

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The very concept of gender and sex are the dichotomy of male and female. However, there are some countries divide the conceptual categories of gender and sex in to three, four and even five categories. One of the countries is Thailand. Thailand, historically, categorizes sex and gender in to the term *phet*. These categories are three: *phu-chai* to refer to male/man; *phu-ying* for female/woman; and an intermediate category that is known as *kathoey* (Barea 2012). Thailand has different way to identify sex. *Phet* does not identify *phu-chai* and *phu-ying* based on the genital organ. It identifies sex based on the ability of the genital organ itself to do its function in intercourse. According to Peter Jackson, a researcher of transgender phenomenon in Thailand, the virility of man is judged by its ability to be an inserter in intercourse (Jackson 1998, cited in Putri 2009). When a man could not do that, then he could be identified as *kathoey*. *Kathoey* is also well-known as *phuying praphet song* (second kind of woman) and he is considered as transgender because what his sex is different with its gender performance. Therefore, if a man is categorized as *kathoey*, he is considered to play his role as woman.

The phenomenon of *kathoey* in Thailand happened because of few things. There are some aspects which support the existence of transgender in that country. One of the aspects is the religion. Buddha, the dominant religion in Thailand,

gives significant contribution. According to Bunmi (Bunmi 1986, cited in Barea 2012, p.193) anyone can become a *kathoey* or has been one in some previous lives, so everyone should be tolerant to them. Buddhism believes that *kathoey* is people who suffer their karma and being *kathoey* is not the thing they want. This tolerance makes Thailand becomes 'friendly place' for transgender people. There are more than 10.000 transgender living in Thailand (Ehrlich 1996, cited in wpath.org). In this country, transgender has wider occupation and occasion. *Kathoey* has jobs as shopkeeper, barber, tour guide, beauticians and entertainer for tourism (Putri 2009). Their role brings them to be magnet of Thailand tourism.

One of the famous tourism objects which show *kathoey* as the primadona is Alcazar Cabaret in Pattaya. The performers in Alcazar Cabaret are *kathoey* and their performance is supported with DTS sound, extra lighting and spacious building capacity. The spectacular show in Alcazar Cabaret is even often compared with Moulin Rouge Cabaret in French. Another example is Transgender Beauty Pageants. The government of Thailand supports some transgender beauty pageants. One of the popular events is Miss Tiffany Universe. The annual Miss Tiffany Contest held in Phuket has drawn millions of tourists to witness the ever largest and lovely ladyboys contest in the world. (Zakaria 2012)

The existence of transgender in Thailand also has reachable access in medical field. Medical activity or medical tourism is easily found in here. Thailand has at least 450 hospitals with internationally trained medical staff that specialise in neurosurgery, dental surgery, heart surgery, and cosmetic surgery (Unitedworld-usa.com 2006, cited in Saniotis 2007, p.24). Things such as

injecting silicon for shaping breast, beautifying the shape of lips and even doing sex surgery are common. Thailand even leads the Asia-Pacific region with about 400.000 foreign patients each year (Chu & Teh 2005, p.308). Besides, the cost of medical tourism in Thailand is also affordable. The cost of surgery in Thailand can be one-tenth or less of what it is in the United States or Western Europe (Hutchinson 2006 cited in Saniotis 2007, p.24).

The role of transgender in Thailand is also brought in motion picture. Student comedies and dramas, action films and horror films for teenagers became so common that they hardly left place to any other film genre (Sungsri 2008). Based on this reason, the filmmaker starts to take LGBT as their theme. *The Iron Ladies* (2000) is taken as the example. This comedy movie tells about transgender volley club.

The Iron Ladies then influences other filmmakers to make other queer movies. The two hits are *The Love of Siam* (2007) and *Bangkok Love Story* (2007) that show gay romance. The reception of those movies was great. It was proved by some prestigious awards like Best Picture of Thailand National Film Association Awards for *The Love of Siam* (online IMDB) and The Grand Award of Brussels International Independent Film Festival for *Bangkok Love Story* (online IMDB).

Those explanations could give some descriptions about LGBT in Thailand, especially for transgender. Famous by its tolerance, but however, Thailand had ever had hard time for accepting LGBT in the past. In 2002, the Thai Ministry of Health publicly declared that homosexuality was no longer to be regarded as a

mental illness or disorder (Allyn 2005). It means that in the previous years, LGBT was still seen as terrible thing. In the past, LGBT people experienced some discrimination such as being prohibited on military service, rejected in applying work and many more. Therefore, in 2002, queer image was changed. Generally, the story about lesbian, gay or transgender in Thailand and Asian movies were previously shown as joke in television or film (Putri 2009). Since the queer regulation in 2002 had been legitimated, the roles of queer in movie were slowly changed to be more serious and dramatic.

