THE CONSTRUCT OF FEMININITY OF THE FEMALE'S MAIN CHARACTER IN THE THAILAND MOVIE "THE TEACHER'S DIARY"

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the construct of femininity in the Thai film "The Teacher's Diary" (2014) through an analysis of the main female character. The film is a romantic-comedy genre directed by Nithiwat Tharathorn which tells the story of two teachers who both teach at the same floating school, however each teaching at different periods of time. Through a diary written by Ann (a female teacher) who first taught at the school, Song (a male teacher) learns a lot about how to deal with the face of the unideal teaching conditions in a floating school. Using gender concepts, namely femininity and masculinity as social constructions from Oakley and Gender Stereotype Characteristics from Kite, this paper argues that although it does not completely break away from gender stereotypes, Ann's femininity also shows masculinity in herself. The construction of Ann's femininity as a single Thai woman is also not completely against the patriarchal system. However, Ann's character offers a different perspective on how to be a single Thai woman.

KEYWORDS: femininity, Thai drama films, gender stereotypes

INTRODUCTION

Films with their technological capabilities, according to Lim (2012) represent social reality through vision, sound, and narration, which are framed as sites of cultural interpretation. The meaning in the film is not singular, but the result of making meaning by the maker and the audience/interpreter. Thus, film as a mass media has the ability to construct meaning, including in this context, femininity in the Thai film "The Teacher's Diary" (2014). This paper will discuss the construction of femininity in the main female character in the Thai film, "The Teacher's Diary" (Kid Tueng Wittaya) which was released in 2014.

So far, femininity in a patriarchal society is often interpreted as merely a woman as being different and inferior to men. In fact, according to a number of gender studies experts, femininity as well as masculinity is a social construct that is included in a term called gender. Oakley (1972) states that gender is a social construct of how to be male and female which is built by humans themselves through social and cultural processes. Bandel (2016) through a search on the concepts of sex and gender, further states that contemporary gender theories view gender as a social construct that is plural and contextual. In other words, the meanings of masculinity and femininity vary.
The "The Teacher's Diary" is a romantic-comedy genre film directed by Nithiwat Tharathorn which tells the story of two teachers, who both teach at the same floating school, however each at different periods of time. Through a diary written by Ann (a female teacher) who previously (the year before) taught at the school, Song (a male teacher) initially learned a lot to deal with the teaching conditions at the floating school which were far from ideal. This romantic-comedy genre film is based on the premise questioning whether or not it is possible for two people to love each other without having a face-to-face interaction with each other. However, the side that is often overlooked in this film is how femininity is presented. It is interesting to discuss how a woman's diary becomes a central part of the story of this film. This diary is also a kind of guide for another teacher (Song) in living lonely days while on duty at the boat school.

There have been many studies related to gender in Thai movies. Mostly, about femininity and masculinity in Thai films (Diamond, 2006; Kitiarsa, 2007; Panitchpakdi, 2015; Ratchatakorntrakoon, 2019). In general, these studies try to see the construction of women and men in various Thai films/TV series. Diamond (2016) discusses the duality of female characterization in Thai theater and film through the case of Mae Naak's character. This character has changed in contemporary Thai society because there are many films and performances about Mae Naak that uses a feminist point of view. Panitchpakdi (2015) examines the representation of women in three Thai TV series, focusing on the construct of women's representation in TV series and Thai social ideology in the context of the feminist movements. In terms of studies on masculinity, Kitiarsa (2007) discusses the Muai Thai genre film (a type of Thai action film) and its relation to gender tension and changes in Thai male culture after the 1997 economic crisis. These three studies are interesting, but this paper wants to look at the construction of femininity in romantic comedy-drama genre film.

The research on Thai romantic comedy films, among others, was carried out by Ratchatakorntrakoon (2019) which explored the representation of single women and analyzed the relationship between the representation of single women and ideology in Thai romantic comedies from 2006 to 2017. The study revealed that the representation of single women in films is organized into seven categories, namely: professional working women; women struggling to get married; worthless women; poor girls; very sensitive women; women who will become ideal housewives; and women with younger partners. These seven representations are closely related to mainstream ideology, especially patriarchal ideology. In other words, the seven representations of single women not only highlight but also reproduce the patriarchal ideology by defining marriage and motherhood as the ultimate goal of women's lives. “The Teacher's Diary” does not include films reviewed by Ratchatakorntrakoon (2019). Ann, the main character in this film, fits into one of the categories above. Ann is a single, professional worker (a teacher) in a remote floating school and is also about to get married. Therefore, this paper will fill a niche about Thai film studies in relation to gender.

