Experiencing Identity

Anna Leonowens and Her Life in Siam during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century

Cheng Ma
(S2594145)

Leiden University
MA History (Politics, Culture and National Identities, 1789 to the Present)
Supervised by Assistant Professor Simon Hallink

20 EC
25 June 2021

Table of Contents

Illustrations

Introduction

On 15 March 1862, the Siamese steamer *Chow Phya* sailing from Singapore reached Chao Phraya River's mouth in today Samut Prakan province, Thailand. One of the passengers on board was Anna Leonowens (1831-1915). Upon arrival in Bangkok, she was surrounded and encountered by—besides her teenage son, a Persian teacher, an Indian nurse, and a Newfoundland dog—an English skipper, some circus people, Chinese coolies, Siamese officials, and commoners, even stray dogs. She experienced the tropical heat and glanced at a fort, a white temple consisted of solid masonry of brick and mortar, and Thai-style stilt houses. Right after she disembarked from the steamer and literally set foot on the Siamese soil, she might have asked herself, "what am I doing here, what should I tell these people who I am, how should I locate myself in this strange country?" It is known that the Siamese King (King Mongkut, 1804-1868) hired her to teach English and Western sciences to the King's children and the royal harem. In her account, she also told the readers that Siam would be her "future "home" and the scene of [her] future labors."[1] However, the latter two questions remained unanswered.

As an ambiguous Protestant Anglo- or, to be specific, Welsh-Indian woman, this thesis aims to investigate Anna's identity during her time in Siam between 1862 and 1867. Even though Siam was not a colony of the British Empire, the country accepted the reinforcement of the Bowring Treaty of 1855. Under the terms of the Treaty, the Britons that lived in the British overseas territory gained privileged rights—extraterritorial rights. This treaty, thus, exempted British subjects from the jurisdiction of the Siamese law. This treaty marked Siam as a so-called "semi-colony."[2] In this condition, Anna might not have to negotiate much with the local socio-cultural environment and have been able to maintain whatever she identified herself among the strange others. To put it another way, living among others in Siam made her identity become clarified.

Moreover, as Siam was not under the British Empire's direct control, the Empire cannot impose its political power, jurisdiction, and cultural influence on the Siamese land as much as it did in other colonies such as in India. Thus, Siam maintained its strong identity

[1] Anna Leonowens, *The English Governess at the Siamese Court* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1988), 8.
[2] Hong Lysa, "'Stranger within the Gates': Knowing Semi-Colonial Siam as Extraterritorials," *Modern Asian Studies* 38, 2 (2004), 328.

even though its judicial power toward foreigners was losing. The letter sent by King Mongkut to Anna implies how stable the Siamese identity was. In his letter, the King said that "you [Anna] will do your best endeavor for knowledge of English language, science, and literature, and not for conversion to Christianity."[3] As Buddhism was one of the essential elements of being Siam, converting to Christianity would badly jeopardize and subvert the Siamese identity. As seen in the latter period, Siam began to become more crystal-clear in its identity. Siam began to create its "geo-body" by using modern mapping technology.[4] The Siamese ruling elites based in Bangkok started to systematically differentiate their subjects in the peripheries by building a hierarchical sense of nation.[5] Siam, therefore, was also in the process of creating a more concrete identity. Reflecting upon this socio-cultural context of Siam, Anna could contrast her identity and sharpen it—consciously or not—by looking at, learning from, and understanding the strange Siamese others. To be aware of the others does not mean to become what *they* are, but to be more who *we* are.

For the research questions, this thesis focuses on the two works about Siam written by Anna and how Anna reflected, implied, experienced, or constructed her identity in these two works and how her identity conformed to or deviated from other Britons', both domestic and abroad. This thesis argues that Anna's identity when she was in Siam was an experiencing process. In other words, it was constructed through experiencing the others. To play on René Descartes' words, it was no more "I think, therefore I am" than "I experience, therefore I am." The thesis also sheds light on an underexplored aspect of a history of the construction of the Britishness. Instead of focusing on the Empire's colonies or metropoles, it focuses on a space that was not under the direct control and influence of the British Empire, that is, Siam. Thus, this thesis suggests that the space outside the Empire contributed to the British identity formation of an individual no less than in the Empire.

[3] Anna Leonowens, *The English Governess at the Siamese Court*, vi.

[4] Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994).

[5] Thongchai Winichakul, "The Other Within: Travel and Ethno-Spatial Differentiation of Siamese Subjects 1885-1910" in Andrew Turton (ed.), *Civility and Savagery: Social Identity in Tai States* (London: Curzon Press, 2000), 38-62.

Figure I The portrait of Anna Leonowens during her midlife. The Canadian Encyclopedia.

The Empire and the Identity

Metropoles, colonies, and networks come to the forefront of the discussion when talking about an empire. As Krishan Kumar pointed out, the British have two empires: the "internal" one and the "external" one.[6] The internal empire consists of a "metropole" in the south-eastern part of Britain and the surrounding "colonies": Scotland to the north, Wales to the west, and Ireland to the northwest. The external empire, on the other hand, had colonies and networks all over the globe. At its height, as told by imperial and military historian Ashley Jackson, the British Empire comprised over 13,000,000 square miles, which covered nearly one-quarter of the land surface on the earth. Its colonies and networks were established in Asia, North America, Africa, Australia, and some parts of South America. The Empire was ruled from London with varying degrees of direct and indirect control. Jackson classifies how

[6] Krishan Kumar, "Nation and Empire: English and British National Identity in Comparative Perspective," *Theory and Practice* 29 (2000), 589.

the Empire's rule affected indigenous polities into three categories: superseding (such as Mughal India, Southern Rhodesia), incorporating (such as princely states, Gulf sheikhdoms, Buganda, Northern Nigeria, Malaya, Zanzibar), and creating (such as Northern Ghana, Iraq, Kenya, Palestine, southern Sudan). The control was administered on the ground by British-appointed civil servants, soldiers, and sometimes employees of British companies.[7] Due to the "white" immigration within the Empire, scholars have been investigating lived experiences of the British peoples who lived overseas and connecting them with the metropole's socio-cultural contexts. One of the aspects explored through lived experiences was a constructed identity, whether in terms of race, ethnicity, class, or gender.

Even though the "internal" empire of Britain consisted of four cultural entities (English, Welsh, Scottish, and Irish), Krishan Kumar and Linda Colley both argue that there was a sense of Britishness, rather than those four fragmented distinct identities, that played a significant role in the "external" empire. Kumar states that "up until about the end of the nineteenth century, Britishness trumped "Englishness."[8] All groups in Britain had the shared value in the enterprise of the Empire, thanks to the Industrial Revolution that empowered the Britons to see themselves as the standard and bearers of civilization. It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that nationalism in each "internal" entity started to surface and form itself concretely. The nationalistic sentiments in the "internal" parts of the Empire reached their culmination in the second half of the twentieth century, coinciding with the loss of industrial and territorial supremacy of the Empire.[9] While Kumar places importance on the Industrial Revolution, Colley points out that Protestantism was the common value with which Britons defined themselves.[10] Colley cautions scholars not to be trapped by the current political situation, especially since the 1960s, when both the Welsh and the Scottish nationalist movements magnified themselves and created their self-consciousness. This political division conceals the fact that,

> The four parts of the United Kingdom have been connected in markedly different ways and with sharply varying degrees of success. … until the late nineteenth

[7] See Ashley Jackson, *The British Empire: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
[8] Kumar, "Nation and Empire," 589.
[9] Ibid., 591-592.
[10] Linda Colley, "Britishness and Otherness: An Argument" *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (October 1992), 316.

> century, at least, the majority of people in all of these countries were never simply and invariably possessed by an overwhelming sense of their own distinctive identity as Englishman, as Scotsmen, as Welshmen, or even as Irishmen.[11]

Thus, when dealing with identities of the Britons at home and abroad during, at least, the nineteenth century, one should look at them by taking Britishness into account instead of disparate national entities. Therefore, although Anna Leonowens named her book title "The English Governess at the Siamese Court," her identity should be examined in the broader context of the Britishness and the British Empire.

Furthermore, Colley suggests that the British identity could not be constructed by itself but by something different, as she calls "otherness." As stated above, one of the common features the Britons shared was Protestantism. The other, in this case, therefore, was Catholicism. Colley figuratively says, the "Britons were encouraged to look through the Catholic glass darkly so as to see themselves more clearly and more complacently."[12] France thus was the long-lasting other in the eyes of the Britons in this respect because France was Catholic. Many politicians, military experts, and popular pundits continued to consider France as a dangerous enemy to Britain.[13] Colley sharpens her arguments of the collective Britishness with regard to Protestantism by including not only patricians but plebians. She takes the case of John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs,* published for the first time in 1563 in London. It was a book devoted to Protestant theology and had somewhat an impact in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This book's popularity increased considerably during the eighteenth century when, in 1731, a printer in Smithfield in London produced a new edition of Foxe's book for a much wider audience. This book, together with the Bible, John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (which was published in English, Scottish, and Welsh), came to be effective tools in constructing the Protestant Britishness to which the ordinary people had access.[14]

Colley also illustrates how the British identity was connected with the British Empire's context. When the Britons possessed vast and obvious land across the seas, these

[11] Ibid., 314.
[12] Ibid., 319.
[13] Ibid., 321.
[14] Ibid., 318-319.

alien possessions made the British see themselves as distinct, unique, and superior. "They could contrast their law, their standard of living, their treatment of women, their political stability, and above all, their collective power against societies that they only imperfectly understood but usually perceived as far less developed."[15] This respect evokes Edward Said's *Orientalism*, as Colley also cites him. Said said in the very first pages of his monumental book, "the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. … the Orient is an integral part of European *material* civilization and culture."[16] Said's point cannot be more relevant to the British case as the British Empire occupied immense land in the East.

Far from home, scholars tend to study the British identity through the Empire's possessions. One of the prominent scholars in the field is Catherine Hall. One of her works explores the life and the fluid attitude and identity of the "imperial man" Edward Eyre (1815-1901). Hall tells readers that identities "are never completed but constantly in flux." They are "the fictions, the representations, the stories that we tell ourselves about who we are."[17] This idea of identity fits well as one begins to understand how Eyre constructed his identity through time and space. He traveled across the British Empire from Australasia in the east and later to the West Indies in the west. In Australia and New Zealand, Eyre pursued conventional masculinity by being a farmer with a large tract of land. His attitude toward indigenous peoples (Aborigines and Maoris) during his early manhood was positive. He believed that these peoples were able to be "civilized" and, eventually, become "like us." However, in the middle of the nineteenth century, the intellectual climate in the metropole changed. Along with the new scientific discourse came a new set of attitudes based on distinct and fixed racial types. This transition of discourse happened at the same time when "the Colonial Office and public opinion in Britain were moving away from the influence of the humanitarian lobby, with its emphasis on native welfare, and were increasingly preoccupied with settler development and self-government." Eyre, who returned to Britain in 1853, might have very likely been influenced by this new intellectual atmosphere and public opinion. Unsurprisingly, when he was appointed as Governor of Jamaica (after

[15] Ibid., 324.

[16] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 1-2.

[17] Catherine Hall, "Imperial Man: Edward Eyre in Australasia and the West Indies 1833-66," in Bill Schwarz (ed.), *The Expansion of England: Race, Ethnicity and Cultural History* (London: Routledge, 1996), 133.

working in St Vincent and Antigua) in 1864, his attitude toward black peoples was negative and, eventually, led to his brutal policies toward them.[18] In this work, Hall studies how Eyre constructed or perceived his identity in the Empire's colonies and links him with the metropole to show how his identity, concerning masculinity, and his attitude toward race, was shaped by the socio-cultural climate at home.

Moreover, Hall's work on Edward Eyre can be implied that the British identity during the nineteenth century was nuanced and transformed through time. Before 1850s, the British identity seemed to be more malleable in way that it embraced "others" to share the same identity when they were "ready," as Eyre said that those indigenous people could become like *him*. While during the second half of the nineteenth century, the British identity became more rigid and bounded. This stiff identity can be attributed, as Hall puts it, to the intellectual change in the metropole when the theory of fixed and distinct race was introduced. In addition, the major uprising in India during 1857, argued by Jill C. Bender, also caused British citizens to be suspicious of Indian people and to underline the "inherent" distinction between Europeans and Asians.[19] In sum, Eyre's case relates to Leonowen's in the sense that their identities both underwent significant changes and transformations through their experiences within the network of the British Empire. In the meantime, it is worth noting that the British identity after 1850s, coinciding when Anna left for Siam, was more solidified than ever.

There is an academic attempt in bringing the British men back home. Tul Israngura Na Ayudhya explores how domesticity and family life were integral to constructing masculinity during the long eighteenth century. Tul states that "rather than analyzing men's activities in the public sphere or taking for granted their patriarchal omnipotence in the house, [his work] puts men back into the fundamental unit of human interpersonal relationships: the family ties, which has received less attention by scholars of men's history."[20] In other words, he studies how men constructed their masculine identity at home (literally home) and argues that the British domestic space played a significant part in

[18] Ibid., 130-170.

[19] Jill C. Bender, *The 1857 Indian Uprising and the British Empire* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2016), 107.

[20] Tul Israngura Na Ayudhya, "Men in the Family: Construction and Performance of Masculinity in England, c.1700-1820" (PhD Dissertation, Queen Mary, University of London, 2014), 3.

shaping men's identity no less than the metropole's public space or overseas colonies and networks.

In contrast to men, British women have been studied extensively by scholars at home in the metropole. Works done by Walter Houghton and Amanda Vickery demonstrate the mentality of British women between the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Houghton explores various aspects of women's lived experiences under the "Victorian frame of mind."[21] Vickery investigates the sphere that has, as predominantly assumed, belonged to woman: home. However, she complicates the stories by demonstrating negotiations and woman agency "behind the closed door."[22]

In the opposite direction with an attempt at bringing men back home, a thesis done by Katie Wernecke tries to explore "imperial women" who traveled to the British overseas colonies during the second half of the nineteenth century. South Africa, India, Burma, and South Pacific were her spatial focus. Wernecke argues that these women travelers were less restricted than those in the metropole, but they still maintained their roles within the private sphere as wives and mothers. The environments outside the metropole forced these women to adapt for the sake of necessity.[23] Similar to Wernecke's work, Margaret MacMillan argues that women participated in the British empire building project even though their roles were limited to that of wives and mothers. Women "were there and their story is a part of the Raj's history, too."[24]

The studies mentioned above, however, put emphasis on how identities were constructed and experienced within the Empire, whether at home (literally home in the family/household and public space) or in overseas colonies. Even though women's history in the Empire started to be at the forefront, how women's identities related to Britishness were constructed or experienced at the corner of the Empire's network, such as in Siam or other East Asian regions, remains scarce. This thesis employs the case of Anna Leonowens to explore how she, who was born in the colony and was of mixed racial background,

[21] Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).
[22] Amanda Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).
[23] Katie Wernecke, *Across the Empire: British Women's Travel Writing and Women's Place in the British Imperial Project during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century* (Master thesis, Florida Atlantic University, 2013).
[24] Margaret MacMillan, *Women of the Raj: The Mothers, Wives, and Daughters of the British Empire in India* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2007), xxiv.

constructed, experienced, and performed her identity during her years in Siam where the Empire had no direct control or influence, and to study and analyze to what extent her identity can be compared with men's and women's identities within the Empire. The thesis, therefore, does not take for granted the importance of the outside Empire's sphere in constructing or performing the Britishness.

Anna Leonowens between Pop Culture and Historiography

In research, there seems to be two Anna: one historical, and one fictional. With the influence of the Hollywood industry, it is unsurprising that the fictional Anna has deserved more popular and scholarly attention. After Margaret Landon published her fictional biography about Anna in 1944 as *Anna and the King of Siam*, film industry and the Broadway in the American pop culture followed. The film that bears the same name as Landon's book was shown to the public in 1941. The Broadway musical that has a catchy title *The King and I* was premiered in 1951. At the end of the nineteenth century, the fictional Anna was portrayed again by Academy Award winning actress Jodie Foster in 1999. (The story of modern reception of Anna Leonowens will be discussed more in the Epilogue.) These cultural products have been objects of study in various academic fields raging from cultural studies, literature, linguistics, education to even psychology.[25] By being portrayed through these cultural products, the fictional Anna was simplified as merely, using Susan Brown's words, "the symbol of the earnestly civilization Englishwoman abroad."[26] But the historical Anna was much more than that.

At the turn of the twentieth to the early twenty-first century, the historical Anna gained more scholarly attention and finally surfaced. Scholars such as Susan Morgan and

[25] See, for example, Sharon Aronofsky Weltman, "The King and Who? Dance, Difference, and Identity in Anna Leonowens and The King and I" in Dinah Birch and Mark Llewellyn (eds), *Conflict and Difference in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010; Pornsawan Tripasai, "Heterogeneous Thai voices: a contact zone of postcolonial counter-discourse to Anna Leonowens' orientalist writing of Thailand" (PhD thesis, Monash University, 2017); Pornsawan Tripasai, "The Construction of Ideological Subjects: Siamese Students in Anna Leonowens' English Classroom," *Changing English*, Studies in Culture and Education, Volume 26 (2019): 295-305; Pahole Sookkasikon, "Fragrant rice queen: the hungry ghost of Anna Leonowens, and Thai/America" (Master thesis, San Francisco State University, 2010); Gampang Nurtjahyo, "The Anna Leonowens' Anxieties and Ego Defense Mechanisms as Found in Elizabeth Hand's Anna And The King: A Freudian Psychoanalytical Approach" *Journal of English Education, Literature, and Culture*, Vol 1, No. 1 (2016): 17-27.