Beautiful Boxer (2004) is one of the queer films in drama genre. This film was directed by Ekachai Uekrongtham. Uekrongtham was born in Singapore and his nationality is Thailand. *Beautiful Boxer* is his debut as director (online IMDB). This film tells about true story of male-to-female transgender named Noong Toom or Parinya Charoemphol. *Beautiful Boxer* used flashback mode to tell the story of Nong Toom since he was a little boy until his decision to do sex surgery on his 16th. The setting was taken in Thailand in 1998.

The story started with the depiction of the poor life of Nong Toom. Since he was a boy, Toom realizes that he prefers girls things like wondering to have long hair, dancing *Likay* (Thailand traditional dance), trying make-up, playing with girls than boys and many more. Those things were brought until he was grown as teenager. One day, accidentally, Toom involved in muay thai game and won much money. It made him to be interested in muay thai and joined in muay thai camp. By his excessive exercise, Toom could defeat his opponent and be a potential excellent boxer. However, in other hand, Toom felt that the boxing

world did not match with his feminine soul. Toom realized that muay thai boxing was just a way to earn money and no more than that.

One day, in his bright career, he decided to do coming-out towards society. Toom did not tell directly that he is a transgender, but he started it by wearing make-up during fighting. When he did that, society replied with laughing and mocking at him. Toom realized that his confession could make people hate him. He then negotiates his problem. The negotiation aimed to help Toom to introduce his new identity as 'woman' and keep a good image of Thai boxer although he is a transgender. Toom did the negotiations on and off the ring. The examples of the negotiations on the ring are wearing make-up during fighting, wearing boxer pants, being top-less and he did not change his hard and deadly boxing way although he is a transgender. Then the negotiations when he was off the ring are refusing to bath together with men, wearing woman's face cream, wearing woman accessories, and trying to wear woman's clothes. At the end of the story, Toom decided to change his sex to a female by doing sex surgery.

From the story of Toom, the writer sees interesting things related with gender negotiation and sex surgery decision. Gender negotiation and Toom's decision to be woman emerge an impression that Toom surrendered to gender dichotomy in society. It makes an impression that Toom has to choose to be man or woman. This is interesting, because in the beginning of film, the audience was invited to understand Toom as the person who considered as third gender. Nevertheless, the ending suggested the audience to agree with conservative notion about gender, that gender and sex is only two. From this point, the writer sees that

although *Beautiful Boxer* promotes queer idea, it also emphasizes heteronormativity.

In analysing this phenomenon, the writer used gender performativity theory by Judith Butler. Butler is a post-structuralist feminist philosopher. Gender performativity explains that gender is performative. Gender is an action or imitation which done repeatedly, then it could be accepted as true, although the sex is opposite with the performed gender (Butler 1999). This theory helps the writer to analyze Toom's gender negotiation, thus analyze the heteronormativity that is the main point of the film.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In order to analyze, the writer would like to state two questions to elaborate her analysis:

1. How is Nong Toom's gender performativity performed in Beautiful Boxer?

1.3 Objective of the Study

Regarding to the statement of the problems, the aims of the analysis of the thesis are:

1. To explore and analyse the gender performativity performed by Nong Toom.

1.4 Significance of the Study

In this part, the writer would like to explain three significance points from this study. First is the significance for academican, especially Cultural Studies

students of English Department. The writer hopes that this study could be worthy or used as reference to learn about queer, especially in gender performativity. Second is the significance for society. The writer hopes that by this study, the writer could give new point of view about gender diversity and new knowledge about queer to the society. The last is the significance for the writer herself. By doing this study, the writer could enrich her knowledge about queer studies and could make her more critical to see or reveal ideology in queer movie.

1.5 Organization of the Paper

This paper consists of five chapters. The first chapter of the paper consists of background of the study, statement of the problems, purpose of the study, significance of the study, theoretical background, method of the study, scope and limitation, organization of the paper and definition of key terms. The first chapter provides guidance in doing and reading the thesis.

The second chapter consists of theoretical framework and related studies. It will elaborate the theory and some related studies that related with this study. This chapter provides the tools of the study.

The third chapter concerns with the methodology in doing the research and provides the ways of the study. It deals with every step in making the analysis. It starts from choosing, gathering and then analysing the data.

The fourth chapter focuses on the analysis in order to answer the statement of the problem written in the first chapter.

The last chapter provides the conclusion. In this chapter, the writer will give explanation about the summary of the findings and the analysis. The writer also gives the interpretation of the findings.

1.6 Definition of Keyterms

- Transgender:** Refers to the idea of moving across (transferring) from one pre-existing gender category to another (either temporarily or permanently); to the idea of living in between genders; and to the idea of living 'beyond gender' altogether (Ekins & King, 2006).
- Heteronormativity:** Refers to heterosexual culture's interpretation of itself as the natural, inevitable structure of society (Warner 1993).
- Gender Performativity:** A strategy for one to survive the compulsory system and avoid punishment (Butler 1999, cited in Agustina 2012).
- Coming-out:** A life long process of understanding, accepting, and acknowledging your identity as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer (LGBTIQ) or a combination of these identities (Geneq.berkeley.edu).

CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW