiences believe that there is an Oasis in every desert, they might interpret the significance of an Oasis dissimilarly.²⁶⁷ Meanwhile, Braudy and Cohen argued that films have two entities: photography and implicit memorable actuality (or nature).²⁶⁸ Photography can refer to images presented in the film, whereas implicit memory may be an entity of facts that requires additional interpretation. Besides, the film might generate meaningful messages through both image and language, allowing the flow of the viewer's perception and imagination. However, the film presents images and language through signs, symbols, or gestures. Nonetheless, Bywater's finding is consistent with Lenin, who asserted that "film could be used as political propaganda to influence the mass [sic]", i.e., the film can have political and psychological implications.²⁶⁹ These studies, therefore, contribute that the film is an expressive means relying on images of events to simulate reality. The simulation can entertain, create imagination and illusion, and offer connotation. Besides, the film's events can reflect society, verify what happened in the past, or remind the general public. As a result, what the film includes may convince the audience and lead to a common belief or manipulate public opinion, for example.

People believe that in the past, films were shot from a long distance, while nowadays, the director sometimes shoots the character's face and emotion to extend focus. The regular development of the film style occurs in two main directions, which are *realistic* and *formalistic*.²⁷⁰ The realistic film contains a minimum distortion of reality that the realist sees as an 'objective mirror' because an authentic world manipulates the realist's film world.²⁷¹ This objective mirror refers to the film as an impression of the world's facts or social reality. On the contrary, a formalistic film is one in which the producer tends to pay more attention to

²⁶⁷ Bordwell and Carroll, *Post-theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, 325.

²⁶⁸ Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, *Film Theory and Criticism*, 7th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 148.

²⁶⁹ Tim Bywater and Thomas Sobchack, *Introduction to Film Criticism*, (Dehli: Pearson Education, 2009), 110-112.

²⁷⁰ Louis Giannetti, *Understanding Movies*, (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1999), 2.

²⁷¹ Giannetti, *Understanding Movies*, 65.

technical elements such as lighting, sound, shot composition, mise-en-scène, and editing, which can make the film less realistic and natural. This formalistic can include intrinsic, allowing the spectator to recognize one object as more meaningful and relevant than what appears through a particular scene's context.²⁷² Indeed, a gun, for instance, portrays its dramatic significance in the film. The gun may lead the spectator to question – what the gun will do. – what is going to happen? – and what could be the consequence?²⁷³ Thus, the spectator's questions may represent the connotative meaning of the gun. Moreover, the example of a gun might permit different imaginations from one spectator to another or a so-called different reception. When an image of the gun appears, the spectator might expect crime or assassination in the following scenes. Meanwhile, some other spectators might assume a suicide in later sequences. Moreover, the spectator might imagine an excessive gun tone, a chaotic moment, or blood through sound and image. In contrast, some spectators may prepare to protect their visual system because the gun-crime image can scare them. These are possible examples of the audience's imagination. Nonetheless, there can be neutral audiences who remain calm without expectations toward the film.²⁷⁴

3.2 Spectatorship and Film

Although Mayne mainly used cinema in her book instead of film, which is different from Casetti, she provided interesting features of spectatorship. She considered cinema as an institution rather than a communication tool because cinema reflects the stability and preoccupations of society.²⁷⁵ The cinema can be an institution of codes, signs, and symbols of society in the form of dynamic images and sounds. Cinema as an institution must be influential and interactive to stimulate pleasure among spectators. In other words, the producer produces the language to capture the spectator's intention certainly. While cinema can be an institution, the cinematic

²⁷² Giannetti, *Understanding Movies*, 65.

²⁷³ Giannetti, *Understanding Movies*, 65.

²⁷⁴ Author

²⁷⁵ Judith Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship*, (USA and Canada: Routledge, 1993), 1.

spectator is a part of this institution.²⁷⁶ Mayne's analysis shows the relationship between cinema and spectator from different points of view and fields of expertise. Since the spectator is a part of the institution, the emergence of cinema can be according to the spectator, and it might capture viewers through the development of texts, messages, and images. In other words, the cinema communicates through narration, language, and motion pictures.²⁷⁷ It further conveys connotative and denotative language to engage the spectator. Besides, the cinema engages social events, reality, and human beings within a story that can be the most persuasive instrument in expressing ideology and control. Additionally, the film director designs films to develop a representation of language in the communication process among people in society.²⁷⁸ In this case, the spectator does not only witness and hear films, but they can pinpoint different human beliefs and values.²⁷⁹ Mayne revealed studies of many scholars that cinema works as a mirror of society, in which reality and imagination, such as social events and other social institutions, can influence its emergence.²⁸⁰ Consequently, its function can stabilize or disturb society. The film can carry a narrative effect through the events shown on the screen, which can greatly or scarcely disturb the lives of ordinary citizens in particular societies and countries.²⁸¹ It means the film message can influence, for example, people's attitudes, change their behaviour, or transform their beliefs.

On the opposition, Olsen and Reinhard indicated that the spectator *must* engage in eye movement and visual system to learn film.²⁸² In other words, the spectator must learn about film through its image. Otherwise, Olsen and Reinhard did not refer to the film's sound, which are verbal dialogues, music, and sound effects. The film can influence the spectator's perception and reception and affect their thought and attitudes. The spectator's impression of the cinema can rely on shared codes,

²⁷⁶ Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship*, 1.

²⁷⁷ Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship*, 64.

²⁷⁸ Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship*, 25.

²⁷⁹ Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship*, 31.

²⁸⁰ Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship*, 32.

²⁸¹ Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship*, 25.

²⁸² Christopher Olson and CarrieLynn Reinhard, *Making Sense of Cinema: Empirical Studies into Film Spectators and Spectatorship*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 259.

leading to different levels of film perception. In this case, shared codes can be the spectator's pertinent information and individual beliefs, which they use to construct their film world. Besides, the shared codes may correspond with the other symbols in the film or what message the film presents, resulting in mutual understanding between the spectator and the film. The interpretation of symbol and connotation relates more knowledge, relevant facts from knowledge, and reasons of fact to find a solution. The knowledge may come from the audience's background, acceptance of world facts, and motivation for the consequences. On the contrary, the audience's interpretation may derive from the spectator's experience, prior knowledge, and reception and from imagination and construction, which can further bring about various degrees of perception.²⁸³

In contrast, Tudor recognized that going to the cinema is perhaps affected by a film story, actors and actresses, commercial nature and other influences, and the spectator's social life, social institution and individual lifestyle.²⁸⁴ Families, friends, colleagues, experience, and background can be essential motivations for the spectator to purchase the film ticket. In contrast, cinema-going in the 30s had much more of a ritualistic flavour, in which people attended theatre only if they were familiar with the film story or genre, for example.²⁸⁵ Only specific genres of the film were produced and could have captured the attention of particular audiences. Tudor further analyzed that the film is a form of expression which contains language, content and reality.²⁸⁶ It means that the film encompasses the medium's materials and mechanical structure. The materials are images and sound, while the structure is language (a formal way of delivering meaning). These materials are necessary to be part of the film, enabling the spectator to express their gratitude and satisfaction toward the film by manifesting recognition, memory, imagination, and emotion during and after the spectatorship. More simply, the spectator can draw their interest in viewing the film to allow their imagination and

²⁸³ Olson and Reinhard, *Making Sense of Cinema: Empirical Studies into Film Spectators and Spectatorship*, 259.

²⁸⁴ Andrew Tudor, *Image and Influence*, (London: Routledge, 2014), 85.

²⁸⁵ Tudor, *Image and Influence*, 85.

²⁸⁶ Tudor, *Image and Influence*, 110

emotion during the film communication process, and they can obtain a memory of the film story from the film spectatorship.

In sum, Mayne's study is relevant to Casetti's idea of a relation between the film and the spectatorship. The cinema must notably contain pleasure, fantasy, enjoyment, and entertainment, even though cinema is a natural force that specifies the spectator's position in film communication. Consequently, the film producer must learn and observe their spectator before producing a film, whereas the spectator's position in the film might refer to their role as witness and receiver. However, *Mayne did not provide a mechanism that the author can use to examine the connotation and ideology inside the film and the spectator's reception.* She defined cinema and spectatorship in a descriptive style, referencing other studies. Furthermore, she found cinema to be an institution reflecting society. Otherwise, this cinematic institution can limit the study of the spectator because they are part of the communication process rather than part of an institution. Moreover, the cinema may reflect society rather than determine society's security. *Olson and Reinhard only focused on eye movement and visual systems* in the film communication. Nonetheless, Casetti found a more profound idea about spectatorship in which the spectator must involve their cognition, not a uniquely visual system. The cognition can allow an extensive analysis of the film: reception and spectatorship. Thus, the researcher intends to refrain from applying Olson and Reinhard to the empirical analysis as it might not contribute to critical results. It may guide us to observe only images but also language. Meanwhile, *Tudor's analysis nevertheless has two ambiguities.* First is 'film materials are images and sounds, while the structure is language.' In Casetti's study, the film comprises language discourse and image, the critical elements. Language is not a structure but a message and meaning, whereas sound can be a sub-category in verbal language. Second, 'film is a form of expression which contains language, content and reality'. This *form of expression can be excessively restricted* to consider *Uncle Boonmee* film because the film is art for Apichatpong, which is more than language, content and reality; otherwise, it offers an image that is likely open to, e.g., reception, interpretation and imagination.

3.3 Perception versus Reception

The essay, *Experiencing Film: From Perception to Reception*, summarizes concepts of psychological, perceptual, and social dimensions of the film experience.²⁸⁷ The principal focus of this essay is related to *three consecutive points*. *First, people attend the cinema with philosophical and cultural traditions that they want to see the presence, the absence, and the illusion of film storytelling.*²⁸⁸ This *presence* might refer to what the story reveals and what appears through conversations and performances. Meanwhile, the *absence* may show the missing information and messages that spectators can expect to see and hear in the film. “...People arrive with expectations before entering a movie theatre...”²⁸⁹ The absence is thus a standard practice that could happen from the spectator's disappointment. People search for information before deciding to see a film because the ticket price may only be affordable for some spectators. At the same time, various movie choices can cause more consideration and expectation from the spectator. Therefore, film images, sounds, stories and characters should impress the spectator and resonate in their remembrance.²⁹⁰ The spectator's anticipation may vary from person to person, depending on age, gender, interest, professional career, and nationality. On the other hand, *illusion* defines a recording of images continually shown in films. Although the images are connected and arranged, those images can be illusory or dreamlike because the film can falsify facts.

*Second, some film theorists have already structured two aspects of spectatorship: psychology and phenomenology.*²⁹¹ Corrigan referred to Christian Metz and Jacques Lacan in this perspective. Metz found that the cinema institution consists of the human desire to attend the movie and the pleasure they may obtain from perceptual experience. Meanwhile, Lacan analyzed that images and imagination can dominate

²⁸⁷ Timothy Corrigan, “Part 1 Experiencing Film: From Perception to Reception,” in *Critical Visions in Film Theory*, ed. Timothy Corrigan, Patricia White, and Meta Mazaj, (Bedford: St. Martin's, 2010), 2.

²⁸⁸ Corrigan, “Part 1 Experiencing Film: From Perception to Reception,” 3.

²⁸⁹ Corrigan, “Part 1 Experiencing Film: From Perception to Reception,” 2.

²⁹⁰ Corrigan, “Part 1 Experiencing Film: From Perception to Reception,” 2.

²⁹¹ Corrigan, “Part 1 Experiencing Film: From Perception to Reception,” 2.

a psychological perception.²⁹² In other words, psychology revolves around visual perception and imagination. In contrast, the phenomenology aspect may be an intention of the spectator, which their human being collectively associates with the film viewing process. The engagement between the spectator and the film (or the spectator's film experience) may further generate perception and expression and require further solid perception.²⁹³

*Lastly, how the social and historical dimensions of the film experience can create media reception, in other words, various forms of film exposition or distinct cultures can influence media reception.*²⁹⁴ Social positioning, such as national identity, class, gender and generation, can shape the spectator's reception toward media. Corrigan further cited that a person's social power and social engagement can manipulate the spectator's reception. It means they may agree or oppose the dominant film message or respond to or reject some film elements.²⁹⁵ In other words, the judgment of film language takes place at a discrete level. Film definition can depend on the spectators' prior experience and personal background.

Corrigan additionally noted that film is *the language of being* because it is an image and a language of action and performance. Film language might include changes during the interaction and behaviour of the character in which we can understand the gestures and movements through explicit meaning. On the contrary, Corrigan found that interpretation is *the being of language* since codes, symbols, signs, and other implicit components can vary from spectator to spectator. After its distribution, the film transforms itself from a fixed and finished product into a flexible message source among numerous spectators.²⁹⁶

He further referred to many theorists from different fields of expertise. The first example is *Baudry*, who believed that ideology is an unconscious perception and a

²⁹² Corrigan, "Part 1 Experiencing Film: From Perception to Reception," 3.

²⁹³ Corrigan, "Part 1 Experiencing Film: From Perception to Reception," 4.

²⁹⁴ Corrigan, "Part 1 Experiencing Film: From Perception to Reception," 2.

²⁹⁵ Corrigan, "Part 1 Experiencing Film: From Perception to Reception," 2.

²⁹⁶ Corrigan, "Part 1 Experiencing Film: From Perception to Reception," 68.

subject of dominant power, expressed through various institutions by an individual's leading belief.²⁹⁷ Ideology is instinctive, and everyone carries personal beliefs. Baudry also stated that cinema is an illusion, and the film ideology can mislead the spectator. The illusion may refer to a constructed image or story of cinema in which the film's implicit meaning can cause this misinformation. However, this cinema is an illusion and derives from different meanings that various spectators interpret, receive, or imagine. Another example is *Currie*, who pointed out that the film may rely on three different angles of human perception.²⁹⁸ First is perceptual realism, which is a relation between visual capacity and natural recognition involving eyes and customary perception.²⁹⁹ In this perceptual realism, film realism can occur through long-take or deep-focus shooting, showing broader image details and communication between characters. Second is illusionism, in which the spectator is obliged to judge whether the image is what they see or what they want it to be because the film is always fiction that is unreal but constructed.³⁰⁰ Since the film is not genuine, the spectator can decide how they may want to perceive the image, i.e., they can decode the message according to their preference. Last is cognitive and perceptual illusions, a connection between the film image and the spectator.³⁰¹ The film can force the viewers to have false beliefs during communication. This false belief might refer to misperception and misinterpretation of the film's implicit and (possibly) explicit message.³⁰² On the contrary, false beliefs can be defined as a mismatch between the spectator's expectation and the film's image and message, causing uncommon understanding between the film's intention and the spectator. The film can be an illusion according to which the fragmented images are recorded and produced.³⁰³ In this case, the film might distort the language and information used in real life, such as daily informal conversations and natural interactions. Instead, it expresses formal verbal language and gestures uncommon to experience in interpersonal interaction.

²⁹⁷ Corrigan, "Part 1 Experiencing Film: From Perception to Reception," 34.

²⁹⁸ Corrigan, "Part 1 Experiencing Film: From Perception to Reception," 47.

²⁹⁹ Corrigan, "Part 1 Experiencing Film: From Perception to Reception," 48.

³⁰⁰ Corrigan, "Part 1 Experiencing Film: From Perception to Reception," 51.

³⁰¹ Corrigan, "Part 1 Experiencing Film: From Perception to Reception," 54.

³⁰² Corrigan, "Part 1 Experiencing Film: From Perception to Reception," 54.

³⁰³ Corrigan, "Part 1 Experiencing Film: From Perception to Reception," 54.

On the contrary, Bennett referred to the primary idea in her thesis: “the film is offered to spectator, but the spectator does not have anything to offer to the film apart from the desire to see and hear. Hence [sic] the spectator's position is one of power, specifically the power to understand the events rather than to change them”.³⁰⁴ As a passive player, the spectator does not offer the film any message or instant feedback, although they have already received its image, language, and storytelling. More precisely, the spectator is not a film content producer, but they can perceive or interpret what the film message suggests and later respond to the film message. They are responsible for seeing, hearing, and appreciating the film's verbal and non-verbal language. It is possibly a non-interactive communication process because the spectator can only wait at the end of the communication circle. The film is nevertheless not tangible but an ideal product that the ticket is only an entrance to the cinema. The audience genuinely invests in an anticipated experience rather than a fee.³⁰⁵ For the audience, the film can be an imaginative device, which they purchase the ticket with the expectation to entertain or educate themselves. For instance, the viewer spends their money in exchange for pleasure rather than a seat in the cinema.³⁰⁶

In Bennett's study, she also indicated that the spectator is interested in theatre for *three main reasons – culture, politics, and social reality*. The production of meaning is related to social constitutions or practices and representation.³⁰⁷ In a film, a lighted cigar represents the bourgeois setting and refers to a social composition of middle-class characters and audiences.³⁰⁸ It is a cultural fact and social reality that upper-class people tend to smoke cigars. Meanwhile, some films show politicians with cigars, emphasizing the political meaning of the element. Nonetheless, the meaning and interpretation are not according to the characters and their action but all setting components, which could be a current circumstance within the film, location, sound-effect, voice-over, and narration. The meaning of

³⁰⁴ Susan Bennett, *The Role of The Theatre Audience: A Theory of Production and Reception*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 83.

³⁰⁵ Bennett, *The Role of The Theatre Audience: A Theory of Production and Reception*, 82.

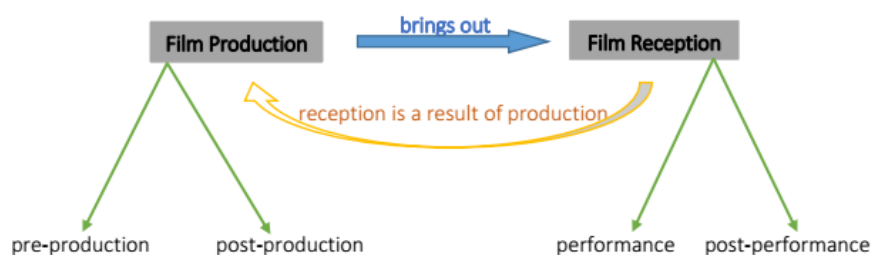
³⁰⁶ Bennett, *The Role of The Theatre Audience: A Theory of Production and Reception*, 82.

³⁰⁷ Bennett, *The Role of The Theatre Audience: A Theory of Production and Reception*, 55.

³⁰⁸ Bennett, *The Role of The Theatre Audience: A Theory of Production and Reception*, 70

cigars and other relevant articles and contexts in the scene can further cause dissimilar perceptions among audiences.

Bennett further provided an example of on-stage performance and post-performance in the theatre. Therefore, the author concluded her study that reception can result from production. In other words, the production and the reception are interrelated.³⁰⁹ The production involves pre-production, characters, and post-production (the production team, actors, editors, and funders, e.g.). Nonetheless, the reception engages character performance and post-performance, including judgment and feedback. According to the researcher's interpretation, the reception in the theatre performance can occur after the spectator witnesses the character's action, receives the image and messages, and later interprets the meaning.³¹⁰ It means the reception results from the performance communication, which includes the actor (who enters input) and the decoder (who obtains output). After the actors finish their performance, the spectators might rely on their individual opinions to provide specific reactions. They are tentatively capable of making meaning of the production (or reception).³¹¹ The feedback or meaning of the reception might derive in the form of memory of the film or following purchases of the other film products. We can compare the relationship between theatre performance and post-performance to the film-production-reception process in the diagram below.



*Diagram 1 Bennett's Stage Performance and Post-Performance*³¹²

³⁰⁹ Bennett, *The Role of The Theatre Audience: A Theory of Production and Reception*, 139-165.

³¹⁰ Bennett, *The Role of The Theatre Audience: A Theory of Production and Reception*, 163.

³¹¹ Bennett, *The Role of The Theatre Audience: A Theory of Production and Reception*, 163.

³¹² Bennett, *The Role of The Theatre Audience: A Theory of Production and Reception*, 139-165.

The film production introduces the film as a product that provides the viewer with a message through non-verbal and verbal language. The interaction between the film and the audience draws out the film's reception, which can refer to the audience's interpretation and comprehension of the film's message and other meanings. The reception appears regarding the film production or the film communication process. Moreover, film production revolves around pre-production and post-production, which are shooting and editing, for example. Meanwhile, the film reception includes performance and post-performance, e.g., characters, film events, film images, film viewers, and film analysts.

Nonetheless, the researcher discovered that *Corrigan offered numerous contradicting ideas in his study*. He found that *film is actual, film is fiction, and film is an illusion* at the same time. *On one hand*, Corrigan stated that the film is produced on an original basis and reflects reality. *On the other hand*, he convinced the spectator that a director produced a film to become a fictional story. The film is often inaccurate because its events are human-made products – what the spectator witnesses in the film is an illusion. Due to these two statements, his position *might raise some challenges throughout the examination*. In addition, *Bennett's study is limited* because it is related to only *Western theatre, but she failed to discuss the non-Western theatregoer*.³¹³ Moreover, she mainly focused on the production and the reception of theatre performances rather than the cinema.

3.4 Language and Cinema

Metz prominently pointed out that film and cinema are different: film is a message while cinema is a group of decode.³¹⁴ For example, film can consist of materials, visual images, sound, speech, and music. Otherwise, cinema refers to code and is one of the language systems that can define the origin of culture.³¹⁵ The difference between film and cinema may further demonstrate that the spectator can understand

³¹³ Bennett, *The Role of The Theatre Audience: A Theory of Production and Reception*, 212.

³¹⁴ Christian Metz, *Language and Cinema*, (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1974), 49.

³¹⁵ Metz, *Language and Cinema*, 36-39.

the film through connotation and denotation. Besides, film is a form of expression unlike ordinary language because it can be a combination of messages, namely image, verbal, and movement.³¹⁶ The recorded film image can construct the message through the script and the character. The film construction overlooks its natural language expression, but it might portray a consolidation of imitation and fact as such. The cinematic language of slow motion may define a dreamlike situation, generating a strange perception toward the viewer.³¹⁷ Metz may have seen the film as a sign and representation rather than a communication process. His study is specifically about the discourse of semiotics and the system of signs, which can be problematic in investigating the film because *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* encompasses both denotative and connotative language discourse. More prominently, the investigation found that Metz distinctively considered film and spectatorship. *First*, he introduced the idea that film is an absolute singular and a *one-way communication* that contains very limited syntaxes.³¹⁸ In his opinion, the film creates only *a few signs* which need to be more distinct. Signs can refer to images and language that do not obviously stand out but construct other meanings apart from explicit verbal and non-verbal expressions. Therefore, the film communicates the sign with restricted meaning, not requiring response or interpretation. In this case, the receiver may not exist. Meanwhile, Casetti pointed out that film is a two-way communication process. *Secondly*, he observed that film is *not language but semiotics*, referring to a system of signs in a communication process.³¹⁹ Nonetheless, the film obtains *only a few signs* but involves a variety of imagination and interpretation from the audience. It contrasts with Casetti that the film is a language discourse in which signs, symbols, and representations are in the language. *Thirdly*, Metz admitted that film is a part of the *language systems* offering socio-cultural depth.³²⁰ In other words, the film can be a tool in the language system connected to society and culture, i.e., the film might reflect society and offer cultural features. Nonetheless, Casetti indicated that film

³¹⁶ Metz, *Language and Cinema*, 16.

³¹⁷ Metz, *Language and Cinema*, 132.

³¹⁸ Metz, *Language and Cinema*, 52.

³¹⁹ Metz, *Language and Cinema*, 9.

³²⁰ Metz, *Language and Cinema*, 36.

is an art form imitating reality. *Fourthly, cinematic language is a fact of discourse* or a portrayal of information developed from reality.³²¹ On the contrary, Casetti signified that film revolves around image and language discourse, which can imitate reality and imagination, not solely a fact. *Finally, Metz discovered that the visual image of the film is less dynamic; it is fixed and finished by presenting code facts and social subjects.*³²² Conversely, Casetti indicated that neither film image nor language is stable. They are dynamic and flexible, depending on the spectator and other relevant factors.

3.5 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter reveals other works of literature considering film, spectatorship, perception and reception, and language (semiotics). Besides, the researcher summarized the limitations of these works, which can also explain why the author does not embrace them in this study. The summary of this section highlights the drawbacks of these studies and approaches compared to Casetti's spectatorship.

These pieces of literature pinpointed restrictions that could be more practical for the thesis. *Early film studies* addressed only the background and the direction of the film development. Otherwise, it needs an apparent mechanism for analyzing film language and images. On the other hand, *Mayne* considered cinema an institution that can be confined for this thesis as the film should be the communication process, and the spectator should be a part of the communication sphere rather than an institution. Meanwhile, *Olsen and Reinhard* initiated that film involves only the eye and visual system. Besides, *Tudor* generated ambiguous ideas about the film, which can cause questions in the analysis. In sum, these three theorists, who studied *cinema and spectatorship*, proposed superficial findings and did not suggest a prominent device for researching the empirical. Similarly, *Corrigan's* investigation on perception and reception identifies contradicting results, while *Bennett* discussed only Western theatre but still needs to argue about

³²¹ Metz, *Language and Cinema*, 45.

³²² Metz, *Language and Cinema*, 53.

the non-Western theatre features. Finally, Metz's most related controversies are that *film is one-way communication* and *film is not a language* but rather semiotics and signs. Since Metz is an expert on symbols and semiotics, it can be limited to analyzing *Uncle Boonmee's* film, which can be an art, offering everyday images and connotative meanings. The film does not particularly present signs and representations but reveals some implicit messages through the conversations and narrative messages of the human and non-human characters. If the author employed only Metz, the analysis might have contributed to the film's signs and symbols concerning political signals, such as the Communist representations and sickle and hammer. More specifically, the study could have failed to notice another prominent verbal language expression, including Boonmee's analogy of Bangkok and Boonmee's verbal comparison of cave and womb.

CHAPTER 4
WHAT IS THE POLITICS IN THE FILM:
THE STATE IDEOLOGY AND THE FILM SPECTATORSHIP?

The film could have produced an interrogation, whether politics or history. Then, the author thematized this as an inquiry because what is interesting is not only the film but the political references that occur in the film. The chapter investigates the politics in the film because some critics also noticed an association between the political situations in Thai history and the events in the film. In other words, the film critiques suggested a connection between the political history and the film narration. Though critics witnessed the politics, the film is not a politically biased medium that intends to disturb or inform the spectator. Apichatpong has always commented in several interviews and lectures that "*Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* is an art piece, not a political film. However, the politics is concealing in his film".³²³ The film introduces a new space for understanding and interpreting the narration by simulating the political events through dreams, recall, and imagination. This simulation does not construct the film's meaning as a product of politics. However, it might offer an allegory to allow another possibility of viewing the film's message and Thai society. The film demonstrates that the state ideology can and usually interpellate people. Apichatpong is knowledgeable of the existence of the state ideology and the interpellation. Then, he might have aimed to deconstruct the state ideology and opened a new space for distinct interpretation. It means that Apichatpong offered a new possibility and allowed unrestricted interpretation. The new space can be considered as the film spectatorship because it permits the spectator to understand the film in a non-specific way (it is more exposed than ideology). The film is a piece of art as the spectatorship is not a specific symbol or ideology. However, it can be an enigma that establishes open-ended messages and spectatorship with a subjective view.

³²³ "Uncle Boonmee Review," Rotten Tomatoes, September 20, 2022, https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/uncle_boonmee/reviews?type=user.

Therefore, the film simultaneously demonstrates the state ideology and opens a space of possibility where people can understand the message differently. *Uncle Boonmee* film is an object that permits the spectators to experience Thai politics. Apichatpong decided to present the politics in the film; therefore, the film is traumatized by historical turmoil. Apichatpong transferred this trauma and transformed it into film images and discourse. However, he offered the trauma as an implicit meaning, which provides a broader chance of reception and interpretation.

This chapter also engages Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) to extend an understanding of an ideology interpellation and how ideology may obtain its presence in the film. The film images and language can distribute the film's ideology. Thus, it is essential to review the fundamental concept of ideology. Moreover, due to three criteria, Althusser's research is consistent with Casetti's spectatorship theory. Firstly, Althusser argued that subject is a fundamental of ideology,³²⁴ while Casetti discovered that film is possibly a subject of enunciation.³²⁵ Therefore, the film can express ideology. Secondly, concerning the first remark, Althusser noted that ideology emerges from social connection,³²⁶ while Casetti found that the film world might contain aspects of reality.³²⁷ Therefore, social engagement and reality can influence the film story and illustration of ideology. In other words, the film events can include ideology from reality. Finally, Althusser discovered that ideology can interpellate an individual as a subject,³²⁸ while Casetti noticed that the film makes a direct address to the spectator.³²⁹ Since ideology can exist inside the film, it might create the spectator as a subject. The subject can directly interact with the ideology, and the spectator can perceive the ideology. Formerly, without knowing Althusser's ISAs, the author would have expected ideology in *Uncle Boonmee* film to derive from the film

³²⁴ Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, (India: Aakar Books for South Asia, 2019), 116.

³²⁵ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 19.

³²⁶ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, 126.

³²⁷ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 65.

³²⁸ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, 115.

³²⁹ Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, 23.

director's personal beliefs. Nevertheless, Althusser's examination can suggest that the state ideology represents culture developed through the social construction and the person's experience. An investigation of Althusser's Ideological State Apparatus can clarify how the film interpellates the state ideology and how it produces its spectatorship. The supreme authority can interpellate state ideology, i.e., it is an interpellation of the ideology from the state down to the public (and to the spectator). On the contrary, the film generates a non-symbolic feature known as a film spectatorship. The film spectatorship is more profound than ideology because it is not closed to a particular interpretation.

Correspondingly, the ISAs study relates to *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, for several reasons. The film title explicitly refers to the religious belief in past incarnations and life after death. However, it implicitly suggests political ideology through Boonmee's memory and dream. Apichatpong recognized the state interpellation and suggested an art which may deconstruct the government ideology or the state interpellation. He may have invented a new prospect of interpreting the film message rather than influencing the spectator to follow the state or attacking the state interpellation. It clearly states that political power is relative and unavoidable because the government is always correct. The film emphasizes through many aspects that the government obtains ultimate authority in interpellating the citizens of being Communists.

In this regard, the study divides this chapter into three parts. Firstly, the chapter will discuss 'ideology inside the film: what is the state ideology in the film?'. It is how Apichatpong viewed the state ideology and how the state operates its power through politics (an ideological state apparatus) in the film. In other words, this section will consider what state ideology the film might interpellate into the characters through political events and religious features. There will be sequences and a character to portray the state ideology, such as Boonmee's dream of the future and Jen. Besides, an example from a 2012 documentary film called *The Act of Killing*, which simulates a 1960s massacre in Indonesia, will be included. Since the massacre happened at a comparable time with the 1965 political insurgency in Thailand, the film should illustrate how the state ideology is interpellated inside the film. Secondly, the chapter will observe 'The film spectatorship: how the film

opens a new space?'. The section refers to the film spectatorship that is more open than ideology and is specific to art, which is not a closed-ending communication and fixed meaning. Since it is a particular art piece, the film can be unclear in addressing, i.e., an enigma that causes difficulty to understand. *Uncle Boonmee, Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, introduces a new possibility of understanding the film story and viewing society dissimilarly. The film spectatorship is not related only to symbols but might correlate to the features contrasting with the state ideology. An analysis will also provide examples of sequences and characters such as Boonmee, who might dismantle the state ideology through argument and opinion, and monk Tong, who might oppose the religious rule. Lastly, the chapter will summarize the principal findings of the film critiques on the state ideology and interpellation and how the film demonstrates the new space. (how Apichatpong might have attempted to deconstruct the state ideology).

4.1 Ideology Inside the Film: What is the State Ideology in the Film?

Althusser's study considers ideology as it emerges from social relations and arises from the dominant mode of production and activities in society. In this case, state apparatuses refer to institutions like churches, schools, parliament, police, and justice courts. Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) are religion, education, family, law, politics, trade unions, and communications executed by ruling class ideologies.³³⁰ These ideological state apparatuses are mechanisms used to implement work and exercise the power of the state apparatuses. For instance, religious belief supports the existence of the church, and law enforcement is a mechanism for police, while justice is a tool for the court. As a result, the ideologies are inserted and expressed through these state apparatuses.³³¹ Although each apparatus may be interrelated, it acts individually and independently. Furthermore, such apparatuses enable the ruling class to ensure their domination and control over other classes.³³² Althusser described interpellation by pointing at the relationship

³³⁰ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, 97.

³³¹ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, 97.

³³² Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, 98.

between subject and ideology, while ideology obtains its prominent function of constituting individuals as subjects, which is fundamental to ideology.³³³ Interpellate generally means ‘to propose an identity to someone or some group.’³³⁴ Althusser explained that interpellation occurs when dominant ideology arrives from a person's experience and social formations.³³⁵ ISAs function primarily by ideology and secondarily by repression, then ideology may arise in association with communication exchange.³³⁶ In other words, the dominant ideology can operate an interpellation. However, the subject's experience, social development and interaction may further construct the interpellation. Then, ideologies perhaps exist in social formation,³³⁷ and these ideologies can be constitutive and unique.³³⁸ Individuals see themselves through how they behave, think, act, and react to certain things or other people, and then they can respond by core ideology, belief and experience, for instance. For example, when a police officer addresses a person, the person is constructed as a subject. They may primarily react by silence and non-dynamic movement because they find themselves guilty. This reaction might derive from a dominant ideology.³³⁹ However, individuals can conduct an ideology after engaging with others and social institutions. Althusser further declared that ideology is eternal, in which individuals produce imaginary accounts of what is happening in the real world. Ideologies are, therefore, images of those relations between the imagination and reality.³⁴⁰

This section refers to an ideological state apparatus in this film: politics. The Thai state uses this ISA to exercise power. Therefore, the state has an opportunity to express and extend its influence and prominence in the film. There is a relationship

³³³ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, 115.

³³⁴ “Oxford Reference,” Oxford Reference, December 16, 2016, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100008265>.

³³⁵ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, 117.

³³⁶ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, 100.

³³⁷ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, 126.

³³⁸ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, 121.

³³⁹ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, 117

³⁴⁰ Michael Freeden, *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 27.

between the subject and ideology in the film, i.e., between the characters and the Thai government. The state proposes an identity that the people (including human and non-human characters) are inferior under the government regime. The state can address the people as the subjects and interpellate the state ideology. It means that the dominant class, possibly the government in the film, can offer the state ideology. Simultaneously, the subject (people) can engage their experience and interact in society to form the dominant ideology.

Uncle Boonmee, Who Can Recall His Past Lives, refers to the ruling government and the ruled citizens. Therefore, the state ideology is an ethical and traditional ideology for people. The film accentuates how the state obtained excessive power in the past and to what extent they are currently influential among Thai people. When Boonmee became a conscript, he responded by following the government's order because he might rely on the ideology interpellation that all men are obliged to protect the nation and state supremacy. The government obtains absolute power and forces citizens to follow their orders, i.e., the state ideology derives from the leading class, the government. Boonmee discusses his dream, before he died in the cave, that the government can eliminate people who cannot identify themselves. Rather than Boonmee's dream story, the sequence shows non-dynamic images of a group of soldiers and a monkey ghost. Boonmee further states that the government will obtain supreme power in the future, and general citizens cannot debate with the government. However, they can only follow the state's instructions. The same group of soldiers without the military uniform also play around with a camera and rocks.

Furthermore, it reveals a monkey ghost surrounded by soldiers and a sign of a sickle and hammer on the soil. The sickle and hammer can signify a lower and inferior public class, in which the leading class or the state ideology restrict them. This sequence can declare that the state ideology is non-Communism, and the state interpellates citizens as lower, less influential, inferior and outdated. The government might perceive itself as the most moral and authoritative apparatus. Besides, several critiques from Rotten Tomatoes and Pantip found that the location in the images below can correspond to the 1965 political events in Isan, Thailand's

arid and insignificant region.³⁴¹ The state receives excessive power and essential respect that the local Isan could not have argued or opposed. The film shows an image of soldiers searching for a monkey ghost in a forest to create a relationship with the Communist concealing camp in Nabua. The government and other people might have accused the villagers of being Communists and condemned the village as being a Communist community. The state trailed the Nabua people, and the troops ceased the village. Moreover, a temple called Bua Khao was used as a military base to protect the nation from the allegedly Communist Nabua.³⁴²



Image 17 A Group of Soldiers with and without Uniforms and Sickle-and-Hammer Symbol

³⁴¹ “Uncle Boonmee Review,” Rotten Tomatoes, September 20, 2022, https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/uncle_boonmee/reviews?type=user. “Who watched and understood the movie Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (movie review) ใครดูหนังเรื่องลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติแล้วเข้าใจบ้างคะ? (สปอยล์)”, Pantip, April 17, 2019, <https://pantip.com/topic/31854178>.

³⁴² See more details in Chapter 1, 1.1 Thailand's Largest Region: What has the region Encountered?

Some film critics found some implicit messages in the film relating to the state ideology and Thai politics in history, which also correspond to the examples of sequences mentioned above. Mark Terry suggested that the monkey ghost could represent the Communist Party of 1965.³⁴³ The Thai government treated the Communist people as if they were evil by sending troops to attack and arrest them. The film director compared the monkey ghost to the Communists who disturb the nation. The monkey can be disgusting, frightening, and threatening, opposite to the government's image. The film suggests the state ideology that the government symbolizes superiority and morality, whereas the monkey ghost represents inferiority. It reaffirms that Communism is strange and that Communism is an outdated and inappropriate ideology for Thai society. The monkey ghost, thus, can be addressed by the state ideology that the government is proper and moral, while their Communist ideology can be mischievous and unlawful. His first appearance might notify the state of interpellation because he does not discuss the current world but instead refers to his forest world. In other words, he does not criticize the government. Moreover, the monkey ghost may perceive the human characters as government representatives and must show respect. Then, he tends to express low-confident characteristics through verbal conversation and body movement. Although the monkey ghost might carry a different political ideology, he is interpellated by the state ideology because he would rather escape to the forest than argue with the state. It shows that the monkey ghost implicitly accepts the politics and the power of the state. Besides, he waits to join the dining table until Aunt Jen invites him. It is comparable to permission from the government as the state can interpellate the monkey ghost by leading his body. Therefore, Jen can further emphasize the characteristics of the state.

As earlier mentioned, the monkey ghost (the Communist representative) is interpellated by the state ideology because he was possibly convinced that his

³⁴³ Mark Terry, "The Worlds Viewed: An Examination of Apichatpong Weerasethakul's Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives through a Cavellian Lens of Film-Philosophy (page 4-5)," Academia, October 4, 2022, https://www.academia.edu/34856859/The_Worlds_Viewed_An_Examination_of_Apichatpong_Weerasethakuls_Uncle_Boonmee_Who_Can_Recall_His_Past_Lives_through_a_Cavellian_Lens_of_Film_Philosophy.

Communist ideology was unethical, and he must have concealed it from the state. Furthermore, the state can interpellate them by attacking, accusing, and eliminating anyone who argues with or criticizes the government. Kon Mong Nang correspondingly found that Apichatpong produced the film to detect and verify his memory of Isan and a historical trauma.³⁴⁴ Thus, the allegation could have provided a haunted memory to the local Isan and Apichatpong. It is a frightening remembrance because Apichatpong may have perceived that the Communists were perhaps harmless, but the government accused them. Eric Bordeleau asserted that “*Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* is set in Isaan and is premised on the affective-historical fact that the region's purging is still felt by the widows and descendants of the disappeared communists, despite the reigning royalist regime's attempts to silence and censor this history in the name of national unity”.³⁴⁵ Rather than generating a historical trauma for local villagers, it causes the Isan Region to be hostile to the central state administration. The region has been significant as a location of rebellion for anti-state people (Isan Communists) who disguised themselves to fight against the central government.³⁴⁶ “Isan was never a competitor for prestige. It was always marginal, a buffer zone – and thus frequent battleground.”³⁴⁷ The area never receives dignity and acceptance from the central authority or people from other regions. Since it is far from the centre (at the border), it cannot demand admiration and attention. More importantly, it has regularly been a defence for the country that people from other countries cannot simply enter Thailand or that the enemy cannot certainly attack the country, for instance. Film Sick further agreed that *Uncle Boonmee, Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, might have occurred in a village called Nabua, which is consistent with the political

³⁴⁴ “After 10 years, what has happened to Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives, the Palm d’or winner 10 ปี ผ่านไป... เกิดอะไรขึ้นหลังจาก “ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ” คว่า “ปาล์มทองคำ”?” Kon Mong Nang ETC, May 26, 2020, <https://konmongnangetc.com/2020/05/26/uncleboonmee-a-decade/>.

³⁴⁵ Erik Bordeleau, Ronald Rose-Antoinette and Toni Pape, *Nocturnal Fabulations: Ecology, Vitality and Opacity in the Cinema of Apichatpong Weerasethakul*, (London: Open Humanities Press, 2017), 48.

³⁴⁶ Lawrence Chua, “Apichatpong Weerasethakul,” *Bomb* 114 (2010): 40.

³⁴⁷ David The, “Itinerant Cinema: The Social Surrealism of Apichatpong Weerasethakul,” *Third Text* 25, issue 5 (2011): doi:10.1080/09528822.2011.608973

incidents of the Isan region.³⁴⁸ The film setting reaffirms that Nabua village and the residents have been under the government's interpellation. The state interpellates the villagers that they are Communists regarding their judgement and regime without considering people's opinions. Isan can be an identity that the government attempts to define Isan people as the Communist. In other words, Isan means the Communist regarding the state interpellation. Meanwhile, Nabua is another symbol of the Communist that the government addresses the habitants as hostile and threatening to the state. All Isan areas, particularly Nabua, are perceived as anti-government, obsolete, and not entitled to government welfare and attention. Three sequences can reaffirm that the film refers to a location in Isan Nabua. The first sequence is the beginning of the film when Boonmee and others arrive home and rest on a bench. Boonmee lives in a countryside house far from modernization and needs more technological facilities for convenience. The house style demonstrates a typical pattern of households in Isan because the first floor is open, and there is a bench to sit and welcome guests. The background of the scene further reveals that the area can be arid because Boonmee possesses enormous water tanks to store water from rain. Since Isan does not have sufficient rain and water in the region, local people must have their reservoirs. Moreover, the two images below can clarify the film's location. Boonmee states that his assistant comes from Laos through the river border. It can further imply that the film story occurs in the Northeast of Thailand, a border region adjacent to Laos. Meanwhile, Jen also argues that the employee speaks Lao rather than Isan dialect because he is from Laos. This sequence may reveal that Boonmee is more familiar with people from Laos and the Lao language because it is nearer to his house and farm. The second sequence demonstrates Boonmee farm and its employees' origin. Boonmee shows Jen his farm and introduces his employees, who are also from Laos and speak French. In addition, he compares his tamarinds to a well-known place in Thailand, which is also close to Isan, and some people speak the Isan dialect. On the other hand, the last sequence presents a dry environment in the film. It may suggest that

³⁴⁸ Film Sick, "Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (Apichatpong Weerasethakul/2010/Thai) a transformation of memory to history ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ (อภิชาติพงศ์ วีระเศรษฐกุล/ 2010 / ไทย) การเปลี่ยนความทรงจำให้เป็นประวัติศาสตร์," *Film Sick* (blog), April 15, 2019, <https://filmsick.wordpress.com/2012/01/08/uncleboonme/>.

the story genuinely happens in the arid and far land where Isan is. It portrays a group of soldiers possibly searching for communists in the area, which can be consistent with the political situations in Isan during the 1960s, as previously discussed.



