

# CHILDREN'S FILMS: CHILDREN'S MATTERS ARE NO CHILDISH MATTERS<sup>1</sup>

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## บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้ศึกษาภาพยนตร์เด็กไทยในช่วงทศวรรษพ.ศ. 2510 เป็นต้นมา ผลการศึกษาแสดงให้เห็นว่า ในเชิงปริมาณมีภาพยนตร์เด็กไทยมากกว่า 50 เรื่องซึ่งมีความหลากหลาย ทั้งที่ทำ “เพื่อ” เด็ก และที่ “เกี่ยวกับ” เด็ก ภาพยนตร์กลุ่มแรกส่วนใหญ่เป็นภาพยนตร์เด็กที่让孩子们มากกว่า หากมองในแง่ประวัติศาสตร์พบว่า ภาพยนตร์เด็กไทยมีพัฒนาการถึง 5 ยุค และสามารถจำแนกกลุ่มภาพยนตร์เด็กออกเป็น 3 ประเภท ได้แก่ ภาพยนตร์เด็กกับตนเอง เด็กกับคนอื่น และเด็กกับสังคม

ถึงแม้จะมีความแตกต่างหลากหลายแต่หากพิจารณา ด้านศิลปะ โดยเฉพาะที่ปรากฏในกลุ่มหนังเด็กกับสังคมพบว่า ภาพยนตร์เด็กนำเสนอภาพเด็กเป็นตัวนำ ตัวร้ายมักจะเป็นผู้ใหญ่ เด็กต้องต่อสู้ฝ่าฟัน โดยอาจมี

ผู้ใหญ่บางคนช่วยเหลือ รวมถึงการมีอาวุธสนับสนุน จากของเรื่องส่วนมากเป็นพื้นที่นอกบ้าน มุมมองของหนังแม้จะเป็นของเด็กแต่ก็แฝงด้วยวิถีคิดของผู้ใหญ่ และผู้ใหญ่ในร่างเด็ก การเล่าเรื่องจะเรียบง่ายไม่สลับซับซ้อน ใช้ภาษาหนังเพื่อสนับสนุนจินตนาการเด็ก ทั้งการใช้สีสันสดใส เพลง-ดนตรีประกอบของเด็ก และการใช้เทคนิคเชื่อมโยงหรือสัมพันธ์กับทบทวนวรรณกรรมเด็กและบริบทสังคม

ภาพยนตร์เด็กประกอบสร้างภาพตัวแทนของเด็กจำแนกได้เป็นภาพบวก คือ เด็กดี เด็กกตัญญู เด็กผู้มีเพื่อน เด็กสู้ ภาพลบ ได้แก่ ผีเด็ก ปิศาจ เด็กมีปัญหา เขี้ยว และภาพกำกวม คือ เด็กเห็นผี ภาพดังกล่าวตกอยู่ภายใต้ความคิดของเด็กซึ่งมีความขัดแย้งกัน คือ เด็กในฐานะผู้กระทำ-ผู้ถูกกระทำ ความบริสุทธิ์-ปิศาจ และถูกผสมระหว่างดีและเลว นอกจากนั้น ยังตกอยู่ภายใต้ความคิดเรื่องเพศสภาพ ชนชั้น เพื่อน ครอบครัว ชาติ-ศาสน-กษัตริย์ และการต่อต้านทุนนิยม ทำให้ภาพตัวแทนเด็กมีความแตกต่างหลากหลาย

## Abstract

*This paper studies Thai children's films produced in the appropriately five decades since the decade of B.E. 2510 (1967). The study reveals that, in this time, there have been more than fifty Thai films in rich diversity both produced “for” children and “about” them, and that of these two groups, the first is more likely to be intended primarily for a young audience. Thai children's films can be divided into*

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*five periods from a historical point of view, and categorized into three groups, namely, children and their inner lives, children and the family and, children and society.*

*Despite this variety of children's films, there are some similarities in terms of the art of children's films, especially among those in the category of children and society. These films present children as protagonists and adults as villains and feature children's struggles with the support of certain adult characters, including by means of weapons. Most take place outside the children's home. The films are presented through the eyes of the children with some implicit adult worldview. The storytelling is simple and the use of film language helps inspire children's imagination. There are also the use of vivid colors, children's songs or music as well as the use of intertextuality associating the films with children's literature and a social context.*

*Ultimately, children's films have contributed to the construction of childhood representations, which can be classified as positive, negative and ambiguous. As for the positive representation, children are presented as decent, grateful, friendly and having a fighting spirit. As for the negative one, children are portrayed as child ghosts, sinful children, problem children and victims. In ambiguous representations, children see ghosts. These images are constructed under conflicting ideologies of children, namely, children as active-passive agents, an innocent-an evil, and hybrids between good and bad. Moreover, the ideologies of gender, class, friendship,*

*family, the triad Nation-Religion-Monarchy as well as anti-capitalism have also contributed to the diversity in children's representations.*

## Introduction

Since B.E. 2510 (1967), more than fifty Thai children's films have been produced. These films have entertained audiences and ultimately offered a wide range of definitions of children and childhood. However, not so many studies have been interested in children's films. In fact, only two studies have given them serious. This lack of interest is presumably based on the assumption that children's films are merely childish matters.

In this regard, this paper studies the Thai children's films having been produced since 1974 in order to comprehend the characteristics, stages of development, and the art of the films. It also seeks to answer as to what childhood representations the films have constructed and what ideologies have been adopted.

In order to answer these questions, a film analysis has been carried out based on conceptual frameworks and theories from these two fields: childhood studies and cultural studies. Childhood studies' interest lies in the fact that childhood is not a natural condition but its definition is socially assigned and that childhood in different periods and in different societies is assigned different meanings. Cultural studies, especially genre studies, seek to understand a group of films sharing similarities in terms of narrative and film language. However, films in each genre

still keep evolving and for this reason, children's films may differ from one another. This study also adopts the concept of ideology which seeks to understand conceptual frameworks that shape people's perception of children as portrayed in the films and that contribute to the fact that the perceived images of children have a tendency to be shaped by society. The last concept employed in this study is the concept of representation, which pays no attention at all to the reflections of reality in the films but is interested in how society and culture have constructed the representations of children, in accordance with the concepts of ideology and childhood studies.

This paper studies a total of forty-eight Thai children's films from the B.E. 2510 (1967) to B.E 2558 (2015) by carrying out a textual analysis and adopting a purposive sampling technique. After textual analysis was done, document analysis was carried out and further interviews were conducted so as to fill in missing information. The results of the study will be shown and discussed in topics 1-3, discussion in topics 4-5 as follows:

### **Definitions, Characteristics and Development of Thai Children's Films**

#### **Defining and Characterizing Thai Children's Films.**

The matter of children's film is not at all a small matter. There are certain difficulties from the very first stage of defining the term. Provided that the definition is based on moral philosophy, a children's film is

primarily a film intended for children viewership so as to inspire their imaginations and to teach them good behaviors (Rittinim 2011). This definition narrows the scope of meaning of children's films since it only places the focus on a naive, bright image of childhood and on the importance of children's imagination, leading to the fact that some children's films barely fit this definition despite the involvement of children in the films. This is because some violent issues may be incorporated, such as in children's war films. However, some western scholars, such as Wojcik-Andrews (2000) and Suber (2008) as well as Sukwong (2015), a prominent Thai film scholar, have expanded the scope of meaning of children's films into films "about" children, "for" children and "by" children. However, in this article I will focus particularly on films "about" and "for" children.

Films "about" children are characterized by the appearance of child characters in the films, while in the case of films "for" children, the protagonists do not necessarily have to be children. In fact, children's films can be animal films, animated films, etc., for which the target audience is children. However, these two definitions have certain common elements in that children's films are defined as films produced by adults, leading to a more recent definition that children's films are those films produced "by" children themselves since children are supposed to be the ones who determine the content of the films, according to modern views of children that center on child rights (Clark 2013).

