



12th International Conference on Thai Studies

THAILAND IN THE WORLD

The University of Sydney
22-24 April 2014



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You are here: Home / Southeast Asia Centre / Thai Studies Conference 2014

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- About the conference
- Registration form
- Program
- Postgraduate and ECR workshop
- Important dates
- Keynote speakers
- Become a sponsor
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12TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THAI STUDIES



The International Conference on Thai Studies is held every three years, hosted either by a Thai university or by a university outside of Thailand where there is an interest in Thai studies. The University of Sydney is pleased to host the next conference from 22 to 24 April 2014. The conference will adopt the theme *Thailand in the World*.

The University of Sydney is one of Australia's leading universities. It is characterised by a vibrant and diverse intellectual community, and it is home to the Sydney Southeast Asia Centre.

The conference will be held at a state-of-the-art conference facility on our main campus in Camperdown, located near Sydney's energetic city centre and stunning harbour. The campus itself is a beautiful location. Sydney is Australia's largest and most dynamic city, and it is home to roughly 5 million people from diverse backgrounds, including approximately 20,000 ethnic Thai residents.

The conference will celebrate the University of Sydney's long-standing connection with Thailand. The University's academics work with colleagues across several Thai universities, addressing critical issues such as governance of the Mekong River Basin, infectious diseases, public health and refugee challenges. They also explore Thailand's culture through art, history and religion.

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เครือข่ายนักวิชาการ (เพื่อน)

ข่าวสารโครงการประชุมวิชาการนานาชาติและความเคลื่อนไหวทางด้านไทยศึกษา
ติดตามได้ทางจดหมายข่าวและเว็บไซต์ของโครงการ

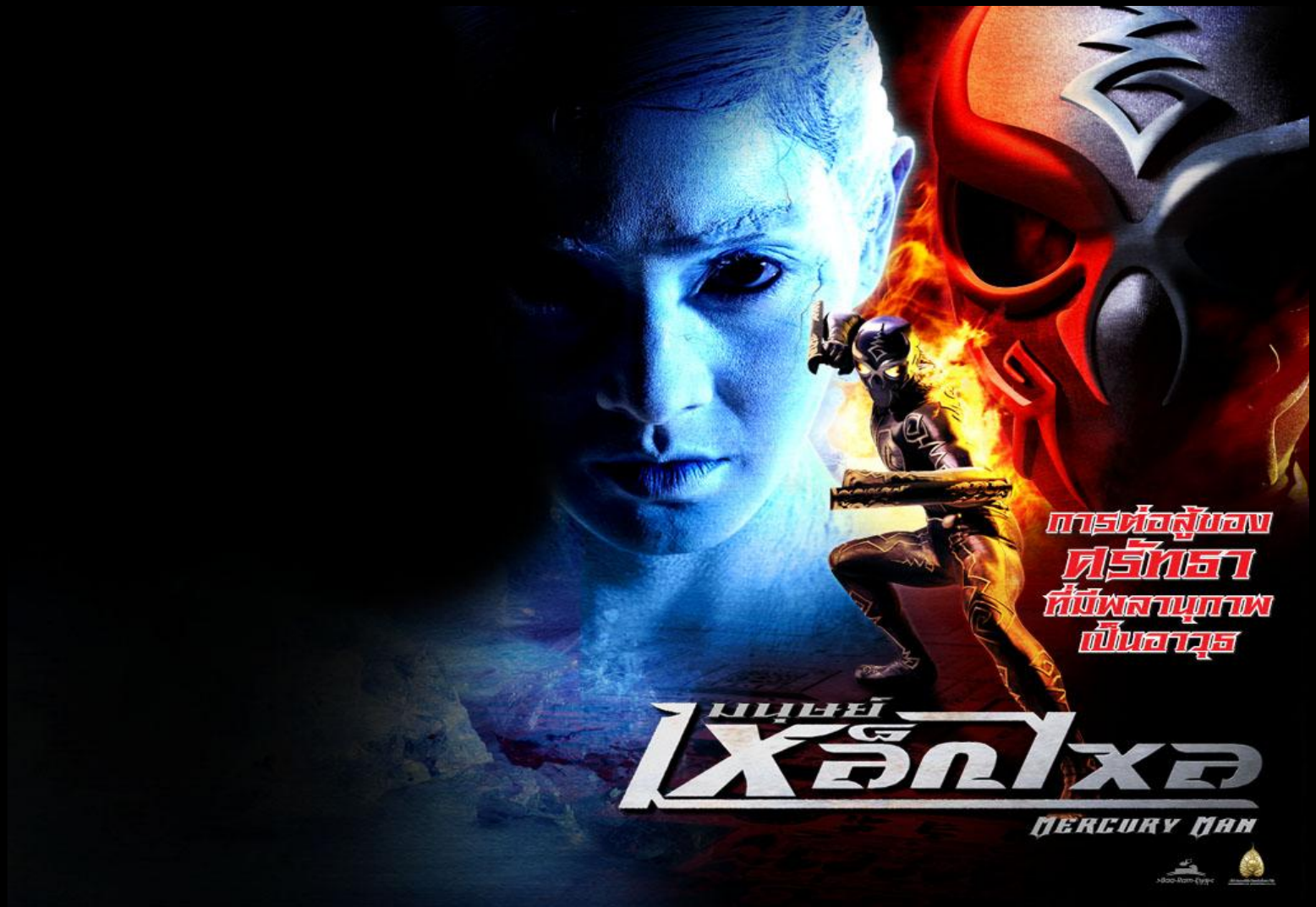
Representation of Thailand through Travel Writings in English