Image 18 The Setting in Film and Isan Environment

On the contrary, Jen may represent the government because she expresses her loyalty through an argument with Boonmee, hostility to rural life, and attention to television programs. The sequence at the hut in Boonmee's garden shows that Jen opposes Boonmee's idea about Kamma. Boonmee observes that the previous actions of murdering the communists and some pests on his farm could have caused the diagnosis. He expresses his concern and regret because the illness may cause extreme pain to his body. The murder mission is an unethical kamma, in his opinion. However, Jen disagrees with him as she believes that murdering the communists is defending the nation. Therefore, Boonmee's deeds were not unethical because he committed them for the country and the government. She convinced Boonmee that supporting the nation is a moral kamma, though Boonmee must have murdered innocent people. It implies that the nation is her superior institution, and the nation is always moral. Jen portrays a characteristic of the Thai state, confidence and assertiveness, owing to her debate against Boonmee's opinion. Boonmee surrenders his statement and terminates the conversation by

lying down and pointing out that the government's command is not always humane and exceptional. This case might further show that Thai citizens are perhaps under an oppressive regime who do not obtain freedom of speech to challenge the government's order and ideology. Then, Jen is a symbol of this regime, which protects the nation's dignity and honour from the prospective anti-government group. Moreover, she lives in Bangkok and is unfamiliar with living in a countryside house with plenty of night insects, foreign workers, and ghosts. Meanwhile, the name Jen is more consistent with city life and modernization.

Two sequences demonstrate that the state interpellation affects Jen because, e.g., she does not like non-urbanization and border people. The first sequence is when Jen enters the house's kitchen, showing that she is unsatisfied and disturbed by some insects. She complains that there are many insects, and she does not seem depressed when she steps on those insects. In this case, the rural house and insects can be representatives of the anti-government that Jen denies. Thus, she is not sympathetic after stepping on the insects. The government can manipulate and persuade her because she lives closer to the central authority and receives attention. The other sequence is when Boonmee asks Jen to stay in his house and manage his farm after he dies. Nonetheless, Jen refuses and declares that only stranger features, such as ghosts and non-Thai employees, exist in the area. Thus, she cannot reside here and work with these people. She further inserted that Boonmee could be insane to ask her to inherit his business and supervise his non-Thai workers who illegally entered Thailand. Jen may perceive that these spirits and unlawful labours can antagonize the state ideology. They might not be hostile to the state because they disregarded the country's border and migration regulations.

Meanwhile, the sequence at a hotel room in the end also asserts that Jen is intensely interested in the military news. She and Rung are watching a television news program that shows an image of military officers marching in a forest. The sequence can emphasize that Jen is entirely influenced by the state and overwhelmed by any information provided by the media. In this regard, Jen can represent that the state ideology interpellates her by convincing her that it has the ultimate authority. In other words, Jen is a subject for the state interpellation because her belief and support for the government can bring her 'patriotism'. In

addition, her loyalty to the government may be encouraged by the state urbanization she experiences in the city. The images below demonstrate arguments between Jen and Boonmee on the farm, Jen's in a local house with night insects, and Jen's preference for the military news.

Apichatpong created this ghost belief to be consistent with the environment of the Isan Region because they mostly live in the forest, which is far from the central modernization. Carson Chan stated that “superstition, animism, and folklore have an intrinsic and ineffable logic outside of Thai cities, where natural, unmediated forces are incorporated into the space of social interactions.”³⁴⁹ The ghost and the spirit tale is a belief of rural people. However, the people and the ghost may connect through social interactions. These social interactions refer to the correspondence between rituals and practices when the human contacts the mystical spirit. As previously stated, Jen claims she cannot live on the farm if Boonmee passes away because there are only foreigners from Laos and ghosts from the forest. According to her expression, this might show that Jen does not encounter ghosts in Bangkok, i.e., mystery and superstition do not exist in the city. She is new to living in a countryside house and working on a farm. Meanwhile, the butterflies and the insects can symbolize ghosts and superstition (or the communists).



Image 19 Jen, as a Representative of the State

³⁴⁹ Carson Chan, “Two Views on Mediation: Apichatpong Weerasethakul and Oliver Laric,” Academia, September 6, 2022, https://www.academia.edu/4981628/Two_Views_on_Mediation_Apichatpong_Weerasethakul_and_Oliver_Laric.

Not only does *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* represent the state ideology, but *The Act of Killing* (2012) from Indonesia, which Joshua Oppenheimer directs, also encompasses the political incident of the Indonesian genocide from 1965 to 1966.³⁵⁰ *Uncle Boonmee's* film reflects the historical events 1965, which the government and the Communists associated with the battle at Nabua Village of Isan. It avoids an explicit debate about the 1965 insurgency through the dynamic image, but it shows the situations through Boonmee and reincarnation. In contrast, *The Act of Killing* is a documentary that engages Anwar and other gangsters who earlier committed the massacre in the mid-1960s. The main characters produce the film and provoke their memories by simulating the execution (the film inside the film). The film might aim to reveal how the people were tortured and to what extent Anwar and the group were cruel. However, the most significant aspect is that the narration of the two films shows that the government suspected people in the film story of being communists. The films engage the state ideology by interpellating the Communists as undesired, criminal and different from the federal government. The state must, therefore, eradicate them to stabilize the power and strength. The citizens of Thailand and Indonesia, as demonstrated in the films, are addressed as subjects who can receive the Communist identity if they express any hostile behaviour against the state. The state likewise interpellates their people as unimportant and inferior because they do not allow the discussion. The sequence in which the main characters in *The Act of Killing* gather people around the communities to act in the documentary can illustrate that the people might not be willing to play the role. However, the production team influenced them to do so. Authoritative people and the government parties can interpellate these people. The documentary may simulate the state interpellation that occurred in the history of Indonesia.

Boonmee and Anwar, who possess direct experience of murdering other people, do not consider the people they earlier murdered as being Communists. They are similar because Boonmee acknowledges his guilt for the previous action and assumes his diagnosis as unethical kamma. In contrast, Anwar is disgusted

³⁵⁰ "The Act of Killing," IMDB, April 12, 2023, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2375605/>.

recalling his experience of killing others. *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* employs unknown actors who speak the Isan dialect to encourage the reality sensation. Meanwhile, *The Act of Killing* demonstrates that Anwar and his movie crew gather a group of local villagers to participate in the shooting. These unknown actors are required to act as victims of the massacre. A character in the documentary mentioned that the winner defines war crime, e.g., the Geneva Convention is perhaps written based on the winner's perception to accuse the loser. In *Uncle Boonmee* film, the Thai state can define the Communist people. It may show that the government and the authority, i.e. mostly write the history, the Communist may not obtain an opportunity to argue. *The Act of Killing* includes the dancing scenes, which are unrelated to the film's other parts. Apichatpong's film involves the princess and the buffalo without referring to an anecdote of their appearance. In addition, the two films remarkably refer to the murder of the communists around the 1960s.



Image 20 The Act of Killing: A Simulation of the Government's Representative and Anwar³⁵¹



Image 21 The Act of Killing: A Simulation of Killing with Unknown Actor and Anwar³⁵²

³⁵¹ "The Act of Killing," IMDB, April 12, 2023, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2375605/>.

³⁵² Carrie McAlinden, "True surrealism: Walter Benjamin and The Act of Killing," BFI, June 5, 2017, <https://www2.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/features/true-surrealism-walter-benjamin-act-killing>.



*Image 22 The Act of Killing: Anwar is Disgusted of His Previous Actions*³⁵³



*Image 23 The Act of Killing: Dancing Scenes*³⁵⁴

In sum, the state ideology in the film *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* is from the leading class, the Thai government. The film shows four prominent perspectives of the state ideology. First, the state interpellates dominant control and leadership over the citizens, i.e., the Thai government takes control over the film characters such as Jen, Boonmee and the monkey ghost. The government is the priority and sovereign authority for the nation and the citizens. Boonmee cannot resist the state when he is conscripted and ordered to slaughter the Communists. Jen favouring the Thai state may derive from her experience in the capital city. The state could interpellate her because she witnesses more welfare and civilization in Bangkok. Secondly, since the Thai state possesses superiority

³⁵³ Carrie McAlinden, “True surrealism: Walter Benjamin and The Act of Killing,” BFI, June 5, 2017, <https://www2.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/features/true-surrealism-walter-benjamin-act-killing>.

³⁵⁴ (left) Euan Kerr, “Act of Killing’ restages a genocide, adding bizarre dance numbers,” MPR News, July 31, 2013, <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2013/07/31/act-of-killing-restages-a-genocide-adding-bizarre-dance-numbers>. (right) “EE British Academy Film Awards in 2014 - Winners Acceptance Speech: Documentary,” BAFTA, February 16, 2014, <https://www.bafta.org/media-centre/transcripts/ee-british-academy-film-awards-in-2014-winners-acceptance-speech>.

and morality, they can denounce Nabua residents as participating in the Communist Party (or as being the Communist) and confronting the government's ideology and command. The film shows that Boonmee lives in Isan, Nabua, which may represent a place of political insurgency in the past. Boonmee's son, who disguises himself in the forest, and the Nabua people were criticized as being the Communists in the 1960s. Thirdly, the state ideology interpellates the Communists as being unethical and hazardous to the government. Then, they must be arrested and defeated. However, these people can be innocent, but they are not allowed to discuss their guiltlessness with the government and argue their points of view. Lastly, the state ideology interpellates Isan as a far-reach region and Isan people as being criminals. It means that other Thai people, and perhaps the government, may give a specific identity to the Isan people and the region, different from Thai citizens in the other regions. Most Thais sometimes interpellate the Isan people as Laotians. The director located his film story in Isan, which is a location of political turmoil in 1965. It shows that the local people were traumatized by the incident, and the state authority abandoned the region economically and socially. The villagers are impoverished because they receive inadequate attention and opportunities, and their presence and requests should be more concerned about and recognized by the state. Therefore, the state ideology or the interpellation enables the Thai government in the film to possess superior power and control.

4.2 The Film Spectatorship: How the Film Opens a New Space?

Apichatpong can be critical of the Thai state and autonomous from the state pressure. Even though it is not aggressive to mention and criticize politics in the Film, Apichatpong avoids showing it through explicit approaches such as violent images and attacking verbal messages. He introduces a new experience and a new way of learning politics. His studio, Kick the Machine, was established to revolve around his memory, political ideology, and social concerns. He clearly remarks himself as an artist who organizes experimental films with combined narration.³⁵⁵

³⁵⁵ "Kick the Machine by Apichatpong Weerasethakul," Kick the Machine, May 10, 2016, <https://www.kickthemachine.com/index.html>.

Besides, his works are independent because he is independent of the government's financial support and regulation.³⁵⁶ Moreover, *Kick the Machine* could have been organized to offer, e.g., non-traditional beliefs, points of view, and practice. Althusser postulated that ideology can be social engagement and personal perception,³⁵⁷ while Apichatpong's resistance toward the state ideology might generate a chronicle of events with unrestricted subjectivity.³⁵⁸ Unrestricted subjectivity is the director's initiative and responsibility. The film director might not have intended to express political ideology or message, but he reproduced these messages in his film. He declared that Boonmee character is the launching idea inspired by a monk and the real Boonmee, but other stories in the film are his project.³⁵⁹ Martin Roberts pointed out that the film illustrates the message in a symbolic style, which can attract imagination.³⁶⁰ It needs to be more explicit because there is a layer from the fundamental to the complex meaning. The layer can refer to different scene definitions, requiring individual knowledge, background or experience, and further interpretation. Rather than creating the new space by directly simulating political events, Apichatpong demonstrated the film spectatorship through reincarnation, dream and imagination. For example, Boonmee is contrary to the government or the ideology that the state interpellates; the local Isan people are not likely to be antagonistic to the government as accused by the government; the monkey ghost who does not seem to be the Communist as denounced; and Lao people who might not influence Thais because they are only employees. These examples suggest a new space for the spectator's interpretation. After reviewing the characters and the film messages from Apichatpong, the spectators might perceive the Thai government in a dissimilar direction rather than

³⁵⁶ "Kick the Machine by Apichatpong Weerasethakul," *Kick the Machine*, May 10, 2016, <https://www.kickthemachine.com/index.html>.

³⁵⁷ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, 108

³⁵⁸ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, 123.

³⁵⁹ Wise Kwai, "The late, great Apichatpong," Internet Archive Wayback Machine, April 20, 2010, <https://web.archive.org/web/20121007231441/http://www.nationmultimedia.com/home/2010/04/20/life/The-late-great-Apichatpong-30127420.html>.

³⁶⁰ Martin Roberts, "Film Review: Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives," *Fan the Fire Magazine*, November 25, 2010, <http://fanthefiremagazine.com/film/film-review-uncle-boonmee-who-can-recall-his-past-lives/>.

the state ideology. The state may not interpellate them because Apichatpong initiated the film spectatorship. The film does not make an interpellation to the spectator but deconstructs the state ideology by employing a new space.



*Image 24 Kick the Machine Website: Apichatpong's Initiative*³⁶¹

Although the film shows a clear opposition between the state and the monkey ghost, and between the state and Isan people as discussed in 4.1 (the monkey ghost Boonsong may be a symbol of the Communist and a monster), it presents an amiable image of the conscript with the monkey ghost. Not only is there a series of photos of the soldiers hunting and arresting the monkey ghost (see 4.1), but there is a photo showing that the military people can become friends with the monkey ghost. The first picture on the left informs that the military officer who chains the monkey ghost wants to punish or kill him. However, he takes a photo with him in a less conflicting manner. The second picture on the right shows that though many soldiers are holding guns around the monkey ghost, they do not present a frightening gesture against it. Concurrently, the monkey ghost does not look scared of the officers; otherwise, he places his hand on the soldiers' shoulders. Besides, having a picture with the government representative might be pleasant. This presentation may reveal that the film opens a new possibility of understanding the monkey ghost and the Communist. It might further emphasize the innocence of the Communist because the monkey ghost does not demonstrate a brutal movement and antagonistic characteristics toward the soldiers. This sequence may deconstruct

³⁶¹ "Kick the Machine by Apichatpong Weerasethakul," Kick the Machine, May 10, 2016, <https://www.kickthemachine.com/index.html>.

the state ideology that the Communist people are immoral and cruel. It further emphasizes a new interpretation of the state ideology by employing soldiers who can be convinced to change their ideology. In this case, they might permit a different understanding of the monkey ghost rather than what the state formerly interpellates.



Image 25 The Soldiers and the Monkey Ghost

When Boonmee and Jen are resting at the farm cottage, it perhaps illustrates that Boonmee participated in the 1965 political incident because he refers to the murder of the Communists. Even though the recall of political turmoil can generate more mental and physical pain to himself, he intends to discuss and express his concern for the people he murdered. Boonmee attempts to accept his karma and disclose it with his family rather than overlooking and changing the consequence. Boonmee's thought can be antagonistic to the state ideology because the state cannot convince him that murdering others is ethical while the nation is the most prominent for him. The Communists are as ordinary as other people; therefore, executing them is an evil karma. In Boonmee's opinion, the killing performance is karma, which can cause a kidney diagnosis. In addition, he may find the government's order brutal because the regime can be an excuse for the government to eliminate the people they do not favour. Those people might be moral and only obtain different ideologies from the Thai state, i.e. the state ideology does not interpellate them. Boonmee implicitly opposes Jen when she discusses that Boonmee's murder act was to protect the nation. Then, Boonmee disagrees by saying, "For the nation, for what?" and lying down as an indication to terminate the conversation. Boonmee can represent the film spectatorship who encourages

others to reflect different beliefs. It means that the state ideology may not interpellate him, and he does not find the Communist dissimilar to the other citizens. He may believe that Isan people are also Thai nationals; therefore, he should not be discriminated against or identified as local Isan but as a Thai resident. Moreover, he can destroy the idea that the government is the most significant institution in the country because he rejects Jen's opinion by expressing an ignorant phrase and lying down his body. On the contrary, he possibly symbolizes art because the monkey ghost or the Communist should not be interpellated only in one definition. This art can be a paradox to allow people to consider or imagine other meanings. In other words, this monkey ghost and the Communist should have various versions of understanding. The state interpellation should not give a specific group of people an identity.



Image 26 Boonmee encounter Jen's State Ideology

Moreover, Boonmee's recall of his past lives can also be another option to deconstruct the state interpellation. The recall may suggest a perceptive point and receptive gaze owing to Casetti. The spectator involves their gaze and visualizing system, while the spectator can construct their gaze and comprehension after they witness the film. However, the gaze and understanding can depend on the subjective view of each player, such as the spectator, the film producer, and the character, for instance. As Boonmee points out, it is the film spectatorship of his story and life in different aspects and perceptions. The recall might show that the spectatorship is more than ideology, and the recall can be more compatible with art because Boonmee has his tale of the recall. At the same time, other people might imagine another feature of his previous lives. In this case, the recall is an open-ended reception that does not depend only on Boonmee or the state ideology. Nevertheless, it can refer to an opposite ideology of what the government usually

interpellates people. The sequence of the princess and the enslaved people might inform that the state is not the most holy entity in society. The princess, who is considered an incarnation that Boonmee can recall³⁶², may represent the state ideology because she is powerful and responsible for all enslaved people. In contrast, the enslaved people can be the general public who must follow the princess's order and desire. This sequence probably deconstructs the state ideology that the citizens must be interpellated and must not criticize the government. We can address the enslaved person as a lower class with deficient independence because he can exchange a conversation with the princess and touch her body. It declares that the traditional class between the ruling and the inferior is defeated and the enslaved person a new space for his understanding. It means that the princess, who might represent the government in this case, cannot interpellate the enslaved person. Then, he confronts the princess, expresses his point of view, and convinces the princess. The enslaved person may represent the film or Apichatpong, who is conscious of the state ideology and attempts to demolish the formal ideology. In addition, the sequence between the catfish and the princess introduces the same aspect of deconstructing the state ideology. In this respect, the catfish may not be interpellated by the state ideology because he is confident in relaxing and stimulating the princess. The catfish is not concerned that he is in an animal class and should not discuss it with the princess. Otherwise, he crosses the class border and convinces the princess to see another meaning of life. He persuades the princess to become a catfish. It demonstrates that the catfish can transform the princess's state ideology, making his persuasion more solid and permanent. Therefore, the film opens a space for art, and the catfish is a product of this art. This catfish can be the film director's imagination because he can speak human language. It means that the catfish is an art which permits the spectator's understanding and interpretation.

³⁶² Film Sick, "Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (Apichatpong Weerasethakul/2010/Thai) a transformation of memory to history ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ (อภิชาติพงศ์ วีระเศรษฐกุล/ 2010 / ไทย) การเปลี่ยนความทรงจำให้เป็นประวัติศาสตร์," *Film Sick* (blog), April 15, 2019, <https://filmsick.wordpress.com/2012/01/08/uncleboonme/>. Further explanation in Chapter 5.



Image 27 The Princess and the Enslaved Person



Image 28 The Princess and The Catfish

On the other hand, Teepisit Mahaneeranon pointed out that the film constructed the ghosts as a representative of border people.³⁶³ In other words, the ghost is archaic and is underprivileged from peripheral towns. Richard Brody stated that the ghost describes border people as non-modern and incompatible with current society.³⁶⁴ The border people live their ancient lives, while the urban citizens possess advanced technologies. Besides, the film might present the ghosts as frightening characters who cannot integrate with modern society. Moreover, the majority of people may aim to avoid encountering the ghosts. “The voices of the poor that cannot be incorporated into the triumphant narrative of the modern, and the 'non-human' beings at the margins of capitalism that do not fit squarely within the time

³⁶³ Teepisit Mahaneeranon, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives: honey, an invisibility during a day ชม ชื่น ข อง ชี วิ ต ที่ ถู ก ลี ม ,” Flim Club Thailand, May 29, 2020, <https://filmclubthailand.com/articles/uncle-boonmee-food/>.

³⁶⁴ Richard Brody, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Live,” The New Yorker, March 2, 2011, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/uncle-boonmee-who-can-recall-his-past-lives>.

and space of the nation-state,” mentioned Chua.³⁶⁵ Huay said that she departed the human world for years and is unfamiliar with the time in this world, i.e., she is an obsolete character from the border village. Meanwhile, the monkey ghost symbolizes the forest, which may need to obtain new knowledge and government assistance. Therefore, his ideology and living conditions can differ from the present time and central society. The dining table scene shows that the humans are the majority because they discuss the present, whereas ghost Huay and the monkey ghost are the minority who mention life in a non-human dimension. Ghosts appear in a symbolic pattern and a haunting memory, which can refer to the pre-modern nation-state era that can reflect the inferior status under the state authority.³⁶⁶ It may convey that the human characters are the government, while the ghosts are the anti-government. In this case, Apichatpong opens a dining table for the ghosts to reflect on their personal experiences in their world. He can further illustrate that the ghost Huay and the monkey ghost are as similar to other ordinary government supporters. Thus, they should receive equal attention from the government (or the human), and the government should not disregard them.



Image 29 An Appearance of Ghost

³⁶⁵ Chua, “Apichatpong Weerasethakul,” 41.

³⁶⁶ Natalie Boehler, “Haunted Time, Still Photography and Cinema as Memory: The Dream Sequence in Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives,” 69-70.

Boonsong might initially possess the state ideology, but he might construct personal ideology after receiving a Pentax camera. His arrival at the forest can define an escape to the forest of the Communist group and Nabua inhabitants traced by the state. The Pentax camera can open a new space, while the forest can represent the new space that offers him another possibility of understanding the world and message. After Boonsong transforms the state ideology, he cannot maintain his original body because the human body belongs to the Thai state. The monkey ghost's body can introduce a new ideology that he can adopt; it might demonstrate that there is more than a state ideology in Thai society, called Communism. Communism may symbolize that people are eligible to view the world and interpret the state interpellation distinctively. Besides, it can deconstruct the state ideology that the Thai government is the only entity and the most powerful institution in Thailand. Communism can be more than ideology; it can be an open-ended ideology like an art. The state no longer interpellates the monkey ghost; he modifies himself to represent his dissimilar ideology. Meanwhile, a verbal narration from the monkey ghost can primarily refer to a human adjustment after entering the forest. Since the forest is a new space, he must adapt to survive the environment and befriend the monkeys. Moreover, the monkey ghost family in the forest can signify that the Communist is a minority in Thai society.³⁶⁷ However, the monkey ghost Boonsong does not seem violent and hostile to the general people (his family) and the government. The film possibly offers spectatorship at two levels: one is the film spectatorship of the monkey ghost, while another is the film spectatorship of the spectators. The film spectatorship of the monkey ghost may refer to a subjective view of the government. Since the state cannot interpellate the monkey ghost, he depends on his subjective reception toward the government and reality. On the contrary, the film spectatorship of the spectator might demonstrate that the film opens a new space or suggests the spectatorship to the film audiences. In this case, the spectators must engage their visualizing system, a perceptive point of view, and a receptive gaze. It means the spectator also obtains a subjective judgment of the film's message and meaning. They can generate their interpretations. However, the monkey ghost might return because of unethical

³⁶⁷ To be discussed in Chapter 5.

judgment in the past; thus, he perhaps intends to appeal for justice now.³⁶⁸ Chairat Polmuk found that ghost Huay and the monkey ghost could be the representatives of the Communist Party who did not receive an opportunity to argue in the past.³⁶⁹ They were prevented from discussing their innocence because the government attacked and eradicated them without hearing their statement. In other words, the government interpellated the ghosts in obtaining, e.g., unethical, horrific, and monstrous identities. Additionally, the government can accuse the monkey ghost and ghost Huay because they might have initially possessed ideologies dissimilar to the government's. The monkey ghost might revisit to inform his family that he was not a Communist, but the government condemned him. Therefore, this return may declare that they aim to deconstruct the state interpellation to any citizens whom the government disliked. If they can convince their family of the message about the communists, they can defeat the state ideology. They present a new possibility that their family can re-interpret the government and society, i.e., they might understand the reality in another concept. The return of the ghosts can further assert that the film does not represent the state; thus, the spectators are not obliged to understand the film in a specific way. However, it functions as an art that the critics can comprehend the film as an aesthetic work with subjective reception or open-ended messages. Besides, Huay can represent local Isan, who appears to speak about the truth. The return of these two ghosts may signify that Isan has never received impartiality and positive thought from the state. It might deconstruct the state ideology that Isan is a threat and that Isan people are contrary to the state's development and stability. Huay might show the spectators and the other characters that she (as a local Isan) is gentle and generous. She does not intend to disturb the state and harm other people. Huay may open a new space to understand ghosts or communists in another meaning. It means they do not oppose the state ideology but are independent of the state interpellation. They rely on their ideology and interpretation.

³⁶⁸ See Chapter 1, 1.2 Buddhism and North-eastern Thailand: Reincarnation and Other Beliefs

³⁶⁹ Polmuk, "Return to Isan: A Haunted Dream and Violence of Bangkok in Film," 56.



Image 30 Ghost's Return for Justice

On the other hand, the film acquires a politicization of ghosts, i.e., it engages the ghosts in politics.³⁷⁰ As mentioned earlier, the ghost Huay and the monkey ghost are representations of the Communists. Terry also stated that the monkey ghost represents the communists in 1965.³⁷¹ Nevertheless, Saynapuy Bloggang from Pantip found that Huay and saline pouring are reflections of the politics of health.³⁷² These analyses may reaffirm that Ghost Huay and the Monkey Ghost have perhaps undergone the politicization process by Apichatpong even though he avoided producing his film as a political tool. The examination observed that the people's characters are transformed (or politicized).³⁷³ Boonsong, in former days, was transformed into a monkey ghost who reappeared in the monkey body in the modern world. At a dining table, a mysterious and frightening sound from the

³⁷⁰ Isaac Marrero-Guillamon, "The Politics and Aesthetics of Non-Representation: Re-Imagining Ethnographic Cinema with Apichatpong Weerasethakul," *Antipoda. Revista de Antropologia y Arqueologia* 33 (2018): 22.

³⁷¹ Mark Terry, "The Worlds Viewed: An Examination of Apichatpong Weerasethakul's Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives through a Cavellian Lens of Film-Philosophy (page 4-5)," *Academia*, October 4, 2022, https://www.academia.edu/34856859/The_Worlds_Viewed_An_Examination_of_Apichatpong_Weerasethakuls_Uncle_Boonmee_Who_Can_Recall_His_Past_Lives_through_a_Cavellian_Lens_of_Film_Philosophy.

³⁷² "Who watched and understood the movie Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (movie review) ใครดูหนังเรื่องลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติแล้วเข้าใจบ้างคะ? (สปอยล์)", Pantip, April 17, 2019, <https://pantip.com/topic/31854178>.

³⁷³ Ronald Green, *Buddhism Goes to The Movies: Introduction to Buddhist Thought and Practice*, (New York: Routledge, 2014), 131.

jungle leads to the appearance of the monkey ghost. His arrival from the forest and physical appearance are incompatible with contemporary society. It may show that the monkey ghost is different, monstrous, and archaic and is compatible with the Communist ideology, which is deficient and inferior. In this case, the Pentax camera can facilitate the politicization process. Meanwhile, the forest, where the Communist Party concealed itself in the 1960s, can be a home for ordinary people who experienced the politicization process. The Communists can be considered as subordinate, obsolete, and underdeveloped, who reside in the forest. They are equivalent to ghosts from another living dimension who are distinct from the humans in the present time because they adopt diverse ideologies. Furthermore, Huay must realize time in the human world when she attends the dining table. Her appearance, costume and performance have ceased since her death, and it declares that she is from the former era. Besides, she moves and speaks slowly as if the time in the non-human world is deliberate or frozen, i.e., the life-after-death world may be slower and outdated. On the contrary, the princess transforms herself into a fish. After abandoning her clothes and social status, she becomes an ordinary animal. This catfish is obsolete and incomparable to the current world. The border between the living and the after-death world can function as a transition for the politicization process. Then, the transformation can be the politicization process in which the person can transform their political ideology by engaging in other societies. This case has two different aspects: an opening of a new space and a deconstruction of the state interpellation. First, in the passage where Huay becomes a ghost, Boonsong turns into a monkey ghost, and the princess changes to a catfish, which can be a new space that the film introduces. This new space, therefore, permits people to obtain different ideologies. Moreover, it points out the film spectatorship that the spectator can create another possibility to understand the ghost, the monkey ghost, and the catfish in a new world. Secondly, the politicization deconstructs the state ideology that the Communist is an improper ideology, which can destabilize the government's status. However, politicization is only a process that provides more opportunities for people to view society differently. It means that politicization is a new space or a non-government world where people can choose. The Communist ideology does not lead to the antagonistic and violent behaviour of the people. For example, although the ghost, the monkey ghost, and the catfish

carry the Communist ideology, they are under the state's responsibility, and the state should treat them equivalently to other citizens.



Image 31 After the Politicization: Huay Seeing Photos of Her Death Ritual



Image 32 Before Politicization Process: Tong and Pentax Camera

Isaac Marrero refers to Adadol Ingawanij as she found material immaterialities (such as ghosts) considerably accurate. These ghosts (or 'phi' in Thai) can generate a metaphysical democracy, which they may return to in search of justice they did not receive in the past, as discussed earlier.³⁷⁴ “It is clear that in Thailand, Buddhism has been an important factor of political stabilization and national

³⁷⁴ Marrero-Guillamon, “The Politics and Aesthetics of Non-Representation: Re-Imagining Ethnographic Cinema with Apichatpong Weerasethakul,” 28.

sentiment.”³⁷⁵ As a result, phi and politics are inevitably correlated and demonstrated in this film. However, Apichatpong did not produce ghosts as a political apparatus; instead, he created ghosts as artistic beauty. Natalie Boehler discussed in her research that the haunting spirit carries subtle political meaning. These ghosts connect religious belief with numerous perspectives, such as nature (plants and animals) and mystical manifestations. In addition, the film interprets and presents political analysis by re-comprehending the pre-modern and re-supposing the future regarding past events.³⁷⁶ Boehler may have discovered that the film reveals political criticism by instantaneously re-assuming the previous era and predicting the upcoming consequences. *Uncle Boonmee, Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, can be called a film of the past because it refers to the historical circumstances. “This violent history, assembled here as the politics of *Uncle Boonmee*, are communicated in the aesthetics of images.”³⁷⁷ Apichatpong re-defined the political situation and presented it in an unrestricted style through the artistic image and initiative of Boonmee character. Though the film is not a specific symbol and the state ideology, the ghost and politics are necessarily related. The film generated the ghosts in an art form with an open-ended interpretation.

In addition to politics in Isan, Apichatpong refers to the politics of Buddhism by distinctly discussing the monk. He might challenge Thai Buddhists by using Tong, who has arguments and performances against the religious rules. Tong's appearance in front of a hotel room can be improper because he escaped the temple at nighttime. It is worse when he enters the room where Jen and Rung work on the merit money. However, it is the worst when he stays close to women and interacts with them privately. The Thai Buddhism entirely prohibits these performances. When allowed to enter the room, Tong points out that his neighbour monk has a computer and uses social networking while awake, but he does not obtain any facility in his room, which is silent and isolated. Nevertheless, possessing a

³⁷⁵ Houtart, “Theravada Buddhism and Political Power – Construction and Deconstruction of its Ideological Function,” 230.

³⁷⁶ Boehler, “Haunted Time, Still Photography and Cinema as Memory: The Dream Sequence in *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*,” 77.

³⁷⁷ Noah Viernes, “The Politics of Health in the Films of Apichatpong Weerasethakul,” *Akita International University Global Review* 5 (2013): 24.

computer and surfing the internet is different from the expected manners for Buddhist monks. Jen then starts to complain that his acts and intimacy in the room are not proper, and she cannot support him to stay. She also assumes that Tong might be afraid of ghosts and might sleep in the room with them. Tong admits that the temple is tranquil and desires to shower and have dinner. Consumption conflicts with one of the religious vital regulations because the rules prohibit Thai monks from consuming (chewing solid substances) after 12 hours (afternoon). Masato Fukushima discussed that “one such case is Apichatpong’s treatment of Buddhist monks in his films”.³⁷⁸ Apichatpong refers to the state ideology that the state and the religion interpellate the Thai Buddhists. He might have attempted to inform the public that the state regulates the monks to act according to their religion and stipulates that Buddhists believe in specific rules. Fukushima continued observing, “Differing from the typical world of Buddhist monks in Japan, who obediently followed the verdict of the Meiji government in the late nineteenth century that allowed them to both eat meat and get married, Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia stipulates a stricter set of precepts that also guarantee the high social status of monks there.”³⁷⁹ In this case, Monk Tong demonstrates that Thai monks are not allowed to do such things, which is common in Japan. Theravada branches in Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand adopt more solid practices and customs. Apichatpong may aim to demolish the state ideology through Tong’s performances that oppose the Buddhist rules that all Thai people recognize. In his opinion, these actions can be typical for monks because they may not cause danger

³⁷⁸ Masato Fukushima, “Sick Bodies and the Political Body: The Political Theology of Apichatpong Weerasethakul’s Cemetery of Splendor”, HKW, September 6, 2022, https://archiv.hkw.de/de/tigers_publication/sick_bodies_and_the_political_body__the_political_theology_of_apichatpong_weerasethakul_s_cemetery_of_splendor__masato_fukushim/sick_bodies_and_the_political_body_the_political_theology_of_apichatpong_weerasethakuls_cemetery_of_splendor__masato_fukushima.php.

³⁷⁹ Masato Fukushima, “Sick Bodies and the Political Body: The Political Theology of Apichatpong Weerasethakul’s Cemetery of Splendor”, HKW, September 6, 2022, https://archiv.hkw.de/de/tigers_publication/sick_bodies_and_the_political_body__the_political_theology_of_apichatpong_weerasethakul_s_cemetery_of_splendor__masato_fukushim/sick_bodies_and_the_political_body_the_political_theology_of_apichatpong_weerasethakuls_cemetery_of_splendor__masato_fukushima.php.

and pain to others, i.e., they do not lead to critical consequences. Besides, the behaviours should not judge Tong's identity. It means that the state or the religion should not address a person. Tong can act according to his perception and interpretation because he does not genuinely wish to stay at the hotel but intends to return to the temple after eating. Apichatpong's reception of the religion can open a new space or another possibility of viewing Buddhism. The Buddhists should receive liberty in behaving or learning the rules. Therefore, the monks can be independent of some specified regulations because they should be eligible to provide subjective reception. Meanwhile, the sequence may suggest a new space for the spectators to interpret Tong's acts. It is also a film spectatorship because it offers an open-ended meaning and a new option for learning the religion and understanding the religious rules.



Image 33 Tong outside the Temple

Health care is another aspect that Apichatpong might have deconstructed the state ideology. “Care becomes the operative word for the film since, as the director states, Uncle Boonmee is the Northeast [*sic*]. For Uncle Boonmee, he continues, is a memory of those who live far away.”³⁸⁰ Apichatpong reveals that Boonmee lives far from the hospital, preventing access to health services. Therefore, his farm employee named Jai always assists him. The sequence portrays that Jai must do kidney dialysis for him. He puts on gloves, changes the dialysis bag, covers it with the bandage, checks the dialysis function, and writes down the treatment record. It might inform the spectators that he is a substitute for a doctor. In contrast, Huay also becomes Boonmee's support for kidney dialysis at the other sequence in the cave. Saynapuy Bloggang from Pantip indicated that Huay relieves his pain and pours saline solution from Boonmee's stomach also refers to politics.³⁸¹ The dialysis can show that home self-treatment is perhaps not sufficient and hygienic, which might stimulate Boonmee's death. It also displays that people at the border or people from the Northeast do not receive necessary welfare from the government. It repeatedly conveys that Boonmee rarely attains the government's attention because he lives in the countryside along the border. The political message for this health issue is that ordinary citizens in rural areas must rely on themselves. Health care in *Uncle Boonmee* film or Isan means self-care. In this respect, Apichatpong might have opposed the state ideology that the government is the most relevant for all aspects of the country. He instead deconstructed by arguing that the state is not benevolent to every citizen, particularly the border people. The government only selects who they want to protect and provide welfare. The film spectatorship demonstrates the scenes without specific narration and the reason for Jai's and Huay's nursing capabilities and support. It may declare that the scenes are art, suggesting an optional possibility of understanding the message.

³⁸⁰ Viernes, “The Politics of Health in the Films of Apichatpong Weerasethakul,” 23.

³⁸¹ “Who watched and understood the movie Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (movie review) ใครดูหนังเรื่องลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติแล้วเข้าใจบ้างคะ? (สปอยล์)”, Pantip, April 17, 2019, <https://pantip.com/topic/31854178>.



Image 34 Health Care or Self-Care

Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives opens a new possibility and deconstructs the state ideology by employing ghosts (recall and memory) and monk Tong. Besides, it simulates and displays historical political incidents through dreams and imagination. Boonmee's dream and imagination in the film can similarly deconstruct the state ideology. As mentioned earlier, Boonmee tentatively finds the government brutal and immoral in judging people. He illustrates his dream regarding his understanding and opinion, but the dream can also be his imagination. In contrast, dreams and imagination are art, which function according to the person's experience and comprehension. There can be distinct definitions of Boonmee's dream because the government, for other characters, can be polite while the people can be violent, for example. Meanwhile, some characters may find Boonmee's dream imaginary. Boonmee is at the final stage of his life, which must be extremely painful; therefore, he produces his imagination. However, Boonmee might be worried about his future incarnation as he has previously killed some Communists. These various interpretations and understanding of Boonmee's dream can emphasize the film's spectatorship. It means that the government only sometimes provides the ideology or meaning. The state cannot interpellate ideology to every citizen, but each citizen can generate an optional possibility. The

director tentatively employed Boonmee to open a new space and introduce a new way of interpreting the film's message.

Boonmee's reincarnation, dream, and imagination can be the new spaces which consist of the film spectatorship (art and non-state ideology). Moreover, this film's recall, memory and imagination reflect Thailand's political instability during the 1960s. In other words, the film events are consistent with the situations in the Isan region. Rather than portraying the story in a documentary form through recorded images, Apichatpong reflects the situation more harmoniously by referring to religious aspects and secondarily identifying social and political perspectives. He subtly combined his memory during his childhood at a doctor's residence in Isan and the ideology he learned from Thai society. The film mirrors the past circumstances and future happening through Boonmee's recall, dream, and imagination during his final stage of life. Besides, Apichatpong calls this film an art because he does not simply and explicitly present politics in the film. Art in his meaning may refer to an absence of apparent meaning and background of the narration. Accordingly, the film offers a non-specified message with dissimilar meanings and diverse interpretations, i.e., the film has an open-ended meaning and imagination. Therefore, the film allows the spectator to express their perspectives and reception independently. In addition to defeating the state interpellation, Boonmee depicts the film's political message. Frances Morgan from *Electric Sheep Magazine* asserted, "*Uncle Boonmee* blends spiritual meditation, political references, a ghost story and moments of intense beauty into a mesmerizing reverie".³⁸² The combination in the film is presented to the spectator, perhaps, in a charming fantasy and dream of Boonmee. Besides, it might offer an option for the spectator by relying on a unique directing style and narration, which is unusual. Dustin Chang criticized that Apichatpong suggested personal experience and inserted connotative political comments into a contemporary production, a local

³⁸² Frances Morgan, "UNCLE BOONMEE WHO CAN RECALL HIS PAST LIVES," *Electric Sheep Magazine*, November 13, 2010 <http://www.electricsheepmagazine.co.uk/reviews/2010/11/13/uncle-boonmee-who-can-recall-his-past-lives/>.

folk, and a non-traditional political story.³⁸³ When Boonmee discusses his dream about the future, a sign of a sickle hammer appears on the soil through non-dynamic images (a group of young men). The sign can signify and represent ‘communist’,³⁸⁴ as the sickle refers to the peasantry and the hammer refers to industrial workers.³⁸⁵ Moreover, the sign represents the proletariat solidarity, used during the Russian Revolution in the early 19th century and used by several Communist movements.³⁸⁶ The drawing of this sign may further demonstrate that the young men (or a group of conscripts without the military uniform) realized the existence of the Communists. Meanwhile, the Communist people might want to mention their presence in Thai society. A critique from the Arts website also supported Chang that “Apichatpong is greatly attached to his earlier-day memory and personal background in Khon Kaen where he resided with his doctor parents”.³⁸⁷ He learned about unfair treatment in the region through the hospital and local patients and later developed his perception of Thai society through working experience. Chang also stated that this can be consistent with Thai melodramas on television and that the flashback can be an essential plot.³⁸⁸ Therefore, Boonmee's dream, flashback and imagination can offer the film spectatorship that is not a closed interpellation by the state. It is not symbolic but rather an art.

³⁸³ Dustin Chang, “Notes on Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (2010) – Weerasethakul,” *Floating World Musings and Opinions on Cinema and Beyond* by Dustin Chang, March 1, 2011, <http://www.dustinchang.com/2011/03/note-on-uncle-boonmee.html>.

³⁸⁴ See also Chapter 5 (5.3 Class Struggle in the film).

³⁸⁵ Owen Hatherley, “Has the communist hammer and sickle had its day?,” *The Guardian*, February 12, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/feb/12/hammer-and-sickle-french-communist-party>.

³⁸⁶ “Hammer and Sickle,” *Dictionary Cambridge*, April 18, 2023, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/hammer-and-sickle>.

³⁸⁷ Kallapapruek, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives, a soulmate which cannot be apart ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ” คู่แล้วสิប់แต่แล้วบกลาคันดอถน่อ,” *Arts*, April 6, 2012, <http://www.arts.su.ac.th/thaicritic/?p=754>.

³⁸⁸ Dustin Chang, “Notes on Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (2010) – Weerasethakul,” *Floating World Musings and Opinions on Cinema and Beyond* by Dustin Chang, March 1, 2011, <http://www.dustinchang.com/2011/03/note-on-uncle-boonmee.html>.