When defined as films “about” children and “for” children, children’s films have a relatively broad array of meanings and, as a genre, have multiple sub genres, such as films based on true stories, family films, fantasy films, animated films, musicals, war films, sport films, comedy films, and film adaptations from children’s literary works (Wojcik-Andrews, 2000). Considering the case of Thai children’s film, my analysis found that they can be divided into three groups, namely, children and their inner lives, children and family, and children and society.

### Development of Thai Children’s Films

After understanding how children’s films are given multiple definitions, this study moves forward to examine the development of children’s films. The study reveals that, so far, there has been no previous recreation the development of children’s films and that there have been only two studies regarding children’s films: Homsap (2011), who studied child abuse films and Rittinim (2011), who investigated children’s films and children’s film policies in the period from 1997-2006. After that a Thai film expert, Dome Sukwong, was interviewed to assure the accuracy of information and gather more information about Thai children’s films since 1974. This was is of help in dividing the development of Thai children’s films into five periods. Each period relates closely with social and Thai film contexts as follows:

The first period or the beginning period of children’s films was in the years 1967-

1976. Sukwong (2015) explains that, when considering Thailand’s social context, this was the period of the popular uprising of 14 October 1973, or the Day of Great Sorrow, consequently, films started to function as a reflection of society. Meanwhile, the National Youth Bureau in 1973, films were no longer entertainment that had no specific audience. Films belonging to this period include the fantasy *Star Warriors* (Thai: หนุมานพบเจ็ดยอดมนุษย์) (1974) and the drama *Phuean Rak* (Thai: เพื่อนรัก) (1975-1976). These two films had a crucial influence on children’s films in later periods.



Figure 1 One of the earliest Thai children’s films

The second period of children’s films development was in the 1977-1986, when fantasy and early children’s problems films dominated. Given the social context, society became more aware of the importance of children as evidenced in the enactment of the National Child and Youth Development Promotion Act B.E. 2521 (1978) and the National Child and Youth policies in 1979. In 1982, the Thai government started to devise national child

and youth development plans. Meanwhile, people in mass media started to study the relationship between media and children in 1979. In the following year, the Mass Communication for Children Promotion Project was initiated and in 1982, the project was restructured and became the Foundation for Child Development. All of these played a vital role in the development of children's film productions.



Figure 2 *The Adventure of Sudsakon* (Thai: สุดสาคร) and *Ched Super Piak* (Thai: เจ้าซูปเปอร์ปิ๊ยก)

On one hand, children's films in this period reproduced children's fantasy films, namely *Ched Super Piak* (Thai: เจ้าซูปเปอร์ปิ๊ยก) (1978) and *the Adventure of Sudsakon* (Thai: สุดสาคร) (1979). Others introduced the audience to children's problems, especially poverty and war by means of children's drama and family films, as evidenced by *Wanli* (Thai: วัลลี) (1985), *Butterfly and Flowers* (Thai: ผีเสื้อและดอกไม้) (1985) and *Cambodia* (Thai: กัมพูชา) (1985).

The third period, from 1987-1996, marked a continuation of children's problem film and the beginning of children as ghost characters in children's films. Society at that time encountered more children's problems, and in that regard the government countersigned UNESCO's Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Therefore, in 1992, children's films started to focus on children's problems other than poverty, such as family problems. Children also were viewed differently, as evidenced by the fact that children were assigned to assume ghost characters.



Figure 3 The beginning of children assuming ghost or demon characters

During this period, children's family films were also made as demonstrated by the films *Rak Raek Um* (Thai: รักแรกอุ้ม) (1988), *Puk Pui* (Thai: ปุกปุย) (1990), *Chon Kab Daeng* (Thai: จ้องกับแดง) (1990), and *Once Upon a Time* (Thai: กาลครั้งหนึ่งเมื่อเช้านี้) (1994). At the same time, there were films

assigning ghost or demon characters to children, namely, *The Little Lord of Siam* (Thai: ท่านขุนน้อยๆแห่งสยาม) (1993) and *Blackbirds at Bangpleng* (Thai: กาเหว่าที่บางเพลง) (1994), suggesting another social perspective towards children. Moreover, there was also the production of a comedy-fantasy film about a child miraculously becoming an adult within a day titled *Diaw Lek Diaw Yai* (Thai: เดี่ยวเล็กเดี่ยวใหญ่).

The fourth period from 1997-2006 was the period of children's crises in children's films. In 1997, economic crisis occurred in Thailand which led to further problems, including children's issues. Children became more-wicked-than-ever ghosts and demons. In other words, children were no longer seen as sweet and innocent as evil murderers, as seen in the films *See How They Run* (Thai: โขยเดอะโฮม) (2006) *12 Begin* (Thai: 12) (2006) and *13 Beloved* (Thai: 13 เกมสยอง) (2006). Moreover, children were also victims of cruelty, such as in *See How They Run*, where a girl is forced into an abortion.

Some children's films have presented children as peculiar, such as children who see ghosts, as in the films *House of Ghosts* (Thai: คนผีปีศาจ) (2004), *Colic* (2006) (Thai: โคลิคเด็กเห็นผี) and *Dorm* (Thai: เด็กหอ) (2006), all categorized as children's ghost films. In fact, in the years from 1987-1996, one film *The Little Lord of Siam* portrayed the child ghost cute and friendly, similar to the child ghost in *Dorm*. However, the ghosts in the two other films are more terrifying. It is possible that society at that time started to view children more negatively and ghost

children are victims of society longing for revenge.



Figure 4 Children seeing ghosts

In this period, there were still new films about children's family problems but the problems seem to be more complicated than in previous periods. Examples of the films in this period are *A Bite of Love* (Thai: ข้าวเหนียวหมูปิ้ง) (2005), *Beautiful Wonderful Perfect* (Thai: เอ้อเธอ) (2005) and *Innocence* (Thai: เด็กโต) (2005).



Other than telling about children's crises, a number of children's films with the theme of friendship were also produced. *Where is Tong* (Thai: 9 พระคู่หมั้น) (2001), *My Girl* (Thai: แฟนฉัน) (2003) and *Chang Phuen Kaew* (Thai: ช้างเพื่อนแก้ว) (2003), for example, concern children and their friends of varying sex and species. This laid the foundation for children's films on the theme of friendship in the periods to follow. However, the contents of these films were not cheerful since the child characters still face social crises.

In addition, children's fantasy films continued to be made possibly because the cost of film production technology went down considerably. Examples of

children's fantasy films in this period are the animated film *Khan Kluay* (Thai: ก้านกล้วย) (2006) and *The Adventure of Sudsakon* (Thai: สุดสาคร) (2006).

The fifth period, from 2007-2015, was a period of children's diversity and child fighters in children's films. A number of films were shot digitally, making it easier to produce fantasy films. Moreover, by virtue of the Film and Video Act B.E. 2551 (2008), a new ratings system for youth came into reflect. Society has paid more attention to and put an emphasis on the notion that children are active agents by means of the enactment of the National Child and Youth Development Promotion Act B.E. 2550 (2007) and the National Child and Youth Development Plan B.E. 2555-2559 (2012-2016). All of these have contributed to a more diverse depiction of child characters, have become more diverse and displayed fighting spirit.

Children's films in this period also present the diversity of children. In the years 2007-2015, the notion of children were given diverse meanings as can be seen in the characters of the Akha in *Mheejou* (Thai: อาข่าผู้น่ารัก) (2008), Nen (Thai: เนน) in *Yom-Pee-Poa* (Thai: โยมพี่พ่อ) (2009) and in *Orahun Summer* (Thai: อรหันต์ซัมเมอร์) (2008). In this period some children's films began to show children from the northeastern region of Thailand, homosexual children and Indian children, as in *Panya Raenu 1* (Thai: ปัญญาเรณู1) (2011), *Panya Raenu 2* (Thai: ปัญญาเรณู2) (2012) and *Panya Raenu3* (Thai: ปัญญาเรณู 3

บุปผะ) (2013). In other words, the definition of children was expanded, moving beyond urban children to children of great diverse class, sex and social status.