Studies on the film "The Teacher's Diary" are generally carried out by experts from the world of education (Yusuf & Dewi, 2020; Galang, 2020). These two studies focus on didactic issues and the role of teachers in the learning process in schools. This is because "The Teacher's Diary" , even though it is a romantic comedy drama, makes a school in a rural area with 7 students as the main background as well as the learning and teaching process at the
floating school. A slightly different study was conducted by Haryani & Utomo (2020) which focused on describing the form of perlocutionary speech acts in the dialogue in this film. These three previous studies are very different from this paper. The significant difference is in the approach used in reading "The Teacher's Diary", namely through gender studies.

This paper uses the conceptual framework of gender as a social construct from Oakley (1972) and the concept of gender stereotyped characteristics associated with women and men from Kite (2001). The question of this research is how is the construction of femininity shown through the female lead in the film "The Teacher's Diary"? Is it following the gender stereotype or not completely following the stereotype? Regarding these gender stereotypes, Kite (2001) divides the Gender Stereotype Characteristics Associated with Women and Men into four categories, namely traits, roles, physical characteristics, and cognitive abilities). In this study, the Gender Stereotype Characteristics of Kite focused only on traits and physical characteristics. This is done because the cognitive category and the role category are not significant to study considering that the profession and the role of the main female character in this film are relatively parallel in this film.

METHODOLOGY

The method used in this study is the descriptive analysis method. The steps of the study are as follows. Firstly, an examination is done regarding the overall appearance in the form of audio and visual in the film "The Teacher's Diary" in terms of femininity. This is done especially regarding the main female character, Ann. Secondly, an analysis is done on the construction of femininity through the figure of Ann in the framework of the gender stereotype chart from Kite (2001). The film "The Teacher's Diary" is the primary source of this study. The film is in Thai language with Indonesian subtitles with a duration of 90 minutes.

DISCUSSION

Ann's character in this film is described as a young woman who chooses a profession as a teacher. She is a stubborn young woman who clashes with the district school principal because she has a small tattoo on her wrist. Since she refuses to remove the tattoo, Ann is assigned to teach in a different school, a small elementary school in a houseboat/floating school. She lives with seven of her students in the houseboat from Monday until Friday. Ann approaches teaching in an informal way and tries to relate her teaching material to the circumstances. Therefore, Ann is loved by her students who all are the children of fishermen. On the other hand, in her personal life, she has a relationship with Nui, a teacher who works as a teacher at a private school in the city. The plot of the story in the film is about Ann's struggle to teach at a floating school and her inner turmoil with her relationship with her lover. Ann keeps a diary and writes down what she experiences and feels in the diary. Ann then left the floating school because Nui wanted Ann to move to the city. To teach at the same school as he does. Ann's diary left behind her diary in the floating school, which is then discovered by Song, the new (male) teacher who used to be a wrestler. Song decided to teach because he had an injury that disabled him to continue being a wrestler. For this reason, further in this section, we
will discuss how Ann's figure is shown in the film "The Teacher's Diary".

Ann's Femininity and Gender Stereotypes

As described in the introduction section, this paper tries to analyze the construct of the femininity of the main female character, Ann, in "The Teacher's Diary". Firstly, an analysis is done referring to the Gender Stereotype Characteristics Associated with Women and Men from Kite (2001). Because the discussion of femininity cannot be separated from masculinity, the following chart also presents the position of the main male character in this film, namely Song. The chart below shows how the two main characters in the film are based on Kite's gender stereotypic characteristics.

*Tabell 1*

Characters’ Analysis of “The Teacher Diary” based on Gender Stereotypic Characteristics Associated with Women and Men by Kite (2001)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traits</th>
<th>Ann’s Characteristics (P)</th>
<th>Song’s Characteristics (L)</th>
<th>Physical Characteristics</th>
<th>Ann’s Characteristics (P)</th>
<th>Song’s Characteristics (L)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>** Associating with men (masculine)**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Athletic</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can make decisions easily</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Brawny</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>broad-shouldered</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feels superior</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Burly</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Physically strong</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never gives up easily</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Rugged</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-confident</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stands up well under pressure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>** Associating with women (feminine)**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to devote self to others</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Beautiful</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aware of others feelings</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Cute</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Based on the chart above, we can see that Ann's physical character description is in line with the gender stereotypes associated with women (feminine). Ann is a beautiful figure, having clean and smooth skin. She also looks very elegant in the casual clothes she wore in the film. The only physical feature that doesn't conform to gender stereotypes is that she is physically strong. She can drive a boat by herself, she can swim and lift a dead body which was stuck under the houseboat, and also clean up the whole houseboat (with the help of the children).