Image 35 Boonmee's Dream of the Future

Apichatpong is an expert in setting social facts and everyday lifestyles into dynamic film images.³⁸⁹ He is obsessed with the fact that the Isan and Laotian people continue crossing the river border through Mae Khong. A scene in which Jai introduces Jen to some employees on the farm can portray that Laotian people escape poverty in their country to search for a career. They may aim for a better quality of life in Northeast Thailand even though the region is far from urbanization. Sarakadeelite stated, “It is produced to recognize the memory of Nabua villagers”.³⁹⁰ *Uncle Boonmee, Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, could have been constructed to reflect how people in Nabue perceived the 1965 incident and to what extent they are perhaps still traumatized by the situation. It might emphasize the film spectatorship because the government's judgment toward Lao people can be wrong. Apichatpong might have dismissed the state ideology that the Lao people could influence the Communist ideology. However, the Lao people in the film are rather generous and friendly and cross the border only for work. Besides, it may deconstruct the state ideology that Lao people possess the Communist ideology because Boonmee informs Jen about his employee who formerly swam across the river during the Revolution in Laos during the 1960s. The film can declare that the Thai government could have addressed some Lao

³⁸⁹ Kallapapruek, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives, a soulmate which cannot be apart ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ ’ คู่แค้นลับแฝงลับวับคลาดกันดอกลั่นอ,” Arts, April 6, 2012, <http://www.arts.su.ac.th/thaicritic/?p=754>.

³⁹⁰ “10 Years Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives, from unknown movie to the Palm d’Or award winner 10 ปี ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ จากหนังเล็กๆ สู่วางวัลปาล์มทองคำ,” Sarakadee Lite, September 7, 2022, <https://www.sarakadeelite.com/lite/10-years-uncle-boonmee/>.

people as being communists by the Thai government. The escape from Laos can further suggest that these Lao employees are not Communists.



Image 36 Boonmee Introduces His Laotian Employees

James Lewis Hoberman indicated that *Uncle Boonmee* film is similar to other Apichatpong's films because he has always located the production and story in the forest of an isolated and impoverished region. Thailand's Northeast is where humans and non-humans repeatedly unite.³⁹¹ Boonmee's house terrace becomes a converging point for humans and spirits. Moreover, the film connects the spectator with the arid and distant area. It may also function as an archive for the spectator to learn about Isan. For instance, the spectator from various parts of the world and Thailand obtains an opportunity to investigate local houses, forests, careers, and traditions. "Boonmee is used to trafficking in the spirit world. Weerasethakul is similarly relaxed and tolerant of ambiguity. Nocturnal voyage in the underworld."³⁹² Apichatpong offers a vague story and leads the spectator to travel in the ghost dimension by producing dark and cloudy scenes to remain a mysterious narration. Besides, the film could have been mostly recorded in a gloomy light

³⁹¹ James Hoberman, "Spirits in the Material World in Uncle Boonmee," *Village Voice*, March 2, 2011, <https://www.villagevoice.com/2011/03/02/spirits-in-the-material-world-in-uncle-boonmee/>.

³⁹² James Hoberman, "Spirits in the Material World in Uncle Boonmee," *Village Voice*, March 2, 2011, <https://www.villagevoice.com/2011/03/02/spirits-in-the-material-world-in-uncle-boonmee/>.

because the director employed a day-for-night technique. This nocturnal voyage to the underworld is comparable to an ambiguous narration of the film. The trip of Boonmee, Jen, Tong and Huay through the forest can further represent ambiguity. The dark image can be puzzling for the spectator because all characters are silent, and the intention of the movement is absent. In addition, the film instantaneously presents mystical and realistic.³⁹³ It reveals two boundaries: one is the recent and existent world, and another one is the materialized spirit world. Boonmee may represent the people from the current world and the previous incarnations. Anders Bergstrom claimed that Uncle Boonmee witnesses an enigma of Thai society between rapid modernization and traditional spiritual belief.³⁹⁴ Besides, Jen obtains two separate features because she is a Bangkok resident originally from Isan. Meanwhile, Huay can demonstrate that she belongs to both human and phantom dimensions. Perhaps the monkey ghost carries two souls: Boonsong in an ordinary world and the monkey in a primitive ape world. The forest and the converging point of human and non-human can imply that the film can be an ambiguous paradox. The mystery of the forest, as well as a natural conversation and interaction between the ghosts and humans, can provide an aesthetic reception. It allows various interpretations of the film's meaning. Therefore, the state ideology cannot interpellate the spectators.

Boehler further added “The film taps into collective memories of cinematic images and becomes a homage to the history of cinema.”³⁹⁵ Leigh Singer from Fandor analyzed the film as a simulation of the 1965 political incident by combining magic, myth, surreal humour, and realism. Additionally, Apichatpong subtly criticized Thailand’s politics and ideology.³⁹⁶ Then, the political message is

³⁹³ James Hoberman, “Spirits in the Material World in Uncle Boonmee,” *Village Voice*, March 2, 2011, <https://www.villagevoice.com/2011/03/02/spirits-in-the-material-world-in-uncle-boonmee/>.

³⁹⁴ Anders Bergstrom, “Cinematic Past Lives: Memory, Modernity, and Cinematic Reincarnation in Apichatpong Weerasethakul’s Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives”, *Mosaic* 48 (2015): 11.

³⁹⁵ Boehler, “Haunted Time, Still Photography and Cinema as Memory: The Dream Sequence in Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives,” 74.

³⁹⁶ Leigh Singer, “Weerasethakul’s Uncle Boonmee,” *Fandor*, April 15, 2019, <https://www.fandor.com/posts/weerasethakul-s-uncle-boonmee>.

connotatively and implicitly presented through a narration and directing pattern. The main character, Boonmee, is employed as a delegate to discuss politics and bring ghosts into the human world. On one hand, Boonmee is interpellated as a conscript and ordered to murder other people; on the other hand, he disagrees with the government's decision. He suggests a non-traditional ideology which opposes the government's regulation and authority. Since Boonmee is not addressed (or controlled) by the state ideology, the film spectatorship provides an optional space for the people in the film to find other meanings and for the spectator to interpret uniquely. During his last hours, Boonmee and his house are the uniting points for Huay, the monkey ghost, and other living family members. Huay and the monkey ghost can represent the Communists who appeal for legitimacy because they did not have an opportunity to declare in the past. Therefore, Boonmee's dying moments permit them to discuss their experience from their points of view. "The present not only chooses which images to remember and forget based on its disappearance, an active forgetting."³⁹⁷ The government also chooses how to interpellate the public and decides what the people should learn. In contrast, these ghosts might select what they want to discuss, which is compatible with a new space the film suggests. They might want to portray only their opinion and knowledge. It is also the subjective view of the film spectatorship. *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* is an art piece with unrestricted meaning and optional interpretation. It might open a new space for the spectator to draw their imagination and determine the final definition and reception for the film. The film deconstructs the state ideology through two leading aspects. On one hand, it employs the ghost Huay and the monkey ghost to convince the spectators and other human characters that they are not Communists. However, the state interpellated them as antagonistic, menacing, and uncontrollable. They appear to appeal for justice because the state obtains absolute power to accuse any citizen. The appeal can further deconstruct the state ideology. On the contrary, the film discusses the state ideology of the religious institution. It used Tong to introduce a new space for understanding and interpreting Monk Tong's performance. Although Tong is in a monk uniform, he acts against the religious rules. Apichatpong shows a new

³⁹⁷ Bordeleau, Pape, Rose-Antoinette and Szymanski, *Nocturnal Fabulations Ecology, Vitality and Opacity in the Cinema of Apichatpong Weerasethakul*, 65.

possibility of determining whether Tong's actions are improper. He presents the scene in an art form by allowing the spectator's reception and interpretation. The film neither indicates nor guides whether Tong should be punished or arrested. The demonstration of Monk Tong can deconstruct the state ideology that the monk who does not follow the regulations must be judged immoral and outlawed. It instead declares that though Tong's behaviours can be unacceptable for some Buddhists, he does not seem aggressive and harmful to other people. Moreover, his desire to shower and have dinner can describe the nature and normality of human beings.

4.3 Summary of the Chapter

An individual audience from Rotten Tomatoes named Alfin questioned whether the film implicitly describes socio-political events of Thailand in the past, present, and probably an approaching future.³⁹⁸ He stated, “a very subtle social-political critique on Thai's past, present, and probably it's [*sic*] near future”. It means that Thailand has encompassed social and political issues and has recently experienced different situations. John de Lorimier researched that “his films are interrelated by politics and background of Nabua. The films work like a documentary that contain [*sic*] both experience and fiction.”³⁹⁹ It refers to the area in Isan and Nabua village, which is compatible with the battlefield in 1965 between the Thai government and the Communist Party. It simulates an indigent region, ghosts, sickle and hammer signs, political incidents, politics of health welfare, and kamma and politics. The Boonmee's recall, memory, and imagination can principally stimulate the simulation. However, the Thai government has never trusted the Isan region, i.e., Isan has always been a suspicious area for the Communist camp. The government further continues its disturbance and neglect toward the people and community.

Boonmee lives in an Isan village (expected to be Nabua) far from the city and health service. Therefore, he relies on self-care. During the last hours of his life, his

³⁹⁸ “Uncle Boonmee Review,” Rotten Tomatoes, September 20, 2022, https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/uncle_boonmee/reviews?type=user.

³⁹⁹ Julie de Lorimier, “Apichatpong: les réincarnation du cinéma,” *24 images* 162 (2013): 29.

deceased wife and lost son, who became the monkey ghost, revisited him. The ghosts may symbolize the communists or the anti-government people who reside in the forest or another dimension that is discrete from the current world (it can be ancient and slower). Nonetheless, the film created the ghosts to oppose the Thai state from re-entering and interrupting Isan. The spirit and ghost might further lead the audience to understand the film story dissimilarly.⁴⁰⁰ They can deconstruct the state ideology that accused them of being Communist and frightening. Boonmee believes that his diagnosis is related to his past actions when he murdered some Communists according to the state's command. Therefore, his pain is a sin, i.e., kamma, resulting from executing others. Moreover, static images of a group of soldiers and young men owing to his dream (and perhaps imagination) and a sickle-and-hammer symbol on soil might further represent the possible existence of the Communists in the past and the future. However, the communists can be as generous as other people in Thai society. They are not necessarily hostile as the government attempts to inform the public. In contrast, a critic found that the ghost only resides in the countryside district. It is apparent that Jen, a character from Bangkok, cannot stay in a rural house because she is disturbed by mysterious ghosts, night insects, and foreign employees. The ghost can terrify Jen, i.e., the Communist can threaten the government's stability because Jen represents the state.

“Uncle Boonmee does more than signify [*sic*] on one side of this ideological conflict between nation and anti-nation, geopolitical centre and margin, royalist and communist,” stated Adam Szymanski.⁴⁰¹ The soldier and Jen represent the state or the nation; they are nationalist and royalist. Jen shows she is more connected to the government because she resides closer to the central political authority. However, Boonmee manifests an anti-nation ideology because he disagrees with the murder. Boonmee is at the border and finds the government insignificant and immoral in ordering the soldiers to kill the Communists. Since he must receive sufficient care and attention from the state, he does not portray loyalty

⁴⁰⁰ “Uncle Boonmee Review,” Rotten Tomatoes, September 20, 2022, https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/uncle_boonmee/reviews?type=user.

⁴⁰¹ Bordeleau, Pape, Rose-Antoinette and Szymanski, *Nocturnal Fabulations Ecology, Vitality and Opacity in the Cinema of Apichatpong Weerasethakul*, 49.

to the government. In other words, the Thai government cannot interpellate the state ideology to Boonmee because he does not accept the state's superiority in commanding and murdering any other citizens.



Image 37 The Conversation Represents the State Ideology and Non-State Interpellation

Aaron Cutler from *Slant Magazine* argued that the reincarnation process could be a simile for the country and the government attempting to ignore history. However, Apichatpong may further refrain from presenting the situation as an offensive approach. Therefore, he summoned the political incidents into Boonmee.⁴⁰² “Boonmee character is linked with [*sic*] Primitive project in a way that in that Nabua village, people try to forget their brutal past, while this guy can remember so much.”⁴⁰³ He is distinct from other Nabua villagers because he intends to forget by remembering the details. Boonmee can assemble personal experience and past politics into his remembrance to design new images. “Uncle Boonmee reproduces the memory of a violent military past and relies upon a direct association with the

⁴⁰² Aaron Cutler, “New York Film Festival 2010: Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives Even though the movies are alive and well, film itself is turning ghostly,” *Slant Magazine*, September 23, 2010, <https://www.slantmagazine.com/film/new-york-film-festival-2010-uncle-boonmee-who-can-recall-his-past-lives/>.

⁴⁰³ Fauzi Naeim Mohamed, Md Sidin Ahmad Ishak and Mohamad Saleeh Rahamad, “Apichatpong Weerasethakul’s Uncle Boonmee and Heidegger’s Phenomenology of Art,” *Malaysian Journal of Media Studies* 18, no.2 (2016): 2.

present subtext of Thai politics.”⁴⁰⁴ He places the military in his memory because he was formerly a conscript, following the national military's instruction and supporting the government. He connects his memory to Thai politics and ideology. When he was previously a conscript, he realized a relationship between the Thai government and the anti-government in Thai society. During the hunting and murder process, the film shows some images of the soldiers; one can be Boonmee searching for the Communist, arresting the monkey ghost, and becoming friends with the monkey ghost. The pictures might inform the spectators that the Communists are not frightening, but instead, they can be the victims. Therefore, these examples suggest that the film denounces the state's controlling power through Boonmee's opinion (connotative language) and other symbols. The film possibly employs Boonmee to depict the people not interpellated by the state ideology. On the contrary, the dream (or perhaps imagination) discusses injustice in history and today and relates the past to the present world. A haunted voice of the past time can reflect the dream sequence.⁴⁰⁵ Boonmee recalls his past lives in a ghostly memory, e.g., his past lives as a princess or a farmer were not preferable (the memories haunt him), and a revisit of his dead wife and lost son in the form of ghosts. These previous incarnations could have consisted of painful ideas, and he is terrified. Additionally, the dream might present that the government can transfer the authoritarian regime to the future.⁴⁰⁶ Boonmee's dream of the future (in the form of non-dynamic images of a group of soldiers) illustrates that the government obtains superior authority to eliminate any citizen who cannot identify themselves. The monkey ghost can represent the people the state must eliminate; in other words, the state ideology cannot interpellate the monkey ghost. However, the monkey is not aggressive because the film might express the non-state ideology as unethical and attempt to deconstruct the state ideology. Meanwhile, his dream can combine the last time he was a conscript and his concern for the following incarnation. Boonmee's souvenir of the previous days is perhaps essential in provoking the non-

⁴⁰⁴ Viernes, “The Politics of Health in the Films of Apichatpong Weerasethakul,” 22.

⁴⁰⁵ Bohler, “Haunted Time, Still Photography and Cinema as Memory: The Dream Sequence in Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives,” 72.

⁴⁰⁶ Bohler, “Haunted Time, Still Photography and Cinema as Memory: The Dream Sequence in Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives,” 72.

state ideology in which he may disagree or disregard the government's idea about the Communist or anti-government groups. Therefore, Boonmee might intend to criticize or insult the state. He is not interpellated (or persuaded) by the government to view the nation and the society owing to the meaning formed by the state. The film introduces another possibility in viewing and understanding the state ideology through Boonmee. Additionally, it opens a new space for the spectators to see the film narration in a more profound meaning rather than a specific or traditional state formation. It is an art piece that permits numerous interpretations and attempts to deconstruct the state ideology.

Many critiques from Rotten Tomatoes, top audiences and all audience categories indicated that Apichatpong's films are Primitive art, art projects, and art films.⁴⁰⁷ Meanwhile, a critique from Ivy Panda indicated that "...the film is a masterful piece of art created to convey life's impermanence through spiritual forms and to showcase the ability of every viewer to relate and sympathize with the protagonist, although not everyone may agree with this one."⁴⁰⁸ This art piece communicates the story through human and non-human characters, which might stimulate the spectator's sensation. Besides, in interviews, Apichatpong has repeatedly emphasized that "his Film is an art film rather than a political film. He does not mean to include any political message or to be a part of any political ideology, but he only offers his opinion and belief in the film".⁴⁰⁹ However, *Uncle Boonmee's* film allows the spectator to interpret the film's meaning with a silent message of politics. Apichatpong obscured the political message according to his experience, political ideology, stories from people he encountered in Isan, and his data collection in Isan. "Apichatpong links fictional film worlds with the public exhibitions of violence that give rise to these stories."⁴¹⁰ He produces the film by

⁴⁰⁷ "Uncle Boonmee Review," Rotten Tomatoes, September 20, 2022, https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/uncle_boonmee/reviews?type=user.

⁴⁰⁸ "Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives" by Apichatpong Weerasethakul Essay (Movie Review)," Ivy Panda, September 6, 2022, <https://ivypanda.com/essays/uncle-boonmee-who-can-recall-his-past-lives-by-apichatpong-weerasethakul-review/>.

⁴⁰⁹ "Uncle Boonmee Review," Rotten Tomatoes, September 20, 2022, https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/uncle_boonmee/reviews?type=user.

⁴¹⁰ Viernes, "The Politics of Health in the Films of Apichatpong Weerasethakul," 10.

relating the imagination with the understanding (or presentation) of society and the political situations. After learning the history from local villagers, he found this historical perception an aesthetic narration. Thus, he transformed the situations into an artistic chronicle on his level.⁴¹¹ He further realized that there are two versions of history: one is an oral history by people to people, and another is media, which the government or the ruler probably regulates.⁴¹² The state can convince most citizens, and the film can be an alternative for other groups who obtain dissimilar ideologies. It may emphasize the film spectatorship that the film or Apichatpong may not agree with the state. Besides, Apichatpong and the film are not interpellated by the state ideology. Instead, he implies the production of art (film) to open a new space and create the film spectatorship.

*Some viewers found Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives to be a masterpiece of the art of Apichatpong, which possesses unrestricted meaning. It allows more opportunity for the spectator to appreciate and interpret. Nevertheless, the message about politics in his film requires profound understanding or personal experience. Justin Chang reaffirmed, “Uncle Boonmee film is more resistant to concrete interpretation.”*⁴¹³ Meanwhile, another research discovered that several scenes in the film only involve sufficient explanation from the beginning to the end. Besides, the narration can challenge the apparent focus of the spectator because of, perhaps, unclear presentation and insufficient knowledge about Apichatpong's background and other films. The film is greatly more open than ideology or symbol because it is a creative beauty. On the contrary, Apichatpong's message reproduction may permit the viewer to interpret the film definition as an

⁴¹¹ Ingawanij and McDonald, “Blissfully Whose? Jungle Pleasures, Ultra-modernist Cinema and the Cosmopolitan Thai Auteur,” 119-134.

⁴¹² O'Hara, “Mysterious Object of Desire: The Haunted Cinema of Apichatpong Weerasethakul,” 179.

⁴¹³ Justin Chang, “A criticism of Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives from Variety” วิจารณ์ "ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ" จากวาไรตี้,” Facebook, May 22, 2010, <https://www.facebook.com/notes/bioscope-magazine/bth-wicarn-lung-buy-mi-raluk-chati-cak-wa-ri-ti/409455064192>.

image of a flashback.⁴¹⁴ Thomas Caldwell from Rotten Tomatoes indicated that Apichatpong shot various sequences in low light to create an atmosphere and perception of the dream world. “He is a genuine artist in a human body who prefers sharing his opinion and political ideology with the viewers”.⁴¹⁵ Nathaniel Roger from Rotten Tomatoes also pointed out that his movie is best viewed in the darkness because there are spirits and ghosts. The darkness in the film can declare that the film provides an ambiguous message from the beginning until the ending of the scenes. These critiques can reaffirm the artistic intention of the film, which introduces another possibility for interpretation rather than manipulating the film's meaning. Althusser discovered that interpellation is development and the person's knowledge. However, the non-state interpellation in the film perhaps revolves around Apichatpong's dominant belief, which can depend on his life experience and political ideology. The social formation within Thai society is independent of the personal message in his film. Since he is detached from the state ideology and interpellation, he constructed a new pattern for the spectator to interpret the message and establish the meaning. He might communicate that the state ideology should only sometimes interpellate the citizens. Nevertheless, the people should be eligible to observe the society (or the spectator should be allowed to understand the film) regarding their reception and comprehension.

The examples related to Isan and the Communist can remind the spectator that the Thai government continues the disturbance against the region and Isan minorities. Apichatpong criticizes the Thai government as they have always accused the Isan people of being communists. In his opinion, the state, therefore, possesses an unfair allegation. People in Isan can be innocent, but the government should not dismiss them by identifying them as communists. The government's supreme power and their threat cannot persuade Boonmee. In other words, he does not agree that the government can accuse anyone from Isan or the forest. Boonmee's and Jen's conversation solidly portrays that Boonmee disagrees with the national government

⁴¹⁴ Bergstrom, “Cinematic Past Lives: Memory, Modernity, and Cinematic Reincarnation in Apichatpong Weerasethakul’s *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*”, 9.

⁴¹⁵ “Uncle Boonmee Review,” Rotten Tomatoes, September 20, 2022, https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/uncle_boonmee/reviews?type=user.

for the capturing and murdering command. Apichatpong further permits the monkey ghost to state his forest life and ideology in the forest. He shows that the monkey ghost is inoffensive and straightforward, and he is perhaps not antagonistic to ordinary Thai citizens and the government. Thus, the government's order to arrest the monkey ghost can be immoral and inhumane. Ghost Huay and the monkey ghost are perhaps the Communists' symbols because they are from the forest, have different dimensions, and do not understand the present time. Their revisiting the family is likely comparable to the Communist's return to appeal for justice. The Communist people might not have obtained an opportunity to defend themselves when the national government condemned them. Thus, they reappear to explain their life in the forest and demand comprehension from most people and the state. However, their opinion may differ from modernity and state ideology. The ghost's appearance might reaffirm that they are not guilty because they do not conceal themselves in the forest or border town. Nevertheless, they would instead meet people and express their opinions. Then, the film may denounce the state interpellation that the religious rules for Thai monks are stringent. Monks in Southeast Asian countries follow more intense regimes than monks in other Asian countries, e.g., Japan. Monk Tong is against Buddhist rules and social beliefs. He represents a non-traditional monk who departs the temple at night, interacts with women, and takes supper. Monk Tong can be utterly hostile to the majority of Buddhists in Thailand. It might also show that the state ideology does not influence Monk Tong. In brief, Apichatpong can challenge the state's morality, i.e., the state is not always correct. Their dominant privilege should not authorize them to denounce or murder any citizen in the country. He aims to defeat the state power and deconstruct the state ideology. Therefore, Boonmee may symbolize Apichatpong because he confronts the government by remembering the political incidents the state aims to disregard and force people to overlook.

CHAPTER 5

HOW IS THE FILM CONNOTATION SYMBOLICALLY READ?

Casetti discovered that the spectator is involved in visuals and analysis after viewing the film. The spectator produces gaze, reception, and interpretation. However, the interpretation is different, causing 'subjective gaze', which can vary from spectator to spectator. Moreover, the film is a two-way communication process requiring two parties to interact.⁴¹⁶ Thus, the spectator is a witness in the film spectatorship who offers interpretation and non-immediate feedback. This chapter revolves around the reception of Thai and non-Thai spectators who reviewed and interpreted some connotative meanings and messages. Significantly, the author will observe the critiques according to the argument: *how is the film connotation symbolically read?* In other words, what can be the spectator's reception of the film message, image, sound, code and sign, and the prominent film connotations that numerous spectators can analyze? Dissimilar spectator interpretation and reception are presented through written critiques as previously proposed in the Methodology. The research divides this chapter into three main sections: how are gender roles and gender identity portrayed through the film, nature, a belief of non-human amateurs in the film and Thai society, and class struggle in the film. The feminist film theory will support an investigation of gender roles and nature, while class struggle can engage the Marxist model. The three sections will elaborate on similar critiques by referring to some names of critiques. Meanwhile, the end of each section will discuss and summarize different reviews of the film. For instance, professional critiques and Pantip will symbolize the review about gender; Rotten Tomatoes and academic papers will mention nature; and individual websites and anonymous audiences will emphasize the review about class. In other words, the chapter will not mention all the names of the spectators, but it will select the spectators who provided common keywords. The end of each section will further conclude the position of the spectator's reception owing to the

⁴¹⁶ See Chapter 2 (2.2 Inside Casetti, Inside the Spectatorship).

'geography of the spectator' as formerly indicated in the *Introduction*. Respectively, repetitive and diverse critiques will be thoroughly organized and displayed in *the Appendix*.

Particular scenes will be examples throughout the analysis. These scenes were selected because they captured some attention from the spectator and created extensive controversy in Thai society. The first example is the sequence between three human characters, a ghost and a monkey ghost, in an ordinary conversation at a dining table. The second sequence is between Uncle Boonmee and Aunt Jen arguing about kamma, murdering, and the nation. The third example is between a princess and a lower-class enslaved person making an intimate body attachment. The fourth sequence is between a monk and two women in a private hotel room, discussing the temple and prohibited acts for Buddhist monks. The last sequence is between Tong and his duplicate before leaving the hotel room for dinner. The main characters connect these five sequences: past and present lives; and social, religious and political messages. The sequence of Boonmee's and Jen's kamma discussion is associated with the dining table sequence by the characters. The sequence of the princess and the enslaved person involves the sequence of Boonmee and Jen, as the princess can be one of Boonmee's incarnations. The sequence of monk Tong is related to the princess sequence as monk Tong and the princess obtain human desire. The sequence of duplicates and the sequence of monk Tong are at the same time and location with the same characters, in which the monk transforms into an average person.

Additionally, the border in the first, the fourth and the fifth sequences needs to be clarified. The first sequence shows an ambiguity between humans and ghosts, while the fourth challenges Monk Tong in a hotel room with two guilty women, and the fifth sequence covers the difference between what is real and what is an illusion. In contrast, the second and the third sequences stress class and difference. The princess and the enslaved person encounter a class struggle, whereas Uncle Boonmee notices the inequality between the government and the anti-government people.

5.1 How are Gender Roles and Gender Identity Portrayed Through the Film?

Casetti discussed the movie *El*, where a male character is interested in one woman, and he later proposes his sight. Although his seeing is not visible to the woman, the woman is his target. The female character in *El* is the man's object, i.e., the woman may influence the man's sexual desire and encourage him to look at her. Nonetheless, some spectators are seeing along with the man, but his seeing the woman may not be apparent because the woman's recognition is absent. Therefore, Casetti's finding is consistent with what the feminist film theory also discovered because a woman is always a look-at target for a man. Even though the film title includes only Uncle Boonmee as the main character, the other male and female characters are remarkable for analyzing gender relations. The film *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, clearly shows the difference between men and women in various scenes.

The critiques found numerous conditions concerning gender, sex, social role, and masculine-feminine distinction. The film's female and male characters might depict their points of view based on gender culture, gender role, and social status, for instance. Thus, this section explores gender roles, identity, social status, and power relations. In this regard, the researcher will examine the transformation as what the transformation means in terms of power relation or social status, how the sexual intercourse affects the transformation, and whether the transformation causes a change to the character's social status (e.g., from a son to a husband, or a daughter to a wife) after engaging in sexual activity with someone. Nevertheless, the feminist film theory formulated limitations; therefore, the problem of their studies will also be stated during the explanation and at the end of this section.

In Theravada Buddhism, the life cycle of son and daughter (or man and woman) is entirely isolated. Parents aim to encourage their sons to become Sangha or monks for a certain period. A man who can become a monk can present maturity and responsibility for their life and decision-making. Meanwhile, a daughter must support her parents because she cannot become a monk.⁴¹⁷ In Isan, marriage and

⁴¹⁷ Tosakul, "Isan Peasants, Thai Nation and Modernization," 90-91.

giving birth are achievements in women's social and cultural roles. The separation indicates that gender roles and identity can cause diversity among humanity. Tong becomes a monk for Boonmee's funeral because Jen's gender identity prohibits her from making merit in a monk uniform, though she is tentatively a closer relation to Boonmee. Since Tong is a male cousin, he is religiously obligated to transfer merit to the dead Boonmee.

Teresa de Lauretis adopted Foucault's theory to consider gender a product of diverse social power relations.⁴¹⁸ She claimed that gender does not naturally exist in human beings, but social technologies perhaps construct it. These social technologies are also known as technologies of gender, such as cinema, that can emphasize the distinction between men and women. Gender is, therefore, ideological-technological production, namely ideology and power relation, which produce and promote the image of gender, e.g., male and female.⁴¹⁹ According to the film, the first example is Boonmee, portrayed as a man according to his gender role as father and husband and social status as a conscript. His gender identity may also be a product of his relation to the army that empowers him to defeat the Communists. The second example is Monk Tong. In Buddhism, only men are allowed to become monks.⁴²⁰ The belief can identify Tong as a male gender and that he can further develop his male gender through a monk status. The third example is Jen, whose gender role as aunt and sister constructed her as a woman. Moreover, Jen also possesses a role as Boonmee's descendant, who will become a farm owner and a leader when Boonmee dies. The status and responsibility can specify a power relation between Jen and farm employees. On the other hand, the gender role also identifies Jen as an active female rather than a passive one because she takes care of Boonmee; Jai and Tong address her as 'aunt', and she receives respect from all Boonmee's employees. The last example is Huay, a mother and a wife, who is referred to as a female because she expresses her concern and passion

⁴¹⁸ Shohini Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists: Laura Mulvey, Kaja Silverman, Teresa de Lauretis and Barbara Creed*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 65.

⁴¹⁹ Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists: Laura Mulvey, Kaja Silverman, Teresa de Lauretis and Barbara Creed*, 67.

⁴²⁰ See Chapter 1, Culture and Influence of Buddhism in Isan.

for Boonmee and Boonsong even though she is dead. After hearing about Boonmee's health condition, she plays the wife visiting her husband. In other words, a conversation with her husband, son and sister can inform her power relation with the family.



Image 38 (left) Monk Tong and family (right) Jen with Farm Employees

De Lauretis also examined queering desire, which is a desire for being not identified by a standard social value and thought of homosexuality.⁴²¹ A person requires no specification of their gender and sex. Despite natural sex or socially constructed gender, the queer prefers visibility and acceptance from the general public. The queer theory intends to remove homosexuals, gays and lesbians.⁴²² The researcher wants to raise examples of the queering desire by the transformation of

⁴²¹ Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists: Laura Mulvey, Kaja Silverman, Teresa de Lauretis and Barbara Creed*, 75-76.

⁴²² Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists: Laura Mulvey, Kaja Silverman, Teresa de Lauretis and Barbara Creed*, 76.

status through sexual intercourse between human beings and non-humans. The first transformation pattern is Boonsong to a monkey ghost after deciding to marry a monkey. His obsession with photography and different ideologies motivated him to escape into a forest because he is interested in a topic that most people do not understand. Therefore, he follows a monkey group that can be considered a minority.



Image 39 Boonsong Before Transformation

This transformation can be a queer desire as Boonsong avoids social judgment toward his gender identity and social status. If he stays as a human, others can identify him as a male identity because of his expected gender role as a son, for instance. Moreover, Navagan from Pantip compared his transformation to a passion for the Communist ideology. Thus, Boonsong might change his ideology and avoid a Communist status by concealing himself in a monkey tribe.⁴²³

The second pattern of transformation is a princess becoming a catfish. Even though some critiques did not notice a relation between the princess and Uncle Boonmee, some other critiques indicated that the sexual intercourse between her and the catfish could destroy social value. The princess's undressing moment shows that she is an ordinary woman (a female gender or a daughter of a family) once she

⁴²³ “Analyze-Criticize Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives Vol. 1 destroying the invisible wall to return (movie review) วิเคราะห์-วิจารณ์ <<< *** ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ *** Vol. 1: การทำลายกำแพงที่มองไม่เห็น เพื่อกลับ >>> (เปิดเผยเนื้อหาสำคัญ),” Pantip, April 17, 2019, <http://topicstock.pantip.com/chalermthai/topicstock/2010/08/A9589007/A9589007.html>.

leaves her social status (the royal princess).⁴²⁴ Furthermore, her departure from the princess status, as well as sexual intercourse, might inform the spectator that she desires to obscure her social status. Meanwhile, her transformation can point out that she does not want her gender identity. The transformation may suggest queer desire that other people cannot specify her (after becoming a catfish) as male or female, or man or woman. On the contrary, sexual intercourse may demolish classes between humans and animals.



Image 40 The Princess and Sexual Intercourse

Queering desire is also displayed in the first other sequences by Huay and Tong's duplicate. The dining table sequence displays a female ghost who is from another dimension. An individual critic wrote in Blog Gang that Huay may obtain a

⁴²⁴ “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives is Difficult to Understand ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ ใจัว หนั่ง
 อู ย าก จ ริ ง ๆ ?????” Terk Movie, March 10, 2011, http://terkmovie.blogspot.com/2011/04/blog-post_10.html.

queering desire by declaring that her age and look had ended since her death.⁴²⁵ It might show that she avoids mentioning her gender identity and discussing her beauty. On the other hand, Tong's duplicate at the end of the film might represent that his duplicate is queer because he does not interact with any other character. The same critique further addressed that the duplicate can indicate that he needs to be more accurate. Therefore, people should not identify him as a male, female, gay, or lesbian.⁴²⁶ Barbara Creed explained an association between male castration and the queer. She tentatively expressed that a woman is; however, male castration can threaten a victim. The woman victim might define born-with female sex, while the male castration might primarily refer to the absence of phallus and secondarily refers to queer.⁴²⁷ Tong's monk status can express the queer situation and male castration.



Image 41 Tong with Duplicate

⁴²⁵ “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives – When I visited Boonmee at the Cinema ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ - เมื่อข้าพเจ้าไปเยี่ยม ลุงบุญมีฯ ที่โรงหนัง,” *Blog Gang* (blog), June 27, 2010, <https://www.bloggang.com/mainblog.php?id=aorta&month=27-06-2010&group=14&gblog=221>.

⁴²⁶ “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives – When I visited Boonmee at the Cinema ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ - เมื่อข้าพเจ้าไปเยี่ยม ลุงบุญมีฯ ที่โรงหนัง,” *Blog Gang* (blog), June 27, 2010, <https://www.bloggang.com/mainblog.php?id=aorta&month=27-06-2010&group=14&gblog=221>.

⁴²⁷ Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists: Laura Mulvey, Kaja Silverman, Teresa de Lauretis and Barbara Creed*, 95.

On the other hand, women are nothing other than a sexual stimulus,⁴²⁸ who are like erotogenic zones. The zones can stimulate a sexual response and provide sexual pleasure to men. Nevertheless, some women might appreciate being looked at because it can signify their pretty look and attractive physical appearance. Mulvey elaborated by first analyzing men's external features and later identifying women. She proposed that women are images, and men are the bearers of the look.⁴²⁹ It means that men own the looks and desires of women. In the film, male characters are theoretically different from females because women lack phallus. With the lack of phallus, women might represent the castration and the absence of a penis.⁴³⁰ The lack of phallus can further signify women as objects while their image dominates their desire. In addition, the phallus is a point of the original appearance and a born-with structure that distinguishes the two sexes. On the other hand, even though Tong is a male character, his monk status can later cause a lack of phallus due to religious beliefs and regulations.⁴³¹ He is not permitted to engage in sexual activity with women unless he leaves this monk status. Navagan again pointed out that Tong can offer a look to Jen and Rung, while the two women are objects who must respect Tong.⁴³² The religious regulation can characterize an absence of phallus, and the object can refer to female layperson status.



Image 42 Monk Tong at Boonmee's Dead Ritual

⁴²⁸ Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1993), 19.

⁴²⁹ Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, 19.

⁴³⁰ Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, 14.

⁴³¹ See section 3, *Thai Culture Relating to Theravada Buddhism*.

⁴³² “Analyze-Criticize Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives Vol. 1 destroying the invisible wall to return (movie review) วิเคราะห์-วิจารณ์ <<< *** ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ *** Vol. 1: การทำลายกำแพงที่มองไม่เห็น เพื่อกลับ >>> (เปิดเผยเนื้อหาสำคัญ),” Pantip, April 17, 2019, <http://topicstock.pantip.com/chalermthai/topicstock/2010/08/A9589007/A9589007.html>.

Moreover, Nong Jung in Pantip observed that the entrance of the cave, where Boonmee dies, is similar to the vagina.⁴³³ James Lewis Hoberman further compared the cave to a woman's womb, the first place to be oriented and born.⁴³⁴ The cave might symbolically refer to a lack of phallus with the expected gender role as a mother and gender identity as a female.



Image 43 Cave Entrance

Buddhists can further classify men and women based on their duty and responsibility. Men are responsible for taking a monk role and cannot touch money or women. The male role is political-bureaucratic representation, which works in the management position.⁴³⁵ In contrast, a woman portrays a mother-nurturer

⁴³³ “Analyze-Criticize Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives Vol. 1 destroying the invisible wall to return (movie review) วิเคราะห์-วิจารณ์ <<< *** ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ *** Vol. 1: การทำลายกำแพงที่มองไม่เห็น เพื่อกลับ >>> (เปิดผจญเหนือหาคำสำคัญ),” Pantip, April 17, 2019, <http://topicstock.pantip.com/chalermthai/topicstock/2010/08/A9589007/A9589007.html>.

⁴³⁴ James Hoberman, “Spirits in the Material World in Uncle Boonmee,” *Village Voice*, March 2, 2011, <https://www.villagevoice.com/2011/03/02/spirits-in-the-material-world-in-uncle-boonmee/>.

⁴³⁵ Thomas Kirsch, “Text and Context: Buddhist Sex Roles/Culture of Gender Revisited,” *Journal of The American Ethnological Society* 12, no. 2 (1985): 303.

image who supports Buddhist institutions through ritual performance and carrying and creating a son to be a monk. Women are more attached to economic duties such as making merits and providing food to monks, specifically called economic-entrepreneurial actions.⁴³⁶ Men can leave an attachment and become monks, whereas women are more related and concerned with the attachment (such as family and household). For example, father and son (in terms of gender identity) can be unattached because they are common, while the mother is always committed to her son because she is distinct from him.⁴³⁷ According to the film, Huay is concerned for Boonsong even though she is dead; meanwhile, Boonmee can be unconnected to Boonsong as he formerly ceased searching for him. Besides, Boonmee also articulates a political-bureaucratic and male role with responsibility for his farm and employees. Nevertheless, Aunt Jen represents an economic-entrepreneurial position because she assists Boonmee and provides food and satisfaction, for instance. Concerning Buddhism, Barend Jan Terwiel pointed out that women may depend on men in the same family.⁴³⁸ Huay may have relied on Boonmee when she was alive.



Image 44 Boonmee and Huay for Love Dependency

⁴³⁶ Kirsch, "Text and Context: Buddhist Sex Roles/Culture of Gender Revisited," 303.

⁴³⁷ Kirsch, "Text and Context: Buddhist Sex Roles/Culture of Gender Revisited," 306.

⁴³⁸ Terwiel, *Buddhism and Society in Thailand*, 67.

In the researcher's opinion, the establishment of gender diversity can control the way the spectator sees the film narration and the character. Nonetheless, film images and message production can show the characters of men and women. This difference can manipulate the spectator's gaze on the film. Additionally, Mulvey indicated that the film story and the narrative method can allow men to lead situations and control the film's phantasy and unconscious activity.⁴³⁹ The social role of the male leading role can explain the two characters in *Uncle Boonmee* film. The first is Boonmee, who obtained a social status as a conscript to protect the nation when he was young. This status revolves around the country's law that all men must be conscripted to the army at 21 years old under the 1954 Military Service Act.⁴⁴⁰ Therefore, the gender identity which reveals masculinity can further emphasize Boonmee's social status as a conscript. In opposition, after taking this green uniform off, Boonmee retains his gender role as a father, a husband, and an employer. Even though the gender role, gender identity and social roles determine him as a male, he disagrees with the idea of murdering and hurting others to defend the nation. His notion might represent that he overlooks his gender identity and male strength. The second is Tong, who possesses the social status of a monk. The monk status can make Tong a male leader because the monk is an opinion leader for Buddhists and prayers.⁴⁴¹ An orange uniform and a bald head can construct the monk status; otherwise, Tong is only a nephew without this uniform. In contrast, Navagan from Pantip illustrated that Tong's escape from the temple may cause an absence of his male identity.⁴⁴²

⁴³⁹ Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, 20.

⁴⁴⁰ Siwach Sripokankul, "The Military Draft in Thailand: A Critique From a Nonkilling Global Political Science Perspective," *Global Change Peace and Security* 31, vol. 1 (July 2018): 8, 10.1080/14781158.2018.1493447.

⁴⁴¹ See Chapter 1.

⁴⁴² "Analyze-Criticize Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives Vol. 1 destroying the invisible wall to return (movie review) วิจารณ์-วิจารณ์ <<< *** ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ *** Vol. 1: การทำลายกำแพงที่มองไม่เห็น เพื่อกลับ >>> (เปิดเผยเนื้อหาสำคัญ)," Pantip, April 17, 2019, <http://topicstock.pantip.com/chalermthai/topicstock/2010/08/A9589007/A9589007.html>.



Image 45 A Group of Soldiers (Conscript)



Image 46 Tong in a Mosquito Nest at a Temple

According to Mulvey, male characters have more power than females as they can control actions and communication and dominate the film story.⁴⁴³ Film Sick personal blog discovered that Boonmee is the most discussed character not only because of his recall story but also because of his gender role. His role can display that he is a male-active character who is a warm, responsible, and caring father,

⁴⁴³ Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, 20.

husband, and farm owner. Besides, it shows a social status as a male-superior.⁴⁴⁴ On the contrary, Jen and Huay are objects to Boonmee and the spectator because they are sister and wife. Thus, Jen and Huay can be the being-looked-at objects. Huay's appearance at the dining table can explain the being-looked-at condition because Boonmee greets Huay as young and pretty. The husband's role defines Boonmee as a male subject while his wife is his object, and he can always possess the look. The Film Sick also reaffirms that the ghost Huay returns as a wife to take care of her dying husband and settle him from pain and misery. On the other hand, Huay further expresses a mother's role by addressing Boonsong as 'luk, ' which means son.⁴⁴⁵



Image 47 Huay Helping Boonmee

⁴⁴⁴ Film Sick, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (Apichatpong Weerasethakul/2010/Thai) a transformation of memory to history ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ (อภิชาติพงศ์ วีระเศรษฐกุล/ 2010 / ไทย) การเปลี่ยนความทรงจำให้เป็นประวัติศาสตร์,” *Film Sick* (blog), April 15, 2019, <https://filmsick.wordpress.com/2012/01/08/uncleboonme/>.

⁴⁴⁵ Film Sick, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (Apichatpong Weerasethakul/2010/Thai) a transformation of memory to history ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ (อภิชาติพงศ์ วีระเศรษฐกุล/ 2010 / ไทย) การเปลี่ยนความทรงจำให้เป็นประวัติศาสตร์,” *Film Sick* (blog), April 15, 2019, <https://filmsick.wordpress.com/2012/01/08/uncleboonme/>.

In addition, Mulvey mentioned pleasure in looking and fascinating without touching sensitive body parts.⁴⁴⁶ People experience sexual interest in observing other people engaging in sexual activity or being undressing.⁴⁴⁷ The catfish may observe the princess's and the enslaved person's physical attachment. He may be interested in the princess because she expresses concern about her physical appearance and is involved with sensual activity. Besides, Navagan presented that the catfish can gain pleasure in this intimate moment between the enslaved person and the princess.⁴⁴⁸



Image 48 Princess's and Enslaved Person's Physical Attachment

⁴⁴⁶ In psychoanalysis, another name for an erogenous zone, specifically the oral, anal, and genital areas of the body. "Oxford Reference," Oxford Reference, April 2018, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199534067.001.0001/acref-9780199534067-e-2853>.