Children as fighters or active agents can be seen in the character of girl ghosts who long for revenge, suffer sexual abuse, and undergo abortion in certain films, namely, *Rahtree Reborn* (Thai: นปฬารাত্রี 3.1) (2009), *Rahtree Revenge* (Thai: นปฬารাত্রี 3.2) (2009) and *The Unborn Child* (Thai: ศพเด็ก 2002) (2011). It can possibly be explained that in reality children are passive agents so they take revenge as ghosts in the realm of ghost films where children can have more power.

Other than that, there were fantasy films about the lives of child fighters, namely, *Pirate of the Lost Sea* (Thai: สลัดดาเด็วกับเด็ก 200 คา) (2008), *Dream Team* (Thai: ครีมทีมฮีโร่ฟันน้ำนม) (2008), *Somtum* (Thai: ส้มตำ) (2008), *Power Kids* (Thai: ห้าหัวใจฮีโร่) (2009) and *Echo Planet* (Thai: เอกโคจิ้งก้องโลก) (2012).

In addition, in this period some children's films with characteristics of earlier films were also reproduced but family issues have become more complicated. This can be seen in the films *Mum Deaw* (Thai: หม่าเด็วหัวเหลี่ยมหัวแหลม) (2008), *Happiness of Kati* (Thai: ความสุขของกะทิ) (2009) and *The Little Comedian* (Thai: บ้านฉันตลกไว้ก่อนพ่อสอนไว้) (2010). Moreover, children's films with

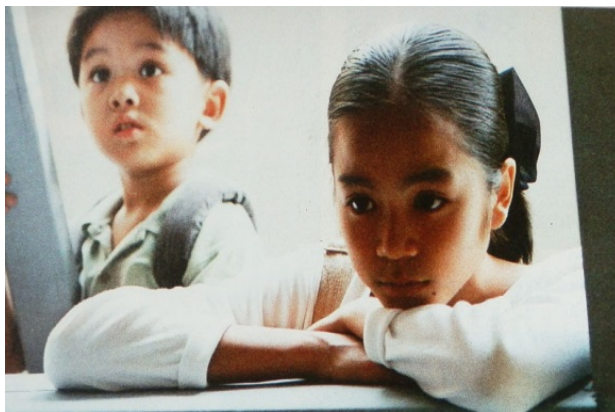
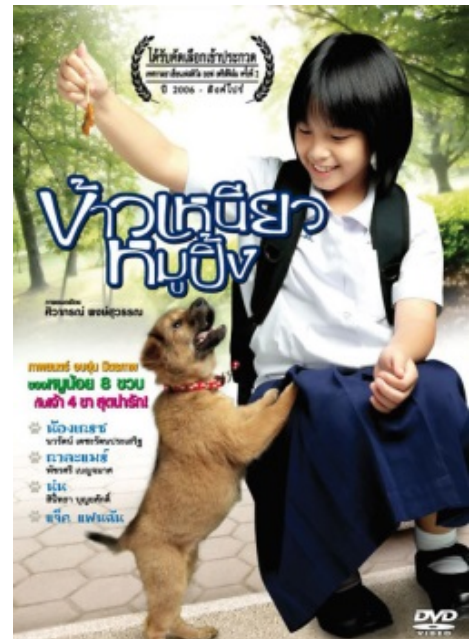


Figure 5 Children with complicated family problems in the years of B.E. 2520 - B.E. 2550  
*Butterfly and Flowers, Once Upon a Time, A Bite of Love and Happiness of Kati*

the theme of friendship were also made, namely, *Dek-Khong* (Thai: อนุบาลเด็กโพ่ง) (2009), *Kapi Ling Jor Mai Lork Jao* (Thai: กะปilingจ้อไม่หกลอกเจ้า) (2010) and *Yak: The Giant King* (Thai: ยักษ์) (2012), as this was a period of political conflicts and discrimination, films have helped foster and instill social harmony in children from at a young age

### The Art of Children's Films

The analysis of forty-four Thai children's films reveals that children's films have a convention of their own, especially among the films about children and society, which are about friends and adventures, namely, *My Girl*, *Pirate of the Lost Sea*, *Dream Team* and *Dek-Khong*. These films can be categorized as children's fantasy films with characteristics distinctive of children's films.

One of the key characteristics of children's films is to have child characters in the films. These child characters are mostly in the age range of 8-12, which is the age of learning. They are adorable and have different gender identities, this is to say, male, female and even transgender. They are also diverse in terms of social status, ranging from middle-class children to rural children and Indian children, as depicted in *Panya Raenu 1*, *Panya Raenu 2* and *Panya Raenu 3*. The role of villain is mostly taken by adult characters, such as the roles of a pirate, a nude ascetic or a police officer. At times, adult characters are given the role of a laughing stock, which reflects children's views of adults as different from them and often foolish. Moreover, children's films make children a hero or a heroine, who lend adults a helping hand. That is why these child characters are frequently equipped

with weapons, including imaginary ones, such as a magic wand and magic, as well as their own wit and physical strength. Occasionally there are helpers who can be animals or adults, such as a teacher and a police officer, whereas, the role of parents seems to have declined in importance.

As for the setting, child characters are mostly found out of the house. This suggests that the outdoors is children's learning space and is what paves the way for their future outdoor adventures. Some films are set in imaginary settings, such as Koh Kaew Phisadan (Thai: เกาะแก้วพิสดาร) in *The Adventure of Sudsakon* or the imaginary future setting in *Yak: The Giant King*. The time periods of the stories are not limited to the present time but include the future. In fact, the time period mostly common in the stories is the end of semester since it is the time when children are able to embark on adventure.

Most children's films are on the themes of friendship, outdoor adventures, and coming of age, as depicted in *My Girl*. Most plots start with peace and as the stories progress, the characters have to encounter and solve problems, and finally enjoy a happy ending.

One of the most important characteristics is film language. Children's films make use of childish jokes, such as, making fun of others' parents' names or jokes about farting and pooping. Stories are narrated in a simple and uncomplicated manner. Signs are adopted to convey the nature of childhood, for example, children's songs and music signifying enjoyment and gaiety. The colors used are vivid. There is also the use of long takes in the filmmaking, especially in fight



Figure 6 Films about children and their friends and children's adventures

scenes, as well as the use of computer graphics to inspire imagination which is impossible in reality. Imaginary scenes of children overcoming adults are particularly common. Imaginary settings are created and oftentimes there is a switching back and forth between the world of children and the animated world so as to display children's imagination, as in *Dek Khong*. Additionally, the technique of intertextuality is adopted to associate the stories in the films with literary texts or other films, such as in the case of *Pirates of the Lost Sea* (Thai: สลัดดาเดี๋ยวกับเด็ก 200 ค.), which alludes to *The Pirate of the Caribbean*. Finally, most children's films ultimately adopt the ideology of an ideal child who is well-behaved, who is an active agent and has a fighting spirit.

However, when the contents typical of children's films are incorporated into films from other genres, such as ghost films, family films, action films, or sci-fi films, there is a strong tendency that children's films will become films of the same genre as those films into which they have been incorporated. When children's film is incorporated into a ghost or a horror film, such as *Rahtree Reborn*, *Rahtree Revenge*, or *Dorm*, there will be elements of fear in the film. If incorporated into a family film, the film will have family members, family controversies, or children's family problems as depicted in *Once Upon a Time* and *Happiness of Kati*. Explosion scenes, cries and children's fights are found in films incorporated into a war film, such as *Cambodia*, whereas the scenes of children lashing out or long takes are commonly found in action films, such as *Power Kids* and *Somtum*. In a sci-fi film, for example, *Blackbirds at Bangpleng*, there will be

elements of imagination and the use of computer graphics. However, despite the hybridity of genres, these children's films still have children as protagonists. They present the stories through the eyes of children and explore the theme of coming of age. This mixture of a children's film and a film from a different genre is considered an interesting innovation or invention.

