

# CHAPTER V

## HOLLYWOOD ELEMENTS IN CONTEMPORARY THAI FILMS

In the previous chapter, the analysis indicates that the two Thai films, *Cloning: Khon Copy Khon* and *303 Klua/ Kla/ Akad* do contain elements of Hollywood movies as they follow the conventional structure and style of specific genres. However, to make the reading tangible and understandable, the two films, belonging to the **action-thriller** and **horror** genres respectively, will be compared to mainstream movies of the same genres in terms of content and style. In this way, the influence of the mainstream movies upon Thai films can be systematically detected.

The methodology is to select a group of Hollywood movies which belong to the **action-thriller** and the **horror** categories and compare them with the two Thai films of identical genres. The analysis focuses on two components: content and style. For the purpose of this study, analysis of content will focus mainly on plot, theme, and characterization. In style, one will look closely at visual and sound, camera work, and film editing.

Studies by western scholars have shown that a number of the major film genres were formulated at the end of the silent era; namely, the **western**, the **horror film**, **melodrama**, and **action-adventure films** (from swashbucklers to

war movies). **Musicals** came into existence with the era of the Talkies, and the **science-fiction genre** was not popularized until the 1950s. Since film genres have long been originated, they are well established and develop certain convention of their own. Note that the years in which the chosen Hollywood movies are released do not have a relative impact on the Thai counterparts since it takes quite a while for the director to assimilate western ideas into his own films. Therefore, the Hollywood movies used in this chapter are randomly selected from those shown in local theaters at the time of this study.

### *Cloning: Khon Copy Khon*

October 22, 1999 is the released date of the Thai **action-thriller film**, *Cloning: Khon Copy Khon*. Noticeably, the overall content and style of this film can be identified with some of the Hollywood movies which belong to the same genre. The Hollywood prototype which will be used for comparative study consist of *The Net*<sup>22</sup> (1995), *Double Team* (1997), *Face/Off* (1997), *Conspiracy Theory* (1997), *Enemy Of The State* (1998), and *The Matrix* (1999). In the following section, these movies will be compared with *Cloning: Khon Copy Khon* in order to identify the characteristics shared by them.

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<sup>22</sup> The years in which the movies were released in the U.S. (Internet Movie Database[Online]: 2000, June 1)

## Content

The plot of the **action-thriller genre** frequently concerns mundane people is e.g. computer programmer, lawyer, taxi driver, etc., caught up in extraordinary circumstances that he/she would never expect. All of the heroes/heroines from the selected movies<sup>23</sup> follow the same pattern of characterization as in *Cloning: Khon Copy Khon*. Note that, the hero in *Cloning: Khon Copy Khon* as well as the selected Hollywood movies is not a loner. He/she has either a family, or a beloved one to care for. The villains, by contrast, are more often than not alone. Examples include *The Net* and *The Matrix*. The villains are implicated in crime, terrorism, or political conspiracy. They set up an evil plot causing horrified circumstances to occur to the hero/ heroine. The plot in *Cloning: Khon Copy Khon* and all of the selected Hollywood movies except *Double Team* and *Conspiracy Theory* involve new scientific or technological discoveries leading to disasters. In turn, the theme of the movies usually spells out the negative outcome of the misuse of scientific experiment. Under such circumstances, the main character is victimized.

The fate of the heroes/heroines from *Cloning: Khon Copy Khon*, *Face/Off*, *Enemy Of The State* and *The Net* are predictable especially as all assistance or means of escape is eliminated. They have to find their way out on their own causing the need for survival to become a major concern of the

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<sup>23</sup> Except *Face/Off* since Sean, the hero, is a FBI agent whose job puts him in extraordinary circumstances all the time.

heroes/ heroines. Consequently, the hero /heroine in **action-thriller films** has the ultimate goal to achieve: either save oneself or help the beloved one.

The villains, in all movies, are indomitable. Toward the end, the conflict between the villain and the hero is heightened. Though a number of supporting characters have been killed, the vicious villain is still alive and involved in cat and mouse scenes with the hero. This signifies the indestructible or die-hard character, not only in *Cloning: Khon Copy Khon* but also in all mainstream movies selected for study.

## Style

Throughout *Cloning: Khon Copy Khon* as well as the selected Hollywood movies, low-key lighting coupled with night scenes are used spontaneously which suggest thrilling, suspense atmosphere. For instance, in the scene in which Niwat, together with his mother, his girlfriend and Off, are having dinner, the creepy atmosphere is accentuated by the use of *low-key lighting*. Though everybody is having a great time, the scene is set to create a nerve-breaking feeling to the audience.

The escape scenes (or the cat and mouse chase scenes) are usually set in the hard-to-escape surrounding such as a deserted building, a crowded sports arena, etc. In such scenes, special effects such as explosion are used frequently

to heighten the audience emotion. **Action-oriented music**<sup>24</sup> is common in **action-thriller genre**. It controls the rhythm and the instruments to give the movie a tense, non-stop excitement, keeping the audience breathless. Props such as guns and weapons are a necessity. In this kind of film, editing is another cinematic style which adds tension and dynamism to the **action-thriller genre**. The fast tempo, sudden crescendo, and abrupt editing help heightening the mood of the audience, making each movement in the scene interesting to follow.

