

Chapter 1

Introduction

Rationale and Significance of the problem

Lonely Planet's online guide to the world (2005) recommends Thailand as a number one tourist destination among Asian countries owing to its distinctive attractions of “breathtaking natural beauty, inspiring temples, renowned hospitality, robust cuisine and ruins of fabulous ancient kingdoms...” Not only that, *Lonely Planet* suggests “the pulse-pounding dance clubs of Bangkok” as another exciting activity in Thailand (www.lonelyplanet.com, 2005). Thailand's notoriety of night entertainment featuring Thai female sexuality through prostitution industry and sex tourism is widely known. According to www.mythaitravel.com (2005), a website for mature adults en route to Thailand, the country offers several sex attractions provided in a must-visit place list including beer bars, go-go bars, soapy massages, couple massages, and fetish bars, catering especially to international male customers. A damaging statement is made from “Thai Bargirl Girlfriend Investigation Service”, available on a well-known website about Thailand for English native speakers www.stickmanbangkok.com (2005), which says “Despite their wonderful appearance and evocative femininity, Thai bargirls often see relationships with Western men as a way to benefit themselves financially, rather than entering into a relationship with each other contributing....”

According to Ryan Bishop & Lillian S. Robinson (1998) in the book *Night Market*, the portrayal of Thailand as a sex attraction is a result of the 1967 Rest and Recreation (R&R) contract to American GIs during the 1962-1972 Vietnam War. Therefore, today Thailand has drawn sex tourists from many places around the world, not specifically from the United States of America but also from Australia and European countries. Every year, a lot of male travelers head to Thailand to enjoy a

naughty nightlife in three major tourist zones for foreigners namely Patpong, Soi Cowboy and Nana Entertainment Plaza, all of which are known for Thailand's sex industry. The ratio between male and female visitors to Thailand as reported by the *Tourism Authority of Thailand, January 2005* can serve as another indicator of Thailand being a popular tourist destination known as a "white male paradise": the United States of America 30,797: 25,194, Germany 26,737: 16,948, United Kingdom 33,152: 25,269, and Australia 18,371: 16,734.

A recent news article in *Komchadluek* (22 November, 2005) reports how the image of Thailand is presented abroad with the headline: 'ฝรั่งเขียนหนังสือฉีกหน้าไทย ตีภาพสาวนั่งตัก-ขย้ออก' - 'Foreign Writers embarrass Thais, exposing picture of foreigner grabbing Thai girl's breast'. The news refers to the travel guide book *Bangkok Inside Out* which publicizes a photograph of Thai female sex worker sitting on a western man's lap, having his hands on her breasts, which clearly represents Thai female prostitutes as sex product of Thailand. Senator Rabiabrat Pongpanich gave her opinion on the publication thus "There are a lot of prostitutes in Thailand who enter this career out of financial necessities. However, these foreign writers have chosen to emphasize the negative aspect of it, and, in doing so, have destroyed the Thai cultural image. It is not right to do this for the sake of promoting sex industry" (*Komchadluek*, 24 November, 2005). Thai authority considers the photograph a pornographic production and claims the book a despising portrait of Thailand. Moreover, Ms.Ladda Tangsupachai, an authority from the Ministry of Culture, takes a serious action by issuing an order for anyone who is caught selling it to be fined or imprisoned for a charge of involving with pornography. Today, *Bangkok Inside Out* is not available in bookshops in Thailand, pending a revised version (www.prweb.com, 2005).

Interestingly, English contemporary novelists have often used Thai female prostitutes as characters in their novels and exploited the sexual image of Thailand as a selling point to English readers around the world, including those living in Thailand (*Bangkok Post*, 2005). The literature is often found sharing a familiar theme of lonely

hearted western men being lured into Thailand's sex industry and trapped in a love relationship with exotic beautiful female night entertainers who seductively lead them to spend their lives differently at the end, mostly in a negative manner. A disturbing thing is that while non-Thai people in general have been well exposed to such portrayals, general Thais and Thai authority are often not aware of the literary content portraying female sex workers of Thailand and presenting a negative image of the country.

