

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Orientalism

This study was inspired by my accumulated knowledge concerning “Orientalism” from related books, researches, and film adaptations. The theme of the study originated with the “bible” of “Orientalism,” Edward W. Said’s Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient (1978). In his book, Said gave an overview of situations during colonial period and its aftermath, specifically relations of power between colonizers and the colonized. Said’s work presented the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized through many historical aspects of both sides. Orientalism, by Said’s definition, is “a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in European Western experience” (1). Said contends that the Orient “is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe’s greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other...”(1). Said also states that there are three qualifications of Orientalism. Firstly the “Orient” exists and to understand it we should look at the corresponding reality; Secondly it is important to study the relationship and configuration of power; and thirdly the structure of Orientalism does not simply subside. The Western conception of the Orient is illustrated by Said’s statement, “Orientalism is not an airy European fantasy, but a created body of theory and practice in which for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment” (6), which suggests

that to understand how European cultures create the Orient in terms of sociology, politics, military, ideology and imagination is to examine Orientalism as a discourse. Said researched the genealogy of “Occident” and “Orient” from sources around the world. His focus, however, was on the Middle-East and Islamic countries. However, the concept of Orientalism can also be used as a framework of analysis for literary works whose contents mention Asian countries such as Siam.

Since nineteenth century, the characteristics of the “Orient” are manifested through numerous works of the Orientalist writers. Said remarks, “one of the important developments in nineteenth-century Orientalism was the distillation of essentials ideas about the Orient—its sensuality, its tendency to despotism, its aberrant mentality, its habits of inaccuracy, its backwardness—into a separate and unchallenged coherence...” (205). These traits the Orient possesses reinforce the stereotypical images of the Orient as sexually-oriented, barbaric, and uncivilized. Apart from that, the Orient is portrayed as exotic or even grotesque as Said further explains, “the Orient is *watched*, since its almost (but never quite) offensive behavior issues out of a reservoir of infinite peculiarity... The Orient becomes a living tableau of queerness” (103). In this sense, the Orient, as being observed by the Westerners, is categorized as a group of strange people in a strange place.

The concept of Orientalism is widely studied among scholars and one aspect of Orientalism directly involves colonialism. A.L. Macfie’s Orientalism (2002) explored a wide range of Oriental writers, basing his analysis mainly on the framework of Said. He studied “Oriental Enlightenment” (1997) and found that the author, J.J. Clarke, effectively accepted Said’s thesis that “European attitudes towards the East often embodied a mixture of patronizing chauvinism and racist

contempt. The colonial rulers of British India, for example, saw themselves as a caste above the rest, all too often treating the sensibilities, beliefs and religious practices of their subject people with indifference and scorn”(153). The colonized Orient such as India is automatically portrayed as inferior to the Western colonizers and such unequal relationship is clearly perceived.

Macfie’ s research on John M. Mackenzie’ s Orientalism: History, Theory and The Arts (1995), however, revealed that Said’ s concept of Orientalism was challenged or even refused. In his work, Mackenzie stated that Said’ s thesis that the West has exploited the stereotypes of the “Other” was completely wrong since the field of the arts, architecture, design, music and theatre “had in fact been one of the constant change, instability...” (150). Mackenzie was quoted further saying, “Fixed images of the oriental may from time to time have appeared in popular culture, **but such stereotyping was not invariably offensive**”(152) (emphasis added). Nevertheless, Mackenzie admitted that stereotype and caricature, racially conscious attitudes, and notions of moral, technical and political superiority remained for a period highly prevalent in European popular culture (Macfie, 152-153).

The Orientalism concept can be perceived through novels written by Westerners about Thailand, then Siam, specifically about Thai culture and royalties. It is legitimate to select the novel entitled Anna and the King of Siam compiled and edited by Margaret Landon as a case study to examine if such Orientalist stereotypes really exist and to what extent they are portrayed. The novel was actually written by Anna Leonowens who was believed to be a governess to King Mongkut’ s royal families. Initially her novel was meant to be her diary for recording and expressing her feelings towards Siam society, especially the monarchy. It was later published

under the title The English Governess at the Siamese Court. Mrs. Leonowens' s second book (1939), The Romance of the Harem, in which the biographical parts of the two books were combined into one, was also a phenomenon. Margaret Landon explains in her novel entitled Anna and the King of Siam (1943) that the narrative style was changed "as seemed consistent with the change from the first-person to a third-person narrator, and from the 1860's to the 1940's" (xii) and special attention needs to be paid to Landon' s statement that "If I were asked to give the fabric content of the book I should say that it is **'seventy-five per cent fact, and twenty five percent fiction based on fact.'**" (Landon, xii) (emphasis added).

