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**(IR)RESISTIBLY MODERN: THE CONSTRUCTION OF MODERN THAI IDENTITIES  
IN THAI LITERATURE DURING THE COLD WAR ERA, 1958-1976**

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**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
University of London  
School of Oriental and African Studies  
2011**

Declaration for PhD thesis

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## ABSTRACT

Through reference to Thai literary works produced during the Cold War Era, 1958-1976, this thesis explores the construction of modern Thai identities under the dual rubrics of ‘modernisation’ and ‘development’. These two framing concepts came to play a crucial role in Thailand both in terms of national policy and of the fabric of people’s day to day lives. Amidst the flux of rapid socio-economic and cultural changes brought about by a form of modernisation, urbanisation and industrialisation directed by the authority of the military state and supported by the American government, the construction and negotiation of Thai identities became vitally intertwined with the processes of ‘becoming modern’. The thesis therefore proceeds to investigate how the ‘desire to be modern’ has evolved and manifested itself in Thai history from the mid-nineteenth century to an age which Benedict Anderson defines as the ‘American Era’ (1950s-1970s) (1977: 15). More specifically, the thesis goes on to examine how ‘modernity’ and ‘being modern’ were embodied and delivered their impact upon the lived experience of Thai people in both urban and rural areas and, at the same time, appeared to polarise ‘tradition’ as its binary opposite. It further looks at the way in which men and women represented as ‘modern’ in the literary texts under analysis are at once subsumed into the influx of changes and struggle to define and negotiate their different identities from within the social dynamics of modernity.

This thesis structures its discussion of the topic into different key issues discerned from the selected literary texts. It opens with the critical survey on the discursive ‘desire to be modern’ of the Siamese/Thai state and the interrelation between the modern environment and the issues of gender and sexuality. The research then explores, in separate chapters, different aspects of modern Thai identities.

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Even with help from many individuals, this work will not be devoid of errors. These are entirely my own.

## NOTES ON TRANSLITERATION AND REFERENCING

There is no generally agreed system of representing Thai in roman script, and all systems have some limitations because the 26 letters of the roman alphabet are not sufficient to represent all the consonants, vowels, diphthongs, and tones of Thai. In this thesis I have adopted a modified version of the Royal Institute system of romanising Thai. The system makes no distinction between long and short vowel forms; and tones are not represented. I differ slightly from the Royal Institute system in using ‘j’ for the Thai ‘jor jan’, not ‘ch’, but revert, for example, to the more widely used *chao* rather than *jao*. Dashes are used to separate units of compound expressions that are translated as a single term in English, such as *khwan-pen-thai* for ‘Thainess’.

I follow the Thai norm of referring to Thai authors by given names, not surnames. I follow the authors’ preferred spelling of their own names in English when known rather than romanising names in keeping with our own transliteration system to maintain consistency.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION: THE (IR)RESISTIBLE ALLURE OF BEING MODERN

Although the Cold War began towards the end of the Second World War in 1945 and ended with the end of the Soviet Union in 1991, the thesis uses the Cold War as broad reference to the period in which world politics was ideologically divided into ‘democratic’ and ‘communist’ camps and Thailand was affected by that division because of its alliance with the US. The specific timeframe from 1958 to 1976 is determined by the internal political situation of the country. The year 1958 is significant in modern Thai political history because Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat executed his second coup d’état in October and came to completely control Thai politics as a result. His military junta and its policy shaped the political, economic, social, intellectual and cultural life of the nation in the next two decades. The year 1976 marks the most horrific government suppression of civilian dissidents in the 6 October massacre. It is a personal trauma for those whose lives were, in more ways than one, affected by it and an historical trauma for the country and its members that is yet to fight for its rightful place in mainstream nationalist history. This thesis examines key issues which are Thai political identity, modern Thai identities in the rural-urban contact, youth identities, female identities and Thai masculinities in selected literary texts produced at different points over the span of almost two decades. These issues are identified and thematised because they well encapsulate changes and challenges brought forth by modernisation in lives of men and women represented in the literary texts.

In its treatment of literary works as cultural texts where diversified discourses interact and articulate, the thesis explores the construction of modern Thai identities under the dual rubrics of ‘modernisation’ and ‘development’. The authoritative discourse of ‘modernisation’ and ‘development’ permeated Thailand both in terms of national policy and of the fabric of people’s daily lives. While this thesis uses literary texts as primary material in its attempt to make a transition from literary into cultural studies, it pays close attention to the historical, political, social and cultural context of the period in question. It is fully aware of the relevance of the historical formation of the discourse of ‘modernisation’ in Thai perception and national identity

construction and how that perception has played a crucial role in the power relation between Siam/Thailand and the West.

The idea that Siam/Thailand<sup>1</sup> needed ‘modernisation’ so that the country and its people became ‘modern’ whether for political, social, economic or cultural reasons has been circulating among the ruling elite, royal or not, as well as the intellectual elite since the mid-nineteenth century, though under different terminology (Boccuzzi, 2007; Chattri, 2004; Kasian, 2001; Peleggi, 2002; Saichon: 2002; Thak, 2007 and 2009; Thongchai, 2000 and 1994). This introductory chapter is thus historically oriented in its contents as it aims to frame the topic at hand within the broader scope of Thai studies in its analysis of the discursive ‘desire to be modern’ of the Thai elite<sup>2</sup> which had gradually been disseminated in the public arena. It is also historically oriented in its attempt to offer an overview of Thai literary studies in the last sixty years in order to place this thesis in the ‘new’ Thai literary studies or Thai cultural studies that is interdisciplinary in its methodology and articulation.

This chapter is structured into three parts. The following three parts form the historical, intellectual and gendered cultural background indispensable to the discussion of the selected popular literary texts and the key issues mentioned earlier. My approach to literary texts examined in the chapters of this thesis is one informed by that of cultural studies. It involves an inclusion of popular literary texts that are excluded from the received corpus of the 1960s and 1970s Thai literature and of Thai literary studies. It emphasises a nuanced and multifarious interpretation of the texts by giving as close attention to history and socio-cultural world of those texts in the new historicist terms. More importantly, the thesis incorporates a critical investigation of ideologies and discursive practices that govern the texts, history and culture in order to deconstruct them and tease out power relations, conflicts and power negotiation that inform an identity construction process represented by the characters. The issues of gender and sexuality in the modern environment are specifically foregrounded in

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<sup>1</sup> The name of the country ‘Siam’ was changed to ‘Thailand’ in 1939 under the first premiership of Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram (1938-1944). Thus, references made to ‘Siam’ are to the country before 1939 while ‘Thailand’ refers to the country from 1939. The debates concerning the name change are beyond the scope of this research. For detailed discussions of the issue see Judith A. Stowe, 1991; Charnwit Kasetsiri, 2005; B. Terwiel, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> The discursive ‘desire to be modern’ of the Thai elite is conceptualised with echoes to research on different discursive practices of the Thai elite in their dealing with the West and western style modernity since the mid-nineteenth century. For discussion of the means and manifestation of modernisation in Siam/Thailand at different historical periods see for example Boccuzzi, 2007; Chattri, 2004; Kasian, 2001; Peleggi, 2002; Saichon: 2002; Thak, 2007 and 2009; Thongchai, 2000 and 1994; Yukti, 1994.

part three for the reason that modernisation was then perceived in gendered terms and that people always ‘live their lives partly through gender’ (Parker, 2008: 221).

Part one unravels the definitions and implications of ‘modern’, ‘modernisation’ and ‘modernity’ as well as the employment of these terms in this thesis. In this part, Siamese contact with foreigners is investigated. It also includes an historical survey of the relationship between Siam/Thailand and the West since the mid-nineteenth century to the period in question in order to show that the discourse of ‘modernisation’ in Siam/Thailand had always been in relation to the West and delivered, in various degrees, real effects on the people.<sup>3</sup> The thesis perceives the Siam/Thailand-the West relationship within the discursive desire to be modern of the Thai elite. Part one, thus, discusses how the discursive desire was manifested in the notions of ‘*siwilai*’ (a Thai transliterated word for ‘civilised’) in the mid-nineteenth century to the end of absolute monarchy in 1932, ‘*sakon*’ (international) in the 1930s to the end of the Second World War, and ‘modernisation’ in ‘development discourse’ implemented by the Thai military elite in the late 1950s. This first part then proceeds to focus specifically on the interrelated issues of the Thai military state, the communist threat, Thainess, intense American presence and influence, and profound socio-economic and cultural changes in Thailand.

