

Representation of Thainess to the Eyes of the West in Lapcharoensap's *Sightseeing* as Thai American Literature

Kittiphong Praphan

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Mahasarakham University, Thailand

Abstract—Thai American literature, despite enriching the field's heterogeneity, remains an understudied branch of Asian American literature. This study investigates *Sightseeing*, a collection of short stories by Rattawut Lapcharoensap, as a representative of Thai American texts, focusing on how Thainess is represented to Western readers. Through the framework of Asian American criticism, this literary work moves beyond the themes of exclusion and the attempt for assimilation to connecting America to Asia. The textual analysis reveals that the author represents Thainess in three critical aspects, including tourism, prostitution, and corruption, which are social realities shaping contemporary Thailand. These aspects of Thainess indicate that Thailand is not merely an exotic tourist paradise, but it is also a site of sexual exploitation and systemic injustice. The portrayal of sex tourism and domestic prostitution reveals the commodification of Thai female bodies as a result of neo-colonial contact, while the depiction of corruption suggests that bribery is normalized in Thai society, exposing structural inequality and injustice. These two negative aspects of Thainess are juxtaposed with the romanticized image of the country perceived by Westerners as a tourist paradise. This Thainess is integral to the author's transnational identity as a Thai American writer, whose writing is shaped by the context of his home country. While foregrounding Thainess and diversifying the voices in the broad field, this book also challenges the dominance of East Asian American literature.

Index Terms—Thai American literature, Thainess, Asian American literature, Thai American identity

I. INTRODUCTION

Thai American literature constitutes a relatively small yet significant subset of Asian American literature. Although positioned as a minority body of writing within the United States, Asian American literature has made substantial contributions to the broader American literary canon by illuminating the lived experiences of Asian immigrants and their descendants. This field of literature was established in the late 1960s, although there were few Asian American writings, mostly produced by Chinese and Japanese American authors at the time (Cheung, 1997). Apart from the Chinese and the Japanese, there were also other groups, such as the Filipinos, Koreans, and writers from South Asia and the Middle East, who immigrated to America for various reasons, such as escaping from war and political persecution, and seeking economic opportunities. Still, the number of their literary works remains smaller than that of Chinese and Japanese writers, who are typically grouped under East Asian American literature. Currently, Asian American literature is composed of a more diverse group of writers in terms of their ethnic origins. Although Asian American writers come from diverse ethnic origins, the purpose of their writing is similar: to share their experiences, whether in their home countries or the new world. As Babri (2024) argues, Asian American voices have become increasingly diverse over time, presenting narratives that more fully capture the complexities of the immigrant experiences. At present, readers encounter more works by writers from South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. This aligns with Lowe (1996), who contends that Asian American literature is a field that is still growing, constituted by the voices of various Asian ethnic groups. The ethnic diversity, as Lowe further explains, refutes the idea of Asian homogeneity or the way Americans lump all Asians together as only one group with no differences. In fact, Asian Americans are diverse ethnically and culturally, as can be seen in their history and literature.

The expansion of Asian American literature has been accompanied by a thematic evolution that reflects authors' experiences as well as the socio-historical contexts of each period. In the first stage, according to Cheung (1997), the themes center around seeking inclusion and claiming America, since Asian immigrants are excluded from the American sphere, suffering from racial oppression as the other on this land. The authors attempt to portray their desire to be seen as fully American and accepted as part of the nation. Currently, the themes have shifted to the display of their interest in exploring Asian histories and identities (Fan, 2024). Along these themes, the issues of class, gender and sexuality, ethnicity, and family and generational conflicts are also intertwined.