[26] Susan Brown, "Alternatives to Missionary Position: Anna Leonowens as Victorian Travel Writer," *Feminist Studies*, Vol 21, No. 3 (Autumn 1995), 587-614.

Alfred Habegger wrote a story of Anna by using historical documents during Anna's contemporary time.[27] Their aim is to reconstruct Anna's history by surpassing the myth that was created by those cultural products mentioned above or by Anna herself for protecting herself from prejudices of her time.[28] As written by Morgan in the preface, her book will solve "many of the mysteries surrounding Anna's life that have eluded searchers for years."[29] Also, as he titled his book on Anna as *Masked*, Habegger endeavors to unveil the mask of Anna's life story by writing her historical biography. The main goal of these two writers was therefore to tell Anna's story from the *reality*. Was she born in Britain or India? Was she white or mix-blood? How much of story that she told the public was true? Morgan and Habegger will answer these questions, and their answers will be provided in the first chapter of this thesis.

Although these two works were very useful for gaining the information of the historical Anna, this thesis tries to perceive Anna in a different angle by focusing on the language she used in her two books about Siam, regardless of her veracity. Due to this approach, instead of asking who she was, this thesis asks how she constructed, experienced, or performed her identity when she was living in the strange country outside the British Empire like Siam. With this question, the historical Anna may become livelier and more nuanced.

Sources

The popular perception of Anna Leonowens as the proper English lady who almost single-handedly "civilized" the Siamese king and the royal court is deeply entrenched in Western audiences' minds. Anna's story, as the general public knows of today, started with a book written by Margaret Landon, titled *Anna and the King of Siam*, published in 1944. The book's highly romanticized depiction of an oriental royal court soon caught the attention of the

[27] Susan Morgan, *Bombay Anna: The Real Story and Remarkable Adventures of The* King and I *Governess* (California: University of California Press, 2008) and Alfred Habegger, *Masked: The Life of Anna Leonowens, Schoolmistress at the Court of Siam* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014).

[28] Susan Morgan, *Place Matters: Gendered Geography in Victorian Women's Travel Books About Southeast Asia* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 239-241.

[29] Susan Morgan, *Bombay Anna*, xvi.

public as well as the Broadway. Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein created a musical in 1951 titled *The King and I,* loosely based on Landon's book. The musical soon gained the audiences' favor, leading to the film version of the musical in 1956, starring Deborah Kerr as the proper and glamorous English governess Anna Leonowens. While the story of Anna Leonowens, an English governess, and King Mongkut of Siam continues to enjoy popularity in many parts of the world. The center of this popularized version of the story is Anna, a widowed English governess, singing and dancing through great cultural differences between the East and the West.

However, the historical Anna was way more ambiguous and complicated. Anna Leonowens lived in Siam from 1862 to 1867, employed by King Rama IV (King Mongkut) as his royal governess. Her work at the royal court included teaching the King's children and his numerous wives about the English language and western scientific knowledge, sometimes also assisting the King's foreign correspondence. She left Siam due to issues of health and the stresses of her job, and she did not return to the country ever again.

The sources used in this thesis are two books written by Anna Leonowens: *The English Governess at the Siamese Court: Being Recollections of Six Years in the Royal Palace at Bangkok* (1870)[30] and *The Romance of the Harem* (1873).[31] After leaving Siam, Anna later ended up in Boston, the United States. With the help of James Thomas Fields, Anna began publishing article series recording her life in Siam in his influential periodical *Atlantic Monthly*, and soon in 1870 published *The English Governess*.[32] After the book's commercial success, Anna later wrote and published a second book titled *The Romance of the Harem* in 1873, elaborating on the similar themes from the first one, consolidating her popular appeal. Anna spent the subsequent years commuting between Halifax (Nova Scotia, Canada), Boston, and New York, holding literary events and public lectures. For most of her remaining decades, Anna lived in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and "devoted herself to liberal political and feminist causes and, after her daughter's untimely death, to raising her grandchildren."[33]

[30] Anna Leonowens, *The English Governess at the Siamese Court*.
[31] Anna Leonowens, *The Romance of the Harem* (Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1991).
[32] Lois K. Yorke, "Edwards, Anna Harriette," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 14, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/edwards_anna_harriette_14E.html.11
[33] Susan Kepner, "Anna (and Margaret) and the King of Siam," *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 10, no. 2 (January, 1996): 3.

Anna's first book, *The English Governess,* offers a detailed, almost chronological account of her stay in Siam. Themes such as Siamese history, political organizations and institutions, religious sites and practices, literature, and language are also featured in this book, making it a personal story yet complicating the genre of travel writing. The second book, *The Romance of the Harem*, however, is one that consists of several narratives, some told in the first person, others narrated in the third person, unconnected to each other. All stories were taken place in the royal harem, a city of women and children. Various aspects of life and culture in Siam are also touched upon. Historical authenticity does not concern or lead the investigation and analysis of the two sources. Instead, an inquisitive and critical approach will be applied to examine them, as shall be made clear in the later sections of this thesis.

Chapters

This thesis consists of three parts, each building up to a more comprehensive understanding of Anna Leonowen's Siamese experience and her identity construction. The first chapter will present an overview of her life leading up to Siam, using Morgan and Habegger's works to contextualize a critical understanding of her years before Siam. Several significant turning points at this stage of her life would prove to be of great relevance as she later experienced, performed, and sharpen her identity in Siam. It will introduce her ancestry, birth, and upbringing in British India, her educational tour to the Middle East, her adventurous and turbulent marriage life with her husband across different overseas colonies within the British Empire, and her eventual encounter of opportunity in British Singapore.

The second chapter will take a critical and inquisitive look at her identity performance and formation in Siam in the face of "others." How she negotiated with the surroundings and later grew more conscious of her own identity will be the focus. Through her contacts with local people and their customs, laws, and beliefs, she had a clearer understanding of her identity. She came to appreciate and take pride in the British component of her identity through experiencing the Siamese "others." She also had a stronger moral conviction related to Christianity after witnessing all cruel and exploitative

local practices such as slavery and the system of a harem, and also after encountering Buddhism.

In the final chapter, she will be compared with Siamese and Victorian women of her time, as well as "imperial men" who stood to profit from the British Empire's structural building from both the metropole and colonies. Her case will be positioned within the broader context of the British Empire, both domestically and internationally. Whether she contrasted or conformed with those in the British Empire will be the center of discussion.

Chapter I

Life before Siam

Before diving into Anna Leonowens's latter life in Siam, there are numerous significant incidents and figures in her former life that are noteworthy. As will be shown later, these events and people not only steered the course of her life into new directions, eventually led to her employment by the Siamese king, but also attested to her fabrication, transformation, and performance of her new identity even before her Siamese experience. Firstly, here is Anna's own version of her story before Siam, written for her grandchildren, which is worth quoted meticulously:

> I believe that I was born in Wales, in the old homestead of an ancient Welsh family named Edwards, the youngest daughter of which, my mother, accompanied her husband, Thomas Maxwell Crawford, to India, while I was left in charge of an eminent Welsh lady, Mrs. Walpole, a distant relative of my father, to be educated in Wales.
>
> Soon after the arrival of my parents in British India, my father was appointed aide-de-camp to Sir James Macintosh who was then in command of the British troops sent to Lahore, to quell the Sikh rebellion, where, while in the act of performing some military duty, he was cut to pieces by Sikhs who lay in wait for him. My mother married again. Her second husband with Colonel Rutherford Sutherland were my guardians and the executors of my father's will.
>
> At the age of fifteen I went out to my mother, who was then in Bombay with her husband, who held a prominent position in the Public Works Department. My mother was in very delicate health. Unable to endure the domestic tyranny of my stepfather, and having an independent income of my own, I travelled with some dear friends, the Reverend Mr. and Mrs. George Percy Badger, to Egypt, visited Damascus, Jerusalem, sailed down the Nile, that flows through old, hushed Egypt, and its sands like some grave, mighty thought threading an unravelled dream; ascended the First and Second Cataracts; in fact, I went to visit everything that was worth seeing,—the pyramids, Luxor, Theves, Karnak, etc., etc. On my return to Bombay in 1851 I married Thomas L. Leonowens, a British officer holding a staff appointment in the Commissariat office, which marriage my stepfather opposed with so much rancor that all correspondence between us ceased from that date.
>
> When I was only eighteen, the death of my mother and my first baby came upon me with such terrible force that my life was despaired of, and my husband embarked with me on a sea voyage to England. But the ship 'Alibi' went on some rocks, through the carelessness of the

> captain, I believe, and we were rescued by another sailing vessel and taken to New South Wales. Here I buried my second baby, an infant son, and still dreadfully ill, we took a steamer for England and finally settled down at St. James's Square, London for nearly three years.
>
> My husband's repeatedly extended leave of absence having expired, we returned with our two children to Singapore, where he was appointed. Here I commenced the study of Oriental languages with my husband under native teachers, but our life was again disturbed by the Indian Mutiny, and we suffered more than ever, not only in the heartrending calamities that befell some of my nearest relatives, and the just retribution that seemed to overtake us as a nation, but in the failure of several India banks, especially the Agra bank, in which the bulk of my fortune was deposited by the executors of my father's will.[1]

The episodes that Anna Leonowowens mentioned were mostly her own inventions. She thoughtfully created this identity and performed it immaculately for the rest of her life and intended that her version of the story be passed on to her audience and her offspring. Despite its questionable veracity, we can see that her own version of her life from her letter was experienced and disrupted throughout the British Empire. Some disruptive events to the British imperial project such as the Sikh rebellion and the Indian Mutiny also affected her one way or another. In this part, Anna's actual, closer to truth, early life will be examined with biographical research done by Susan Morgan and Alfred Habegger against her letter. And this early life of Anna would be her own baggage that she carried while experiencing, performing, and sharpening her identity beyond the Empire in Siam.

Given Family

According to thorough research and analysis done by Alfred Habegger, Anna's ancestral roots in Wales started with her great-grandfather whose name is Cradock Glascott. Born in 1742 during the Georgian era, Cradock was the first one in his middle-class, Protestant family, that made a living through ironworking and saddle making, to had attended Oxford

[1] The letter is kept at Archives of Wheaton College, Illinois, in the collection of Margaret and Kenneth Landon Papers cited in Susan Morgan, *Bombay Anna: The Real Story and Remarkable Adventures of the King and I Governess* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 3-4.

University, and later who became a reverend.[2] He had three sons, two of which followed his footsteps and became clergymen.[3]

His second son William Vaudrey Glascott (born in 1789), on the contrary, chose a very different path for a secular life. William went to cadet school, which prepared young men to work in the East India Company's private overseas army, and became an officer stationed in India. Drawing from findings and analyses of scholars such as Susan Kepner, William Syer Bristowe, and Alfred Habegger, William—the grandfather of Anna Leonowens—found solace or companionship with a local woman, as it was simply "a common practice"[4] in the Eurasian empire like the British one. Thus, the mixed-racial background of Anna started with her grandfather generation. William died in 1821, leaving two girls and one boy in India, one of the two girls, named Mary Ann, was to be a mother of Anna.[5]

At the paternal side of the story, Thomas Edwards enlisted in the British army in 1825 and reached Bombay (now Mumbai) and was transferred from the Infantry to the Corps of Sappers and Miners.[6] Unfortunately, he died of unknown cause in July 1831, leaving his still-pregnant wife Mary Ann no option but to marry again.[7] Patrick Donohoe, a reliable and skilled sergeant engineer who was of Irish Catholic background, became Anna's stepfather just after her birth in 1831.[8] Patrick built a relatively successful career and provided a comfortable life for Mary Ann and their children.[9] This is the story of her given family that she didn't choose for herself.

Chosen Family

Anna, as will be seen, defied the rigidly structured colonial system, refused to settle for a simple life of merely being married off and led onto a path of societal norm. She took matters

[2] Alfred Habegger, *Masked: The Life of Anna Leonowens, Schoolmistress at the Court of Siam* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), 17.
[3] Ibid., 20.
[4] Susan Kepner, "Anna (and Margaret) and the King of Siam." *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 10, no. 2 (January 1, 1996): 6.
[5] Alfred Habegger, Masked, 26-27.
[6] Ibid., 27.
[7] Ibid., 27.
[8] Ibid., 49-51.
[9] Ibid., 52.

into her own hands and forged an unusual life. Through investigation into the published annual reports of the Bombay Education Society, Habegger indicated that after the death of Anna's grandfather Lieutenant William Glascott, a friend of his took care of his children for a while and sent them to one of the schools affiliated with the Society. "A semi-independent organization created by philanthropic officials, military officers, and merchants with the backing of the Bombay government and Anglican hierarchy," the Society existed "to sponsor boarding schools for Eurasian military orphans."[10] As examined by Habegger, as girls of the school approached their fifteenth birthday, they were either arranged to marry older sergeant or conductor of the East India Company, or let go to their family. Anna's mother Mary Ann and her aunt Eliza also conformed to the pattern.[11] Anna, too, was schooled at the same institution that her mother and her aunt had been to. However—just like her great-grandfather who chose to go on a different path, instead of following his father and brothers' footsteps—Anna chose her own distinct path. Contrary to the common practice that her mother and aunt conformed to, as well as other Eurasian women in India before her, Anna refused to settle and chose to marry on her own terms. This may be one of the episodes of her life that made her feel sympathy to those women who wanted to live and love out of their free will, as one will see in the latter chapters of the thesis.

Anna chose to marry Thomas Leonowens. He was enlisted in Her Majesty's Twenty-Eighth Regiment on Foot on 28 June 1842, in Liverpool.[12] On 7 July 1843, along with sixty-two other recruits in his Regiment, Thomas set sail for Bombay. Within one and a half years, Thomas was promoted first from private to corporal, then again from corporal to paymaster sergeant. His quick advance in rank exhibited his talents and capabilities. Thomas's Regiment was stationed in Disa for nearly two years, from 1846 to 1847. Most likely as Habegger puts it, it was there that Anna and Thomas met each other because Anna's stepfather, Patrick Donohoe, had his home there.[13] In late 1847, the Twenty-Eighth Regiment to which Thomas belonged was ordered to leave India and embark for England. Thomas now

[10] Alfred Habegger, *Masked: The Life of Anna Leonowens, Schoolmistress at the Court of Siam* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), 34.
[11] Ibid., 36-37.
[12] In Habegger's analysis, Thomas minted his middle and last names together to be Leonowens, instead of it being created by Anna after his death as often said. Habegger also points out that when Thomas married Anna in 1849, he wrote "LeonOwens" as his surname, and by 1853 he was known simply as Leonowens. Ibid, 75.
[13] Ibid., 76.

faced one of the most significant and consequential choices of his life: to remain in India for his beloved mixed-race woman and find means to support himself as well as his future wife, or to simply go back home. Apparently, he stayed, and, together with Anna, they led a struggling yet adventurous life.

Anna and Thomas, as one being a Eurasian woman and one being a young Army officer, experienced hardships and challenges. Their experiences contrast with what the East India Company's directors tried to do. The British imperial government insisted on maintaining a wide distance from all things and peoples of the East, in both behavioral and social senses.[14] And at the same time, however, there were many cases that Anglo-Indian women formed their personal, social and marital connections with influential imperial officers which brough their cultural and political powers.[15] Anna and Thomas' marriage was at the opposite end. While Thomas was institutionally advised to keep distance from local "things and peoples"—in this case a mixed-race or Eurasian woman like Anna, he on the contrary married with the non-white. Anna, who may have been reminded by her family that a Eurasian woman's prospects were tightly connected to an "imperial" husband, chose to marry with the minor British officer. Due to this nonconformity, Thomas and Anna faced great difficulties in terms of their choice of marriage. This exposed a lot of risks for Anna when later Thomas was no longer a part of Her Majesty's Regiment and possessed no "imperial" prestige or connections.

Educational Tour of the Middle East

Before getting married, in 1849, Anna took an educational and enlightening tour of the Middle East with Reverend George Percy Badger and his wife Maria Badger. Margaret Landon gave a summary to Anna's tour, implying that the tour was a tactical arrangement by Anna's parents to cool her romance with Thomas down.[16] William S. Bristowe, three decades after Landon, however, concluded that Anna traveled with an unmarried Mr. Badger and that

[14] C. J. Hawes, *Poor Relations: The Making of a Eurasian Community in British India 1773–1833* (Richmond, Surrey, UK: Curzon Press, 1996), 58.

[15] Mary A. Procida, *Married To The Empire: Gender, Politics and Imperialism in India, 1883-1947* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 30.

[16] Margaret Landon, *Anna and The King of Siam* (New York: John Day Company, 1944), 10.

he paid for her expanses, triggering some lewd speculations.[17] Susan Morgan, in contrast, holds the opinion that Anna "never traveled with the Badgers." [18] Nevertheless, after comparing different analyses from various scholars and writers, as well as researching the sources himself, Habegger indicates that the Badgers' story has truth in it and that it deserves some attention.