Part two focuses on the intellectual tradition of Thai literary studies in Thailand which has been taking place alongside and has also been effected by socio-political changes of the country. It critically surveys the four dominant approaches in Thai literary criticism and attempts to unearth the fundamental ideological conflict between conservatism and the progressivism in the area of Thai literary studies. It also reviews research on the corpus of literary works of the period in question and justifies the present study’s deliberate selection of popular literary texts outside the corpus of ‘Literature for Life’ movement both in terms of Marxist-Socialist literary content and criticism.

Part three discusses the formation of issues of gender and sexuality in the modern environment. Along with material transformation came the transformation of people’s gendered lives. Topics of woman’s status and prostitution entered the public debate of national progress in gendered terms. The public debate on the topics in the print media implied an anxiety in society to control female sexuality in the face of

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<sup>3</sup> See footnote 2. For discussion of Thai identity construction in Thai popular culture and film with specific reference to Thailand and the West encounter see Harrison, 2010a and 2010b.

modernisation and social changes. This part also addresses sexual cultural assumptions regarding femininity and masculinity. They are pertinent in the discussion of power dynamics in gender relations, gender identity and sexuality in the context of modern society in chapter four to chapter six as this thesis also aims to broaden these foci in the discussion of works produced in the period in question.

## PART ONE

### **THAN-SAMAI, SAMAI-MAI, DISCURSIVE ‘DESIRE TO BE MODERN’, THE THAI STATE, COLD WAR POLITICS, MODERNISATION AND THAI IDENTITIES**

#### ***Than-samai and samai-mai***

The Thai translation of ‘being modern’ or ‘to be modern’ as *than-samai*, which literally means ‘to catch up with the time/the era’, implies the absence or the lack of capacity to keep abreast with the given time or era. *Than-samai* also connotes ‘modernity or the best of the era—in science, technology, industry, education, statecraft, business, etc.’ (Thak, 2009: 463). In this way, an anxiety ‘to be modern’ has long occupied the interest of the Siamese elite since the mid-nineteenth century. An underlying assumption of the state of lack embedded in search for ‘being modern’ (*than-samai*) and ‘modernity’ (*khwa-m-than-samai* or *samai-mai*) rendered its tangible effects in the lived experience of Thai people to an unprecedented degree and scale by developmental discourse practiced by the military regimes of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat (1958-1963 hereafter Sarit) and his successors, Field Marshal Thanom Kittikhajon and Field Marshal Praphat Jarusathian (1963-1973 hereafter Thanom and Praphat, respectively). ‘Modernisation’ (*kan-tham-hai-than-samai* or *kan-tham-hai-pen-samai-mai*) and ‘development’ (*kan-phattana*)<sup>4</sup> became the order of the day to take the country and its people out of the state of ‘lack’ as they were concretised and delivered by national policy. The definitions of *kan-phattana* in the Thai usage of the term range from ‘improvement of infrastructure’ (Thak, 2007: ix) to ‘path forward’ (ibid. xv), *kan-phattana* thus undeniably implies the very idea of (Western) modernity and modernisation.

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<sup>4</sup> *Kan* is a prefix added before an abstract concept making it an abstract noun similar to a suffix ‘-ment’ in English.

This thesis recognises the problematic demarcation of the terms ‘modernity’ and ‘modern’ in both chronological and intellectual senses and by no means disregards the fact that its employment of the terms expands across different politico-historical periods in Thai history. The term ‘modernity’ is ‘ambiguous and chronologically elastic’ (1991: 40), Tomlinson observes, whereas, ‘modern’, argues Thongchai Winichakul, is ‘a vague and relative term which hardly signifies any specific historical character. [...] In the context of Siam, this adjective generally means Westernised as opposed to traditional’ (2004: 19). In most situations, however, the terms ‘modern’, ‘traditional’, ‘premodern’ are ambiguous and each of them is ‘intelligible only in reference to the others’ (ibid.). With regards to the abovementioned argument in its use of the terms, this thesis specifically looks at ‘modernisation’ and ‘modernity’ in the development context of 1960s and 1970s Thailand and, to a lesser degree, in terms of the ‘modernity’ associated with the aspiration of the Siamese elite from the mid-nineteenth century<sup>5</sup> to engage in cultural materials of Anglo-European modernity.<sup>6</sup> Yet, an awareness of how the latter informs the former is taken into full account in the discussion of the topic at hand.

The present study also makes no attempt to debate the intellectual history of Western modernity and its relevance to the Thai intellectual history. It does not debate ‘Modernism’ as art and as an intellectual movement (Bradbury and McFarland, 1978; Ayers, 2004). In its emphasis on ‘modernisation’ and ‘modernity’ in the development context of Thailand in the 1960s and 1970s, it follows the observation of Scott Lash and Jonathan Friedman that ‘modernity is a matter of *movement*, of *flux*, of *change*, of *unpredictability*’ (1992: 1); and of Marshall Berman that modernity is the experience of space and time, of the self and others, of life’s possibilities and perils’ (1988: 15). In its reference to modernity and modernism, this thesis adopts Berman’s inclusive idea of ‘modernism as any attempt by modern men and women to become subjects as well as objects of modernisation, to get a grip on the modern world and make themselves at home in it’ (ibid. 5). Modernism is a struggle to make a place for oneself in a constantly changing world (ibid. 6, 11). It is the very struggle and lived experience of

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<sup>5</sup> I owe the notion of modernisation in development term as opposed to the Siamese elitists’ aspiration for European modernity to Boccuzzi, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> See Thongchai, 2000; Peleggi, 2002.

common Thai men and women to define themselves in the rapidly changing milieu, where ‘there was some excitement in the air, a sense that something was happening or was about to happen’, as Thak describes his personal experience during and after the first Sarit coup of 1957 (2007: xii), that this thesis addresses. At the same time, however, it also takes into account the narrower and context-dependent meaning of ‘being modern’ (*than-samai*) as ‘to catch up with the time/the era’ and the desire for ‘modernity’ as attainment of ‘the best of the era’ both of which were fundamental to the Thai government’s modernisation project.

Amidst the profound socio-economic and cultural changes brought about by a form of modernisation, urbanisation and industrialisation directed by the authority of the military state and supported by the American government, this thesis argues that the construction and negotiation of Thai identities during an age which Benedict Anderson defines as the ‘American Era’ (1950s-1970s) (1977: 15) became vitally intertwined with the process of ‘becoming modern’. It therefore critically examines how ‘modernity’ and ‘being modern’ were embodied, how Thai people in both urban and rural areas experienced them and, at the same time, how they appeared to polarise ‘tradition’ as an indispensable binary opposite. It further examines specifically the way in which the men and women represented as ‘modern’ in the literary texts under analysis are at once subsumed into the social dynamics of modernity and also struggle to define and negotiate their different identities from within it.

The next section investigates Siamese contact with foreigners and how the ‘desire to be modern’, central to the modernisation project, had evolved and manifested itself from the mid-nineteenth century to the ‘American Era’. It explores the perception, reaction and negotiation of the Thai royal and military ruling elite towards the West and what it stood for as well as the position of the country and the people in relation to the West and the rubric of ‘modernisation’ which came to be indispensably connected to the construction of modern Thai identities.

### ***Farang, Westernness (khwam-pen-tawantok) and Discursive ‘Desire to be Modern’***

This section illustrates that modernisation and the notion of modernity in Siam/Thailand intrinsically connects with Westernisation and the country’s

relationship with the West. Indispensable in the perusal of the notion of modernity in the Siamese/Thai mindset is the pertinent reference of the country's interaction with its Western counterpart. In the discussion of the relationship between Siam/Thailand and the West, this thesis repeatedly employs the Thai term '*farang*' as it is a generic term used in both writing and speaking interchangeably to mean an 'identification [marker] for the West, Western peoples, and Western-derived things' (Pattana, 2010: 60). *Farang*, used both as a noun and adjective, could mean 'the West' (as in *muang farang* = city/country in the West), 'a white westerner' or Caucasian (*khon farang*), 'the westerners' (*phuak farang*) and 'Western' (*ahan farang* = Western food). The etymological explanation of *farang* is still inconclusive. However, it is generally accepted that the word derived from the Persian word '*farangi*', which means 'foreigner' in Farsi, as the Siamese traded with the Persians and the Indians and consequently came to indiscriminately call all the white westerners *farang* (Sulak, 2002: 33). In Urdu and Hindi, 'foreigner' is also referred to as *farangi*. Prince Damrong Rajanuphap (1862-1943 hereafter Damrong), Siam's first interior minister, a blue-blooded historian, intellectual and veteran administrator, explained that the Siamese called all white westerners *farang* as they were 'following the example of the Indian who called all European "Farengi"' (Damrong, 1959: 1). However, during the Vietnam War when so many black American soldiers were stationed in or came to Thailand for 'Rest and Recreation' (R&R), the phrase *farang dam* (literally black *farang*) was also used.

