

Chapter 3

Analysis: Orientalism in Anna and the King (1999)

It is a classic, “true-life story.” When English schoolteacher, Anna Leonowens, arrives in the ‘exotic land of Siam’ to teach the children of King Mongkut, her Western sensibilities clash with the ruler’s Eastern ways. The tension builds as Mongkut learns that outside forces are conspiring against his regime. With the political intrigue set to explode, Anna and the King must become allies in a daring fight to ‘save’ Siam from dangerous enemies bent on destruction. In the tradition of Braveheart and The English Patient, comes Anna and the King; a sweeping masterpiece filled with “passion and adventure.”

Twentieth Century Fox 2000 Pictures puts the above caption to advertise Anna and the King (1999). As depicted in this caption, the film is produced following the “tradition,” the existed and preferred model adopted by the filmmaker, and the tradition of “passion and adventure” must be very appealing to the audience, particularly Westerners; otherwise, the story of Mrs. Anna Leonowens would not have inspired and entertained Western audiences for over a century. Whereas the Western audience fully enjoyed the film, Thai people in this century faced with inexpressible feelings; either skeptical of the film’s accuracy or worrisome of its portrayal presented to the eyes of the audiences globally. Apart from viewing it for the sake of entertainment, the audience should suspect that the film is a “mirror” giving the clearest reflection of the relations between Anna representing the West and the King representing the East. A thorough analysis can reveal the mentality of the Western filmmaker in this film. The focus of this paper is how the film is to analyze the filming techniques the filmmaker adopted which affect the audience perceptions about Siam.

Fundamentally, it is important to discuss various scenes in the film Anna and the King (1999) to see the overall picture of the film, to facilitate the discussion, and to serve as future references. The film can be divided into twenty scenes listed as follows.

Scene 1. The Englishwoman

The story begins when the protagonist, Anna, is introduced along with her son, Louis, and two Muslim servants, BeeBee and Moonshee. They get off the steamboat, Chaopraya and head to the royal palace. On their way to the palace, they see a marketplace and how many Siamese spend their routine lives.

Scene 2. The Palace

When entering the royal palace, they observe remarkable Giant Statues. People are sitting down on the floor while performing their tasks. Anna is brought to meet Chaopraya Kralahome, the Prime Minister of Siam.

Scene 3. Meeting the King

After waiting to meet the king for 3 weeks, Anna and Kralahome go to meet the King in the royal hall. Anna and Kralahome seem to be late for the introduction. Resisting Kralahome advice for her to wait for another day, Anna runs to introduce herself to the king. That surprises the King a great deal and so he asks Kralahome if Anna knows the protocols.

Scene 4. The Royal Family

Since the King has not dismissed her, Anna has to follow him. They walk to the inner palace where the King presents her to his family namely his head-wife, the

princes and princesses, who all become her students. It is the first time she meets Prince Chulalongkorn.

Scene 5. The Royal School

The first day of her work, she is surprised by the atmosphere of the school. The royal students are ready for the class. Prince Chulalongkorn gives the presentation about Siam and the King. Louis feels that what Prince Chulalongkorn presents is exaggerated. They quarrel and end up fighting with each other.

Scene 6. Slavery

Both Prince Chulalongkorn and Louis are ordered to write “I will not fight in class” on the board as a punishment. Though it is evening, they both have not been dismissed. All of a sudden, they hear a lamenting voice of a woman, who appears to be a chained slave named La’ Ore.

Scene 7. The King’s Approval

The King, his children, and Anna are on the Royal Barge. The King actually takes Anna to her new house near the river. Anna is surprised by his kindness.

Scene 8. The Rice Festival

The King and his family go to Ayudhya to perform a rice ritual. Anna, Louis and her servants come along. They ride on elephants’ backs to pay respect to the Pagoda.

Scene 9. Burmese Death Squad

A Burmese squad is hiding in a bush near Chaopraya Boonnak’s house waiting for British businessman, Mr. Kincaid, to leave so they can kill the Siamese officials in the house.

Scene 10. A Royal Party

The King decides to invite British nobles for a royal dinner to show that Siam is also a civilized country. People in the palace have to learn Western manners and etiquette. There is a challenge to the King by Mr. Kincaid, a British investor of West India Company, about his family and his political vision. Anna stands up to argue with Mr. Kincaid about the “British cultural Superiority” and that pleases the King. He asks her for a dance.

Scene 11. The Marketplace

At the marketplace, Anna and Bee Bee are talking about the King’s appearance and disposition. Bee Bee tells Anna to think about being the King’s 26th wife. During the conversation, Balat, Tuptim’s lover asks a boy to give a secret letter to Anna for Tuptim.

Scene 12. A Small Gift

The King asks for Anna’s presence to talk with her and to ask for her opinion about military strategy. He offers her a ring as a reward for pleasing the King well but she refuses to receive it.

Scene 13. Fever

Princess Fa-ying, the favorite daughter of the King, is found having fever in the rain. She suffers a great deal from Cholera. Anna is brought to the deathbed and experiences the sad atmosphere.

Scene 14. A Letter

Royal Family and Anna have a retreat in the King's resort near the beach and float Fa-ying's ash in the sea. At night, the King startles Anna when she sneaks out to the sea. The King asks her to read Abraham Lincoln's letter for him.

Scene 15. An Attack

Siamese troop led by General Alak and Prince Chao Fa, the Second King, strikes the Burmese's. At night, Prince Chao Fa is murdered by Alak, who is actually a treason.

Scene 16. Tuptim

Tuptim's maid comes to see Anna at night and tells her that Tuptim is a great danger. Anna follows the maid and later found Tuptim in a yellow monk robe. Tuptim is then arrested in a charge of committing treason to the King as she is accused of having a lover.

Scene 17. Kincaid's Information

Mr. Kincaid meets Kralahome to inform him that the British is always a friend to the Siam's king.

Scene 18. Nong Khai

Anna is about to leave Siam because Tuptim and her lover are executed. Kralahome comes to see her at the pier and asks her a favor to persuade the king to stay with his family until the Siam's troop returns Bangkok. In a time of danger, Anna expels Alak's troop successfully and the King's life.

Scene 19. The White Elephant

At night, the princes and princesses perform a play about the White Elephant to celebrate the victory over Alak's attempt of treason. Late at night, Anna shares her feeling with the king that she does not know how the relationship with the king will be and what she is going to do next in the future. The king gives her advice to go back to England. He then asks her for a dance.

Scene 20. End Title

Thanks to the vision of his father, King Mongkut, and the teachings of Anna Leonowens, King Chulalongkorn not only maintained Siam's independence, but also abolished slavery, instituted religious freedom and reformed the judicial system.

The movie portrays Anna as having a domineering role as she is included in almost every scene. As a result, Anna becomes a significant and influential character leading the entire story. By purposely allowing Anna to possess the majority of space, the filmmaker significantly supports the one-sided perspective of Anna herself. By doing this, the audience are prone to support Anna, follow her actions, interpret, and judge things through her point of view. Anna's predominant presence actually emphasizes her authority and even strengthens her contributions to Siam and the royal monarchy. This style of creating literary work has been widely practiced by the imperialist colonizers when they wrote about the colonized particularly the Orient subjects. Westerners are portrayed as intelligent and capable of fixing the corrupted Oriental lands when the Orientals tended to be portrayed as incapable, inferior, and barbarous. This is actually an extreme dichotomy between the West and the East in which the relations of the two are never equal.

On the other hand, filming techniques suggest an attempt to counter Orientalism implying the better understanding of the Thai culture and history or even

disagreement to the Orientalist portrayal as found in previous versions. In this version, the King interacts with Anna in a more constructive way. In some parts, he shares and teaches Anna the wisdom of Siam and the style of thought of the East. It is undeniable that Anna casts her authority in many parts, but gradually she is taught by the King and learns that her White authority does not bring her any benefits. This is anti-Orientalism in a way.

This paper thus argues that this film presents ambivalent attitudes towards Siam. As a Hollywood style of entertainment, the filmmaker might realize that the film should include its appeal, a brave and intelligent Western hero saving the corrupted society. This even reflects the filmmaker's unconscious longing for the glory in the colonization period. In contrast, as the world is changing, the filmmaker might want to present a new dimension of interpreting the cultural relation between the West and the East by merging them together. Therefore, this paper will focus on both sides of Orientalism and anti-Orientalism observed in this film by looking at plot, characterization, and major themes which are divided into exoticism and barbarism appeal, romance appeal, white supremacy appeal, and heroism appeal, respectively.

Plot analysis

Regarding the significant roles of Anna in contributing to Siam as portrayed in the film, her authority over Siam can be observed in many aspects, which are the ideas of Orientalism. The coming to Siam of Anna confirms an imperialist idea that European colonizers see the Oriental lands as the places to fulfill their mission, to seek for fortune, and to civilize the inhabitants. In short, the Oriental territories benefit

them politically, economically and intellectually. The inner cover of Edward Said's Orientalism quotes Benjamin Disraeli's speech, "the East is a career." This statement is quite true in some senses when it is used to consider the significance in the film Anna and the King. A thorough analysis of this film leads to two kinds of "career." At the superficial level, the film producers can make a great fortune from selling what Siam is. In the story itself, Anna, the British schoolteacher and the protagonist, comes to the East for her career. Perhaps, a deeper analysis traces back to the original author of the source, Anna Leonowens, and her renowned successor or popularizer, Margaret Landon, who both found their careers in the East and gained benefits from Siam either in form of money or recognition.

Anna and the King begins with Anna, her son, Louis, and two Muslim servants arrive at Bangkok in 1856. At first, her family finds that Siam is not as good a place to live as London. They discuss things they do not truly understand or if they do, they can understand them superficially. Anna concludes the conversation with Louis when he begins to ask many questions about Siam and some cross-cultural aspects by saying that "the ways of England are the ways of the world."

Anna's responsibilities in the royal palace are not limited to teaching academic subjects, but also implanting British or Western culture, style of thoughts on people in the palace. She sets conditions with everything around her. In this regard, it projects, as Said would say, ideas about what "we" can do and what "they" cannot do or understand as "we" do (12). This is the imposition of political and intellectual power of imperial authority. Anna, as a British, regards herself as an intellectual who has some extent of authority to negotiate or to be against the King's power. She defies the King by opposing him or disagreeing with him almost all the time and

gradually wins the King's heart. The King even consults her personally about how to deal with the country's affairs or even diplomacy or military. When Siam is frequently attacked by Burmese squads, who were believed to be supported by the British government, the King asks Anna to run a royal dinner with a purpose to show the British nobles that Siam is actually as "civilized" as England or France. Since then Anna is highly admired and is asked to begin teaching the King's children in whatever subjects she wishes. When the King and his family are in danger, Anna is asked to escort the Princes and Princesses to a safe place. Such portrayal that the King is made to surrender to Anna's reasons reiterates the higher position of the West unchangeably and systematically as it is actually about political power. Anna even plays a vital role in the climatic scene. The following picture shows that Anna is a savior when she expels Alak's troop successfully and saves the King's life.



Figure 1: The King appreciates Anna's effort to save him from the traitor's attack.

The King is grateful for her and bows his head to thank her. The filming technique here is the use of over the shoulder shot in which the frame contains two figures. The audience tend to pay attention to the one who stands before them and concentrate on his/her action. When the King thanks Anna, the audience tend to believe that Anna deserves a bow from the King. This just emphasizes Anna's initiation and sacrifice for Siam.

Yet, it is arguable that the film also portrays Anna as a pertinent woman who ends up causing problems on several occasions. When Tuptim is judged, Anna cannot stay calm as other observers. She explodes her anger since she disagrees with the judgment. In the court, Anna speaks out loud and argues with the judge's order that Tuptim commits no wrong as she is honest to her heart. Anna's expression causes disorder and interruption to the trial proceedings. Anna's interference even puts pressure to the judge hastening the process of punishment and makes it impossible for anyone to help Tuptim. Also, the situation reflects Anna's ignorance of Siam's governing system and culture. Regarding this point, the fixed image of West's intelligence and rationality is challenged. The filmmaker makes it clear that the West could also be wrong and ignorant if they lack understanding about cultural differences. Moreover, the Western mentality is sometimes not applicable to some situations in the East. This part of the film is clearly presented as counter-Orientalism as Anna makes a "mess" in Siam. This scene suggests that the filmmaker, to a certain extent, disagrees with Orientalism.

Characterization

For most Thai people, one significant issue which provokes a great deal of controversy is the portrayal of the King in the film as dependent or inferior to Anna, the British schoolteacher. This results in a censorship from the Film Board of Thailand by not granting a permission to use Thailand as a filming location and later on the ban to release the film. An article entitled “Anna and the King: Blasphemy or Praise to King Mongkut” in *Matichon* Newspaper revealed an interesting point about the film that, Anna and the King (1999) is another grand form of Hollywood that makes Thailand become known around the world, but amazingly it is not allowed to be released in the country. Many Thai people are interested in this film in particular since the story is claimed to base on a true story, a diary of Mrs. Anna Leonowens, a British teacher, who was granted a favor by His Majesty King Mongkut to teach princes and princesses of the Siam’s royal family. The interest is actually a concern since there have been many American filmmakers using Mrs. Leonowens’ s diary as a source to produce musicals, cartoons, and films. These works portrayed the images of the King of Siam as a “clown,” who is loud, irrational, barbarous, and cruel. All these negative traits need to be fixed by Anna. When Twentieth Century Fox planned to reproduce a new version annexed to the story of Anna, there is a concern that “history might repeat itself.” Fox promised that it would respect the Thai history and showed a good will by choosing Thailand as a filming location, but the request was refused. The location then changed to Malaysia instead (6). After having finished the filming, the film was banned to be launched in Thailand.