⁴⁴⁷ Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, 16.

⁴⁴⁸ "Analyze-Criticize Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives Vol. 1 destroying the invisible wall to return (movie review) วิเคราะห์-วิจารณ์ <<< *** ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ *** Vol. 1: การทำลายกำแพงที่มองไม่เห็น เพื่อกลับ >>> (เปิดเผยเนื้อหาสำคัญ)," Pantip, April 17, 2019, <http://topicstock.pantip.com/chalermthai/topicstock/2010/08/A9589007/A9589007.html>.

The conclusion, owing to Mulvey, is that an opposition between masculinity and femininity dominates life. What men do not possess, women possess, and vice versa. As a result, the dissimilarity can create an exchange of sexual activity, causing men and women to be inseparable because the sexual appearance and activity can offer sexual pleasure to them. On the other hand, the film might hold power over the spectator as it can influence the audience owing to its image and message. For example, Ann Kaplan demonstrated that the image of a surgery shown in the film can motivate the viewer to follow as the surgery is mainly from women's insight feelings of fear and desire.⁴⁴⁹ Jen and the princess can be examples of the film's power and the influence of decoration and technology. Jen's statement about sunscreen indicates her social status as a female from the city unfamiliar with the paddle field. Jonykeano considered this sunscreen a technology women generally trust to protect their metropolitan status.⁴⁵⁰ On the contrary, the princess is concerned about the white skin because she requests the catfish to turn her body white and pretty like the reflection. The princess is not attractive but possesses the princess costumes and accessories. Navagan also asserted that her clothes and jewelry might signify her gender identity as a female and her social status as a princess.⁴⁵¹ Sunscreen and white skin can symbolize the influence of technology, while the princess's status and accessories may refer to the power of decoration. In sum, Chaudhuri debated that media (including film) may work as an outstanding and prominent stimulation that reassures fear and desire to appear more rapidly or precisely. This fear is a problem of not being as pretty as other women, while desire is a wish to be as beautiful as female characters or actresses in the media.⁴⁵²

⁴⁴⁹ Ann Kaplan, *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film, and the Imperial Gaze*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 260.

⁴⁵⁰ “Who watched and understood the movie Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (movie review) ใครดูหนังเรื่องลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติแล้วเข้าใจบ้างคะ? (สปอยล์)”, Pantip, April 17, 2019, <https://pantip.com/topic/31854178>.

⁴⁵¹ “Who watched and understood the movie Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (movie review) ใครดูหนังเรื่องลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติแล้วเข้าใจบ้างคะ? (สปอยล์)”, Pantip, April 17, 2019, <https://pantip.com/topic/31854178>.

⁴⁵² Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists: Laura Mulvey, Kaja Silverman, Teresa de Lauretis and Barbara Creed*, 260-262.



Image 49 Princess's Wish for Beauty



Image 50 Jen's Sunblock Lotion

Additionally, gender roles and identity can further explain Uncle Boonmee and Aunt Jen from the garden scene and the princess and the enslaved person from the waterfall scene. In the garden sequence, Boonmee portrays a brother role while Jen performs a sister role. Boonmee expresses his position as a brother consulting sister, while Jen attempts to express her leading thought and persuade Boonmee. The Film Sick found that Jen's and Boonmee's opinions can symbolize their social status. Boonmee can be a minority citizen because he opposes the government's

command to kill, whereas Jen can be a patriot as the government is the most significant authority and priority.⁴⁵³ In this sequence, Boonmee's and Jen's gender roles can vaguely define their gender identity because Boonmee does not reveal strength and superiority over Jen. Jen does not display a passive female object because she influences Boonmee. We can conclude that an expression of their power relation is at a family level as brother and sister, but their gender identity is independent of their gender role. On the other hand, the Film Sick found the prominent gender role and social status of the princess and the enslaved person. The princess's gender role and social status emphasize her femaleness and passive-object (to be looked-at by the enslaved person). Meanwhile, the enslaved person's gender role, social status and performance present his masculinity as a strong guard who protects and obeys the princess.⁴⁵⁴



Image 51 Brother-Sister Relation

Likewise, Nai Nang from Pantip pointed out that the two scenes present gender differences. Boonmee discussed his former distribution to the nation, while the

⁴⁵³ Film Sick, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (Apichatpong Weerasethakul/2010/Thai) a transformation of memory to history ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ (อภิชาติพงศ์ วีระเศรษฐกุล/ 2010 / ไทย) การเปลี่ยนความทรงจำให้เป็นประวัติศาสตร์,” *Film Sick* (blog), April 15, 2019, <https://filmsick.wordpress.com/2012/01/08/uncleboonme/>.

⁴⁵⁴ Film Sick, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (Apichatpong Weerasethakul/2010/Thai) a transformation of memory to history ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ (อภิชาติพงศ์ วีระเศรษฐกุล/ 2010 / ไทย) การเปลี่ยนความทรงจำให้เป็นประวัติศาสตร์,” *Film Sick* (blog), April 15, 2019, <https://filmsick.wordpress.com/2012/01/08/uncleboonme/>.

enslaved person shows responsibility through defending work. However, Jen applies her emotion when speaking, while the princess desires physical attractiveness. The body language and spoken dialogues from these two sequences can further summarize that Jen, the princess, and the enslaved person are attached to their biological sex, which is compatible with their socially constructed gender.⁴⁵⁵ However, Boonmee's comment against the murder can define an ambiguity of his male gender.



Image 52 Princess on A Sedan, the Enslaved Person as a Life Protector

Though most feminist film theorists adopted the same school of thought and belief, there are still some *problems and limitations* existing in the theory. Mulvey's study covers the discussion primarily on women and sexual differences, but she did not contribute to the fact that the film can reach everybody despite gender roles and identity. Moreover, Patricia Erens criticized some feminist theorists because they pointed out that “film may address the spectator as a female rather than portraying

⁴⁵⁵ “Who watched and understood the movie Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (movie review) ใครดูหนังเรื่องลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติแล้วเข้าใจบ้างคะ? (สปอยล์)”, Pantip, April 17, 2019, <https://pantip.com/topic/31854178>.

women positively or negatively”.⁴⁵⁶ It means the film can specify the spectator as a female object because it can dominate the spectator and the communication process. This finding can be inaccurate to find the spectator as a female because it is not only women who gaze at the film; therefore, gender identity is not a factor.

As a result of the media effect, the spectator cannot actively create media content, but they can choose what to perceive and how to interpret.⁴⁵⁷ Subsequently, the gender relation and the symbolic meaning of the gender aspect are more concerned by Thai critiques. Thai spectators viewed the main characters individually based on their knowledge of Thai society and the culture of inferior women. Owing to the 'geography of the spectator', Thai spectators may obtain the 'interpellation' point of view because they rely on partial seeing, guided by the character's gaze, discursive knowing that shows an engagement of the Thai viewers (addressee) and the film narration (addressor); and relative believing which is the spectator's belief toward the facts presented in the film. In contrast, non-Thai spectators might possess the 'objective' point of view with exhausting seeing because they receive only slight details of the film information about Thailand, for example, diegetic knowing which can be apparent facts revealed in the film, and solid believing that the spectator does not question other connotative message in the film. However, the issue of gender is discussed mainly in personal blogs, discussion boards, and professional websites (online newspapers). In brief, Thai and non-Thai spectators from blogs and newspapers suggest a combined point of view between the 'objective and interpellation' points of view. They take partial seeing as directed by their and the character's gaze. Furthermore, they carry diegetic knowing since they instantaneously gain information from the film image and language. Meanwhile, they may acquire relative believing because of a commitment to the facts from the film.

The following topic will argue about the symbolic meaning of nature or non-humans in the film that the spectator discovered. Nevertheless, this non-human or

⁴⁵⁶ Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists: Laura Mulvey, Kaja Silverman, Teresa de Lauretis and Barbara Creed*, 294.

⁴⁵⁷ See Chapter 2, 2.2 Inside Casetti, Inside the Spectatorship.

natural appearance can also be related to the gender theory in terms of power relations and the transformation of social status. In this case, the author found an interpretation of nature in general comments, professional journals, and academic studies.

5.2 Nature: A Belief of Non-Human Amateurs in The Film and Thai Society

Casetti suggested that the character is essential in bringing the image to life. Though humans conduct the film, it offers itself into sight and brings its image to life. This 'image brought into life' includes the film's natural characteristics, making the film image look usual. The 'image brought to life' may also be connected to non-human characters in *Uncle Boonmee's* film, namely, ghost, monkey ghost, catfish, dream, and imagination. Derek Smith from Tiny Mix Tapes accentuates that the film director eliminated an apparent border between the past and present, living and dead, and man and nature.⁴⁵⁸ It represents idealistic and dreamy dynamic photography. Besides, Mark Adams discovered that this film's nature is perhaps "simple in story but complex in structure and subtext".⁴⁵⁹ It may imply that the film presentation is natural and explicit or unsophisticated. Otherwise, the film composition might consist of various sophisticated meanings. The non-human amateurs are considered to be the 'nature' of the film because they portray an ordinariness of the story and fundamental image. In other words, not only does 'nature' concern daily dialogue and setting location, but nature also refers to ghosts, monkey ghosts, catfish, and other dreams and imagination. Scott Tobias from Film AV Club noticed this movie could be "a tale that softens the boundaries between humanity and nature, life and the afterlife".⁴⁶⁰ Meanwhile, Shawn Levy simplified that, on the one hand, the spectator can easily get engaged with the film elements such as natural sound, long takes and a pervasive sense of calm amid metaphysical

⁴⁵⁸ Derek Smith, "AFI Fest 2010 No such thing as a free lunch, but how about a free festival?" Tiny Mix Tapes, December 2, 2010, <https://www.tinymixtapes.com/features/afi-fest-2010>.

⁴⁵⁹ Mark Adams, "Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives," Screen Daily, May 21, 2010, <https://www.screendaily.com/uncle-boonmee-who-can-recall-his-past-lives/5014254.article>.

⁴⁶⁰ Scott Tobias, "Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives," Film AV Club, March 3, 2011, <https://film.avclub.com/uncle-boonmee-who-can-recall-his-past-lives-1798167514>.

turmoil (Tong's frightening moments seeing Huay and his duplicate, e.g.); on the other hand, they can be confused with the non-human appearance.⁴⁶¹ The long shot is long according to three criteria: duration, distance, and depth of focus.⁴⁶² *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* is criticized for obtaining a long-take technique with an extended scene duration because Apichatpong is an expert on this strategy. The film contains only six major scenes, making each scene stable, primarily static, and extended.⁴⁶³

This section relates to buffalo, ghost, monkey ghost, princess's shadow, catfish, dream, imagination, and usual screenplay. The non-human nature in this film can be consistent with the belief of North-eastern people toward ghosts and mysterious myths.⁴⁶⁴ Moreover, they revolve around a religious belief because Huay is a ghost, while the princess's shadow might be the princess's previous incarnation. Justin Chang commented that the film is perhaps a Buddhist mythical story, attempting to capture people's imagination.⁴⁶⁵ In contrast, it can involve a transformation of social status after sexual intercourse between human characters and non-humans. This case refers to Boonsong changing to a monkey ghost (considered a monster) and the princess turning into a catfish. While some critics viewed Uncle Boonmee's film as terrifying and unusual, some other critiques found that the film is not a horror film, although it is composed of many non-human characters. Some spectators may define Thai horror films as composed of frightening narration with

⁴⁶¹ Shawn Levy, "Uncle Boonmee review: mysteries cluster as a farmer nears death," Oregon Live, April 28, 2011, https://www.oregonlive.com/madaboutmovies/2011/04/uncle_boonmee_review_mysteries.html.

⁴⁶² Mike Wayne, *Marxism Goes to the Movies*, (United Kingdom: Taylor and Francis Books, 2020), 121.

⁴⁶³ Shawn Levy, "Uncle Boonmee review: mysteries cluster as a farmer nears death," Oregon Live, April 28, 2011, https://www.oregonlive.com/madaboutmovies/2011/04/uncle_boonmee_review_mysteries.html.

⁴⁶⁴ See Chapter 1 Culture and Influence of Buddhism in Isan

⁴⁶⁵ Justin Chang, "A criticism of Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives from Variety นนวิจารณ์ "ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ" จากวาไรตี้," Facebook, May 22, 2010, <https://www.facebook.com/notes/bioscope-magazine/bth-wicarn-lung-buy-mi-raluk-chati-cak-wa-ri-ti/409455064192>.

haunted and furious ghosts. The genre is commonly produced and presented in the Thai movie industry and other countries.

*“Indeed, horror films have played a significant part in introducing Thai cinema to international audiences, given that in 1999, it was Nonzee Nimibutr’s **Nang Nak** - a retelling of the classic Thai ghost story - that became the first ever Thai film to find a foreign distributor. In 2004, another ghost movie, **Shutter**, became the first Thai film to spawn a Hollywood remake. Ever since then, the horror film has become Thailand’s calling card on international film markets and within South East Asia....”⁴⁶⁶*



Image 53 (left) *Nang Nak* (right) *Shutter*⁴⁶⁷

A critic of Blog Gang found that *Uncle Boonmee* film is not a horror ghost genre,⁴⁶⁸ whereas Mark Adams from Screen Daily characterized the film as a “ghost, spirit

⁴⁶⁶ “Introduction: Thai horror film: International success, history and the avant-garde,” *Horror Studies* 5, no. 2 (2014): 153, doi: io.1386/host.5.2.153_2

⁴⁶⁷ (left) “Nang Nak,” IMDB, October 1, 2022, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0217680/>. (right) “Shutter,” IMDB, October 1, 2022, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0440803/>.

⁴⁶⁸ “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives – When I visited Boonmee at the Cinema ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ - เมื่อข้าพเจ้าเข้าไปเยี่ยม ลุงบุญมีฯ ที่โรงหนัง,” *Blog Gang* (blog), June 27, 2010, <https://www.bloggang.com/mainblog.php?id=aorta&month=27-06-2010&group=14&gblog=221>.

and incarnation”.⁴⁶⁹ However, Tim Robey found it an “old-fashioned horror” genre.⁴⁷⁰ Meanwhile, the film director has consistently highlighted the belief in ghosts or non-human creatures in Thailand by referring to his childhood and experience of ghost tales from Isan. In his interview with Hollywood Reporter, he declared that “the Northeast is arid and dry. It's [sic] the most hard [sic] part of our country in terms of agriculture, so the people are pretty poor. They migrate a lot to work in the big cities like Bangkok. We have a very big cultural influence from Laos and Cambodia, so there are a lot of animist beliefs and tales that I grew up with but that I had never really explored before. In this film, I give an impression of the landscape and the tales.”⁴⁷¹ Moreover, he expressed his ghost belief through a speech at the 2010 Cannes Film Festival for the Palm d'Or granting moment.

*“And also, I would like to thank the spirits and all the ghosts in Thailand, [sic] they made it possible for me to be here.”*⁴⁷²



*Image 54 Apichatpong Addressing at 2010 Cannes*⁴⁷³

⁴⁶⁹ Mark Adams, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives,” Screen Daily, May 21, 2010, <https://www.screendaily.com/uncle-boonmee-who-can-recall-his-past-lives/5014254.article>.

⁴⁷⁰ Tim Robey, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives, review,” Telegraph, November 18, 2010, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/filmreviews/8143932/Uncle-Boonmee-Who-Can-Recall-His-Past-Lives-review.html>.

⁴⁷¹ “Q&A: Apichatpong Weerasethakul His Uncle Boonmee is up for Cannes' Palme d'Or,” The Hollywood Reporter, May 18, 2010, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/business/business-news/qampa-apichatpong-weerasethakul-23765/>.

⁴⁷² Palm d'Or 2010, “Charlotte Gainsbourg gives the Palme d'Or to Apichatpong Weerasethakul - Cannes 2010,” recorded May 23, 2010 in Cannes, Youtube video, 04:20, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CAgn-H_OGjo&t=281s.

⁴⁷³ Palm d'Or 2010, “Charlotte Gainsbourg gives the Palme d'Or to Apichatpong Weerasethakul - Cannes 2010,” recorded May 23, 2010 in Cannes, Youtube video, 04:20, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CAgn-H_OGjo&t=281s.

Apichatpong further expanded in other interviews that he wanted *Uncle Boonmee* film to be a childhood memory since he heard a story of the invisible ghost, the human world, and others. Thus, Apichatpong tended to show ghosts in his films based on a natural basis and film technique because he did not favour advanced effects. Robert Beeson from New Wave Film commented that Apichatpong's film (and his other films) must integrate nature facts and computer technology.⁴⁷⁴ “Ghosts in Thai films are typically taken from well-known folklore. Traditional ghosts (phi) are overwhelmingly female. Their representations in films carry serious overtones in terms of perpetuating stereotypes and reinforcing repressive gender roles for women. Sometimes they are made into sexy ghosts in films.”⁴⁷⁵ In other words, the ghost is basically from everyday life, which can convince the spectator. Besides, the female ghost can better engage the spectator's sensation because this female ghost may express her female object characteristics. Ghost Huay in *Uncle Boonmee* film may offer a realistic impression since she looks similar to other human characters (particularly Boonmee) in the film, and perhaps looks natural for the spectator. Through images and verbal language, she expresses a caring and loving emotion for her husband and son. Even with this, Peter Bradshaw found that this fade-in ghost Huay is entirely unexpected and unimpressive.⁴⁷⁶ On the other hand, the researcher realized that the monkey ghost Boonsong can be natural, though his costume causes an artificial look. Rather than a costume, the monkey ghost is not enchanting for the spectator due to his communication style. His red eyes and monotone voice reveal that he can antagonize other characters and the spectator.

A critique from Film Sick recognized that Apichatpong made this film based on an opposition to aesthetic art by inserting a story of low-cost cartoons, traditional soap operas, and phantom and black magic. He promoted lower-class art, which is

⁴⁷⁴ Robert Beeson, “UNCLE BOONMEE WHO CAN RECALL HIS PAST LIVES (LUNG BOONMEE RALUEK CHAT) ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ a film by Apichatpong Weerasethakul Winner Palme d’Or Cannes Film Festival 2010,” New Wave Films, October 7, 2022, http://www.newwavefilms.co.uk/assets/467/uncle_boonmee_pressbook_.pdf.

⁴⁷⁵ Green, *Buddhism Goes to The Movies: Introduction to Buddhist Thought and Practice*, 129.

⁴⁷⁶ Peter Bradshaw, “Review Avatar,” The Guardian, December 17, 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2009/dec/17/avatar-james-cameron-film-review>.

entertainment at the rural level and is antagonistic to superior art, into a high-position art acceptable to upper-class people.⁴⁷⁷ The critique further found that the ghost Huay in his film is created only to entertain local people. However, it is not connotatively related to politics if general people are not interested in it. This spirited tale, black magic, and Buddhist concept are re-constructed several times.⁴⁷⁸ Chuck Stephen found this a "Buddha-surrealist jungle story" that engages the past and future with the present time.⁴⁷⁹ In this case, Huay can symbolize a local belief based on life after death and spirit. Besides, the ghost might show the film's simplicity and attract more spectators from rural villages. It further combines real and surreal, and the director created this surreal to be authentic by obviously and simply showing it to the spectator. Nai Nang from Pantip addressed that though the film can reflect belief and reality, it cannot convince and excite the spectator, causing the movie to be general and unimpressive.⁴⁸⁰ Perhaps this ghost is not a ghost but an image that Boonmee, Jen, and Tong imagined. As Bradshaw pointed out, the film exceptionally generated the ghost character, "...it hardly feels supernatural at all."⁴⁸¹ On the other hand, the critics criticized the film as a movie-ghostlike, composed of mythical creatures that dead and living characters created as usual and undramatic. They blend strange and ordinary, as Anthony Oliver Scott

⁴⁷⁷ Film Sick, "Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (Apichatpong Weerasethakul/2010/Thai) a transformation of memory to history ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ (อภิชาติพงศ์ วีระเศรษฐกุล/ 2010 / ไทย) การเปลี่ยนความทรงจำให้เป็นประวัติศาสตร์," *Film Sick* (blog), April 15, 2019, <https://filmsick.wordpress.com/2012/01/08/uncleboonme/>.

⁴⁷⁸ Film Sick, "Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (Apichatpong Weerasethakul/2010/Thai) a transformation of memory to history ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ (อภิชาติพงศ์ วีระเศรษฐกุล/ 2010 / ไทย) การเปลี่ยนความทรงจำให้เป็นประวัติศาสตร์," *Film Sick* (blog), April 15, 2019, <https://filmsick.wordpress.com/2012/01/08/uncleboonme/>.

⁴⁷⁹ Chuck Stephens, "Review: Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives," Film Comment, April 15, 2011, <https://www.filmcomment.com/article/uncle-boonmee-who-can-recall-his-past-lives-review/>.

⁴⁸⁰ "Who watched and understood the movie Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (movie review) ใครดูหนังเรื่องลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติแล้วเข้าใจบ้างคะ? (สไปดส์)," Pantip, April 17, 2019, <https://pantip.com/topic/31854178>.

⁴⁸¹ Peter Bradshaw, "Review Avatar," The Guardian, December 17, 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2009/dec/17/avatar-james-cameron-film-review>.

from the New York Times called it Apichatpong's trademark.⁴⁸² Even though Apichatpong could have aimed to present the mystery through ghosts, Richard Brody from the New Yorker considered Huay a famous, friendly Casper.⁴⁸³ She neither scares nor haunts any human; she is generous and compassionate.

Saynapuy Bloggang from Pantip realized a connotative message of politics or the government when Huay pours saline solution from Boonmee's stomach (after a dialysis).⁴⁸⁴ It might mean that welfare can rarely reach local people because they need to nurse themselves. In comparison, ghost Huay cannot contact the government; thus, she must help her husband, for instance. Besides, Huay can symbolize border people who live in nature. Meanwhile, Nai Nang revealed that Huay's gaze at photos of her funeral is impressive because it is privileged that a dead person acknowledged her life incidents after death.⁴⁸⁵ The scene shows that the director is outstanding in producing unanticipated situations for the spectator.



Image 55 Boonmee Shows Photos to His Wife and Son

⁴⁸² Anthony Oliver Scott, "A Farewell to This Life, and All Its Ghosts," The New York Times, March 1, 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/02/movies/02uncle.html>.

⁴⁸³ Richard Brody, "Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Live," The New Yorker, March 2, 2011, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/uncle-boonmee-who-can-recall-his-past-lives>.

⁴⁸⁴ "Who watched and understood the movie Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (movie review) ใครดูหนังเรื่องลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติแล้วเข้าใจบ้างคะ? (สปอยล์)", Pantip, April 17, 2019, <https://pantip.com/topic/31854178>.

⁴⁸⁵ "Who watched and understood the movie Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (movie review) ใครดูหนังเรื่องลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติแล้วเข้าใจบ้างคะ? (สปอยล์)", Pantip, April 17, 2019, <https://pantip.com/topic/31854178>.

Erik Bordeleau argued that “uncle [sic] Boonmee's dinner table scene offers an idiosyncratic take on depth of field (nourished by the opacity of the outside) to invite consideration of its ontological depth.”⁴⁸⁶ The scene lacks clarity and reality basis because the three human characters can talk to a ghost and a monkey ghost, which may establish scepticism among the spectators. Weerasethakul revealed in an interview with Howard Feinstein in *Film Maker Magazine* that he made ghost Huay using a traditional style of a mirror-light technique, which is more expensive than a computer-generated image.⁴⁸⁷ This occurrence might not genuinely surprise the spectator but might discomfort them. We cannot overlook how ghosts and humans can usually discuss without hesitation, fear, and concern. John Frosch discussed that this usual interaction creates amusing conversation, leading to an uncommon, impossible, and unreasonable moment.⁴⁸⁸ Frosch further provides another straightforward example when Huay touches the human body and objects. She intimately provides a hug to Boonmee, helps with the dialysis in the cave, and serenely sees the funeral photos. It can be beyond the truth and reality, making the film a comic-like story.⁴⁸⁹

More importantly, Wesley Morris from *Archive Boston* discussed that the spectator can have difficulty controlling the appearance of ghosts and other natural characters. Nevertheless, the non-humans can be the spectator's instinct and imagination.⁴⁹⁰ In addition, Will Chadwick asserted that the film revolves around

⁴⁸⁶ Bordeleau, Pape, Rose-Antoinette and Szymanski, *Nocturnal Fabulations Ecology, Vitality and Opacity in the Cinema of Apichatpong Weerasethakul*, 60.

⁴⁸⁷ Howard Feinstein, “Past Tense,” *Film Maker Magazine*, Jan 24, 2011, https://filmmakermagazine.com/19141-past-tense/#.Yz_4MnZBy5c.

⁴⁸⁸ Jon Frosch, “Thailand's Weerasethakul casts [sic] late-festival spell with Uncle Boonmee,” *France 24*, May 22, 2010, <https://www.france24.com/en/20100521-thailand-weerasethakul-festival-cannes-uncle-boonmee>.

⁴⁸⁹ Jon Frosch, “Thailand's Weerasethakul casts late-festival spell with Uncle Boonmee,” *France 24*, May 22, 2010, <https://www.france24.com/en/20100521-thailand-weerasethakul-festival-cannes-uncle-boonmee>.

⁴⁹⁰ Wesley Morris, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives 'Uncle' embraces this life — and the others,” *The Boston Globe*, April 6, 2011, http://archive.boston.com/ae/movies/articles/2011/04/06/uncle_embraces_this_life__and_the_others/.

a fantastical world rather than rational facts, also called a dreamlike film.⁴⁹¹ Nonetheless, it is noticeable that Huay maintains her body stably and peacefully as she slowly and calmly moves and speaks, rarely changing body position and expressing gestures. This steady body might notify the spectator of the distinction between human and non-human. Besides, it may present that the afterlife dimension is slower than the current human world, that the ghost may not need to rush. For example, Huay can be independent from all responsibilities and competition in the real world.



*Image 56 Tong's Astonishing Moment*⁴⁹²

⁴⁹¹ Will Chadwick, "Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives Review," We Got This Covered, November 18, 2010, <https://wegotthiscovered.com/movies/uncle-boonmee-who-can-recall-his-past-lives-review/>.

⁴⁹² Jared Mobarak, "REVIEW: อุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ [Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives] [2010]," Jared Mobarak, January 27, 2011, <http://www.jaredmobarak.com/2011/01/27/uncle-boonmee/>.



Image 57 Huay's First Appearance

Another form of non-human creature is the princess's shadow. Even though the shadow that the princess witnesses in the water appears like a human, Film Sick believes that it is the princess's previous life, which she recalls around the water flow. The same critique also stated that the shadow is probably the princess's illusion since she is attached to social status and gender roles.⁴⁹³ The previous life might specify the religious reincarnation belief, while the illusion can refer to the character's desire for beauty. Another critique from the Art website perceived a disconnection between the princess and Uncle Boonmee and found that the princess is only a folk tale within the film.⁴⁹⁴ This critique can further reaffirm the non-human status of the princess's shadow because she is illusory in Boonmee's

⁴⁹³ Film Sick, "Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (Apichatpong Weerasethakul/2010/Thai) a transformation of memory to history ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ (อภิชาติพงศ์ วีระเศรษฐกุล/ 2010 / ไทย) การเปลี่ยนความทรงจำให้เป็นประวัติศาสตร์," *Film Sick* (blog), April 15, 2019, <https://filmsick.wordpress.com/2012/01/08/uncleboonme/>.

⁴⁹⁴ Kallapapruek, "Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives, a soulmate which cannot be apart ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ ' คู่แล้วหิบบ่แล้วบ่คลาดกันดอกร่นอ,'" *Arts*, April 6, 2012, <http://www.arts.su.ac.th/thaicritic/?p=754>.

dream or imagination to cherish the film and comfort the spectator. More importantly, the princess can be an unimportant non-human creature as it is commonly analyzed primarily by Thai spectators. Perhaps non-Thai spectators may need to realize the linkage between the princess and Boonmee as the character's background is not evidence or related to other parts of the film.

Nonetheless, there is another single-appearance character, which the author would like to discuss because we cannot associate the character with Boonmee. Many Thai critics and Film Sick commonly claim that the buffalo or the farmer in the first scene can be one of Boonmee's previous incarnations.⁴⁹⁵ Otherwise, they tend to disregard further information about these characters, perhaps because the buffalo shows up only in the first scene. Therefore, the spectator needs help finding a connection with Boonmee, which they neglect throughout the story. A non-Thai critic from the NPR website interpreted the buffalo (or cow-like) as Boonmee's memory of his past lives, which might be motivated by his weak body and pain.⁴⁹⁶ All critiques are still determining to conclude that the buffalo is Boonmee's former life. However, David Bowie-Sell from the Telegraph summarized that the buffalo could be only a sign of the characters living in the countryside and a forest.⁴⁹⁷ In addition, the first scene needs to guide how the film story will continue. Thus, it is difficult for the spectator to react to the detail of the buffalo.

⁴⁹⁵ Film Sick, "Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (Apichatpong Weerasethakul/2010/Thai) a transformation of memory to history ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ (อภิชาติพงศ์ วีระเศรษฐกุล/2010 / ไทย) การเปลี่ยนความทรงจำให้เป็นประวัติศาสตร์," *Film Sick* (blog), April 15, 2019, <https://filmsick.wordpress.com/2012/01/08/uncleboonme/>.

⁴⁹⁶ Ella Taylor, "Uncle Boonmee: A Quiet Journey Through Past Lives," *NPR*, March 3, 2011, <https://www.npr.org/2011/03/03/134059407/uncle-boonmee-a-quiet-journey-through-past-lives?t=1555096494861>.

⁴⁹⁷ Daisy Bowie-Sell, "Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives: DVD Review," *Telegraph*, March 27, 2011, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/dvd-reviews/8410918/Uncle-Boonmee-Who-Can-Recall-His-Past-Lives-DVD-review.html>.



Image 58 Farmer and Buffalo in a Forest

Apart from engaging ghost belief and life after death in the film, the ghost reference depends on karma and merit-making. “Through Buddhism, this is connected to merit making, which cancels out the bad karma that got the ghosts in a position of suffering in the first place.”⁴⁹⁸ At the dining table, Jen (Huay's sister) asks whatever Huay receives her merit she makes several times. Merit-making intends to commemorate the dead family members or to eradicate immoral deeds that the dead person committed during their lifetime. Meanwhile, Huay accepts that she realizes Jen's praying and is thankful for that. Besides eradicating karma, Jen's merit-making may reveal that she regularly thinks about her sister and always wishes her to be in a blessed place. More apparently, Boonmee's house terrace becomes an assembling place for non-human creatures. Roger Ebert indicated that the meeting of spirits who are Boonmee's family can be the last pleasant moment.⁴⁹⁹ Furthermore, Erik Bordeleau supported that “ghosts (who used to be human)

⁴⁹⁸ Green, *Buddhism Goes to The Movies: Introduction to Buddhist Thought and Practice*, 121-122.

⁴⁹⁹ Roger Ebert, “Death Joins the Conversation,” Roger Ebert, April 14, 2011, <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/uncle-boonmee-who-can-recall-his-past-lives-2011>.

emerge from this zone of capacity where the jungle lies, and they come out into the light. They are made visible, and their memories are depersonalized and made equally accessible to all, provoking a shift in the scene's ontological consistency."⁵⁰⁰



Image 59 Boonmee's Terrace with Non-Human Creatures

Briefly, the ghost Huay, the princess's shadow, and the buffalo may reveal that the film requires further interpretation and reception. "In Buddhism, there is a widespread belief that this life is but one of 31 realms of existence. This scheme, referred to in many Buddhist scriptures, includes immaterial and material realms, realms of happiness and those of suffering."⁵⁰¹ It can refer to the princess who imagines herself or recalls her earlier incarnation. The image she witnesses in the water can slowly happen when she expresses her suffering from royal status and desire for physical beauty. The princess cannot change what she possesses at birth but might flashback or dream about her future beauty. In opposition, the buffalo

⁵⁰⁰ Bordeleau, Pape, Rose-Antoinette and Szymanski, *Nocturnal Fabulations Ecology, Vitality and Opacity in the Cinema of Apichatpong Weerasethakul*, 58.

⁵⁰¹ Green, *Buddhism Goes to The Movies: Introduction to Buddhist Thought and Practice*, 122-123.

running away from his tie is like leaving social constraints.⁵⁰² It might suggest that the buffalo's escape is a relief from grief and a release from attachment.

On the contrary, the film further introduces other non-human amateurs through a transformation. A change from a human into an animal does not appear the first time in *Uncle Boonmee* film. “Most Theravada Buddhists believe in rebirth, be it as humans, animals, deities or ghosts.”⁵⁰³ The Film Sick and Sinnoo Parinyaporn discovered that the rebirth as an animal earlier appeared in a folklore called Pla Boo Thong or Golden Goby fish.⁵⁰⁴ The suffering mother dies and transmigrates herself into the body of fish because she cannot relinquish her daughter, whom a stepmother can harm.⁵⁰⁵ Moreover, Sinnoo declared that Seo Sa Ming, a tiger ghost, is another tale presented in a gothic Thai movie. In this story, the ghost can disguise itself as a tiger, becoming an amulet in certain regions.⁵⁰⁶ On the other hand, the supernatural and non-human-form characters also emerge through news stories. For example, when strange animals appear in the media, people believe they can bring luck in winning the lottery. Some Thai people cannot perceive these animals under a scientific mutation theory but see them as a holy spirit or superstition. In Thai society, a genetic mutation can symbolize serendipity that people rely on rather than aiming at working more diligently.⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰² Green, *Buddhism Goes to The Movies: Introduction to Buddhist Thought and Practice*, 130.

⁵⁰³ Berkwitz and Thompson, *Routledge Handbook of Theravada Buddhism*, 194.

⁵⁰⁴ Film Sick, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (Apichatpong Weerasethakul/2010/Thai) a transformation of memory to history ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ (อภิชาติพงศ์ วีระเศรษฐกุล/ 2010 / ไทย) การเปลี่ยนความทรงจำให้เป็นประวัติศาสตร์,” *Film Sick* (blog), April 15, 2019, <https://filmsick.wordpress.com/2012/01/08/uncleboonme/>.

⁵⁰⁵ Sinnoo Parinyaporn, "Superstitions Regarding Animals: Mutation and Reincarnation in a Thai Context," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 6, no. 11 (November 2016): 169.

⁵⁰⁶ Parinyaporn, "Superstitions Regarding Animals: Mutation and Reincarnation in a Thai Context," 169.

⁵⁰⁷ Parinyaporn, "Superstitions Regarding Animals: Mutation and Reincarnation in a Thai Context," 169.



Image 60 *Pla Boo Tong* (left) and *Seo Sa Ming* (right) in Thai Soap Opera⁵⁰⁸

The appearance of Huay and Boonsong can be Boonmee's un-erased memory because they are significant for him. Although Boonsong and Huay are non-human, they are dissimilar due to a change in their human structure. Erik Bordeleau debated that “Boonsong and Huay are different when they come out of the jungle, having been transformed by the unrepresentable horrors that took place within it.”⁵⁰⁹ The following paragraphs discuss non-human characters and transformation, relating to a monkey ghost (Wesley Morris from Archive Boston and other critiques call ghost monkey or melancholic ghost),⁵¹⁰ and a catfish. The two cases of transformation occur after sexual intercourse. Significantly, the princesses' and Boonsongs' transformations can relate to social status and gender roles.

Wesley Morris commented, “Apichatpong might believe in spiritual transmigration....”⁵¹¹ On the contrary, Robert Beeson indicated that Apichatpong

⁵⁰⁸ (left) IPM, “ปลาบู๋ทอง EP.1 (Pla Boo Tong EP.1),” posted October 6, 2016 in Thailand, Youtube video, 00:00, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uTp-rYB5TVY>. (right) “เสื่อสมิง Seo Sa ming,” Channel 7 Thailand, October 1, 2022, <https://www.ch7.com/drama/16334>.

⁵⁰⁹ Bordeleau, Pape, Rose-Antoinette and Szymanski, *Nocturnal Fabulations Ecology, Vitality and Opacity in the Cinema of Apichatpong Weerasethakul*, 62.

⁵¹⁰ Wesley Morris, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives 'Uncle' embraces this life — and the others,” *The Boston Globe*, April 6, 2011, http://archive.boston.com/ae/movies/articles/2011/04/06/uncle_embraces_this_life__and_the_others/.

⁵¹¹ Wesley Morris, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives 'Uncle' embraces this life — and the others,” *The Boston Globe*, April 6, 2011, http://archive.boston.com/ae/movies/articles/2011/04/06/uncle_embraces_this_life__and_the_others/.

usually reaffirmed his belief in the transmigration of the soul between humans, plants, animals, and ghosts. His Uncle Boonmee film demonstrates a story of humans and animals and ignores their differences.⁵¹² Boonsong gets lost in a forest and later transforms into a monkey ghost after marrying a monkey wife. At the same time, the princess's suffering for love and beauty turns her into a catfish after underwater sexual intercourse. We can analyze these two cases with two different ideas: firstly, whether Boonsong and the princess lose their gender identity and adopt new social status, and latterly, whether sexual intercourse influences transformation and change of gender roles. Likewise, Boonsong may desire a pairing though he is in a forest, whereas the princess is a sexual object for the catfish.



Image 61 Monkey Ghost's First Appearance

⁵¹² Robert Beeson, "UNCLE BOONMEE WHO CAN RECALL HIS PAST LIVES (LUNG BOONMEE RALUEK CHAT) ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ a film by Apichatpong Weerasethakul Winner Palme d'Or Cannes Film Festival 2010," New Wave Films, October 7, 2022, http://www.newwavefilms.co.uk/assets/467/uncle_boonmee_pressbook_.pdf.

*Philip French from the Guardian asserted that “the son is now a strange simian creature with bright-red, glowing eyes, a cross between a yeti and Bigfoot with a striking resemblance to Chewbacca in Star Wars.”*⁵¹³ A passion for photography causes Boonsong to enter a forest with a camera he previously received from his father and never return home. He later marries a female monkey and then becomes a monkey ghost. Boonsong becomes a husband and a father in a monkey family. Mark Adams proposes that the ordinariness of a cheap gorilla costume can offer an amusing time for the spectator.⁵¹⁴ . The red-eyed monkey arrives at a dining table, addressing Boonmee's sickness and indicating his human identification. He points out that after observing around the house through his camera lens, he was lost and could not have discovered the way home. A look into the lens can define his new ideology and motivation for his partner, while his obsession with the camera and photos can inform that he does not belong to the current society. On the other hand, Buddhism and Thai-Lao (Isan) culture illustrate that a man marrying and moving into a woman's family can ensure the farmer's career and household continuity and stability because the woman can inherit land from her parents.⁵¹⁵ It might mean that Boonsong marries a female monkey family and transforms into another soul because a female monkey must succeed in the family's beliefs and culture. A critique from Arts also found that even though a couple was not born in the same family species, intermarriage between races must be permitted to maintain a connection of fate.⁵¹⁶ Meanwhile, Mulvey further supported that the polarity of masculine and feminine dominates sexual life.⁵¹⁷ Marriage should always be permitted since a man's and woman's pairing is necessary. In this case, Boonsong's

⁵¹³ Philip French, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives – Review,” *The Guardian*, November 21, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2010/nov/21/uncle-boonmee-recall-past-lives>.

⁵¹⁴ Mark Adams, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives,” *Screen Daily*, May 21, 2010, <https://www.screendaily.com/uncle-boonmee-who-can-recall-his-past-lives/5014254.article>.

⁵¹⁵ Tosakul, “Isan Peasants, Thai Nation and Modernization,” 91.

⁵¹⁶ Kallapapruek, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives, a soulmate which cannot be apart ลูกบุญมีระลึกชาติ’ คู่แล้วสิบ่แคล้วบ่กลาคั่นคอกน้อ,” *Arts*, April 6, 2012, <http://www.arts.su.ac.th/thaicritic/?p=754>.

⁵¹⁷ Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, 19.

soulmate can force him into a transformation. The distinction in race and family species cannot separate them but instead reunites them and transforms one of them.

On the other hand, a monkey ghost can be compared to the Communist Party as they were old-fashioned people residing in the jungle. Nong Jung from Pantip compared Boonsong's passion for photography to a fascination with the Communist ideology, leading him to participate in the group.⁵¹⁸ Before receiving a Pentax camera, Boonsong can be an ordinary person who relies on the same ideology as the majority. Nonetheless, after having a camera, his point of view changes. Photography can be an art understood only by a particular group of people. At the same time, the camera can symbolize the Communist ideology, and the monkey tribe (including Boonsong's wife) can represent the Communist Party, which lives distant from the central civilization and contradicts the state. On the contrary, *Terk Movie* suggested that Boonsong's transformation into a monkey ghost can further refer to a return to a human origin, which is a primitive ape.⁵¹⁹ Therefore, this monkey ghost character can be the human antiquated ancestor.



Image 62 Soldier versus Monkey Ghost or the Government versus the Communist

⁵¹⁸ “Analyze-Criticize Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives Vol. 1 destroying the invisible wall to return (movie review) วิเคราะห์-วิจารณ์ <<< *** ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ *** Vol. 1: การทำลายกำแพงที่มองไม่เห็น เพื่อกลับ >>> (เปิดเผยเนื้อหาสำคัญ),” Pantip, April 17, 2019, <http://topicstock.pantip.com/chalermthai/topicstock/2010/08/A9589007/A9589007.html>.

⁵¹⁹ “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives is Difficult to Understand ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ ใจว่าหนังดูยากจริงๆ????” *Terk Movie* (blog), March 10, 2011, http://terkmovie.blogspot.com/2011/04/blog-post_10.html.

However, the monkey ghost represents the border residents, who are mysterious and scary. Teepisit Mahaneeranon from Film Club Thailand wrote that these people live in the periphery area, isolated from development and well-being, making them obsolete.⁵²⁰ For example, these monkey ghosts and border people can be distinctive, horrifying, and uneducated. The critique further interpreted a re-appearance of a group of monkey ghosts in a forest and cave: one is Boonsong, and the rest is his family (wife and children). These red-eyed monkey ghosts participate in a farewell for Boonmee's final moments.



Image 63 Monkey Ghost in the Cave



Image 64 A Monkey Family⁵²¹

⁵²⁰ Teepisit Mahaneeranon, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives: honey, an invisibility during a day and a meal...sweetness and bitterness of the forgotten lives ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ : ‘น้ำผึ้ง’ ต้องหนกลางวงพาข้าวแดง ... ความหวานอมสับสนขมขื่นของชีวิตที่ถูกลืม,” Flim Club Thailand, May 29, 2020, <https://filmclubthailand.com/articles/uncle-boonmee-food/>.

⁵²¹ Jared Mobarak, “REVIEW: ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ [Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives] [2010],” Jared Mobarak, January 27, 2011, <http://www.jaredmobarak.com/2011/01/27/uncle-boonmee/>.

Both Thai and non-Thai critics reviewed the case of Boonsong's transformation into a red-eyed monkey ghost. However, their findings have an insignificant difference since Thai critiques were more concerned about the change in ideology and political message; otherwise, the non-Thai critiques discovered that Boonsong's transformation is a return to the primitive origin of humans. Nonetheless, Thai and non-Thai critiques indicated that the monkey costume can be found in the market because it looks unreal and low-cost.

Mulvey pointed out that “woman’s desire is subjected to her image as bearer of the bleeding wound, she can exist only in relation to castration and cannot transcend it”.⁵²² The princess can receive respect and worship from others because of her princess status. In other words, an absence of the princess's status can lead her to an absence of admiration and recognition. Thus, this trauma stimulates her desire for physical beauty.

Later, when the catfish addresses her, she may be released from an inferiority perception. The catfish possibly increases the value of her gender role and gender identity. Justin Chang discussed that the transformation process takes a few seconds. However, it may be the most-talked-about image of the film as it creates a distressing impact on the spectator and leads them into a fantasy and unanticipated world.⁵²³ A critique from the Guardian debated that “*for he who cannot let himself be carried away with this experimental and abstruse experience ... there is still a long love scene – intense and surprising – between a princess and a catfish.*”⁵²⁴

⁵²² Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, 14.

⁵²³ Justin Chang, “A criticism of Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives from Variety” บทวิจารณ์ "ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ" จากวาไรตี้, Facebook, May 22, 2010, <https://www.facebook.com/notes/bioscope-magazine/bth-wicarn-lung-buy-mi-raluk-chati-cak-wa-ri-ti/409455064192>.

⁵²⁴ Lizzy Davies, “Cannes winner Uncle Boonmee panned by French film critics,” *The Guardian*, September 1, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2010/sep/01/palme-dor-winner-uncle-boonmee>.



Image 65 The Princess and The Transformation Process

The princess and the enslaved person can create a romantic scene, but the princess and the catfish might construct a horrific moment. Film Sick considered that the princess undergoes an illusion of a pretty woman; she finally decides to leave jewellery as if she leaves her princess status and then becomes a catfish.⁵²⁵ The princess might lose her subconsciousness after the enslaved person departs and enters a profound mourning. The Blog Gang defined that the sexual intercourse between the princess and the catfish can destroy a class between humans and animals and establish equality between humans and non-humans, i.e., all living creatures are similar.⁵²⁶ Though it is unexpected, the spectator can disregard the fact that humans and fish cannot engage in sexual activity.

⁵²⁵ Film Sick, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (Apichatpong Weerasethakul/2010/Thai) a transformation of memory to history ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ (อภิชาติพงศ์ วีระเศรษฐกุล/ 2010 / ไทย) การเปลี่ยนความทรงจำให้เป็นประวัติศาสตร์,” *Film Sick* (blog), April 15, 2019, <https://filmsick.wordpress.com/2012/01/08/uncleboonme/>.

⁵²⁶ “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives – When I visited Boonmee at the Cinema ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ - เมื่อข้าพเจ้าไปเยี่ยม ลุงบุญมีฯ ที่โรงหนัง,” *Blog Gang* (blog), June 27, 2010, <https://www.bloggang.com/mainblog.php?id=aorta&month=27-06-2010&group=14&gblog=221>.

Simon Crook from Empire Online introduced that “...a princess enjoys a thundering orgasm with a catfish.”⁵²⁷ A critique from Arts compared The Princess and the Catfish to a movie called *Max, mon amour* (1986) by Nagisa Ōshima because the main character's wife falls in love with a chimpanzee.⁵²⁸ Therefore, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* is not the first film to offer a love story of diverse races. Furthermore, the film *King Kong* (2005) also communicates a love angle between a female character and King Kong once they spend time together in the jungle.⁵²⁹ Although the sexual intercourse between the princess and the catfish is instant and can be irrational, crossed-race intercourse must occur, as previously mentioned. Consequently, the critique from the Arts pointed out that this affair should hardly frighten the spectator because it may be designed and permitted by the Cupid god.⁵³⁰

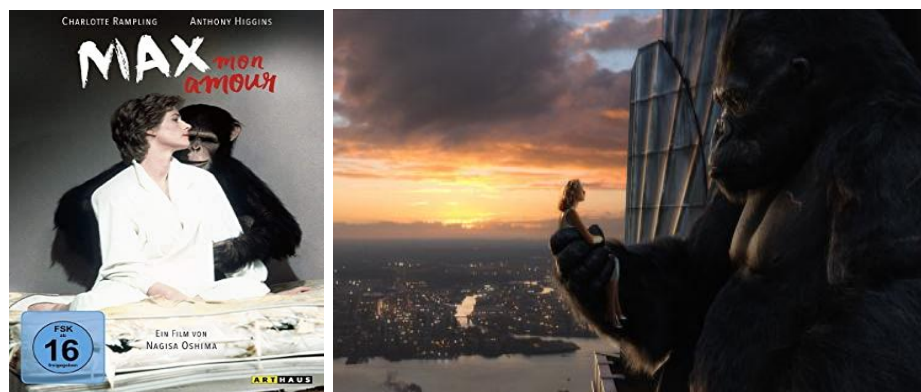


Image 66 *Max mon amour* (left) and *King Kong* (right)⁵³¹

⁵²⁷ Simon Crook, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives Review,” Empire Online, November 19, 2010, <https://www.empireonline.com/movies/uncle-boonmee-can-recall-past-lives/review/>.

⁵²⁸ Kallapapruek, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives, a soulmate which cannot be apart ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ’ คู่แล้วหีบแต่แล้วบ่คลาดกันดอถน้อ,” Arts, April 6, 2012, <http://www.arts.su.ac.th/thaicritic/?p=754>.

⁵²⁹ Author

⁵³⁰ Kallapapruek, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives, a soulmate which cannot be apart ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ’ คู่แล้วหีบแต่แล้วบ่คลาดกันดอถน้อ,” Arts, April 6, 2012, <http://www.arts.su.ac.th/thaicritic/?p=754>.

⁵³¹ (left) “Max mon amour,” Amazon, October 1, 2022, <https://www.amazon.de/Max-mon-amour-Charlotte-Rampling/dp/B016QEZQO8>. (right) “King Kong,” IMDB, October 1, 2022, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0360717/>.

“Women displayed as sexual object is the leit-motif of erotic spectacle: from pins up to strip-tease, from Ziegfeld to Busby Berkeley, she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire.”⁵³² The film image shows that the catfish attempts to relax, i.e., to seduce the princess. It means that the princess possesses the female-object look and female identity; she might generate the catfish's desire since the beginning of the scene when she constructs an imagination of a beautiful woman and physical intimacy with the enslaved person. Even though the sexual affair is an astonishing and unexpected incident, it might release the princess from her pressure. Besides, it can be the princess's liberty that she desires.⁵³³ Oppositely, the affair might detach the spectator from reality; it is, however, unimaginable and unacceptable for some spectators.

On the other hand, the princess's transformation can be a 'costume drama', in which a film happens in the past era, and the character wears typical clothes of the ancient period.⁵³⁴ The princess transforms after she undresses, while the catfish does not obtain any cover. An absence of clothes can further refer to an archaic era. Besides, the princess and the enslaved person possess the clothes from antique days. On the contrary, the costume code may indicate that the princess's transformation could have occurred only in the past. Even with this, the transformation may not be fundamental. It is just a folk tale because some critiques and a critique from Arts analyzed the princess story as a tale of the film.⁵³⁵ In other words, the transformation can only be Boonmee's dream or imagination during his coma. Arts again compared images in Boonmee's dream to a French movie, *La jetée* (1962), which presents non-dynamic photos telling a post-nuclear war story by employing an artificial sound to provoke the spectator's emotion. Meanwhile, *Uncle Boonmee* film stimulates the spectator's attention with the surrealist intercourse between the

⁵³² Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, 19.

⁵³³ Philipa Gates and Lisa Funnell, *The Reel Asian Exchange; Transnational Asian Identities in Pan Pacific Cinemas*, (England: Routledge Advances in Film Studies, 2010), 186.

⁵³⁴ Gates and Funnell, *The Reel Asian Exchange; Transnational Asian Identities in Pan Pacific Cinemas*, 186.

⁵³⁵ Kallapapruek, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives, a soulmate which cannot be apart ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ” คู่แค้นสิบแปดตัวปลาดก้นดอกน้อ,” Arts, April 6, 2012, <http://www.arts.su.ac.th/thaicritic/?p=754>.

princess and the catfish and then the enormous water movement.⁵³⁶ Moreover, Natalie Bohler is concerned that “*La jetée* lets [sic] its viewers revisit alleged memories of the post-World War III future: it features images of a bombed Paris and of cruel government functionaries, captured in grainy black-and-white still images.”⁵³⁷

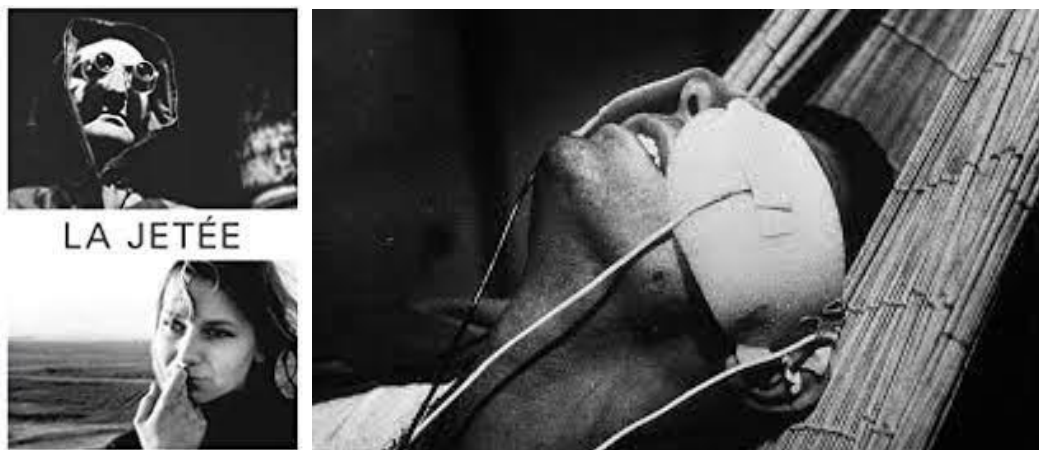


Image 67 *La jetée*, a French Science-Fiction, Black and White Film⁵³⁸

Additional features of nature that Terk Movie found are Boonmee’s dead place and Jai’s arrival in Thailand.⁵³⁹ The cave where Boonmee is dead signifies another rebound to a human origin, i.e., he becomes as simple as when he was born. It may represent the woman's womb, where the baby is pre-nurtured and born. Nonetheless, Mark Terry observed the meaning of the cave differently. "...the cave is a metaphor or, perhaps more precisely, a metonym of the cinema."⁵⁴⁰ On the other

⁵³⁶ Kallapapruek, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives, a soulmate which cannot be apart ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ” คู่แล้วสิบ่ แลแล้วบ่คลาดกันดอกน้อ,” Arts, April 6, 2012, <http://www.arts.su.ac.th/thaicritic/?p=754>.

⁵³⁷ Bohler, “Haunted Time, Still Photography and Cinema as Memory: The Dream Sequence in Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives”, 76.

⁵³⁸ “La jétée,” IMDB, October 7, 2022, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0056119/>.

⁵³⁹ “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives is Difficult to Understand ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ ใจว่าหนังดูยากจริงๆ????” Terk Movie, March 10, 2011, http://terkmovie.blogspot.com/2011/04/blog-post_10.html.

⁵⁴⁰ More discussion in 5.3 Class Struggle in the Film.

hand, Jai's illegal arrival from Laos indicates an unattachment to the law. Therefore, we can consider him as 'nature'. The regulations and civilization humans construct do not influence Jai, but he is ordinary. More precisely, the law is non-nature, while Jai's liberty is human's original consciousness (nature). Navagan supported that crossing the border can be an ethical and unethical action owing to the laws.⁵⁴¹

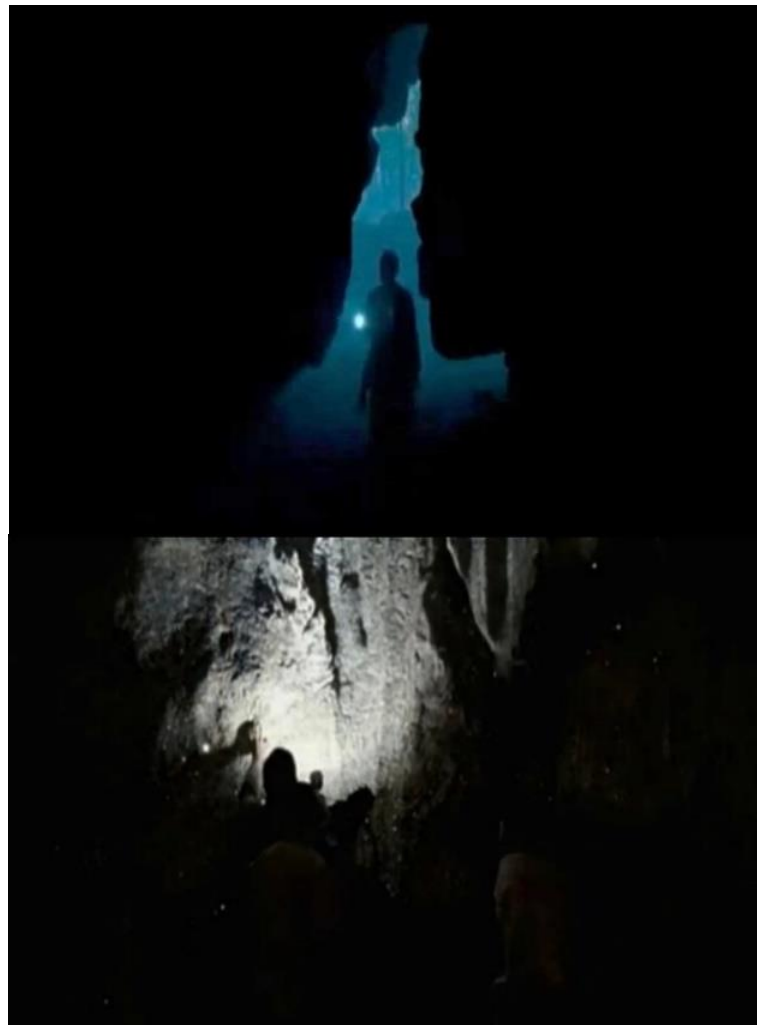


Image 68 The Group Enters the Cave and Walks through the Pathway

⁵⁴¹ “Analyze-Criticize Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives Vol. 1 destroying the invisible wall to return (movie review) วิเคราะห์-วิจารณ์ <<< *** ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ *** Vol. 1: การทำลายกำแพงที่มองไม่เห็น เพื่อกลับ >>> (เปิดเผยเนื้อหาสำคัญ),” Pantip, April 17, 2019, <http://topicstock.pantip.com/chalermthai/topicstock/2010/08/A9589007/A9589007.html>.

Respectively, religion can function as a psychological force or a mental influence, i.e., the Buddhist can be affected by religious practice or beliefs such as superstition or the existence of ghosts (non-human creatures in this world). Humans can later develop the practices and beliefs to become Thai society and cultural symbols. The superstition can appear in diverse patterns rather than deadly human creatures, e.g., animals, plants, and rocks. Besides, Thai Buddhist's belief in reincarnation may further reveal that ghosts can transform or re-appear in the form of animals or other living things.⁵⁴² Most of the time, Isan confronts drought, which causes obstacles for the residents to work on their land. The spirit belief from Laos PDR and Cambodia further affects the region. Therefore, The locals live their routine by respecting mystical ghosts and magic. Although the film shows ghosts and other non-human characters, Shawn Levy from Oregon Live simplified it so that the spectator can be astonished by the ghost and Boonmee's dream. However, they still engage with the story.⁵⁴³ Meanwhile, Boehler affirmed this opinion that the haunt or visit of the spirits can emerge through different channels, including dreams, images, and narration. "In current cinema and theory, ghosts increasingly appear not solely as literal beings, but in a symbolic, figurative way."⁵⁴⁴ The spectator can be bewildered because the director must chronologically present film events and connect the scenes. Besides, it might raise whether the ghosts are from Boonmee's dream or imagination. The first scene begins with a farmer and a buffalo without a background and further narration. Meanwhile, ghost Huay and monkey Boonsong can be Boonmee's dreams or memories. In contrast, the princess's story of transformation can be only Boonmee's imagination or dream when he is terminally ill. Boehler further asserted that "as the dream sequence blurs the temporal planes of the film's storyline, it imbues it with a haunted temporality. The film's images

⁵⁴² Parinyaporn, "Superstitions Regarding Animals: Mutation and Reincarnation in a Thai Context," 172.

⁵⁴³ Shawn Levy, "Uncle Boonmee review: mysteries cluster as a farmer nears death," Oregon Live, April 28, 2011, https://www.oregonlive.com/madaboutmovies/2011/04/uncle_boonmee_review_mysteries.html.

⁵⁴⁴ Boehler, "Haunted Time, Still Photography and Cinema as Memory: The Dream Sequence in Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives", 69.

and narration become ghostlike, transgressing temporal linearity.”⁵⁴⁵ In the end, Apichatpong did not explain the meaning of ghost, monkey ghost, buffalo, and catfish. Therefore, it is a problem that these non-human characters are whether Boonmee's past lives or Boonmee's haunted memory based on his past wounds and current health condition.

In opposition, Wesley Morris from Archive Boston commented that Boonsong's transformation into a monkey ghost could transform social status because Boonsong is an ordinary citizen. In contrast, the melancholic monkey is perhaps a symbol of the Communist ideology.⁵⁴⁶ The monkey can lead Boonsong to a new ideology that he needs to abandon his former role and social status. The sexual intercourse process can further explain the transformation of social status and gender roles. “Sexual instincts and identification processes have a meaning within the symbolic order which articulates desire. Desire, born with language, allows the possibility of transcending the instinctual and the imaginary.”⁵⁴⁷ Human desire is perhaps a born-with trait that maintains some symbolic meaning, while sexual activity can be a profound thought for all human beings. Therefore, after sexual intercourse, the human might change their body owing to their desire and imagination, for example. Boonsong and the princess are possible representations of human beings, but the monkey ghost and the catfish may result from sexual intercourse. Sexual intercourse can cause a change of gender role, but gender identity. Boonsong's role changes from a son to a father and a husband of the family. Nevertheless, his new gender role defines his gender identity as 'male'. On the other hand, the princess's role changes from a princess (and perhaps a daughter) to a wife, but this new gender role still defines her identity as a 'female'. In addition, intercourse can modify social status and power relations. As a son, Boonsong

⁵⁴⁵ Bohler, “Haunted Time, Still Photography and Cinema as Memory: The Dream Sequence in Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives”, 77.

⁵⁴⁶ Wesley Morris, “ Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives 'Uncle' embraces this life — and the others,” *The Boston Globe*, April 6, 2011, http://archive.boston.com/ae/movies/articles/2011/04/06/uncle_embraces_this_life__and_the_others/.

⁵⁴⁷ Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, 18.

perhaps carries a power relation as a follower of his father. Nevertheless, Boonsong, as a husband and father, may obtain a family relationship as a leader for his wife and children. His social status changes from a human who is the farm owner's son to a non-human in a monkey tribe. The princess might obtain power relations with people in her family and the public because she can actively influence general citizens. Otherwise, in a family, she can be dominated by the king and the queen (or the father and the mother) and her older siblings. This power relation is diverse after her status turns from a human to a non-human amateur, i.e., she might acquire an inferior relation as a passive wife under the catfish's rule, as discussed by Arts.⁵⁴⁸ Kevin Jagernauth from Indie Wire informed us that Boonsong's and the princess's transformation can be the most unusual diversion. However, the director aims to create a poetic and comic ambience throughout the story.⁵⁴⁹ Frances Morgan from Electric Sheep Magazines indicated that the film is not only an immature imagination tale but also unusual and non-native.⁵⁵⁰ These mysterious and non-native features further reaffirm the 'nature' characteristic of the film. In contrast, Kevin Jagernauth opposed that the nature in this film can be "art in arthouse", which may offer sarcastic cinematography of ghosts.⁵⁵¹ Though the ghost is natural and subtle, consuming it can be problematic.

⁵⁴⁸ Kallapapruek, "Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives, a soulmate which cannot be apart อุณ บุญมี ระลึกชาติ ' คู่แล้วหิบบ่แล้วบ่คลาดกันดอกลั่นอ,'" Arts, April 6, 2012, <http://www.arts.su.ac.th/thaicritic/?p=754>.

⁵⁴⁹ Kevin Jagernauth, "Review: Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives Is A Very Difficult, But Deeply Rewarding Film Review," IndieWire, March 2, 2011, <https://www.indiewire.com/2011/03/review-uncle-boonmee-who-can-recall-his-past-lives-is-a-very-difficult-but-deeply-rewarding-film-120005/>.

⁵⁵⁰ Frances Morgan, "UNCLE BOONMEE WHO CAN RECALL HIS PAST LIVES," *Electric Sheep Magazine*, November 13, 2010 <http://www.electricsheepmagazine.co.uk/reviews/2010/11/13/uncle-boonmee-who-can-recall-his-past-lives/>.

⁵⁵¹ Kevin Jagernauth, "Review: Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives Is A Very Difficult, But Deeply Rewarding Film Review," IndieWire, March 2, 2011, <https://www.indiewire.com/2011/03/review-uncle-boonmee-who-can-recall-his-past-lives-is-a-very-difficult-but-deeply-rewarding-film-120005/>.

Both Thai and non-Thai critiques received the exact meaning of ghost Huay. She is an unexpected creature, appearing in a more surreal form, but she presents a natural sensation and provides a perception of nature. However, the human characters in the film and the spectator do not find this ghost character terrifying, exciting, or mysterious. The spirit can be a colourless and desperate child story. As previously indicated, the woman is a sexual object who can motivate male desire. In this case, Thai critiques found that the catfish observes the princess and identifies her as a woman according to her gender role and social status, constituting her as an object to be looked at. Respectively, the catfish's behaviour and sexual desire toward the princess can structure him as a male subject who possesses the look for the princess. In other words, he can actively generate communication and persuade the princess. Therefore, the princess is a female object, a target for the male fish.

In summary, Thai and non-Thai spectators obtain an 'impossible objective' point of view. They all discovered that ghost Huay is not terrifying and mysterious, whereas Boonsong can be incredibly comical because of the low-cost mask. Although the ghosts are unanticipated creatures, they can be nature. On the other hand, Thai critiques analyzed Boonsong's transformation as a conversion of the political ideology and a return to human origin and the princess's transformation as a revision of her class and social status. Meanwhile, non-Thai critics interpreted Boonsong's transformation as a return to human origin, whereas the princess's transformation as Boonmee's imagination (dream) and Apichatpong's tale to make the film more vibrant and entertaining. "It's [sic] about going back to the roots of things, what we have in our bodies, the primitive energy," said Apichatpong to Philip French in *The Guardian*.⁵⁵² The sexual intercourse between different classes and species must then be permitted to maintain the world beings. The 'impossible objective' displays that the spectator perhaps possesses 'total seeing' because they referred to the characters, the shooting technique, and the camera placement when interpreting the film message. Besides, the spectator might hold 'metadiscursive knowing' as they review the apparent image of the film and the message that they

⁵⁵² Philip French, "Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives – Review," *The Guardian*, November 21, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2010/nov/21/uncle-boonmee-recall-past-lives>.

can precisely detect from the character, narration, and location. Then, the spectator can offer an absolute believing because they all could have analyzed the implicit definition of the ghost, the monkey ghost, and the transformation. Thai spectators may have explained the meaning according to their beliefs and religious background, while non-Thai spectators could have interpreted the scenes based on their experience and knowledge. Nevertheless, the spectator's reception of nature (ghost, monkey ghost, and transformation) in the film can be discovered entirely in the Pantip discussion board and personal websites, online journals (professional columnists), and two scholarly papers. Therefore, the spectator from these three major diverse categories also introduces an 'impossible objective'. It demonstrates that the spectators focused on the film's ghost, mystery, and non-ordinariness, though the film restrictedly shows some images and messages on the screen. However, the film must thoroughly discuss the catfish (referred to in a few comments) because the fish is related only to the princess. The catfish is not genuinely connected to Boonmee, even though one critique insignificantly remarked that the fish might be Boonmee's incarnation. In this regard, the 'nature' for Thai and non-Thai professional, private, and academic spectators commonly discovered that nature is perhaps a forest, past lives, memory, spirit (haunted visual), and surrealism (supernatural transformation). It means all creatures from the forest and mysterious folk can be 'nature'.

The succeeding section refers to the division or class, explicitly and implicitly illustrated in the film. Several film critiques read class in *Uncle Boonmee* film through different perspectives such as politics and society. The investigation found that every mode of production is also a culture, and every struggle between classes is always between cultural modalities.⁵⁵³

5.3 Class Struggle in The Film

Casetti defined the 'geography of the spectator' as it relates to seeing, knowing, and believing, and objective, impossible objective, interpellation, and subjective points

⁵⁵³ Hall, "Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms," 63.

of view. These features can define the position or result of the spectator's reception and display the spectator's gazing act.⁵⁵⁴ While Casetti classified the spectator by their reception, Marx divided people according to gender and labour relations. Though Marx failed to explain why ideology has been conceptualized in scientific terms, he significantly marked that society has a background of class struggle.⁵⁵⁵ Furthermore, Marx found that class is not only a relation of production but also acquires ideological and political aspects.⁵⁵⁶ Marx's work can be scientific because people live by ideology, and their practice is perhaps ideological.⁵⁵⁷ However, ideology is not only elitist but science over the masses in scientific socialism.⁵⁵⁸ It means that ideology not only revolves around the superior class but can also be knowledge that people from diverse classes obtain. "Classes, are, for Marx, groups of men and women with a similar position in a social division of labour, with a common relation to the means of production."⁵⁵⁹ In other words, classes are the social division of male and female labour based on their production method.⁵⁶⁰ The class struggle can then conflict within society as people desire to possess the most effective materials or anticipated products.⁵⁶¹ Additionally, the high self-expression of each class can cause controversy between the lower and middle classes.⁵⁶² Marx defined the working class as a proletariat who may not possess the consumption process but may dominate production. For example, the banker in the capital society's primary class cannot manage the consumption but can control the production base (or workers).⁵⁶³ "The middle class have been hugely important to capitalism because they have typically been portrayed in the mass media, as well as within political discourses, as the norm to which people can and should aspire

⁵⁵⁴ See also the Table of the Geography of the Spectator in Chapter 2, 2.2 Inside Casetti, Inside the Spectatorship.

⁵⁵⁵ Andrew, "Marx's Theory of Classes: Science and Ideology," 458.

⁵⁵⁶ Andrew, "Marx's Theory of Classes: Science and Ideology," 461.

⁵⁵⁷ Andrew, "Marx's Theory of Classes: Science and Ideology," 455, 457.

⁵⁵⁸ Andrew, "Marx's Theory of Classes: Science and Ideology," 457.

⁵⁵⁹ Andrew, "Marx's Theory of Classes: Science and Ideology," 458.

⁵⁶⁰ Andrew, "Marx's Theory of Classes: Science and Ideology," 458.

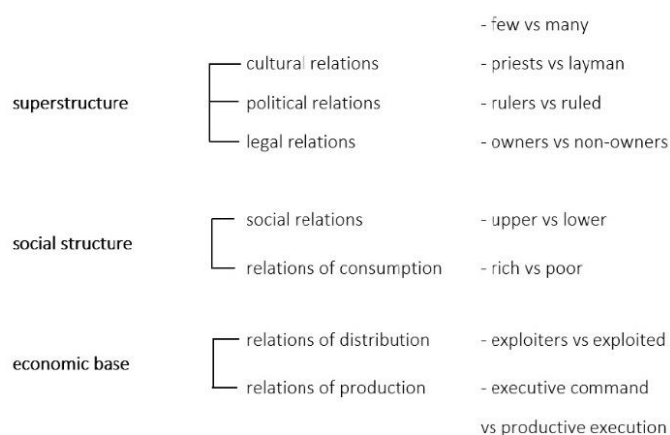
⁵⁶¹ Andrew, "Marx's Theory of Classes: Science and Ideology," 461.

⁵⁶² Andrew, "Marx's Theory of Classes: Science and Ideology," 464.

⁵⁶³ Wayne, *Marxism Goes to The Movies*, 4-5.

to.”⁵⁶⁴ More apparently, Marx specified the term 'mode of production' to formulate the progress of human history, which began in a primitive hunting society, developed in the slave-based community of the antique time, proceeded through the aristocrat and labourer, and then approached the current capitalist production civilization. The social and economic relations have been improved and substituted by the evolution of capital wage labour.⁵⁶⁵

The model below can signify Marx's class analysis and show how he comprehended the social relations that constituted a mode of production. His model relies on three structures: economic, social, and superstructure. The model can further encourage the author's understanding of the film and clarify an emerging class within the film. As a result, relations of production, distribution, consumption, social relations, legal relations, political relations, and cultural relations can systematically illustrate the class struggle in the film. The film can show these relations in each character through character, dynamic image, verbal conversation, and narration. Moreover, it explains how each spectator might have different points of view according to their class and relations. They might possess objective, impossible objective, interpellation, or subjective point of view. The expanded detail of the model is as follows.



*Diagram 2 Class Relations Diagram*⁵⁶⁶

⁵⁶⁴ Wayne, *Marxism Goes to The Movies*, 9.

⁵⁶⁵ Wayne, *Marxism Goes to The Movies*, 78.

⁵⁶⁶ Andrew, "Marx's Theory of Classes: Science and Ideology," 458.

Marx grouped classes into 'three levels': economic base, social structure, and superstructure. The 'economic base' is divided into relations of production and relations of distribution that can be an executive command (factory CEO) and productive execution (factory workers), exploiters (providers, entrepreneurs) and exploited (workers under oppression). On the other hand, the 'social structure' is social relations and relations of consumption. In this case, it can be the relations between upper and lower groups or rich and poor. It means that wealthier people may rely on a higher power of purchase and consumption.

However, the 'superstructure' refers to cultural, political, and legal relations. Cultural relations can be cultural facets and practices, while political relations might concern the nation and residents, and legal relations may concern law and citizens. More concrete examples of this superstructure are few and many (majority and minority), priests and laypeople (religious practitioners and followers), rulers and ruled (government and people), and owners and non-owners (employers and employees). Marx additionally described class usage as "class relations are not exclusively economic but pervade the legal, political, and cultural (or ideological) realm as well, although the class structure is more determinate or sharply defined on the economic level. Class relations arise from determinate relations of production, the characterizing form corresponding to the mode of production."⁵⁶⁷ *Uncle Boonmee* film implicitly exposes class struggle through image and language. The film critic may generally classify the film characters into various categories, such as Thai and non-Thai characters, farm employer and employee, the ruling government and general citizen, humans and non-humans, and the princess and the enslaved *person*. At the economic base, *Uncle Boonmee* film may demonstrate relations of production between commander (Boonmee) and his workers. In the social structure, the film might present social relations between upper Thais and lower non-Thais who previously came across the Thai-Lao river- border, metropolitan citizens and local Isans, and urbanization and obsolescence (border people such as monkeys and ghosts). At the superstructure, it can disclose cultural relations of human and non-human characters (ghost and monkey ghost: few and many) and Thai and Lao ethnicity. Besides, it perhaps reveals political relations

⁵⁶⁷ Andrew, "Marx's Theory of Classes: Science and Ideology," 459.

between rulers (the Thai government) and the ruled (general citizens and the communists). Finally, the film can further display legal relations between the owner (Boonmee as an employer) and non-owners (Boonmee's employees). The author will apply the three structures discovered by different film critiques and expand its details in the succeeding paragraphs.

When Marxism appears in the movies, it always includes three prominent keywords: societal structures, economic power, and class struggle.⁵⁶⁸ More precisely, the Marxist concept in the film includes labour, class and hierarchy, object and material, political uncertainty, or provocative expression. Many films demonstrate, e.g., societal layers, the relation in economic structure (entrepreneur-employee production mode), and class inequality. A 1927 film by Fritz Lang called *Metropolis* emphasizes the mode of production and presents the difference between the owner class and the blue-collar worker.⁵⁶⁹ The film is produced in the Weimar period but is located in the future dystopia. "The product of the workers' labor in Metropolis is to power the city above and to prevent the destruction of their underground city by flooding. It is a calculated move by the masters to make the continued existence of the proletariat dependent upon their enslavement to the machine, which in turn provided the power to allow the aboveground dwellers to live in luxury."⁵⁷⁰

The film further demonstrates that the workers attempt to defeat the separation in society because they must converge with the master class at the heart. Though the master controls the city, they must rely on the production under the city. Meanwhile, the workers are obliged to continue working to impede damage. Accordingly, the ruler and the ruled classes are interdependent.

⁵⁶⁸ Marry K. Leigh and Kevin K. Durand, *Marxism and the Movies: Critical Essay on Class Struggles in the Cinema*, (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publisher, 2013), 6.

⁵⁶⁹ Leigh and Durand, *Marxism and the Movies: Critical Essay on Class Struggles in the Cinema*, 17-18.

⁵⁷⁰ Leigh and Durand, *Marxism and the Movies: Critical Essay on Class Struggles in the Cinema*, 20.



Image 69 *Metropolis*⁵⁷¹

The film *Avatar* from 2009 refers to the future scenery in 2154 on Pandora, a moon in the Alpha Centauri star system.⁵⁷² Pandora is a magnificent planet with various animal species, such as blue lemurs, a hammerhead-type primitive elephant, flying dragons, and illuminating butterflies.⁵⁷³ Numerous organisms can accentuate the class distinction between each animal and between animals and human visitors. Nonetheless, humans are not strong enough to survive the natural environment and breathe the air. Then, they learn to adopt oxygen masks and protect themselves with technologically advanced armed forces.⁵⁷⁴ “Marx argued that the imbalance of power is the seed of conflict in any society, and this would be true in Pandora.”⁵⁷⁵ In brief, the power relations and inequality happen throughout the film. The power is attained by the humans who possess technology and military weapons, for instance, whereas inequality can be learned through humans and animals and between animals. Respectively, the films of the 1960s may reveal the status quo

⁵⁷¹ (left) “Metropolis,” IMDB, March 7, 2023, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0017136/>. (right) Simon Abrams, “Review: Metropolis Lang’s film is a monumental achievement about monumental egos,” Slant Magazine, May 8, 2010, <https://www.slantmagazine.com/film/metropolis/>.

⁵⁷² Leigh and Durand, *Marxism and the Movies: Critical Essay on Class Struggles in the Cinema*, 147.

⁵⁷³ Leigh and Durand, *Marxism and the Movies: Critical Essay on Class Struggles in the Cinema*, 147.

⁵⁷⁴ Leigh and Durand, *Marxism and the Movies: Critical Essay on Class Struggles in the Cinema*, 148.

⁵⁷⁵ Leigh and Durand, *Marxism and the Movies: Critical Essay on Class Struggles in the Cinema*, 151.

and the Communist Party.⁵⁷⁶ In this case, it can function as a time machine for memory and a medium for political expression. “Film has been part of a general media penetration of foreign markets around the world, which, because of the links between media and broader goods and trends, has been labelled a form of cultural imperialism.”⁵⁷⁷ It means the film distributes cultural components intending to infiltrate the international market and conquer the world.



Image 70 Avatar⁵⁷⁸

In *Uncle Boonmee* film, Jen and Huay symbolize the disparity in society though they are sisters. Jen signifies urbanization, whereas Huay represents obsolescence. Jonykeano from Pantip declared that Jen is more compatible with city life, while Huay can be outdated and rural. Furthermore, the countryside people are more familiar with Huay, i.e., her name is more heard around the neighbourhood than Jen's. Nevertheless, Jen might want to reside in the city and neglect her origin.⁵⁷⁹ Moreover, Jen's reference to sunblock is a distressing irony that a person from a metropolitan should not live on a farm. On the contrary, the irony might demonstrate that if Jen aims to live in a local Isan village, she must forget

⁵⁷⁶ Eva Mazierska and Lars Kristensen, *Marx at the Movies: Revisiting History, Theory and Practice*, (United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014),149.

⁵⁷⁷ Wayne, *Marxism Goes to The Movies*, 86.

⁵⁷⁸ (left) “Avatar,” IMDB, March 7, 2023, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0499549/>. (right) Peter Bradshaw, “Review Avatar,” *The Guardian*, December 17, 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2009/dec/17/avatar-james-cameron-film-review>.

⁵⁷⁹ “Who watched and understood the movie Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (movie review) ใครดูหนังเรื่องลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติแล้วเข้าใจบ้างคะ? (สปอยล์)”, Pantip, April 17, 2019, <https://pantip.com/topic/31854178>.

Bangkok's convenience. Additionally, Huay emphasizes obsolescence because she is not alive and familiar with the current world, i.e., she needs to recognize the time being of the human world.

Rather than human names, the film rhetorically constructed the city name as an analogy. Jonykeano also found Boonmee's comparison of 'Kungtepmahanakhon' (Bangkok) to 'Krungtepmahanarok' because he does not find Krungtep (an abbreviation of Bangkok) as a pleasant place to live.⁵⁸⁰ He changes 'mahanakhon,' which means excellent city, to 'mahanarok,' referring to profound purgatory. In other words, 'Nakhon' and 'Narok' oppose the idea that the former implicitly defines heaven or civilization, but the latter defines purgatory. Therefore, Boonmee tentatively criticizes Bangkok, saying that although the city is remarkably developed, it is miserable. Besides, we can observe another comparison through the film image. Doisoong from Pantip discovered that presenting forest (or nature) and costume can further differentiate city and border people.⁵⁸¹ For example, Jen is probably more concerned about her clothes and skin, while Boonmee is concerned about his farming career. It shows that Jen is Bangkok, but Boonmee is Isan. Furthermore, Jen stereotypes the butterfly and night insect as a characteristic of rural houses.



Image 71 Jen and Huay

⁵⁸⁰ “Who watched and understood the movie Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (movie review) ใครดูหนังเรื่องลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติแล้วเข้าใจบ้างคะ? (สปอยล์)”, Pantip, April 17, 2019, <https://pantip.com/topic/31854178>.

⁵⁸¹ “Who watched and understood the movie Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (movie review) ใครดูหนังเรื่องลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติแล้วเข้าใจบ้างคะ? (สปอยล์)”, Pantip, April 17, 2019, <https://pantip.com/topic/31854178>.

Mark Terry introduced that Weerasethakul suggests an aggressive invasion of secular modernity in the film against traditional religious beliefs and practices.⁵⁸² It may reveal that Weerasethakul offers an antagonistic message to Thai society's conservative beliefs and traditions. Secular modernity may refer to a city-style person who does not solidly connect religious belief to their routine life and their background to their current lifestyle, such as a Bangkokian Jen. She does not speak the Isan dialect with Tong, but she reviews karma with a different definition. It may mean that Jen may not believe in traditional concepts and be attached to her origin. Jen guides Boonmee to focus on his intention when discussing the previous murdering act. Boonmee believes that he deserves the pain and disease because he murdered some Communists as well as insects. However, Jen does not find his action immoral because Boonmee killed people for the nation. These two opposite opinions can feature the cultural relations of the superstructure, which are urban experience (self-concerned Jen) and rural idea (ingenuous Boonmee).

Mark Terry further found the monkey ghost as a minority and an image of memories or a being from the past. Thus, the monkey ghost is a primitive character who participates in the modern world with eccentric outfits and verbal expressions. Furthermore, it can represent people from the past whom the military attempted to eliminate. The soldiers arrest the monkey ghost because they may classify him as a Communist who can be hostile to national stability.⁵⁸³ Around the film's end, Boonmee illustrates his dream through non-dynamic images of a group of soldiers and a monkey ghost. He narrates that the government must undoubtedly eradicate

⁵⁸² Mark Terry, "The Worlds Viewed: An Examination of Apichatpong Weerasethakul's Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives through a Cavellian Lens of Film-Philosophy (page 4-5)," *Academia*, October 4, 2022, https://www.academia.edu/34856859/The_Worlds_Viewed_An_Examination_of_Apichatpong_Weerasethakuls_Uncle_Boonmee_Who_Can_Recall_His_Past_Lives_through_a_Cavellian_Lens_of_Film_Philosophy.

⁵⁸³ Mark Terry, "The Worlds Viewed: An Examination of Apichatpong Weerasethakul's Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives through a Cavellian Lens of Film-Philosophy (page 4-5)," *Academia*, October 4, 2022, https://www.academia.edu/34856859/The_Worlds_Viewed_An_Examination_of_Apichatpong_Weerasethakuls_Uncle_Boonmee_Who_Can_Recall_His_Past_Lives_through_a_Cavellian_Lens_of_Film_Philosophy.

the people who do not declare their identity (perhaps who cannot clearly show that they are pro-government). The elimination can refer to the punishment against the anti-government or the Communist people. This strategy may be an analogy that the government attempts to force rural people (i.e., border people) to leave the city because they cannot adjust to change and improvement. More essentially, the film presentation and the spectator's reception reveal that the monkey ghost is incompatible with modern times and the human dimension. The primitive nature, original religion, and advanced human world may bring about a secular world of materiality.⁵⁸⁴ The world is divided into two parts, including ancient and modern. Besides, the combination of civilization and archaic creatures in the film may display the film's unattachment of traditional religious beliefs. However, it may generate new orders and customs for people. Teepisit Mahaneeranon from Film Club Thailand further agreed that the ghosts and spirits from *Uncle Boonmee* film are based on Buddhist belief. In contrast, the monkey ghost can further represent border people (lower class and poorer) who may be communists.⁵⁸⁵

Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives locates in Isan and refers to a village around Nabua. The film presents the Isan dialect, traditional house, career, and religious beliefs. Furthermore, it refers to Laotian refugees who formerly entered Thailand by the Mekong River and Boonmee's house and farm near the Thai-Lao border. "Isaan has been a historically obstreperous place. Isaan was the site of several anti-state rebellions," wrote Lawrence Chua.⁵⁸⁶ Some Isan people are thoroughly disturbed by the memoirs that they formerly participated in the anti-

⁵⁸⁴ Mark Terry, "The Worlds Viewed: An Examination of Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* through a Cavellian Lens of Film-Philosophy (page 4-5)," *Academia*, October 4, 2022, https://www.academia.edu/34856859/The_Worlds_Viewed_An_Examination_of_Apichatpong_Weerasethakuls_Uncle_Boonmee_Who_Can_Recall_His_Past_Lives_through_a_Cavellian_Lens_of_Film_Philosophy.