The derivation of the term testifies that contact between the Siamese and foreigners (*khon/chao tang chat*) was common. The Siamese had traded with foreigners since the Ayutthaya period (1350-1767) while contacts with Western countries only started in the sixteenth century (Anuman Rajadon, 1990: 7). The West took an interest in Siam, especially in the early seventeenth century, mainly for the reasons of commerce and spreading Christianity. However, foreign and Western soldiers were also hired in Ayutthaya for their advanced weapons and military skills unfamiliar to the Siamese especially during the reign of King Narai the Great (r. 1656-1688) who implicated them in internal political conflicts among the monarch and his court officials (Nidhi, 1980). Despite the westerners' abilities and potentially beneficial contribution, the Western influence often encompassed also the danger and risk derived from associating too closely with westerners whether manifested in the

form of religious Otherness i.e. Christianity, capitalist monopolisation or military power.

The confrontation between Siam and the West turned more intense in all aspects in the mid-nineteenth century when Imperialism was at its height and made its presence felt in the region, especially its military challenge to China and India, the former sources of civilisation in the South East Asia region. Not only did the Siamese elite attempt to define the West and estimate its place on the power scale, they also perceived it as an 'entity' with specific characteristics different from those of the Siamese. The differentiation enabled the Siamese elite to identify the West and what it represented as 'un-Siameseness/un-Thainess'. 'Negative identification'<sup>7</sup> as the process of defining by difference rather than similarity served as a useful tool in the construction of Thai 'national identity' (*ekkalak khong chat*).<sup>8</sup> 'Once the un-Thainess can be identified, its opposite, Thainess,<sup>9</sup> is apparent' (Thongchai, 2004: 5). 'National identities' hence denote 'a relational category brought into existence by comparison and contrast' (Reynolds, 2002: 3). In a nutshell, 'notions of national identities are discursively constructed and therefore are subject to change' (Thongchai, 2004: back cover).

The next section critically surveys Siam/Thailand's 'self'-defining moments vis-à-vis the West from the height of Imperialism in the mid-nineteenth century to the 1970s. The three interrelated yet significantly different periods of encounter between Siam/Thailand and the West are, first, during the reign of Rama IV (Mongkut r. 1851-1868) to the end of absolute monarchy in 1932; second, during the Second World War under the first premiership of Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram (hereafter Phibun) (1938-1944); and third, after the Second World War under the second premiership of Phibun (1948-1957) followed by the military regimes of Sarit and Thanom-Prapchat, his successors, which lasted until 1973. Each critical juncture reveals its dominant ideology as well as the challenges posed and the dynamics of a

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<sup>7</sup> For the discussion of 'the positive and negative identification of Thainess' see Thangchai, 2004: 3-6.

<sup>8</sup> Although 'Chineseness' has also played a crucial role in the shaping of 'Thainess' since at least the beginning of the twentieth century with an influx of Chinese immigrants who later became crucial contributors of Siam/Thailand economic structure, it is beyond the focus of this research.

<sup>9</sup> Reference to the term 'Thainess' (*khwa-pen-Thai*) as Thai national identity in this thesis takes into account Thongchai Winichakul's notion of its discursive construction rather an entity with intrinsic characteristics and values. His argument that the formation of Siam as a 'nation state' had just begun in the reign of Rama V (Chulalongkorn r. 1867-1910) with the modern geography and technology of mapping brought forth by Europeans also reinforces that 'Thainess' is indeed a modern construction (Thongchai, 2004).

discursive construction of the Thai national identity/‘Thainess’/‘We-self’<sup>10</sup> in the face of the modernity represented by the West. This construction, the thesis argues, was informed by a specific socio-political, historical and economic context.

The following historical narrative conveys the Siam/Thailand-the West relationship within the discursive ‘desire to be modern’ of the elite. It shows that the discourse of ‘modernisation’ in Siam/Thailand has always been in relation to the West and has delivered, in various degrees, real effects on the people. It portrays the transition of the notions of ‘*siwilai*’ with contested meanings ranging from ‘Anglo-European modernity’, royal nationalism and egalitarianism to the notions of the Thai military elite’s ‘modernisation’ in ‘development discourse’, which provides the context of an analysis of the selected literary texts in the following chapters.

### **The First Wave of ‘Being Modern’: *Siwilai*, the Floating Signifier**

The Siamese court of the Rattanakosin Period (1782-present) in the mid-nineteenth century occupied a prominent position in the country’s interactions and relationships with the West, which was then focussed on Europe, particularly Britain and France, and to a lesser degree on the United States. Portuguese foreigners reappeared in Bangkok in the 1810s (Baker and Pasuk, 2005: 37). An increasingly powerful Western presence made itself felt during the reign of Rama III (Nangklao r. 1824-1851) and had raised the alarm as a result of two significant incidents—the victory of the British over Burma in 1826 (ibid. 39), and over China in the Opium War of 1842. Though the king had not yet been confronted with the pressing need to acclimatise himself to the coming of a new world order during his reign, he acknowledged that the *axis mundi* was shifting from India and China to the West (Thongchai, 2000: 533). The last words of Rama III urged a safeguard against the *farang*:

There will be no more wars with the Burmese and the Vietnamese. There will be troubles only with the *farang*. Take good care; do not fall into their traps. Whatever they have invented, or done, which we should know of and do, we can imitate and learn from them, but do not wholeheartedly believe in them. (Rabibhadana, 1969: 125)

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<sup>10</sup> See Thongchai, 2004: 7-9 for discussion of the Thai collective ‘We-self’ as the discourse that authorises some claims and texts in the field of Thai studies.

The late king's words of worry and advice not only encapsulated the anxiety of the Siamese elite towards the power of the West but also their ambivalent attitudes towards the *farang* from whom they should 'learn but believe not'. Fully aware of the colonial power even while he was in the monkhood between 1824-1851 (Baker and Pasuk, 2005: 42), Prince Mongkut (later Rama IV) and his young entourage learnt English and other Western languages from missionaries.

Ascending the throne in 1851, Rama IV was the first to be hit by the whirlwind from the West. Inviting John Bowring, the governor of British Hong Kong, to negotiate a trade treaty, the king signed the Bowring Treaty in 1855 though he could not achieve it on his terms (ibid. 45). This Anglo-Siamese agreement resulted in the Siamese royal elite's loss of control over commercial monopolies and in the imposition of extraterritoriality for British nationals and their colonial subjects such as the Indians, the Burmese, the Malays and the Hong Kong Chinese (Anderson, 1978). However, as the treaty also allowed the British to import opium for sale through a monopoly of the Siamese government, 'the court made the opium monopoly into the single largest source of revenue' (Baker and Pasuk, 2005: 45). This period, broadly speaking, marked the beginning of 'modernisation' in Siam that came about as much as a result of the threat of colonisation imposed by Britain and France as the exposure to Western technological advancement and the expansion of the market economy.

America, the 'New Country' (*meuang mai*), at this juncture had not yet been known to be an imperial power in the region but to spread Christianity and offer altruistic relations. The Siamese royals and commoners felt less threatened and more positive towards the Americans, especially the missionaries who brought much Western advancement such as modern medicines and printing technology to Siam. Prominent among their number was the American Presbyterian missionary doctor Dr. Dan Beach Bradley who had quite a close connection to the court of Rama IV. However, some reservations may have existed among the Siamese royals towards the fact that America did not have a monarchy. As a result, they remained uncertain of its ideology and were displeased with the 'less refined' American manners towards the court (Thanet, 2004: 376-7). For Rama IV, the New Country, despite its modern advancements, did not appeal to him as a reservoir of Western civilisation, and 'Civilisation' was the measure of all things.