This paper on the contrary argues that the King’ s positive traits such as being a righteous king who feels the need to modernize his country, the mighty king, the military head, a scholar, and a father who loves his children dearly are depicted in this

film. The change in the characterization reflects the anti-Orientalism concept as it opposes to the representations of King Monkut in previous versions. The director of Anna and the King (1999) attempts to dismantle the Orientalist idea through the change of characterization of the King. This might be considered a hint of an attempt of the American filmmaker to present the King as a rounded character in a more respectful tone.

For Anna, her characterization can be examined through the concept of Orientalism and anti-Orientalism. To begin with, it might be interesting to see how American people look at Anna in the previous film versions. Exploring Anna's characterization, Chantasingh states, "[E]vidently, The King and I contains something that was extraordinarily appealing to American audiences over time"(207). One aspect she points out is "heroism and hero worship." She contends that "heroes in numerous societies have been transformed into objects of worship" (208). Anna herself is admired as a redeemer of Siam and that makes her a very important figure in Siam's history. Chantasingh further discusses that "Anna still puts a brave front and courageously challenges the King as well as traditional Siamese practices that contradict American ideals of freedom" (210).

In a sense of Orientalism, Anna in the 1999 film, starring Jodie Foster, seems to remain intact with the previous versions in terms of her heroic cause. The film deliberately portrays Anna as a heroine by putting her right after a scene of the King with Prince Chao Fa and Alak discussing the solution to the attack of Burmese squads. Right after the dialogue, Anna appears teaching her students. This sequencing of frames persuades the audience and influences their perception to implicitly accept Anna as the heroine, who can help the King solve his problem.

Besides being a brave woman, Anna is portrayed as a representative of American ideal of equality. Anna never resists to be equal to the King and also tries to “liberate” other characters such as La’Ore, a female slave who is chained, and Tuptim, the King’s concubine. In the hall scene that Jaojom Marnda Ung sits before the King telling him about Anna’s attempt to free her slave, Anna presents herself and converses with the King until she is triumphant in the argument. Anna, in this sense, is portrayed as a fighter for the rightness whereas Tuptim is presented as submissive and voiceless. This clear demarcation of characterization between Anna and other female characters has been shown throughout the story. For Tuptim, at the beginning of the story, she is presented as a naïve Siamese woman who has no confidence to express her thoughts and feelings. For Anna, she is portrayed as a helper, a mental guide for Tuptim. The film makes it clear that Anna’s encouragement and guidance greatly strengthens Tuptim’s personalities to be more confident and outspoken. The characteristics of Tuptim can be explained by the concept of Oriental females. Said proposes that “Flaubert’s encounter with an Egyptian courtesan produced a widely influential model of Oriental woman [that] she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotion, presence, or history” (6). Considering this framework, it is clear that Tuptim is an Orient in this sense as she cannot speak for herself. Therefore, it is safe to state that the portrayal of each character in the film is actually a manifestation of Orientalism that the Oriental is dependent and rather weak while the Occidental is distinctively far better off.

Interestingly enough, the intention of the filmmaker in minimizing Anna’s wisdom as the West can be traced. In the very first scene, Anna is kept in a small compartment in a boat. It gives a feeling that Anna’s knowledge and wisdom is

limited, and she seems to know only her own culture. The use of narrow space implies her limited knowledge of the World. Another scene in which the director portrays her as ignorant is when she introduces herself before the King. One of the filming techniques clearly observed in this scene is the use of sign. The doors and ladders contain symbolic meaning suggesting how Anna is experiencing Siam. Anna's opening the door signifies her obtaining of new experience, new knowledge. When Anna is being escorted to meet the King, Kralahome leads her up the ladder. Here, the ladder can be a sign of Anna's uplifting knowledge and status. Kralahome in this scene represents how the East leads the West to a new world that the West has never known before. The West has to be led or guided to understand the East. At the end, the filmmaker has Anna accept the wisdom of the East as she repeats Siam's cliché or ideas. When talking with the King at the end, she says, "everything in Siam has its own time." This implies that she learns some values from Siam and agrees to embrace them. In this sense, Anna's portrayal can be categorized as an attempt to counter Orientalism. That is, as a Westerner is trying to understand and learn from the East.

Themes

In this part of analysis, the focus is on the major themes in this latest film reproduction that emphasizes the Orientalist portrayal. The themes that should be considered include barbarism and exoticism appeal, romantic and fantasy appeal, existence of white supremacy nostalgia, and American heroic ideal. Firstly, barbarism and exoticism appeal will be explored to see if they are presented in this film as in previous versions or if there are any new dimensions of Orientalist thinking and interpretation.

Barbarism and Exoticism Appeal

Orientalism, a style of thought and perception that the West is superior to the East, is a major theme which predominantly features and unites the entire story. This theme is very dynamic and affects the audience's perception as it conveys a strong message that Western culture is more civilized than the Eastern. The word "civilized" contains a sense of comparison and is always associated to its opposite term, "uncivilized." In the latest version, though the portrayal of the King as "barbaric" or "half-barbaric" subsides or is hardly seen, the notion that the West is better than Siam still remains as the core of the film. This concept seems to be instinctively imparted in the Westerners' mentality. This distinction or demarcation implies unequal status between the Orient and the Occident.

The cultural inequality is traced back from the industrial period in the West. In Orientalism, Said explores the term "hegemony" and found that it is used to describe such condition that "certain cultural forms predominate over others, just as certain ideas are more influential than others...[T]his cultural leadership is what Gramsci has identified as *hegemony*, an indispensable concept for any understanding of cultural life in the industrial West" (7). To simply put it, this concept means that the Western culture leads whereas other cultures have to follow. In reaction to this concept, this paper contends that a particular culture should not be regarded as superior or more civilized than the others since differences do not necessarily mean better or worse. The East and the West are geographically and historically different from each other, and so are their cultures. To formulate the imposing attitudes of one culture over the others is therefore uncreative and unconstructive since it causes more conflicts.

Besides, the slant understanding of the East is arbitrary. Said explores Flaubert's novel entitled Bouvard et Pécuchet and remarks that "knowledge is what gets on silently, without comment, from one text to another. Ideas are propagated and disseminated anonymously, they are repeated without attribution; they are literally become *idées reçues*: what matters is that they are *there*, to be repeated, echoed, and re-echoed uncritically" (116). Indeed, ideas and reality sometimes are not the same.