Nevertheless, although children's films have very distinctive characteristics in terms of the art, they are a kind of mishmash of films for adults and children's films. In a sense, this is because these films have been produced by adults and thus have some elements of films for adults as well as adult point of views, especially in the cases of films about children and their inner lives, and children and family. As for those films about children and society, which put an emphasis on friendship and adventure, stories are more likely to be narrated from the children's point of view as can be seen in the use of humor, the presentation of adults as a laughing stock, naive world views, and the use of unsophisticated songs and music. However, an implicit adult point of view still exists, as illustrated in the reminiscence of good old days in *My Girl*, *Panya Raenu 1* and *Panya Raenu 2*, as well as in the incorporation of the notion of love and adult music in the films. Lastly, the ending of these children's films tends to support adult ideology of the ideal child who is well-behaved and grateful and who has a fighting spirit and good friends.

### **Representations of children and Underlying Ideologies**

## Representing Children in Thai Children's Films

The analysis of the three groups of children's films, namely, films about children and their inner lives, children and family and children and society, reveals different perceived images and characteristics of children.

Initially, there is a wide range of diversity in the characteristics of children, such as gender diversity. That is to say, other than male and female child characters, children's films start to incorporate transgendered child characters, though they are not yet main characters. In most children's boys are protagonists while the girls, if not passive agents, are likely to be presented as fighters, or even as ghosts taking revenge as illustrated in *Rahtree Reborn* and *Rahtree Revenge*.

Children in most films are from middle-class backgrounds but children from the lower class have started to appear as fighters as well as victim, especially of poverty and violence.

Additionally, rustic children, rural Isan children, tribal children, Indian children, novice monks and disabled children are also depicted. This shows the diversity that has started to appear in children's films.

Most children are in the 8-12 age range. Some films have a 5 year-old child character to display naivety, as in *Dek Khong* and *Dream Team*, whereas some other films such as *Rak Raek Um* and *Once Upon A Time* have infant characters. *Innocence* is the only film that attempts to define an 18

years old in compliance with the Thai definition of children and puts forward the view that children should get firm support from adults.

The physical appearance of most child characters is relatively attractive and lovely; even the character of a victimized child is exception. However, in children's ghost films, children who play ghosts appear grotesque and terrifying as shown in *See How They Run*, *Rahtree Reborn* and *Rahtree Revenge*.

Moreover, it is found that the representations of children introduced by the films are remarkably diverse. These representations depend very much upon social construction and the children's film categories to which they belong.

The first category is those films about children and their inner lives, most of which are drama or ghost films. In fact, three representations of children are commonly found, namely, sinful children, child ghosts and children who see ghosts. The representation of children as evil or as demons reflects the adult's view that children possess innate wickedness and that capitalism has contributed to their evil competitive and consumeristic nature. Films in this category like *12 Begin* and *13 Beloved* convey the message that as children become evil, their gloomy future can be predicted.

In the case of child ghosts and children who see ghosts, children become alienated, weird and different from others, leading to their supernatural ability to see ghosts and their becoming ghosts. Child ghosts are the



Figure 7 The diversity of children in children's films



Figure 8 A lovely child and a child ghost

representation of abused or victimized children, those forced to have an abortion or who are sexually abused, and are driven by a desire for revenge. It should be noted that

there has been an increase in the representation of children as child ghosts, such as in *Rahtree Reborn*, *Rahtree Revenge* and *The Unborn Child*. This may suggest a higher degree of violence against children and difficulties in solving issues of violence.

The second category of children's films is those about children and family. These films can be also categorized as children's dramas and family films. At least four representations of children are produced by these films, namely, grateful children, children with family problems, victimized children and brave children.

While the first representation of children as grateful offspring is a positive representation, the second one views children as problems. Children's problems range from a small one, like, not being loved and cared for by parents as in *Puk Pui* and *The Little Comedian*, to domestic abuse as depicted in *A Bite of Love*, *Rahtree Reborn*, *Rahtree Revenge*, and *The Unborn Child*, and alienation and marginalization such as in the case of orphaned children, disabled children, tribal children and transgendered children. In a sense, these representations may present diversity in the depiction of children. On the other hand, they point to greater marginalization and alienation of children. Most importantly is the fact that these children have to encounter and solve these problems.

The third representation is children as victims, which seems more negative than the second representation in that relationships have expanded from that between children and family to that between children and social issues. To illustrate, children in these

films are portrayed as victims of their own families and society. In *Once Upon A Time*, for example, the three siblings run away from their mother's home to see their father and thus encounter a child abduction gangster and child prostitution. Yet, these children do not give up or accept their fate but decided to fight with the support from adults and family. *A Bite of Love* is the only film that ends in tragedy, indicating that children's problems are not always easy to solve. This leads to the children in ghost films take revenge.

The last representation is of brave children, who endure and fight for the nation with firm support and motivation from family, as shown in *Cambodia* and *Khan Kluay*.

The third category of children's films is the films about children and society, which are mostly films with the theme of friendship and action films. At least three representations of children are evident, to wit, children who have friends, child fighters and victims.

The first representation is interested in the idea that children cannot survive on their own; they always need friends who are trustworthy, helpful and forgiving. The meaning of friendship is expanded from human beings to ghosts and animals. This probably points to the importance of firm friendship in modern society.

The second representation is children as fighters. This representation also appears in family films about brave children who fight for the nation. In this category, children fight in both the real and imaginary world, against poverty and for their environment. What is

very interesting is that the images of fighting children are not limited to boys but also girls.



Figure 9 A boy fighter and a girl fighter in *Power Kids*

Finally, the third representation is children as victims. Although most films in this category have a positive view of children, some children are represented as victims, especially of their own society, such as deception and fraud. Children may die. They may be victims of domestic labor, in accordance with the representations of children as victims in the category of films about children and family.

Considering the overall representations of children, it is found that regardless of film category, children's representations in children's films can be categorized into three types: positive, negative and ambiguous.

The positive representation puts an emphasis on the images of grateful children, friendly children and child fighters (including those brave children). Other subordinate characteristics are that children in this group

are lovely and despite their seemingly naughtiness, they are clever and patient and most importantly, they are active children. All of these traits are defined as "decent."

In the negative representation, the images of child ghosts, sinful children, children with family problems and victims are commonly found. These images emphasize the negative traits and passivity of children, which make them the victims of family and society.

The ambiguous representation is chiefly seen in the image of a child who sees ghosts. On one hand, children are seen as an alien. On the other hand, children are thought of as able to communicate with supernatural powers, which adults cannot do. This kind of communication is still being reproduced in films about friendship with animals.

### **Reproducing Children Ideologies and Ideologies about Children in Thai Children's Films**

This section examines a reproduction of ideologies in films, which can be divided into two categories: children ideologies and ideologies about children.

First as for children ideologies, my textual analysis found that children are constructed in five significant respects, namely, an active agent; as a passive agent; as a sinful child; as a decent child and as a hybrid of a sinful child and a decent one.

The first respect is the conflicting ideologies of children as an active agent and a passive agent. These two ideologies are in conflict in that the first one tends to view children

positively through the lens of child rights. Children are believed to be able to cope with difficulties by themselves so children's films under this active-child ideology present problems which are confronted and resolved by children at the end. However, it is noted that since children are still young, some actions cannot possibly be carried out without the help or support of adults (Hart as quoted in Clark 2013). This is why most films use adult characters as helpers of child characters.

On the contrary, the passive-child ideology or the ideology seen that children as passive agents or victims, views children as the victims of violence and abuse from family and society. Children inevitably encounter difficulties and thus need help and protection. Children's films depicting passive children are likely to demand help and support for these children and in later periods, some films have made passive children fight for themselves, as depicted in *Wanli*, *Rahtree Reborn* and *Rahtree Revenge*.

