

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The scope of literature review is separated into three main aspects:

1. Fiction Theory
2. Prostitution
- Prostitution in Thailand
3. Orientalism

Fiction Theory

In fiction study, several theories have been established, one of which can be found in the book *Fictions, Novel and Social Reality* by Michel Zeraffa (1976). In his analysis, Zeraffa considers novels a form of art, a combination of reality and imaginary connected with the fact occurring. He suggests that a novelist works as a social movement observer so that a novel can be understood as a sociological description of what is happening in the society or a particular event in history as well as a device for extracting meaning and demonstrating the society's future shape. However, the reality presented is not considered a "social presentation" because novelists always narrate the story through their own perception and add their own attitudes towards social phenomena.

Another theory on fiction was introduced in the book, *The Art of Fiction: a Handbook and Anthology* by R.F. Dietrich and Roger H. Sundell (1967). The authors help describing the nature of fiction that in order to create a novel to be an admirable piece of art for readers, there are many elements a writer should consider in their novels. Apart from other elements such as subject, theme, plot, characters, point of view and

tone, a novelist should never ignore considering putting into their novels image and symbol. Images are an essential part of novels since they are influential in associating reader's understanding to other elements. The repetition of images can bring to the readers a clearer explanation of certain factors and empower the images to be recognized as a symbol, in which levels of recognition of images and their symbolic functions depend on reader's life experience on specific ideas. As a result, good images and symbols created can successfully convey feelings and create atmosphere at the same time that they vividly describe setting, events, and characters.

Prostitution

Observing numbers of earlier studies involving sex labor trade in general should certainly be helpful in this study. For the following academics prostitution is believed to be an institution oppressing women. Plus, for interracial client-worker relationship, these academics have also raised a question of racial discrimination.

Gender bias and racial bias are Kathleen Barry's major concern in her book *The Prostitution of Sexuality: the Global Exploitation of Women* (1950). Barry brilliantly argues that in accomplishing sexual drives, men assess women as a sex object and also questions whether women in this business are being treated as human beings or not, since they are universally obsessed by a stereotype of "sexed body", as she explains "When society becomes sexually saturated, sex is equated with the female body-where it is gotten, had, taken. In sexualization of society, woman is sexed body. Sexualization of society constructs femaleness as an 'essence' and as acquisition that is sex. As sexed body are made universal, and women, accessible for sex, are made to be indistinguishable from each other. That is sexual essentialism" (21). More importantly, various kinds of media and pornography can be considered another type of prostitution which objectifies women for being consent and a vehicle for sexual pleasure. According to the exposition of

women's faces and identities, it seems that women are justified as a subject of sexual desire without any concern of security or privacy. Meanwhile males are superior and advantageously occupy their sexual activities as a private issue. Secondly, with a concern of an unfair treatment to colored sex workers, Barry points out that prostitution has been functionalized racial and cultural differences and brought along an interpreting of "inferior other woman" to be an exotic invention awarding men's sexual fantasies, as she says that "Race is that which is bought with sex" (34).

An analysis of Julia O'Connell Davidson's in her book *Prostitution, Power and Freedom* (1998) agrees with Barry that prostitution is an act of hegemony relationship between a powerful male customer and a powerless female sex worker. She states that "Prostitution is an institution that allows clients to secure temporarily certain powers of sexual command over prostitutes" (3). It is clear that male clients receive legitimacy to exploit the bought woman with his aspiration; altogether, images of female sex providers are precisely attached with eroticization and whoredom. In addition, an unequal action can be much more obvious in a relationship between white clients and colored prostitutes. It is reported that those particularly Americans, Germans, and British men are major group of seeking "dirty whores" of different races where women of colors are dehumanized since racial differences are thought to be a symbol of promiscuity. Countries such as Latin America, South Africa and the Caribbean, are the preferable destinations where female workers who live in a ruined shape are considered an authentic choice. The required features are women of the darkest skin color, drug users, streetwalkers, including poor, pregnant and previous physical abused females and child prostitutes, etc. (142-145).