Soranat Tailanga
Thongrob Ruenbuntaeng
Kulapa Kuldilok
Natthanai Prasannam



**Translation of Sexual Innuendo
in King Vajiravudh's Romeo and Juliet**

Thongrob Ruenbanthoeng



**Heroes, Villains and Cultural Hybridisation: Necromancers
in Thai Cinema since 1997**
Krittaya Na Nongkhai

Thai action adventure films have reflected the adoption and adaptation of foreign culture with Thai culture since the beginning. The creation of heroes interestingly illustrates the cultural hybridisation.

The one outstanding type of hybrid characters are the Thai style superhero and super villain. In the process of character creation, we can see the clash between modern society/technology and the old beliefs creating the most creative characters.

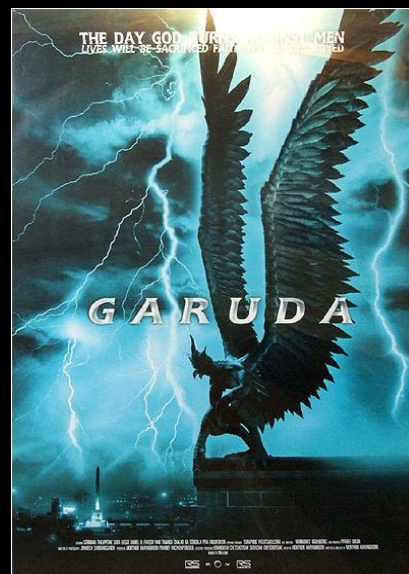
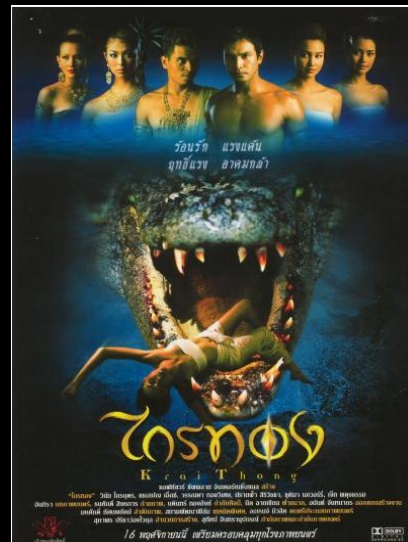
I, thus, take the opportunity to study the cultural hybridisation seen through the hero and villain characters in Thai action adventure films produced and released during 1997-2013.