The second respect is the conflicting ideologies of children as sinful and children as innocent. The opposition is rooted in different conceptual frameworks. To illustrate, under the first ideology, children are believed to be savages. Jenk (1996) explains that this ideology is influenced by the Christian belief that humans are born with sin. In addition, psychoanalytic theory explains that a child's personality is all id and, thus uncontrollable. Consequently, children may have wayward behaviors as portrayed in many Thai children's films, especially among children's ghost films and horror films. These films accentuate the

belief, and thus children have been viewed negatively since B.E. 2530 (1987).

Meanwhile, the ideology of a decent or innocent child is influenced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's theory (quoted in Jenk 1996), which posits children's loveliness, enjoyment and liveliness. This ideology believes that children's behaviors can be improved by means of discipline and that children have to go through a learning and development process which will make them a better person for the society. Most children's films have a positive view of children, as depicted in the images of a grateful child, a fighter and a child who has a good friend. These children are considered decent and most importantly, they have been through a learning and development process so as to become a good member of the society. Thus, children's films under this ideology are likely to showcase children's stages of development from the beginning to the end or, children's coming of age.

Since children's films are likely to focus on children's loveliness, it can often be seen that children's films produced by adults aim at looking back at the good old days when these adults were still young and happy, as illustrated in *My Girl*, *Panya Raenu*, and, especially *Diaw Lek Diaw Yai*, in which at the end the adult takes the medicine so as to go back to the days when he was young. This is in compliance with the idea of nostalgia or a yearning for the return of those good old days.

The third respect is the ideology of children as hybrids between sinfulness and innocence. This ideology views children as having a mixture of good and savage

natures. In this sense children can be called a Dionysian child or an Apollonian child (as proposed by Ansell 2005). This means that the very same child has the potential to be either innocent or evil, as clearly seen in the character of a child ghost or a child seeing ghosts in ghost films. At times, a child ghost may be terrifyingly savage but at other times, he or she can be friendly, as depicted in *Dorm* and *The Little Lord of Siam*. The terrifying aspect of a child ghost may appear at a specific time, such as when haunting or teasing people (taking revenge). Similarly, a child who can see ghosts may have both lovely and bizarre images at the same time because of his or her mysterious ability to see ghosts or supernatural spirits.

Apart from children's ghost films, several films on the theme of friendship have recognized see the mixture of good and evil in children since 1997 as can be seen in *Panya Raenu* and *My Girl*. These two films have made society realize that children do not have only a bright innocent side. Raenu in *Panya Raenu 2* teased Job to the point that he became sick. Jiab in *My Girl* deliberately cut Noina's rubber-band rope so as to befriend Jack. However, despite the mixture of both good and bad, the images of children still tend to be positive.

Other than those mentioned ideologies of children reproduced in children's films, there are some other ideologies of the society embedded in children's films. It is important to note that different ideologies appear in the children's films are made by adults. These ideologies can be divided into three levels. In the first level are the ideologies regarding individuals which are the ideologies of gender and class. On the

second level are the ideologies regarding others, namely friends and family. Finally are the ideologies regarding society, which are the ideologies of the triad Nation-Religion-Monarchy, capitalism and consumerism.

### **Ideologies Regarding Individuals**

**Ideology of gender.** The ideology of gender, which appears very often in children's films which function very similarly with children's literary texts that reproduce the ideology of gender. That is to say, boys are supposed to fantasize about the world outside their home whereas girls are supposed to dream of happiness, beauty and the wait (for a prince). The question is, has the ideology of gender ever changed in accordance with the changing society? Some children's films have answered this question by reproducing of the ideology of gender. However, at the same time, other films have played a role in rebutting mainstream ideology of gender.

To begin, most children's films have a tendency to reproduce the ideology of patriarchy as men are likely to be the ones who produce the films. Boys are given more importance and portrayed as educated and clever. On the contrary, girls are considered passive agents, and victims who need assistance. That is why competent boys are commonly found in children's films while girl characters appear weak and fragile and have to stay at home. Sometimes these girls are sexually abused and the object of male sexual desire.

However, there has been an attempt to retaliate against the ideology in the form of

more involvement of girls and questions concerning why girls cannot play with boys, as illustrated in *My Girl*, *Panya Raenu*, and *Dek Khong*. Most importantly, a number of the girls have become fighters as depicted in many children's ghost and action films in the years after 2007.

In the years after 1997, at least two films started to generate representations of homosexual children, namely the tomboyish girl and the queer boy. Although these children minor characters, the period was a milestone in resisting traditional definitions of gender.

Gender ideology does not only affect children but also adult characters in the films, especially the character of parents. Women or mothers are assigned to take care of their house and children. When a mother fails to do so, for example, she might be sick or abandon her child, she will be definitely viewed negatively and accused of being the root of her child's problems, as seen in *A Bite of Love*, *Wanli*, *Rahtree Reborn* and *Rahtree Revenge*. As for the fathers, children's films have reproduced father-child problems, such as the father's child abuse in *Rahtree Reborn* and *Rahtree Revenge*, and disagreement between the father and child in *Puk Pui* and *The Little Comedian*.

**Ideology of class.** The ideology of class, as with the ideology of gender, has been continuously reproduced in Thai children's films. On one hand, most films put more focus on middle-class children since films are likely to be produced by the middle class. Most of the content and issues in the films tend to be those of middle class

children, such as school break activities, as well as family problems of the middle class, such as divorce and the lack of parental love and care.

On the other hand, children's films have started to present more of the lives of children from lower-class backgrounds because children's films intend to showcase children's family and social problems, such as poverty, corruption, and abandonment as depicted in *Wanli*, *Butterfly and Flowers*, *Innocence*, *Kapi Ling Jor Mai Lork Jao* and *A Bite of Love*.

Moreover, given the fact that some of the film directors come from rural areas, children films such as *Chang Phuen Kaew*, *Panya Raenu 1*, *Panya Raenu 2*, and *Panya Raenu 3*, started to examine the lives of rural people, which had not been mentioned previously or mentioned only in passing. These films aim at promoting an awareness of class diversity, for example, *Panya Raenu 3* interestingly presents the lives of the untouchables in India.

### **Ideologies Regarding Others**

Ideology of friends. Many children's films focus on the importance of friends, especially among the films about children and friends, which attempt to communicate that friends are important and that children need friends. The stories are likely to tell about how children have met their friends, starting from not knowing each other, hating each other, encountering problems together and finally becoming friends. These films emphasize that friends are the ones to lead children into the outside world and embark on adventures. Moreover, according to

Marxism, friends are very important in the society of capitalism.

Given the importance of friends, up to 13 films with the theme of friendship have been made. These films attempt to show what a friend or friendship is and who children should be friends with, regardless of gender, age, class and species. To elaborate, children can befriend animals or even ghosts, as evidenced by *Dorm, Yak: The Giant King* and *Chang Phuen Kaew*. On the contrary, some films also present the images of a bad, dangerous friend so as to make the society realize that a bad friend can be a murderer of his own friend, as seen in *12 Begin*.

Ideology of family. It is found that there have been up to sixteen films, which have continuously reproduced the mainstream ideology of family. However, some films have started to question mainstream ideology and opened a space for the notion of a new family.

The mainstream ideology seeks to explain that a warm, happy family should comprise of a father, mother and child. The disappearance of the father or the mother can pose further difficulties for the child, as portrayed in *Butterfly and Flowers* and *Wanli*. Nevertheless, since 1987, children's films have started to create a space for the ideology of a new family, by proposing that a family does not need to have a father, mother and child. In fact, a perfect family can comprise only mother and child. In addition, an ideal family does not have to come from a middle-class background. Instead, the family of a special child or a tribal child can be an ideal family. Ultimately, decent children can be

parentless, or may not even need a family or can choose to live by themselves, as portrayed in the *Happiness of Kati*.