Prostitution in Thailand

An in-depth investigation on prostitution specifically in South East Asia was made by Chris Ryan and C. Michael Hall in *Sex Tourism: Marginal People and Limialitie* (2001). Ryan and Hall discuss prostitution as a significant act indicating masculinity's weakness in developed world, which enacts and stigmatizes a position of "indigenous people" in three perspectives: gender, race, and economics. This is particularly true for female sex workers in countries under a construction of development witnessed in many Asian countries including Thailand. Explaining sex tourism in South East Asia as a consequence of Rest and Recreation or R&R of American military during Vietnam War, the industry is an obvious product of self-interest concern. Furthermore, the hegemony relationship of sex tourists and sex workers forces women to surrender to economic and cultural power. It oppresses them with an idea of "exotic other" emphasized by sexual imaginary and exoticism, where different racial appearances are major selling points.

Another interesting study was created by Ryan Bishop and Lillian S. Robinson who provides an exploration on sex tourism of Thailand in the book *Night Market: Sexual Cultures and the Thai Economic Miracle* (1998). Bishop and Robinson further discuss a conceptualization of "exotic other" as rooted on account of American troops' visiting "Rest and Recreation" or R&R in 1967 and an influence of mass media especially the productions of Anna Leonowen. Like other tropical destinations namely the Philippines, Kenya, the Virgin Islands, and Hawaii, Thailand is labeled with a stereotype of 'sun, sea, sand, and sex', pointing to the countless natural resources and exoticism (88-89). The reputation of Thailand as a "playground of Western world" (16) is also mentioned as well to point out the abundance of female sexuality and the country's surrender to Western power and imagination.

Collected from her 30 years experience working in Thailand, several descriptions on sexual services are given in Penny Van Esterik's *Materializing Thailand* (2000). Esterik gladly demonstrates differentiated attitudes toward sex work of Thailand amongst feminists and activists as follows: firstly, a prostitute is a liberated working woman; secondly, patriarchal society is actively oppressing female sex workers according to a request for commoditization, and lastly passivity and submission are their images in general. Moreover, some feminists have an agreement on an urgent need for legalizing prostitution in order to free the exploited females from social biases. Contrarily, another group of feminists shows an insistence for unnecessary legalization. Additionally, Esterik argues that in westerners' attitude, Thai women nowadays are taken as a social icon or a national identity representing "Thainess" or rather refined for "exotic beings" observed by foreign media such as *Foreign Bodies* (1988) in which Thailand is represented as the "brothel of Asia". In addition, *The Good Woman of Bangkok*, a documentary film by an Australian film maker Dennis O'Rourke reflects a "self-serving" perception and puts Thai women's images with otherness and exoticism. As a result, in sex tourism, it is found that Thai women are often discriminated as a symbol of superb pornographic fantasy that Esterik observed from one commercial advertisement: "Anything goes in this exotic country" (180). This image signifies Oriental Thai sex workers as women of outermost possibilities for their extreme exoticism.

Elements of prostitution in Thailand are observed by several academics as follows:

As it is known that Thai society is considered a patriarchal society, perhaps, Vern Bullough and Bonnie Bullough's theory can be used to describe the phenomenon in this country. In their book *Woman and Prostitution; A Social History* (1987), the Bulloughs believe that prostitution is one big outcome of patriarchal power. Conducting a social analysis on prostitution, the two writers discovered that patriarchy is a great institution behind prostitution exploiting women

worldwide. With the social force relevant to religions and beliefs created by males, a patriarchal society strongly values female sexual purity and discredits women's state of adultery. As a result, it is likely that a woman who fails in marriage, a wife who loses her partner or a single middle-age woman is easily perceived as a public woman or a prostitute. Moreover, in some patriarchal religions like Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, people are taught to perceive such profession negatively as it is against morality. In short, they argue that most patriarchal societies dishonorably take women in prostitution with botheration and condemnation, indiginizing female gender in every sense.

Prostitution in Thailand is also demonstrated by Odzer Cleo, a feminist researcher in *Patpong Prostitution: Its Relationship to, and effects on, the Position of women in Thai Society* (1990). Odzer explains that the nature of sex business is based on three biases: 1) moral bias: it illuminates sex workers in a negative sense for being immoral and sinful women 2) male bias: the work often requires women to be inferior to man's or pimp's power 3) the middle class bias: female prostitutes are usually not well accepted by middle class people. Apart from the biases, Cleo accuses Thailand's prostitution nowadays for its basis of gender inferiority of women and economic inadequacy.