Thai American literature is a relatively new subset of Asian American literature. Drawing on Cheung (1997), the field remains small and marginalized, lacking both extensive academic study and dedicated experts. The first Thai American work to emerge in the canon is *Confessions of a Mail Order Bride* (1989) by Wanwadee Larsen. In this semi-autobiography, Larsen chronicles her journey as a young Thai woman adjusting to life in the United States after

marrying an American professor. After this book, it took many years for other works to appear, such as S.P. Somtow's *Jasmine Nights* (1994) and his other works, as well as Ira Sukrungruang's *Talk Thai* (2010). An important characteristic shared among these writings is the presentation of Thailand, the authors' home country. Many dimensions of this country, whether they are the landscape, people, culture, or ways of life, are presented in the stories. That is to say, these literary works provide readers with a background on Thai Americans, which is crucial for understanding this Asian group. Like other Asian American writings, Thai American writings depict the life of their people in the new world and their home country. For example, in a study of Somtow's *Jasmine Nights*, Praphan (2019) argues that stories of the homeland (Thailand) are integral to the author's memory and Asian American identity.

Sightseeing is the first book by Rattawut Lapcharoensap, a Thai American writer who was born in Chicago but grew up in Bangkok. He returned to the United States for his college education at Cornell University and the University of Michigan, where he earned a degree in creative writing. This book is a collection of seven short stories, published in 2005, depicting Thailand in many dimensions. In the year of its publication, it won the Asian American Literary Award and was nominated for the Guardian First Book Award and the New York Public Library Young Lions Fiction Award. Moreover, in 2006, it won the "5 Under 35 Award" by the National Book Foundation, celebrating five phenomenal writers under the age of 35. Growing up in the Thai context, he brought Thainess with him to the United States, reflected in his writing. This study aims to investigate *Sightseeing*, focusing on how important traits of Thainess are represented to the Western audience, as this book is published in the United States. The term "Thainess" in this study refers to the characteristics of Thai people, culture, images, ways of life, and identity. In other words, this study explores how stories of the homeland constitute this literary work, which represents Thai American literature. By doing so, scholarship on Thai American literature will be expanded and more visible. Furthermore, this study will promote the heterogeneity of Asian American literature constituted by diverse groups of people.

II. ASIAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Since Thai American literature is a subset of Asian American literature, to investigate this literary work, it is crucial to understand the background of its broader field. Asian American literature refers to literature created by American writers of Asian descent. This group of writers comprises the first generation of Asian immigrants and their subsequent generations. Significant Asian immigration to the United States occurred in the second half of the 19th century and the early 20th century, during which a large number of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Filipino immigrants were brought to labor in sugar plantations in different parts of the country. In addition, the Gold Rush in California also brought a high number of Asians with the belief in economic prosperity to America. As stated by Lowe (1996), who employs a Marxist lens to critique Asian immigration in the United States, an important motivation behind the importation of Asians to America was that they were cheap labor for the capitalist economy. According to Chan (1991), after the abolishment of slavery in 1833, Asian laborers became a major international workforce. The Chinese, in particular, left their home country because of population pressure, economic change, political upheaval, religious persecution, and natural disasters. Following the Chinese, other ethnic groups, such as the Filipino, the Korean, and the Japanese, also immigrated to the United States for similar reasons.

In the United States, Asian immigrants faced racial oppression and exclusion in many forms, such as labor exploitation, a lack of legal rights and American citizenship, and discrimination. Based on Lowe (1996), "the American nation has been built on the exploitation and political exclusion of immigrants" (p. 14). Asians, in particular, were barred from citizenship during the early stages of immigration, as can be seen through a series of laws to exclude them from this right, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1822, the Immigration Act of 1917, and the Immigration Act of 1924 (Lowe, 1996; National Archives, n.d.). These Acts indicated that the American government sought only the economic value of Asian immigrants but denied their human value regarding their legal rights. In addition, they, especially the Chinese, were also labeled as the "Yellow Peril," which threatened white Americans who feared that they would invade their land, destroy their economy, and harm their society in various ways. As argued by Song (2015), the Yellow Peril (yellow refers to the Asian race) stemmed from colonial ideology in which the Orient—both the areas and the people—is something mysterious, something to fear, and something to control. At the time of Asian migration to the United States, this ideology remained deeply embedded in American society, contributing to the systematic alienation and exclusion of Asians. Moreover, according to Palumbo-Liu (1999), an important reason behind this exclusion is the Americans' obsession with their superior white blood and intention to maintain their pure white community, excluding other races from the body of the nation. In the same vein, during the second half of the 20th century, people in the United States were treated based on their races; white people as the privileged class and other minority groups, including Asians, as the second class (Omi & Winant, 1994). Due to the pain of bitter exclusion, as Okihiro (2014) puts it, "Minorities, especially Asian Americans, have in the past sought inclusion within the American community" (p. 24). The history of racial exclusion and marginalization has become a foundation shaping Asian American literature, which serves as a cultural response to the oppression they encounter and a powerful assertion of their existence in the United States.

