

Representation of Shamanism in the Film "The Medium" (Semiotic Analysis of Charles Sanders Peirce)

Tri Buana Putri

Universitas Teknologi Sumbawa

Article Info

Article history:

Received: 2 July 2024

Publish: 14 July 2024

Keywords:

Film, Shaman, Worship, Ritual

Abstract

The Medium is a supernatural horror film, produced by Showbox from South Korea and GDH 559 from Thailand, directed by Banjong Pisanthanakun, who also serves as a producer alongside Na Hong-Jin, the director of the film The Wailing. This research aims to understand the presence of shamanism or witchcraft in Indonesia and Thailand, as well as the depiction of shamanism in Indonesia through the semiotics of Charles Sander Peirce, by connecting signs, objects, and meanings in accordance with what is portrayed in the film The Medium. This research uses a descriptive qualitative method with data collection techniques such as observation, analysis, and literature review, based on the semiotic analysis of Charles Sanders Peirce. The research findings show that shamanism in the Isan community in Thailand is portrayed as a bridge between humans and the supernatural world, with the shaman acting as a mediator. During the ritual process, the shaman uses various tools such as white thread, candles, incense, and statues. Mantras are used as a form of communication, the worship space serves as a place of worship, dance accompanied by music is a form of worship, ritual scars are a form of shamanic impact, the use of blood and cow heads is a way to ward off evil spirits, and traditional Thai clothing represents the local culture and traditions.

This is an open access article under the [Lisensi Creative Commons Atribusi-BerbagiSerupa 4.0 Internasional](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)



Corresponding Author:

Tri Buana Putri

Universitas Teknologi Sumbawa

1. INTRODUCTION

Tradition and culture are two things that cannot be separated from human life, which have existed for centuries, from the time of our ancestors until now. Thailand is a country whose people are still tied to the traditions and culture of their ancestors. The country with the largest number of Buddhist adherents is around 4,300 people (Santoso, 2020). So it is not surprising that there are many Buddhist prayer places at home or even in the forest, because the average population there believes that every place, namely caves, big trees and statues, has a guardian. According to Thai belief, the people there believe in the existence of gods and goddesses who are divided into two, namely the good god who is often worshiped by the Buddhist community and always brings good while the evil god brings bad things, disasters, possesses humans until they die, where this belief has been going on for centuries. -centuries from the time of our ancestors (Fatasyah, 2022). With this cultural tradition, the term shaman or dukun emerged who was highly revered and believed to be able to cure all kinds of illnesses and also overcome various problems related to the supernatural.

The medium is a film that explores traditions in Thailand where people there still believe in shamanism or belief in shamans to this day. This film, which was produced in 2021, is a Thai film with a supernatural horror genre and is a type of mockumentary film which is packaged in a documentary style even though this film is not a documentary film, which is very rarely found in films. According to 6.com coverage, this film is the best-selling film because it reached 730,000 viewers and won the Best of Bucheon award at the 25th film festival and topped the box office charts (Fatasyah, 2022). In Indonesia alone, this film was watched by more than 520 thousand viewers, because it offered a tense horror experience for the audience with a story about mystical beliefs that still exist in Thailand

today. With documentary-style shooting techniques, the audience can feel the horror as shown and highlight stories about shamanism or shamanism which has existed for centuries in Thailand and is the belief of the Buddhists in the Isan region of eastern Thailand, whose people still believe in spirits and gods. which is believed to be from the time of their ancestors until now.

This film, which was produced by GDH 559, was directed by two legendary directors who created horror films, namely Banjong Pisanthanakun, who was also the producer of the film along with Na Hong, the director of the film *The Wailing*. *The Medium* was first broadcast in South Korea on July 14 2021 (Kompas.com). According to data from the Korean Film Council, when it was first shown in South Korea, the film "The Medium" was in 15th place in South Korea's highest grossing film draft with earnings of 7.32 million US dollars. This makes researchers interested in conducting research.

This film tells the true story of a remote village called Isan in the eastern region of Thailand which is known to still believe in the existence of shamans. This story begins with the arrival of a group of documentary teams from Thailand who came to the village because they wanted to highlight the religious traditions of the people there who still adhere to mystical beliefs that have been going on for centuries regarding a spirit called the god Bayan. This belief has existed since the time of our ancestors. Nim is a female shaman in the village who is believed to have been given the task of accepting the presence of the god Bayan because Noi, Nim's older sister, rejects the shaman lineage and prefers to embrace Christianity. Until Mink, Noi's son and Nim's nephew, suddenly behaves strangely and is quite scary, allegedly because the god Bayan went berserk and disturbed the lives of all Nim's family members, so this not only endangered the family but also the shaman who helped Mink's healing process and the team crew. documentary. Not only does it tell a horror story, this film also has many unique features and messages contained in it, namely the existence of shamanism and belief in gods who are thought to be able to bring good and bad things into human life. So the plot shown not only explains shamanism but also focuses on the ritual of exorcising evil spirits by a shaman.