Chalerm Sri Chantasri's dissertation (1999) explored how American people perceived Thailand or Siam through the musicals adapted from the original text. The purpose of her work was to provide a different point of view to counterbalance "the skewed image and representation of my people (Thai) and my culture"(iv). Her work was meant to be a reminder for people to be cautious and not to readily accept without skepticism theatrical images of any other peoples and cultures. Chalerm Sri's work, The Americanization of the King and I: The Transformation of the English Governess into an American Legend, provided a thorough analysis on two well-known American adaptations, The Film Anna and the King of Siam (1946) and The Musical The King and I (1951) as well as plot, characterization, and theme of each version. Her main argument appeared in Chapter Four B: The Orient versus the West, in which she stated that the predominant motif in The King and I is the battle between the civilized West represented by Anna, on the one hand, and the half-barbaric Orient as represented by the King of Siam, on the other and that such motif is predominant in every version of the story. Furthermore, she emphasized that the notion that

Westerners and Western cultures are “better” than the Siamese is overwhelming in the narrative (197).

In her analysis, Chalerm Sri made several references to Said’s Orientalism, especially in her discussion on the opposition between the West and the East. Looking at The King and I within Said’s conceptual framework, Chalerm Sri posits that the musical fits the ideas in many respects as it addresses several underlying issues concerning the opposition between the West and the East, which exists in both production process and the contents of the narrative. She reasoned that since the Americanization process of the musical begins with the producers’ attitudes and intentions, the way the narrative is transformed and presented to the public is clearly a portrayal of the Western domination of the East (199).

Film as discourse

Apart from the concept of Orientalism, some relevant film discourse theories should be taken into consideration to help analyze the film Anna and the King (1999) itself and its popularity mechanism. Ironically enough, though some parts of the film are misleading, the popularity of the film never fades. On the contrary, the response of the audience even increases. To understand the mechanism of creating success, it is therefore essential to look at the film as a channel and analyze it as a discourse. Film is similar to a novel in the sense that they both contain plot, theme, setting, characters, point of view, focalization and dialogue. But one exception is that film communicates through pictures. Thus it allows pictures to be signs and sometimes signs do not necessarily agree with dialogues. In Film and Literature: An Introduction (1979), Moris Beja (1979) states “[e]ver since film arose as a story-telling art, there has been

a tendency by filmmakers, writers, critics, and audiences alike to associate it with literature, as well as an insistence by many people that the association is false or perhaps deceptive... ” (51). They both tell stories, but film tells it by pictures. Beja states that basic components of verbal language are words whereas the film’ s basic ones are the frame or photographed image and the editing of the images (54). Each visual image is comparable to a full sentence. Therefore, films today are “audio-visual” ones (56). Film then should be analyzed through its dialogue and visual images.

Therefore, some filming techniques or elements should be discussed as fundamental understanding and common ground of the film convention. First and foremost, choices of a distance in putting camera from what is to be photographed are important as they affect audience’ s attitudes and feelings toward the subject matter. Some commonly used terms are shot and angle. A shot is what is seen on the screen from the time the camera is turned until it is turned off; thus continuous, unedited action. An angle is where the camera is placed in relation to what is being filmed. Angles are techniques by which the director can express his/her attitudes to the subjects. Shots and angles are purposely chosen and create different perception for the audience. An establishing shot, for example, is taken at a far distance to capture landscape, location of the action. A long shot is taken to film the body in full scale and focuses on one person. An over-the shoulder-shot is used when two characters are in conversation, but the audience will see from behind one character over his/her shoulder to the other character. The use of the over-the-shoulder-shot allows the audience to witness and observe the characters facing and concentrating on each other. For angles, the bird’s Eye View is an overhead position where the camera is

placed. It shows how a character is powerless and trapped. The high angle shot is taken from higher direction to the subjects emphasizing how they are trapped by surroundings. The eye-level shot presents non-judgmental position whereas the low angle shot shows characters as being more powerful than normal. The oblique angle is taken as the camera is held at a slant so the pictures are tense and insecure.

Second, the use of color in film is also an important element which largely affects audience's emotions. In Successful Color Photography (1968), Andreas Feininger provides the significance of colors in film and their effects to audience. He explains that "colors can create powerful emotional effect and made a greater appreciation of surroundings-people, nature and, things" (264). Colors in this sense are used as a means to express the feelings and intent of the filmmaker and to convey these to his audience. Colors are also "psychologically meaningful," which means they can create senses of "warm or cold, aggressive or passive, strong or weak, gay or somber, exciting or depressing"(265). To achieve the fullest effects, "the emotional quality of color" should be agreeable to "the emotional significance of the subject being photographed"(265). In short, colors of subjects in film should effectively represent their suggestive meanings. Feininger further explains how colors are used to affect different moods and sensations:

Red is the most aggressive and advancing, active and exciting-suggestive of blood and flame, associated with danger (warning signal). It is the symbol of revolution, violence, and vitality.

Blue is the coolest color, receding, passive, restful, and remote. It suggests the coolness of water, the remoteness of the blue sky, the tranquility of quiet shade.

Orange evokes feelings similar to those produced by red but generally somewhat milder.

Yellow is suggestive of warm and pleasant feelings such as sunshine and warmth, cheerfulness spring.

Earth tone symbolizes soil, earth and earthy qualities.

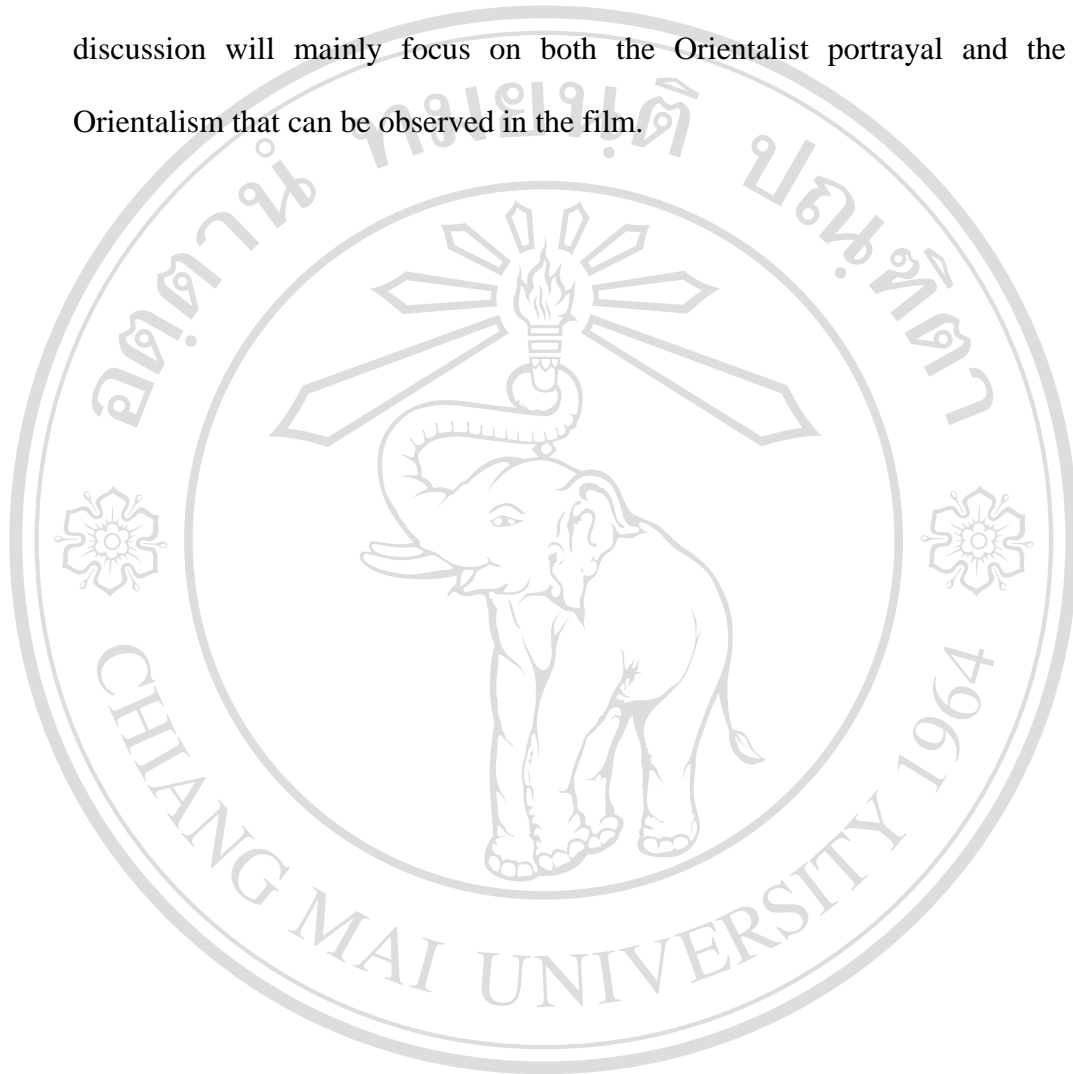
Green is the color of nature signifying forest, neither aggressive nor passive, neither hot nor cold, neither advancing nor receding, but “in between” (266).

Third, semiotics or the study of signs in film are another means to understand and analyze film. According to Giannetti (1993), semiotic or a study of sign is a way to “film criticism, to allow for more systematic and detailed analyses of movies” (433). It is a method derived from various fields such as linguistics, psychology, and philosophy aiming to focus on a more precise analysis. In other words, sign is what film signifies to communicate and establish some thoughts or attitudes of the filmmaker (434). In one frame, there can be many signs, but it is natural that the audience will focus on the dominant one. For example, a frame in which a woman appears dressed in a man’s white costume standing on stage might contain many signs, but the focus is on why she is dressed in white and in man’s clothes.

For the verbal part, this paper refers to Guy Cook’s *Discourse* (1996), in which it proposes that there are two ways of approaching language, which are *contextual*, referring to the fact outside language, and *formal*, referring to the facts inside language. Formal links, also known as *cohesive devices*, can be categorized into verb form, parallelism, referring expressions, repetition and lexical chains, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and information arrangement. Moreover, Cook also states that formal links are not enough and that we should analyze deeper in the *contextual* level including language functions, conversational principles and *schema* (15).

To summarize, this paper will explore literary components including plot, characterization, point of views, and themes which are divided into different appeals

based on the concepts of Orientalism namely exoticism and barbarisms, romance, heroism, and white supremacy illustrated by filming techniques analysis. The discussion will mainly focus on both the Orientalist portrayal and the counter Orientalism that can be observed in the film.



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