Yet, poverty is also mentioned as a serious reason leading women into prostitution. In his study *The Expectation of the Family and the Daughter's Role in "The Prostitution Community": A Case Study of a Village in Phayao Province* (1997), Niwat Suwanphatthana claims economic failure created through years of inefficient governing obligates daughters to bear a pressure of being a breadwinner for the sake of gratitude. On the other hand, consumerism is another unexpected reason. With a consumerist value both the family and the community try to show the significance of money and belongings, no doubt that they have become institutions influential to a decision in enter prostitution. The act is also empowered by the loss of traditional belief of 'phii phu njaa' or 'ancestor guardian spirits' which

used to imply community strength. Surprisingly, women who have lost their virginity and become sex workers do not do any harm for their images in the village according to Thai norm, contrarily, they are admired for being good daughters who realize a duty in supporting their family financially and can be excused for being “bad women”. Hence, both parents and women are victimized by consumerism and continuously suffer in an ultimate cycle.

Another aspect for a cause of prostitution in Thailand is pointed out by Sinith Sittirak in her book *Daughters of Development* (1996). She claims that Thailand today is exposing to Neo-colonialism and consumerism which are regarded as results of a fashionable concept of “development”. As the country struggles to sell its identity as competent goods with an aim for economic development, it unexpectedly reduces natural resources and precious culture putting female populations into labor force and sex service market.

Orientalism

In studying of Thai female sex workers, a survey on Edward W. Said's Orientalism should definitely be included here. The well-known theory in his book *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (1987) describes the hegemony relationship between the West as colonizers and the East as colonized countries; the power relation between the two unequal parts of “the Occident” and “the Orient”. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, France and Britain were seen as main European countries which considered themselves cultural superior over non-European people especially the Middle East and Islamic countries. However, in the twentieth century, the United States of America began to take over France and Britain as place of ‘the Occident’. Believing that the structure of Orientalism is nothing more than structure of lies or of myth, relying on detailed logic governed not simply by empirical reality but by a “battery of desires, repressions, investments, and projections”, Said suggests that

“novel-writing” is one of many institutions continuously reproducing the phenomenon of Orientalism.

One more interesting piece of research is *Lifting the Veil: Images of the Exotic in Judith Gautier's novels (1845-1917)* by Elizabeth N. Fisher Goldsmith. In her work, Goldsmith provides a French Orientalist writer Judith Gautier's biography and discusses her six novels which are considered as Orientalist works in the nineteenth-century. Gautier's writings are mainly about an escaping voyage to a mysterious land of the Oriental, Middle and Far East where the greatest journey and romantic love begin. All of these explains her ideology and personal ideas towards “Orientalism” through a perception of a nineteenth-century French woman. The study is divided into four parts: 1) the rewriting of Oriental storyteller-narrator 2) the depiction of the Oriental landscape 3) the dual image of Oriental women as it resembles and differs from other, typically male versions and 4) the theme of eternal, transcendental love. Goldsmith studies literary elements related to Gautier's aesthetics, her literary techniques, narrative style and motif.

Natee Insorn's *A Study of Reproduction of Orientalist Portrayal of Siam in the Film Anna and the King (1999)* demonstrates stereotypes and misrepresentations of the Oriental Thailand as portrayed in the successful film *Anna and the King (1999)* by Twentieth Century Fox. Based on the book *Anna and the King of Siam* by Anna Leonowens, Natee claims that the film is influenced by Said's *Orientalism*. As a form of media providing amusement and excitement to audience, it fails to correctly present Thai culture and Thailand. Furthermore, Orientalism is found to have strong influence on the representations of many literary works. For example, *Memoirs of a Geisha* by Arthur Golden, *A Passage to India* by E.M. Foster, *Thousand and One Nights*, and H. Rider Hadggard's *Cleopatra*, all emphasize Oriental images through only the writers' limited perception.