This period is significant because of two main reasons. Firstly, these films have been released in both national and international areas. Secondly, from 1997 onwards, the intensity of globalisation has been perceived in Thailand, and Thai society has reacted in several ways such as the search of Thai identity and nostalgia.

These factors may be influences on the characterisation of hero and villain characters in Thai action adventure films produced and released during this period. It is found that there are a number of films, especially in 2001 onwards, are about the battle of the hero and villain with a mage character.

This article seeks to study creations of the necromancer in 13 Thai action adventure films made during 1997-2013 as follow

1997: (1.) *Khon Puan Saifa [Destiny Upside Down]*, (2.) *Ta Fa Likhit [Who is Running]*;
2001: (3.) *Kraithong [Kraithong]*;
2002: (4.) *Sap Suea Lam Nam Kasat [Tigress of King River]*;
2003: (5.) *Maha Ut [Tattoo]*, (6.) *Chom Khamang Wet [Necromancer]*,
2004: (7.) *Amanut [Unhuman]*, (8.) *Paksawayu [Garuda]*, (9.) *Ukkabat [The Meteor]*,
(10.) *Suriyakhat [Curse of the Sun]*;
2006: (11.) *Khon Fai Bin [Dynamite Warrior]*, (12.) *Manut Lek Lai [Mercury Man]*;
2008: (13.) *Hanuman Klook Phun [The White Monkey Warrior]*



Objective

The purpose of this study is to examine the culturally hybrid features of the hero characters in the Thai action adventure films from 1997 to 2010 (2540-2553 B.E.).

It is hypothesized that the characterisation of necromancer in these films has been influenced by the characterisation of the characters found in foreign films. The foreign influence has been adapted and mixed with local Thai beliefs and values. Thus, hybrid heroes have emerged, and this emergence demonstrates the dynamics of Thai film production in response to globalisation.

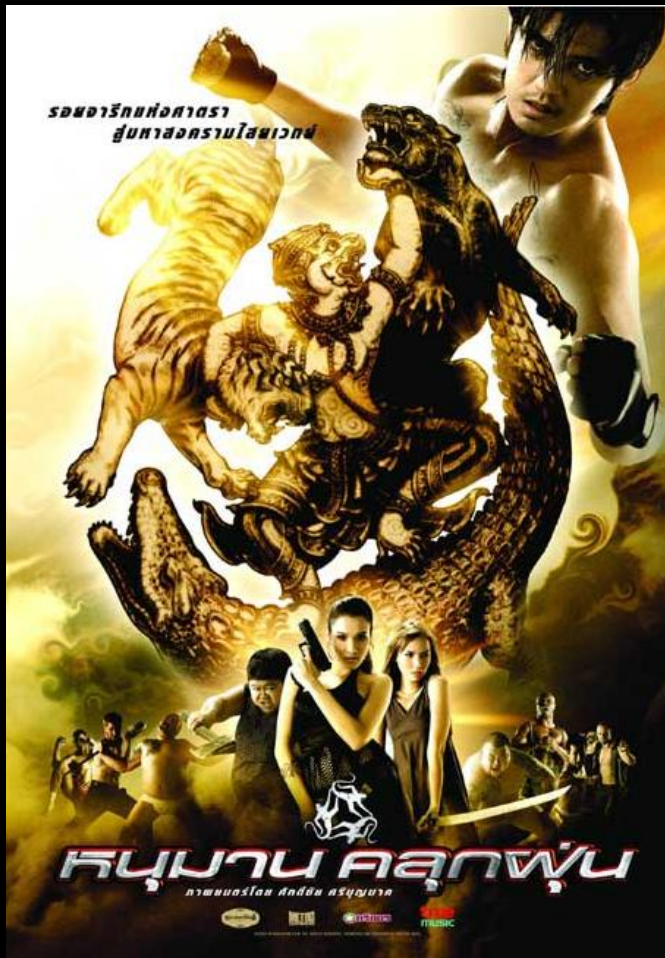
It is found that the necromancers in Thai films were created through the combination of different religious beliefs in Thai society such as Buddhism, Brahmanism, Animism, and magical power with the superhero archetype imported from the West.