This trip gave Anna the first experience to explore the wider world in and beyond the Empire. During Anna's time, the Middle East was a contentious region of powers between the British and the Ottoman Empires. It had not been a colonial control of the British Empire until the collapse of the Ottoman after the First World War in 1918.[19] Thus, the Badgers demonstrated firsthand to Anna that there could be a new possibility for her: an alternate path on which she could travel, learn, find employment, teach, and write about different peoples of the East; an option that was beyond the limit and imagination of girls born of interracial marriages in the overseas colony.

During the trip, Anna visited several places and explored new cultures. She traveled to Syria and Egypt and learned Arabic and Persian languages and cultures. She may have developed self-improvement overseen and guided by the learned and experienced Badgers, George and Maria. The traveling experience may have been inspiring for Anna; she saw the possibility of a new kind of life, where one's identity was not fixed but could be developed and transcend. As will be seen in the next chapter, when she was in Siam and exploring Thai cultural arts, the knowledge and experienced Anna had gained from the Badgers trip would be invoked to make sense of the new culture and environment that she never had witnessed before.

Adventures in the Overseas Colonies

By the time when Anna returned to Bombay in October 1849, the two confirmed their love and subsequently entered marriage on Christmas Day in the same year, and the young couple would go on to live their lives in several colonies across the British Empire. During their time

[17] Alfred Habegger, *Masked*, 61.
[18] Susan Morgan, *Bombay Anna*, 54.
[19] Richard Davis, "Britain's Middle Eastern Policy, 1900-1931: Dual Attractions of Empire and Europe," *Histoire@Politique. Politique, culture, société*, N°11 (mai-août 2010): 3.

in Bombay, they had no permanent house to live in the crowded and expensive Bombay, and they lost their first child in May 1852.[20] Australia became promising choice for two of them. Since 1851 the discovery of gold in Australia dramatically increased the influx of migrants.[21] Thus, a new opportunity was presented to them by Bombay's newspapers that had reports of wealth and plentiful employment in Australia. Even though still pregnant with the second child, Anna and her husband took the risk, as well as chance, nonetheless.

The journey to Australia was anything but a comfort. The Leonowens left for Australia on 16 November 1852. They had to stop at Singapore as a transit point for the second voyage sailing to Western Singapore.[22] Interestingly, Anna did provide the truthful name of the ship that they took when she wrote the letter shown above; the ship was named *Alibi*. Somewhere during their harsh voyage on the sea, Anna went into labor and gave birth to the couple's second child. This time the baby is a boy.[23] Giving birth on a ship definitely doubled the hardship to Australia. As Andrew Hassam puts it, traveling to Australia was not a pleasant journey; apart from the long-time voyage, passengers experienced the poor diet, inadequate ventilation, lack of privacy, and contagious diseases.[24]

However, once arrival in Australia, the career opportunity came to them. Only five days after they had been in Perth, Thomas secured a job in the Commissariat, the imperial government's local distributor of food, tools, machinery, weapons, and building materials as other goods.[25] Around the same time, Anna also tried to start a new career. At the end of 1853, she advertised a school for young ladies, her first attempt at running a school and entering the business of teaching or education.[26] However, her plan was never materialized. It must have been challenging and unconventional for a married woman with an infant to start a school on her own. Her bid for this enterprise might have been heavily inspired by a writer, Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had achieved worldwide acclaim just between 1852 and 1853. As also a working woman, Stowe made an impact on

[20] Alfred Habegger, *Masked*, 96.
[21] Andrew Hassam, *Sailing to Australia: Shipboard Diaries by Nineteenth-century British Emigrants* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 6.
[22] Alfred Habegger, *Masked*, 103-104.
[23] Ibid., 105.
[24] Andrew Hassam, *Sailing to Australia*, 3.
[25] Alfred Habegger, *Masked*, 111.
[26] Ibid., 111.

contemporary society and made a successful living for herself. Stowe's case must have served as a good example for Anna. As one shall see, Stowe and her work would also come to feature a significant part in Anna's later years in Siam (this will be discussed more in Chapter 2).

Along with her husband's career, Anna maintained herself as a mother. Unfortunately, again, the couple's second child died in March 1854. However, Anna was already pregnant by the time she lost her second child. The third child, Avis, was born on 25 October 1854.[27] One year later, with their daughter, the Leonowens moved to Port Gregory, a desolate, far-north settlement in Western Australia. For fifteen months, Thomas was its storekeeper of the Commissariat. In the isolated, surrounded-by-desert town, the couple welcomed their fourth and a last child to the world: Louis Gunnis Leonowens born on 22 October 1856.[28] In the near future, he would accompany his mother to Siam and later lead an affluent life thanks to his overseas experience.

Without much progress in terms of her husband's career, they decided to leave Australia for a new journey and embarked on a vessel bound for Singapore on 3 April 1857.[29] A bustling city under the British rule, Singapore was already a multiethnic city and an important base for international trade. In 1857, the trade of Singapore started to increase significantly than ever. The total import and export trade in 1857 amounted to 46.5 million dollars, and the next year it was going to rise to 53 million dollars. The total trade during the second half of the nineteenth century was two times higher than the total trade in the first half of the century that had amounted only between 10-20 million dollars.[30] This financial growth of Singapore evidently attracted fortune seekers across the British Empire including the Leonowens. Soon after their arrival in Singapore, Thomas found a job working for the Singapore branch of the Borneo Company, a London-based company run by Glasgow merchants who traded in the South China Sea and now were looking to expand business to Sarawak and Siam.[31]

---

[27] Ibid., 113-114.
[28] Ibid., 124.
[29] Ibid., 129.
[30] Wong Lin Ken, "Singapore: Its Growth as an Entrepot Port, 1819-1941" *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Volume 9 Issue 1 (April 2011): 57.
[31] Ibid., 131.

Figure 1.1 The steamship at a port in Singapore during the nineteenth century. *Investigating History: Colonial Singapore, 1819-1941* (National Museum of Singapore), 24.

It is worth noting here that during Anna's time in Singapore, in India, her former home, there was a disruptive, though unsuccessful, rebellion in May 1857 caused by the Indian sepoys. This rebellion was a pivotal event in the history of the British Empire. From her letter above, it is known that Anna was financially affected by this major rebellion. In Singapore, on the one hand before the mutiny event, colonial official held positive opinions toward Indians; they thought of the Indians as compliant public workers who were "steady, well-behaved men, doing no harm in the Settlement, and found useful and industrious in many respects."[32] On the other hand after the event, a sense of panic emerged to those "imperial" officials in Singapore. Indians became demonized by the end of 1857. With public rumors and editorials and reports in the local press, they were much feared by the British.[33]

One year after the Indian Rebellion, in the middle of 1858, Thomas left for Penang, in the hope to secure a managerial job at a newly opened hotel. Anna took her two kids and went to join her husband in Penang. Alas, Thomas died on 8 May 1859, just almost a year

[32] Rajesh Rai, "The 1857 Panic and the Fabrication of an Indian 'Menace' in Singapore" *Modern Asian Studies* 47, 2 (2013): 366.
[33] Ibid., 365-405.

after they had settled in Penang. This time was the third time that she experienced bereavement; she was truly left with nothing apart from her children: no family to support, no source of income, and no home.

The Early Phase of Anna's Re-invention of Identity

Suffering great loss and pain, Anna, nevertheless, had an opportunity to start a new life. A widow Anna started her business by opening a school in Singapore. As Alfred Habegger investigated that the city directories of Singapore recorded that she was a proprietor of a private school between 1861 to 1862.[34] Susan Morgan identified that Anna, as a sort of governess and a nursing-school teacher, taught and took care of students and young children of British officers.[35] Her children must have been in the school as well, given that they were still very young.

With her new career as a teacher, Anna began to re-invent herself. Regarding the transformation of Anna's identity after she returned from Penang to Singapore in 1859, Morgan argues that Anna disembarked in Singapore with a brand-new identity. She continues carefully explaining why Anna—without a husband, much money, and family support—maintained that she was of gentry birth and came from Wales, as seen from what she told her grandchildren in the letter quoted at the beginning of this chapter.[36] Whereas Habegger holds an opinion that "she could not have taken on a new identity and history in a place where she was already known."[37] However, one thing that can be certain is that by the time Anna was ready to set sail for Bangkok, her newly transformed identity as a well-educated British woman of gentry birth, a widow of a British army officer, a capable and knowledgeable teacher of proven records, took shape. And she would continue to perform such an identity when she encountered Siam. She did so because she knew, through experiences, that by passing off as a white educated gentlewoman who was qualify for work as a governess would free her from the socio-economic disadvantages related to her class and race. More importantly, in Morgan's words, her new identity would "allow her to live in

[34] Alfred Habegger, *Masked*, 138.
[35] Susan Morgan, *Bombay Anna*, 82
[36] Ibid., 70-71.
[37] Alfred Habegger, *Masked*, 132.

a world where her achievements had the possibility of matching her large talents and her at-least-as-large dreams."[38]

During her years in Singapore, both Morgan and Habegger point out that Anna's relationship with two men were crucial. One is an American named Francis David Cobb, and the other a British named William Adamson. The former was a young man from Boston, he was a strong abolitionist, committed to the principles of equality and individual worth, who introduced Anna many of the well-known American authors and contemporary political issues in the United States in the early 1860s.[39] As suggested by Thai historian Thanet Aphornsuvan, confirmed by Morgan and Habegger, Anna was recommended several important works such as writings from Ralph Waldo Emerson, a novel by Nathaniel Hawthorne, and, most importantly, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The last book was a novel that has anti-slavery connotations. The Cobbs, furthermore, recounted to Anna the abolitionist movement led by William Lloyd Garrison and the political movement of Abraham Lincoln.[40] In one of her books about Siam, Anna also dedicated a page in a book to Mrs. Cobb. She felt that she owed to the "generous friendship of noble-hearted American women."[41] It was through this friendship with the Cobbs that Anna "encountered a set of beliefs that, at least ideally, spoke to her own deepest belief in human equality."[42] From her own experiences, the institutional equality and disadvantages that came with it were felt firsthand. Arguably, this experience with her American friend and the American society in Singapore in general enriched her identity. Anna incorporated the abolitionist and liberal elements into her identity, absorbing the ideals of those Northerners of the United States, and went on performing this identity when she later was in Siam.

The other important relationship of Anna's was with William Adamson. He was the former boss of her husband, Thomas, from the Borneo Company. Adamson later became the manager of the Singapore branch of the Company and went to Bangkok to expand the Company's operations, and finally gained the trust of the Siamese king Mongkut.[43] When

[38] Susan Morgan, *Bombay Anna*, 72.
[39] Ibid., 84.
[40] Thanet Aphornsuvan, "Anna kap Margaret: Feminist Nai Ratchasamnak Sayam [Anna and Margaret: Feminists in the Siamese Court]," *Silpawattanatham*, 21, No. 2 (December 1999), 36-47.
[41] Anna Leonowens, *The English Governess at the Siamese Court* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1988), a page before Preface.
[42] Susan Morgan, *Bombay Anna*, 85.
[43] Alfred Habegger, *Masked*, 141.

Adamson returned to Singapore from Siam, Anna's school was not doing well financially. Interestingly and timely, Adamson came across a piece of information from another successful merchant, who was serving the Siamese King as a consul general and a special agent in the Straits Settlement. The information revealed that King Mongkut was looking for a qualified English teacher for his children in the palace. It was this piece of information and the introduction from Adamson that completely altered the course of Anna's life:

> Adamson was familiar with the king's oddities and could imagine what it would be like working for him. A governess fresh from Britain would not be up to that, but there was a woman in Singapore who might be—his late clerk's struggling widow. On the instant, Mrs. Leonowens's vague origins, wanderings, travails, and odd authority were converted from liabilities to assets. She had experience teaching; she was as tough, correct, and high-toned as she was warm and motherly; she had to have something more remunerative than her sad little school; and she was English enough for the Siamese, who weren't anxious about racial or ethnic purity.[44]

The King got in touch with Anna personally and issued her employment. She sent her daughter Avis to a boarding school in London, took her son Louis and boarded the steamer bound for Bangkok in early 1862.

At this stage, by severing ties with her family in India and inventing a new identity, Anna got rid of all the stains and disadvantages that were related to her racial and cultural backgrounds, which came from her given family. At the same time, she constructed an identity through her experiences that was based on her marriage with a British army officer, her knowledge of the world in and beyond the Empire from education and travel, and her liberal belief in human equality. Through these, Anna would continue to perform her identity faithfully and convincingly, and further sharpen it with new "others" during her years in Siam.

[44] Alfred Habegger, *Masked,* 141.

Chapter II
Life in Siam

The preceding chapter provided a sketch on Anna Leonowens's life before her Siamese experience: her turbulent childhood in British India, enlightening educational tour with the Badgers, marriage with her husband Thomas, multiple losses of children and, later, her husband, overseas experiences in Australia and the Straits Settlements, as well as her first stage of life as an enterprising widow in the education sector in Singapore. Through her experiences, Anna reconstructed her identity, disconnecting her past in India, ridding herself of the disadvantages related to her previous lower-class and mixed-race identity which would relegate her and her children to an inferior social status. Meanwhile, Anna invented a new identity for herself, one that was based on her birth into the British gentry class, her marriage with a British army officer, her ample knowledge gained from education and travels, her proven capabilities to teach from experiences, and her firm stance on abolitionism and staunch belief in human equality. With her invented autobiography and continued performance of this new identity, Anna was prepared to embark on a new journey of her life.

Through her connections in Singapore, Anna was introduced to take the post of royal governess for the Siamese monarch King Mongkut. However, as content and hopeful as she was when she accepted the King's employment and dreamed of a new exciting life ahead, she soon came to find out that her life in Siam did not even start, let alone proceed smoothly at all. When the steamer carrying Anna Leonowens, her son Louis, and a retinue on Chao Phraya River approached the town of Samut Prakan[1] in Siam, they came to witness a "strange" custom. The steamer was anchored opposite the town, and the captain "went ashore to report himself to the Governor, and the officials of the custom-house, and the mail-boat came to [them]."[2] They reacted to the practice: "Moonshee, my Persian teacher, and Beebe, my gay

[1] In her writing, she mistakenly translated the meaning of the town as ocean affairs. The town's name which is still in use today actually means ocean fortress in Thai.
[2] Anna Leonowens, *The English Governess at the Siamese Court* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1988), 3.

Hindostanee nurse, expressed their disappointment and disgust, Moonshee being absurdly dramatic in his wrath, as, fairly shaking his fist at the town, he demanded, 'what is this?'"[3]

Figure 2.1 The sketch of Chao Phraya River scenery in nineteenth-century Bangkok. Henri Mouhot, *Travels in the Central Parts of Indo-China (Siam), Cambodia, and Laos, During the Years 1858, 1859, and 1860*, Volume 1 (London: John Murray, 1864), 43.

Soon Anna Leonowens's group met the Siamese Prime Minister (Chuang Bunnag) and his crew on the deck. During the brief conversation with the "half-naked" Prime Minister, Anna informed him that she knew no one in Bangkok and brought up the topic of the "promised residence" by the King of Siam himself. To her surprise, before taking off instantly, the Prime Minister only bluntly replied: "His Majesty cannot remember everything," and that "you can go where you like." She vividly described her shock and speechlessness: "I was dumfoundered, without even voice to inquire if there was a hotel in the city; and my servants were scornfully mute."[4] Thus, she could only prepare to spend her first night in the foreign land of Siam on a deck "under a canopy of stars." Anna lamented:

[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., 10.

> The situation was as Oriental as the scene,—heartless arbitrary insolence on the part of my employers; homelessness, forlornness, helplessness, mortification, indignation, on mine. Fear and misgivings crowded and stunned me. My tears fell thick and fast, and, weary and despairing, I closed my eyes, and tried to shut out heaven and earth; but the reflection would return to mock and goad me, that by my own act, and against the advice of my friends, I had placed myself in this position.[5]

One can only imagine the predicament that Anna was in. As it turned out later, finding a house proved to be a strenuous quest. It is worth noting that these feelings that she had upon arrival in Siam seemed to elucidate not only her first night in the country but also the large part of her life before coming to Siam. Her marriage life with Thomas was impoverished. The couple did not have any satisfactory and permanent housing. After Thomas's death, Anna's life was even worse off financially. She had been struggling to provide for herself and her children.

Months after months, Anna worked at the royal palace, performing the tasks of her double office as, on the one hand, the English-language and western sciences teacher of King Mongkut's children and ladies of the Harem; on the other, the King's assistant in translating foreign texts and dealing with correspondences to and from foreign dignitaries. The inhospitality of palace officials, capricious moods of the King, tropical weather, distress caused by witnessing the tyranny that the King inflicted on his wives, and her still-unfound promised house had been discouraging her day by day. "I had never beheld misery till I found it here," she grumbled.[6]

"The existence of others is crucial in defining what is 'normal' and in locating one's own place in the world."[7] It is through trying and challenging foreign environment and her contacts with various kinds of local people that a clearer representation of her idea of "otherness" is depicted, therewith revealing, at the same time, a clearer sense of her identity. This chapter will take an inquisitive and critical look at Anna Leonowens's life in Siam, discussing elements such as personality, attitudes, and beliefs while she was in Siam between 1862 and 1867. The chapter examines how she formed as well as sharpened these aspects

[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid., 104.
[7] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 186.

of her identity through contrasting and comparing with the Siamese others. It can be argued that her time in Siam greatly transformed and accentuated her identity. Besides encountering Siamese others, she also came into contact with Westerners who lived in Siam—especially the British—and led her to appreciate and utilize the extraterritorial rights granted by the 1855 treaty between Siam and the British. The Siamese others and Western familiars helped Anna Leonowens define her identity and position herself through their contrasting and similar images, ideas, personalities, and experiences.

First Impressions

As Anna Leonowens and her company waited for the afternoon tide to carry them further, they were joined by a crew of circus people. Amidst a bustle, she set herself apart from the fellow passengers and found a more enjoyable company with numerous and different dogs present on a deck.

> There were the captain's two, Trumpet and Jip, who, by virtue of their reflected rank and authority, held places of privilege and pickings under the table, and were jealous and overbearing as became a captain's favorites, snubbing and bullying their more accomplished and versatile guests, the circus dogs, with skipper-like growls and snarls and snaps. And there was our own true Bessy, a Newfoundland, great and good, discreet, reposeful, dignified, fastidious, not to be cajoled into confidences and familiarities with strange dogs, whether official or professional. Very human was her gentle countenance, and very loyal, I doubt not, her sense of responsibility, as she followed anxiously my boy and me, interpreting with her heart the thoughts she read in our faces, and responding with her sympathetic eyes.[8]

Through praising her own dog, Anna employed the orientalist frame of mind and projected preoccupations and prejudices about "other" dogs and, by extension, other peoples. This falls in line with the common practice of Westerners regarding the colonial dog as the embodiment of enlightenment and domestication. Thus, native dogs and, by extension, native humans were disparaged and implicitly criticized.[9] In other words, even though the

[8] Ibid., 2.
[9] Aaron Herald Skabelund, *Empire of Dogs: Canines, Japan, and the Making of the Modern Imperial World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 39-40.

subject of discussion was about dogs, Anna was expressing her preferred characteristics of not only domestic animals but also of people, distinguishing the "others" from what she thought to be more refined and exemplary, accentuating her British and Western identity, and asserting a sense of superiority over the oriental other.

Interestingly, before coming to Siam, a canine issue was a major concern for the British imperial project during Anna's time in Singapore. Dogs had been present in the island long before the British came to dominate. During the British rule, on the one hand, local feral dogs were considered as "one of the greatest nuisances." On the other, bred dogs that began to arrive in Singapore from Victorian England in the mid-nineteenth century were cherished as pets.[10] Throughout the 1850s, the practice of culling feral dogs was executed by the colonial officers as part of a project of "taming the island"; in May 1859 alone—the year when Anna came back from Penang—200 dogs were killed by 103 officers.[11] The tension between "uncivilized" and "civilized" dogs was therefore prevalent in colonial Singapore, and Anna might have felt about it when she was there.

As the steamer approached Bangkok, Anna finally had a good and close look at the city where she was going to work in. She described:

> Here were the strange floating city, with its stranger people on all the open porches, quays, and jetties; the innumerable rafts and boats, canoes and gondolas, junks, and ships; the pall of black smoke from the steamer, the burly roar of the engine, and the murmur and the jar; the bewildering cries of men, women, and children, the shouting of the Chinamen, and the barking of the dogs, yet no one seemed troubled but me.[12]

A vivid sketch of an otherworldly scene was created by Anna when seeing a city hovering on water; all types of water transportations and wastes seen in the water; noisy, crowded, unorganized, unhygienic environment. These surroundings unsettled a woman who had just arrived. Soon after, she was greeted by the Siamese Prime Minister, who was neither friendly nor helpful. He left abruptly after meeting them, providing neither the "promised residence" meant for Anna and her company nor proper temporary lodging. As Anna was ready to give

[10] Timothy P. Barnard, *Imperial Creature: Humans and Other Animals in Colonial Singapore, 1819-1942* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2020), 36-48 and 70.
[11] Ibid., pp. 42-43.
[12] Anna Leonowens, *The English Governess at the Siamese Court*, 8.

in and get ready to settle the first night in Siam on the steamer's deck, she was "saved" by a kind English captain whom she addressed as Captain B.

The others were gradually fading away when the familiar came to the scene. The environment around Anna changed immediately and entirely as her mood was uplifted by the timely arrival of Captain B's help:

> In the beautiful gondola of our "friend in need" we were pulled by four men, standing to their oars, through a dream-like scene, peculiar to this Venice of the East. Larger boats, in an endless variety of form and adornment, with prows high, tapering, and elaborately carved, and pretty little gondolas and canoes, passed us continually on the right and left; yet amid so many signs of life, motion, traffic, bustle, the sweet sound of the rippling waters alone fell on the ear. No rumbling of wheels, nor clatter of hoofs, nor clangor of bells, nor roar and scream of engines to shock the soothing fairy-like illusion. The double charm of stillness and starlight was perfect.[13]

All of a sudden, the bustling and rowdy surroundings turned tranquil. Water vessels of all functions and shapes were still there, but they became objects worth observing and appreciating, with elaborate decorations. City noise made up of people's movements and voices were diminished. Obnoxious sounds from all kinds of machinery were no more. All there left was the smooth and pleasant sound from water, complemented by the serene starlight.

Anna established and defined herself through the making of the geographical and racial others, and then through the familiars. The troubling and strange scene consisted of almost the same elements that Anna had observed earlier was transformed into a dreamy and enjoyable "illusion" with the timely and gracious help from a fellow Englishman. When Anna reached the Englishman's house, she met with his wife, Mrs. B. She "welcomed [Anna] with a pleasant smile to her little heaven of home across the river, and by the simplicity and gentleness of her manners dispelled in a measure my feeling of forlornness."[14] The ideas of "simplicity" and "gentleness" had already been developed since the late eighteenth century in Britain during the Georgian period. Amanda Vickery shows how these ideas were at work when British gentlemen and gentlewomen ordered house wallpapers from decorating firms.

[13] Ibid., 10-11.
[14] Ibid., 13.

British buyers often expressed their wish to the firms that they wanted wallpapers that were "not too showey." Vickery states that the opposite of showey excess was neatness, and "neat" conveyed a simple elegance of form which was free from unnecessary embellishments. [15] Alison Blunt furthermore claims that there was a string link between metropolitan and imperial domesticity in British India through reports of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in periodicals.[16] The idea of "neat and not too showey" is similar to what Anna found pleasant in Mrs. B who was simple and gentle at the same time. Moreover, Mr. and Mrs. B's house was probably decorated with something "neat and not too showey" as well.

An opposite case of being "neat and not too showey" is made through the description of the luxuriously ornamented interior decorations of the Siamese Prime Minister's house. When Anna and her son left Mr. and Mrs. B's house the following morning and were led into the "saloons" of the Prime Minister, she detailed what she saw:

> We moved softly, as the interpreter led us through a suite of spacious saloons, deposed in ascending tiers, and all carpeted, candelabraed, and appointed in the most costly European fashion. A superb vase of silver, embossed and burnished, stood on a table inlaid with mother-of-peal and chased with silver. Flowers of great variety and beauty and beauty filled the rooms with a delicious though slightly oppressive fragrance. On every side my eyes were delighted with rare vases, jewelled cups and boxes, burnished chalices, dainty statuettes, —*objets de virtu*, Oriental and European, antique and modern, blending the old barbaric splendors with graces of the younger arts.[17]

The Prime Minister's residence exuded grandeur and glamor. On the contrary to the British idea, showey excess in Thai concept of power was an indication of a *barami* (moral perfection, virtue, charisma) of a person who was able to flaunt his/her own wealth, as seen from the *Thet Mahachat* ceremony in Siam where "big men" like the king, royals, or dignitaries showed their affluence to prove their ability of merit-making.[18] However, compared to what her

[15] Amanda Vickery, "'Neat and Not Too Showey': Words and Wallpaper in Regency England," in Amanda Vickery and John Styles (eds.), *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North America, 1700-1830* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 216.
[16] Alison Blunt, "Imperial Geographies of Home: British Domesticity in India, 1886-1925" *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (1999), 422.
[17] Anna Leonowens, *The English Governess at the Siamese Court*, 15.
[18] Patrick Jory, "The Vessantara Jataka, Barami, and the Bodhisatta-Kings: The Origin and Spread of a Thai Concept of Power," *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 2002, Vol. 16, No. 2 (2002), 36-78.

"compatriots" had offered and exhibited at the previous night, a stark contrast is made clear. While the British couple—Mr. and Mrs. B—conveyed a sense of friendliness and showed "simple elegance," the Siamese Prime Minister, on the other hand, projected an ambiance of unwelcomeness and showed "unnecessary embellishments." In short, Anna came to realize and cherish the Britishness of her identity when she met her "compatriots" and therein received comfort and support. More importantly, Anna took the approach of othering the Siamese counterpart which was represented by the Siamese Prime Minister.

Moral Conviction

During Anna Leonowens's time in Siam, the institution of slavery was still in practice. It was not until the next monarch—King Chulalongkorn who was one of her pupils—that slavery started to be gradually abolished in 1874 when she already left Siam.[19] In the British Empire, slavery was practiced in many overseas colonies. During the eighteenth century, the Bombay government imported slaves from Africa. Bombay was evidently the clearing house for African slaves.[20] However, it needs to be noted that while Anna was living in India, although Britain abolished slavery throughout its empire in 1833 with the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833, slavery in India continued to remain as "the East India Company's Indian territories were specifically excluded from the Act." [21] Thus, slavery in India was not effectively abolished during the years of Anna's upbringing. She must have been familiar with the institution of slavery and witnessed the daily practices of it when she and her family were living in Bombay.

Anna's ideas on slavery, however, only gradually started to take shape when she left India and traveled to Australia and Singapore. In Australia, she learned about the international fame of Harriet Beecher Stowe through the publication of her abolitionist novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. As reminded by Alfred Habegger, Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* became a worldwide bestseller in 1852 and 1853 and "captured public interest in Bombay before

[19] R.B. Cruikshank, "Slavery in Nineteenth Century Siam" *Journal of The Siam Society*, 63 (July 1975), 315-333.

[20] Murali Ranganathan, "In Colonial Bombay, Slavery Practiced by Both Indians and the British Administration," The Wire, https://thewire.in/history/bombay-slavery-africa.

[21] Andrea Major, *Slavery, Abolitionism and Empire in India, 1772-1843* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), 3.

Anna's departure and in Perth after her arrival."[22] Later in Singapore, she befriended the young American Francis David Cobb and his wife. The couple then introduced her to the American community in Singapore. Anna specifically dedicated one of the pages before the main body of *The English Governess at the Siamese Court* to "Mrs. Katherine S. Cobb"; she felt that she owed to the "generous friendship of noble-hearted American women."[23] Mrs. Cobb therefore must have played an important role to Anna no less than her husband, even though, as indicated in the first chapter, Susan Morgan and Alfred Habegger mention that it was only Francis David Cobb that introduced American literary works, especially related to the theme of abolitionism, to Anna. The Cobb couple's collective influence on the formation of Anna's identity was undeniable. Through the Cobbs, who supported the abolition of slavery and believed in the principles of equality and individual worth, Anna learned more about slavery and came to appreciate and affirm the values of the abolitionists, especially considering that she must have experienced the disadvantages of her descent from mixed-race and socially inferior status throughout her life.

Her moral conviction got confirmed and strengthened when she came to find out about slavery in Siam and observed first-hand the sufferings of female slaves in the royal palace. She spared no effort in condemning the system of slavery, as she wrote:

> How I have pitied those ill-fated sisters of mine, imprisoned without a crime! If they could but have rejoiced once more in the freedom of the fields and woods, what new births of gladness might have been theirs, they who with a gasp of despair and moral death first entered those royal dungeons, never again to come forth alive! [...] I had never beheld misery till I found it here; I had never looked upon the sickening hideousness of slavery till I encountered its features here; nor, above all, had I comprehended the perfection of the life, light, blessedness and beauty, the all-sufficing fulness of the love of God as it is in Jesus, until I felt the contrast here, pain, deformity, darkness, death, and eternal emptiness, a darkness to which there is neither beginning nor end, a living which is neither of this world nor of the next. The misery which checks the pulse and thrills the heart with pity in one's common walks about the great cities of Europe is hardly so saddening as the nameless, mocking wretchedness of these women, to whom poverty were a luxury, and houselessness as a draught of pure, free air.[24]

[22] Alfred Habegger, *Masked: The Life of Anna Leonowens, Schoolmistress at the Court of Siam* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), 112-113.
[23] Anna Leonowens, *The English Governess at the Siamese Court* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1988), a page before Preface.
[24] Anna Leonowens, *The English Governess at the Siamese Court*, 104.

Being the only woman who had free and unlimited access to the royal palace on a daily basis, especially its most forbidden part, the Harem or *Nang Harm*, Anna witnessed the lives of female slaves within the palace closely. The suffering of female slaves in the Siamese royal palace made her deeply sympathize with these women; she cried for the mistreatments and cruelties inflicted upon them, and even tried to seek justice on their behalf in some cases. Through this experience, her abolitionist and liberal beliefs were reflected, demonstrating her uninterrupted performance of an identity that she had been constructing since before Siam and made a firmer stand on her moral ground.

Figure 2.2 Female slaves and their masters in Siam. Gypzyworld.

Moreover, these enslaved women's predicaments made her reflect and think about herself as a woman and also as a follower of Christianity. In her belief, the love of God and Jesus Christ was all-powerful and shined through the darkness. Such pain and misery found in those women should not happen in a Christian land. She became more convinced of the values and morals taught through Christianity and came to appreciate the "better" world created by it enormously. In other words, she became more Christian than ever as she "felt

the contrast here" in Siam. The religious component of her identity was strengthened by facing the stark contrasting oriental others here.

A similar sense of hopeless confinement and misery was not only seen from the female slaves in the palace but also their mistresses (the numerous wives of the Siamese King). Most of them were "the fairest of the daughters of Siamese nobles and of princes of the adjacent tributary states"[25]:

> On certain high holidays and occasions of state, the high-priest administers here a sort of mass, at which the whole court attend, even the chief ladies of the harem, who, behind heavy curtains of silk and gold that hang from the ceiling to the floor, whisper and giggle and peep and chew betel, and have the wonted little raptures of their sex over furtive, piquant glimpses of the world; for, despite the strict confinement and jealous surveillance to which they are subject, the outer life, with all its bustle, passion, and romance, will now and then steal, like a vagrant, curious ray of light, into the heart's darkness of these tabooed women, thrilling their childish minds with eager wonderment and formless longings.[26]

Another instance where Anna's sense of religious conviction got reinforced in the face of "other" women from Siam was when she was settling down in her temporary housing in the Prime Minister's residence. She found herself surrounded by the boisterous and curious company of his wives and female servants. Before long, Anna was asked if she "should not like to the wife of the prince, their lord, rather than of the terrible Chow-che-witt."[27] Anna expressed her shock toward this proposition: "Here was a monstrous suggestion that struck me dumb. Without replying, I rose and shook them off, retiring with my boy into the inner chamber."[28] However, these women persisted and pursued without compunction, repeating their question, adamant about getting an answer. After expressing her sympathy to these women confined within the boundary of the domestic sphere and subjugated to domestic tyranny, she explained:

[25] Ibid., 94.
[26] Ibid., 94.
[27] Ibid., 21. *Chow-che-witt* literally translates in Thai as "Lord of Life." Here it is referring to the supreme King.
[28] Ibid., 21.

> "The prince, your lord, and the king, your Chow-che-witt, are pagans," I said. "An English, that is a Christian, woman would rather be put to the torture, chained and dungeoned for life, or suffer a death the slowest and most painful you Siamese know, than be the wife of either." […] They remained silent in astonishment, seemingly withheld from speaking by an instinctive sentiment of respect; until one, more volatile than the rest, cried, "What! not if he gave you all these jewelled rings and boxes, and these golden things?" […] When the old woman, fearing to offend, whispered this test question in Malay to me, I laughed at the earnest eyes around, and said: "No, not even then. I am only here to teach the royal family. I am not like you. You have nothing to do but to play and sing and dance for your master; but I have to work for my children; and one little one is now on the great ocean, and I am very sad."[29]

Once again, Anna drew a clear line between "other women" and her. While the former was subjugated to oriental polygamy, being only their "pagan" master's entertainment, objects without agency, the latter embodied the Christian virtues such as being faithful to monotheism, prudent, hardworking, and family-centered. Interestingly, the images of these domestic tyrants in Siam might have persisted in her thought long after Siam when she was writing a letter to her grandchildren (see the letter in Chapter 1). In the letter, she mentioned her stepfather, Patrick Donohoe, when she was in India. She considered him as "domestic tyranny"[30] who might have impeded her independent agency when she was young. Her experience with those Siamese domestic tyrants probably came to her mind when she was writing about him and made her put her stepfather in the same category with them.