⁵⁸⁵ Teepisit Mahaneeranon, "Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives: honey, an invisibility during a day and a meal...sweetness and bitterness of the forgotten lives สูงบุญมีระลึกชาติ : 'น้ำผึ้ง' ล่องหนกลางวงพาข้าวแดง ... ความหวานอมส้มปนขมขื่นของชีวิตที่ถูกลืม," *Film Club Thailand*, May 29, 2020, <https://filmclubthailand.com/articles/uncle-boonmee-food/>.

⁵⁸⁶ Chua, "Apichatpong Weerasethakul," 40.

government uprising and endeavoured to demolish the superior state regime (other people allegedly accuse the Isan people of being Communists). Adam Szymanski addressed in *Nocturnal Fabulations* that the film story could originally derive from “affective-historical fact that the region's purging is still felt by the widows and descendants of the disappeared communists, despite the reigning royalist regime's attempts to silence and censor this history in the name of national unity.”⁵⁸⁷ It is implicitly noted in the film that the regional habitants are traumatized because the government accused their ancestors of being communists. This trauma does not emerge as a presentation of events but a simulation through the characters, e.g., the Communist and a monster monkey. Monkey ghost Boonsong symbolizes the Communist who is unusual and discrete from the general population. Nong Jung wrote in *Pantip* that the comparison could further create massive emotional suffering among the locals.⁵⁸⁸ Even though the Thai government has undertaken some actions to abandon the past and reintegrate the nation, local Isans are still intensively outraged by the historical incidents. While some villagers intend to disregard those former days, Boonmee is the contrary because he remembers and reminds himself of previous performances.



Image 72 Majority and Minority

⁵⁸⁷ Bordeleau, Pape, Rose-Antoinette and Szymanski, *Nocturnal Fabulations Ecology, Vitality and Opacity in the Cinema of Apichatpong Weerasethakul*, 48.

⁵⁸⁸ “Who watched and understood the movie Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (movie review) ใครดูหนังเรื่องลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติแล้วเข้าใจบ้างคะ? (สปอยล์)”, *Pantip*, April 17, 2019, <https://pantip.com/topic/31854178>.

Respectively, the non-human characters are at the boundary, and the government overlooks their existence. “The voices of the poor that cannot be incorporated into the triumphant narrative of the modern, and the *non-human* beings at the margins of capitalism that do not fit squarely within the time and space of the nation-state”, stated Lawrence Chua.⁵⁸⁹ This critique found that the poor people's points of view will not be reviewed by the government or included in the country's modernization. More precisely, the non-human amateurs need to be more appropriate to the current Thai society, which is advanced and perhaps motivated by capitalism. Therefore, the centrality and the innovation coerce them to be distant.

In opposition, Tong conveys various messages concerning his social roles. On one hand, Tong reveals the development of the current society that may depend on advanced knowledge. On the other hand, Monk Tong illustrates the past, which relies on mystery and silence. Tong may be the modernity, perhaps non-nature, while Monk Tong represents the history that might symbolize nature. Moreover, an ordinary Tong can represent an unattachment between religion and modernity. Meanwhile, Monk Tong depicts a religious belief in ghosts, spirits, and rural life. Mark Terry observed that “through Tong, we see there are two forces at odds with each other - the spiritual and the secular – each one defined by enchantment: the enchanted world of the spiritual and the pastoral, the dis-enchanted world of the modern and the urban, and finally, the re-enchanted world of artificial nature, flashing lights and electronics.”⁵⁹⁰ In this case, the enchantment can refer to ordinary Tong who recognizes the existence of spirit, peace, and countryside. The dis-enchanted world may be Monk Tong, disconnected from civilization and modernity because he must follow religious rules. Nonetheless, the re-enchanted world can define the re-transformation of a monk to a normal Tong because he is

⁵⁸⁹ Chua, “Apichatpong Weerasethakul,” 41.

⁵⁹⁰ Mark Terry, “The Worlds Viewed: An Examination of Apichatpong Weerasethakul's Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives through a Cavellian Lens of Film-Philosophy (page 3),” *Academia*, October 4, 2022, https://www.academia.edu/34856859/The_Worlds_Viewed_An_Examination_of_Apichatpong_Weerasethakuls_Uncle_Boonmee_Who_Can_Recall_His_Past_Lives_through_a_Cavellian_Lens_of_Film_Philosophy.

re-fascinated with materials and desires. Monk Tong is, however, committed to human beings and desires food and shower; thus, he must return to an ordinary status. Besides, the artificial nature may refer to human-made objects that lead to convenience in human life, such as restaurants and hotels in the scene.



Image 73 Ordinary Tong, Monk Tong, and Ordinary Tong

Ed Gonzalez from Slant Magazine indicated that the film may function as a gate to reunite the living and the dead.⁵⁹¹ Meanwhile, Scott Tobias from Film AV Club reaffirmed that the film lessens the boundaries between humanity, nature, life, and the afterlife (human world and non-human dimension). In this respect, humanity may describe the reality bases, whereas nature can be environmental-constructed creatures such as visible appearances and unsubstantial souls (Huay and monkey ghost).⁵⁹² The dissimilarity between the two realms is reduced at the dining table when the humans show hospitality to the non-human characters. They question Huay and Monkey Boonsong about well-being and food. These greetings are standard and expected in Thai culture. Boonmee offers a glass of water to Huay as

⁵⁹¹ Ed Gonzalez, "Review: Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives," Slant Magazine, September 22, 2010, <https://www.slantmagazine.com/film/uncle-boonmee-who-can-recall-his-past-lives/>.

⁵⁹² Scott Tobias, "Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives," Film AV Club, March 3, 2011, <https://film.avclub.com/uncle-boonmee-who-can-recall-his-past-lives-1798167514>.

if she can carry it and flashbacks his concern for Boonsong, while Tong returns to sit by Huay and offers food to Boonsong, and Jen speaks naturally to her sister and nephew. However, Tobias concurrently contradicts himself by pointing out that *Uncle Boonmee* film can also strengthen the separating line between the material world and the spirit one.⁵⁹³ The film emphasizes that recent society engages with modernity and human beings. In contrast, the ancient or afterlife world revolves around natural and supernatural presence, which can be primitive myths, spirits, ghosts and mystical beliefs. The border becomes more apparent than in earlier scenes at Boonmee's dining table when humans and ghosts discuss their time and world. Huay cannot specify the time in the current world, while Boonsong needs help understanding the current principle. He continues speaking about his monkey family and forest, and his eyes cannot adjust to intense lights. The monkey ghost's unfamiliarity with house lights may inform us that he is not habitual to the modern world. The forest does not obtain electricity; thus, it can hurt Boonsong's vision if he returns to city life. His monkey body further declares that he is from the natural world, where the living amateur appears in another form. Besides, Huay is surprised when she sees the photos of her funeral, which may reaffirm that she is a spirit. Nainang remarked in Pantip that this scene is magnificently impressive because it can infrequently be found in the film.⁵⁹⁴ Nevertheless, the film diminishes the territory again when Boonmee, Huay, Jen, and Tong travel through the forest to the cave; they can be a cooperative family. Furthermore, the walk through the forest at night might clarify that Huay is perhaps frightened of daily light. Mark Terry simplified the border of time and territory of the world in *Uncle Boonmee* film that “through Weerasethakul’s hybridization of these characters, combining two different worlds in time and space of human/animal (Monkey Ghost) and living/dead (Huay, Boonsong) that mirrors the Cavellian transcendental relocation from one world (the cinema) to another world (the world viewed on

⁵⁹³ Scott Tobias, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives,” Film AV Club, March 3, 2011, <https://film.avclub.com/uncle-boonmee-who-can-recall-his-past-lives-1798167514>.

⁵⁹⁴ “Who watched and understood the movie Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (movie review) ใครดูหนังเรื่องลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติแล้วเข้าใจบ้างคะ? (สปอยล์)”, Pantip, April 17, 2019, <https://pantip.com/topic/31854178>.

screen)".⁵⁹⁵ It means that the film director integrated the current-world organisms and afterlife souls. Fauzi Naiem Mohammed and his colleagues additionally examined that the film artistically appeals to the lives of ordinary people through the supernatural method. It is a converging point of beauty and poetry, which further engages a perception of the other world rather than a singular human world.⁵⁹⁶ Terry, Mohammed and his colleagues might briefly show that the film presents the parallel worlds between normality and the metaphysical.



Image 74 Non-Human Characters

A critique from Sarakadee Lite analyzed that the film explicitly refers to ghosts, spirits, and reincarnation but implicitly presents class relations to reflect society.⁵⁹⁷ The dining table scene with the human and non-human characters illustrates the cultural relations between a few (two ghost characters) and many (three human characters). It further presents the social relation of class between upper and lower. The human characters can be superior, while the ghost of Huay and the monkey

⁵⁹⁵ Mark Terry, "The Worlds Viewed: An Examination of Apichatpong Weerasethakul's Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives through a Cavellian Lens of Film-Philosophy (page 7)," *Academia*, October 4, 2022, https://www.academia.edu/34856859/The_Worlds_Viewed_An_Examination_of_Apichatpong_Weerasethakuls_Uncle_Boonmee_Who_Can_Recall_His_Past_Lives_through_a_Cavellian_Lens_of_Film_Philosophy.

⁵⁹⁶ Mohamed, Ishak and Rahamad, "Apichatpong Weerasethakul's Uncle Boonmee and Heidegger's Phenomenology of Art," 10-11.

⁵⁹⁷ "10 Years Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives, from unknown movie to the Palm d'Or award winner 10 ปี ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ จากหนังเล็กๆ สู่รางวัลปาล์มทองคำ," *Sarakadee Lite*, September 7, 2022, <https://www.sarakadeelite.com/lite/10-years-uncle-boonmee/>.

ghost are inferior. In addition, the film subtly defines Boonmee as an owner of the house, while the guests are non-owners. In contrast, the scene when Monk Tong meets Jen and Rung in a private hotel room signifies another form of cultural relations. It discloses a relationship between a Buddhist monk and a layman. Furthermore, the scene where the princess is in a sedan can stress the social relations between the rich and poor and the upper and lower classes. The princess is wealthy and belongs to an upper elite class, whereas the people carrying the sedan are in a lower slave class.



Image 75 Buddhist Monk and Laymen



Image 76 The Princess and The Enslaved Person

Jonykeano further suggested that the monkey ghost can be a minority in society because he lives in the forest and carries a dissimilar ideology to normal humans. Perhaps the majority in Thai society finds the monkey tribe or monkey as monstrous, unusual, and incompatible with traditional customs and national culture, for instance. In addition, Nai Nang from Pantip reviewed that Boonsong's interest in photography is as common as Weerasethakul's enthusiasm for art. Numerous people do not appreciate art and photography, making Boonsong and Weerasethakul to become a minority.⁵⁹⁸ After becoming the monkey ghost, Boonsong is unrelated to society and the modern world. His monkey body entails diverse opinions, ways of living, and beliefs. Meanwhile, Weerasethakul may have proposed personal beliefs in the film, which can be antagonistic to the current ideology of the country.⁵⁹⁹



Image 77 Boonsong's Obsession for Photography

The film presents a hierarchy of human and non-human (nature) creatures and a clash between the living and the afterlife worlds, and it expresses a 'freedom' of passion and transformation. Doisoong from Pantip supported this freedom by stating that humans and animals in the film establish a vague boundary of hierarchy

⁵⁹⁸ “Who watched and understood the movie Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (movie review) ใครดูหนังเรื่องลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติแล้วเข้าใจบ้างคะ? (สปอยล์)”, Pantip, April 17, 2019, <https://pantip.com/topic/31854178>.

⁵⁹⁹ See Chapter 4 What is the Politics in the Film: The State Ideology and the Film Spectatorship?

and class.⁶⁰⁰ The princess is perhaps convinced and pleased by the fish, while the fish may expect to receive a reward from her. The withdrawal of jewellery and clothes from her body symbolizes her entering an independent world by abandoning her royal status and social role. Later, when she allows a sexual engagement with the catfish, she may be liberated from human attachment and social hierarchy. Sexual intercourse after verbal interaction can destroy the class between humans and animals and offer liberty to everyone. Besides, Navagan asserted that the princess is an ordinary woman after taking off her clothes and jewellery. Terk Movie website supported that intercourse between the princess and the catfish leads the princess to regular status after the transformation.⁶⁰¹ She may finally realize that her pleasure is not owed to her family and social status but can instead depend on a disconnection from the current human world. The princess and the catfish further draw out political relations (superstructure) and social relations (social structure). The political relations reveal that the princess is a ruler while the catfish is a ruled supervisee before the transformation. However, the social relations indicate that the princess is in the upper class, whereas the catfish is in the lower class. On the other hand, a relationship between the princess and the enslaved person can also signify political and social relations. In this case, the enslaved person is in a similar hierarchy as the catfish; he is ruled (under the princess's demand) and in a lower position. Briefly, the film removes the human-made wall by returning the characters to their original nature and detaching them from value, tradition, custom, and law, for instance.⁶⁰²

⁶⁰⁰ “Who watched and understood the movie Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (movie review) ใครดูหนังเรื่องลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติแล้วเข้าใจบ้างคะ? (สปอยล์)”, Pantip, April 17, 2019, <https://pantip.com/topic/31854178>.

⁶⁰¹ “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives is Difficult to Understand ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ โอ้ว หนังดูยากจริงๆ????” Terk Movie, March 10, 2011, http://terkmovie.blogspot.com/2011/04/blog-post_10.html.

⁶⁰² “Analyze-Criticize Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives Vol. 1 destroying the invisible wall to return (movie review) วิเคราะห์-วิจารณ์ <<< *** ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ *** Vol. 1: การทำลายกำแพงที่มองไม่เห็น เพื่อกลับมา >>> (เปิดเผยเนื้อหาสำคัญ)”, Pantip, April 17, 2019, <http://topicstock.pantip.com/chalermthai/topicstock/2010/08/A9589007/A9589007.html>.

Navagan from Pantip also addressed that Apichatpong usually includes the meaning of class and inequality in the film through Jen's legs and the ending music. The presentation of the parallel world and comparison can be a trademark of the film director.⁶⁰³ Jen presents unequal legs throughout the film narration. Otherwise, she can walk and do routine business like other people. Although the inconsistent legs cannot specify her life barrier, it might show that Thai society possesses hierarchy and inequality. Moreover, one regular leg and one problematic leg might reveal that the government may not offer adequate health security to local citizens. In addition, Navagan from Pantip criticized the song 'Kluoi Kwam Soong' or 'Fear of Height' at the end-credit as it refers to inequality in society.⁶⁰⁴ The music describes a man passionate about a higher-class woman but anxious to participate in a superior class. Therefore, he asks her to move to a lower class. Apichatpong may include a song regarding his personal belief in inequality and inequity in Thailand.



Image 78 Jen's Inequal Legs

⁶⁰³ “Analyze-Criticize Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives Vol. 1 destroying the invisible wall to return (movie review) วิเคราะห์-วิจารณ์ <<< *** ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ *** Vol. 1: การทำลายกำแพงที่มองไม่เห็น เพื่อกลับ >>> (เปิดเผยเนื้อหาสำคัญ),” Pantip, April 17, 2019, <http://topicstock.pantip.com/chalermthai/topicstock/2010/08/A9589007/A9589007.html>.

⁶⁰⁴ “Analyze-Criticize Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives Vol. 1 destroying the invisible wall to return (movie review) วิเคราะห์-วิจารณ์ <<< *** ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ *** Vol. 1: การทำลายกำแพงที่มองไม่เห็น เพื่อกลับ >>> (เปิดเผยเนื้อหาสำคัญ),” Pantip, April 17, 2019, <http://topicstock.pantip.com/chalermthai/topicstock/2010/08/A9589007/A9589007.html>.

The 'economic base, social structure, and superstructure' are also portrayed through the politics of health. The film represents that social and medical welfare can rarely reach Northeastern people, i.e., the locals can have problematic access to the hospital and public health system. Noah Viernes shows that 'care' is one of many prominent words in the film. "For Uncle Boonmee, he continues, is a memory of those who live far away."⁶⁰⁵ He returns home from the hospital with support from his employee, who is also his driver and nurse for kidney dialysis. The film presents that Boonmee lives significantly away from the hospital and must care for himself. It is coherent with former research that government welfare, such as education and administration, is belatedly derived in local Isan areas. The region is economically and socially relinquished.⁶⁰⁶ Apichatpong's films are beyond a simple prediction because the hospital and fundamental well-being might be between hierarchical and political meanings. He clearly illustrates in several films that the primary health care system for border people (or rural residents) means 'self-care'. The government perhaps provides welfare to people according to the living area and a political ideology, for instance.⁶⁰⁷



Image 79 Boonmee's Self-Care by An Employee

The cave may function as an interdimensional channel, taking a person to a new world. After entering the cave, Boonmee is dead and probably reincarnates in the future. Mark Terry compared the cave to the cinema in which the spectator enters the darkness and accepts new knowledge. "We enter a darkened space intending to

⁶⁰⁵ Viernes, "The Politics of Health in the Films of Apichatpong Weerasethakul," 23.

⁶⁰⁶ See Chapter 1, 1.1 Thailand's Largest Region: What has the Region Encountered?

⁶⁰⁷ Viernes, "The Politics of Health in the Films of Apichatpong Weerasethakul," 14.

leave our present world (death) to enter a new world (re-birth, reincarnation) on the screen each time we go to the cinema. Boonmee's cave is an interdimensional way station for souls to enter and to leave this world.”⁶⁰⁸ On one hand, the cave is the theatre itself because they are commonly gloomy and mysterious. On the other hand, the cave functions as a station to transform the soul, i.e., a person enters the cave with one body and soul, exits the cave and arrives in another incarnation with another body and soul. When they exit the theatre, they may obtain a different belief, equivalent to perceiving a new point of view.⁶⁰⁹ Briefly, critiques from newspapers, discussion boards, private blogs, and academic areas commonly found two different divisions in the film. The first division is realism, which refers to the modern world, whereas the second division defines an imaginative or non-human world that can be nature, magic and mystery. Despite direct and indirect representation of class, David Jenkins from Time Out discovered that *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, destroys the relation of class. “The film demolishes the boundaries between life and death, man and beast, and pain and happiness.”⁶¹⁰ As earlier mentioned, the film ignores the unfeasibility of crossing the border between life and death, humans and monsters, and trauma and pleasure. It connotatively shows that people from different classes can combine. They can exchange verbal communication, collaboratively participate in certain activities, discuss their memory and prediction, and share their experience. In sum, Apichatpong connects the extraordinary to the ordinary, i.e., he relates unusual

⁶⁰⁸ Mark Terry, “The Worlds Viewed: An Examination of Apichatpong Weerasethakul's Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives through a Cavellian Lens of Film-Philosophy (page 13),” *Academia*, October 4, 2022, https://www.academia.edu/34856859/The_Worlds_Viewed_An_Examination_of_Apichatpong_Weerasethakuls_Uncle_Boonmee_Who_Can_Recall_His_Past_Lives_through_a_Cavellian_Lens_of_Film_Philosophy.

⁶⁰⁹ Mark Terry, “The Worlds Viewed: An Examination of Apichatpong Weerasethakul's Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives through a Cavellian Lens of Film-Philosophy (page 13),” *Academia*, October 4, 2022, https://www.academia.edu/34856859/The_Worlds_Viewed_An_Examination_of_Apichatpong_Weerasethakuls_Uncle_Boonmee_Who_Can_Recall_His_Past_Lives_through_a_Cavellian_Lens_of_Film_Philosophy.

⁶¹⁰ David Jenkins, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives,” *Time Out*, November 16, 2010, <https://www.timeout.com/movies/uncle-boonmee-who-can-recall-his-past-lives>.

situations to familiar people and life events by making the story normal.⁶¹¹ The spectator learns the unexpected events without noticing that they are not regular because the director constructed them to be natural and ordinary. He employed unknown actors, dialect language, regular behaviour, and actual location. Additionally, Apichatpong produced the film as an archive of his childhood memory. Moreover, the film's end specified the sickle and hammer sign on the soil, which can signify 'class'. The sickle refers to the peasantry, and the hammer refers to the industrial workers.⁶¹² These two signs are in two distinct classes: the peasantry is lower class, while the industrial worker can be higher. In the economic base, the peasantry is a productive execution while the industrial worker may be an executive command. In social structure, the peasantry can be a lower poor class, whereas the industrial worker might represent the upper rich group. Moreover, in the superstructure, the peasantry can refer to the ruled people and the industrial worker symbolizes the ruler.



Image 80 A Group of Young Men (Conscripts without Uniform)



Image 81 Sickle and Hammer

⁶¹¹ Viernes, "The Politics of Health in the Films of Apichatpong Weerasethakul," 3.

⁶¹² Owen Hatherley, "Has the communist hammer and sickle had its day?" *The Guardian*, February 12, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/feb/12/hammer-and-sickle-french-communist-party>.

In conclusion, the spectator analyzed this class struggle in numerous aspects. Critiques from newspapers, online websites, and academic articles commonly show that the film symbolizes a two-sided basis through human versus ghost, future versus past, memory versus present, dream-like versus imagination, Bangkok versus Isan, city versus rural, Thai people versus Lao people, the government versus the Communist, rich versus poor, hospital versus self-care, living world versus afterlife world, and human versus animal. Furthermore, anti-state rebellions can be opposite to the modern world or the nation-state. The film divides the citizens into two discrete classes: one supports the state, and another participates in the anti-government regimes. On the other hand, non-human characters in the film are poor and antagonistic. Non-Thai spectators analyzed class by focusing on the politics of health of the characters who live in a distant region. The healthcare welfare cannot genuinely support border people. Besides, they discovered the representation of the other world and singular world: modern city versus obsolete village and rich versus poor. Meanwhile, the ghost and the monkey ghost are found unordinary. In this regard, non-Thai spectators might possess the 'interpellation' point of view with partial seeing as they rely on their visual reception. On the other hand, they probably carry 'discursive knowing' because there is a relation between the film director (addressor) and the spectator (addressee). Most non-Thai spectators are familiar with Apichatpong's movies. Thus, they have realized the film's background, definition, and relation between Apichatpong's work and personal life. Then, they can obtain a relative believing since the message and image presented in the film can convince them. They profoundly criticized facts, human and non-human characters, and other satirizing structures. On the contrary, Thai spectators primarily interpreted class based on ghosts, religious belief, and inequality through the film narration, analogy, and characters. The message about class may derive from an inequality of two legs, a disparity between the princess versus the enslaved person and the catfish, a contradiction between Boonmee and his employees, and discrimination between a monk and an ordinary woman. Therefore, they perhaps encompass a 'subjective' point of view with limited seeing because they examined the message and image according to the character's opinion. Nevertheless, they may suggest intradiegetic knowing based on what the characters discuss and encounter in the film or remember and expect. Besides, they can acquire a transitory believing because the non-famous characters might honestly

illustrate the role of ordinariness and poverty. More evidently, professional critiques, personal blogs, discussion boards, and scholarly articles decode the message about class struggle. The most common idea is two separated worlds (classes) of realistic and imaginative. Correspondingly, the realistic means the modern world, whereas the imaginative refers to nature, magic and mystery. In brief, they may carry 'integrated reception', limited seeing, discursive knowing, and transitory believing.

5.4 Summary of the Chapter

Frances Morgan from Electric Sheep Magazine revealed that *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, combines spirits, politics, ghost stories, and other beauty into an alluring dream.⁶¹³ The film principally concerns Boonmee's life events and shows disintegrated stories. Boonmee is a platform that collects numerous narratives and narrates them through his vision, experience, recall, dream, and imagination. Mattie Lucas of From The Front Row stated, "Metaphysical manifestations of past lives appear like fragments of a dream, making us accept the impossible and perhaps even the ridiculous (monkey ghosts, amorous catfish) as something of great and powerful beauty."⁶¹⁴ These happenings in the film may further reflect that the film is an art, offering and constructing imagination. It simultaneously suggests genuine history and a fictional story (surrealistic), which later requires the spectator's interpretation. *Uncle Boonmee* film also functions as a memory chronicle, displaying Apichatpong's childhood experience until adulthood when he studied social facts, political history, and religious beliefs. It is perhaps a channel to convey a person's life story from birth, live, to death. We can also compare the film to a theatre where people arrive with

⁶¹³ Frances Morgan, "UNCLE BOONMEE WHO CAN RECALL HIS PAST LIVES," *Electric Sheep Magazine*, November 13, 2010 <http://www.electricsheepmagazine.co.uk/reviews/2010/11/13/uncle-boonmee-who-can-recall-his-past-lives/>.

⁶¹⁴ Mattie Lucas, "Review Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives," From the Front Row, March 31, 2011, <http://www.fromthefrontrow.net/2011/03/review-uncle-boonmee-who-can-recall-his.html>.

one soul or belief and exit with a new spirit or knowledge. Respectively, when the spectator witnesses *Uncle Boonmee* film, they might adopt other ideas. An individual audience named Generoso from Rotten Tomatoes indicated that Apichatpong produced and directed films in a purposeful and ghostly style.⁶¹⁵ He always included spirit in his films and selected some particular messages, such as life in Isan and political circumstances.

However, Apichatpong discussed in the interview with Wise Kwai from the Nation Multimedia that “Boonmee was the starting point, and it just gradually became this kind of movie about how he remembers, but it's [sic] only an inspiration, [sic] because the other stories I wrote myself”.⁶¹⁶ In sum, Apichatpong obtained the story of Boonmee from a monk in Isan and his further research about Boonmee's family. One of Boonmee's sons reassured him that Boonmee was real and lived in the past. Therefore, he developed other aspects regarding the initiative of Boonmee character. More essentially, “the film challenges the spectator with the haunting wife motif.”⁶¹⁷ A critique from Ivy Panda interpreted that the family relation concept may influence the haunting wife because the dead wife might always be concerned about her husband and children. A disturbance from the spirits (his deceased wife and transformed son) leads Boonmee to a particular opportunity to learn how his life was and will be.⁶¹⁸ In this case, Boonmee may not be frightened by the ghosts, but he solidly thinks about Huay and Boonsong and deliberates them through his dream. Film *Sick* uncovered that his dream is the most common

⁶¹⁵ Mattie Lucas, “Review Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives,” From the Front Row, March 31, 2011, <http://www.fromthefrontrow.net/2011/03/review-uncle-boonmee-who-can-recall-his.html>.

⁶¹⁶ Wise Kwai, “The late, great Apichatpong,” Internet Archive Wayback Machine, April 20, 2010, <https://web.archive.org/web/20121007231441/http://www.nationmultimedia.com/home/2010/04/20/life/The-late-great-Apichatpong-30127420.html>.

⁶¹⁷ Green, *Buddhism Goes to The Movies: Introduction to Buddhist Thought and Practice*, 130.

⁶¹⁸ “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives by Apichatpong Weerasethakul Essay (Movie Review),” Ivy Panda, September 6, 2022, <https://ivypanda.com/essays/uncle-boonmee-who-can-recall-his-past-lives-by-apichatpong-weerasethakul-review/>.

simulation narrating the film.⁶¹⁹ In opposition, Tim Brayton and Dennis Schwartz commonly found that *Uncle Boonmee* film projects a fantasy and dreamy world with slow-moving images. It is imaginative and anti-realistic.⁶²⁰ Although the film reflects society, nation and political history, it formally portrays an invented story that contradicts reality. On the other hand, the film might suggest a religious principle that life can be uncertain and that death is a normality of life. An individual audience called Lewis from Rotten Tomatoes revealed that “uncle Boonmee has been redirected away from his past materialistic existence to accepting the idea that life is an illusion, and one should accept death without fighting it.”⁶²¹ In comparison, the spectator cannot oppose the media content but can approve what to perceive and how to interpret.⁶²² The film story is perhaps folklore and lower-class art that reflects the film director's childhood memory, ghost, and jungle story.

The chapter first discussed how spectators viewed gender roles and gender identity throughout the film. They analyzed diverse areas of gender, which are gender roles, gender identity, and social roles. We found and interpreted the male and female in the film as an inseparable masculine-feminine polarity. Monk Tong can symbolize the lack of phallus according to his gender role and social status, whereas the cave entrance may refer to a woman's vagina, and the cave itself is perhaps the woman's womb. Moreover, the religious and social roles can differentiate males and females. In Buddhism, only men can become monks and practice religious customs, while women can act as supporters, who are called laypeople, in nurturing their sons and providing food to monks. The social institution can construct men to maintain

⁶¹⁹ Film Sick, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (Apichatpong Weerasethakul/2010/Thai) a transformation of memory to history ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ (อภิชาติพงศ์ วีระเศรษฐกุล/2010 / ไทย) การเปลี่ยนความทรงจำให้เป็นประวัติศาสตร์,” *Film Sick* (blog), April 15, 2019, <https://filmsick.wordpress.com/2012/01/08/uncleboonme/>.

⁶²⁰ Dennis Schwartz, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives,” Dennis Schwartz Movie Reviews, August 5 2019, <https://dennisschwartzreviews.com/uncleboonmee/>. Tim Brayton, “Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives,” Alternate Ending, April 18, 2011, <https://www.alternateending.com/2011/04/death-in-the-family.html>.

⁶²¹ “Uncle Boonmee Review,” Rotten Tomatoes, September 20, 2022, https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/uncle_boonmee/reviews?type=user.

⁶²² See Chapter 2, 2.2 Inside Casetti, Inside the Spectatorship

national security and stability by becoming conscripts. However, many characters in the film may prefer an unidentified sex and gender. The queer desire may appear through Boonsong, the princess, and the duplicates. Boonsong's transformation into a monkey ghost and the princess's transformation into a catfish may inform us that they both avoid being stereotyped as a man and a woman or a son and a princess. Meanwhile, the duplicates probably reveal that Tong abandons his body to prevent other people's judgment on his gender identity as a man and social status as a monk. In this regard, Thai spectators might obtain an 'interpellation' point of view with partial seeing, discursive knowing, and relative believing. However, non-Thai spectators can rely on an 'objective' point of view with exhaustive seeing, diegetic knowing, and solid believing. Nonetheless, Thai and non-Thai spectators from personal blogs, discussion boards and professional newspaper sites can share a combined point of view between 'objective and interpellation' with partial seeing, diegetic knowing, and relative believing.

Secondly, the chapter further considered the 'nature' characteristic of the film. The spectator found nature, namely daily dialogue, location, non-human characters (buffalo, ghost, monkey ghost, and catfish), and the princess's shadow. The analysis can compare non-humans to border people living outside the city. Furthermore, they observe a human transformation into an animal as nature and as a transformation of gender and social status. Nature further refers to religion when Jen makes merit for her deceased sister, demonstrating an attachment between humans and nature (non-human). Non-Thai and Thai spectators found ghosts unexpected but not scary. On the contrary, Thai spectators reviewed Boonsong's transformation as a conversion of ideology and the princess's transformation as a revision of status and class. Nevertheless, non-Thai spectators explained Boonsong's transformation as a return to human origin and the princess's transformation as a religious reincarnation of the soul. Correspondingly, Thai and non-Thai spectators possibly possess an 'impossible objective' point of view with total seeing, metadiscursive knowing, and absolute believing. Nevertheless, Thai and non-Thai spectators from professional newspaper websites, private blogs, and two scholarly papers also acquired an 'impossible objective'.

Lastly, the chapter reviewed the class struggle that appears in the film. Marx indicated that “class struggles are everywhere”.⁶²³ The spectator signified that the film mirrors class and hierarchy through numerous aspects. The film is a presentation of a two-dimensional world. It clarifies the material world as modern and current and the spirit one as obsolete. More importantly, the class transformation of the characters from upper to lower classes, such as the princess and Boonsong, can further emphasize the class struggle. The concept of a parallel world can simultaneously strengthen and separate humans and non-humans or modernity and obsolescence. According to Marx's model of class relations, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* expresses a relationship of production between Boonmee and his workers, social relations between upper Thai and lower Thai, Jen and Huay, rural and urban, modern and obsolete, reality and dream-like, majority and minority, and city people and border people; cultural relations between human and non-human, and Thai ethnic and Laotian ethnic; political relations between the government and general citizen, and the government and the Communist Party; and legal relations between farm owner and non-owner. Additionally, the film prominently refers to the politics of health, that people living in Isan may receive deficient health care from the central government. Boonmee must rely on the self-care system and his farm employee for kidney dialysis because he is distant from the hospital. In sum, non-Thai spectators perhaps take an 'interpellation' point of view with partial seeing, discursive knowing, and relative believing. Thai spectators may gather a 'subjective' point of view with limited seeing, intradiegetic knowing, and transitory believing. However, the spectator from professional websites, individual blogs, discussion boards, and academics can develop an 'integrated point of view' (between interpellation and subjective), namely limited seeing, discursive knowing, and transitory believing.

Commonly, Anders Bergstrom conceptualized that Apichatpong needed to define the film's ending and beginning.⁶²⁴ The spectator is supported in creating their

⁶²³ Lars H. Schmidt, “A Marxist Theory of Class Struggle”, *Acta Sociologica* 20, no. 4 (1997): 391.

⁶²⁴ Bergstrom, “Cinematic Past Lives: Memory, Modernity, and Cinematic Reincarnation in Apichatpong Weerasethakul’s *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*”, 9.

personal interpretation and final message as he declared that his film is an art. Art has no official or correct definition; it relies on the person's visualization and point of view. The film can be a comical contradiction, as James Lewis Hoberman commented that the film is modest, natural, and mysterious.⁶²⁵ Besides, it may contain various knowledge and features such as beauty and gender. The film is a two-communication process that requires the decoder or the spectator's visualization, reception, and response. Respectively, the spectator possesses a 'subjective gaze' as a passive witness. Meanwhile, *Uncle Boonmee* film discloses that women are targets for other men in the film and outside the film. The film contains an image brought into life as a 'nature', including non-human characters and other ordinary dialogue, location, and narration. Casetti's investigation of the 'geography of the spectator' can be compatible with Marx's division of class and relation. Geography can distinguish the spectator's reception and point of view, while Marx divided people into three diverse levels.

Rather than converging professional critiques and personal blogs, Rotten Tomatoes offers another review category called 'all audience'. These audience numbers are anonymous and unofficial, with avatar images, abbreviated names and perhaps pseudonyms. The reviews primarily criticized the film, the ghost, and the director. There are a few comments concerning Apichatpong, such as that he offers a similar pattern of film related to ghost and spirit belief and Thailand's past, present, and future. These reviewers might be familiar with the director because they also discussed his previous films, such as *Syndrome and the Century* and *Tropical Malady*.⁶²⁶ In contrast, most reviews proposed similar ideas and arguments about the film and the ghost. The keywords in these comments are slow, strange (bizarre), boring, confusing, dreamy (dream-like), simple, ambiguous, beautiful, fascinating and mesmerizing, mysterious (mystical), surreal (surrealism), puzzle, ghostly, and

⁶²⁵ James Hoberman, "Spirits in the Material World in Uncle Boonmee," *Village Voice*, March 2, 2011, <https://www.villagevoice.com/2011/03/02/spirits-in-the-material-world-in-uncle-boonmee/>.

⁶²⁶ "Uncle Boonmee Review," Rotten Tomatoes, September 20, 2022, https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/uncle_boonmee/reviews?type=user.

eerie (spooky).⁶²⁷ In brief, the film is slow, strange, tedious, confusing, but beautiful and fascinating. Even though it is surreal, mysterious, and ambiguous, its photography and dialogue are simple and exciting. Besides, the reviews are generally in English and 12 other languages: German, Spanish, Portuguese, Indonesian, Swedish, French, Turkish, Italian, Polish, Finnish, Romanian and Dutch.⁶²⁸ Rotten Tomatoes further introduces specific numbers of negative reviews from the 'all audience' category against *Uncle Boonmee* film. The audiences discovered that film could be better quality and low-cost, insufficiently invested, unorganized, inadequate connection between scenes, contemplative, beyond incoherent and uninteresting, not a movie, nonsensical and meaningless, exaggerated, and mistaken.⁶²⁹ More obviously, four disturbing critiques should be stressed. An anonymous audience from the 25th of December 2010 debated that the film was a failed experiment. Meanwhile, four anonymous audiences and Jen T clarified that the film was a waste.⁶³⁰ Additionally, Jean Phillippe S portrayed that the film leads him to sleep by employing a 'play of pronunciation' in French words. He wrote "La Palme dort...Zzzz Zzzz Zzzz", which is coherent to la Palme d'Or. Dort is French, meaning 'to sleep'. In this case, he compared the pronunciation of d'Or to dort. Briefly, the film might have received an award for sleeping from him.⁶³¹

⁶²⁷ "Uncle Boonmee Review," Rotten Tomatoes, September 20, 2022, https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/uncle_boonmee/reviews?type=user.

⁶²⁸ The film release dates: Thailand on 25th June 2010, Germany on 30th September 2010, Spain on 15th October 2010, Portugal on 31st March 2011, Indonesia on 3rd December 2010, Sweden on 29th April 2011, France on 1st September 2010, Turkiye on 22nd October 2010, Italy on 15th October 2010, Poland on 21st January 2011, Romania on 20th May 2011, and Netherlands on 21st October 2010.

⁶²⁹ "Uncle Boonmee Review," Rotten Tomatoes, September 20, 2022, https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/uncle_boonmee/reviews?type=user.

⁶³⁰ The Anonymous audiences wrote their reviews on 27th October, 8th November, 5th December 2010, and 10th May 2011.

⁶³¹ "Uncle Boonmee Review," Rotten Tomatoes, September 20, 2022, https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/uncle_boonmee/reviews?type=user.

CONCLUSION

1. Finding and Result

The study found that most spectators provided a reaction and reception of the film through written critiques, i.e., descriptive form. Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 displayed the spectator's reception of *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* in four principal aspects: ideology and politics, gender relation and transformation, nature and non-human, and class struggle. Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 findings showed that the spectator's reception revealed similar and dissimilar messages. Although the spectators from diverse sources suggested plenty of receptions and reactions, the number of messages discovered is relatively similar and more coherent than distinctive. The similarity may have derived from their previous knowledge and observation of other written papers, critiques, Apichatpong's interview, and another film background. Many spectators earlier experienced Apichatpong's films and realized his production style. Therefore, they know his film narration, location, and opinion. The critics might have realized Apichatpong's idea and influence in constructing the film from various interviews because he has always referred to his life background in Isan as a doctor resident. He has continually stressed two regular concepts in interviews and *Kick the Machine* (website). On the one hand, his films can be affected by his childhood experience in Isan's town and hospital area. On the other hand, his films are independent and considered art because the message is not specific. The film story mostly depends on his point of view about politics and social concerns. However, the results from Chapter 4 demonstrate that the film simultaneously presents the state ideology and opens a new space for the film spectatorship. The chapter analyzed the film in two directions, including the state ideology, which is interpellated in the film, and the film spectatorship, which opens a new space and possibility for the film interpretation. This latter case is consistent with what Apichatpong mentioned in his interviews because he found his film to be an art piece with non-fixed meaning and interpretation. Apichatpong declared in various interviews that the politics in this film are subtle because they are not

explicit. Besides, he attempts to present the messages about politics in a less destructive pattern. It refers to the politics that the spectators could have related to the political situations in the history of Thailand. According to the critiques, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* exquisitely signifies politics in Isan, particularly in Nabua village, and revolves around the political disputes between the Thai state and the Communist Party of 1965. The film director connected social issues and political turmoil to the memory of the region and its residents. However, the film director may prevent himself from being politically biased because he illustrated two sides of the information. He depicts the state ideology (the state interpellation) and possibly challenges the state by offering a new space and the film spectatorship through the main character. For instance, Jen is a representative of the state. In contrast, Boonmee, on the one hand, is a government loyalist who participates in military activity, and on the other hand, is the government's opposition who carries a different point of view. The film simulates historical situations and reveals those events through Boonmee's recall, dream, and imagination. *Uncle Boonmee, Who Can Recall His Past Lives* can be perceived as non-political, but Apichatpong can intentionally make it political. Thus, the film is perhaps Apichatpong's aesthetic of politics, which opens a new space for interpreting the film's meaning or a new possibility of perceiving the Thai state and society, known as the film spectatorship.

Chapter 4 primarily summarized important arguments that the critiques found about the state ideology and the film spectatorship. Nevertheless, it did not point out the spectator's point of view regarding Casetti's geography of the spectator. This is because the author wanted to emphasize how the film shows and discusses the state ideology and how the film criticizes the state ideology or opens a new area for the spectator receptions. The most obvious and significant statement for the state ideology can be the state interpellates the dominant power which allows them to accuse Isan people as being the Communists and criminals. However, the film simultaneously criticizes the politics and ideology by employing Boonmee to discuss politics and bring ghosts to appeal for the justice. These ghosts are representative of the Communist people. In this case, the film deconstructs the state ideology and opens a new space for independent reception and interpretation. The film simply illustrates the state ideology and offers a non-traditional thought for

the audiences. Therefore, the spectators can relate the political incidents to the implicit message and allow their personal imagination. Both Thai and non-Thai spectators found the message about politics and history. It is widely argued in a few types of critiques including discussion boards, academic papers, personal blogs and professional newspapers. The researcher might conclude that the critics, which are referred to in Chapter, shared interpellation, and subjective points of view. The spectators may obtain discursive knowing and relative believing because they can associate to the film director and the information presented in the film story (or through Boonmee). On the other hand, the critics can rely on subjective point of view as they are dependent only on Boonmee's opinion and original life experience. Nonetheless, this is the subjective assumption from the researcher, which can be placed in the table of the geography of the spectator below.

	Seeing	Knowing	Believing
Objective			
Impossible Objective			
Interpellation	spectators who discovered the message about the politics		
Subjective			

Table 3 Assumption for the Reception about Politics

Moreover, Boonmee's life occurrences define multiple aspects of Thai society. Some critics found the film a memory chronicle, whereas others discovered it as a mystical imagination. Apichatpong began the film with the inspiration of a natural person named Boonmee (sometimes Boonma), whom he learned from a Thai monk and his research in the Isan region. Meanwhile, the film title starts with a religious perspective, but the interpretation further shows the message about social, political, and regional issues. Numerous critiques commonly explored the film's messages on social class, inequality between city and border towns, and an expression of nature. The film frequently indicates that Jen's legs, health welfare, and the monkey ghost emphasize the difference between wealth and poverty.

On the one hand, the rich may possess farms, land, and houses, while the poor may obtain low-quality health care. The upper-class people can live in large cities, but the lower-class people can reside in the forests and rural houses, for example. Besides, the government is a ruling class, while the public and the Communist Party are under the ruling actor. On the contrary, the film portrays spiritual creatures, animals, and non-humans, recognizing these features as nature. Nature refers to, e.g., the buffalo, the catfish, the ghost Huay, and the monkey ghost. On the other hand, fewer numbers of critiques analyzed the film's meaning of gender and social status in the film. The princess can show social status and status transformation because her costume and jewelry can specify gender roles, gender status, and superiority, while the transformation perhaps generates queer desire. Monk Tong is linked to gender roles and transformation. Owing to his gender appearance and status, he can transform into a monk, providing him with a new social status. The conclusion of each aspect is clearly illustrated at the end of each section in Chapter 5, namely 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3.