Necromancer character is the clear evidence of cultural hybridization between the characterisation of superhero characters in foreign films and Thai beliefs about supernatural power and magic power.

This mixed cultural ingredient originates hybrid Thai superheroes and super villains as follow

- 1) necromancer heroes
- 2) shamans or demonic villains.



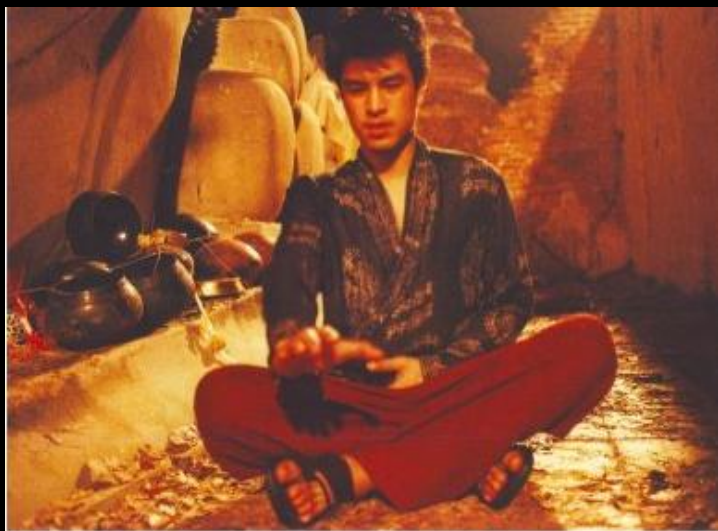
The White Monkey Warrior

หนุมานคลุกฝุ่น (2551)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Kuzqq-QyQA>

1) Necromancer heroes

- Thai necromancer superhero is an ordinary man who takes adventure into the magic world or is affected by any disaster caused by supernatural things, monsters, or black magic power.
- The protagonist learns magic and then possesses magical power. He uses his magical power to fight the monsters and mistakes caused by scientific and technological experiment in order to protect those in need.
- The Thai necromancer superhero is found in *Destiny Upside Down, Who is Running, Kraithong, Tigress of King River, Tattoo, Necromancer, Unhuman, Garuda, The Meteor, Curse of the Sun, Dynamite Warrior, and Mercury Man.*



Mercury Man is one of the most prominent examples of the cultural hybridisation. This film tells about Chan, a fire police, who possesses Suriyan mental charm (Leklai). This man is hot-tempered. He tries and learns how to control his mind so as not to be destroyed by the power of his mental charm. Then, when he knows how to control his mind's dark side and temper, he also knows how to control the power of mental charm. Meditation practice fuses him and his charm to become the Mercury man whose power is far beyond ordinary people. The power of his charm causes him trouble. He is chased after by the terrorists led by Ussamah who possesses Chanthra mental charm. Ussamah wants to possess Chan's charm. It is because whenever his charm is fused with Suriyan mental charm, his power is incomparable and no weapons can harm him.

2) Shamans or Demonic Villains



This is villains with dark magic and cursing spell or Devil or Demonic Beast.

The villain is the shaman with powerful magical spells as his expertise.

He usually uses black magic and dark art or devils and ghost to commit crimes and the result in doing that turns him to be one of the devils.

In some stories, the villain is the devil or demonic beast killing people.

This kind of villain is found in *Unhuman, Necromancer, Garuda Dynamite Warrior, The White Monkey Warrior*

The belief in magic and spells is introduced through the villain character such as in *Tattoo*, *Necromancer*, *Mercury Man* and *Dynamite Warrior* magical spells is used in the wrong and corrupt ways. The villain has become an allegory of injustice showing that the advantages or disadvantages of using magic and spells depends chiefly on the conscience of the user. The magic spells of the villain is therefore a dark magic turning him to be one of the devils.



Step of hero's journey

Villain creates social crisis with his dark spell.

ผู้ร้ายซึ่งมีวิชาอาคมก่อให้เกิดวิกฤตการณ์ทางสังคม

Hero has inherited magical charm.

พระเอกมีวิชาอาคม

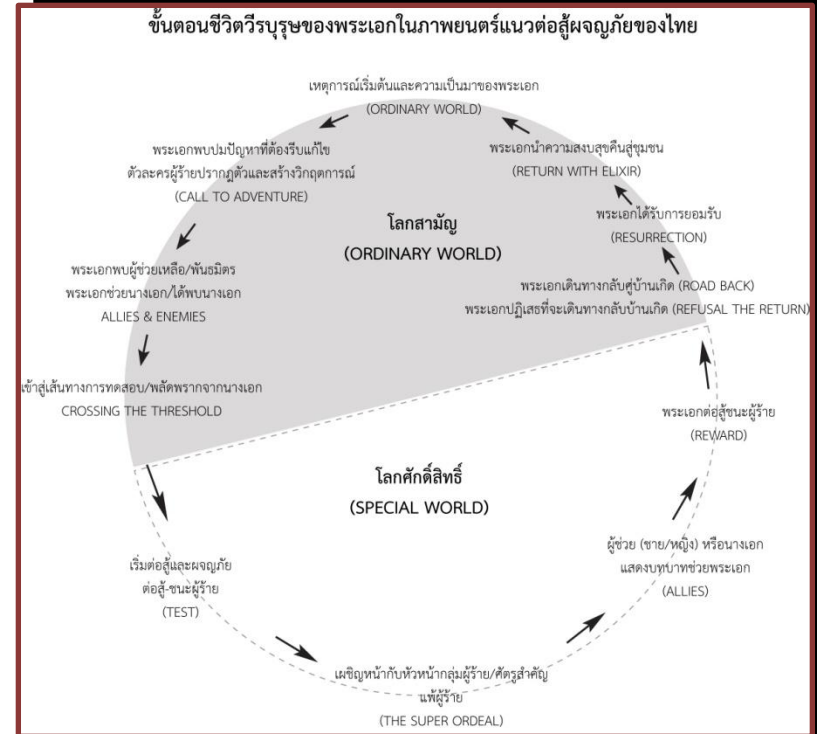
Hero be assigned to defeat the villain

Hero and villain are fighting using their spells and occult magic

พระเอกกับผู้ร้ายต่อสู้กันด้วยวิชาอาคม

Hero defeats the villain and restores peace back to society

พระเอกเอาชนะผู้ร้าย คืนความสงบสุขให้สังคม



Thus, the main idea presented through the conflicts between the hero and magical villain is the binary opposition between vice and virtue.

The hero of this kind will normally be a magician who is interested in practicing virtuous deeds; therefore, his magical spells are much more powerful than those of the villain because the spells are cast from the one who cherishes virtue over vice. If he aims to use them for the sake of people and society, it will finally bring peace and good result to him.

The villain is the symbol of greed, anger and deception so he intentionally uses the spells to the wrong ends.