Since Asian American literature is created by Asian immigrants, it is also classified as an immigrant narrative. As stated by Song (2015), this narrative genre depicts the lives of immigrants, focusing on their experiences and struggles in the new world. It features stories of their arrival, struggle, and adjustment. Based on the experiences of Asian

immigrants discussed above, Asian American literature in its early stages centers around seeking inclusion, which aligns with the characteristics of the immigrant narrative. As stated by Cheung (1997), most Asian American literary works during this era reflect the authors' aspiration to be accepted and included in the body of the American nation. In other words, they try to claim that they are also American and at the same time protest against any form of exploitation, oppression, and exclusion. This can be seen in literary works by Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Filipino American authors. For example, Carlos Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart* (1973) depicts the life of Filipino immigrants who suffer greatly from labor exploitation and tolerate racial oppression in the United States. Overall, the themes of Asian American literature in this age are mostly about oppression, exploitation, exclusion, and the yearning for inclusion.

In the later stages of Asian American literature, there has been a shift in its themes and content. According to Cheung (1997), this literary genre presents a new theme of connecting America to Asia. Under this theme, the authors present their homelands in Asia, providing the background of their people, including historical accounts, culture, ways of life, and identity. This is because the situation of Asian Americans was better than that in the previous era. They gained American citizenship and were more (if not fully) accepted by white Americans. Moreover, they were even assigned a positive image as a model minority, since they were more successful economically and professionally than other minority groups. Therefore, those authors are not obsessed with seeking inclusion and claiming America like those in the previous era. As a representative work, Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) is considered a great achievement of Asian American literature. Employing the style of talk stories, this novel depicts the relationships and conflicts between Chinese mothers and their American-born daughters, while also offering readers insights into Chinese cultural and social backgrounds. Apart from this novel, Helie Lee's *Still Life with Rice* (1997) is also a good example of Asian American novels providing Asian contexts. Based on her grandmother's memories, Lee paints a picture of a Korean woman who escapes from the Korean War and finally resettles in the United States. These two authors, as well as other writers of the same era, significantly incorporate Asian contexts into their writings. In addition, studying Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, Patel (2025) argues:

In order to establish her voice within a space that does not include such marginalized voices, Kingston utilizes elements of fiction and myth that illuminate her experiences. In her exploration of both Chinese and American values, Kingston achieves a narrative that illuminates the tension between the responsibility one has towards their culture and community and the obligations one fulfills for themselves. (para. 10)

This study also indicates that the exploration of cultural heritage and the presentation of the homeland's narratives have become important elements of Asian American literature. In addition to Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, readers can also see a similar way of voice establishment employed in Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* to explore the Chinese and American values and connect China to America, as mentioned earlier.

Thai American literature, rooted in Southeast Asia, is a relatively small branch of Asian American literature, compared to its counterparts, such as Chinese and Japanese literature. Since Thai American literature is new in the Asian American canon, there is no expert or scholar whose expertise is in this area (Cheung, 1997). According to Lowe (1996), Southeast Asian American literature contributes a new voice to Asian American literature, providing stories of war, communist persecution, and the refugees' journeys to the new world. As stated by Chan (1991), after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, a great number of refugees from not only Vietnam but also Cambodia and Laos escaped from the communist persecution to their neighboring countries before being transferred to the First World countries. Due to its critical role in the Vietnam War, the United States became the primary destination for refugees from those countries.

Regarding literature, Vietnamese American writers are the most significant group of Southeast Asian American literature, with higher visibility in the canon than other groups from the same region. Based on Truong (1997), Vietnamese American literature is shaped by war and its aftermath, depicting the brutality of war, the refugee diaspora, and trauma endured by the survivors relocated to American soil. Apart from the Vietnamese, there are other refugee groups whose writings also address similar issues. For example, in a study by Praphan (2024), which investigates memoirs of Hmong refugees from Laos collected in *Hmong Means Free* by Chan (1994), the writing of this group of people is contextualized by their diaspora and trauma. Those memoirs are considered trauma narratives serving as collective memories of Hmong Americans. In the same study, *Golden Bones*, an autobiography by Siv (2008), is also found to be a trauma narrative and collective memory of Cambodian Americans. For Thai American literature, there are a few studies on this small area. Praphan (2019), for example, analyzes the impact of American imperialism on Thai society in S. P. Somtow's *Jasmine Nights*, arguing that Thailand's role as a U.S. military base has led to multidimensional transformations as a consequence of American involvement in the Vietnam War (1954–1975).

The broader Asian American literary field has moved beyond the initial Chinese and Japanese dominance to include a wider array of voices from South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East (Babri, 2024; Lowe, 1996). Therefore, the emergence of Thai American literature, despite being a tiny branch, becomes particularly significant. Although there is limited scholarship and a small number of foundational works, the exploration of "Thainess" in this study of Lapcharoensap's *Sightseeing* is not only an expansion of the Asian American canon but also an essential process to assert the heterogeneity of Asian American experiences and identities.

III. *SIGHTSEEING* AS A REPRESENTATION OF THAINESS IN ASIAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Lapcharoensap's cross-cultural upbringing gives him a unique voice manifesting his transnational literary discourse focusing on diasporic experience, cultural perception, and Asian American identity. In addition, as shown in *Sightseeing*, he reflects the contact between the East and the West in Thailand, highlighting neo-colonial privilege in the form of tourism, presented in a humorous tone. In addition, this book highlights economic disparity, which renders the marginalized groups invisible in society, causing injustice, inequality, and exploitation in Thailand (Chansit & Rattanamathuwong, 2022). Unlike the aforementioned issue, which is presented in a humorous tone, Lapcharoensap employs a serious tone to depict the class disparity in Thailand. Apart from these two issues, a significant characteristic of this literary work is the representation of Thainess as part of Lapcharoensap's cross-cultural identity, which reveals his perception of his home country. Such Thainess is portrayed in different aspects as follows.

The first trait of Thainess portrayed in *Sightseeing* is Thailand's image as a global tourist destination. According to *U.S. News*, two destinations in Thailand—Chiang Mai and Phuket—are ranked sixth and tenth, respectively, among the best places to visit in Asia in 2026 (Tersch, 2025). In fact, Thailand's international image has long been closely associated with tourism. Growing up in Thailand, Lapcharoensap is familiar with this image and tourists from different parts of the world seeking memorable holidays in this country, so it is part of his perception of his homeland, appearing in his writing. As depicted in "Farangs," the first short story in *Sightseeing*, Thailand is a destination for tourists from different countries. Set on a famous island in the country, this story features the life of the narrator, a young boy in love with a *farang* girl. The Thai term "farang" refers to white Westerners, derived from the name "Frank." Historically, during the Ayutthaya period of Siam (now Thailand), the Siamese adopted this term to refer to the Portuguese, who had arrived in the country in significant numbers. Since then, the term *farang* has been used up to the present time (Kittiaras, 2010). A son of a motel owner, the narrator encounters *farangs* from different parts of the world daily:

June: the Germans come to the Island—football cleats, big T-shirt, thick tongues—speaking like spitting. July, the Italians, the French, the British, the Americans. The Italians like pad thai, its affinity with spaghetti. [...] The French like plump girls, rambutans, disco music, baring their breasts. Americans are the fattest, the stingiest of the bunch. [...] They're also the worst drunks. Never get too close to a drunk American. August brings the Japanese. Stay close to them. Never underestimate the power of the yen. Everything's cheap with imperial monies [sic] in hand and they're too polite to bargain. (Lapcharoensap, 2005, p. 1)

The excerpt indicates that the tourists on the island are not only Westerners but also Japanese. In fact, most international tourists are from Asian countries. According to the Association of Thai Travel Agents (2026), in 2025, the Chinese were the biggest tourist group with the number of 605,974, followed by the Indians (306,974). The biggest group of *farang* tourists was the Russian (163,334). Other groups, such as the Vietnamese, the Korean, and the Japanese, also contribute high numbers of foreign tourists to Thailand's tourism. These numbers indicate that Thailand is a hub of international tourists in this region.

Although Thailand is celebrated as a tourist destination, to many *farangs*, it is a site for sexual purposes. While the tourists in general visit Thailand for its beautiful landscapes and culture, a considerable number also focus on Thai women. This dynamic is portrayed through the perspective of the narrator's mother, who attends to male *farangs* at her motel and comes to realize that the two exoticized aspects of Thailand that most appeal to them are women and elephants:

"Pussy and elephants. That's all these people want." She always says this in August, at the season's peak, when she's tired of farangs running all over the Island, tired of finding used condoms in the motel's rooms [...] "You give them history, temples, pagodas, traditional dance, floating markets, seafood curry, tapioca desserts, silk-weaving cooperatives, but all they really want is to ride some hulking gray beast like a bunch of wildmen and to pant over girls and to lie there half-dead getting skin cancer on the beach during the time in between". (Lapcharoensap, 2005, p. 2)

The mother's view of the male *farangs* reveals that their real purpose in visiting Thailand is to enjoy Thai women. In fact, Thailand is also known among foreign tourists as a land of sex tourism: "Thailand hosts one of the largest prostitution markets in the world, per capita. [...] Thailand is known internationally as a major sex tourism site" (Weitzer, 2023, p. 1). This situation can be analyzed as a form of neo-colonial contact between the East and the West, as the West sees the former as a place for exotic sex not available in the Western world (Said, 1978). Although Thailand was never colonized by any Western countries, during the Vietnam War, many U.S. military bases were set up in different parts of the country. In addition, based on Baker and Phongpaichit (2005), it was established as the R & R place (Rest and Recreation) for American soldiers to take a break from the battle in Vietnam. Many nightclubs, bars, and brothels were open to serve the demand of American soldiers.

The above discussion indicates that, alongside the image of the country as a tourist destination, prostitution is another significant trait of Thainess represented in *Sightseeing*. In addition to the mother's view on the male *farangs*, who aim to exploit Thai female bodies, this matter of human trafficking at a local level also appears in "The Café Lovely," another story in the collection. This story is set in a contemporary slum neighborhood in Bangkok, revealing the desire of the narrator, a teenage boy, to experience nightlife, which brings him to witness a deeply-rooted problem of prostitution in Thailand. A fatherless boy with only his older brother as company, he pleads to visit a night cafe with his

brother, only to find out that it is, in fact, a brothel. Imagining this cafe as a regular fun place for boys to hang out, he is stunned to see what is in front of him:

A couple of girls in miniskirts and tank tops and heavy makeup danced and swayed with two balding, middle-aged local men [...] their large hands gripping the girls' slender waists. In a dark corner, more girls were seated at a table, laughing. They sounded like a flock of excited birds. I'd never seen so many girls in my life. (Lapcharoensap, 2005, pp. 36-37)

The picture of many sexy girls waiting to serve their customers makes the boy realize that this place is a brothel. In the previous story, the sex consumers are primarily *farangs*, but for the brothel in this story, local men are regular visitors. This distinction indicates that prostitution in Thailand is not limited to foreign demand, but it also serves local customers. According to Baker and Phongpaichit (2005), capitalism is an important cause of this problem, as it turns people to be materialistic, resulting in poverty. With no choices, many girls are forced to become prostitutes not only to survive, but also to support their families. It is even more poignant to see in the story that underage prostitution also exists in Thai society, as the narrator describes a girl he sees at the cafe:

She couldn't have been more than sixteen years old—younger than my brother—but it seemed clear to me now that she was the one holding him, directing his course, leading him. I wondered how many men she had held up tonight, how many more she would hold in the thousands of nights before her. (Lapcharoensap, 2005, pp. 45-46)

The depiction of this girl suggests that the circle of prostitution in Thailand is large, encompassing women of a wide range of ages, with authority neglect. The place where she works also implies that prostitution is operated not only at a brothel, but at a cafe as well. As Weitzer (2023) argues, in Thailand, this sex business is also available at other places such as massage shops, bars, karaoke restaurants, hotels, or even beauty salons. In addition, according to Favre (2020), although prostitution is prohibited by law in Thailand, sexual services are widely available in practice, including those involving children. The two stories, "Farangs" and "The Café Lovely," reveal that there is a close relationship between tourism and prostitution. Thailand is a popular destination among travelers worldwide. Its long-standing appeal stems not only from its natural beauty but also from the availability of commercial sex services sought by individuals often referred to as sex tourists (Favre, 2020). In other words, international tourism partially contributes to the promotion of prostitution, and together these two phenomena have come to constitute prominent markers of Thainess in the eyes of the global community. Although prostitution in "The Café Lovely" aims at the local customers, it is rooted in sex tourism, which normalizes this sexual exploitation by making people think that it is acceptable to trade bodies for money. The portrayal of this dimension of Thainess in *Sightseeing* suggests that prostitution significantly forms part of Lapcharoensap's perception of his home country.

Another significant aspect of Thainess represented in *Sightseeing*, beyond its construction as a tourist destination and its association with prostitution, is corruption. Corruption is a serious problem in this society, happening in different forms and in various sectors. Based on the statistics by Transparency International (n.d.), the Corruption Perceptions Index of Thailand is 34/100 as of 2024, ranked 107 out of 180 countries. These statistics indicate that the rate of corruption in this country is extremely high, especially when compared to Singapore, another country in Southeast Asia, gaining 84/100 and ranked 3 out of 180. Corruption in Thailand is operated through different means, such as patronage politics, power abuse, bribery, and cheating, all of which are viewed as common practices in the country, while the government fails to deploy effective measures to eradicate them.

Corruption in Thailand is depicted in "Draft Day," a story narrated by a young man who is summoned to participate in a military draft. Based on the Thai constitution, all Thai men aged 21 are required to participate in this military conscription process, where they can either volunteer for a reduced service term or submit to a public lottery draft to determine if they must serve. In the lottery, the participants will pick a card from an urn containing red and black cards. A man who picks a red card must join the military training for two years, while a black card means no obligation to serve. The annual selection period typically occurs in April. Typically, many Thai men and their parents fear conscription into the military because of the long period of rigorous training and the potential risk of armed conflict. Consequently, many individuals employ all possible means, including praying and making offerings to gods or sacred beings, in an effort to avoid military conscription. In many cases, bribery as a form of corruption is practiced by some families to ensure that their sons will be safe from this process.

In the story, the narrator and his friend Wichu are required by law to participate in the conscription lottery. Both are so anxious about their fate that they turn to alcohol for comfort the night before. However, Wichu is unaware of the plan of bribery arranged to help the narrator avoid military service, while the other participants—including Wichu himself—must rely on luck to determine their fate. This arrangement indicates that bribery as a form of corruption is practiced by some Thai people to benefit themselves. Living in the Thai context, Lapcharoensap sees that this practice is an important part of Thainess, and it seems that it is common for people to do it, as he portrays it through the narrator's situation:

I didn't tell him everything had already been arranged for me. I didn't tell him that my father's boss's older brother—a retired navy lieutenant—had recently received two crates of Johnny Walker Blue and a certificate for his wife to a famous goldsmith... I didn't tell Wichu that the lieutenant, in turn, had called my father to thank him. He told my father that he'd recommended me to the draft board as an upstanding young citizen, so

upstanding I didn't need the benefits of marching drills and mess hall duty and combat training to improve my character in any way. (Lapcharoensap, 2005, p. 56)

Conducted through connections between people, this bribery destroys the justice system in Thailand, as it divides people into the privileged and the underprivileged. It is a reciprocal act between the briber and the bribe-taker, who view this act as acceptable. Based on a study by Ariyabuddhiphongs and Hongladarom (2014), to Thai people, bribery is somewhat acceptable because they view paying bribes as a reciprocal exchange, and the analysis shows that this sense of obligation connects acceptance to bribe-payment. In general, people complain about bribery but do not take serious steps to report it through the legal system.

In addition to the bribery conducted by the narrator's family, Lapcharoensap points out in another incident that people simply criticize this corruption but fail to take serious action. In front of many people, one lottery participant is removed from the line while awaiting his turn to draw a card from the urn. This preferential treatment implies that his family has bribed officials to avoid conscription. Although other participants closely witness this incident, they do not protest or report it to the authorities; instead, they merely voice resentment toward the system: "Fucking corruption, somebody says. Cowards, says another. Just another day in the Kingdom of Thailand" (Lapcharoensap, 2005, p. 66). These statements suggest that despite their anger with this corruption, they ultimately come to accept it as a normalized and routine aspect of Thai society. At the end of the draft day, the narrator returns home safely, while Wichu is unlucky as he draws a red card, thus having to join the army. His mother has neither the money to offer bribes nor connections with military officials, so he must rely entirely on luck—and he has none. Through literary representation, Lapcharoensap articulates this dark aspect of Thainess, with his writing operating as a cultural tool to protest against structural injustice embedded in Thai society.

IV. CONCLUSION

Through the framework of Asian American literature, this study discovers that *Sightseeing* articulates Thainess in different aspects for Western audiences. By placing Lapcharoensap's work within the development of Asian American literature—from early immigrant stories about exclusion to later transnational writings that reconnect America with Asia—the study also shows how *Sightseeing* helps expand and diversify the Asian American canon. Since Thai American literature is a relatively understudied field, this analysis renders it more visible, challenging the dominance of East Asian American literature, which has a longer history, and reaffirming the heterogeneity of the canon.

The close readings of the selected stories indicate that Lapcharoensap represents Thainess in different dimensions, particularly tourism, prostitution, and corruption. Thailand is portrayed not only as an exotic destination for international tourists but also as a country shaped by unequal power relations, neo-colonial encounters, and global capitalism. The depiction of sex tourism and prostitution indicates that Thai bodies are commodified for both foreigners and locals. Meanwhile, the portrayal of corruption reveals how injustice and inequality are normalized in this country. These representations, as social realities, are juxtaposed with the romanticized Western imagination of Thailand as a tourist paradise. However, Lapcharoensap does not entirely condemn these unjust systems; instead, he reflects his critical perspectives on the country as an insider and a Thai American writer whose identity is constituted by such a transnational background. *Sightseeing* is employed as a means to reveal structural problems in Thai society, which are uncomfortable, unavoidable truths about the country, and at the same time to assert the presence of the Thai voice within Asian American literature. In the same vein as Cheung (1997), this literary work connects America to Asia by presenting stories of the homeland, which represent Thainess as the cultural specificity of Thai American identity. Furthermore, the theme of this book also aligns with Fan (2024) in that it explores the histories, cultures, and identities of the author's home country. By foregrounding Thailand's social realities alongside its global image, *Sightseeing* expands the boundaries of Asian American literature and reasserts its heterogeneity, constituted by diverse histories, cultures, and lived experiences.

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Kittiphong Praphan earned a Ph.D. in English: Literature and Criticism from Indiana University of Pennsylvania, USA, in 2015, where he was also awarded an Excellent Graduate Research Award for his dissertation on Southeast Asian diasporic literature. While studying at this university, he also served as a teaching associate responsible for undergraduate writing courses.

Currently, he is an Associate Professor of English, teaching literature and writing at the Department of Western Languages and Linguistics, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Mahasarakham University, Thailand. He has published research papers on Southeast Asian American literature and ecocriticism, his areas of interest.

Dr. Praphan can be reached at kittiphong.p@msu.ac.th