Anna and the King (1999) fits Said's observation. Western culture, particularly British, explicitly signifies authority and power over Siam. The "British Ways" become influential model for Siam and the King to adopt in order to remain equal of the British. Adoption or conformity to embrace the British culture then means British culture dominates Siam even though the King's intention is to take that as a solution to maintain the nation's independence. The demand of Siam to be "civilized" in the film actually exists in every version of the film so far. Because of this hegemony, the superiority of British or Western culture has been perpetuated for several centuries in Siam and the "Orient" as Said posits, "It is hegemony, or rather the result of cultural hegemony at work, that gives Orientalism the durability and the strength..." (7).

The film portrays Siam as uncivilized or barbaric from the beginning of the story. When Anna, Louis, and her two Muslim servants, Moonshee and Beebe, arrive at Siam and get the first experience of being in Siam, they express their frustration over things surrounded them. Louis observes how Siamese labors working and sees an accident. Louis talks with Anna implies that Siam is a dangerous and wild place since death can occur easily:

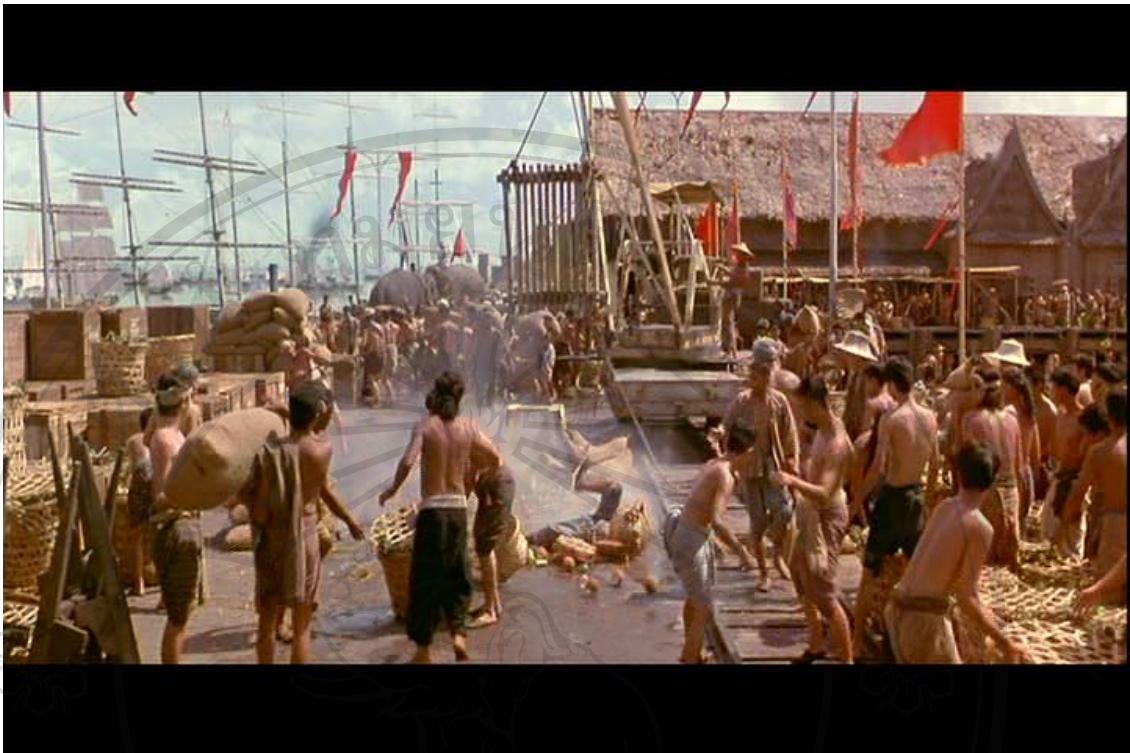


Figure 2: Louis observes an accident on the pier on the first day of his arrival to Siam

Louis: Mother, come look. I think they' ve killed someone.

Anna: Louis, take care about the railing, honey.

In choosing this scene to introduce Siam, the director seems to suggest that Siam is a wild and risky place. Half naked people are what the director wants to present audience, and he might want to convey a message that Siam is exactly the land of uncivilized people. Apart from the above dialogue, Siamese is also portrayed as aggressive or barbaric as they shout and quarrel to each other in the public. Louis observes such situation and questions what kind of people Siamese are. Establishing shot allows audience to see the locale and atmosphere of Siam. In this scene, an accident occurs at the pier, and it startles the laborers as well. These men turn their back to the audience as they themselves are panic-stricken. Some men stand in the

position of oblique line, which shows anxiety. The color is in earth tone reflecting a primitive or down to earth sense.

Another frame that shows the barbarity and wilderness of the Oriental lands can be observed in the following scene which illustrates the perception of Siam as a barbaric and wild place.



Figure 3: Siamese villagers were hung by Burmese squads.

This picture shows the cruelty and barbarity of Burmese troop who hang Siamese villagers. Though the Siamese are not portrayed as barbarians in this scene, Siam is still presented as a land which is full of danger. The use of dark colors and the gloomy tone causes the audience to feel horrified. Anna's dialogue with Kralahome as they firstly met is another example showing how Siam is represented as a very unsafe place that not many people dare to come. As Anna says, "However, getting here [Siam] was something of a challenge." This statement reflects her mentality about

Siam very well. When Anna and her family are provided a place to temporarily stay in the Kralahome's compound, she angrily expresses her disappointment since the house that has been promised has never been provided: "A monarch who refuses to keep his word is uncivilized, unenlightened." As she talks to the King, Anna bursts out her anger without knowing the causes that kept her waiting. Through both Anna and Louis dialogues, it is evident that they perceive Siam as what they "bring with them." Words like "shouting," "challenge," "uncivilized," and "unenlightened" are all negative ones. These words are used to describe Siamese and their King. Anna and her family's perception at this point somehow frames the audience to perceive that Siam is what they see. Such mentality had been implanted in many Westerners at that time. Anna's speech when she is heading to the royal palace that "because the ways of England are the ways of the world" reflects such mentality of being superior to other cultures or countries very well. This statement is supported by the idea of British superiority, which emphasizes the "negative traits" of the Orient as opposed to the "positive traits" of the British or the Occident.