### Ideologies Regarding Society

Ideology of religion and belief. The ideology of religion and belief is embedded in many of the children's films, especially, in ghost films like *The Little Lord of Siam*, *Dorm*, *Colic*, *See How They Run*, *Yom-Pee-Poa* and *Orahun Summer*. It also appears in some films about children and friends, such as *Panya Raenu 1*, *Panya Raenu 2* and *Panya Raenu 3*, and in children's drama films such as *Butterfly and Flowers*. All of these films insist that religion and belief, namely Buddhism, Islam and beliefs in superstition, have long been part of Thai society.

Although the society is striving to become one society of science and logic, children's films are still reproducing the ideology of religion and belief. The reason might be that science cannot answer all the questions nor explain all phenomena, especially, good-evil, birth-old age-sickness-death and life after death. Consequently, children's films raise both major and minor issues of religion and belief.

However, it is very interesting that these films do not criticize belief and religion, which is similar to the case of the nation-monarchy ideology. This is because these films aim at instilling these ideologies in children.

Ideology of Nation-Monarchy. Although the ideology of Nation-Monarchy may seem unrelated to children, there has been a

reproduction of this ideology in one children's film: *Kan Kluay*. Other than being exposed to the cuteness and brave fighting of Kan Kluay the Elephant, children are introduced to Thai nationalization and imaginary enemy, which is the Burmese through the Siamese-Burmese war scenes. One important thing to be noted is that Kan Kluay did not only fight for the sake of the nation, but worshiped the monarchy as well.

*Kan Kluay* was produced in the years after 1997, at a time when a number of the films were made in honor of the nation and the monarchy, namely, *Bang Rajan: The Legend of the Village's Warriors*, *The Legend of Suriyothai* and *King Naresuan*. One of the main reasons was to make children realize the importance of the nation and the monarchy.

Apart from *Kan Kluay*, *Cambodia* which was produced around 1967 is another film in which the ideology of nation is embedded. The film displays Cambodia's civil war and the foreign invasion of the country, suggesting that children have to fight in order to drive out the enemies and rebuild their country. The film also compares *Cambodia*, a county at war, with peaceful Thailand. So Sombak, the child character, reflects that Thailand is a more peaceful country.

Moreover, many children's films have played a role in instilling the notion of Thainess in children through Thai traditional greetings or "Wai," respect for adults and the use of the National Flag, as depicted in *Panya Raenu 1*, *Panya Raenu 2* and *Panya Raenu 3*. This is the same in the case of *The Adventure of Sudsakon*, adapted from a

prominent work of Thai literature. This film also reproduces a sense of Thainess and traditional Thai culture, which has been passed down from generation to generation.

Ideology of anti-capitalism. Whereas some of the children's films incorporate ideologies of religion and belief as well as the nation and the monarchy, most films criticize industrial capitalist society. They view the aftermaths of the growth of industrial capitalism as a key cause of various problems, including poverty, money-oriented competition, the growth of industrialization and consumerism, as well as environmental destruction and nostalgia. All of these have contributed to the direct changes of children's ways of life.

Besides, since children's films are produced by adults, who have been affected by the industrial capitalist crisis, the problems caused by industrial capitalism are portrayed in films, both intentionally and unintentionally.

Poverty caused by the capitalist society is children's major problem. Since the late 1960s, several films have pointed out that children suffer more from the effects of poverty. This is portrayed in *Wanli*, *A Bite of Love* and *Innocence*. However, although much time has passed, problems caused by capitalism and poverty are still going on. Moreover, when children are affected by poverty, it can also affect other dimensions. Such issues as street children, child labor and child prostitution are in line with the concept of Holland (2008) and Corsaro (2015), which indicates that poverty is the main problem that leads children to further life crises.

The next problem is that, capitalist society, which is driven by competition, has forced children, like adults, to compete against one another. The situation was intensified in the late 1990s, as evidenced by *12 Begin* and *13 Beloved*, in which the child inevitably went into competition and joined the cruel game that would destroy humanity.

While western children's films often reinforce the influence of capitalism to point out its effect on the lives of children, such as in the cult of children's consumerism (Wojcik-Andrews 2000 and Kapur 2008), this dimension is still rare in Thai society. If looking on the positive side, one may find that the issue of consumerism may not yet be a serious issue. However, in the 1990s, a Thai children's film, *My Girl*, started to incorporate the issue of consumerism, as evidenced in the scene of children playing with a handheld game device and the scene in which Jiab's neighboring house has changed into a convenience store.

These three problems seem to be directly related to children while environmental issues may seem distant. However, upon careful consider, it is clear that the issue is significantly related to children. *Echo Planet* is the first Thai animated film to deal with the environmental crisis resulting from the growth of industrial capitalism. The film points out that since children will be part of the future, they must step in to solve the problem.

In the end, industrial capitalist society has made adults sick and tired and want to escape from it. However, since escape seems impossible, the adults choose to return to the past (nostalgia), especially to their sweet

childhood. This phenomenon occurred in the years after 1997 after the economic crisis as reflected in *My Girl* and occurred ten years later as shown in *Panya Raenu 1* and *Panya Raenu 2*, which are considered films that take the adults back to their happy and beautiful childhood.

### Summary of Children Ideology

To sum up, children's films are produced by adults under multiple ideologies. Other than the positive, negative and hybrid ideologies of children, there are also ideologies regarding individuals, such as the ideology of gender and class, as well as ideologies regarding others, including the ideology of friends and family, and ideologies regarding society, namely, ideology of religion and belief, ideology of Nation-Monarchy and ideology of anti-capitalism.

The ideologies embedded in these children's films are not different from those in the song *Dek Oei Dek Di* (Thai: เด็กเอ๋ยเด็กดี) of the 1960s. Thai society during that time set the ten duties of the ideal well-behaved child, including following the religion, preserving tradition, obeying the parents and teachers, speaking politely, being grateful, working, studying hard, saving, being honest and helping others. However, as almost four decades have passed, the ideologies of children in children's films have been changing. Most importantly, some ideologies may conflict with others, such as conflicting ideology of gender and family and it is possible that future studies of children's films may reveal more diverse ideologies which overlap and conflict in line with the changing society.

### Children's Films: The Overlooked Film Genre

At first glance, children's films may be few in number and since they have been produced for children, the emphasis is likely to be on children's loveliness and aim at instructing children (Rittinim 2011). This study has flipped the definition of children's film based on the approaches of certain western and Thai film scholars (Wojcik 2000, Suber 2006 and Sukwong, 2015), thus widening the range of meaning of children's films, namely films "about" children, "for" children and "by" children. This study only examines films "about" children and "for" children, skipping those "by" children because Thai children's films are relatively small in quantity and are not considered mainstream films. However, this survey reveals that more than fifty children's films have been produced in the course of five decades or, in other words, about ten films are produced annually. The past ten years has seen the highest volume of children's films produced. The growth of children's films has resulted in an increase in social interest in children. Moreover, that Thai films have started to present reality and that film production technology has become less sophisticated, have contributed to the increase in the volume of children's fantasy films. This point suggests that a careful study of Thai children's films should be carried out.

Film genre scholars endeavor to study the distinctive characteristics of children's films. For instance, the work of Wojcik-Andrews (2000) points out that children's films have multiple sub genres but also have distinctive characteristics in terms of film language.