The Process of cultural hybridisation

When the belief in magic power is mixed with the concept of western superheroes, it creates a hybrid hero, the necromancer superhero, as found in *Mercury Man*. Hereafter are examples of cultural hybridisation presented through the

1) superhero character's ability 2) gestures 3) costume

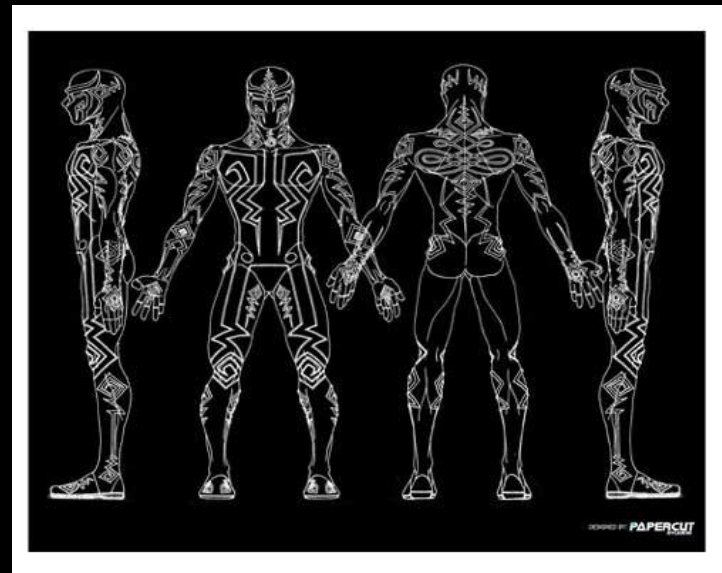


The Mercury man's gesture is not different from American and Japanese superheroes, mixed with Thai national martial arts.

The superhero's costume is itself a hybrid object. It is a noticeable motif that is created in the superhero films' convention mixed with Thai beliefs.

- Nine-top tattoo (yan kao yod) on the Mercury man's costume is the symbol of the Lord Buddha's nine types of marvelous kindness. It is believed to be able to prevent any danger and to be invulnerable.

- His arm weapon is an ancient Thai weapon called Plong Mai Sok. (พลองไม้ศอก) It is used to save its user and to attack any enemies.



ผลงานภาพมนุษย์
ไอ้จิ้งจอก

"กิ้งก่า" มีสัญลักษณ์แห่งการรับความ
เชื่อของไทย ก่อนทหารออกรบเพื่อชัยชนะ
จะอยู่คู่กับผู้นั้นตลอดไป

"ลายบนเนื้อผ้า" ออกแบบโดย อ.ช่วง มูลคัง
ศิลปินแห่งชาติ เป็นลายไทยประยุกต์ผสมผสาน
ความสวยงามของลายไทย กับสีสันของ
มนุษย์ได้อย่างลงตัว

"ข้อศอก" แทลมคม
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ป้องกันการโจมตีและ
เครื่องมือโจมตีศัตรู
ในคราวเดียวกัน

"ลายยันต์เก้ายอด
และลายบนนูนบนตัว" ออกแบบ
โดยคุณชัยพร พานิชรุทวิวงศ์ ได้รับแรง
บันดาลใจมาจากยันต์เก้ายอดสัญลักษณ์
แห่ง คุณริศของพระพุทธเจ้า
ทั้ง ๘ ประการ สามารถป้องกัน
ศาสตราวุธและสิ่งเลวร้ายทั้งปวง
คงไว้ซึ่งความคงกระพัน
หนังเหนียว พันธะไม่เข้า

"ลักษณะการต่อสู้" ใช้การต่อสู้
ด้วยศิลปะมวยไทยแบบประยุกต์
พลังอันมหาศาลทำให้หมดมวย
หนักหน่วงกว่ามนุษย์ธรรมดา

"ดวงตา" สีฟ้าสีทอง
คุณธรรม เมตตา ไม่คิดร้าย
ต่อผู้อื่น แน่วแน่ ไวและคม
ดุจเสือ

"สีดำ" สีดำของปีกแมลงทับ
สีแห่งเหล็กไหล รัตนาสู
มหัศจรรย์อันทรงพลัง

"กล้ามเนื้อ" พลังจาก
เหล็กไหลหลอมรวมกับ
เลือดเนื้อและร่างกาย
เป็นหนึ่งเดียว เปลี่ยน
กล้ามเนื้อเชิงแกร่ง
ดุจเหล็กกล้าไร้
ศาสตราวุธใด ๆ
จะต้านทาน