Thus, this research underlines the importance of the representation of shamanism in the film *The Medium* through Charles Sanders Pierce's semiotic analysis. In support of this assumption, researchers conducted pre-research to confirm the strong belief in shamanism or shamans and belief in spirits and mystical creatures, one of which is the god Bayan in the film 'The Medium'. In pre-research, researchers used descriptive qualitative methods. The data source is primary data from the film "The Medium". By using Charles Sanders Pierce's theory of semiotic analysis by looking for the relationship between signs, objects and meanings contained in the film *The Medium*. It is hoped that this research will provide an understanding regarding shamanism.

Film as a mass communication medium certainly functions to provide information indirectly or indirectly to the audience. To find out whether the film "The Medium" is a medium for disseminating information to the public through stories (Wibowo, 2006: 196), as well as increasing understanding regarding shamanism or shamanism and spirits that have mystical powers in accordance with the intended meaning, researchers feel it is necessary carry out research regarding this matter. In various previous studies, the film *The Medium* has been widely used as a research object not only in communication science but in other fields of science.

By understanding the representation of shamanism in the film *The Medium*, this research will provide insight into how shamanism is understood and perceived in popular culture as well as understanding symbols and signs. The researcher chose the film "The Medium" as the research object because the researcher wanted to develop research related to the film "The Medium" in the field of communication science. In this research, the

researcher wants to provide a new point of view regarding the film "The Medium" where the researcher focuses on semiotic analysis from the perspective of shamanism/shamanism which is not only found in Thailand but is also often found in Indonesia, with research using descriptive qualitative research to find out whether the film Medium is able to provide information related to shamanism where film is an important medium for disseminating information and increasing insight. The use of Charles Sanders Peirce's theory is used to explore the relationship between signs, objects and meaning in the film "The Medium".

2. METHOD

The type of research used in this research is qualitative research methods. Qualitative research according to Bogdan and Biklen, S explains that qualitative research is a procedure where the data results are in the form of descriptive or written speech and writing about an observed problem. Where understanding is obtained through social analysis which is the focus of the research (Rahmat, 2009).

According to Sugiyono, qualitative research examines participants' perspectives with interactive and flexible strategies. Where qualitative research is aimed at understanding social phenomena from the participant's perspective by looking at the condition of the object (Siyoto and Sodik, 2015). Meanwhile, according to Kiyantono, qualitative research is a data collection technique that invites readers to think about and identify as much as possible everything that will be researched when conducting research (Kriantono, 2007). Then, as a basis for the analysis, content analysis is used, which is a method that studies and analyzes communication systematically and objectively regarding the visible message (Berelson and Kerlinger).

So it can be concluded that qualitative research is research that collects and analyzes data without trying to calculate and analyze numbers. The main thing underlying the use of qualitative research methods is that the formulation of the problem raised and the research objectives to be achieved in this research can be resolved using qualitative research, with the aim of understanding the meaning of the signs in the film "The Medium". With research that focuses on the film "The Medium" with research analysis units in the form of several scene recordings related to shamanism. To make the research more focused, the researcher uses a study focus on the semiotic analysis of Charles Sanders Peirce by looking for the relationship between signs, objects and meaning, where many meanings will be captured using semiotics. Therefore, qualitative research methods are the right method to complete this research. Apart from that, the use of qualitative research methods is also to strengthen the research results which will later be in descriptive form with strong data.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Results



Figure 8. Scene 6

4.2.1 Scene 6

4.2.2 Sign: Nim describes himself as a shaman, the wound on Nim's wrist.

1. Qualisign

- a) Nim's qualifications as a shaman can be seen from the attributes used by Nim to describe a shaman in the Isan region of Thailand. Nim's ability to heal someone affected by evil spirits and communicate with the unseen world is Nim's qualification as a shaman. This qualification is a sign that differentiates Nim from other individuals (Fatasyah, 2022:3).
- b) The wound on Nim's wrist is a qualisign resulting from the trauma he experienced because he was unable to withstand the power of the bayan god that entered his body. According to the Thai Isan people, when a person's body is entered by a parrot spirit, they will show symptoms such as possession, prolonged headaches, and even loss of self-control because the parrot spirit controls the person's body (Fatasyah, 2022:3).