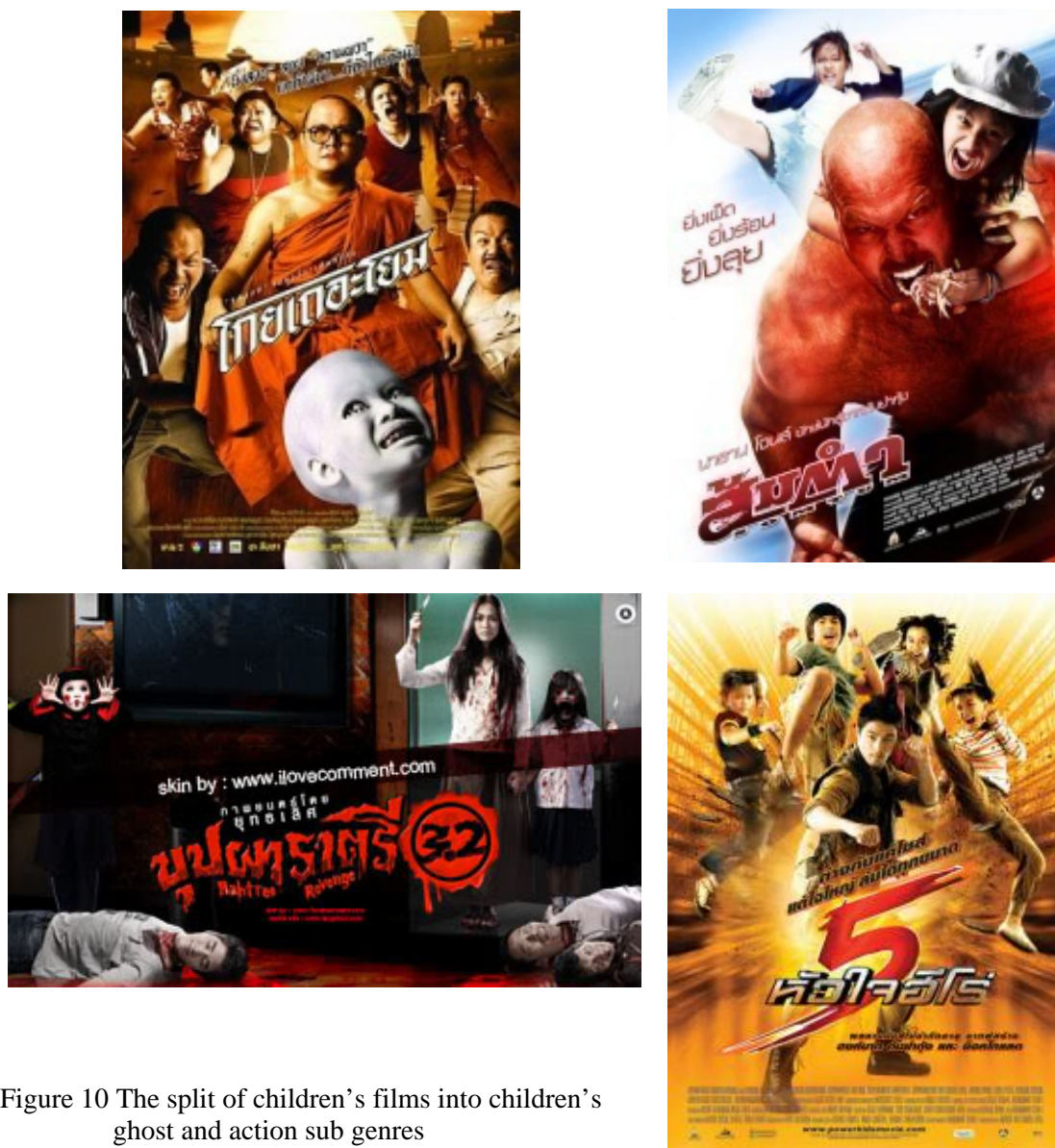


Figure 10 The split of children's films into children's ghost and action sub genres

This study has used film narrative and film language to carry out an analysis of children's films' characteristics. The study reveals that although there is a wide variety of Thai children's films, they have distinctive characteristics like their western

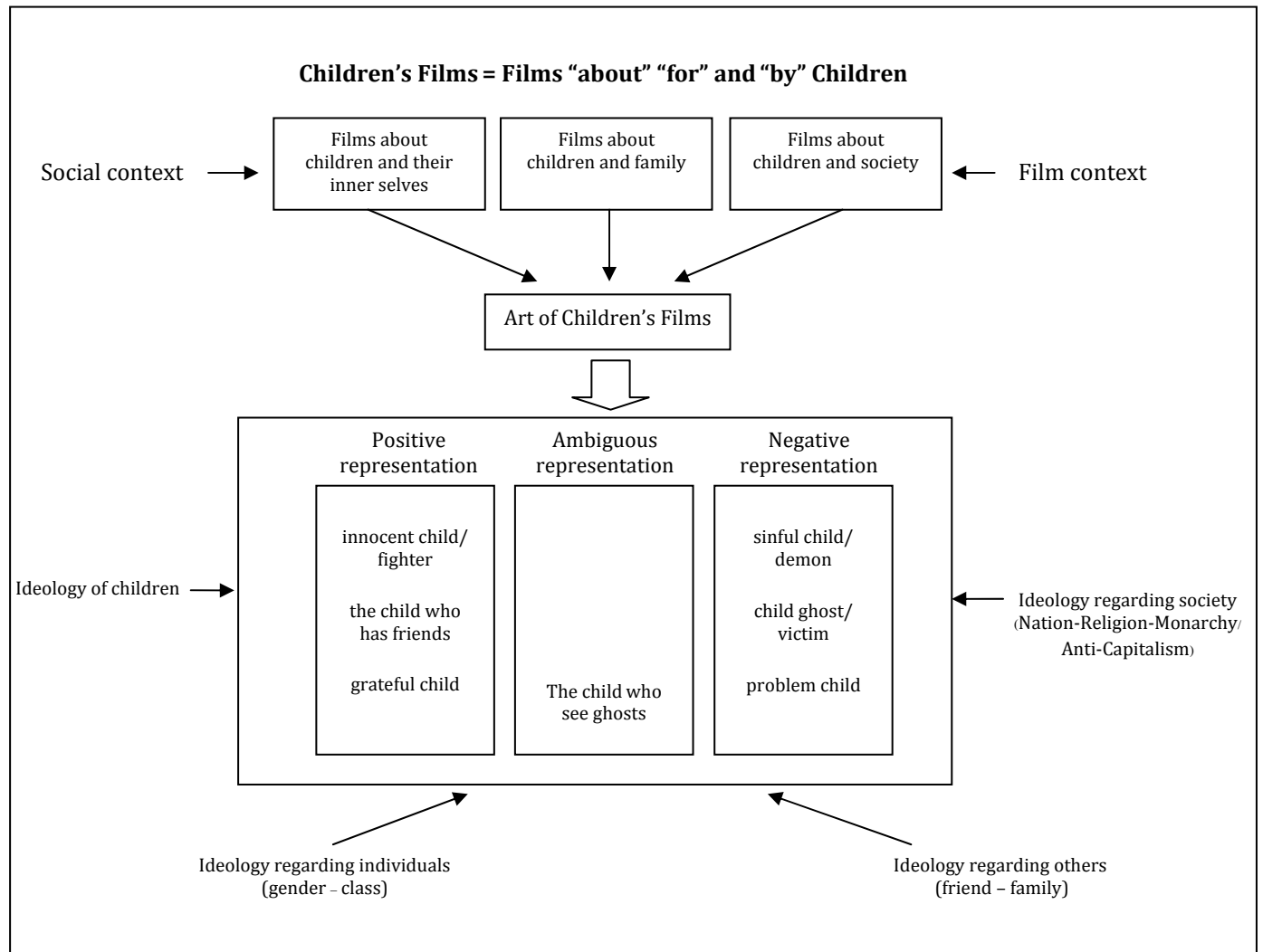
counterparts. To elaborate, child characters are active agents in the films with the help and support of adult characters, and the plots involve children's adventures in the outside world. Most themes are about children themselves, as well as their family and

society. Plots are simple and unsophisticated. Easy film language is adopted and there is the use of childish signs, children's songs and music as well as vivid colors to attract children's attention. This suggests that Thai and western children's films may not be different in terms of characteristics. The reason may be that Thai and western children are thought of in a similar way.