The notion of *siwilai*, (the Thai transliteration of the word ‘civilised’ and meaning ‘being civilised’ or ‘having civilisation’<sup>11</sup>) no matter how elusive or contentious, had been a major concern among the Siamese royal and non-royal elite alike since the mid-nineteenth century. The elite’s anxiety about *siwilai* had set in during the Rama IV period and unequivocally manifested itself during the reign of his son, Rama V (Chulalongkorn, r.1868-1910). ‘This was a new consciousness of the world in which Siam had to reconceptualise itself in relation to the rest of the world, including the new supreme sources of power’, namely, Britain and other European countries ‘whose ethos was “civilisation” ’ (Thongchai, 2000: 529 and 533).

Siam during the reign of Rama V appeared at times to be under the threat of colonisation. The country’s sovereignty, however, was guaranteed by its becoming a buffer state between the colonial territories of British India-Burma and of French Indochina in a 1896 treaty signed by Britain and France. This fact supports Thongchai Winichakul’s argument, running contrary to the conventional historiography of Thailand, that the Siamese royal elite was not simply compelled to modernise or civilise the country in order to remove the preconditions of colonisation. Instead, an equally, if not more, important motivation lay in the desire to be civilised (ibid. 532). Thongchai argues that, ‘as the traditional imperial power in the region, Siam was anxious about its position among modern nations’ as a result of which it struggled to maintain ‘the relative superiority of Siam’ in the region through ‘the quest for *siwilai*’ (ibid. 529). Ranging from an interest in the acquisition of material objects, to social etiquette and modes of living, the Siamese royal elite and intellectuals played a central role in the ‘appropriation and localisation of the ideas and practices of *siwilai*’ (ibid.) in which ‘“Europe” became a signifier in the discourse on *siwilai*, referring to a distant land that was the imagined model for progress and desirable changes’ (ibid. 538).

As the Siamese elite in the late nineteenth century sought to tap into the sources of superiority from privileged Others, they also constructed inferior ‘Others within’ from among their own subjects; *chao pa* (the jungle people) as the uncivilisable and *chao bannork* (the rural villagers) as the backward and naïve (ibid. 536). The attainment of *siwilai* was a vessel which carried the ruling classes closer to the more *siwilai* Western Others and further away from the less *siwilai* Others within.

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<sup>11</sup> *Siwilai* can be interchangeably used as a noun, a verb, or an adjective.

The institution of the monarchy turned to ‘an assumption of augmented powers over its own people in an imitation of colonial rule—not as a victim to it’ (Harrison, 2010a: 13). In effect, Rama V sent out several of his sons to study and be civilised in England and other European countries while the king himself visited England and many European countries in two significant state visits in 1897 and 1907, the first made by any Thai monarch to Europe.

Despite the fact that Siam retained its sovereignty during the height of imperial expansion, its crypto-colonial status (Herzfeld, 2002) manifested itself in areas of elite-directed cultural hegemony. Kasian Tejapira succinctly assesses the role of the ruling elite at the end of the nineteenth century as follows:

[The Chakri rulers] inhabited a mental, intellectual, and discursive ‘civilised’ world wishfully close to their sovereign counterparts in the European metropolises and far from their compatriots in the villages. Regarding themselves subjectively as almost a supra-ethnic or supranational cosmopolitan ruling caste, they lorded it over the Siamese nation-people as colonial masters with a royal Thai face. (Kasian, 2001: 5-6)

King Rama VI (Vajiravudh, r.1910-1925) both inherited and redefined his father's notion of *siwilai* and went further in his attempt to create a nationalist discourse that would surpass the urban Siamese’s challenge to the elite’s monopoly of *siwilai*. Sent to England at the age of thirteen and spending the next nine years being ‘civilised’ through his education there, Vajiravudh, his siblings and aristocratic peers represented the first generation to experience ‘Westernness’ at first-hand.

Consequently, Vajiravudh’s was also the first generation to face an identity crisis of the royal elite at the crossroads between a desire for *siwilai* and a traditional Siamese cultural heritage. As much as they were enchanted by and engrossed themselves in the civilised Westernness, it was ultimately not their own discourse and thus could not anchor them in the context of indigenous Siam. To solve this dilemma, Vajiravudh returned to Siamese cultural origins, bestowing upon them new cultural meanings, in the discursive practice of ‘archaeology’. In other words, indigenous Siamese roots were to be preserved and developed in their capacity as cultural artefacts (arts, performing art, fine art, architecture, craftsmanship etc.) that spoke of a glorious, genealogical Siamese civilisation that was no less ‘civilised’ than that of the West. It was the ‘revival’ of the traditional in a new context with a newly-given cultural meaning.

On the part of *siwilai* in a nationalist discourse, the socio-political and economic changes engendered the crisis of legitimacy faced by Rama VI, and subsequently his brother Rama VII, for these changes ushered in the concept of *siwilai* in the public debate about national progress. During the reign of Rama V, when the country's public sphere was still in its formative stage, the authority of the monarch remained more or less undisputed (Peleggi, 2002: 10). However, that was no longer the case with Vajiravudh. The spread of literacy in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the increasing numbers of educated non-elite Thai, the steady growth of print capitalism, and a mass market of urban reading public from the 1890s resulted in the emergence of an imagined Thai community, argues Barmé (2002) following Anderson's seminal concept of the 'imagined community' (1983). This imagined Thai community comprised 'individuals personally unknown to one another [who] began to engage in print-mediated public debate and discussion about "national" issues and concerns' (Barmé, 2002: 7). Egalitarianism, as a constituent of *siwilai* and progress, was central to the public debate on the state of the nation in which the tension between the middle-class commoners and the established authority became apparent. The debate engaged the educated commoners who came to see themselves as citizens playing a vital role in the cultural life of the nation, a role formerly monopolised by the royal elite (ibid. 255).

While *siwilai* became a public discourse utilised by commoners in their debates on egalitarianism, Rama VI viewed it differently. For him, stressing the point that all Thais had duties determined by their social positions, *siwilai* were good citizens, individuals who understood and carried out their duties which were, inescapably, focussed on a loyalty to 'Nation, Religion and King' (*chat-sat-kasat*). The trinity, modelled on the British term 'God, King and Country', was founded by Vajiravudh and was the heart of his nationalist discourse for he identified himself as the embodiment of the Thai nation (*chat Thai*) in which the king's duty was to protect the country and Buddhism, the moral core of the nation (Barmé, 1993: 27, 31).

However, the commoners' redefinitions of progress and *siwilai* diverged from those of the royal elite. Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, citing Atthachak Sattayanurak, argue that educated commoners viewed progress as a situation in which 'human beings have a better and happier life...as a result of their own efforts'. They redefined those who were *siwilai* as people 'who behave nobly...and contribute to the country's progress' (Atthachak, 1955: 250, 252 in Baker and Pasuk, 2005: 109).

These interrelated notions of progress, *siwilai* and nation were more inclusive of the common people and represented their interests, unlike what Vajiravudh proposed. Such a divergence gradually reached its apogee in the reign of Rama VII.

Rama VII (Prajadhipok r.1925-1934) came to the throne at a critical and challenging time, both in terms of it being the time of the Great Depression and of the wider Siamese populace's rejection of absolutism, which followed as a result of Rama VI's financial extravagances and lack of popularity. While his absolutist government was struggling unsuccessfully to solve the economic crisis by reducing officials, cutting education budgets and raising taxes for salaried officials, the press increasingly criticised the inefficiency of the regime in solving problems, hence raising widespread resentment. Amidst such political currents, Damrong, whose roles as an elite intellectual and historian had never ceased since the reign of his brother Rama V, proposed in his keynote address 'The Siamese government in ancient times' (*Laksana kan-pokkhorng prathet sayam tae boran*, 1927) the oft-quoted 'national characteristics of the Thai people' (*uppanisai khornng chon-chat Thai*). These were 'love of national independence', 'tolerance' and 'compromise or assimilation' (*kan-prasan prayote*) (Damrong, 1975: 6 in Reynolds, 2002: 12; Saichon, 2003: 312; Thongchai, 2004: 4).

Damrong's proposal might appear to be inclusive and even advocate a casteless society. However, his ideology was perhaps not dissimilar in kind but only in lexicon to Vajiravudh's royal nationalist slogan of 'Nation, Religion and King' emphasising the monarch as the embodiment of *chat Thai*. The aged prince delineated in his speech that the first two characteristics resided in Thai people of all backgrounds, from monarchs to commoners, but assimilation was a 'royal virtue'. Damrong supported his argument by giving many historical accounts in which the kings had successfully solved the country's problems and brought forth prosperity (Saichon, 2003: 312). He acknowledged class conflicts, economic crisis and the call for 'Western democracy' only to emphasise that Siam under monarchical rules had prospered and always prevailed through times of peril, even one so severe as a risk to lose the country's independence. Such resilience was due to the fact that there was nothing wrong with the Siamese governing system. If there were failures in resolving problems or conflicts, such failures were due to personal conflicts and individuals, not the system (ibid. 313). Unequivocally though unsuccessfully, Damrong accentuated the magnitude of monarchy. By June 1932, the People's Party (*Khana ratsadon*)

brought absolute monarchy in Thailand to an end, replacing it with a constitutional one.<sup>12</sup> The 1932 Revolution marked a new chapter of Thai modern history.

‘Modernisation’ in Thailand took another turn and another meaning in the heyday of ‘democracy’.

**The Second Wave of ‘Modern Identity Asserted’: ‘The Thai Empire’,  
We have *arayatham* and are *sakon***

Phibun’s first premiership (1938-1944), the wartime regime, best expressed the sense of cultural as well as political change from the previous absolutist regime. In the 1930s, the power axis spun to the Pacific hemisphere as it was the era of Pan-Asianism represented by the Japanese Empire. Phibun’s government issued twelve Cultural Mandates between 1939 and 1942, which functioned as his nationalist cultural policy. The Cultural Mandates were called *ratthaniyom* (state convention) meaning literally stat-ism or following the state in Thai (Sulak, 2002:41). Their content ranged from national level such as changing the name of the country from Siam to Thailand in the first mandate in 1939; prohibiting Thais from representing foreign interests against national interests in the second mandate; and promoting the national anthem and the royal anthem, to private life and personal levels such as prescribing dress codes, both Thai and Western style, and recommending that ‘husbands should kiss their wives before going to work’ (Reynolds, 2002: 5-6). For Phibun, such measures would transform ‘Old Siam’ into ‘New Thailand’ (ibid.6).

The promulgation of the Cultural Mandates symbolically reinforced the departure from the royal prescriptions (*phraratchaniyom*, royal-ism, following the royal) of the previous regime. More importantly, the content of the edicts, though some might seem laughable, actually engendered and even intensified the government’s justification to discriminately assert its hold on dissident voices. As Reynolds insightfully puts it, the implication of the second edict

foster[ed] the belief in the ruling elite and the population at large, a belief later translated into legislation, that certain political groups or political activity—most notably communist—was ‘un-Thai’ or even ‘anti-Thai’ and thus

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<sup>12</sup> The formation, internal politics and conflicts of *Khana Ratsadon* as well as the debates and complexity of the end of absolute monarchy in 1932 are themselves a research topic in their own right and beyond the scope of this research. For detailed discussions of this political and historical period see for example, Christopher John Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, 2005. Benjamin A. Batson, 1974 and 1984.

dangerous, subversive, and destabilizing. By this Mandate Thai identity and national security were forever joined. (2002: 5)

State authority exercised the power to define the domain of ‘un-Thai activities’ and, of course, utilised it to their benefit and agendas. Chai-anan Samudavanija argues in his paper ‘State-Identity Creation, State-Building and Civil Society, 1939-1989’ (2002) that the twelve Cultural Mandates served as the state apparatus that enabled the Thai state to forge an ideology for the state with specific ‘Thai characters’, no matter how superficial and fictional they were (as will be discussed below). The state ideology with emphasis on Thai characters not only helped to ‘legitimise its accession to power but also to undermine the influence of the Chinese bourgeoisie that had supported the change of government in 1932’ (Reynolds, 2002: 9) by associating communism with the Chinese. Implementing cultural politics in politics, Phibun’s Cultural Mandates orchestrated cultural homogeneity by placing the state-defined ‘national’ culture at the apex of a hierarchy which implicitly suppressed folk cultures and local traditions (ibid.).

Phibun’s war-time premiership was not only marked by his aspiration to make the country ‘New Thailand’, but also to re-build it as the ‘Great Thai Empire’ (*maha anajak Thai*) that is the kingdom as it was prior to 1893 which included the four Malay states, parts of Cambodia and all of Laos (Terwiel, 2002:111). Thai nationalism was promoted along the fascist models of Germany, Italy and Japan. Phibun and his literary ally-confidant, Luang Wichit Wathakan who was a prolific journalist, publicist and writer, ‘shaped a new version of Siam as a nation in history’ (Baker and Pasuk, 2005:126). However, this is by no means to say that the nationalist ideology of ‘New Thailand’ completely disconnected itself from that of the previous, absolutist era. Luang Wichit, as head of the Department of Fine Arts (established to promote the public culture of the post-absolutist era) and his nationalist campaign bore a close resemblance to that of Vajiravudh. Both of them, Barmé argues, ‘stood between two worlds, the West and Siam, intimately involved in transmitting ideas from the former to the latter for political purposes. At the same time Wichit, like Vajiravudh, was strongly imbued with traditionalist notions...that art should impart morals if it was to be of any value’ (1993: 116). Though Wichit’s view echoed the pre-existing Thai trinity of Nation, Religion and King, he played down the monarchical element and accentuated racial nationalism by modifying the fourth term Constitution (*ratthathammanun*) as a crucial factor that strengthened New Thailand’s

unity and independence (ibid.113), one which the Thai populace should hold dear, respect and protect.

After the Japanese landing in Thailand in 1941, Phibun appeared to have no other alternative but to comply. However, it was not a coincidence that his ‘compulsory’ cooperation with Japan, the new power axis, for the Pan-Asianism project would realise Phibun’s ambition to build the Thai Empire. ‘Phibun imagined Thailand serving as Japan’s partner in ridding Asia of Western colonialism’ (Baker and Pasuk, 2005:135). In order to deliver the sense of change in epoch, the beginning of a new Era and of the Great Thailand Empire, a vision of ‘New Thai’, as opposed to ‘Old Siam’, was changed into *khwam-charoen mi araya*<sup>13</sup> (having prosperity and being civilised) or *mi arayatham* (being civilised). Such a vision was different from *siwilai* which alluded to royal taste and aspiration that defined ‘being civilised’ in the previous absolutist era. The Sanskritised Thai term *araya* (civilised) and *arayatham* (*araya* + *dharma*, civilisation) were extensively used in place of the transliterated loan word *siwilai* in order to avoid the royal elite’s terminology and its implied ideology.

Attempting to establish ‘a new relation of hegemony not based on the monarchy’ (Van Esterik, 2000: 100) but on a state-defined national culture, Phibun’s New Thailand was characterised by, firstly, *khwam-mi-araya* on a par with other nations; and, secondly, no reference to the court tradition (Chattri, 2004: 336). The state-slogan/goal used to justify the cultural policy was ‘to elevate Thai culture up to par with other civilised countries’ (*yok radap wattanatham Thai hai that-thiam araya prathet*) (Yukti, 1994: 28). Not only was it patronising, but it also implied a latently disdainful attitude towards the masses at the receiving end. In 1941, the government passed the National Cultural Act which defined ‘culture’ (*wattanatham*) as ‘characteristics that show flourishing prosperity, orderliness, harmonious progress of the nation and good morals of the citizens’ (Suchip, 1957: 160). Giving culture such a definition, many local customs and practices were prohibited on grounds of ‘orderliness’ such as chewing betel and wearing sarongs or wrap-around cloth tops, especially in public places, for these practices ‘were deemed to be damaging to the

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<sup>13</sup> ‘*Khwam*’ functions as a prefix added before an abstract concept, making it an abstract noun similar to a suffix ‘-ness’ in English. ‘*Charoen*,’ despite its denotation to nonmaterial prosperity, ‘gave way in the nineteenth century to connoting secular or worldly development, material progress and technological advance’ (Thongchai, 2000: 531). ‘*Charoen*’ can be alternatively used with *siwilai* in this sense, though it has never been as popular.

prestige of the country' (Thak, 1978: 257). The given definition of culture and how it was carried out in public policy went hand-in-hand with the aforementioned state-slogan.

Though 'other nations' and, interchangeably, 'other civilised countries' were not articulated outright as 'the Western countries', using them as a point of comparison and a frame of reference, almost a desired goal, inescapably implied Western models. Perhaps as Anglophilic as the aspiring Siamese elitists of the absolutist regime, if not more, Phibun's cultural homogeneous campaign naturalised 'Westernness' (*kham pen tawantok*) by rendering it in practice as 'universal/international norms' or *sakon* (derived from *sakala* in Sanskrit meaning universal). A new catchword emerged as the state aspired to turn its new Thais into 'modern citizens of the world' (Baker and Pasuk, 2005: 139) through cultural reconstruction.

The two criteria of New Thailand's national culture were not unlike the identity crisis that had faced the royal elite since the reign of Rama VI. The issue was especially difficult in the case of the new, non-royal, political elite members who could not elevate what had been sanctioned as 'indigenous Siam traditions' to 'national Thai traditions' for this formulation was too closely identified with the royal court. Moreover, the political elite members could not implement 'Thainess' harmoniously and openly in conjunction with widespread Westernness since this would contradict their own propagated racial nationalism and condemnation of 'indulgence in alien culture' (*khwam-long wattanatham tangdao*). Their solution was to bypass this dilemma by constructing a set of genealogical explanations that Western things had been Thai or, in some cases, to explain that such things were 'international' (*sakon*), belonging across the board to mankind as a general, universal category, and not to a specific nation or culture (Saichon, 2002: 138-144). For example, Luang Wichit explained on one occasion, 'the opinion that wearing *sakon* uniform [jacket suit, trousers and necktie] means abandoning the use of Thai dress is incorrect. ... Nationalism is not in a form but an essence. That is to say that even if one wears a *sakon* uniform, it should be made of Thai fabric' (*Nangsuephim Suphaphurut*, (15 April 1941) 2, 514 in *ibid.* 144).

The most outrageous claim, though rather a typical fabrication of 'original Thainess', concerned the change of national New Year's day from 1<sup>st</sup> April to 1<sup>st</sup> January, according to the international calendar:

It is our Thai ancient tradition. A new year starts on the first night of the waning moon of *aay* [first] month...I have commanded research on calendars for the last hundred years and found that the first nights of the waning moon of *aay* month have been very close to the first of January. This was the reason why we changed our New Year Day from 1<sup>st</sup> April to 1<sup>st</sup> January. We neither changed it according to *sakon* convention nor followed suit of the *farang*, but instead the change aimed to be as close to Thai tradition as possible. (Luang Wichitwathakan, 1961 in *ibid.*145)

Wichit's claim that the change did not follow *sakon* convention and *farang* fashion was untrue. The official change meant to follow the international that is Western calendar. This incident revealed that what the state authority at the time claimed as *sakon* was, in fact, Western. Thus, the construction of 'Thainess' in this period was a combination of adaptation, re-invention or even fabrication from both domestic and foreign materials.

Phibun's vision of the Great Thai Empire was brought to an end, along with the foreseeable end of his first government, with the defeat of Japan at the close of the Second World War. During the last years of his first premiership, the economy slumped as a result of Japan's excessive wartime demands. The War, as Baker and Pasuk put it, effected two changes that brought Phibun's rule to an end. 'First, it created a war economy with deeper government involvement. ... Second, the war drew Thailand deeper into a complex international politics involving Japan, China, and the Western powers, especially the US' (2005:139). Any attempts to define the Thai nation, to control the Thai state and to assert political decisions in Thailand became inextricable from the country's entanglement in the Cold War.

On the national scale, the defeat of Japan at the end of the Second Word War brought to an end Phibun's irredentist aspirations for the Thai Empire and attenuated his political power. In the international arena, war-torn Europe lost the central role in world affairs and struggled to restore economic stability. Instead, the US rapidly gained its position as the world's 'superpower' by offering post-war relief and reconstruction loans to those countries in need. In Thailand, American presence and power became increasingly recognised and visible especially in the country's negotiation of post-war reparations.

After Phibun's fall in 1944, his liberal opponent Pridi Banomyong (1900-1983) enjoyed a brief moment of glory. Pridi, the anti-royalist, had been the founder of the People's Party (*Khana ratsadon*) back in Paris in 1927 and later became the

leader of the Party's civilian wing in the aftermath of the 1932 Revolution. While he was depoliticised during Phibun's first premiership by being made a regent in 1942, Pridi formed good relationships with some members of the royal elite and, from 1944, ironically brought back the royalists in an aim to counter Phibun and the army (ibid. 141). He endorsed the royalist Seni Pramoj as prime minister in 1945 with the aim to encourage the country's post-war punitive negotiation with American support. His manoeuvre was supported by the fact that while Seni was serving as an ambassador in the US, he refused to deliver Phibun's declaration of war on the US. Instead, Seni organised the 'Seri Thai' (Free Thai) group which worked in close collaboration with the Allies and formed a good relationship with the US during the Second World War as a result. Pridi's political liberalisation threatened both the royalists and the militarists, especially after the death of the young king Ananda Mahidol in 1946 of which royalist politicians accused Pridi's involvement. The post-war economic slump and the confusion over the king's death prompted an intervention by military coup led by Phibun in November 1947 (ibid. 140-3).

### **The Third Wave of 'Modern Identities in the Making': 'Small Thailand', We Need 'Help' and 'Development'**

Phibun's second premiership (1948-1957) after the Second World War marked a change of political climate in a change of catchword. As the aspiration to be 'the Great Thai Empire' was fading fast, Thailand in a post-war public discourse became a 'small country' (Saichon, 2002: 152). The small Thailand needed help from a big country, 'the Great Friend'. The US not only saved Thailand in a reparation settlement because of Seri Thai's collaboration with the Allies, but also offered a 'helping hand' of protection against the threat of Communism, especially after the Chinese Communist Party overthrew the Nationalists and established the People's Republic of China in 1949. Thailand's cooperation with America was intensified along American anti-communist strategic lines. Though Phibun was still concerned with the country's relationship with China and the existence of a large Chinese community in Thailand, he increasingly depended on American political and financial support. As a result he did not hesitate to impose strict controls over the surge in Chinese nationalist sentiment that was perceived as 'pro-communist' and moved against the local left in the early 1950s (Baker and Pasuk, 2005:145). Such aggressive

measures earned decisive support from the US. In 1953 the US National Security Council declared it was to develop Thailand as an 'anti-communist bastion' in order to 'extend US influence—and local acceptance of it—throughout the whole of Southeast Asia' (Fineman, 1997 in *ibid.* 146).

Phibun's friendliness with America also benefited his personal agenda. His political leadership in 1948 was insecure because he did not gain firm support and had to compete with the two rising rivals, Army Chief Sarit Thanarat and Police Chief Phao Siyanon, who had served him since his first premiership. Since the early 1950s, Sarit was backed by the Pentagon in his modernisation of the military along American lines, while Phao was backed by the CIA in his mediating support for Kuomintang operations inside Southwestern China (Anderson, 1985:18). Phibun thus looked to America for personal support and hoped to maintain his position by acting as a broker between America and his two subordinates. Expecting to get financial aid and military supplies, Phibun prepared to cooperate closely with America in international affairs (Thak, 2007: 68). However, the competition for power between Sarit and Phao became violent and open as it reached its culmination in 1955. Phibun desperately attempted to counter the unruly power of his two subordinates. He declared that he would 'restore democracy' and, as a result, lifted the ban on political parties and press censorship, released political prisoners, nullified many restrictions on the Chinese, legalised labour unions and scheduled elections for 1957 (Baker and Pasuk, 2005:147).

Once press control was lifted, a shaft of democratic light shone through. Many newspapers began to criticise the US role in Thailand and promoted anti-American sentiment. Phibun, allied with Phao, jumped on the bandwagon and won the 1957 polls. Sarit withstood the way the wind was blowing and executed a coup d'état forcing Phibun and Phao into exile. Despite the fact that Sarit's press vigorously attacked America in his 1957-election campaign, he needed US support to maintain his control over the army. Thus, Sarit made peace with the US by appointing Phote Sarasin, a former ambassador to the US, as prime minister after the 1957 coup. In the general election in December 1957, many leftists got elected and proved difficult to control by Thanom who became a prime minister with Sarit's support. In October 1958, Sarit, with the strong support of the US and Thanom's consent, executed a

second coup and enjoyed premiership.<sup>14</sup> This time he declared martial law, dissolved parliament, banned political parties, imposed press censorship and arrested hundreds of journalists, intellectuals, and politicians (ibid.148). Sarit and his successors, Thanom and Praphat, maintained uninterrupted military control for fifteen years thereafter. Even after Sarit died of liver cirrhosis in December 1963, Thanom, coming to power as the new Prime Minister, assured the US that Thai foreign policy would remain unaltered (Surachart, 1988: 119).