Regarding the above discussion, Anna, on the other hand, is portrayed as an ignorant and hot-tempered person. At the very beginning, she completely lacks knowledge or understanding about the King's affairs. When Anna arrives in Siam, the country was in crisis of Burmese attacks, but she thinks only about herself and her benefits without really understanding the political situation of Siam. By portraying Anna as irrational and improper, the director seems to suggest that the West is not always the right side. Such portrayal of the Anna as a self-centered and impatient person attacks the West in a way and thus counter the concept of Orientalism. Here, the West can be "irrational." The negative traits of the East under the notion of

Orientalism now belong to Anna. The director fully supports this view as he makes Anna gradually learns and develops amenable feelings to the King and Siam, which is totally opposite to the way she thought at the beginning. She even appreciates and embraces some values of Siamese culture.

Colors is another important filming technique used to strengthen the Orientalist setting of Siam. Evidence can be seen when Anna and Kralahome are walking in the royal palace to meet the King.

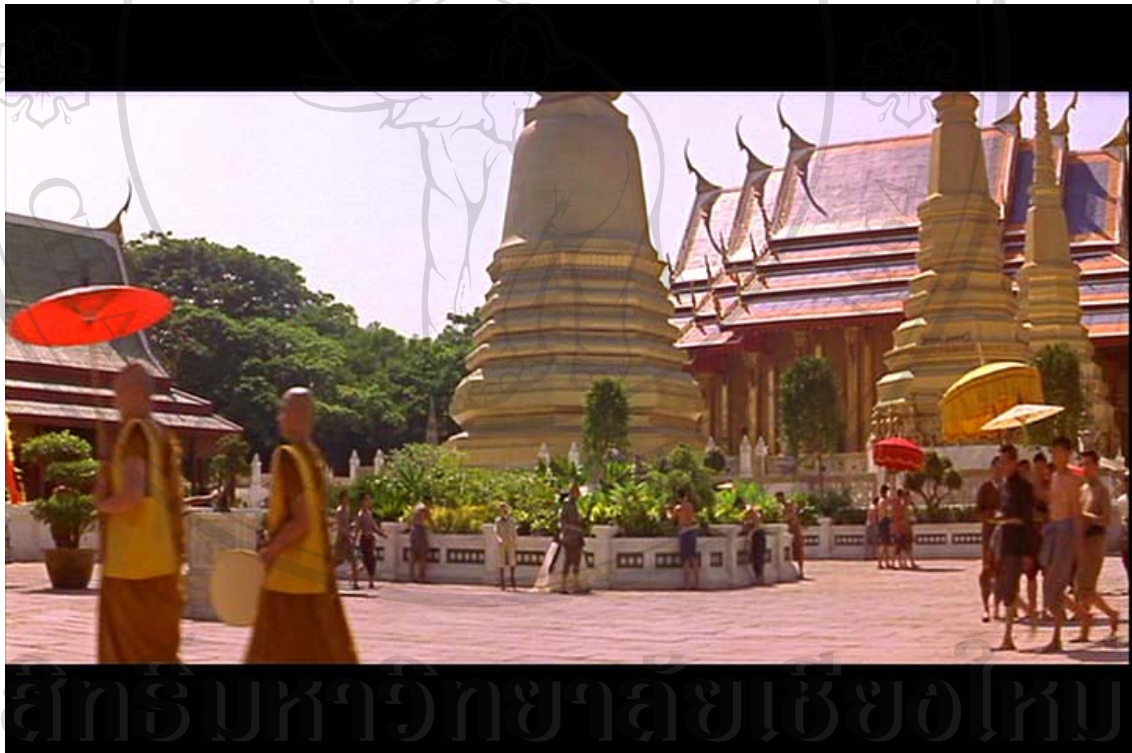


Figure 4: Anna first experiences the royal palace.

Golden pagodas are suggestive of warmth and prosperity. Pagodas and monks in this frame are signs of Buddhism, which is highly respected by the Siamese monarch. This representation invites viewers to see Siam as a culturally rich country. Camera pans in the horizontal direction following their lateral movement. The view is quite

panoramic in which the audience can observe clearly monks, golden pagoda, nobles, and the royal palace, the Oriental atmosphere in Siam. The panning is a normal human way of looking at things and therefore facilitates the audience in watching small details. The cinematic technique is also used to build the perception of what the director presents as the Oriental traits. In this sense, Siam is depicted as an amazing and vital setting.



Figure 5: Anna in the royal barge appreciating the scenery

Gold, bright yellow, red colors are the strong mood creators which depict vitality, warmth, cheerfulness and activeness of the King and his surroundings. The colors of the King's costumes represent liveliness whereas the colors for Anna's dress, which is white or grey, represent the coldness and dullness. In this regard, the director might want to indicate that Siam or the East is actually more inviting and exciting than the

West. If this assumption is correct, Siam in the director's view is a pleasant and lively place. The viewers then can perceive joyous mood when they see this picture which is quite opposite to the scenes at beginning.

Yet one notion of Orientalism that the Oriental lands are sexually oriented is still presented as shown in this following scene.



Figure 6: King Mongkut's royal family

The establishing shot allows the audience to see the King's concubines in full scale. Red and gold dresses also give the feeling of sexual pleasure as rich colors. The concubines who gather in this place constitute an image of a harem. They are represented as a group of special people in an exotic place. There are no distinctions among each of them, and therefore they become a collection of pleasure for the King. The idea of eroticism which prevails in this scene re-echoes the concept of Orientalism that the Oriental lands are the lands of sexually corrupt.

Romance Appeal

One significant theme of the film that can be observed and is worth discussing is the romance of Anna and the King, which illustrates the idea of confrontation when the West meets the East, and how Anna's mentality of Siam, the Oriental land, reflects the psyche of the West. On the one hand, Said posits that "[t]he Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences" (1) and "was something bright young Westerners would find to be all-consuming passion"(5). Anna came to Siam and found a new life and a new love. It is a place that fulfils Anna's dream and passion in a certain degree. Her romantic relationship with the King is an archetype of romance in Orientalism that Westerners rejuvenate their lives by creating sensual relationship with the Easterners. By allowing romance between Anna and the King to be a core part throughout the whole story, the director perpetuates this inter-romance appeal of Orientalism. The intention of the director to adopt such notion is illustrated in the dancing scene:



Figure 7: The King leads Anna to the dance floor.

King: And in honor of our most distinguished guests, a waltz, as in European Custom of dancing after dinner. [poking his hand toward Anna as a sign of asking her for a dance]
[When positioning on the floor]

King: I want you to make a promise Anna to always tell King what you think, no matter what, like the man from East India Company.

Anna: I always have.

In terms of Orientalism, the King's trust and passion for Anna reflect his acceptance of Anna in the way that the East is projected to obey to the West. The King's speech indicates Anna's importance to him and the familiarity between them. In this scene, the two characters are standing very close to each other. The space is very close. They have a direct eye contact, staring into each other eyes, holding hand in hand. The king asking Anna to make a promise to tell him everything she thinks implies the request for openness and sincerity from Anna. As for Anna, by replying, "I always have," she

implies that she knows the King quite well all along even before the King himself begins to ask her. This style of conversation is more than that of mere friends or employer and employee. The portrayal of the King here is therefore like that of what a man is talking fondly with the woman he has an eye on and so does Anna. The King, being infatuated with Anna, tacitly embraces “everything” that is Anna. Not only is he projected as a love blinded man, but also gives her a consent to share her Western opinion with him. Romance, in this sense, is actually a device of Western cultural dominance and the Eastern acceptance. Perhaps, we can go back to the scene when Anna firstly appears in the gala. Andy Tennant, the director, calls this scene “here comes Cinderella moment ” (Anna and the King (1999) DVD, Andy Tennant’ s interview).



Figure 8: Anna appears in the gala.

Anna’ s stunning appearance in the gala draws the audience attention to look at her as a very important person.

Anna: Forgive me, Your Majesty. I believe the sun set a little earlier today.

King: *Mem*, you arrange all this to influence positive future of Siam.
And now, *you steal attention away from it*.

Anna: Oh, well, that was not my intentions. Your Majesty.

In this dialogue, Anna becomes a key figure as she “influences positive future of Siam” and casts her striking appearance in the gala that can “steal [people] attention away from it.” In the verbal part, Anna’s conjunctions “*Oh*” and “*well*” imply that she is embarrassed and flattered by such compliment, which makes the conversation more or less a courtship. Through the visual part, the use of long shot displays the full body of Anna and thus concentrates on her. Her white costume is quite extraordinary, and she is the only woman who dresses in white. White color represents White superiority.

On the other hand, the romance of Anna and the King also signifies the equality of both characters as a man and a woman and of the two hemispheres: the East and the West.



Figure 9: Holding hands

Through the visual part, the director merges the two cultures: the East and the West. It can be seen particularly when Anna and the King hold each other's hands for the dance. This attempt represents cooperation and unity of the two cultures equally, which seems to be a new dimension of interpreting the cultural relations through the sign of hands. Moreover, when focusing on the romance, the King is presented as an ordinary man who is not in the higher position to Anna. This portrayal of the King eliminates the "barbarity" and "irrationality" that exists in the previous versions. After the gala successfully finished, the King sends for Anna. He gives her a ring to award her contribution in managing the gala:

King: ***Mem's hand has been lonely without such.***

Anna: It is most kind, Your Majesty. It's very beautiful and though I am terribly grateful...

King: It is custom to bestow favors for those who please King and *Mem* has done so.

Anna: I'm sorry. I cannot accept such generosity.

Though the King refers to the custom of awarding people who have contributed to the King or the country, the ring signifies the nuptial bond, specifically a wedding ring, rather than a mere award. This scene heightens the romance complex between the two as Anna hesitates and refuses to receive the ring. Her hesitation implies that she is not ready or willing to be his wife. The romance theme signifies, in this sense, equality between the two characters.

However, the intention of the director is not clear at the end of the film as he chooses to separate Anna and the King on the ground of different culture and custom. They do not have to hide their feelings to each other any more when Anna has to leave Siam for the sake of his son's future. The director, at this point, seems to return to Orientalism in a sense that the East and the West are divided into two different

worlds. The use of romance as a major theme therefore serves many purposes. First, it can be used as a device of Western cultural dominance, an attempt to bridge and level the East and the West and to re-echo the cultural differences. In effect, though the film maker has an attempt to use romance as a cultural bridge, he does not seem to go beyond the structure of Orientalism. To illustrate, through the romance theme, though the director struggles to challenge Orientalism by positioning the two main characters in the equal level hoping to show his interpretation of the equality between the East and the West, he still cannot escape from presenting the romance of Anna and the King. The existence of romance theme is an appeal in a movie that the Western audience might still want to see. By presenting the romantic bonds between Anna and the King, Anna's privilege in tutoring the King is emphasized in a way that the East allows itself to be tutored by the West.

White Supremacy Appeal

In the theme of White Supremacy, the film suggests the attempt to deconstruct the concept of Orientalism regarding colonialism is challenged, reinterpreted, and presented in a rather new style.

The director satirizes Anna's attitudes about the White Supremacy at the beginning of the story. Louis questions his mother why she has to be here in Siam and why the duty of teaching the royal students has to be hers. Anna replies to him that "because the ways of England are the ways of the world. Wise man, he knows that." Anna's prompt answer illustrates the idea of the White supremacy that it is White people who set the rules. They were the righteous people to lead and the others to follow. This is probably a mockery of the director as Anna finally learns to value

Siam. The cliché is also used by Lady Bradley, the wife of the England Queen's envoy. After being enlightened, Anna argues with a group of British about the truth of the support for Burmese's squads. Anna is disappointed by her countrymen's attitudes and insincerity to the King of Siam. Lady Bradley cuts the conversation by saying the same cliché. Here, Anna stands forth to argue with her countrymen about the same cliché she used at first. The White superiority in the director's view is not an admirable and not really "superior" as the British characters believe. This is a challenge and an opposition to Orientalism.

Another scene that illustrates an attempt to oppose Orientalism is the following scene in which the director depicts Anna as a giver of scientific knowledge or the world knowledge, but he portrays the King as a sage of spiritual wisdom who enlightens and uplifts Anna. The White Supremacy theme is therefore demystified and instead reinforces the mutual redemption.



Figure 10: Anna is reading a letter under the light from the King's lantern.

King: These hours are meant for sleep.

Anna: Ha, you startled me.

King: I thought it wise to do so.

Anna: May I ask what the Majesty is doing awake at such an ungodly hour?

King: Gazing at the moon.

Anna: Yes, it is beautiful.

King: As the sun rises, she will surrender the night, but she is always with him, even when he cannot see her.

Anna: It must be a great comfort to him.

King: Yes.

Here, the director chooses a metaphor of the sun and the moon as the duality of nature to imply the relationship of the King and Anna. This can also connote the duality of the East and the West. The King's showing a lamp for Anna to read a letter can be a sign that the West is not the only side who offers knowledge to the East but the East can also enlighten the West, vice versa. This sign seems to challenge Orientalism, but it might show an intention to accept that East and West actually interchange and

interconnect. This scene also suggests that both the King and Anna representing the East and the West need help from each other. The word “always” suggests that the East coexists with the West.

Another clear image of how the East enlightens the West can be seen through Kralahome’ s speech made to Anna at the very beginning of the film. When Anna persists to see her house and to be introduced to the King, Kralahome advises her not to be haste and to learn that “ [i]n Siam, everything has its own time.” At first, Anna seems to be furious and irritated about his remark since the Eastern perception is different from that in her own culture. She prefers to be precise and straightforward, but sometimes she might not realize appropriateness in accordance with cultural background of Siam. This reflects the leading role of Kralahome in educating Anna about the Siamese culture. It is noticeable that Anna herself repeats the sentence “[I]n Siam, everything has its own time” later on, after she was fully enlightened. The repetition suggests that she accepts the worldview of the Siamese.

Another conversation between Anna and Louis about the setting of proper English household in Siam is also interesting as it reveals how the director subverts the idea of White Supremacy:

Louis: Mother, how can it be a proper household? You haven’ t lived in England since you were a little girl, and I’ ve never been there at all.

Anna: India *IS* British, Louis. That’ s what being colonized is all about.

Here, both Anna and Louis have a very limited experience living in England.

However, Anna is still adamant that she was born English and therefore deserves the right to be proper in the way of British no matter where she is. Also Anna clearly

states that such colonized country as India actually belongs to her country. In speaking so, Anna casts a superior tone to India, the Orient. Even a trivial matter as household arrangement, there is a hidden message and, ideologically, it is the British who is entitled to possess the superiority to the others.



Figure 11: Beebe and Mooshee exchange a knowing glance reacting to Anna's remark.

One interesting observation here as portrayed in the film is a hint of questioning or disagreement with Anna's speech. Beebe and Moonshee exchange a knowing glance reacting to Anna's opinion about colonialism. This might be another attempt of the director to provoke the audience to question Anna's idea of White Supremacy.

Another piece of evidence that illustrates how the notion of Western superiority is subverted is in the dinner scene. British nobles and Siamese officials sit around the dining table and Mr. Mycroft Kincaid, a British businessman, shows his pride of being British:

King: Also I think, to arrive at forefront of the world in wealth and power, yes? Still, progress through commerce is logic. King find most practical and excellent topic for discussion.

Kincaid: All due respect, Your Majesty. It is a little far-fetched to think that commerce alone will bring progress to your people. Especially when they're awash with, uh, superstition and fear, like your lovely concubines here with their talismans; worn, no doubt, to protect them from us foreign devils.

King: A friend once said, Mr. Kincaid, am I mistaken that your country also has a tale of Merlin and Camelot?

Kincaid: Point taken, Your Majesty. However, *there is no arguing the superiority of the English*. And in the light of these dreadful massacres up and down your border, it's no wonder *you're seeking our favor*. (emphasis added)

Kincaid's response to the King that the Siamese strongly believe in talismans and superstition connotes that Siam is an uncivilized country that lacks a scientific or logic thinking. Kincaid's sense of humor or satire evades as the King is wise enough in responding him. He then cuts straight to the point that English is still superior to Siam in any circumstances. Anna's dissatisfaction and irritation with Mr. Kincaid's attitude can be observed in this scene. Kincaid continues to tease the King that he himself will beg for help and surrender to their superiority to survive. This causes Anna to lose her temper and stand up arguing with Kincaid about the White Supremacy. Anna's speech reflects the director's attitude to the subject, which clashes with the notion of Orientalism.

Heroism Appeal

The adoption of Orientalism is manifested through the portrayal of Anna as a British woman who possesses fine qualities of heroic figure in a sense that Europeans

go to the East to set a “new vision,” to set a “new world,” “a wholly new place.” One piece of evidence of Anna’s heroic deed is her plot to save the King’s life when he confronts Alak, the traitor. She is portrayed as a smart woman, who has no fear even of death as she successfully deceives Alak and his soldiers that the fireworks and Louis’ bugle are from British army sent to support the King.

Portrayed as a heroine of the film, Anna is more likely to be created out of imaginary viewpoint of the American filmmaker. It is also possible that Anna’s characteristics are actually the American ideal that the filmmaker adopts to fulfill the American audience. Regarding this, Chantasingh studied the musical version, The King and I (1951), to see how it is “Americanized.” She found that the musical was produced based on American perspective and interpretation and in that the producer portrayed Anna as an ideal American woman to satisfy the audience and to emphasize the position of America from other countries or cultures. On the topic of *Heroism and hero worship*, she posits that “[t]his story [The King and I] responds to the innate love of heroes and hero-worship in the American people” (210). She cited from Theodore L. Gross’ s The Heroic Ideal in American Literature (1971) to present characteristics of hero in American literary creations:

The hero of American literature must certainly struggle and view his experience with perception; but he must, in some sense, be extraordinary, and he must pursue an ideal—in protest or in accommodation to some form of authority. (quoted in Chantasingh 209).

In response to the American heroism framework, I argue that such notion still prevails in the half century later. To illustrate the point of how Anna represents the ideal

American and how the King and Siamese are orientalized, the following scenes and dialogues are drawn to support the argument.

In the film, the American heroism represented by Anna is observed in King Chulalongkorn's speech (Voice Over) at the very beginning of the story to introduce Anna:

She was the first Englishwoman I had ever met and it seemed to me she knew more about the world than anyone but it was a world Siam was afraid would consume them. The monsoon winds had whispered her arrival like a coming storm. Some welcomed the rain, but others feared a raging flood. Still, she came unaware of the suspicion that preceded her. But it wasn't until years later that ***I began to appreciate how brave she was.*** And how alone she must have felt. An Englishwoman, the first I'd ever met. (emphasis added)

The above speech clearly states the American heroic qualities of Anna and the orientalized Siam. This can be explained by discourse analysis. The utterance "The first English woman I had ever met" is repeated twice. The word "World" also repeats twice. The repetitions are to emphasize what the speaker wants to convey. Words such as "monsoon winds," "coming storm," and "raging flood" are associated with the image of wild and dangerous climate of Siam, and thereby emphasize the difficulties and obstacles Anna had to overcome. A conjunction "still" implies her strong determination that seems admirable. Pararellism in "how brave she was" and "how alone she must have felt" clearly emphasize Anna's heroic personality. This prelude therefore effectively reflects the heroism appeal in this film version though the audience has not yet seen Anna's face.

The theme of American ideal heroism is reinforced when Anna puts all her efforts in helping La' Ore to be free from slavery.

Anna: La'Ore purchased her freedom once, Your Majesty. And I believe, had I given this woman my ring first she would have simply taken it and continue to hold La' Ore captive.

King: King' s commitment to noble families must not be compromised.

Anna: In your letter confirming my employment, Your Majesty, *you claimed you wanted Siam to take its place among the nations of modern world. You spoke of building something greater than yourself, a country where no man is above the law, which is why I chose to come here.*

King: Schoolteacher has outstanding memory. (emphasis added)

Through the framework of Said, Anna's speech shows how the King desires to modernize his country by following the West. This means the East invites the West to control and to govern it. Exploring the aftermath of the former colonized Egypt, Said remarks that financial prosperity Egypt succeeded from England does not matter as significantly as the moral prosperity. He further argues that

“what really mattered was the unbroken, all-embracing Western tutelage of an Oriental country, from the scholars, missionaries, businessmen, soldiers, and teachers who prepared and then implemented the occupation to the high functionaries like Cromer and Balfour who saw themselves as providing for, directing, and sometimes even forcing Egypt' s rise from Oriental neglect to its present lonely eminence”(35).

At this point, it is clear that the King' s implicit agreement with Anna's statement is actually the permission to be dominated and civilized. Besides, the reaffirmation of Anna' s brave deed concerning the slavery here is fruitful. She wins the “battle” and overcomes the struggling for the cause of freedom. Her utterance “which is why I chose to come here” seems to be a good conclusion for all the reasons and for who she really is, that is a modern creator and a freedom activist. The triumph on the slave matter proves legitimacy of Anna' s action as a savior, a redeemer, and a heroine. The

visual part of Figure 12 can illustrate this point. The King admires Anna for her directness and her persistence for equality.



Figure 12: The King admires Anna's vision of freedom and equality.

To simply put it, Anna, as a representative of Americans and Westerners, is right in both of her ideas and her actions in and about Siam.

The end of the film also emphasizes Anna as the American heroine. The point of view switches back to King Chulalongkorn's. In his voice over and through his eyes as an observer, the audience tend to witness the King and Anna's dancing along with him. The narrator retells the story in the position of a son and a student. The tone therefore is admirable and respectful. He already interprets the whole story for the audience. Instead of leaving the audience to watch from outside, the narrator draws them right into the situation to create the direct involvement and force them to experience the emotion. The feeling is more immediate and intense. Furthermore, the

legitimacy to intellectually dominate Siam of Anna is re-echoed as shown in the ending note:

Thanks to the vision of his father, King Mongkut, and the teachings of Anna Leonowens, King Chulalongkorn not only maintained Siam's independence, but also abolished slavery, instituted religious freedom and reformed the judicial system.

To put this note in a simpler way, the narrator's description of Anna conforms with the notion of Orientalism in a very systematic discipline. That is, Said would say, "European culture was able to manage-- and even produce-- the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively..." (3). Anna is portrayed as a key figure in modernizing Siam to be a "civilized" country.

Yet Anna's heroism is questioned by the director as she argues with the King expressing her attitudes towards slavery. Anna attempts to liberate La' Ore, a maltreated slave of Chao Chom Marnda Ung, and reminds the King that she comes to Siam because the King wants to modernize his country. Slavery is a sign of uncivilized country which does not support the human rights. In this part, the King fully understands what she said. He himself asks Kralahome to explain to Chao Chom Marnda Ung to understand that slaves can free themselves if they can redeem themselves. This is quite clear that Anna is not the only person who understands the issue of slavery. The King is reserved and calm when dealing with this case as he wants to gradually abolish slavery himself, and if he acts so precipitously, there might be a turmoil. Actually, Anna's interference causes conflicts in the Siamese governing system.

On another occasion, the director questions Anna's boldness in the scene of presenting herself to the King. When Anna and Louis are escorted to meet the King,

Kralahome advises her to keep herself low to the floor but she persists to present herself with the utmost respect. When they enter the hall, Kralahome notices that they are late as the King finishes the government affairs already. Anna persists and heads toward the King and that alarms people around him. It is a chaos as the aide-de-comps stand guard with their weapons. Her manner causes the unrest; the director presents this as another mess created by Anna:



Figure 13: Anna intrudes to meet the King.

Kralahome: It appears Sir must wait to meet His Majesty another day.

Anna: No, I do not think so. Come along Louis.

Kralahome: Mem Leonowens! Mem, wait please!

Anna: Your Majesty, I am Anna Leonowens. I' m a school...

King: Who? Who?

Kralahome: Your Majesty, Mem Leonowens and son.

Anna: We have been kept waiting for near 3 weeks. And though I appreciate that you have an issue of great importance, I would imagine that your son' s education would be far more...

King: Silence!

Anna's boldness is perceived by the Siamese in film as ignorance and impropriety as she intrudes to meet the King. Her portrayal as being improper allows the audience to observe her aggression. The bird-eye-view makes her aloof, remote, and detaches the audience involvement from her and let them observe her improper manner instead. By doing this, the audience are protected from identifying themselves with Anna's absurdity, ignorance of royal protocols. This portrayal reflects an attempt to counter Orientalism.

Anna's argumentative and bold personality reinforces that she is out of place. Her extreme confidence that she is a key element of "devotion to progress" is challenged and subverted by the King and thereby subsides her heroism:

Anna: I am most flattered by your welcome, and I find the opportunity to be in school an exciting one. Such devotion to progress is to be commended.

King: Reform is vital for my country's survival. As tiny feet change, so, too, will Siam.

Anna: But being in a country with so many unique customs, if I am to raise my son to be like his father, which I very much hope he will be, then I must feel free to follow our own traditions.

King: As a father, I understand.

Anna: Good. Then His Majesty will appreciate why having home outside the palace walls is of such great importance to us. A home which...had been promised, but so far has not been provided.

King: It is my pleasure that you live in the palace.

Anna: But it is not mine, Your Majesty.

King: You do not set conditions of your employment. And you shall obey!

Anna: May I respectfully remind His Majesty that I am not his servant but his guest!

King: A guest, who's paid. Education begins tomorrow.

This dialogue is evident of anti-Orientalism in the film. Anna's intention to implant certain Western values in Siam in a convention of Orientalist concept to deal with the Orientals is resisted by the King. Anna's utterance "Such devotion to progress is to

be commended” clearly reflects what is in her mind. She believes that she can attribute to Siam’s progress by offering the royal members the Western education. For the King, such perspective seems exaggerating, especially the choice of word “progress,” which connotes that the present Siam is backward and thereby needs to be changed. He then responds, “as (Anna’s) tiny feet change, so, too, will Siam.” Anna’s confidence in making progress to Siam is probably a sub-type of American heroism as she is presented as “extraordinary.” Here, the King reminds her that she is a “tiny figure” in Siam and teaches her to adjust herself with Siam’s society and culture. Her fight for her private house is also another facet of the pursuit of righteousness. Anna’s utterance “A home which... had been promised, but so far has not been provided” can be drawn for an implicature that “Please keep you own word.” Though this fight is not triumphant for her, Anna remarkably introduces herself as a fearless heroine, and it is a hint that she has to fight and struggle more severely for what she thinks it is right. However, her request is refused by the King and he warns her not to set employment condition. That reflects the King’s authority and intelligence in arguing with her. Her confidence is fruitless here and appears aggressive and improper rather than being brave. This therefore can be observed as a subversive attempt to counter Orientalism.