Table 3.1 indicates the similarity of content and style used in *Cloning: Khon Copy Khon* and Hollywood movies:

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<sup>24</sup> Percussion is a major musical instrument used in action-oriented music, stimulating continuous excitement

**Table 3.1: The similarity of content and style used in *Cloning: Khon Copy Khon* and Hollywood movies.**

No.	Cloning: Khon Copy Khon	Face/Off	Enemy of the State	The Net	The Matrix	Double Team	Conspiracy Theory
3.1.1	<b>Content</b>						
	A. Plot concerning everyday person caught up in extraordinary circumstances		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	B. Involving the new technology or scientific discovery	✓	✓	✓	✓		
	C. The main character is caught as a victim	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	D. The main character is not a loner, attaching to sentimental relationship	✓	✓			✓	
	E. All assistance is eliminated	✓	✓	✓			
	F. The hero (ine) has the ultimate goal i.e. to have his/her life back to normal	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	G. The villains are implicated in crime, terrorism, or political conspiracy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	H. The villain is a loner			✓	✓		✓
	I. The villain is indomitable. (Die-hard villain)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	J. The movie points out the negative outcome of the misuse of scientific experiment	✓	✓	✓	✓		
3.1.2	<b>Style</b>						
	A. Chase (cat and mouse scenes) mostly occur in the hard-to-escape setting	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	B. Low Key Lighting	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	C. Night scenes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	D. Rapid editing, fast tempo	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	E. Explosion is involved	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	F. Deadly weapons are used	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	G. Action-oriented music	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

\*Note that the classifications above are obtained from the characteristics of Hollywood's action-thriller movies

### *303 Klua/ Kla/ Akad*

Released on October 2, 1998 this film belongs to the Horror genre<sup>25</sup> in which the slasher scene together with the occult horror element are the main components. The slasher film is the film in which slashing is the main line of action. Examples of Hollywood slasher film include *Scream* (1996)<sup>26</sup>, *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997), *Disturbing Behavior* (1998), and *Urban Legend* (1998). The occult horror, on the other hand, is about supernatural power and witchcraft. *Little Witches*(1996), *I've Been Waiting For You* (1998), and *Urban Legend* are examples of the occult horror made by the mainstream moviemakers.

With teenagers as the main characters, the chosen film can be identified with several of Hollywood horror movies. To detect the influence of the Hollywood elements, a number of box-office successful movies are selected for comparison. These movies include *Little Witches*, *Scream*, *I Know What You Did Last Summer*, *I've Been Waiting For You*, *Disturbing Behavior*, and *Urban Legend*.

### **Content**

In *303 Klua/ Kla/ Akad*, as well as all the selected mainstream movies except *Disturbing Behavior*, the story is a continuation of the past event in

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<sup>25</sup> The **horror genre** is categorized into two types: **slasher film** and **occult horror**. ([All Movie Guide](#)[Online]: 2000, June 1.)

<sup>26</sup> The years in which the movies were released in he U.S. (Internet Movie Database[Online]: 2000, June 1.)

which the murderer committed a mass killing. Later, the vengeful murderer who is motivated by past misdeed is back.

In view of the storyline of the **horror film**, there must be a gruesome murder on a female victim, revealing her to be a fragile woman, who tries in vain to escape from the slasher and cries breathlessly for help. Such is the obligatory scene of the horror genre. The scene in which Miss Oracha in *303 Klua/ Kla/ Akad* is trapped in the school building is a good example. She calls for help as she is followed by a vicious killer and is eventually killed mercilessly. This is similar to the scene from most of the selected mainstream movies.

In terms of characterization, the main characters of *303 Klua/ Kla/ Akad* as well as all other selected mainstream movies are inquisitive teenager(s) with all-of-the sudden courage. The teenager(s) in the film, usually, explore(s) or investigate(s) without consulting his/her/their parents or teachers in order to find out the truth about the killer. The investigation requires their courage to commit forbidden acts such as sneaking out at night, having a secret meeting, or practicing black magic. In addition, the leading characters from the Horror genre have the unforeseen courage to confront the horrified situation or revengeful psychopathic murderer. Another interesting characteristic of the Horror genre is that the only girl who is also the leading female character is usually attacked but finally survives the mass killing. Undoubtedly, such a

character appears in *303 Klua/ Kla/ Akad* as well as in all Hollywood movies selected for study.

As regards the villain, the common personality of the killer in the **horror genre** is motivated by past experience or suppressed subconsciousness that drive him to perform evil acts. The murderers from all of the selected movies including *303 Klua/ Kla/ Akad* are lunatic, revengeful, psychopathic, depressed, and live a secretive life. Such personality can cause the person to pursue ruthless action. Moreover, they share a common characteristic with the villain in **action-thriller genre** i.e. indestructible. It is obvious that the villain is very tough; he cannot be executed by ordinary means or weapons. There is also the obligatory double ending in which the killer is back and the remaining characters have to fight against him again and again. This kind of ending is found in *303 Klua/ Kla/ Akad* as well as in all selected Hollywood horror movies.

## Style

The setting of the *303 Klua/ Kla/ Akad* is an old austere Catholic school where there is a dormitory for students. The school itself is located in an isolated area, completely cut off from the outside world which makes it hard to obtain any kind of help. Such setting is characteristic of all of the selected Hollywood movies, too. These movies are all set in isolated schools where the students are required to stay in the dormitory. Or else, they are set in remote

villages where communication with the outside world is not accessible. Hence, the characters are “trapped”. Since the locale is in secluded area, a number of incidents occur in cyclical setting. This also restricts the slashing scene to specific setting: the so-called hard-to-see-and-escape setting such as locker room and bathroom. For example, in *303 Klua/ Kla/ Akad*, one of the seniors gets electrocuted in the bathroom. In the famous locker scene of *I Know What You Did Last Summer*, the audience knows that someone is in there, secretly watching Barry, a character, from the rows of locker! In *I’ve Been Waiting For You*, another slashing scene occurs in the bathroom where the killer slits the boy’s throat with a knife.

With the filmic use of *subjective shots*<sup>27</sup>, the audience do not see the stalker, but they can assume where the stalker is and what he is thinking. In this kind of setting, the character in the scene is the object of the camera’s gaze. Such shots are used in the **horror genre** to signal that a character’s fate is about to be doomed. It gives the creepy feeling and hints that the character is being watched in every move he makes.

While rapid editing is a common style of the **action-thriller genre**, it is also inevitable in the **horror genre**. Rapid editing is especially useful in slashing scenes or escape scenes because it creates frightening, scary atmosphere to the film.

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<sup>27</sup> Subjective shots are shot from the point of view of a character in the scene.

There are other stylistic elements that *303 Klua/ Kla/ Akad* and the selected Hollywood movies share in common. For instance, *low key lighting* renders horrified atmosphere in much the same way that night scenes do. The alternate pattern of light and shadow, created by lightening and thunderstorm for example, intensifies the excitement of the movies. In one scene we see the lightening strike a big tree causing it to fall. Samarn, a teacher, is injured while looking around that area to discover that the road which connects the city and the school is destroyed. The phone line is dead. It is obvious that the characters are trapped within that isolated place. Apart from this, music is another important element that adds to the frightening mood in such movie. For instance, background music sometimes rises to a crescendo or forte with percussion instruments such as drums.

Props are also used in the **horror genre** to suggest how horrifying the slasher is. The most important props are the weapons available in the scene, especially deadly ones such as axe, knife, handgun, or fisherman's hook. The killer in *303 Klua/ Kla/ Akad* uses many kinds of weapons but mainly he goes for the long handle axe and the rifle gun which are commonly seen in Hollywood movies.

The following table lists the findings in terms of the similarity of content and style by comparing the selected Hollywood **horror** movies with *303 Klua/ Kla/ Akad*.

**Table 3.2: The similarity in content and style used in 303 *Klua/ Kla/ Akad* and Hollywood movies**

No.	303 <i>Klua/ Kla/ Akad</i>	Little Witches	Scream	I know what you	I've been waiting	Disturbing Behavior	Urban Legend
3.2.1	<b>Content</b>						
	A. The vengeance of the killer or the repetition of the past event	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
	B. Involving supernatural phenomenon or mass killing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	B. The main characters are usually inquisitive teenagers with all-of-the-sudden courage	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	C. The main characters secretly investigate, without consulting parents or teachers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	D. The leading female character, the only girl in the group, is usually attacked and survived	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	E. There must be a gruesome murder on female victim.		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	F. The killer is lunatic, psychopathic, revengeful, suppressive	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	G. Die hard villain	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3.2.2	<b>Style</b>						
	A. The setting is an isolated place i.e. a small village, or an old austere Catholic school	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	B. Many scenes occur in cyclical setting	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	C. Slashing scenes are in a hidden/ inescapable setting	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
	D. Subjective shots - directly of a character's eyes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	E. Rapid editing is used in slashing scenes or escape scenes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	F. Low Key lighting, night scene, rain and thunderstorm signify the frightening atmosphere	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	G. Sudden forte and crescendo to create tense and horrifying atmosphere	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	H. The villain is calm and self-composed. His psychological movement causes pressure	✓	✓	✓		✓	
	I. The killer has specific weapon		✓	✓	✓		✓

\*Note that the classifications above are obtained from the characteristics of Hollywood's horror movies

In conclusion, according to the findings above, it can be said that both *Cloning: Khon Copy Khon* and *303 Klua/ Kla/ Akad* share a number of similarities in terms of content and style with the mainstream movies. Thus, it confirms that Hollywood elements are inherent in contemporary Thai films. These two films are extreme cases of films in **Contemporary Period** which follow the convention of Hollywood **action-thriller** and **horror genres**. Therefore, regarding the hypothesis stated earlier, there exists vivid evidence of Hollywood influences on contemporary Thai films of identical genres.

Chapter VI summarizes the findings of the research on “Influences of Hollywood Movies on Contemporary Thai Cinema: Cases Study of Action-Thriller and Horror Genres” and gives suggestions for further studies.