The summary of Chapter 5 briefly indicated the spectators' points of view owing to Casetti's geography of the spectator. However, these points of view can be a prejudiced conclusion because it is based on the author's subjective opinion. For the message about gender, Thai spectators obtained an interpellation point of view. In contrast, non-Thai spectators possessed an objective point of view, and the spectators from personal sites and professional newspapers similarly shared objective and interpellation points of view. For the message about nature and non-human, Thai, non-Thai spectators and the spectators from professional newspaper websites, private blogs, and two academic articles acquired an impossible objective point of view. On the contrary, Thai spectators held a subjective point of view on the message about class. In contrast, non-Thai spectators had an interpellation point of view, and the spectators from professional newspapers, individual blogs, and academic research adopted combined points of view between interpellation and subjective. The researcher can illustrate the results can as examples in the table of the geography of the spectator.

	Seeing	Knowing	Believing	
Objective	Non-Thai Spectator			Personal Sites and Professional Websites
Impossible Objective				
Interpellation	Thai Spectator			
Subjective				

Table 4 Assumption for the Reception about Gender

	Seeing	Knowing	Believing
Objective			
Impossible Objective	Thai and Non-Thai Spectator, Professional Websites, Private Blogs, Academic Articles		
Interpellation			
Subjective			

Table 5 Assumption for the Reception about Nature and Non-Human

	Seeing	Knowing	Believing	
Objective				Professional Websites, Individual Blogs, Academic Research
Impossible Objective				
Interpellation	Non-Thai Spectator			
Subjective	Thai Spectator			

Table 6 Assumption for the Reception about Class

Before the research, the spectators were divided by Thai and non-Thai origin. However, the data collection and the study results (from Chapters 4 and 5) can further divide the film critiques on different bases: the career, the purpose of writing comments, and the author's background. Therefore, the following paragraphs summarize *repeated keywords of the spectator's reception* by re-dividing the spectator in two categories: Category 1 is the reception from Thai and non-Thai spectators, and Category 2 is the reception from professional, personal,

and academic spectators. Therefore, the description in each paragraph can rely on the exact keywords because the spectator's reception is from the same sources but categorized on divergent foundations. The first category is according to origin and culture, while the second can be according to the writer's purpose and career.

Category 1: Thai spectators commonly observed the film in four aspects: nature and non-human (ghost, memory, and dream); ideology, politics and class struggle (Isan); gender relation and transformation (transformation), and ideology and politics (Apichatpong). Nevertheless, in Category 1, non-Thai spectators uncovered four focuses of the film: nature and non-human (ghost, memory, and dream); ideology, politics and class struggle (Isan); gender relation and transformation (transformation and time), and ideology and politics (Apichatpong). In opposition to Category 2, professional critics (journals, newspapers, and Rotten Tomatoes) criticized the film in three main domains: nature and non-human (ghost, dream, memory, mystery); ideology, politics and class struggle (Isan); and ideology and politics (Apichatpong). Meanwhile, Category 2, personal (discussion board Pantip, personal blogs, Rotten Tomatoes' all audiences) noticed Uncle Boonmee's film in four areas: nature and non-human (ghost, dream, memory); ideology, politics and class struggle (Isan), gender relation and transformation (the princess and transformation); and ideology and politics (Apichatpong). Also, Category 2 academic sources reviewed the film in four points: nature and non-human (ghost, dream, memory); ideology, politics and class struggle (Isan); gender relation and transformation (transformation and time); and ideology and politics (Apichatpong). These common findings can be illustrated in the diagrams that Thai, non-Thai personal, and academic spectators proposed overlapping comments. However, some Thai and personal spectators analysed transformation, while others found time and transformation correlated. Professional spectators introduced a minor difference in their reception. In brief, the most common critiques revolve around ghosts, mystery, dreams, and memory, Isan and Apichatpong. These repeated keywords are directly derived from the film critiques; thus, these are the repeated data rather than subjective analysis.

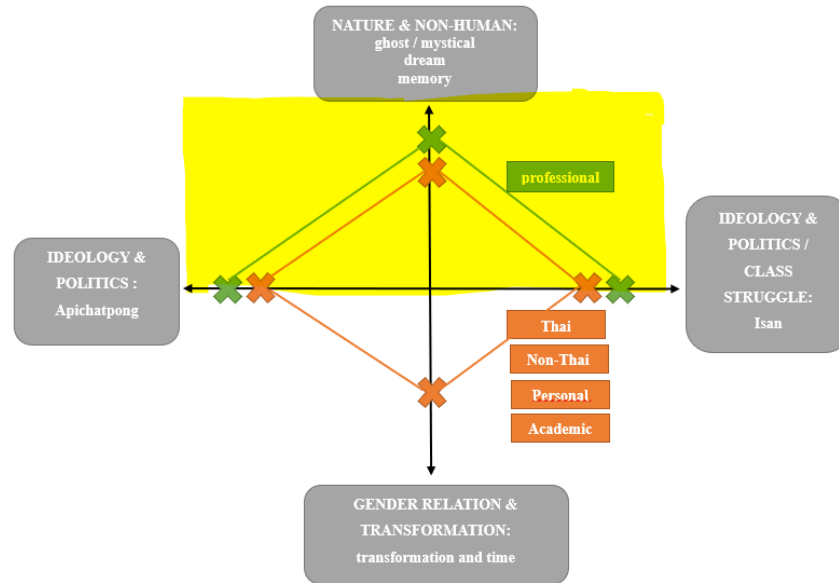


Diagram 3 Common Keywords from the Spectators' Critiques

The common film critiques and important keywords are further extended in the following paragraphs regarding the two categories of the spectators. After the expanded explanation, the spectators' shared reviews and understanding are placed in the diagram for each sub-category and section for significant details.

Category 1: Critique from Thai and non-Thai Spectator

The film is strange and different for Thai spectators but instantaneously exciting and exceptional. It obtains excessive imagination content, such as a crossed-species affair, which may simultaneously demonstrate the ordinariness and simplicity of the film story. Even though the ghost in the film is not frightening, it is characterized as an old-fashioned horror. The ghost offers a symbolic meaning and refers to Thai society and Buddhism, while the monkey ghost can be a representative of border people and the communists. Some critics found that comparing a monkey ghost to a Communist is extremely painful because the monkey ghost is monstrous. The film blurs the boundary by permitting the characters to cross time and dimension and the spectator to design and interpret the film message. The princess, the enslaved person, the catfish, Jen's, and Tong's duplicates symbolize the dimension passing. This idea of crossing the border can

further present a passage between ethical and illegal performance. For example, after removing her clothes and jewelry, the princess is an ordinary woman; unclothing may define a return to her origin. Moreover, the film constructed a parody by implicitly comparing the characters, the names, and the places, for instance. Jen's legs and the music at the end entitled 'Fear of the Height' may signify inequality in Thai society.

Meanwhile, the names Jen and Huay create an incompatibility between the sisters. One lives in a rural town, while the other resides in Bangkok. Besides, applying sunscreen on a rural farm can further cause Jen to be different from her family. The sunscreen, cloth, and jewelry can denote technology and women's identity. In addition, other comparisons include Kungtepmahanakhon versus Krungtepmahanarok, nature versus city, and cave as a vagina and human womb. Bangkok is also considered urbanized, whereas the border people are perceived as obsolete. On the contrary, the kidney dialysis by Jai and Huay can be related to politics. It may illustrate that people from border areas cannot access social services and health welfare. Meanwhile, human and non-human creatures can be equal because they produce an unclear class boundary.

Uncle Boonmee's film reveals an identity of the Isan region that most people overlook because it is considered a drought and a far area. Additionally, Isan-ness (belief, custom, and dialect) is presented as a ridiculous story that people from other regions can insult. The location in the film is assumed to be a village in Isan called Nabua, which is a site for anti-state people to conceal during the political insurgency in 1965. In the film, Boonsong escapes the Communist social status by entering a monkey tribe and perhaps changing his political ideology. The Communist ideology initially influenced him. His obsession with photography is similar to Apichatpong's fascination with art. In contrast, Huay's transformation into a ghost ceases her age and physical look.

The film works as an archive of Apichatpong's memory because it reveals an attachment of the film narration to Apichatpong's childhood memory and personal history in Khon Kaen and along the Mae Khong River border. In other words, his recall of Isan, his early days' experience, and political incidents in Nabua occurred

during the prosecution operation against the Communists around the Cold War period. He might have created the film to appreciate the memory of Nabua villagers. Additionally, he always delivers an image of everyday life by inserting unusual stories into an ordinary conversation. Apichatpong adopted historical facts and reproduced them in an aesthetic style based on his individual opinion. He connected some actors from previous films to *Uncle Boonmee's* film. Tong previously appeared in *Tropical Malady* and *Blissfully Yours*, while Jen formerly appeared in *Blissfully Yours* and *Syndrome and a Century*. Sakda (Tong) earlier acted in a monk role (a monk with guitar) in *Syndrome and a Century*. Rung, in the end, earlier played in *Blissfully Yours*. Thus, *Uncle Boonmee, Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, can be a converging point for actors and characters. Furthermore, the monkey ghost can be comparable to the tiger ghost in *Tropical Malady*, and Boonmee's passage inside the cave is comparable to the walk with candles in the cave in *Tropical Malady*. Nonetheless, some scenes need to be chronologically ordered, requiring further discussion and interpretation. On the other hand, Apichatpong may have used Boonmee's dream to simulate the fundamental political events that occurred in the past. However, some critiques discussed that the princess story is a folk tale inside the film. The reception from Thai critiques can be concluded in the chart below.

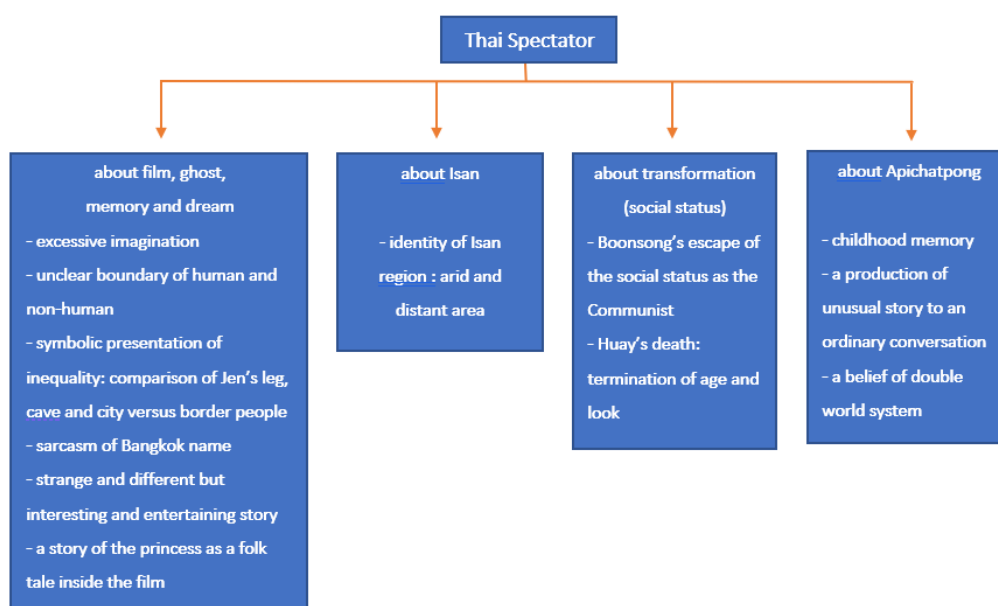


Diagram 4 Category 1: Thai Spectator

For non-Thai spectators, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* is not difficult to understand; it is simple in story but complex in structure and subtext. However, it is still exciting and entertaining, and sometimes puzzling. It is a bizarre and fantastical film between the real and the magical worlds. The film simultaneously presents mysticism and realism; it destroys a barrier between tradition and modern lifestyles. The film demolishes or softens the boundaries between life and death, man and beast, and pain and happiness. Though the film combines everyday life and extraordinary creatures, it creates routine normalities in a calm, gentle atmosphere.

Moreover, metaphysical manifestations of past lives appear in fragments of a dream. On the contrary, the film is strange, unusual, and slow but fascinating. It is built on a surprising basis with great photography and an optimistic approach to death. The film is a masterful meditation on journeying into the afterlife. The previous incarnations are presented in a mystical flashback parallel, which shows the present and the past time. Boonmee is discrete from others who attempt to forget the past by remembering. His souvenir influences the audience to recognize that life is an illusion. The cave in the film can be the passage of life to death. It is also between black magic and Buddhism that is not a ghostly horror. Ghosts appear symbolically and figuratively as a haunting memory. The ghost and haunted time are employed in the film to challenge injustices of the past and the present day. It further merges two worlds, e.g., human and animal (Monkey Ghost) and living and dead (Huai, Boonsong). However, the fade-in ghost can make the film unrealistic and unexpected and make it a Buddhist fairy tale, i.e., a surrealist jungle story similar to the Buddha's early life. The film can be a country folk and dreamlike imaginative with dreamy images and slow-moving art. It encourages the audience to accept the exoticism of the monkey ghost, the ghost, and the speaking catfish. In opposition, the film completely departs from a typical narrative structure by showing numerous mysteries of human adventure, a slideshow of unrelated events, memories, and reincarnation fantasies. In other words, it is a moderate presentation of poetic and evocative portraits in the form of moving images. It can be considered an art in arthouse with dry humor and expressive cinematography that is visually arresting and engagingly entertaining. It is wryly comic. Even so, *Uncle Boonmee's*

Who Can Recall His Past Lives is hopelessly slow because the plot is simple, and some sequences are incredibly long and static, which can lead to boredom.

On the other hand, the film is contemplative and reflective because it revolves around a social-political critique of Thailand's past, present, and upcoming future. It reproduces the memory of a violent military past, which might reveal ideological conflict between, e.g., nation and anti-nation, and center and margin. Isaan was the site of several anti-state rebellions, and the film story is assumed to happen in the region. Boonmee can represent those who live at the margins and are different from the time and space of the nation-state. He views the future as a time when a conflict appears between the people of the future and the people of the past. In addition, people from the past are transformed, society is changed, and other people can affect the individual. For example, the princess discovered a new freedom by transforming herself into an animal kingdom.

Like his other movies, Apichatpong set *Uncle Boonmee's* film mainly in the forest and poor northeast Thailand. He provokes emotion in people about the country's insurgency. Nevertheless, he suggests a destructive invasion of secular modernity, which opposes traditional religious beliefs and practices. The film is the most significant expression of Weerasethakul's paradox, which is a piece of natural beauty with sophisticated and mysterious features. His directing style matches poetry with mysterious cinematic designs. The production is intentional, purposeful, and ghostly because he prefers to make the audience experience the darkness and spiritual image. Although Boonmee is the main character, he is only a starting point of the film narration because the other angles derived from Apichatpong's research and imagination, i.e., he combines his background and his films. He explored nature and expressed Thailand's history (based on the oral tale) and then displayed it in an expressive manner and graphics. Nevertheless, he instantaneously always employs excessive use of the extended shot technique. Thus, the film scenes are long and sometimes dull. More importantly, Apichatpong links fictional film worlds with general situations. His films are interrelated by politics and background of Nabua, i.e., the films function as a documentary that contains both experience and fiction. The comments are summarized in the diagram.

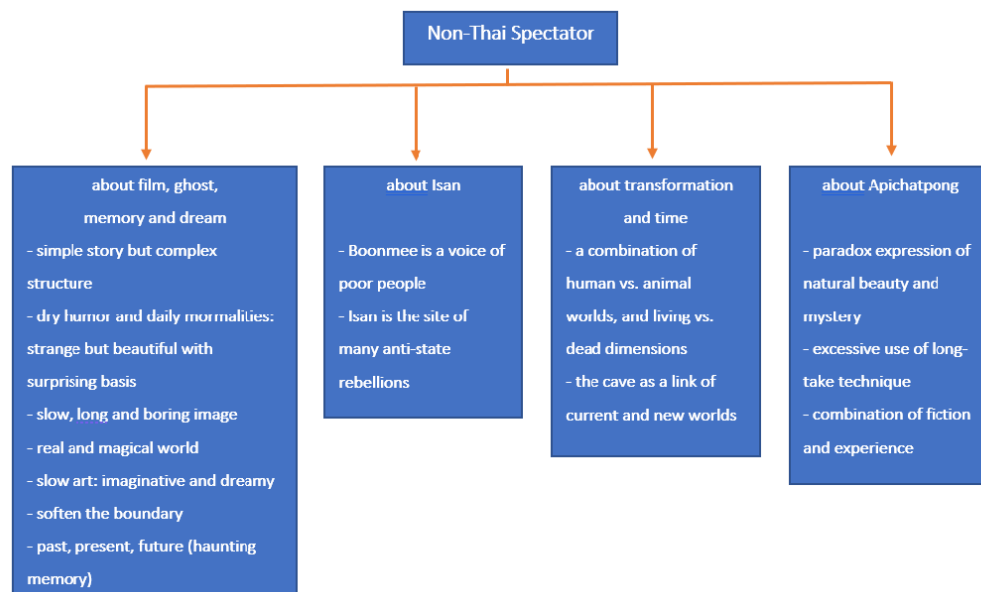


Diagram 5 Category 1: Non-Thai Spectator

Category 2: Critique from Professional, Personal, and Academic Spectator

Professional critiques (journals, newspapers, and Rotten Tomatoes) discovered that the film is manageable and straightforward in its story but complex in structure and subtext. It is an art with an imagination and fantasy of unrelated events, which obtains symbolism and captivating imagery. The film presents a memory and a dreamlike past and future story. It is an unreal version of nature, a Buddha's surrealist jungle story, and country folk. Besides, the film is mystical, spiritual, ghostly, haunting, supernatural, and magical, i.e., it is a cinema of spirits and human reflections. In opposition, *Uncle Boonmee's* film is a vague combination of extraordinary and everyday, spirit and real worlds, and earthly and supernatural characters. The film is slow and bizarre.

In conclusion, the film reveals a two-dimensional world (or parallel world). It obscured boundaries between life and death, man and monster, pain and pleasure. Boonmee opposes other Nabua residents because he can remember his past actions and former lives. Thus, it can create an analogy that Boonmee forgets the past by remembering. The film displays ghosts and spirits in a symbolic way owing to

religious beliefs as well as social and political history, e.g., the monkey ghost is a representative of the Communist Party and border people.

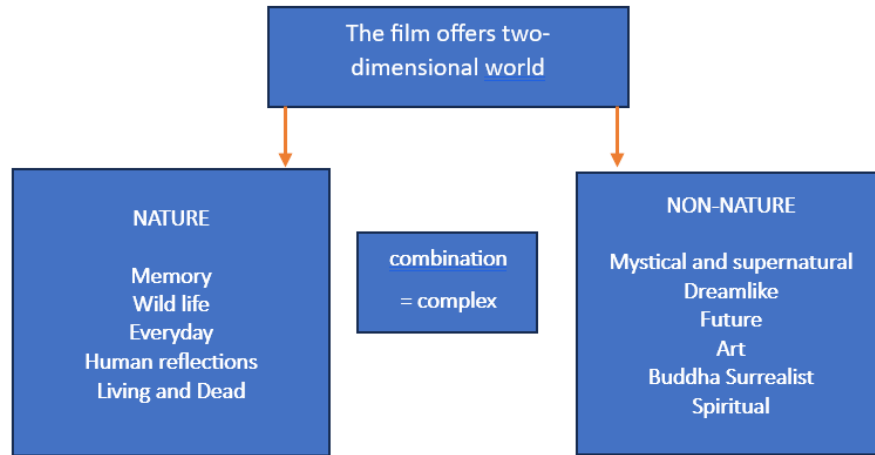


Diagram 6 Category 2: Professional Spectator (1)

Apichatpong initiated the Primitive project, particularly *Uncle Boonmee, Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, intending to revive Nabua village. The director provokes feelings by matching poetry with mysterious cinematic designs. In other words, he combines magic and myth with surreal humor, in which the mystery derives from his personal experience and belief. The film is a cosmic collection of Apichatpong's imagination and personal memories. He attaches his childhood memory and personal history to the film narration. The imagination presents spiritual mediation and ghost story in an artistic beauty form. He is a master of the actual movie magic. Moreover, he mirrored Isan-ness in an outrageous story, i.e., Isan people and their characters are mimicked or insulted by people from other regions. It is the passage from life to death and life beyond life. The film is a playful paradox between the modest and natural. However, the personal memories further reflect political references. *Uncle Boonmee's* film challenges Thailand's political turmoil, i.e., the metaphysical turmoil of the director's country. In brief, he engages magic and myth, earlier days memory, and metaphysical or political events in history.

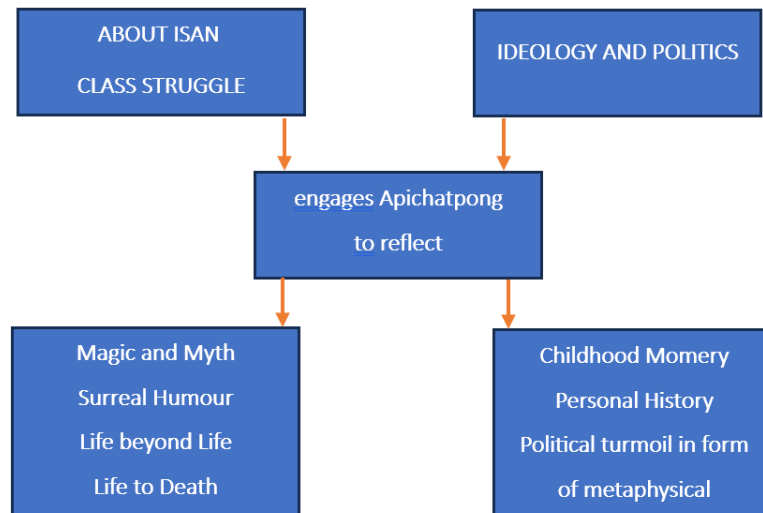


Diagram 7 Category 2: Professional Spectator (2)

Discussion board (Pantip), personal blogs, and Rotten Tomatoes' all audiences section analyzed that the film is ultimately more interesting than entertaining regarding great photography and exciting combination. Nevertheless, it is slow and tedious because it relies on long takes. The film softens the boundaries between humanity, nature, life, and the afterlife. In other words, it abolishes the border separating the material world from the spirit realm. The story relies on Buddhist rhythms, mythical underpinning, and mesmeric images. It is subconscious, complex, and abstract, consisting of reality and fantasy. It is a magical mystery tour in visual poetry and moments of truth. The film opposes the metaphysical and magical mystery of past lives through fragments of dreams. The film moves like a dream with puzzling events and sequences. However, it can be a combination of magic and realism, which is also slightly confusing because some scenes are not chronologically ordered and unclear but exceptional and relaxed. Some critics found that the film is original and appealing, which creates a metaphor to reflect society, e.g., the Communist is a ghost or evil, Jen's unequal legs present inequality in society, and Jen and Huay names, sunscreen lotion technology, and countryside, and Krungthemahanakhon and Krungthepmahanarok show a paradox of culture.

The film is a slow-moving art that shows ghosts from a dreamy world as supernatural and illusory. It further offers a slow and contemplative meditation. In

contrast, the film is constructed with beautiful images rather than introducing the path to death. Boonmee's dream is the most straightforward simulation to explain the film as he illustrates stories through his souvenirs and dreams. The film defines the most peaceful approach that carries Boonmee to death. Additionally, the cave is like a passage between life and death. Briefly, the film simultaneously reduces boundaries and separation as well as combines realism and magic.

Rather than being a channel from life to death, the cave represents a return to human origins, e.g., Boonmee's death in a cave is a homecoming to a woman's womb, and the princess without jewelry is a return to an ordinary human being. Moreover, the film is constructed to verify Apichatpong's memory of Isan, his childhood, and political incidents at Nabua. In this case, Apichatpong inserted the recall into Boonmee's recollections. The political events signify historical trauma and prosecution operations in the Isan area around the Cold War period. Thus, the film shares Apichatpong's vision of the world. He related his films by recurring actors, characters, incidents, locations, and scenes.

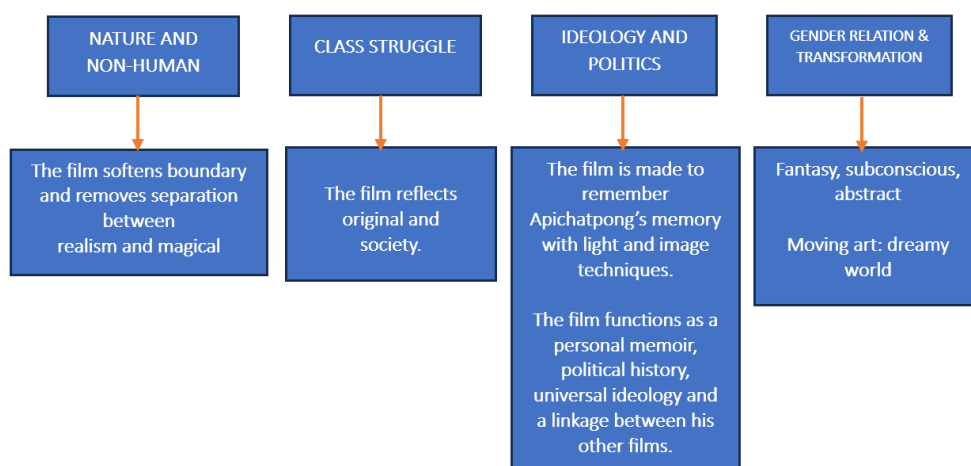


Diagram 8 Category 2: Personal Spectator (e.g. Blog and Discussion Board)

Critiques from academic spectators pointed out that the film is a strange but beautiful dream with various consciousness and remembrance. It presents supernatural and spiritual aspects by illustrating ghosts in a symbolic way as a

haunting memory and a representation of injustice from the past and in the present. Besides, the monkey ghost symbolizes the images of memories and the archaic people incompatible with the current time. On the contrary, the ghosts were always part of the landscape. The film shows the lives of ordinary people in an extraordinary form and reproduces the memory of the violent military past. Boonmee is a contradiction of other Nabua people because Boonmee can remember while local villagers try to forget the brutality in history. Otherwise, it lacks an apparent beginning and ending. In conclusion, the film instantaneously reflects both memory and supernatural components.

The film is set in Isan, the site of several anti-state rebellions. Nonetheless, the royalist attempts to silence the history of national unity. Nabua suggests a repressed memory of political history, and their voices cannot be incorporated into the modern world because they are underprivileged. These poor people and non-humans are inconsistent with the current time and the nation-state, i.e., the modern world. The reflection of poverty in Isan and non-human characters can further emphasize inequality in Thai society.

The transformation of the characters is comparable to the transformation of society. For instance, the obsolete past was transformed into the current modernity; the princess has her newfound freedom through body transformation. The film focuses on a belief in the other world that is a part of our lives. Boonmee's dream of the future, however, expresses a controversy because he sees people of the past and people of the future. Meanwhile, the cave is a metaphor, or perhaps more precisely, a metonym, of the cinema. We enter a dark space intending to leave our present world (death) to enter a new world (re-birth, reincarnation). In this case, the cinema is a passage of transformation. Additionally, the cave is an interdimensional way station for souls to enter and leave this world. People from the past and the monkey ghosts represent man's primitive nature of religion and the secular world.

Apichatpong is an expert in structuring ambiguity and darkness and presenting the supernatural. His work is an art piece that is an expressive representation of difference. Moreover, he is familiar with the excessive use of a long-take technique (or extended shot) to stretch the struggle between times and images. His other films

and *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* connect the extraordinary with the ordinary through a rational process that accentuates the society's reflection and politicizes the nation-state's everyday affairs. Apichatpong is further motivated to involve fictional film worlds with public exhibitions. His work discloses a relationship between hierarchical political authority in hospitals and local Isan people. In other words, his films are interrelated by politics and the background of Nabua; the films function as a documentary that contains both experience and fiction. Besides, Apichatpong described in an interview that the politics in his work is concealed.

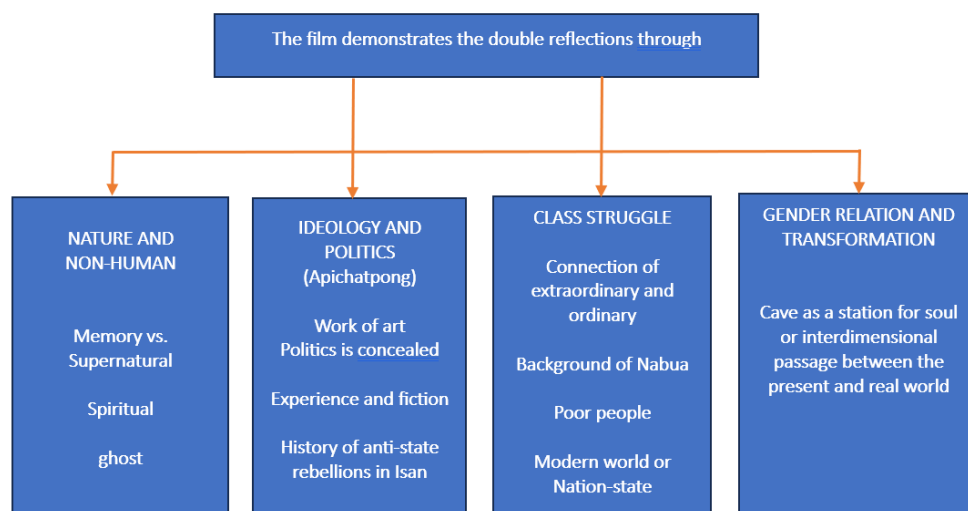


Diagram 9 Category 2: Academic Spectator

In addition, the result can show that the spectator's reception may be influenced by the spectator's personal experience, perception of Thai society, knowledge about Apichatpong and his previous works, understanding of Thai culture and religion, comprehension of Thai political history, the impact of other existing film reviews (i.e., comments, research, and journal critiques). Their preference for Apichatpong's political ideology and other works may disturb their favorable agreement on the film's meaning. However, the spectator might have criticized *Uncle Boonmee's Who Can Recall His Past Lives* as difficult and monotonous because Apichatpong's work does not offer implicit meaning and traditional belief.

2. Limitation

The research acquires a primary limitation and two modest restrictions. The critiques observed that the spectator generally depends on some common keywords, including strange, fascinating, symbolic, imagination, the Communist, boundary and border, memory, Isan, Nabua, the unusual, ordinary, fantastic, mystical, passage of life and death, past, present, future, haunting memory, entertaining, history, politics, ideology, cave, human origin, forest, nature, mysterious, long-take, turmoil, combine, original, reflection, ambiguous, exaggerated style, trauma, recall, representative, inequality, past modernity, and work of art. However, when I discoursed them into narrative texts in the previous paragraphs, I changed some informal terms into academic words such as strange to mysterious, bizarre, unordinary, and turmoil to insurgency or incident. The same sources can influence replicated critiques, e.g., former critiques and Apichatpong's interviews and speeches. Some critiques might have primarily adopted information from Apichatpong's interview entitled *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives with New Wave Films*.⁶³², and an academic article named *Haunted Time, Still Photography and Cinema as Memory: The Dream Sequence in Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives in Journal of Modern Literature in Chinese* by Natalie Boehler⁶³³, for example. On the contrary, the academic authors may have gathered the film comments from the interviews, newspapers, and Apichatpong's lectures, and vice versa. The shared spectator's reception is not repeated by coincidence. The spectator received and interpreted consistent messages because they also learned from other existing resources, i.e., the spectators might affect and influence each other. Therefore, their reception would have arisen from something other than substantial understanding and original

⁶³² Robert Beeson, "UNCLE BOONMEE WHO CAN RECALL HIS PAST LIVES (LUNG BOONMEE RALUEK CHAT) คุณบุญมีระลึกชาติ a film by Apichatpong Weerasethakul Winner Palme d'Or Cannes Film Festival 2010," *New Wave Films*, October 7, 2022, http://www.newwavefilms.co.uk/assets/467/uncle_boonmee_pressbook_.pdf.

⁶³³ Natalie Boehler, "Haunted Time, Still Photography and Cinema as Memory: The Dream Sequence in Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives," *Journal of Modern Literature in Chinese* 12, vol. 1 (2014): 62-72.

opinion, causing an inaccurate conclusion that the spectators provided more similar interpretations than divergent ideas. Additionally, the replicate reception discovered through the examination can restrict an analysis of the geography of the spectator. According to the table of geography, the mistaken results of the spectator's point of view in Chapter 5 may appear, e.g., Thai spectators may not obtain an interpellation point of view for gender relations and transformation. In contrast, Thai and non-Thai spectators may not possess an impossible objective point of view of nature. Non-Thai spectators may not carry an interpellation point of view for class struggle. Meanwhile, the spectator from personal blogs, discussion boards, and professional newspaper sites might not share a combined point of view between objective and interpellation for gender relation and transformation; the spectator from professional newspaper websites, private blogs and two scholarly papers might not acquire impossible objective point of view for nature; and the spectator from professional websites, individual blogs, discussion board, and academic might not develop 'integrated point of view' (between interpellation and subjective) for class struggle, for instance.

On the other hand, the analysis relied on only a film from Apichatpong. It lacks reliable comparison to other films from other directors. Apichatpong is an independent filmmaker from the Thai New Wave group, but the thesis does not offer a comparison to other films from the New Wave directors. Moreover, many critiques found that the monkey ghost idea is taken from the film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, but the study needed to engage *2001: A Space Odyssey* in an extended narration. Meanwhile, Apichatpong said in many interviews that his political ideology may have influenced him to produce a prejudiced film. This personal ideology might further cause audiences with dissimilar political ideologies to analyze *Uncle Boonmee's* film with discrimination.

3. Recommendation

Future research that employs the reception theory should concern the repetition of the critiques because it can suggest an imprecise result. The researcher may focus their examination on the development of the film critiques and should also consider

surrounding factors that the spectator can develop their reception. The factors include the film director, career, and specific topic of interest. Focusing on film reviews can provide imprecise data and findings because the spectators might be the director's supporters. In other words, they express their critiques based on what they agree and appreciate rather than what can be facts and intentions in the film. Moreover, the following research can focus on a comparative study of films from the same genre but with different directors. The comparative study might contain more apparent results of the spectator's reception, how and why they perceive the same genre of film similarly and dissimilarly (what might influence the spectator's reception), and why a film may obtain larger or smaller numbers of critiques than another film. On the contrary, the other research may suggest an expanded investigation of Apichatpong's works because he produces films regarding his personal experience and political ideology. The conclusion of the spectator's reception of all films can more precisely distribute to the work's intention or Apichatpong's intention. Then, the future study can rely on a focus group of spectators who have not previously seen the film rather than a document review. The focus group might allow the researcher to conduct direct questionnaires to the research problem and instantaneously reduce the study time. In addition, the selected samples can generate original comments such as their pre- and post-impression on the case study.

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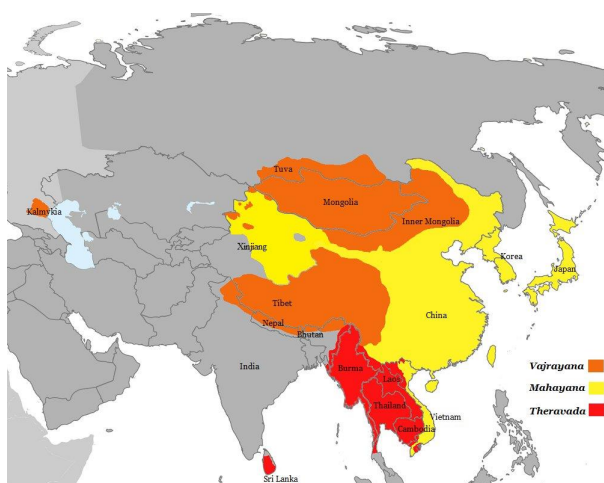
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APPENDIX**List of Image***Introduction*

Image 1 day for night technique and mirror-ghost technique

Chapter 1

Image 2 Royal Ploughing Ceremony⁶³⁴Image 3 Map of Buddhism⁶³⁵Image 4 Map of Isan⁶³⁶

⁶³⁴ “The Result of the Royal Ploughing Ceremony: Plenty of Water and Food พระราชพิธีแรกนาขวัญ ผลดีของ ทาย น้ำมาก- ธัญญาหารอุดมสมบูรณ์,” Thai Public Broadcasting Service, October 4, 2022, <https://news.thaipbs.or.th/content/1524>.

⁶³⁵ Twitter, August 31, 2022, twitter.com.

⁶³⁶ Simon Bonython, *Discovering Isaan: The Beauty of Thailand's Northeast*, (Thailand: Amarin Printing and Publishing, 2007), 151.



*Image 5 'Heun Koey', Sakon Nakhon (left),
a House with Beneath-Storage (right)*⁶³⁷



Image 6 Example of A House and Neighbourhood in Uncle Boonmee Film



*Image 7 Traditional Costume in Isan*⁶³⁸

⁶³⁷ “Isan House เอื้อนอีสาน (บ้านคนอีสาน),” Isan Gate, August 21, 2021, <https://www.isangate.com/new/31-art-culture/tradition/653-huen-isan.html>.

⁶³⁸ (left) “Making Traditional Isan Incense Sticks, Ban Pao Local Wisdom การทำรูปหอมและรูปพันแบบโบราณอีสาน ภูมิปัญญาท้องถิ่นบ้านเป่า,” Esan Pedia, August 25, 2017, <http://www.esanpedia.oar.ubu.ac.th/esaninfo/?p=2835>.

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[EP02_%E0%B8%AA%E0%B8%A7%E0%B8%99%E0%B8%AD%E0%B8%AD%E0%B8%99%E0%B8%8B%E0%B8%AD%E0%B8%99%E0%B8%9E%E0%B9%88%E0%B8%AD%E0%B9%80%E0%B8%A5%E0%B8%B5%E0%B9%88%E0%B8%A2%E0%B8%A1](http://www.bccchannel.com/V121-EP02_%E0%B8%AA%E0%B8%A7%E0%B8%99%E0%B8%AD%E0%B8%AD%E0%B8%99%E0%B8%8B%E0%B8%AD%E0%B8%99%E0%B8%9E%E0%B9%88%E0%B8%AD%E0%B9%80%E0%B8%A5%E0%B8%B5%E0%B9%88%E0%B8%A2%E0%B8%A1).



*Image 8 Som Tam*⁶³⁹



*Image 9 Larb-Koi (left) pork (right) beef*⁶⁴⁰



Image 10 Living in Isaan and Connection with Lao People

⁶³⁹ (left) “Thai-Papayasalat – Som Tam Thai,” Asia Street Food, September 27, 2022, <https://asiastreetfood.com/rezept/thai-papaya-salat/>.

(right) “Foto von : Som Tum Pu Plara version,” Trip Advisor, September 27, 2022), https://www.tripadvisor.ch/LocationPhotoDirectLink-g186338-d2330387-i271429214-Suda_Thai_Cafe_Restaurant-London_England.html.

⁶⁴⁰ (left) “Thai-Papayasalat – Som Tam Thai,” Asia Street Food, September 27, 2022, <https://asiastreetfood.com/rezept/thai-papaya-salat/>.

(right) “Thai spicy minced beef meat food in the southeast of thailand or isan 'laab beef'with cucumber slices top,” Free Pik, September 27, 2022, https://www.freepik.com/premium-photo/thai-spicy-minced-beef-meat-food-southeast-thailand-isan-laab-beef-with-cucumber-slices-top-view_30269896.htm#page=2&query=thai%20beef%20salad&position=26&from_view=keyword.



*Image 11 (left) Phu Thai Ethnic Costume and Local Food
(middle and right) simulation of 1965 Incident⁶⁴¹*



Image 12 Receiving Money and Counting Money

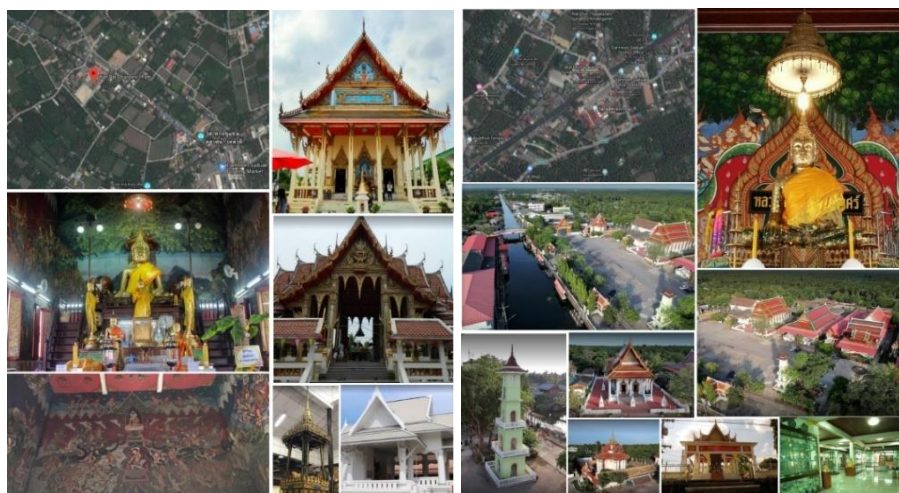


Image 13 Wat and Community⁶⁴²

⁶⁴¹ “Nabua, historical Village, Gunshot Day, Observe the Phuthai’s Culture บ้านนาบัว หมู่บ้านประวัติศาสตร์ วันเสียงปืนแตก เบิ่งวัฒนธรรมเก่าๆไทย,” Ban Muang, October 5, 2022, <https://www.banmuang.co.th/news/region/130775>.

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Image 14 Soldiers as Metaphysical Animations

Chapter 2



Image 15 Different Designs of Film Poster⁶⁴³

⁶⁴³ (left) Amazon, [website], 2011, <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Boonmee-Recall-Poster-French-Inches/dp/B0046OVEME>, (accessed 16 November 2022). (middle) Author. (right) Bol, [website], <https://www.bol.com/nl/nl/p/uncle-boonmee-who-can-recall-his-past-lives/1002004011244616/>, (accessed 23 November 2022).