The character of Ann is also described according to gender stereotypes associated with women (feminine). Ann is someone who is devoted to others, sensitive, although not always gentle. However, interestingly, she also has qualities that tend to be associated with men (masculine). Ann is very active; despite the challenges, she actively takes the initiatives in improving the school, especially in terms of improving the teaching in the learning process. Once, Ann took the initiative to go to her student’s house to negotiate for him to go back to school since he was absent because he had to help his parents find fish.

Figure 1
Ann as a female main character in “The Teacher’s Diary”
Song as a male main character in “The Teacher’s Diary”

Ann is not described as someone who easily gives up. She lives in a non-ideal situation (has a poor living conditions, has no telephone signal, has to face children who are not enthusiastic about school, etc.). Yet, she still insists on completing her one-year teaching at the floating school. Her attitude is different from the previous teacher, a colleague of hers named Gigi. Gigi only lasted in the floating school for a few days because she could not stand the condition of the floating school. In addition to the uncomfortable poor condition of the school, Gigi’s experience of seeing a dead body under the floating school was traumatic (something Ann did not mind about). Even if in the end Ann moves out of floating school, it was not because she did not like teaching in the floating school. It was more because she wanted to fulfil Nui’s (her lover’s) wishes. From the table above, it can be seen that Ann has qualities that tend to be associated with men (masculine) without losing the qualities that tend to be associated with women (feminine).

Since the very beginning of the film, it is shown that Ann’s character is stubborn. A scene shows Ann’s debate with her previous principal. At that time Ann was still teaching in a private school in the city. Ann had tattoos picturing three small stars on her wrist. This was what triggered Ann to be transferred to a floating school outside the city. Here’s the dialogue:
Principal: We are teachers. We should be role models.
Ann: As the principal, I think you've gone too far. You judge me as a bad teacher because of this trivial thing?" (Ann shows the tattoo on her wrist).

Ann's determination and confidence were also very evident when she returned to the city, to teach in a private school. Ann taught physics by inviting her students to swim in the pool. The principal did not think that that method of teaching was necessary and relevant. Ann did not agree with the principal and started to think of going back to boat school where she had more freedom in choosing how to teach. Additionally, Ann had other problems too. Nui had an affair with another woman who got pregnant. This condition made Ann very emotional. Yet, she quickly decided to return to teaching at the floating school. Since, Ann has proven that her teaching skills are very good, she was able to improve the students' learning, she was immediately accepted to return to teaching at the school.

Nevertheless, Ann's feminine side also looks equally prominent in this film. Her diary is filled with how her day was in the floating school. She was willing to move to the city, to teach in the school where Nui teaches after Nui proposed to her. Her diary shows that Ann often feels lonely. Still, Ann also is someone who decides to think rationally and this is shown clearly in a scene in the final part of the film. Ann was in the car with Nui and articulately and reflectively decided that they were not suitable together. So, Ann decided to separate from Nui. This was not an easy decision to make since both of them have been in a relationship for a long time, since the early days of college. Ann realized that Nui's view on life was very different from hers after seeing Nui's attitude in responding to the story about Song's efforts to encourage the floating boat students to learn. Song wouldn't mind pretending that the floating boat is a train, to help his students imagine what it is like to ride a train to help them in learning science. Nui thinks that doing such a thing is not relevant while Ann thinks she would do the same thing as Song did.

Ann: Precisely because we never understand each other. So we shouldn't be together anymore.

As a closing of this section, the masculinity of the main male character in this film, Song, when based on the table above, especially in the attitude column, also tends to have both a masculine and feminine side that looks quite dominant. It can be said that the two main characters in this film, although still referring to common gender stereotypes, are not always in harmony with these stereotypes.

Ann's Femininity Construct

This section will analyze how the construct of femininity was intended to be displayed by "The Teacher's Diary". As stated by Oakley (1972) that gender is a social construction of how to be male and female which is built by humans themselves through social and cultural processes. In line with that, Bandel (2016) states that contemporary gender theories view
gender as a social construct that is plural and contextual. This means that masculinity and femininity are diverse. Therefore, this section will try to reveal what this film wants to convey with Ann's femininity model.