Cruel and habitual mistreatments of women were further highlighted by the imprisonment of a woman whom Anna called Hidden Perfume—one of her pupils. Hidden Perfume was the mother of a young prince and one of the King's wives. She was accused of plotting to undermine the King's authority by petitioning to the King that the post held by her late uncle be transferred to her elder brother, only she was not aware that the King had already a preferred candidate in mind for the appointment. In "a rage of hypocritical patriotism, and seeking to justify himself by condemning her," Hidden Perfume was dragged to a ghastly and deadly cell, later flogged, and beaten on the mouth with a slipper for lying. Anna heavily criticized such an act because "it was horrible to witness such an abuse of

[29] Ibid., 22.
[30] Susan Morgan, *Bombay Anna: The Real Story and Remarkable Adventures of the King and I Governess* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 4.

power at the hands of one who was the only source of justice in the land."[31] "It was a crime against all humanity, the outrage of the strong upon the helpless," she continued.[32] On Hidden Perfume's behalf, Anna then righteously interceded privately with the Prime Minister: "I have only come to you for justice. She did not know of the appointment until she had sent in her petition; and to punish one woman for that which is permitted and encouraged is gross injustice."[33] Through this incident, Anna's moral conviction grew more substantial. In addition to condemning the King's gross abuse of power, particularly since it came from petty grudges, she led the charge against it by intervening in the matter, ensuring that justice got served. Anna thus grew more convinced of her moral beliefs when confronted with the oriental domestic tyranny and despotism. The liberal and egalitarian beliefs embedded in her were waken, reinforcing her identity as a firm believer of individual worth and human equality.

"A Matter-of-Fact English Woman" and Buddhism

In *The English Governess*, Anna wrote a whole chapter about Buddhism, documenting and explaining its doctrine and practices, even including some dialectic discussions about Buddhism and Christianity with the Siamese King. She expressed positive views on Buddhism and criticized those who "missed seeing what is true and wise in the doctrine of Buddha because they preferred to observe it from the standpoint and in the attitude of an antagonist, rather than of an inquirer:"[34]

> The renascence of Buddhism sought to eliminate from the arrogant and impious pantheisms of Egypt, India, and Greece a simple and pure philosophy, upholding virtue as man's greatest good and highest reward. It taught that the only object worthy of his noblest aspirations was to render the soul (itself an emanation from God) fit to be absorbed back again into the Divine essence from which it sprang. The single aim, therefore, of pure Buddhism seems to have been to rouse men to an inward contemplation of the divinity of their own nature; to fix their thoughts on the spiritual life within as the only real and true life; to teach them to disregard all earthly distinctions,

[31] Ibid., 109.
[32] Ibid., 109.
[33] Ibid., 110.
[34] Ibid., 186.

> conditions, privileges, enjoyments, privations, sorrows, sufferings; and thus to incite them to continual efforts in the direction of the highest ideals of patience, purity, self-denial.[35]

In a later passage in the same chapter, Anna recounted an episode when she was to have an audience with the King. She followed the page and "traversed the long, low passages that separate the cells of the priests, the weird sound of voices, chanting the hymns of the Buddhist liturgy, fell upon [her] ears."[36] She continued and described: "the darkness, the loneliness, the measured monotone, distant and dreamy, all was most romantic and exciting, even to a matter-of-fact English woman like myself." It is curious how she seemingly conflicted herself here by emphasizing that she identified herself as a rational English woman yet could not help but to be drawn to appreciate the allure of Buddhism, an oriental religion that was so seemingly different from Christianity, and specifically, Protestantism that she so closely associated her identity with.

However, there was indeed a connection between Protestantism and "the renascence of Buddhism" or "pure Buddhism" like Anna termed. As Thongchai Winichakul points out, the reform of the Siamese Buddhism was an active religious and intellectual movement similar to contemporary reform movements in Sri Lanka and Burma, which he coins as the rationalization of Buddhism[37] and is also called "Protestant Buddhism" by Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere.[38] In Thai historiography, this "successful reform of Buddhism is largely attributed to the intellectual prowess and vision of Rama IV [King Mongkut]."[39] The reformists advocated a "rational interpretation of Buddhist teachings," "denounced Hindu-Buddhist cosmography and teachings that tried to explain the universe and the natural world," and incorporated modern scientific knowledge to the understanding and interpretation of Buddhism.[40] In the meantime, as reminded by Patrick Jory, orientalist scholars in the nineteenth century judged that indigenous cultural traditions of European colonies needed to be freed from "cultural accretion, pollution, and superstition, which had

[35] Ibid., 185.
[36] Ibid., 200.
[37] Thongchai Winichakul, "Buddhist Apologetics and a Genealogy of Comparative Religion in Siam," *Numen*, 62(1), 77.
[38] Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Tranformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka* (Delhi: Motilai Banasidass Publishers, 1990), chapter 6.
[39] Thongchai Winichakul, Buddhist Apologetics," 77.
[40] Ibid.

obscured the original message."[41] Thus, while the West imposed the idea of "rationalization" of religions on the colonies, especially concerning Buddhism in South and Southeast Asia, Siam reformed its Buddhism yet along with the way the West was doing. Anna's standpoint on Buddhism coincided with the contemporary discourse circulating in the British Empire and its networks. Her "approval" of Buddhism, on the one hand, implies that she conformed to her contemporary orientalist discourse, on the other, invoked and sharpened her Protestant "matter-of-fact" identity.

British Supremacy

Although Siam was never colonized by any European powers, it did accept the terms entailed by a treaty concluded with the British. Sir John Bowring, the then Her Britannic Majesty Queen Victoria's plenipotentiary in Siam, in 1855 negotiated this treaty of commerce with the Siamese government. In this treaty extraterritorial rights were granted to British subjects on Siamese soil, exempting them from the jurisdiction of Siamese laws, thus, providing the British subjects in Siam a somewhat privileged status.[42]

Anna Leonowens certainly made great use of this rights. In fact, she invoked the "supremacy" of the British Consul several times to protect her interests. Her supposed, or at least, self-claimed British identity gave her a powerful tool with which she could maneuver her way around the royal court and in daily life. The first example can be seen as early as when she was still temporarily lodging at the Prime Minister's residence. Unaware of the situation of the Siamese harem, Moonshee, Anna's Persian teacher, mistakenly intruded into the space of the Prime Minister's favorite lady of the harem. He was dragged to an inquisition, ordered to be stripped and beaten. Although the interpreter that Anna had sent earlier was already present, he refused to intervene. Having lost the last bit of her patience, Anna went straight up to the judge, telling him that should any lash was laid on Moonshee's back, the judge shall suffer tenfold of the punishment, for she would take this matter directly to the British Consul.[43]

---

[41] Patrick Jory, "Thai and Western Buddhist Scholarship in the Age of Colonialism: King Chulalongkorn Redefines the Jatakas," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 61, No. 3 (August 2002), 892.
[42] Hong Lysa, "'Stranger within the Gates': Knowing Semi-Colonial Siam as Extraterritorials," Modern Asian Studies 38, 2 (2004), 327-354.
[43] Ibid, 23.

Anna recorded the reaction of the Siamese crowd after she utilized the powerful weapon of invoking the name of the British Consul:

> Though I spoke in English, he caught the familiar words "British Consul," and turning to the interpreter, demanded the explanation he should have listened to before he pronounced sentence. But even as the interpreter was jabbering away to the unreasonable functionary, the assembly was agitated with what the French term a "sensation." Judge, interpreter, and all fell upon their faces, doubling themselves up; and there stood the Premier, who took in the situation at a glance, ordered Moonshee to be released, and permitted him at my request to retire to the room allotted to Beebe.[44]

As a British subject in Siam, Anna felt proud and empowered. By simply being British, she could wield power granted to her through the treaty and, by extension, the British might and supremacy to negotiate, to make demands, and to defend her interests. A sense of national belonging must have been awakened, and Anna felt more British than she ever had been.

Another instance was when Moonshee got ruthlessly beaten by the henchmen of the Prime Minister's half-brother on the ground of refusal to bow down before him. The same night, as Anna was sitting in the piazza of her house, she was struck by a large stone on the head. As soon as she recovered in the following morning, she sent someone to the Prime Minister's secretary and warned him: "if a repetition of the outrage already perpetrated upon members of my household should be attempted from any quarter, I would at once take refuge at the British Consulate, and lodge a complaint against the government of Siam."[45] Here were menaces made in the name of the British Consulate. And it worked. The secretary returned the next day with "copies of a proclamation in the Siamese language, signed by his Excellency, to the effect that persons found injuring or in any way molesting any member of [her] household should be severely punished."[46] The national component of Anna's identity was strengthened and boosted by the power of the British Empire stealthily creeping into the

[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid., 127.
[46] Ibid.

Kingdom of Siam. Anna blended it with the Victorian culture of her time whose "organizing principle was a sense of national and racial superiority based on Britain's imperial status."[47]

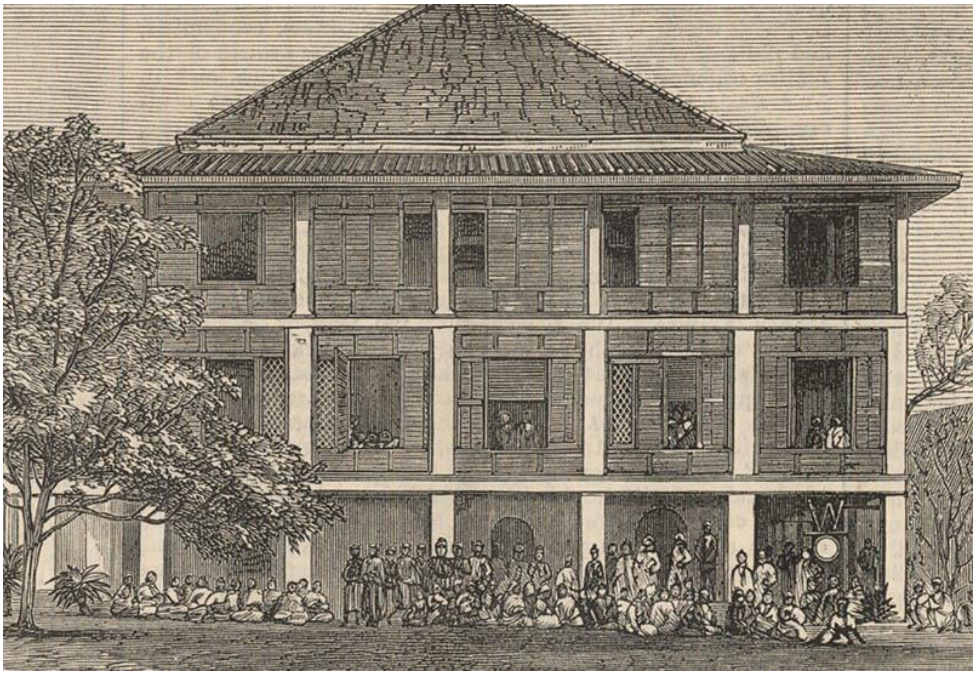

Figure 2.3 The sketch of the British Consulate in Bangkok on *The Illustrated London News* in 1853. Silpa Wattanatham.

More examples of British supremacy can be observed from the King's plan to reform the government, education, and architecture. Soon after the coronation of the King, he expressed "his earnest desire to administer his government after the model of the limited monarchy of England; and to introduce schools, where the Siamese youth might be well taught in the English language and literature and the sciences of Europe."[48] The King also erected a new palace modeled after Windsor Castle, which demonstrated his preference for English architecture. Moreover, the post of harbormaster of Bangkok was conferred to an English gentleman. Being assured of British primacy and influence, Anna purposefully reminded readers that "it is to be remembered, however, in justice to the British Consul-General in Siam, Mr. Thomas George Knox, that the sure though silent influence was his,

[47] Antoinette M. Burton, "The White Women's Burden, British Feminists and the Indian Women, 1865-1915," *Women's Studies International Forum* 13, no. 4 (1990): 295.
[48] Anna Leonowens, *The English Governess at the Siamese Court*, 242.

whereby the minds of the king and the prime minster were led to appreciate the benefits that must accrue from these foreign innovations."[49]

Anna's identity was complex and multilayered. On top of the invented identity that she carried since she left Singapore for Bangkok, various aspects of her identity were further reinforced through her encounters with the Siamese "others." Upon entering Siam, she already started to discover her preferred personalities in terms of animals and, by extension, peoples, through her observation of the dogs on the steamer. After being "saved" and later welcomed into the house of the British B couple, and surrounded by all sort of familiarities, she came to appreciate the Britishness of her identity, accentuating the national and racial components of her identity. When she later came into close contact with the practice of slavery and the general treatment of women in the royal palace, she expressed her repulsion to the institution of slavery and lamented the suffering of women in the Harem. Her moral element of the identity based on liberal and humanistic beliefs was further strengthened. While the religious component of her identity based on Christianity was already reaffirmed through her contact with oriental polygamy, it got pronounced more clearly as she learned more about Buddhism in Siam. Her views on Buddhism aligned with those of her contemporary orientalist scholars who believed that there should be a rationalization of indigenous cultural practices. As she witnessed a "purer" sect of Buddhism being practiced in Siam after the reform, it invoked a deeper sense of belonging to Protestantism and confirmed the religious element of her identity. Continuing to imply her identity, she gave numerous examples demonstrating the might and superiority of the British Empire, bolstering a proud affiliation to Britishness, mirroring a strong political and cultural attachment to the Empire, reflecting in turn the national and political elements of her identity.

[49] Ibid., 246.

Chapter III

Life beyond the Empire: Transgressing Boundaries

In an introduction attached in Anna Leonowens's *The Romance of the Harem*, Susan Morgan suggests something very thought-provoking:

> What can be sure of is that this Victorian woman [Anna Leonowens] in her early thirties found herself in the amazing and utterly unique position of moving daily between two normally inaccessible spheres: the female world of some of the most powerless people in Siam and the world of the one most powerful person in Siam, who in the 1860s still ruled by divine right. And in certain limited ways she became the confidante, and the advisor, to teach.[1]

Nang Harm (the harem of the royal concubines) was "the female world" to which Morgan refers. In Anna's account, she described it as a place where "… no man is permitted to enter, except only the King, and the priests [Buddhist monks], who are admitted every morning under guard, in order that the inmates may perform the sacred duty of giving alms."[2] Besides the King and prominent monks, Anna was the only one who gained privilege in access to this royal harem and experienced the everyday life of Siamese royal concubines and their slaves in this forbidden sphere. Literally, *Nang Harm* in Thai means the forbidden mistress. In this regard, Anna transgressed the Siamese traditional boundary limited to a small group of palace personnel. It would be therefore interesting to look at Anna's experience through Homi Bhabha's use of the concept of liminality. For Bhabha, liminality and hybridity intertwine with and complement each other. The liminal space is an "interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy."[3] Anna's position in the royal palace and her experience beyond the British Empire corresponds to this definition. In addition to the royal harem, she was also allowed as an English teacher to enter the court, a place where dignitaries, all of whom were men, participated in politics with the King. In this sphere where

[1] Susan Morgan, "Introduction," in Anna Leonowens, *The Romance of the Harem* (Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1991), xx.
[2] Anna Leonowens, *The Romance of the Harem*, 13.
[3] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 4.

most of the women were passively subjugated and silenced by men, she had her voice heard, and her worldviews even influenced the "one most powerful person in Siam."

As born in the British Empire, she also transgressed the boundaries of the Victorian culture and the Empire. She was a widow and a working mother. She talked about politics. She was not kept behind closed doors at "home" or within the Empire. Considering these two areas—Siam and the British Empire—where she had a lived experience, the Kingdom and the Empire could not restrict her within the conventional boundaries. This chapter will discuss Anna's identity in comparison with conventional women in Siam and the Victorian ideal of women in Britain, and compare her worldview on the subject of slavery with the British imperial man like John Bowring (1792-1872), a British plenipotentiary in Siam and the Governor of Hong Kong, who came to witness a slavery system in Siam.

Anna and Siamese Women

> I had drawn quite near to Tuptim when she began her simple narrative, and was so much absorbed in attention to what she said, and in admiration of the fearlessness as well as of the beauty and majesty of that little figure, that I had remained rooted to the spot, standing there mechanically, and hardly noting what was going on around me. But the effect of that reply was startling; it brought me suddenly to my senses and to a full appreciation of the scene before me.[4]

This is what Anna set down in her account when she witnessed the trial held in the Siamese palace to convict Tuptim, one of the King's concubines, of alleged adultery that she had committed with Balat, a monk who had been sometimes invited to preach and receive alms in the Harem. Tuptim, also one of her students, impressed Anna because she was to her "a proud, heroic woman."[5] Anna admired the "fearlessness as well as … the beauty and majesty" of her.[6] The judges ordered to punish her by stripping and flogging her thirty times. When the first blow descended on her bare shoulders, Anna felt the pain as it was descending on

[4] Anna Leonowens, *The Romance of the Harem*, 32.
[5] Ibid., 27.
[6] Ibid., 32.

hers. She even forgot that "[she] was a stranger and a foreigner there, and as powerless as the weakest of the oppressed around me."[7]

This might be congruous and also contradictory to what Gayatri Spivak has argued. White women, in Spivak's argument, wrote books that constructed indigenous or foreign women by, at the same time, constructing themselves. By doing so, white women—carrying with them baggage of imperialism and a sense of superiority—had their voice heard through the speechlessness of other women.[8] It is justified that Anna constructed herself via writing about Siamese slave women and royal concubines in the Harem. However, it is not that she felt herself on higher ground in terms of womanhood (and motherhood) than those in the Harem. This agrees with what Susan Morgan states: "The most salient relations these tales [in the Harem] represent between the narrator [Anna] and the women are when the narrator speaks not simply for them, a stereotypical imperial rhetorical stance, but actually as them."[9] Anna and Tuptim shared similar traits. Both of them transgressed the conventional boundaries demarcated in their own space and time. While Anna was idiosyncratic vis-à-vis the Victorian ideal of a woman, Tuptim contravened the ideal of being a Siamese palace woman and even of any Siamese woman in general.

During the early nineteenth century, the economic and socio-cultural changes had transformed Bangkok into a bourgeois society in which people—both men and women—began to behave and think in bourgeois ways.[10] Women, as a prominent Thai historian Nidhi Eoseewong argues, had more determination in choosing their own destiny. *Suphasit son ying* (Sayings for the instruction of ladies), written by a Thai poet Sunthon Phu during the early nineteenth century, reflected this new mentality of the women. These sayings guided women on how to select a partner in marriage. One of the sayings goes:

> Think about yourself. Finding a husband is hard. / Many men are bad. Do not fall for them. / Those who smoke opium or drink liquor will bring ruin. / Women living with them will become poor. /

[7] Ibid., 32-33.

[8] Gayatri Spivak's classic essays on this topic are "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism, *Critical Inquiry* 12 (Autumn, 1985): pp. 243-261; and "Can the Subaltern Speak? Speculations on Widow Sacrifice," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271-313. Cited in Susan Morgan, *Place Matters: Gendered Geography in Victorian Women's Travel Books about Southeast Asia* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 256.

[9] Susan Morgan, *Place Matters*, 258.

[10] See Nidhi Eoseewong, *Pen and Sail: Literature and History in Early Bangkok* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2005).

> They will take your money and beat you. / It's like keeping a monitor lizard as a pet—useless. … Having a bad husband makes everything difficult. / Life becomes so burdensome. Do not fall prey.[11]

As seen, women in *Suphasit son ying* were able to "think about [herself]." Her own volition could prevent a woman from living with a wrong husband who would be a patriarchal tyrant and ruin a wife's economic status.

Unfortunately, Tuptim was not a common woman. She was one of the King's concubines and was a member of his royal harem. The bourgeois poetry *Suphasit son ying* could not be applied there. Tuptim was, however, supposed to follow the instruction given in *Kritsana son nong khamchan* (Krishna's instruction of her younger sister).[12] This literary work was an adaptation of an existing text, which can be traced back to the period before Bangkok, Ayutthaya (1350 to 1767), during the reign of King Borommakot (1733 to 1758). The Bangkok version still faithfully followed the storyline of the older version, aiming to instruct girls and women within the *sakdina* (feudal-like) environment. These instructions taught women nothing but how to be good wives, and ready, at all times, to serve and respect their husbands: "A king is the head / Of a big realm with extensive territory. / A husband is the light and the protector / With supreme authority over [his] women."[13] Interestingly, *Kritsana son nong khamchan* compares a husband of a household as a king of a country. According to this analogy, a wife had to submit herself to her husband's authority unconditionally in any way. Unfortunately, for Tuptim, a king and a "husband" were the same person for her. Thus, eloping with her lover was considered as severely deprecating the authority of the "husband" and committing treason to the King. Such an infringement led Tuptim and her lover to be sentenced to death by fire. This horrifying incident made Anna "completely exhausted and worn out … shudder, as if [she] were entombed alive."[14]

---

[11] Ibid., 189.

[12] *Kritsana son nong khamchan* has various editions and each was composed under various circumstances. The oldest version emerged during the reign of King Borommakot of Ayutthaya (1733-1758). Later, it was recomposed during King Taksin's reign (1767-1782) after the fall of Ayutthaya. The version used in this thesis was composed by Prince Paramanuchit Chinorot (1790-1853), the Supreme Patriarch and a son of King Rama I who had founded Bangkok as a capital city. The story in *Kritsana son nong khamchan* was based on Hindu epic poem *Mahabharata* when the two princesses (Draupadi and Satyabhama) were talking to each other about how to win the favor of the princes. Kritsana here is not the male Hindu deity Krishna, but a Thai-Sanskrit name for a woman.

[13] Ibid., 188-189.

[14] Anna Leonowens, *The Romance of the Harem*, 39.

Likewise, Anna did not fit the conventional Victorian definition of women. Victorian women were stereotypically expected to be "kept" at home, though not as sexual slaves like those in the Siamese royal harem but as household managers. Manuals and instructions of domestic affairs for women were very popular during this time. One of them was Isabella Beeton's *Book of Household Management,* which sold 60,000 copies in its first year of publication in 1861.[15] In the book, Beeton, in the very first chapter, compared women as "the Commander of an Army, or the leader of an enterprise … so will her domestics follow in her path."[16] Although a household was in authority of a woman, her relationship with other male members in the house was not based on equality. Beeton borrowed a quotation from the novel *The Vicar of Wakefield* by Oliver Goldsmith to stress the subordinate role of a woman as a wife to her male family members. It suggested that a wife "makes her husband and her children happy, who reclaims the one from vice and trains up the other to virtue."[17] The overpowering Victorian gender hierarchy emerged from a context of the Industrial Revolution. The new characteristics of the production process hinged on the division of labor, specialization, and concentration of economic production outside the home. In this process, as demonstrated by Sudesh Vaid, "the function of the family became simultaneously narrowed as well as specialised."[18] In addition, Catherine Hall argues that the Victorian domestic ideology was initiated by the Evangelical movement in Britain between 1780 and 1820—the time when Anna's grandfather was born and lived (see Chapter 1). Though religious in essence, the Evangelical movement also reacted to the change brought by the Industrial Revolution. Well-to-do women forwent their employment because of new existing material conditions. The Evangelicals were thus very concerned about the position of these women: "how were these women, with their new-found wealth and time, to behave?" They believed that a proper religious life and morality began at home.[19] These conditions put women and men in different spheres. While men were responsible for the economic

[15] Elizabeth Langland, "Nobody's Angels: Domestic Ideology and Middle-Class Women in the Victorian Novel," *PMLA*, Vol. 107, No. 2 (March 1992), 293.
[16] Isabella Beeton, *Book of Household Management* (London: Warwick House, Salisbury Square, E.C., 1888), 1.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Sudesh Vaid, "Ideologies on Women in Nineteenth Century Britain, 1850s-70s" *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol XX, No. 43 Review of Women Studies (October 1985): 63.
[19] Catherine Hall, "The Early Formation of Victorian Domestic Ideology," in Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 75-93.

wherewithal and public affairs, engaging in the public sphere; women were for domestics and physical comfort, nurturance, and morality at home, remaining in the private/domestic sphere.[20] Darwin's theory of biological evolution developed during this period also reaffirmed the gender hierarchy between men and women. It was believed that women developed the qualities of tenderness and unselfishness which extended toward her "fellow creature" or men, and, because of sexual and natural selection, men ultimately became superior to women.[21]

In the British colony of Jamaica, Victorian discourses were also embedded in the education system. Throughout the nineteenth century, as the social circumstance in Jamaica deteriorated, one section of the population, Afro-Jamaican indigenous children, was socially and culturally left behind. The British colonial government initiated the school system to educate and mold these "future of the colony" to be good colonial citizens.[22] The educational system in the colonial Jamaica was also based on the separation of spheres between men and women. While boys were recruited into the industrial school, all girls received training to be domestic servants by working in the kitchen and the laundry room. These educational activities reinforced the idea that "women determined the tone of family life" as they had to be the moral and civilizing guides for their children.[23]

In British India, Anna, too, attended the colonial educational system based on gender-segregated education when she was young. In the early 1840s, she enrolled in the girls' school at Byculla (a neighborhood in Mumbai nowadays) which belonged to the Bombay Education Society.[24] As reminded by Alfred Habegger, the mission of the Society "was to ensure that biracial children whose fathers had died or returned to Britain were raised as Christians and Europeans and given vocational training."[25] Girls and boys were kept in separate schools, disciplined in "spartan" ways. While the girls learned to read, write, and cipher, and were trained to do needlework, the boys were trained and controlled in even

[20] Sudesh Vaid, "Ideologies on Women," 64.
[21] Ibid., 66.
[22] Shani Roper, "Creating Good Colonial Citizens: Industrial Schools and Reformatories in Victorian Jamaica," in Tim Barringer and Wayne Modest (eds.), *Victorian Jamaica* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2018), 190-208.
[23] Ibid., 195.
[24] Alfred Habegger, *Masked: The Life of Anna Leonowens, Schoolmistress at the Court of Siam* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), 42.
[25] Ibid, 34.

more spartan manner.[26] Habegger further examines the future of these interracial girls and pointed out that most of these girls, after reaching adulthood, were "disposed of by marriage, or with due consideration … restored to their friends."[27] The main objectives of colonial education can be clearly seen: to keep the interracial kids from local cultural and religious influence, to impose British ideals onto them, and, more importantly, to enforce gender segregation and shape the girls to become good domestic help. Therefore, there is no doubt that Anna learned the Victorian norms and values as much as all girls in other colonies or the metropole through reading and religious teachings. However, her experience in Siam shows that these Victorian discourses did not have their way much on Anna

Anna estranged from Victorian expectations. Temporally Anna and Beeton were born around the same time in the 1830s. Spatially, while Beeton was born in London, Anna grew up in the British colony in India and moved across the Empire. Her marriage also did not last long, as pointed out in the first chapter, because her husband died in the Straits Settlements (or British Malaya) in 1859. Instead of mourning in a Victorian black dress, she had to continue her life on her own with a six-year-old son. She pursued her teaching business in British Singapore and was eventually given the opportunity to continue her pedagogical career in Siam. Seeing her in this regard, she was never kept at "home"—both in a sense of a household and the British Empire.

Her idiosyncrasy as a woman made the Siamese Prime Minister question and compare her with other Siamese women. While petitioning to the King about her home in Bangkok, in the meantime Anna settled down to her "Oriental studies" and improved her Thai language. When the Prime Minister paid a visit to her at her temporary accommodation, he expressed his curiosity about her behavior as a woman. He asked Anna with his way of speaking English: "Siamese lady no like work; love play, love sleep. Why you no love play?"[28] His question to Anna implies the perception of Siamese men toward women, especially those in the Harem, who were kept behind closed doors. Those Siamese women, as seen through the patriarchal eyes, did not have to "work" but only to "play" and "sleep." In this respect,

[26] Ibid, 35.
[27] Ibid, 36.
[28] Anna Leonowens, *The English Governess at the Siamese Court*, 71.

Anna was a different kind of woman, either in the Siamese or Victorian sense. Tuptim was also clearly an unconventional woman upon which Anna was able to reflect herself.

Tuptim was not only a self-reflection to Anna as being an atypical, intelligent, and courageous woman. In *The Romance of the Harem*, several more women imprinted Anna with their tough, determined, and lionhearted experiences. L'ore, a Muslim slave girl, "expressed herself so well" and "manifested [her] gentleness and resignation that she completely won [Anna's] affection and pity."[29] May-Peah, with her wit and ultimate loyalty, had silenced herself to protect her mistress's escape from the Harem. This incident made Anna "tear [herself] away from her" because she was "proud to be loved by her, and heart-broken to think that she would never speak again."[30] Boon, a slave girl who helped an unconventional concubine elope with her lover and later was punished for her faithfulness to her mistress, made Anna hurry back home and write down her story word for word "as nearly as [she] could."[31] These women, as she declared, were her "ill-fated sisters."[32] However unfortunate, these "outwardly powerless women"[33] were truly powerful within the domestic sphere for Anna's eyes.

Anna and the Separation of Spheres

As stated above, Victorian women were supposed to remain in the private sphere at home. Women were not allowed to roam freely in the public sphere without a permission or authority of men. Thus, the separation of spheres was crucial in the Victorian norm of gender. Anna understood this separation too well but did not act much accordingly to its command. When she arrived in Siam, the very first thing she needed to get settled was to find a house to separate herself from work when she was off her duty. However, the Siamese authorities failed to find her a proper house and wanted to keep her in the palace instead. She in turn lamented and insisted on having a house of her own so she could have her own "privacy and

[29] Anna Leonowens, *The Romance of the Harem*, 50.
[30] Ibid., 201.
[31] Ibid., 144.
[32] Anna Leonowens, *The English Governess at the Siamese Court*, 103.
[33] Morgan, *Place Matters*, 261.

home."[34] Once she sought an interview with the Prime Minister, she told him that it was "impossible … for [her] and [her] child to lodge within the walls of the Grand Palace." Her "objection to the palace, as a place of residence as well as of business, seemed to strike him as reasonable enough."[35] As seen from her words, she perceived the Siamese palace as her workplace, not home. In this respect, she separated her private and public domains explicitly. In the end, a "tolerable house" was eventually procured for her child and servants.[36]

Even though the demarcation of spheres was clear for Anna, she was not entirely retained in one or another because, using Susan Morgan's words, she had a "unique position of moving daily" between the public and private spheres. At first, the King wanted to keep her in the palace because she was considered a servant of the royal household. When she confronted with the King and discussed this matter, the King advanced with rage, "you are our servant; and it is our pleasure that you must live in this palace, and—*you shall obey*. … you *shall* live in palace … you *shall* live in palace!"[37] Determined as she was, the loud and clear command of the Siamese King could not stop her from insisting on finding a place to live outside the palace walls. This also illustrates the conflicting ideas toward space separation related to genders between Anna and the King of Siam. The King perceived the Grand Palace as the private sphere and perceived Anna as one of domestic servants who should be kept within such space. Anna, on the contrary, perceived the palace as a workplace that should be separated from home or the private sphere. Even if they viewed the palace in the same way as home, Anna, undoubtedly, would not appreciate being only conserved to such space because she, as were other women in her writing, was not that kind of woman. She did not crumble the separation of two spheres, but she believed in herself that she was suitable to both. In almost every morning, she traveled to the palace, her public sphere, to work at a place where only a very small group of people was allowed in; in the evening, once finished with her teaching, she went back to her private sphere where she could relieve herself from arduous work at the palace.

[34] Anna Leonowens, *The English Governess at the Siamese Court*, 68.
[35] Ibid., 67.
[36] Ibid., 73.
[37] Ibid., 65.

Figure 3.1 King Mongkut in his coronation apparel. Paisarn Piemmettawat, "Siam through the Lens of John Thomson 1865-1866: A Photo Essay," *Journal of the Siam Society*, Vol. 103 (2015): 135.

Furthermore, her presence in the Siamese public sphere did not involve only teaching the King's children and wives in the Harem but also the Siamese public political affairs as she was of secretarial help to the King. The King often asked Anna to rephrase and correct his English wording and grammar when he wrote letters that were to be delivered to other nations, especially Britain that had international business relations with Siam. This work "with translating, correcting, copying, dictating, reading" made Anna had "hardly a moment [she] could call [her] own."[38] This secretarial task with the King brought her into the world of Siamese international politics. She might have advised the King on how to deal with

[38] Ibid., 270.

various European powers that at the time tried to subjugate Siam to their terms. The advice would not be merely on policy matters but rather on European customs and attitudes.[39]

Her role as the King's secretary had given her power to influence his decision-making to a certain extent. She explicitly wrote that her influence would put her in danger among Siamese dignitaries: "I had everything, too, to fear from the jealousy with which certain royal courtiers and judges watched my previously growing influence at court."[40] She might have deduced her situation from a historical case in seventeenth-century Siam. In *The English Governess at the Siamese Court*, she took up several pages narrating about the Greek adventurer Constantine Phaulkon (1647-1688) who had become a significant counselor to King Narai of Ayutthaya (1632-1688, r. 1656-1688). Interestingly, King Narai was an icon similar to King Mongkut in Thai historiography as the two kings had a similar interest in European science and technology.[41] After Anna introduced Phaulkon to the readers and provided some biographical facts, she went on that "Phaulkon, by his address, and skillful management of public affairs, continued to exercise paramount influence over the mind of the king."[42] His influence and rewards from the King, said Anna, "soon provoked their jealous murmurings against him and his too partial master [King Narai]."[43] In the end, he was put to death by one of the Siamese dignitaries, who later proclaimed himself as the next king of Siam, establishing a new ruling dynasty. Phaulkon's story must have cautioned her to balance her sway at court. Otherwise, the price that she had to pay for transgressing Siamese conventional boundaries might be too high.

However, there has been a debate about her influence at the Siamese court. Prince Damrong Rajanubhab, one of King Mongkut's sons, once said that Anna was a liar; she made up her story about her influence at court to sell to the public because she needed money to raise her children.[44] In the twentieth century, several Western scholars of Siam, such as A. B. Griswold and W. S. Bristowe, also denounced her writings as a fantasy and a fraud.[45]

---

[39] Morgan, *Place Matters*, 238-239.
[40] Anna Leonowens, *The Romance of the Harem*, 145.
[41] Ian Hodges, "Western Science in Siam: A Tale of Two Kings," *Osiris*, Vol. 13, Beyond Joseph Needham: Science, Technology, and Medicine in East and Southeast Asia (1998): 80-95.
[42] Anna Leonowens, *The English Governess at the Siamese Court*, 36.
[43] Ibid., 38.
[44] Pramin Khruathong, "Anna Leonowens Khrai wa lon tolae? [Anna Leonowens, who said she is a liar?]," *Silpawattanatham*, https://www.silpa-mag.com/history/article_3026.
[45] Morgan, "Introduction," x-xi.

Nevertheless, Pramin Khruathong, a Thai writer, shows one of the letters written by King Mongkut to Anna that she and the King of Siam had talked about politics, especially concerning the matter of slavery, and the King was influenced to some extent by Anna's wit and her political opinions.[46]

Within the British Empire, regarding the separation of public and private spheres, an interesting example can be seen from Lady Dufferin, Harriet Blackwood (1843-1936), who was the wife of Lord Dufferin, the Viceroy of India from 1884 to 1888. In her capacity as the Viceroy's wife, she had to serve in both private and public spheres. While she had to maintain her role as a good Victorian wife and mother, she also had to be present at or participate in numerous political and social events.[47] Besides hosting events and dinner parties at a residence, already blurring the line between private and public spheres, Lady Dufferin also took up a public and official role, sometimes representing her husband, sometimes on her own. When her husband was not present, Lady Dufferin received important guests such as the Maharajah of Jeypore on behalf of her husband; she also visited local schools and hospitals, presenting prizes and raising funds.[48] Although there was flexibility in Victorian woman's life in overseas colonies like India, blurring the lines of private and public spheres, as exemplified by Lady Dufferin, her role was still very much constructed upon the Victorian ideal of womanhood, as she was closely tied to her husband, providing help and supporting the public role of her husband, and being a good wife and mother. But Anna in Siam was all by herself.

Anna and Imperial Men

One of Anna's explicit political views that has been thrilling Thai history so far was her statements about slavery. Both of her writings about Siam strong criticism of Siamese slavery either in the form of slaves per se or concubines retained in the royal harem. In *The English Governess at the Siamese Court*, she put that she "never looked upon the sickening

[46] Pramin, "Anna Leonowens Khrai wa lon tolae?."
[47] Katie Wernecke, "Across the Empire: British Women's Travel Writing and Women's Place in the British Imperial Project during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century" (Master thesis, Florida Atlantic University, 2013), 89-91.
[48] Ibid., 95-97 and 99.

hideousness of slavery till I encountered its features here" in Siam.[49] Reading along the grain leads one to surmise that her Siamese experience changed how she conceived of slavery. Nevertheless, in *The Romance of the Harem*, she stated that "now, to tell the truth, as I was treasonably disposed against slavery and polygamy and several other gross abuses that grew out of them, and had stoutly set my face against them from the very first day of my installation as teacher in the palace."[50] In this writing, she claimed that she already had a preoccupation against slavery on the first day of her arrival in Siam.

Anna's life before Siam can probably shed light more on this aspect. As has been addressed in the previous chapters, even before she traveled to Singapore, Anna might have known Stowe's abolitionist novel already when she was in India and Australia. Later when she was in Singapore, she acquainted with Mr. and Mrs. Cobb who lived next door to her house. The couple introduced American literary works, abolitionist ideas, and liberal values to her. These incidents indicate that Anna was clearly aware of and, to a certain degree, acknowledged abolitionist novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Thus, I argue here that her views against slavery and her identity based on abolitionist and liberal beliefs had been gradually formulated before Siam. However, her feelings toward slavery had not been so intense until she came to directly experience it in Siam. Such heightened feelings are, however, very different from her contemporary Victorian British "compatriots."

When she became a governess at the Siamese court, as claimed by her writing, she introduced Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to her pupils. One of her students was called "Sonn Klean" which can be translated as Hidden Perfume. She recounted that Hidden Perfume's favorite book was *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; that she "would read it over and over again, though she knew all the characters by heart, and spoke of them as if she had known them all her life."[51] This novel, notably, encouraged Hidden Perfume to become like Harriet Beecher Stowe and not to "buy human bodies again, but only to let go free once more, and so [she has] now no more slaves, but hired servants."[52] It is no coincidence that she laid out the chapter about the story of Hidden Perfume to be next to the chapters about slavery in Siam and the subsequent

[49] Anna Leonowens, *The English Governess at the Siamese Court*, 104.
[50] Anna Leonowens, *The Romance of the Harem*, 180.
[51] Ibid., 248.
[52] Ibid., 249.

reign of King Chulalongkorn who was one of her favorite disciples and would abolish the Siamese system of slavery.[53]

Figure 3.2 King Mongkut and Prince Chulalongkorn. Wikimedia.

Anna's opinions on the matter of slavery were completely different from one of imperial men who served under and benefitted from the British Empire. In his account about Siam, John Bowring—the then governor of Hong Kong and the diplomat who had negotiated a trade agreement with the Siamese King, as also discussed in the previous chapter, which belittled the sovereignty of Siam—expressed his opinion about the Siamese slavery system in a positive way that "[he] saw few examples of harshness in the treatment of slaves: they are generally cheerful, amusing themselves with songs and jokes while engaged in their various toils." [54] He, furthermore, cited the observation on the Siamese slavery by "a

[53] Ibid., 257-270.

[54] Sir John Bowring, F.R.S., *The Kingdom and People of Siam* (London: John W. Parker and Son, West Strand, 1857), 124.

gentleman resident at Bangkok"[55] who had furnished to him with that "[the Siamese slavery] cannot … be considered as slavery in the European sense of the word."[56] The "gentlemen resident" went on to say "in small families, the Siamese slaves are treated like the children of the master."[57] The positive view on the Siamese slave system in Bowring's account was not much different from the apologists of slavery in America who depicted black slaves singing happily on plantations and being well taken care of by their sympathetic masters.[58] The benevolent view on slavery also circulated within the Empire during the era of emancipation. The proslavery idea during this time pointed out that slaves were peasants. One of the alleged observations illustrated that "slaves are the best clothed, best fed, the most cheerful and contented peasantry in the world."[59]

Anna's view on slavery greatly differed from other men within the Empire. In the Empire, she was exposed to American abolitionism. In Siam, the time she spent here also coincided with the years of the American Civil War. The topic of slavery was continually under public discussion among Europeans, Americans, Asians as far away as Southeast Asia.[60] In Siam, American missionaries were people who received firsthand news of the American Civil War.[61] The War thus must have not been away from Anna's awareness. Anna was continuously sympathetic toward Siamese women and slaves. Her femininity escaped the Victorian (and also Siamese) boundaries and the Empire, and universally encompassed all women and subjugated men. As expected by men in the Empire, women had to be "the angel in the house" who had to please men and subscribed to their masculinity.[62] But Anna was, using Elizabeth Langland's words,[63] nobody's angels.

[55] Ibid., 189.
[56] Ibid., 193.
[57] Ibid., 194.
[58] Susan Morgan, *Place Matters*, 251.
[59] Padraic X. Scanlan, "Slaves and Pe asants in the Era of Emancipation," *Journal of British Studies* 59 (July 2020), 510.
[60] Susan Morgan, *Place Matters*, 244.
[61] William F. Strobridge and Anita Hibler, *Elephants for Mr. Lincoln: American Civil War-era Diplomacy in Southeast Asia* (Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2006), 3.
[62] Coventry Patmore, *The Angel in the House* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1863), 109.
[63] Elizabeth Langland, "Nobody's Angels," 290-304.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored the life of Anna Leonowens up to her experience in Siam (1862-1867) and her identity construction during her years working as a governess of the children and wives of King Mongkut. Meanwhile, Anna's experience has been compared with her contemporary Victorian women and imperial men of the British Empire. The sources used in this thesis are two books that she wrote, documenting and narrating her years in Siam: *The English Governess at the Siamese Court* (1870) and *The Romance of the Harem* (1873). A woman of British-and-Indian mixed origin, who lived her teenage years in British India, was educated in the colonial girl school, and later led an adventurous and illustrious life within various colonies of the Empire, broke free from many boundaries, and carved out her own path. She transcended the limits of colonial interracial descendant, Victorian ideal of a woman in and beyond the Empire, and imperial personnel who benefitted from the structures of the imperial project.

The first chapter takes a look at all the crucial points throughout her life before her appointment as the royal governess of the Siamese monarch, providing a general overview of how she came to formulate her basic ideas on different cultures, how she utilized her general knowledge and developed a career in education, how she absorbed new ideas and formed a new identity, and how she came across the opportunity that led to her employment by the Siamese king.

However, as she embarked on this new chapter of her life with hope and prospect, the reality turned out to be quite hard to cope with. The second chapter examined her life in Siam with a critical approach, focusing on her negotiation with the surroundings, accumulation of a clearer self-awareness in terms of the various elements that consisted of her identity. By experiencing life in a foreign country, especially one that was not under the rule of Imperial Britain compared to her previous stays throughout the different British colonies, her ideas, moral convictions, and beliefs were confronted with those of the "others," leading her to appreciate and take pride in those components of her identity, reflecting and making clear her identity. While some of those elements derived from her being British, others were purely out of her own experiences. Since her arrival, a clear idea of her and the

Siamese "others" was formulated through stark contrast between what she found familiar and preferable, and what was foreign and strange. Anna's moral convictions were later reinforced as she observed and commiserated how the women, both slaves, and royal concubines were treated in the Harem. And her identity as a rational woman was sharped when encountering Buddhism in Siam. She also came to comprehend and take pride in the British presence, especially when it displayed the might and advancement of the British Empire. Through her Siamese experience, how she positioned herself within the exotic environment and constructed her identity thus became more evident.

In the final chapter, Anna Leonowens was compared with her contemporary Siamese women, Victorian ideal of women, and one of the "imperial men" who occupied administrative posts within the Empire and its network. The conventional idea of womanhood in Siam was laid out firstly, and, as it turned out, the character of Tuptim, a royal concubine, who was spoken out through Anna, did not fit the mold of an ideal of Siamese women. Anna deeply sympathized with her and felt her pain and hopelessness intensely. Interestingly, through Tuptim, Anna's own identity was mirrored and made clear. In addition, Anna did not fit in the standard of a Victorian woman. She transcended the boundary of Victorian womanhood, even though she grew up and was educated in such canon. Being one of the few people, both in the Siamese domestic and the international senses, who had almost unlimited access to the Harem, she witnessed the daily affairs, as well as gruesome yet inspiring incidents that took place in this highly restricted space in the Siamese palace. Being in the Harem, confronting with the women of the Harem, made her realize that she transcended from the boundary of Victorian womanhood.

Moreover, her insistence on the separation of spheres came into intense contact with her Siamese counterpart, the King. The different ideas on the separation of spheres differentiated her from the Siamese tyrant, clarifying her position as an independent and professional working woman. The King deemed Anna as one of the domestic servants, whose job was to serve his household, and accordingly she should be confined within the domestic sphere, in this case, his palace. In contrast, Anna believed that the palace was merely her workspace and that she needed her own private sphere when the work was done. Being the governess of the King's children and wives, and, at the same time, the King's secretary in foreign affairs to a certain extent, Anna transgressed the Siamese public and private spheres.

Finally, over the matter of slavery, Anna's stance was compared with a typical "imperial man" like her contemporaries John Bowring, who was the governor of Hong Kong from 1854 to 1859. While the typical white male's perspective saw slavery in Siam as a benign, Anna greatly detested and opposed it. Her attitudes toward it were further strengthened by the deliberate assertion of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in her texts, which was a great hit during her time and a solid testament to antislavery movements.

Experiencing Identity

It is useful to invoke the following passage from Joep Leerssen to further understand and interpret Anna Leonowens:

> "The tendency to attribute specific characteristics or even characters to different societies, races or 'nations' is very old and very widespread. The default value of humans' contacts with different cultures seems to have been ethnocentric, in that anything that deviated from accustomed domestic patterns is 'Othered' as an oddity, an anomaly, a singularity."[1]

Anna was no exception in this regard. Ever since her first encounter with the Siamese natural environment, its people, its creatures, its architecture, and ways of life, she implicated her active association with one particular social group which is the overseas Britons. In turn, she othered the Siamese people with their different practices, traditions, and lifestyles, emphasizing on their differences from her. This first stage of her encounter with Siam marked the beginning of her identity transformation, and, to cite Ian Craib's term, she started to "experience" her identity in new ways. As Craib pointed out, identity is best seen as a process, instead of a fixed thing. This process is "one of constant negotiation with those around us" and identity is "the product of agreement and disagreement and open to change."[2]

This is exactly when Anna underwent in Siam. She negotiated with her surroundings as soon as the steamer that she took arrived in the Siamese water, making it clear what she preferred, which is what the British were associated with, and what she found strange and

[1] Joep Leerssen, "Imagology: History and Method," in *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters: A Critical Survey*, ed. Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007), 17.
[2] Ian Craib, *Experiencing Identity* (London: SAGE Publications, 1998), 4.

upsetting, which comes from the Siamese counterpart. Furthermore, through her disapproval and criticism of the institution of slavery and the general mistreatment of women in Siam, through "disagreements," her identity became more clearly defined. Similarly, as Anna realized the power of the British Empire overseas, even in a non-colonized country such as Siam, she took pride in being under the protection of the British Consulate. She made good use of her privilege as a tool to negotiate and gain favors out of it, thus, becoming more British than she ever was. Anna's identity continued to be transformed and reconstructed through her intimate contact with Siamese women. From rebellious and unconventional royal concubine Tuptim, Anna saw the reflection of herself. Both of her and Tuptim did not conform to their contemporary ideal of a woman. While Tuptim did not submit to the authority of the King, and allegedly committed adultery with a monk; Anna did not stay behind closed doors and only took care of domestic affairs as a mother, she traveled across different continents without a husband by her side and pursued her own career.

In her daily capacity as both the royal governess and the King's temporary secretary, Anna transgressed various boundaries. Because of the 1855 Bowring Treaty, Siam at the time can be seen as hanging in the liminal sphere of between colonized and free, as it remained independent, yet it accommodated imperial powers such as Britain and France almost excessively. Under such circumstances, Anna was able to, on the one hand, invent herself as a proper English governess, and on the other, experience this highly inaccessible life within the royal palace of Siam.

She entered the liminal sphere between fiction and fact. There is no doubt that she spent several years in the most exclusive and central place in Siam, but it remained contested as to how much of what she wrote was based on facts. Before and after her, during the Bangkok period, there was no other foreigner who had that degree of intimate contact with the royal family of Siam and nowadays Thailand. Anna was the only one who had both direct access to the Harem, the King's exclusive premises, and the King himself.

In this position, she entered the liminal sphere of public and private affairs of the supreme ruler of Siam. She assisted the King on foreign correspondence, and, according to her, even had her opinions about state affairs heard by the King, taking a part in the public affairs of the country. At the same time, she was surrounded by the wives and children of the King, she taught them knowledge of English language and western sciences, literally shaping

their views of the world, even helping some women in the Harem, and actively participating in the private affairs of the King. Being in multiple liminal spheres, Anna transgressed boundaries, roamed freely in the largely hidden and forbidden place of all of Siam, had significant sway on important affairs of the country, and led a peculiar and intriguing life.

In the academic world, both traditional Thai and Western scholars on Siam or Thailand from the twentieth century have discredited Anna's stories. On the one hand the Western scholars, in Susan Morgan's words,

> "[…] denounced Leonowens as an amateur, an outsider, a fake. The image of Leonowens that her critics have projected is that of a lower-class conniver of dubious respectability, ungrateful to her royal employer, crippled by ignorance, and blinded by narrow-minded religious prejudices. […] She has been disqualified from membership not only on the grounds of her lack of knowledge and her lack of rationality, but also on that more fundamental ground of perhaps not being truly, which is to say wholly, Western."[3]

On the other hand, many Thai scholars have found it "particularly offensive and deceitful" in her portrayal of King Mongkut, who has been revered highly in Thai nationalist history, as a tyrant who ruled the Harem with cruelty and violence.[4]

However, Anna Leonowens's story could also be read, with a critical and inquisitive approach, as a gateway that leads to more angles of histories, especially in the networks of empires and regions where European imperialists were presence but not in fully command. With its occasionally ruthless yet mostly enlightened monarch, its inaccessible harem system, and intricate slavery, a complicated Siam is brought to both the Thai audience and those abroad. Stripping away the nationalist lens, the quest for historical objectivity, the prejudices based on genders, social classes, and racial backgrounds, her story offers new insight into what many find as absolute truth and singular experience.

[3] Susan Morgan, "Introduction," in Anna Leonowens, *The Romance of the Harem* (Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1991), xi.
[4] Ibid., xxxi.

Epilogue: Afterlife

Margaret Landon, the wife of an American diplomat in Thailand, published her semi-fictional biography of Anna Leonowens, titled *Anna and the King of Siam*, in 1944, which soon became a success. Hollywood noticed it and adapted it into a film in 1946 under the same title, starring Irene Dunne and Rex Harrison. Then Broadway noticed, soon the frolic and glamorous musical *The King and I* was created by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein, based loosely on the novel written by Landon, which premiered on Broadway on 29 March, 1951. Five years later, the musical was made into a film, starring Deborah Kerr and Yul Brynner, which gave the story national exposure in the United States. Throughout the following decades, the popularity of the story did not fade away. With Andy Tennant as director, widely recognizable and popular Jodie Foster, and Hong Kong star Chow Yun-fat as its leading actors, 20th Century Fox reinvented the story in 1999. Fox elevated its exposure to a global audience through this new film named *Anna and the King*. The most recent revival of the 1951 musical, starring Kelli O'Hara Ken Watanabe, swept four Tony Awards and, once again, extensively promoted and popularized Anna's story.