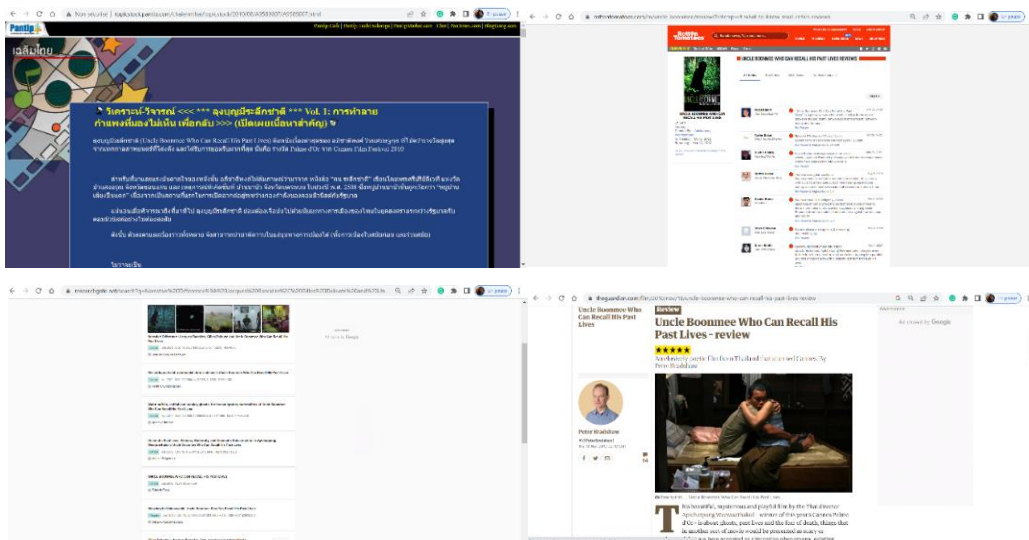


Image 16 Example of Film Critiques from Blog and Website

Chapter 4



Image 17 A Group of Soldiers with and without Uniforms and Sickle-and-Hammer Symbol



Image 18 The Setting in Film and Isan Environment



Image 19 Jen, as a Representative of the State



*Image 20 The Act of Killing:
A Simulation of the Government's Representative and Anwar⁶⁴⁴*



*Image 21 The Act of Killing:
A Simulation of Killing with Unknown Actor and Anwar⁶⁴⁵*

⁶⁴⁴ "The Act of Killing," IMDB, April 12, 2023, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2375605/>.

⁶⁴⁵ Carrie McAlinden, "True surrealism: Walter Benjamin and The Act of Killing," BFI, June 5, 2017, <https://www2.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/features/true-surrealism-walter-benjamin-act-killing>.



*Image 22 The Act of Killing: Anwar is Disgusted of His Previous Actions*⁶⁴⁶



*Image 23 The Act of Killing: Dancing Scenes*⁶⁴⁷



*Image 24 Kick The Machine Website: Apichatpong's Initiative*⁶⁴⁸

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Image 25 The Soldiers and the Monkey Ghost



Image 26 Boonmee encounter Jen's State Ideology



Image 27 The Princess and The enslaved person



Image 28 The Princess and The Catfish



Image 29 An Appearance of Ghost



Image 30 Ghost's Return for Justice



Image 31 After the Politicization: Huay Seeing Photos of Her Death Ritual



Image 32 Before Politicization Process: Tong and Pentax Camera



Image 33 Tong outside the Temple



Image 34 Health Care or Self-Care



Image 35 Boonmee's Dream of the Future



Image 36 Boonmee Introduces His Laotian Employees



*Image 37 The Conversation Represents the State Ideology
and Non-State Interpellation*

Chapter 5



Image 38 (left) Monk Tong and family (right) Jen with Farm Employees



Image 39 Boonsong before Transformation



Image 40 The Princess and Sexual Intercourse



Image 41 Tong with Duplicate



Image 42 Monk Tong at Boonmee's Dead Ritual



Image 43 Cave Entrance



Image 44 Boonmee and Huay for Love Dependency



Image 45 A Group of Soldiers (Conscript)



Image 46 Tong in a Mosquito Nest at a Temple



Image 47 Huay Helping Boonmee



Image 48 Princess's and Enslaved Person's Physical Attachment



Image 49 Princess's Wish for Beauty



Image 50 Jen's Sunblock Lotion



Image 51 Brother-Sister Relation



Image 52 Princess on A Sedan, the Enslaved Person as a Life Protector



Image 53 (left) Nang Nak (right) Shutter⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴⁹ (left) “Nang Nak,” IMDB, October 1, 2022, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0217680/>. (right)

“Shutter,” IMDB, October 1, 2022, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0440803/>.



*Image 54 Apichatpong Addressing at 2010 Cannes*⁶⁵⁰



Image 55 Boonmee Shows Photos to His Wife and Son



*Image 56 Tong's Astonishing Moment*⁶⁵¹

⁶⁵⁰ Palm d'Or 2010, "Charlotte Gainsbourg gives the Palme d'Or to Apichatpong Weerasethakul - Cannes 2010," recorded May 23, 2010 in Cannes, Youtube video, 04:20, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CAGn-H_0Gjo&t=281s.

⁶⁵¹ Jared Mobarak, "REVIEW: อุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ [Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives] [2010]," Jared Mobarak, January 27, 2011, <http://www.jaredmobarak.com/2011/01/27/uncle-boonmee/>.



Image 57 Huay's First Appearance



Image 58 Farmer and Buffalo in a Forest

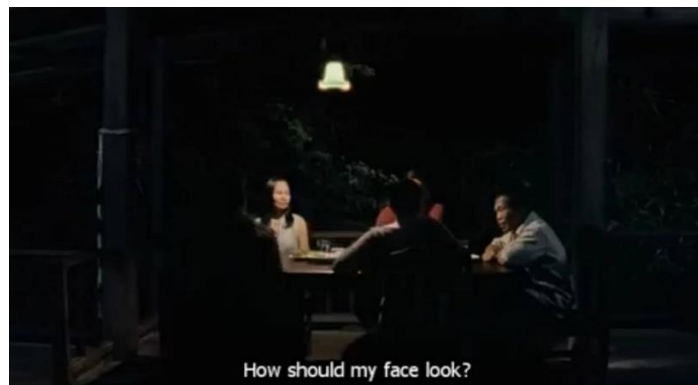


Image 59 Boonmee's Terrace with Non-Human Creatures



*Image 60 Pla Boo Tong (left) and Seo Sa ming (right)
in Thai Soap Opera⁶⁵²*



Image 61 Monkey Ghost's First Appearance

⁶⁵² (left) IPM, “ปลาบู๋ทอง EP.1 (Pla Boo Tong EP.1),” posted October 6, 2016 in Thailand, Youtube video, 00:00, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uTp-rYB5TVY>. (right) “เสื่อสมิง Seo Sa ming,” Channel 7 Thailand, October 1, 2022, <https://www.ch7.com/drama/16334>.



Image 62 Soldier versus Monkey Ghost or Government versus Communist



Image 63 Monkey Ghost in the Cave



Image 64 A Monkey Family⁶⁵³

⁶⁵³ Jared Mobarak, “REVIEW: อุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ [Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives] [2010],” Jared Mobarak, January 27, 2011, <http://www.jaredmobarak.com/2011/01/27/uncle-boonmee/>.



Image 65 The Princess and The Transformation Process

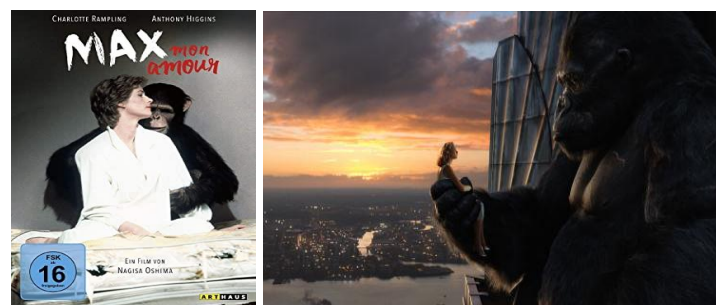


Image 66 Max mon amour (left) and King Kong (right)⁶⁵⁴

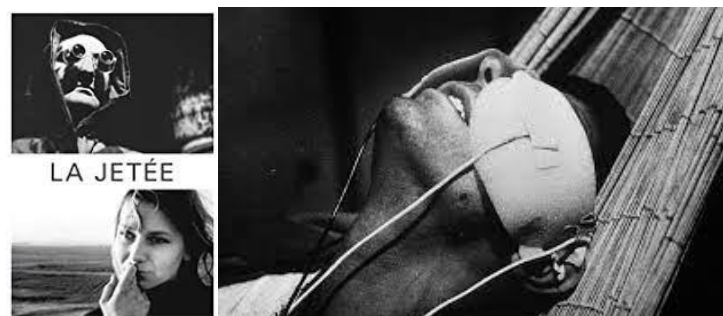


Image 67 La jetée, a French Science-Fiction, Black and White Film⁶⁵⁵

⁶⁵⁴ (left) “Max mon amour,” Amazon, October 1, 2022, <https://www.amazon.de/Max-mon-amour-Charlotte-Rampling/dp/B016QEZQO8>. (right) “King Kong,” IMDB, October 1, 2022, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0360717/>.

⁶⁵⁵ “La jétée,” IMDB, October 7, 2022, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0056119/>.



Image 68 The Group Enters the Cave and Walks through the Pathway



*Image 69 Metropolis*⁶⁵⁶



*Image 70 Avatar*⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁵⁶ (left) “Metropolis,” IMDB, March 7, 2023, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0017136/>. (right) Simon Abrams, “Review: Metropolis Lang’s film is a monumental achievement about monumental egos,” Slant Magazine, May 8, 2010, <https://www.slantmagazine.com/film/metropolis/>.

⁶⁵⁷ (left) “Avatar,” IMDB, March 7, 2023, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0499549/>. (right) Peter Bradshaw, “Review Avatar,” The Guardian, December 17, 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2009/dec/17/avatar-james-cameron-film-review>.



Image 71 Jen and Huay



Image 72 Majority and Minority



Image 73 Ordinary Tong, Monk Tong, and Ordinary Tong



Image 74 Non-Human Characters



Image 75 Buddhist Monk and Laymen



Image 76 The Princess and The Enslaved Person



Image 77 Boonsong's Obsession for Photography



Image 78 Jen's Inequal Legs



Image 79 Boonmee's Self-Care by An Employee



Image 80 A Group of Young Men (Conscripts without Uniform)



Image 81 Sickle and Hammer

List of Table

Introduction

Main-Appearance Character	Lesser-Appearance Character	Single-Appearance Character
Uncle Boonmee Aunt Jen Tong	Jai Huay Monkey ghost	Buffalo Farmer The farmer's family Boonsong Princess Slave Catfish Rung A group of soldiers A group of people at a temple People in a restaurant

Table 1 Characters in Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives

Chapter 2

	Seeing	Knowing	Believing
Objective	Exhaustive	Diegetic	Solid
Impossible Objective	Total	Metadiscursive	Absolute
Interpellation	Partial	Discursive	Relative
Subjective	Limited	Intradiegetic	Transitory

*Table 2 The Geography of The Spectator*⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵⁸ Francesco Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1998), 71.

Conclusion

	Seeing	Knowing	Believing
Objective			
Impossible Objective			
Interpellation	spectators who discovered the message about the politics		
Subjective			

Table 3 Assumption for the Reception about Politics

	Seeing	Knowing	Believing	
Objective	Non-Thai Spectator			Personal Sites and Professional Websites
Impossible Objective				
Interpellation	Thai Spectator			
Subjective				

Table 4 Assumption for the Reception about Gender

	Seeing	Knowing	Believing
Objective			
Impossible Objective	Thai and Non-Thai Spectator, Professional Websites, Private Blogs, Academic Articles		
Interpellation			
Subjective			

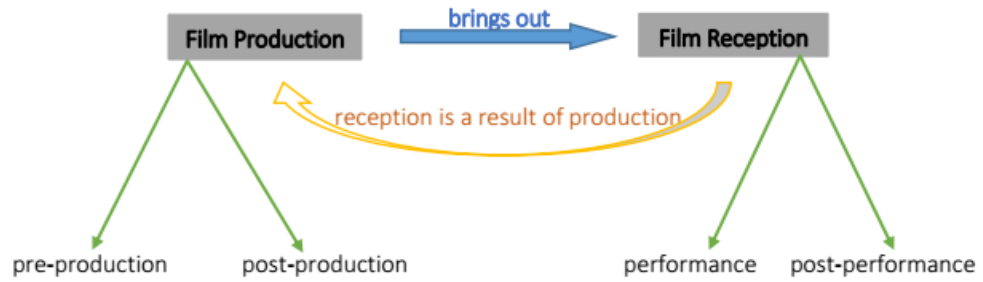
Table 5 Assumption for the Reception about Nature and Non-Human

	Seeing	Knowing	Believing	
Objective				
Impossible Objective				
Interpellation	Non-Thai Spectator			Professional Websites, Individual Blogs, Academic Research
Subjective	Thai Spectator			

Table 6 Assumption for the Reception about Class

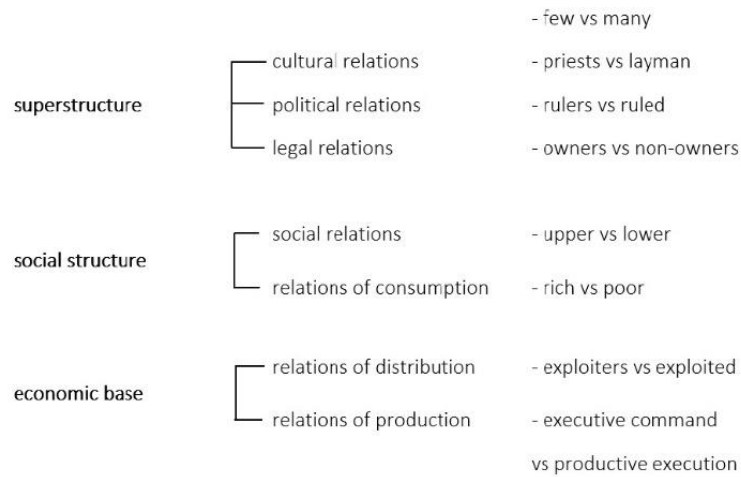
List of Diagram

Chapter 3



*Diagram 1 Bennett's Stage Performance and Post-Performance*⁶⁵⁹

Chapter 5



*Diagram 2 Class Relations Diagram*⁶⁶⁰

⁶⁵⁹ Susan Bennett, *The Role of The Theatre Audience: A Theory of Production and Reception*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 139-165.

⁶⁶⁰ Edward Andrew, "Marx's Theory of Classes: Science and Ideology," *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue Canadienne de science politique* 8, No.3, (September 1975): 458.

Conclusion

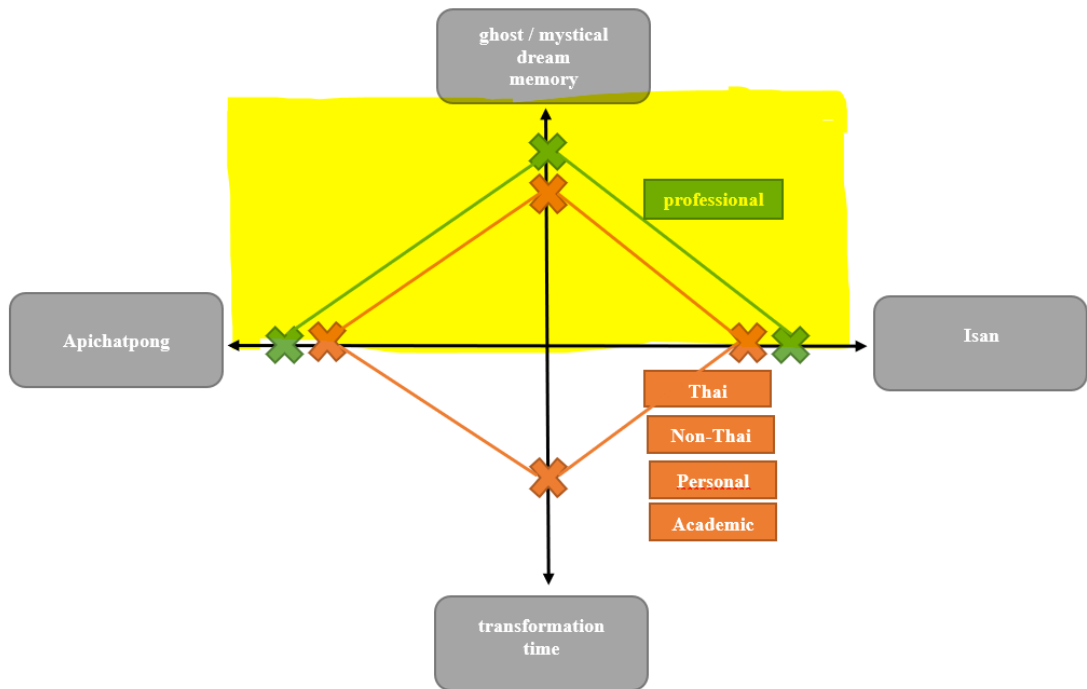


Diagram 3 Common Keywords from The Spectators' Critiques

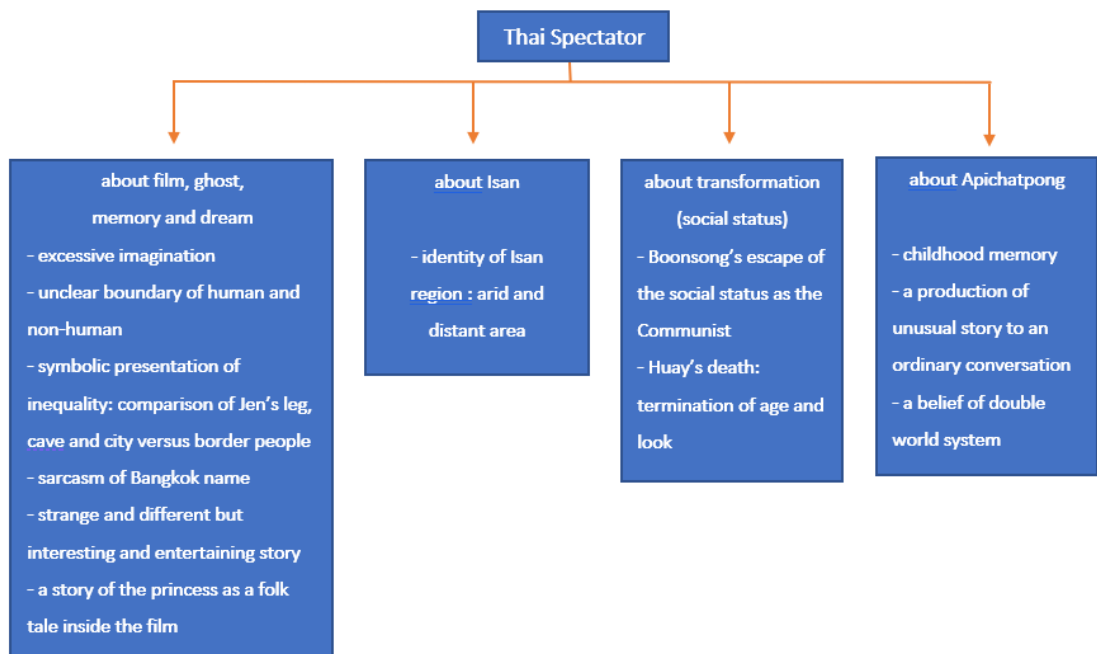


Diagram 4 Category 1: Thai Spectator

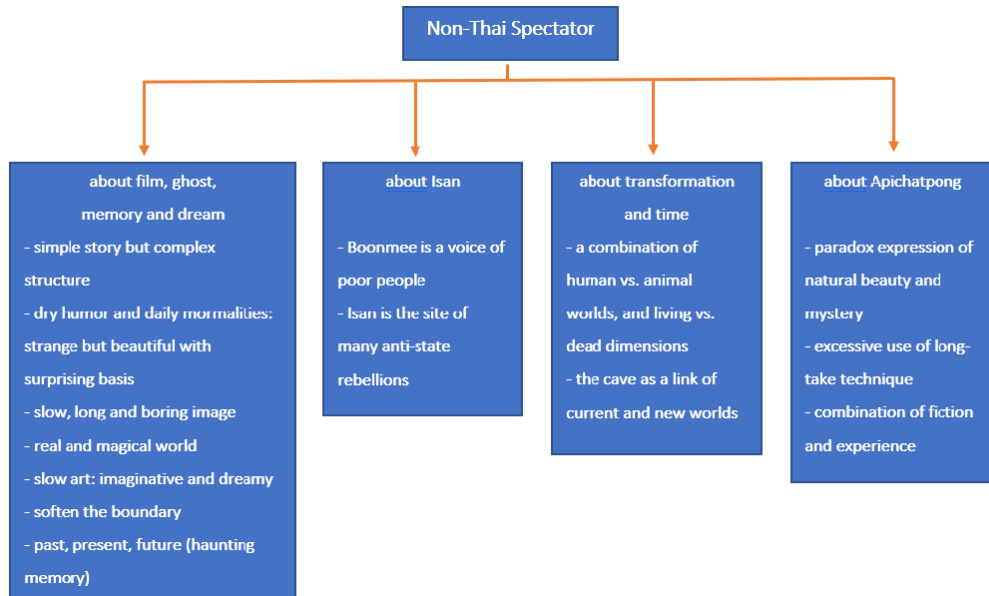


Diagram 5 Category 1: Non-Thai Spectator

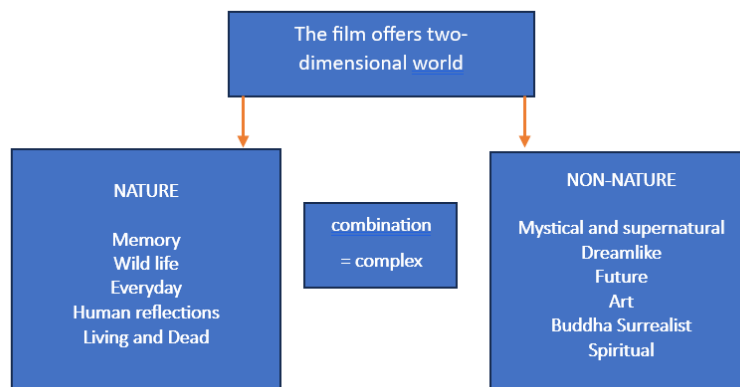


Diagram 6 Category 2: Professional Spectator (1)

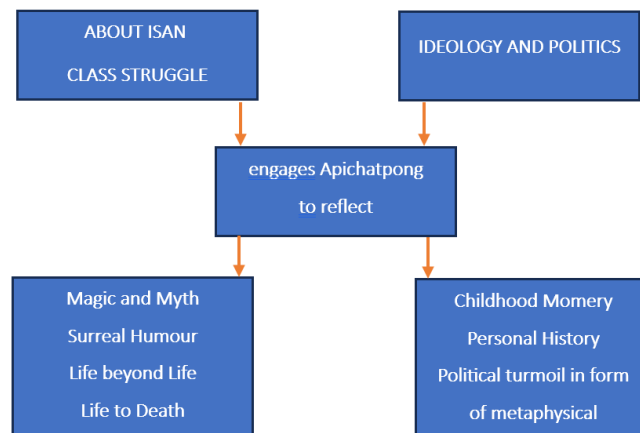


Diagram 7 Category 2: Professional Spectator (2)

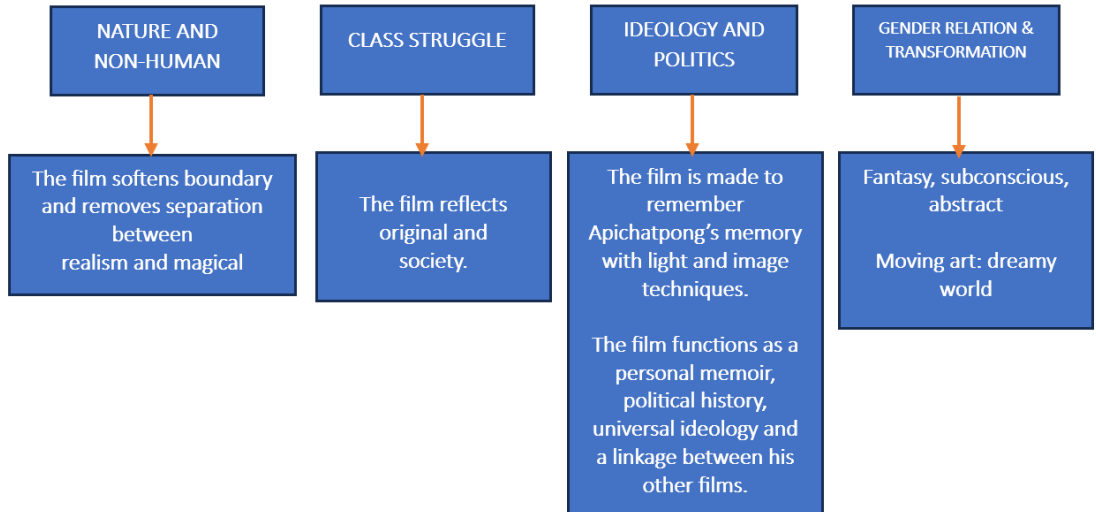


Diagram 8 Category 2: Personal Spectator (e.g. Blog and Discussion Board)

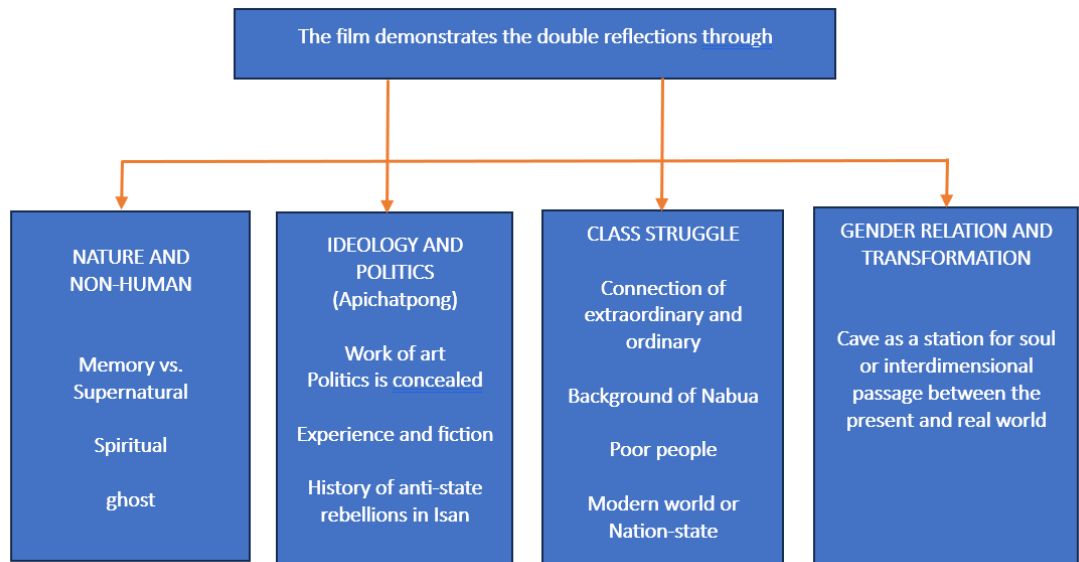


Diagram 9 Category 2: Academic Spectator

List of Common Arguments from Two Categories of Critiques

The common arguments are divided into two different levels which are critiques from Thai and non-Thai spectators; and critiques from professional, personal, and academic spectators.

Category 1: Critiques from Thai and non-Thai Spectators

1.1. Thai Spectator

1.1.1 about the film, ghost, memory and dream

- The film is strange and different, but however interesting and outstanding. It obtains excessive imagination content such as a crossed-specie affair which may be produced to simplify the film story.
- The film is characterized as ghost and spirit incarnation or old-fashioned horror.
- Ghost and spirit are referred in a symbolic way to reflect society and religious belief, while the monkey ghost can be a representative of border people and the Communist. Comparing a monkey ghost to the Communist is very painful because it makes a parody that the Communist is an evil or monster. The Communist monkey ghost then become a minority.
- The film blurs the boundary such as the human and a catfish. It offers a freedom to the film characters to cross the time and dimension, as well as the audience to imagine the film message. Crossing the border line is crossing the righteous and unethical of the law. The princess, the slave, the catfish, Jen's and Tong's duplicate is crossing of dimension. The film destroys the human-made wall to make people stay out of instinct, original nature such as value, tradition and custom, and law. The princess is just an ordinary woman after taking off her clothes and jewelry in which the unclathing may refer to a return to the origin.
- Jen's legs and the music at the end entitled 'fear of the height' may signify inequality.
- The film works as an archive of the director's memory.
- The film portrays a sarcasm to society including, the names Jen versus Huay, sunblock in a rural farm, Kungtepmahanakhon versus Krungtepmahanarok, and nature versus city.
- Boonsong's obsession with photography is similar to Apichatpong's fascination with art.
- The film scenes are not chronologically ordered which needs further discussion and interpretation.
- There are the same actors from previous films appearing in this film. Tong previously appeared in *Tropical Malady*, while Jen formerly appeared in *Blissfully*

Yours. Sakda or Tong in *Uncle Boonmee film* earlier acted a monk role (a monk with guitar) in *Syndrome and a Century*. Rung appears to help at the end as she earlier played in *Blissfully Yours*. The film can be a parade of the same actors (character) from previous movies, or a gathering point.

- On the other hand, the monkey ghost can be comparable to the tiger ghost in *Tropical Malady*. Meanwhile, the walk through the cave is like the walk with candles in the cave in *Tropical Malady*.
- Cave can represent vagina and human womb.
- Boonmee as a caring father and farm leader, while Huay is a caring wife and mother.
- Sunscreen, cloth, and jewelry can signify technology and woman identity.
- kidney dialysis scenes (Boonmee, Huay and Jai) are related to politics.
- The princess story is just a folk tale inside the film.
- Human and non-human creatures are equal.
- A comparison of Bangkok name and city versus border people.
- Human and animal produce an unclear boundary of class.
- Jen's legs and music represent inequality in society.
- Boonmee's dream is a simulation of the film story.

1.1.2 About Isan

- The film reveals an identity of Isan region that most audiences overlook because it is considered as a drought and a far-reach area. In this film, Isan-ness is mirrored as a ridiculous story.

1.1.3 About Transformation (social status)

- Boonsong escapes the Communist social status by joining a monkey tribe and perhaps changing his political ideology. On the other hand, he can be fascinated with the Communist ideology.
- Huay's transformation into ghost ceases her age and physical look

1.1.4 About Apichatpong

- The film reveals an attachment to Apichatpong's childhood memory and personal history in Khon Kaen and along Mae Khong River border. In other words, it is his recall of Isan and childhood experience, and political incidents at Nabua, which

occurred during the prosecution operation against the Communist around the Cold War period.

- He always delivers an image of normal life by inserting unusual story in an ordinary conversation, for instance. He might have created the film to appreciate the memory of Nabua villagers.
- For Apichatpong, his encounter with what is now a historical canon of aesthetic revolt has fuelled an aesthetic renewal on an individual scale.
- The double-world system is the director's logo in producing film.

1.2. Non-Thai Spectator

1.2.1 about the film, ghost, memory and dream

- *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* is not a difficult film. It is simple in story but complex in structure and subtext.
- It is like an art in arthouse with dry humour and expressive cinematography that is both visually arresting and engagingly entertaining.
- The film creates day-to-day normalities, calm and gentle equivalence. It is also a combination of everyday life and extraordinary.
- The fade-in ghost causes the film unrealistic and unexpected. It is between black magic and Buddhism. But it is not a ghostly scary.
- The previous incarnations in the film are presented in a mystical flashback parallel, showing image of the present and the past time.
- *Uncle Boonmee film* is a masterful meditation on journeying into the afterlife.
- The film is hopelessly slow, while the plot and the sequence are very long and static, leading to boredom. But it is wryly comic.
- The movie not a rational puzzle, but it is instead closer to a Buddhist fairy tale i.e., it is a Buddha-surrealist jungle story. It's a weird and fantastical film that is between the real and the magical worlds.
- The film can be a country folk and a dreamlike. The film is imaginative, offering a dreamy world of slow-moving art.
- The film is a charming, haunting, floating miasma, unpleasant, strange, and beautiful.

- The film demolishes or softens the boundaries between life and death, man and beast, and pain and happiness.
- Boonmee is discrete from others who try to forget by doing nothing else but remembering.
- The film and cave carry souls through different time. It is the passage of life to death.
- It is metaphysical manifestations of past lives appear like fragments of a dream, making the audience accept the non-ordinariness of monkey ghost, ghost, and catfish.
- The film mixes mystical and realism and completely depart from a typical narrative structure with abundant mysteries of the human adventure, a slideshow of unrelated events, memories, and reincarnation fantasies.
- The film is built on surprising basis with great photography and optimistic approach to death.
- The film breaks barriers between tradition and modern lifestyles. It is a moderate presentation of poetic and evocative portrait in form of moving image.
- Although the film is found as strange, unusual, and slow; it is fascinating. It is further interesting and entertaining. It is sometimes perplexing.
- The film is contemplative and reflective.
- The film can influence the audience to recognize the idea that life is an illusion.
- The film is a social-political critique on the past, present, and upcoming future of Thailand
- Ghosts appears in a symbolic and figurative way as a haunting memory. The ghost's voice and haunted time are employed in the film to challenge injustices of the past and of the present day.
- The film reproduces the memory of a violent military past, which might reveal ideological conflict between nation and anti-nation, and center and margin, e.g.

1.2.2 about Isan

- *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* is set in Isaan, Boonmee can be a representative of those who live far away.
- The voices of the poor people are at the margins and are not consistent with the time and space of the nation-state.
- Isaan was the site of several anti-state rebellions.

1.2.3 about transformation and time

- The people from the past were transformed, the society were changed, and the individual can be affected by others. Besides, the princess discovered a new freedom.
- Boonmee sees the future as a time where a conflict appears between the people of the future and the people of the past.
- The film combines two different worlds of human/animal (Monkey Ghost) and living/dead (Huai, Boonsong).

1.2.4 about Apichatpong

- Apichatpong evokes feeling and mood of the country's insurgency.
- Weerasethakul is suggesting an aggressive invasion of secular modernity which is taking place against traditional religious beliefs and practices.
- Like many of previous movies, he set his film story mainly in the forest and poor northeast Thailand.
- The film is the fullest expression of Weerasethakul's paradox: a work of natural beauty, but sophisticated and mysterious.
- His directing style matches poetry with mysterious cinematic designs.
- Boonmee story is a starting point of his film, while the rest of the film story is from his research and imagination.
- Apichatpong's film depicts the north-eastern region of Thailand through a mixture of film and installation.
- Apichatpong combines his experience and his films.
- Apichatpong's style of directing is intentional, purposeful, and ghostly. He likes making the audience experiencing the darkness and spiritual image.
- Weerasethakul explored nature and expressed Thailand's history (based on oral tale); and displays it in expressive representations and graphic.
- Apichatpong always employ excessive use of a technique called long take (or extended shot). So, the film scenes are long and sometimes boring.
- Apichatpong's films connect the extraordinary with the ordinary to discuss the everyday affairs of the nation-state.
- Apichatpong links fictional film worlds with the general situations. His films are interrelated by politics and background of Nabua i.e., the films work like a documentary that contains both experience and fiction.

Category 2: Critiques from Professional, Personal, and Academic Spectators

2.1. From Professionals (Journals, Newspapers, Rotten Tomatoes)

2.1.1 about the film, ghost, dream, memory, mystical

- It is not a difficult film: simple in its story but complex in structure and subtext.
- It is an art: imaginative and fantasy with a slide show of unrelated events and puzzle. It also obtains symbolism and captivating imagery.
- It is slow but strange.
- It is a memory and dreamlike versus past and future story.
- It presents a fantastic version of nature, Buddha surrealist jungle story, country folk and wildlife.
- The film is mystical, spiritual, ghostly, haunting, supernatural and magical. It functions as a cinema of spirits and human reflections.
- It is a vague combination of extraordinary and every day, spirit world and physical one, and earthly and supernatural settles.
- The film blurs boundaries between life and death, man and beast, pain and happiness. It further illustrates a relationship between living and dead.
- The film presents an analogy that local villagers attempt to forget the past, whereas Boonmee is an opposition because he can remember his past actions and former lives.
- The film displays ghost and spirits in a symbolic way according to the religious belief. It further reflects the society which the monkey ghost is a representative of the Communist Party and border people.

2.1.2 about Isan

- It is a film in the Primitive project, with an aim to wake up Nabua village.
- Isan-ness is mirrored through a ridiculous story.

2.1.3 about Apichatpong Weerasethakul

- It is the passage from life to death: life beyond life.
- Weerasethakul is a master of the real movie magic.

- The director provokes feeling and mood by matching poetry with mysterious cinematic designs. In other words, he combines magic and myth with surreal humor. The mystery is out-of-body experience.
- The film is a playful paradox: it is ostentatious (modest and natural).
- The film works as a critique of Thailand's political turmoil i.e., the metaphysical turmoil of director's own country.
- The film is a cosmic pool of Weerasethakul's imagination and his personal memories. The imagination presents spiritual mediation and ghost story of intense beauty. However, the personal memories reflect political references. It is found that Apichatpong's film shows an attachment to his childhood memory and personal history.
- In conclusion, Apichatpong engages magic and myth, childhood memory, and metaphysical turmoil.

2.2. From Discussion Board (Pantip), Personal Blogs/Sites, Rotten Tomatoes (All Audience)

2.2.1 about the film, ghost, dream, memory

- The film softens the boundaries between humanity and nature, and life and afterlife. It wipes out the gulf separating the material world from the spirit one. In other words, it introduces a freedom and a blur boundary.
- The film story relies on Buddhist rhythms, mythical underpinning, and mesmeric images. Meanwhile, ghost is supernatural. The supernatural features are blurred beautifully.
- The story is subconscious, complex, abstract through intangible, reality and fantasy, and meditative.
- The film offers an opposition of metaphysical and magical mystery. It is a metaphysical manifestation of past lives through fragments of dream. The film moves like a dream with events and sequences puzzling. In contrast, it is a magical mystery tour in visual poetry and moments of truth. However, it can be a combination of mystical and realism.
- The film is a slow-moving art that demonstrates a dreamy world. It offers a slow and contemplative meditation.

- It is also strange and mysterious: slightly confusing but exceptional and relaxed.
- The film is appearing, appealing, and original.
- Boonmee's dream is the simplest simulation to explain the film.
- The film is a metaphor to reflect society which the Communist is ghost or evil, and an inequality in Thai society. The film represents Jen's unequal legs, Jen and Huay names, sunblock and countryside, Krungthemahanakhon and Krungthepmahanarok, and Boonsong with photography and Apichatpong with art.
- The film is not chronologically ordered; it offer puzzling scenes. It is ambiguous.
- The cave is like a passage between life and death. It is the most optimistic and positive approach to death.
- The film is constructed with beautiful images rather than being constrained by a narrow linear approach to death.
- The film ultimately falls more toward interesting than entertaining. Although it's a great photography and interesting plot, but slow and boring.
- It provides long takes, but interesting combination.
- The film suggests good imagery, plenty of distinctive humour, exaggerated narrative style, inadequate to say it is meaningful or entertaining.
- In conclusion, the film, simultaneously, softens boundaries and wipes out separation. Nonetheless, it combines realism and magic.

2.2.2 about Isan

- It is a recall of Apichatpong or a record of his memory: memory of Isan and his childhood, political incidents at Nabua, and historical trauma and prosecution operation in Isan.
- The film is made to observe and verify his own memory about Isan as well as to recall a historical trauma which occurred during the prosecution operation against the Communist around the Cold War period.

2.2.3 about the princess, transformation

- The film communicates about a return to human origin: Boonmee's death in a cave (a return to woman womb), and the princess without jewelry (a return to an ordinary human being).

2.4 about Apichatpong Weerasethakul

- The film works as chronicle of Apichatpong's personal memories as well as contrives Boonmee's personal memories.
- It invents a latent political commentary.
- All Apichatpong's films are linked by recurring actors, characters, incidents and scenes.
- *Uncle Boonmee film* perhaps shares Apichatpong's vision of the world.
- In conclusion, memory is an essential theme for the movie. It is constructed to recall and verify Apichatpong's memory and experience.

2.3. From Academic Sources

2.3.1 about the film, ghost, dream, memory

- Ghosts were always part of the landscape. The movie is like stream of consciousness, drifting from one remembrance to another.
- The film is strange; it is considered as a beautiful dream.
- It presents supernatural and spiritual. Ghost is illustrated in a symbolic way as a haunting memory and a representation of injustice of the past and present. In addition, it shows lives of common people of the supernatural form.
- The film lacks a clearly defined beginning and ending.
- Boonmee is a contradiction of other Nabua people because Boonmee can remember while local villagers try to forget the brutal past.
- The film reproduces the memory of violent military past.
- The monkey ghost also symbolizes the images of memories.
- In conclusion, the film reflects both memory and supernatural components

2.3.2 about Isan

- The monkey ghost is a representative of people who are not compatible with the current society.
- The film is set in Isan. Isan is the site of several anti-state rebellions. Nabua is a repressed memory. Nonetheless, the royalist attempts to silence the history for national unity.
- Voices of the poor cannot be incorporated into the modern world.

- The non-human beings (i.e., poor people) are not consistent with the current time and space of the nation-state (i.e., the modern world)
- In conclusion, the inconsistency of historical non-human characters and the modern nation- state can refer to an inequality in Thai society.

2.3.3 about transformation and time

- The transformation of the characters is comparable to the transformation of society. The obsolete past was transformed into the current modernity.
- The princess has her newfound freedom.
- The film focuses on the beliefs in other-worldly elements that are actually parts of our lives.
- Boonmee's dream of future however expresses a controversy because he sees people of the past and people of the future.
- The cave is a metaphor or perhaps more precisely, a metonym, of the cinema. We enter a darkened space with the intention of leaving our present world (death) in order to enter a new world (re-birth, reincarnation) on the screen each time we go to the cinema. Boonmee's cave is an interdimensional way station for souls to enter and to leave this world.
- 'Past people' and Monkey Ghosts (guerillas hunting gorillas?), all those who represent man's primitive nature of religion to make way for a completely secular world of materiality.
- It shows time and space of human and animal or living and dead.
- In conclusion, the film can be a comparison of cave which people in the present world witness the story (enter the cave) and receive a new message and ideology from the film (exit the cave into the new world with a new soul).

2.3.4 about Apichatpong

- Weerasethakul is pleasant in offering ambiguity and darkness and presenting supernatural.
- Weerasethakul's produces work of art which is expressive representation of difference.
- Apichatpong is keen with the excessive use of a technique called long take (or extended shot); to stretch the struggle between times and images to spark and nurture personal interpretive contemplation even further.

- Apichatpong's films connect the extraordinary with the ordinary as a "relational" process, highlighting the procedures of speaking and listening, reflecting, and deliberating, to politicize the everyday affairs of the nation-state and the ways it is imagined.
- Apichatpong is motivated, "film is an excuse, or a medium that lets people communicate with the outside (people and places)".
- Apichatpong links fictional film worlds with the public exhibitions of violence that give rise to these stories.
- His work discloses a relationship between hierarchical political authority in hospital versus well-being. The films are interrelated by politics and background of Nabua.
- His films function as a documentary that contains both experience and fiction.
- Apichatpong discussed in an interview that the politics in his work is concealed.