Purpose of the study

To examine stereotypical images of Thai female night entertainers or any bias perception as represented in the chosen contemporary novels: *A Killing Smile* by Christopher G. Moore (1991), *Fast Eddie's Lucky 7 A Go Go* by David Young (2004), and *Private Dancer* by Stephen Leather (2005).

The scope of the study

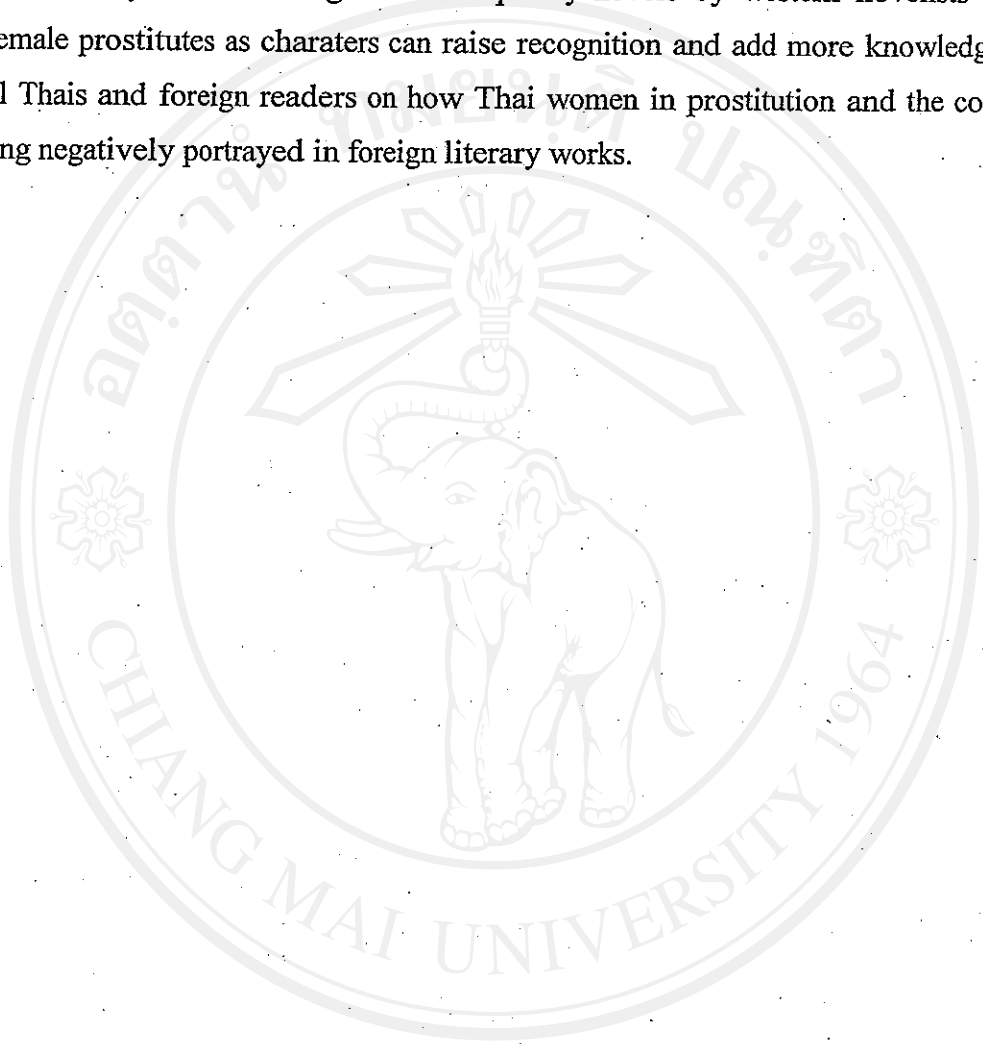
This study aims to explore image of Thai female sex workers as represented in three English contemporary novels through an analysis of Orientalism and sociological perspectives.

Definitions of terms

"Consumerism" refers to the tendency of people to identify strongly with products or services they consume, especially those with commercial brand names and obvious status-enhancing appeal, e.g. an expensive automobile, rich jewelry (Wikipedia, 2006).

Application advantages

The analysis of the English contemporary novels by western novelists using Thai female prostitutes as characters can raise recognition and add more knowledge for general Thais and foreign readers on how Thai women in prostitution and the country are being negatively portrayed in foreign literary works.



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