Thailand—‘the Great Thai Empire’ that had asserted itself as being on a par with other nations in terms of international norms (*sakon*) during the Second World War was hence transformed into Thailand ‘the small country’, subsumed into the ‘anti-communist’ discourse after the war. The small country sought ‘refuge’ in the protection of America ‘the Great Friend’ (*mahamit*) in a world that was divided by conflicts between the ‘Free World’ and the ‘Communist World’. In South East Asia, the Cold War manifested itself in the Vietnam War (1965-1975) and while the USSR and China supported North Vietnam, the US supported the South. Strategically, Thailand was turned into a frontline of the US war in Indochina. American military bases were established throughout the East and Northeast of Thailand. The American presence, its wealth and advancement made anything American sensational and fashionable in the capital. In the provinces where there were military bases, the rampant American presence and the consequential economic boom affected local communities socially, culturally and psychologically. The period covered by the military regimes of Sarit (1958-1963) and Thanom-Praphat (1963-1973) is an age which Benedict Anderson defines as the ‘American Era’ in modern Thai history (1977:15); an epoch in which ‘Americanness’ ‘redefined what was modern and aspirational, especially for the urban middle class’ (Baker and Pasuk, 2005:150).

The unprecedented, penetrating American presence in Thailand was brought upon Thailand by Sarit himself. Even before acquiring direct political power in 1958, Sarit controlled ‘the Americanisation (in terms of organisation, doctrines, training, weaponry, and so forth) of the Thai military, following his first visit to Washington in 1950’ (Anderson, 1977:15). Baker and Pasuk aptly describe Thailand in the 1950s and after as ‘a US client-state under military rule’ (2005:146). While Phibun is associated with, among other things, creating ‘the Great Thai Empire’ in Thai public

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<sup>14</sup> For the concise and insightful discussion of the return of the military to political leadership after the World War II see Thak, 2007: 13-42.

memory, Sarit is remembered for his commitment to ‘development’ (*kan-phatthana*). ‘Development’ or *kan-phatthana* has, since the late 1950s, transformed both the landscape and social-scape of the country as well as the mindscape of its people.

Although the Thai government under Phibun’s premiership had established the National Economic Council in 1950 to provide economic advice, it was under Sarit’s premiership that economic development plans significantly involved in the country’s policy making. Sarit founded the National Economic Development Board (NEDB) (1959) on recommendations of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) under the World Bank. Undertaking *kan-phatthana* as a national goal, if not a state ideology, Sarit and his politics of despotic paternalism (Thak, 2007) under the label of ‘Thai democracy’ joined Thailand with the IBRD as he was ‘willing and eager to make ‘development’ part of his quest for legitimacy and to accept the advice of US-trained technocrats in drawing up and implementing developmental programs’ (Anderson, 1977: 15). As a result, Thailand’s military budget skyrocketed from US\$ 20 million a year in the 1950s to around US\$ 250 million in the early 1970s (Baker and Pasuk, 2005: 149); and by 1968, Thailand was hosting 50,000 US servicemen, eight major bases and twelve minor installations operated by the Americans (Anderson, 1977: 15). With such pervasive numbers and activities, it is hard to imagine that the military government successfully kept all of its operations and cooperation with the US government hidden from public knowledge. The government was able to explain away the American military presence in Thailand by its ability to control public knowledge and to utilise the discourses of the ‘enemy next door’ (the Communists in Laos) and ‘self-defence’ as well as ‘America, the Great Friend’. Sarit emphatically propagated the idea that to counter the communist threat was a mission too great for a small country like Thailand; thus, the Great Friend with more power was to be the country’s security. He even called for the Thais to cooperate with both the American government and people in order to prevail against the world’s crisis (Prajak, 2005:156).

Only in 1967 did a minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs admit for the first time the presence of American military bases in Thailand and the collaboration with the American government that had taken place and been kept secret since the late 1950s. However, the extent of the cooperation and operations and the situation in Vietnam remained outside the public knowledge. On the same occasion, the minister also emphasised that ‘those who disagree with the policy of the US in Vietnam must

be insane, pro-Communism themselves, or the cronies of that Eastern Camp' (Sulak 1967: 3). Because of such a McCarthyistic attitude adopted by the military government and strict press control, Thai people were largely kept in the dark, not knowing what was going on in Thailand, Laos and Vietnam. This 'silence' within the country was gradually broken by the rise of the anti-Vietnam war movement spearheaded by students and intellectuals, who posed a challenge to the regime with their anti-war discourse.

Development along American anti-communist lines brought forth 'an intensification of Bangkok's administrative control of the country's population' (Anderson, 1985: 20). 'Rural development', heavily funded by the US, was implemented by a vast expansion of the police force, the military and of educational bureaucracies; of market-based agriculture; of the construction of roads and highways according to American strategic planners; and of the more widespread introduction of electricity supply and public services to the countryside (ibid.21). While development was under way in Thailand's rural areas, Bangkok also changed drastically as it was chosen as a place of 'Rest and Recreation' (R&R) for American GIs in the region in 1967. The policy to permit US forces to come to Thailand in this way boosted economic growth due to tourism and to the expansion of the sex industry in particular. Bars, nightclubs, brothels and massage parlours opened to accommodate the demand for sexual services in Bangkok as well as around the US air bases. The total number of foreign visitors to Thailand reached over 600,000 by 1970 and the largest group was American (Baker and Pasuk, 2005:149). The growth of the city demanded both factory workers and those for the service industry. The rural development scheme enabled easy access and mobility between the city and the country and rural migration became a prominent feature from the late 1950s onwards.

Under the long spell of military regimes, Thailand underwent many transformations. Among them were the epidemic growth of the tourist industry; the expansion of education as a result of the economic boom brought about by the country's 'development' along American anti-communist strategic lines as outlined above; an increase in the number of American-educated young Thai (Anderson, 1985:20-3); the revival of radical Thai intellectual thought that went underground because of censorship and suppression in the early 1950s; and a vociferous popular and youth culture (Anderson, 1985; Prajak, 2005). In terms of national politics, the country experienced, for the first time, the power of popular demonstrations that

brought the dictatorship of Thanom and Praphat to an end on the 14 October 1973. However, the return of the two former leaders from exile in 1976 led to further demonstrations and resulted in the violent right-wing coup of 6 October 1976 when Thailand horrifyingly faced, also for the first time, students and civilians massacred by military assault.

The abovementioned historical survey of the three key moments conceptualises the transition of the notions of '*siwilai*' with contested meanings between the court and the commoners ranging from 'Anglo-European modernity', royal nationalism and egalitarianism to the notions of the Thai military elite's 'modernisation' in 'development discourse'. The next two sections particularly focus on the political, socio-economic and cultural impacts of Thailand's encroachment into international politics after the Second World War and during the subsequent Cold War which effectively joined anti-communist sentiment to Thai identity construction. Such a close collaboration significantly intensified American ideological intervention through different forms of aid and policy advice manifested in Thai national development policy which delivered an extensive, tangible impact on the Thai people's lives regardless of their class. This background provides the context to the analyses of the selected literary texts in chapter two to chapter six, especially chapter two on state-defined Thainess and chapter three on rural-urban contact.