2. Sinsign

- a) The sinsign shown by Nim was when he told about spiritual experiences, such as entering a magical realm, the treatment he carried out was always successful as shown by the many Isan people who came and asked for his help (Fatasyah, 2022:3).
- b) The sign of the wound on Nim's wrist reflects Nim's health condition when he wanted to become a shaman. This happened because Nim was not strong enough to withstand the power of the parrot spirit that would enter his body. So the wound marks are a sign of Nim's process of becoming a shaman and developing spiritual abilities (Fatasyah, 2022:3).

3. Ligisign

- a) Legisign can be seen from Nim who says he is a shaman who is believed to have mystical powers that can heal. The use of objects such as statues becomes a legisign shown by Nim. Apart from that, Nim explained the process used in shamanistic practice which described Nim as a shaman (Fatasyah, 2022:3).
- b) The wound on Nim's wrist is a sign of Nim's sacrifice in the process of his spiritual journey to become a shaman (Fatasyah, 2022:3).

4.2.3 Object

1. Icon

- a) Nim is an icon of shamans in the Isan region of Thailand, where belief in shamans has existed for centuries from the ancestors until it has been continued until now and now shamans have become a cultural tradition of the Thai Isan people (Fatasyah, 2022:3).
- b) The wound on Nim's hand is an icon of his suicide attempt, which he did because he was unable to withstand the power of the bayan god that entered his body (Fatasyah, 2022:3).

2. Index

- a) Nim became a shaman because of the bloodline passed down by Nim's grandmother, who was also previously a shaman. Initially, the inheritance was to be given to Nim's older sister, Noi, but Noi refused and preferred to embrace Christianity, so Nim was the one who had to replace her (Fatasyah, 2022:3).
- b) The wound on Nim's wrist was caused by pain and depression as a result

of the great power of the spirit of the bayan god which was about to enter his body. Nim, who was not strong enough, tried to kill himself but failed because he was saved by his two brothers (Fatasyah, 2022:3).

3. Symbol

- a) Nim is a shaman symbol in Isan Thailand. The Isan people respect him and it is not uncommon for the Isan people to come to Nim to ask for help in safety and healing (Fatasyah, 2022:3).
- b) The wound on Nim's hand is a symbol of a suicide attempt because he was unable to resist the spirit of the bayan god who possessed his body which caused pain in the body area, (Fatasyah, 2022:3).

4.2.4 Interpretant

1. Rheme

- a) Shaman is defined by the Isan people as a shaman whose body is believed to contain the spirit of a bayan. The shaman's job is to help those affected by evil spirits and perform rituals (Fatasyah, 2022:3).
- b) The wound on Nim's hand was interpreted as pain by the parrot spirit that entered his body. Nim, who was not strong enough with the power of the bayan god, tried to commit suicide but failed because his brother saved him (Fatasyah, 2022:3).

2. Design

- a) Nim is a shaman in Isan Thailand. The people there believe that a shaman is someone who has a bayan spirit in their body who helps them overcome problems related to mystical forces and evil spirits (Fatasyah, 2022:3).
- b) Nim's hand wounds are believed by the Isan people to be a result of becoming a shaman, because to become a shaman their body must be prepared to get sick because of the power of the bayan (Fatasyah, 2022:3).

3. Argument

- a) Nim became a shaman because his grandmother's bloodline was then passed on to his older sister Noi but was rejected so it was passed on to Nim (Fatasyah, 2022:3).
- b) The reason for the wound on Nim's hand was because he attempted suicide due to not being able to withstand the power of the bayan god which entered his body during the process of becoming a shaman (Fatasyah, 2022:3).

4. DISCUSSION

Figure 8. Scene 6 explains the cut wound on Nim's wrist, this was caused by Nim not being able to withstand the power of the spirit of the bayan god which was about to enter his body. In Thai Isan belief, becoming a shaman is not easy, the prospective shaman's body will be possessed by the bayan spirit which has an impact on the prospective shaman's health such as dizziness, blood coming out of the body, possession so that if he is not strong enough to withstand this power he will die. For this reason, Nim tried to end his life but was stopped by his two older brothers.

5. CONCLUSION

- 1) The sixth representation of shamanism is also shown through the cut wound on Nim's wrist, this is caused by the shaman lineage passed down by Nim's grandmother. However, because the power of the parrot god's strong spirit caused many effects on

Nim's body, ranging from fainting, vomiting, to possession. This is what pushed Nim to commit suicide because he couldn't stand the power of the bayan god that was about to enter his body, but this failed to happen because Nim was saved by his two brothers.

6. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ahmad, J. (2018). Research design Content Analysis (Content Analysis). *Research Gate*, 5(9), 2-20.
- Akmal, M. (2022). Representation of Minangkabau Cultural Values in the Film Sinking of the Van Der Wijck Ship. *Journal of Intercultural Communication and Society*, 1(01), 11-30
- Andulrahman, S. (2014). Gomatere Ritual: Shamanistic Practices of the Tugutil People. *ETHNOHISTORY: Scientific Journal of Culture and Welfare*, 1(2), 64-79.
- Anwar, LP (2022). Semiotic Analysis of the Representation of Family Dysfunction in the Film Boyhood. *Journal of Interview and Media Research*, 1(01), 60-78.
- Fatasyah, EA (2022). Horror Movie Stereotypes Southeast Asia (Semiotic Analysis in the Film "The Medium") (Stereotypes of Southeast Asian Horror Films (Semiotic Analysis in "The Medium")) (Doctoral Accompaniment, University of 17 August 1945 Surabaya).
- Fatasyah, EA, Jupriono, MS, & Danadharta, I. (2022, August). Representation of Manatism in the Film "The Medium" (Semiotic Analysis of Roland Barthes). In National Seminar on Thesis Results (Vol. 1, No. 01, pp. 481-485).
- Fatasyah, EA (2022). Southeast Asian Horror Film Stereotypes (Analysis of Semiotics in the Film "The Medium") Doctoral dissertation, University of 17 August 1945 Surabaya.
- Fitria, R. (2012). Learning Process in Inclusive Settings in Elementary Schools. *Scientific Journal of Special Education*, 1(1), 90-101.
- Hartono, D., & Sugalih, A. (2019). The Meaning of the Smile Symbol in Lay's Advertisements on Television (Semiotic Analysis of Charles Sanders Peirce). *Communication Perspective: Journal of Political Communication and Business Communication*, 3(1), 39-49.
- Kompas.com. 2021. "Synopsis of *The Medium, Thai Horror Film*". Retrieved October 14, 2023 from <https://www.kompas.com/hype/read/2021/10/19/104827166/sinopsis-the-thai-horror-film-medium>.
- Kristiyono, J. (2018). Film as a Tourism Communication Medium. *Tourism Hospitality and Culinary Journal*, 2(1), 44-52.
- Meiyani, KH, Muderana, IK, & Astariani, PSP (2023). Credit Granting Procedures *Steady Pensium at PT Bank Mandiri Taspen Bangli Sub-Branch Office* (Doctoral dissertation, Bali State Polytechnic).
- Nathaniel, A., & Sannie, A.W. (2020). Semiotic analysis of the meaning of loneliness in the lyrics of the song "Space Alone" by Tulus. *SEMIOTICS: Journal of Literature and Linguistics*, 19(2), 107-117.
- Rorong, M.J. (2019). Representation of Human Values Web Series Carlo's Story (Semiotic Analysis from the perspective of Charles Sanders Pierce). *Semiotics: Journal of Communication*, 13(1).
- Sasmita, U. (2017) Representation of Masculinity in the Disney Film Moana (Semiotic Analysis of Charles Sanders Pierce). *Online Journal of Kinesics* 4(2), 127-144.
- Salsabila, S. (2022). SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF THE FILM THE MEDIUM. 2022 (Doctoral dissertation, FISIP UNPAS).

- Santoso, J., Gumiri, S., Yulianti., N., & Masliani, M. (2020). The Environment and Its Problems in the Interpretation of Buddhist Religious Figures: Case Study of Forest and Land Fires. *Journal of Socio Humanities Science*, 4(2), 860-880.
- Tanujaya, C. (2017). Production Standard Operational Procedure Planning at the Coffeein Company. *Performance Journal: Journal of Management and Business Start-up*, 2(1), 90-95.
- Wijaya, DE (2022). Semiotic Analysis of Smoking Addiction in the Documentary Film "Emergency! Schools Surrounded by Cigarette Advertisements." *Journal of discourse and Media Research*, 2022. 1.01: 13-27.
- Yasifa, TA, Syahidin, Y., & Herfiyanti, L. (2022). Design and Development of an Information System for Completeness of Claim Files for the BPJS Polyclinic at the Muhammadiyah Hospital in Bandung. *Journal of Informatics Engineering (Jutif)*, 3(4), 1089-1097.
- Yustiana, M., & Junaedi, A. (2019). Representation of Feminism in the Film *Marliana the Murderer in Four Acts* (Semiotic Analysis of Roland Barthes). *Connections*, 3(1), 118-125.
- Yuwita, N. (2018). Representation of Nationalism in the Rudy Habibie Film (Semiotic Analysis Study of Charles Sanders Pierce). *Heritage Journal*, 6(1), 40-48.
- Zahara, S (2019). THE DEVELOPMENT OF SHAMANISM IN SOUTH KOREA (Reviewed of *Gut rituals*) (*Doctoral dissertation*, NATIONAL UNIVERSITY).