

The purpose of this thesis is to study the characteristics, roles and characterization of female characters in Thai literature from the Ayutthaya to the early Ratanakosin period <1350-1851>. The study covers three types of poetry namely didactic poetry, Niras and narrative poetry consisting of tales and dramas.

The study reveals that female characters in didactic poetry are idealistic wives. The concept of a perfect wife influences the characterization of female characters in Niras and narrative poetry.

Female characters in Niras play a significant role without any real action. They are important to the theme of this literary genre which is the mourning for beloved women. Female characters in Niras are perfect women in their beauty and qualifications. The separation from them cause unbearable sufferings to the poet. Female characters in Niras are therefore the most essential element that creates the unique style of this type of poetry.

Female characters in narrative poetry are as important to the plot and the theme as male characters. In some literary works, female characters are main characters. The characteristics of female characters in narrative poetry are based on ideal women from didactic poetry. Thus, there are two kinds of female characters in this type of poetry, one is based on ideal women and the other is not. Most of the female characters in narrative poetry preserve the convention of female characterization based on ideal women. However they reflect the real nature of human beings. Thus, sometimes their actions are conflicting with ideal concepts. They mostly impress the audience by their roles and behaviors which reflect the complexity of their minds and of human nature.

One of the important function of poetry is the aesthetic function. The literary pleasure that the audience experience comes from the powerful language evoking the intensity of feelings through sounds and meanings. These literary techniques have become a cherished convention reflecting the pride of being the master over the language. The important parts of poetry usually involve female characters. Thus, female characters are crucial to the aesthetic beauty of Thai poetry.

As Thai poetry is closely related to dramas, the various "rasa" in the literary texts is a highly valued literary quality. Although most Thai poetry share similar plots, the various rasa and the various feelings conveyed in the exquisitely poetic language make Thai poetry an "eternal" spring of pleasure.

There are no denying that this spring of pleasure, which has set a Thai literary taste, owes much of its charm to the female characters.