

Chapter 4

Conclusion

As a rich and complicated source reflecting the perception of a Western filmmaker in terms of cultural relation between the West and the East, Anna and the King (1999) presents an ambivalent attitudes and images of Siam. It is ambivalent in a sense the Orientalist portrayal of Siam is perceived, but the film somehow suggests an attempt to counter the concept of Orientalism. Firstly, the framework of Orientalism and the media discourse analysis enable us to see the influence of a Western protagonist Anna Leonowens as having a domineering role in Siam. Through evidence of certain scenes in the film, Anna is portrayed as an ideal American heroine who has certain qualities of being rational, extrovert, and intelligent, which help her overcome troubles or problems facing in Siam. Her roles as a teacher of the Siam's royal family members and a consultant to the King reinforce her importance in implanting the Western knowledge and attitudes in the leader of the country and his successive heirs thereby echoing the Western superiority over the East.

In the film, the Orientalist portrayal of Siam as a wild land is observed. Anna's first experience of Siam suggests that it is a wild and risky place where death and danger could occur any times. Her warning to her son Louis to be careful at the beginning implies a sense of barbarism in Siam reinforcing the Orientalism concept that barbarity and brutality prevail in the Oriental lands.

Furthermore, Siam is portrayed as an exotic place which is sexually corrupt. The audience tend to perceive the King as sexually oriented as the director presents

the picture of his concubines gathering in the royal palace. That constitutes an image of a harem offering the King sexual pleasure. In addition, red, gold, and rich colors which are used as the Siamese female dresses reinforce a sense of sexual gratification. The idea of eroticism strengthens the concept of Orientalism that Siam is the exotic land of sexually corrupt.

Apart from that, romantic relationship between Anna and the King reinforces the Orientalism concept that the Westerners come to the Oriental lands to find their new life and fulfil their passion. As for Anna, she comes to Siam and has a new life and a new love. The sensual relationship between the two characters not only serves as an appeal in the film, but also as a vital theme in which the King listens to and obeys Anna.

Despite the Orientalist portrayal of Siam, the film somehow subversively presents an attempt to deconstruct the concept of Orientalism concept which offers a new dimension of interpreting the cultural relation between the West and the East. The director has Anna change her attitudes towards the Siamese culture as she learns and understands more about it.

Another subversive portrayal in the film is colonialism and the idea of White Supremacy. Anna's changing attitudes towards the idea of White Supremacy implies an attempt to counter Orientalist notion, as the West is not necessarily superior to the East.

Moreover, the film seems to suggest that the East and the West actually coexist as Anna offers the King the world knowledge and the King offers her the spiritual knowledge. In the scene that the King offers Anna the light from a lamp to read a letter from the President Lincoln, the President of the U.S., the King gives a

metaphor of the sun and the moon telling Anna that they are never apart from each other. Anna seems to understand that metaphors connote the meaning of the living together with the King. This portrayal of relationship reinforces the coexistence of the West and the East.

In conclusion, though an attempt to redefine the position of relationship between the West and the East or to demystify Orientalism is perceived, the filmmaker cannot escape from presenting a fixed image of Siam as the “Oriental land.” At another level, it is obvious that the film production serves the concept of Orientalism as it was produced by the West, telling what being “the Orient” and the “Oriental” is all about. Clearly, the power relation exists that the West is more powerful in constructing images and meanings of the East whether Orientalism or anti-Orientalism. It is plausible to summarize here that whoever has the language and media has the power to construct meaning.

As the analysis in this paper is based on a controversial film, which draws different perspectives and opinions from the society, the research findings therefore are not aimed to be absolute facts, but an attempt to present a digestive piece of information or reference concerning the cultural relationship between the East and the West. If a challenging task is to be taken by a researcher, the topic of interest should be another production of Andy Tennant, the director of this film version, to study how the American heroic deed is implanted or involved in the entertainment. Another engaging piece of study might be on the portrayal of Thailand through entertainment or media. By looking at the American filmmaker produces his work on Siam or Thailand, the Thai researchers should also look at how the Thai literary works project other countries, for examples, Burma and Laos, to see what are the possible ideologies

they wish to convey. Such cross-cultural study might offer the insights or mutual understanding.



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