Ann's femininity is a construct that is not very common in Thai’s patriarchal society. The argument of Ratchatakorntrakoon (2019) states that the portrayal of single women in Thai romantic comedy films is built into seven categories, namely: professional working women; women struggling to get married; worthless women; poor girl; very sensitive women; women who will become ideal housewives; and women with younger partners. These seven representations are closely related to mainstream ideology, especially patriarchal ideology. Ann belongs to the category of single women. She is also a professional worker. She is also in a position to get married in this film, as seen in the scene when Nui proposes to him. These two points, Ann's representation as a single professional and about to get married, become the starting point for the analysis of Ann's femininity construction in this paper.

Ann as a professional single woman is shown as an idealist. She sees that the educational process is very important for children, including among the children of fishermen. Interestingly, Ann does not see her profession rigidly. Ann's basic character and the learning that Ann encounters while teaching at the floating school, encouraged Ann to view her teaching profession differently. Her view is that education is a process that should not separate children from the reality of their environment. Additionally, her experience in teaching in the floating school reaffirms her reason for becoming a teacher. This is stated in one of Ann's last writings in her diary when she was about to leave the floating school for the second time.

Hello Mr Song,

We haven't met yet, but the kids would love to see you again. The school hasn't changed much since you were last here. The wall in the kitchen that you have made, I redecorated. It looks beautiful when you want to use it. Kids love to play wrestling and use the moves you teach them...

...This year Tuna became a teenager, she started to like to dress up. Mr. Song, don't make fun of her for her dark skin. Muek's grown up, now he can spell his friends' names... Two nights ago, we celebrated Chon's graduation. I never thought that helping a child graduate from elementary school would make me happy... Thank you Mr. Song, for helping me to see and remember why I became a teacher in the first place...

Ann's femininity is the embodiment of a woman who is very soft-hearted while also stubborn, independent, and self-confident. It should be noted that Ann is inseparable from the representation of single women in Thai’s romantic comedies who are struggling to get married. Ann’s representation, however, is not entirely the case. There is a negotiation that Ann does in matters of her personal relationship with Nui. In the early part of the film, she insists on teaching at a floating school, although Nui disagrees. However, she decides to transfer to Nui's school because of his lover's request. Nui then proposed and then Ann and Nui got engaged. However, when Ann met a woman who claimed to be pregnant with Nui's child, she was angry.
and decided to leave Nui and return to teach at the floating school. When Nui then visited Ann to explain that he was willing to be responsible for the child and still wanted to be with Ann, Ann’s heart turned soft again. She decided to forgive Nui and get married. Nevertheless, in the end, Ann rationally decided not to continue the relationship by marrying Nui.

The striking difference between Ann’s character and the representation of women struggling to get married in Thai’s romantic comedies according to Ratchatakorntrakoon can be summarized as follows. The figure of Ann as a single person who longs for a personal relationship with a man is clearly visible. She also wants to get married and have a family like most other women. She is willing to fight and sacrifice for the sake of a relationship by leaving the floating school which she loves so much. But on the other hand, her struggle is not just trying to answer the question of whether or not she should marry Nui. Ann is also struggling with herself, by questioning whether her relationship with Nui. Will her relationship with Nui make her happy despite the fact that he had betrayed her? The answer ultimately lies in Ann's discovery, that they will not basically be a happy couple, because Ann and Nui do not really understand each other.

Implicitly at the end of the film, Ann chooses to meet Song, whom she has never met and known so far. Their communication with each other happened indirectly, only with Ann’s diary which was left behind. Ann wrote about her experience while teaching in the floating school in that diary which Song read. Then, Song also did the same. He continued writing in the diary that Ann left behind about his experience while teaching in the floating school which was then read by Ann. The emphasis on the common value principle, which is the basis of a relationship, is the main premise of this film, even though the two people have never met.

**CONCLUSION**

Femininity as well as masculinity is a social construct that is included in terms of gender and is a social construct that is both plural and contextual. The feminine construct of Ann's character in "The Teacher's Diary" shows this. Although not completely free from gender stereotypes, Ann's femininity also shows the sides of masculinity in her. A woman who is beautiful, gentle, kind, but also smart, brave, stubborn, and has a strong desire to become a model of femininity offered by Ann's character.

On the other hand, the construct of Ann's femininity as a single woman is also not completely against the patriarchal system in Thai society. However, Ann's character provides a different perspective on how a single Thai woman lives her life, namely being professional, doing good to others, caring, and trying to find the best personal relationship based on the common principles of looking at life.

The study of gender in Thai films, especially the drama genre, still needs to be done further. Regarding "The Teacher's Diary", the discussion about the ideology behind the selection of the presentation of gender equality between the two main characters of this film deserves to be investigated more deeply.
REFERENCES