Despite the abovementioned similarity, there are some differences in terms of children's film sub genres. To elaborate, Thai children's films have diverse sub genres, namely, children's drama films, children's family films, children's comedy films, children's documentary films, children's science films, films about children and friends, children's fantasy films, children's film adaptations of literary texts, action films, children's horror films and children's ghost films. Children's ghost films are the sub genre most strikingly different from western children's films. This difference is probably due to the fact that Thai society firmly believes in superstition.

Moreover, it could be said that the development of children's films proceeds as these films mix with films from other genres, thus leading to the expansion of children's film sub-genres. For example, children's action films namely, *Somtum* and *Power Kids* emerged in the past decades. The question is, is it possible that children's films will expand into other film genres in the future? If considering children's nature as interested in imagination and thoughts, it is possible to predict the evolutionary development of the films as long as children's imagination is endless.

The variety of children's films can also be comprehended by considering different issues in the films, namely, children and their inner lives selves, children and family, and children and society. This leads to the discovery of different representations of children, this is to say, positive, negative and hybrid representations. Positive representations include images of the innocent child, the grateful child, the fighter and the child who has friends. Negative representation can be seen through the images of ghosts, the sinful child, the problem child and the victim. Lastly, hybrid or ambiguous representation is the image of the child who sees ghosts. By applying the ideas of Hall (1997), this study explains the representations of children as shaped by society and culture. Thai society has shaped the images of children based on the ideology about children and other sets of ideology, such as class, gender, friend, family, Nation-Religion-Monarchy and anti-capitalism. In a sense, these children's films function as a bypass but partly they also play a role in shaping the definition of Thai children. This can be explained by the diagram below.



For the filmmaker, imagination in children's films can come to an end. This is because children's films have a limited audience, consisting of children and parents who come with their children. Moreover, the production of children's films is complicated, especially when directing child actors or actresses. Ultimately, children's films lack support from the government (Rittinim 2001). Consequently, there have

been demands for government support for the production and screening of children's films.

However, the aspect of children's film that has been forgotten is that children's films are supposed to be produced by children. This idea views children as having the potential to make their own films and, from the perspective of child rights, children are not

supposed to be only actors; instead they can be directors or filmmakers. In some western countries, such as Sweden, children have been allowed to produce films since the 1950s and a curriculum of children's cinema has been established (Sukwong, 2015). In the case of Thailand, children have been involved in film productions since the early years of the new century. This is possible because film production technology has become much less sophisticated and a number of institutions or organizations have provided support for children's film production so as to make children realize the importance of visual communication. Moreover, some organizations use films as means to promote development. For example, the Thai Health Promotion Foundation has used children's films as a means to promote health, and the Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre has started using films to promote children's understanding of their culture. However, the development of children's films may have to be in the hands of the National Film Archive, which has started training children to make films and educating them about the art of filmmaking (Dome Sukwong, 2015). Nevertheless, there has been no involvement of children in the children's film industry to date. Children are still only actors.

The idea that children should be the makers of children's films has been embedded by at least two social concerns. First, children's films in the past were likely to narrate stories from an adult point of view. Consequently, children should be given the platform to present their own issues. Second, although children have not become producers of their own films or entered the

children's film industry yet, film literacy is important for children in that it enables them to understand films.

Although children's films are produced by adults and inevitably incorporate implicit adult worldviews, many children's films are told through the eyes of a child in the body of the adult. As a result, viewers can still see the image of the child or, in a sense, the image of an adult who yearns for childhood. Consequently, the art of film language in children's films cannot be said to be that of films for adults. Moreover, some ideologies embedded in children's films still have the scents of children, such as the view of adults as a laughing stock, as well as the use of childish signs such as vivid colors, children's songs and music. This has put many children's films in the hearts of children and of adults who yearn for their childhood.

As a result, many Thai children's films, such as *My Girl*, have become blockbusters, because these films not only target children but also adults who once were children. This phenomenon is not different from several foreign films, whose initial target audience was children but while later attracted the interest of adults whose making films, such as *E.T.*, blockbusters (Kramer 2002).

It could be said that Thai children's films are the space where adulthood and childhood overlap. Some films have a high tendency to be films for adults, such as *Cambodia* whereas some films have a mixture of adults' and children's scents, such as *My Girl*, while others tend to be films for children, such as *Dek Khong*. This may be different from the case of Thai teenage films

which have been produced under adult ideology as presented by Chittapasata (2010).

## **Conclusion**

According to childhood and film scholars, the images of children portrayed in films are representations constructed by society. In order to comprehend these socially-constructed representations, studies need to be carried out.

This study reveals that there is a wide range of diversity in the representations of children in Thai children's films, namely, positive, negative and ambiguous representations. More characteristics have been incorporated into these representations over the course of almost five decades. The image of a lovely child has been changed into the images of the child ghost, sinful child, the child who see ghosts, the grateful child, problem child, victim, friendly child and fighter. The images of the grateful child, problem child, friendly child and victim are representations that have appeared over the course of children's film history. There have been some changes over time in the form of the addition of more violent and diverse images. On the other hand, the image of the sinful child appeared later in the late 1990s. The image of the child ghost first appeared in the late 1980s, though the child ghost was still characterized by loveliness. Two decades later, the child ghost had become a demon, which was no better than a sinful child. This is probably because the society started to view children as savages.

The findings of this study are in line with those of Clark (2013) in that the

representations of children have been changing from the image of an innocent, lovely child into at least three alternate images. The first is the image of children as a victim of sexual abuse and consumerism. The second is the image of children as a threat since children are viewed as sinful and dangerous. Some children have even been arrested and thus society has been asked to take care of the matter. Finally is the image of children as a national investment. Thus, children have become an important resource of the nation. At the same time, children are considered to be exposed to more risks, such as murder, abduction and higher rate of accidents, leading to over-protection of children.

Considering these three images, it is found that, on one hand, children depicted in Thai films are not different from modern western children. This is partly because Thai society is moving towards western society. In this regard, images depicted in films are images of the victim, the sinful child and the threat whereas the image of children as national investment is less common. However, sooner or later, the image of national investment may appear when Thai society has been completely westernized.

However, the images of children that society wishes to see are different from those images in films and in reality. To illustrate, society wants a lovely, calm, participating and grateful child who follows the ten duties and the twelve national core values. These images of children are what adults and society expect from children.

Clark (2013) has also noted that adults tend to view children these days through their

nostalgic eyes. So the images of children that they see seem unsatisfactory. To illustrate, they see the image of children nowadays as extravagant, technology-oriented and daring while the image they wish children to be is the image of their own childhood. This means that adults want to freeze the image of children, though the reality is not like that. This can be seen in films, such as *My Girl*, *Panya Raenu 1*, *Panya Raenu 2* and *Panya Raenu 3*. As a result, some ideal images of children in adults' opinion cannot be related or accepted by children.

This study of children's films over the course of five decades reveals that the representations of children in films are not only constructed by society, but also by adults and that the process of construction has not yet finished. This means that there might be some changes to the representations of children in the future, especially when society's view has changed. The images or representations that are accepted by the producer, the child and the parents, are likely to be repeatedly reproduced to carry on the ideologies, whereas those that are not accepted are likely to disappear.

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*Beautiful Wonderful Perfect* (Thai: เอ้อเธอ), 2005

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*Panya Raenu 2* (Thai: ปัญญาเรณู 2), 2012

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*Pirate of the Lost Sea* (Thai: สลัดดาเด็ชกับเด็ก 200 ตา), 2008

*Power Kids* (Thai: หัวหัวใจอีโร่), 2009

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*Rahtree Reborn* (Thai: นุปผาราตรี 3.1), 2009

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*Somtum* (Thai: ส้มตำ), 2008

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1979

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2006

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สอนไว้), 2010

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