However, while the rest of the world continues to enjoy the fabulous tunes, glittering costumes, and captivating storylines of *The King and I*, in the country where the original story took place, it is an utterly different scene. Almost whenever there was a new cinematic adaptation or a revival of the musical, these cultural products were poorly received in Thailand. Moreover, *The King and I* (1956) and *Anna and the King* (1999), among several other films which are based on the British governess Anna Leonowens' memoirs and/or Margaret Landon's *Anna and the King of Siam*, are on the list of a series of banned movies set by the Thai authorities. When referring to non-Western modernities, Shmuel Eisenstadt writes: "The variability of modernities was accomplished above all through military and economic imperialism and colonialism, effected through superior economic, military, and communication technologies."[1] Although Eisenstadt does not list Siam as one of his examples of Asian societies encompassed by modernity, as Siam did not experience direct colonial and imperial control like many of its neighbors, one can still clearly see the impacts of Siam's

[1] S. N. Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities," *Daedalus* 129, no. 1 (2000): 14.

adjacent societies' modernizations have on it. Therefore, being the only nation in South East Asia that stayed free from direct European control, Penny Van Esterik points out that nationalism has a different rationale in Thailand, one that is based on avoiding colonization.[2] On Siam's 'escape' of European conquest, Thongchai Winichakul adds that Thai historiography thus presents the country's modernization since the mid-nineteenth century as a "necessary measure to save the country by satisfying the Europeans or minimizing the preconditions of colonization," and in this narrative, it is the brilliant monarchs who save the day.[3]

Central to Thai nationalistic discourse and its account of history is the monarchy and its positive impacts on the wellbeing and development of the Thai nation. Patrick Jory, after examining numerous Thai sources such as the official dynastic chronicles, observes that the image of King Mongkut in Thailand today is "of a pious Buddhist, a modernizer and a national hero who successfully negotiated Thailand's earliest encounter with a predatory West."[4] Meanwhile, King Chulalongkorn, King Mongkut's heir, and successor, as studied by David Wyatt, is presented as follows:

> Being firmly committed personally to reform and vitally convinced of its importance to the survival of the nation, he [Chulalongkorn] had to battle and overcome the resistance to change and modernization. This was a slow, painful, and delicate task, to which few men would have been equal. He accomplished it with great skill, consummate patience, supreme determination, and a single-minded dedication to the ultimate good of the nation.[5]

Through the writings of Thai history, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as Matthew Phillip Copeland organizes, are portrayed as:

> […] a time of stunning royal accomplishment, a period in which the court at Bangkok successfully maintained the kingdom's independence, modernized the administrative apparatus of state, enacted a series of far-reaching social reforms, developed the country's economic infrastructure,

[2] Penny Van Esterik, "Anna and the King: Digesting Difference," *South East Asia Research* 14, no. 2 (2006): 292.
[3] Thongchai, Winichakul, "The Quest for Siwilai : A Geographical Discourse of Civilizational Thinking in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Siam," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 59, no. 3 (2000): 532.
[4] Patrick Jory, "The King and Us: Representations of Monarchy in Thailand and the Case of Anna and the King." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 4, no. 2 (2001): 206
[5] David K. Wyatt, "Interpreting the History of the Fifth Reign", *Studies in Thai History* (Chiangmai: Silkworm Books, 1994), 275

> laid the framework for an eventual transition towards democratic rule - and all under the aegis of an expanding royal authority.[6]

It is clear that "an understanding of what is meant by modernity in Thailand today cannot sidestep a (re)appraisal of the historical role of the monarchy as an agency of modernization."[7]

Two years after King Chulalongkorn's death in 1912, an attempted coup d'état, intending to topple the monarchy and establish a republican regime, failed. In the following decades, the Thai press was seen to satirize the kings ruthlessly. Arguably, this helped pave the way for the 1932 coup led by Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram that transformed the country into a constitutional monarchy. Between the years 1932 to 1957, the Thai monarchy basically disappeared from the political arena.[8] It was after the 1957 coup by Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat that the Thai monarchy got revitalized and reinforced. The Sarit regime, through a series of highly effective moves: organizing royal visits to the rural regions as well as state visits abroad, designing royal holidays, naming (higher) educational institutions after kings, making royals present university degrees, reviving the custom of prostration that King Chulalongkorn initially abolished, successfully reinserted the authority and symbolism of the monarchy.[9]

The Sarit government also took advantage of the legal code of lèse-majesté, which states that criticism or slander directed to the King and other members of the Thai royal house a legal offense. After being found guilty, the culprit will be sentenced to no less than three and up to fifteen years of imprisonment. It is worth noting that while the law was hardly invoked and used prior to the Sarit regime, after the 1957 coup, the number of persons charged with lèse-majesté has risen from only 9 cases in the 1950s to 45 cases in the 1960s, and the number keeps adding up to over 100 by the end of the 1970s.[10] David Strechfuss' concludes that "as portrayed by defenders of the official state narrative, lèse-

---

[6] Matthew Phillip Copeland, "*Contested Nationalism and the 1932 Overthrow of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam*" (PhD diss., Australian National University, 1994), 1

[7] Maurizio Peleggi, "*The Making of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Public Image*" (PhD diss., Australian National University, 1997), 10

[8] Charles F. Keyes, *Thailand: Buddhist Kingdom as Modern Nation-State* (Bangkok: Duang Kamol, 1989), 65 and 79-80.

[9] Patrick Jory, "The King and Us: Representations of Monarchy in Thailand and the Case of Anna and the King." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 4, no. 2 (2001): 211.

[10] David Streckfuss, "Kings in the Age of Nations: The Paradox of Lèse-Majesté as Political Crime in Thailand," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, no. 3 (1995): 452.

majesté is tantamount to a kind of cultural treason, a national spiritual betrayal of Thai-ness."[11] The essence of lèse-majesté being a cultural betrayal of one's Thai-ness, or national identity, is linked to the nationalistic discourse of Thailand, in which the monarchs and the institution of the monarchy are the central components. Up to now, it is clear that the Thai monarchy, through the play of national historiography and the legal protection ensured by the government, has managed to become not only ever more prestigious but, more importantly, inviolable. Moreover, the fact that state-sponsored paramilitary forces brutally crushed the student protest at Thammasat University and killed many demonstrators on 6 October 1976 silenced the crowd from public discussion of the monarchy in an extreme demonstrative manner.

Therefore, the dominant nationalist discourse centered on the glory and authority of the Thai monarchs, the institutional and legal hindrance prevented a different story of the Siamese kings from entering the Thai contemporary popular conception.

[11] Ibid, 463.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Beeton, Isabella. *Book of Household Management.* London: Warwick House, Salisbury Square, E.C., 1888.

Leonowens, Anna. *The English Governess at the Siamese Court*. Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1988.

_____. *The Romance of the Harem*. Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1991.

Mouhot, Henri. *Travels in the Central Parts of Indo-China (Siam), Cambodia, and Laos, During the Years 1858, 1859, and 1860*, Volume 1. London: John Murray, 1864.

Patmore, Coventry. *The Angel in the House.* London: Macmillan and Co., 1863.

Sir John Bowring, F.R.S., *The Kingdom and People of Siam*. London: John W. Parker and Son, West Strand, 1857.

Secondary Sources

Aphornsuvan, Thanet. "Anna kap Margaret: Feminist Nai Ratchasamnak Sayam [Anna and Margaret: Feminists in the Siamese Court]." *Silpawattanatham*, 21, No. 2 (December 1999), 36-47.

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *Post-colonial Studies : The Key Concepts*. 3rd ed. London and New York: Routledge, 2013.

Barnard, Timothy P. *Imperial Creature: Humans and Other Animals in Colonial Singapore, 1819-1942*. Singapore: NUS Press, 2020.

Bender, Jill C. *The 1857 Indian Uprising and the British Empire*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2016.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture.* London and New York: Routledge, 1994.

Blunt, Alison. "Imperial Geographies of Home: British Domesticity in India, 1886-1925" *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (1999), 421-440.

Brown, Susan. “Alternatives to Missionary Position: Anna Leonowens as Victorian Travel Writer,” *Feminist Studies*, Vol 21, No. 3 (Autumn 1995), 587-614.

Burton, Antoinette M. “The White Woman’s Burden: British Feminists and the Indian Woman, 1865–1915.” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 13, no. 4 (1990): 295–308.

Colley, Linda. “Britishness and Otherness: An Argument” *Journal of British Studies*. Vol. 31, No. 4 (October 1992), pp. 309-329.

Craib, Ian. *Experiencing Identity*. London: SAGE Publications, 1998.

Cruikshank, R.B. “Slavery in Nineteenth Century Siam.” *Journal of The Siam Society*, 63 (July 1975), 315-333.

Davis, Richard. “Britain's Middle Eastern Policy, 1900-1931: Dual Attractions of Empire and Europe,” *Histoire@Politique. Politique, culture, société*, N°11 (mai-août 2010): 3.

Eisenstadt, S. N. "Multiple Modernities." *Daedalus* 129, no. 1 (2000): 1-29.

Eoseewong, Nidhi. *Pen and Sail: Literature and History in Early Bangkok.* Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2005.

F. Keyes, Charles. *Thailand: Buddhist Kingdom as Modern Nation-State.* Bangkok: Duang Kamol, 1989.

Gombrich, Richard and Gananath Obeyesekere. *Buddhism Tranformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka*. Delhi: Motilai Banasidass Publishers, 1990.

Habegger, Alfred. *Masked: The Life of Anna Leonowens, Schoolmistress at the Court of Siam*. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014.

Hall, Catherine. “Imperial Man: Edward Eyre in Australasia and the West Indies 1833-66,” in Bill Schwarz (ed.), *The Expansion of England: Race, Ethnicity and Cultural History*. London: Routledge, 1996.

Hall, Catherine. “The Early Formation of Victorian Domestic Ideology,” in Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 75-93.

Hassam, Andrew. *Sailing to Australia: Shipboard Diaries by Nineteenth-century British Emigrants*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994.

Hawes, C. J. *Poor Relations: The Making of a Eurasian Community in British India 1773–1833*. Richmond, Surrey, UK: Curzon Press, 1996.

Hodges, Ian. “Western Science in Siam: A Tale of Two Kings.” *Osiris*, Vol. 13, Beyond Joseph Needham: Science, Technology, and Medicine in East and Southeast Asia (1998): 80-95.

Houghton, Walter E. *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.

Investigating History: Colonial Singapore, 1819-1941. A Resource For Secondary School Teachers. National Museum of Singapore.

Israngura Na Ayudhya, Tul. “Men in the Family: Construction and Performance of Masculinity in England, c.1700-1820.” PhD Dissertation, Queen Mary, University of London, 2014.

Jackson, Ashley. *The British Empire: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Jory, Patrick. "The King and Us: Representations of Monarchy in Thailand and the Case of Anna and the King." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 4, no. 2 (2001): 201-18.

Jory, Patrick. “Thai and Western Buddhist Scholarship in the Age of Colonialism: King Chulalongkorn Redefines the Jatakas,” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 61, No. 3 (August 2002), 891-918.

Jory, Patrick. “The Vessantara Jataka, Barami, and the Bodhisatta-Kings: The Origin and Spread of a Thai Concept of Power,” *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 2002, Vol. 16, No. 2 (2002), 36-78.

Kepner, Susan. “Anna (and Margaret) and the King of Siam,” *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 10, no. 2 (January, 1996): 1-32.

Khruathong, Pramin. “Anna Leonowens Khrai wa lon tolae? [Anna Leonowens, who said she is a liar?].” *Silpawattanatham*, https://www.silpa-mag.com/history/article_3026.

Kumar, Krishan. “Nation and Empire: English and British National Identity in Comparative Perspective,” *Theory and Practice* 29 (2000), pp. 575-608.

Landon, Margaret. *Anna and The King of Siam*. New York: John Day Company, 1944.

Langland, Elizabeth. “Nobody’s Angels: Domestic Ideology and Middle-Class Women in the Victorian Novel.” *PMLA*, Vol. 107, No. 2 (March 1992), 290-304.

Leerssen, Joep. “Imagology: History and Method.” In *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters: A Critical Survey*, edited by Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen, 17-32. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007.

Lin Ken, Wong. "Singapore: Its Growth as an Entrepot Port, 1819-1941" *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Volume 9 Issue 1 (April 2011): 50-84.

Lysa, Hong. "'Stranger within the Gates': Knowing Semi-Colonial Siam as Extraterritorials," *Modern Asian Studies* 38, 2 (2004), pp. 327-354.

Major, Andrea. *Slavery, Abolitionism and Empire in India, 1772-1843.* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012.

Morgan, Susan. *Bombay Anna: The Real Story and Remarkable Adventures of the King and I Governess.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.

Morgan, Susan. *Place Matters: Gendered Geography in Victorian Women's Travel Books about Southeast Asia.* New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1996.

Nurtjahyo, Gampang. "The Anna Leonowens' Anxieties and Ego Defense Mechanisms as Found in Elizabeth Hand's Anna And The King: A Freudian Psychoanalytical Approach" *Journal of English Education, Literature, and Culture*, Vol 1, No. 1 (2016): 17-27.

Peleggi, Maurizio. "*The Making of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Public Image.*" PhD diss., Australian National University, 1997.

Phillip Copeland, Matthew. "*Contested Nationalism and the 1932 Overthrow of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam*." PhD diss., Australian National University, 1994.

Piemmettawat, Paisarn. "Siam through the Lens of John Thomson 1865-1866: A Photo Essay," *Journal of the Siam Society*, Vol. 103 (2015): 133-142.

Procida, Mary A. *Married To The Empire: Gender, Politics and Imperialism in India, 1883-1947.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002.

Rai, Rajesh. "The 1857 Panic and the Fabrication of an Indian 'Menace' in Singapore" *Modern Asian Studies* 47, 2 (2013): 365-405.

Ranganathan, Murali. "In Colonial Bombay, Slavery Practiced by Both Indians and the British Administration," The Wire, https://thewire.in/history/bombay-slavery-africa.

Roper, Shani. "Creating Good Colonial Citizens: Industrial Schools and Reformatories in Victorian Jamaica." In Tim Barringer and Wayne Modest (eds.), *Victorian Jamaica*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2018, 190-208.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1978.

Scanlan, Padraic X. "Slaves and Peasants in the Era of Emancipation." *Journal of British Studies* 59 (July 2020), 495-520.

Skabelund, Aaron Herald. *Empire of Dogs: Canines, Japan, and the Making of the Modern Imperial World*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011.

Sookkasikon, Pahole. “Fragrant rice queen: the hungry ghost of Anna Leonowens, and Thai/America.” Master thesis, San Francisco State University, 2010.

Streckfuss, David. "Kings in the Age of Nations: The Paradox of Lèse-Majesté as Political Crime in Thailand." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, no. 3 (1995): 445-75.

Strobridge, William F. and Anita Hibler. *Elephants for Mr. Lincoln: American Civil War-era Diplomacy in Southeast Asia*. Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2006.

Tripasai, Pornsawan. “The Construction of Ideological Subjects: Siamese Students in Anna Leonowens’ English Classroom,” *Changing English*, Studies in Culture and Education, Volume 26 (2019): 295-305.

Tripasai. Pornsawan. “Heterogeneous Thai voices: a contact zone of postcolonial counter-discourse to Anna Leonowens’ orientalist writing of Thailand.” PhD thesis, Monash University, 2017.

Vaid, Sudesh. “Ideologies on Women in Nineteenth Century Britain, 1850s-70s.” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol XX, No. 43 Review of Women Studies (October 1985): 63-67.

Van Esterik, Penny. "Anna and the King: Digesting Difference." *South East Asia Research* 14, no. 2 (2006): 289-307.

Vickery, Amanda. “’Neat and Not Too Showey’: Words and Wallpaper in Regency England.” In Amanda Vickery and John Styles (eds.), *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North America, 1700-1830*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006, 201-223.

Weltman, Sharon Aronofsky. “The King and Who? Dance, Difference, and Identity in Anna Leonowens and The King and I” in Dinah Birch and Mark Llewellyn (eds), *Conflict and Difference in Nineteenth-Century Literature*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Wernecke, Katie. *Across the Empire: British Women’s Travel Writing and Women’s Place in the British Imperial Project during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century*. Master thesis, Florida Atlantic University, 2013.

Winichakul, Thongchai. "The Quest for Siwilai: A Geographical Discourse of Civilizational Thinking in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Siam." *The Journal of Asian Studies*59, no. 3 (2000): 528-49.

Winichakul, Thongchai. “Buddhist Apologetics and a Genealogy of Comparative Religion in Siam,” *Numen*, 62 (1), 77-99.

Winichakul, Thongchai. “The Other Within: Travel and Ethno-Spatial Differentiation of Siamese Subjects 1885-1910” in Andrew Turton (ed.), *Civility and Savagery: Social Identity in Tai States*. London: Curzon Press, 2000.

Winichakul, Thongchai. *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*. Honoluu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994.

Wyatt, David K. “Interpreting the History of the Fifth Reign.” in *Studies in Thai History*, Chiangmai: Silkworm Books, 1994.

Yorke, Lois K. “Edwards, Anna Harriette,” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 14, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/edwards_anna_harriette_14E.html.1.