"ฝ่ามือ" ปลดปล่อย
พลังแห่งเหล็กไหลที่เข้มงวด
ในร่างกายให้สามารถดึงดูด
หรือผลักวัตถุที่เป็นเหล็กทุก
ชนิด ไม่ว่าจะหนักหรือใหญ่
เพียงใดก็ตาม เสมือนร่าง
กายคือแม่เหล็กทั้งตัวบวก
และลบในตัวเดียวกัน

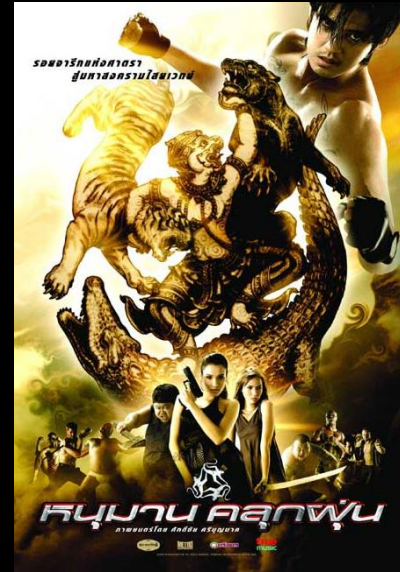
The mixture of a superhero's costume and traditional Thai belief relates to Thai ways of life in contemporary society. Although their lives have been surrounded by modern technology, they search and expect for mental security and warmth from a supernatural power as it is represented in traditional Thai society. Therefore, the knowledge and concepts of black magic and supernatural power can blend well with modern technology and exist in the contemporary world, though its status is inferior.

The Necromancer heroes and villains have express the idea of deeply rooted beliefs about supernatural power and magic belief in Thai society. And inherited ideas

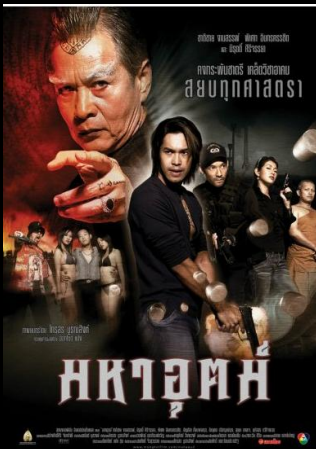
"The hero is a magic and supernatural powers" that can defeat enemies, something supernatural, such as ghosts, giants, or even fight enemies with magic, between the protagonists and opponents.



<http://www.guyyasit.com/index.php?topic=264.0>



The combination between the belief of black magic and superstitious belief and supernatural powers such as spiritualism, legend and tales about magical creatures is way to bring local knowledge to the perception of the masses.



Conclusion

It can be concluded that necromancers in Thai films were created through the combination of different religious beliefs in Thai society: Buddhism, Brahmanism, Animism, and magical power with the superhero archetype imported from the West. This mixed cultural ingredient originates hybrid Thai superheroes: 1) necromancer heroes and 2) shamans or demonic villains. The hybrid characterisations of these characters convey the messages about “the right VS the mighty” and Karma rules according to Buddhist doctrine. The characters also represent Buddhist folktale, particularly the magic and the talisman.

One of the interpretations for the emergence of these hybrid characters popularized during 1997-2013 could be located within the changing context of Thai society and the way of life that had been more carried forward through modernisation. It can be assumed that the cultural hybridisation found in Thai filmic superhero characters also reflects the modern Thai ways of living in which the local beliefs often intersect and transform through modern technology. Despite living in materialistic and modernised surroundings, Thai people are still seeking for spiritual security from supernatural forces to which they used to be faithful.

In conclusion, magical beliefs still exist in the mainstream Buddhism and have influenced the world of fantasy films.