### **Military State, the Communist Threat to Thainess and the Un-Thai Identities**

This section discusses 'the fear of communist threat' as a discourse<sup>15</sup> that circulated in Siam/Thailand from the early twentieth century onwards. It aims to illustrate that 'the fear' did not just emerge with the American presence in the 1950s. Although the fear of communist subversion undeniably delivered the most recognisable impact on the country in the 1950s, its manifestation sprang from the 'political insecurity' of the ruling power in the last decades of the absolutist era. An accusation of any subversive groups or political opponent as communist was not a new strategy. It had been employed since the late 1910s during the reign of Rama VI (1910-1925) against progressive Thais who were educated abroad, and in the 1930s

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<sup>15</sup> The impact of the fear of communist threat on Thai identity and the communist as a threat to Thainess are research topics in their own right. The brief discussion here only serves as background to my attempt to answer the question of modern Thai identity construction.

after the end of absolutist regime in the royalists' vilification of Pridi Banomyong. In the Cold War climate after the Second World War, the 'communist' label served as a political weapon in the tug-of-war between royalists and military generals. Phibun executed 'the Silent or Radio Coup' in 1951 against his own royalist Democrats-dominated government claiming that there were communists in the parliament and the cabinet. This incident poignantly showed how Thai politics was subsumed into an international ideological struggle (Baker and Pasuk, 2005: 143-4), which also manifested itself in internal cultural strategy with Phibun's establishment of the Ministry of Culture in 1952. He, as head of the ministry, rigorously campaigned to 'bolster the US-fuelled rhetoric that portrayed communism as public enemy number one' through the use of popular media such as radio programmes, adaptations of folk theatre (*likay*), plays and pamphlets (Harrison, 2010c: 199). This pro-American sentiment was intensified side-by-side with the anti-Communism penchant which then came to be synonymous with Chineseness.

In the late 1950s, when Sarit assumed complete control over Thai national politics, the 'communist' label came to include 'foreignness' (*khwa-m-pen-tang-chat*) and 'un-Thainess' (*khwa-m-mai-pen-Thai*) within it. It is important, however, to reiterate here that although 'Americanness' was also foreign, its 'foreignness' was desirable, especially when it signified modernity and advancement. Its 'privileged' status in the Thai perception was due to propaganda by the Thai government that America was Thailand's 'Great Friend' who offered 'protection' from Communism and financial and technical support to the country, as discussed in the previous section. On the contrary, *khommiwnit* 'foreignness'<sup>16</sup> was defined and publicised by the state as the foreign enemy who was subversively infiltrating the country. Such a projection of communist as a threat permitted the government to carried out any violent measures in counter-insurgency operations. This negative perception did not only live well through the next two decades, but was violently enacted in the bloody apex of the protest on 6 October 1976 against Thanom's return to Thailand after his exile in October 1973. On the day, students and civilian protesters, accused of being

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<sup>16</sup> '*Khommiwnit*' in Thai is transliterated from 'communist'. It refers to both 'communist' and 'Communism' (or *latthi khommiwnit*).

communists, were massacred.<sup>17</sup> The extent to which the pro-Americanism sentiment and the anti-Communism penchant play crucial parts in the construction of Thai politico-national identity is appositely put forth in the companion piece novellas *Met in yu.et.e.* (1973) (Made in U.S.A) and *Ngo ngao tao tun (Met in yu.et.e.2)* (1973) (Complete idiot (Made in U.S.A.2)) which will be explored in chapter two.

The caution against ‘communist subversion’ took shape and gathered political momentum even before the end of absolute monarchy in 1932. The perception of socialism and communism as a threat to Siamese/Thainess had emerged and circulated since the early twentieth century in the last years of the reign of Rama V (1867-1910) and manifested itself in the most inhumane form in the massacre of 6 October 1976. Over the span of 70 years, the wariness of the Siamese/Thai royal elite and the commoner political elite towards the ‘communist threat’ has evolved and been politically and violently enacted in rising degrees.<sup>18</sup> As the ‘location’ of ‘communism’ moved closer to home, from China and Russia to Indochina and finally within Thailand, so the fear of ‘communist subversion’ grew and different representations of communism were conjured up at different political junctures to serve the political agendas of those in power.

The apprehension of the Siamese government about revolutionary ideas from overseas as a realistic threat set in because of a brief visit of Dr. Sun Yat Sen, the Chinese leader of Kuomintang (Nationalist Party), in 1908. Sun’s aim was to raise funds and support for political changes in China from the Chinese community in Siam. The support he gained, his success in overthrowing the Manchus and the establishment of the Republic of China in 1911 aggravated the Siamese elite’s anxieties that ‘republican and revolutionary ideas would excite aspirations for change in Siam’ (Baker and Pasuk, 2005: 114). As the Chinese immigrants, their accumulation of capital and membership of Kuomintang increased, so too did the caution of the Siamese government. The number of Chinese-language schools

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<sup>17</sup> For discussion of the incident see Baker and Pasuk, 2005: 184-196; Thongchai, 2002; Anderson, 1977; Puey, 1977.

<sup>18</sup> In early 1976, there was already a proclamation that ‘Any type of socialism is Communism’ (Puey, 1977: 4). The violence reached the point when Bangkokians witnessed the right-wing hired hooligans firebombing the moderate New Force Party’s Bangkok headquarters. A month later, a mass demonstration demanding full withdrawal of American military operation was bombed in central Bangkok (Anderson, 1977: 14, 25 footnote 8). In the same year, a right-wing, famous monk called ‘Kittiwuttho Bhikku’ (Kittinak Jaraensathapawn) told the press that ‘it was not sinful to kill Communists’ (Puey, 1977: 4).

increased from one in 1909 to at least six in 1916 and reached forty-eight in 1925 (Vella, 1978: 187-8). There was an estimation of 20,000 Kuomintang members in Siam by 1928 (Baker and Pasuk, 2005: 115). During his reign, Vajiravudh was a distant observer of foreign revolutions in the early years of the twentieth century<sup>19</sup> and a witness to the increasing number of the Chinese in Siam as well as a growing political discontent among the urban Thais. He wrote numerous articles on political changes overseas with a repetitive emphasis that ‘foreign revolutions were no example for Siam’ (Vella, 1978: 67).

At the end of 1912, as the Republic of China was unsettled by social disorder, anarchy, injustice and political executions, Vajiravudh utilised ‘China in chaos’ as a motif in his writing so that ‘his people know the facts and not blindly admire or seek to emulate what they did not understand’ (Vella, 1978: 67). Justified as it seemed, his emphasis was more an attempt to secure the monarchical institution and suppress dissident ideas than an impartial report. The Siamese royal elite mostly perceived that the 1917 Russian Revolution was a ‘mistake’ caused by a ‘misgiving precocity’ (*ching suk korn ham*—literally, ‘ripe before mature’) of the proletariat to transform Russia into a republic (Tamthai, 2003: 161). The same description became the explanation provided in school textbooks from the late 1950s onwards for the 1932 Revolution led by the People’s Party that had brought an end to absolute monarchy in Siam.

For the Siamese elite, ‘socialists’, ‘communists’ and ‘the Bolsheviks’ represented those who sought to ‘depose the monarchy and lead the country to anarchy’ (Tamthai, 2003: 163) as seen in a state of unrest, the bloody civil war and revolts in the post-Revolution Russia. The royal elite ascribed both *khommiwnit* (communist) and *bornchewik* (Bolshevik) to violence, public disturbance, anarchy and anarchist in their usage of the words. They utilised the two terms as a label, if not a condemnation, of any potential political challenge or subversion to their power. Among royal members and public perception, *khommiwnit* and *bornchewik* were an enemy of the ‘Nation, Religion and King’ (*chat-sat-kasat*), indoctrinated by the state as the ‘core of Thainess’.

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<sup>19</sup> Such as the Young Turks’ dethronement of Adulhamit in 1909, the establishment of the first Portuguese Republic in 1910 after the assassination of King Carlos I and his eldest son in 1908 and the overthrow of Manuel II the king’s young son (*World Book Multimedia Encyclopaedia*, 2004 edition, version 8.2.1 entries ‘Young Turks’ and ‘Portugal (history)’).

Though the monarchical government failed to solve the country's problems and was overthrown by the 1932 Revolution, the old regime was able to tarnish the new one. Some royal members and the royalists who were dismissed from their military and senior bureaucratic positions reorganised themselves and aimed to regain control. 'They spread rumours that the revolution was a "communist" plot' (Baker and Pasuk, 2005: 119). Pridi Banomyong and his draft of the 'Outline Economic Plan' (*khao-khron setthakit*) with its socialist overtone of 'a voluntary nationalisation of all land' (ibid. 120) were discredited with accusation of being *khommiwnit*. Despite the fact that Pridi later gained political ascendancy, his 'Outline Economic Plan' was never brought back to the consideration of the constitutional government.

The royal elite's definition and representation of the communist as exploitative anarchist came to an end together with their political power once Prajadhipok abdicated the throne in 1935 and the People's Party came to power. The use of the *khommiwnit* label as a political weapon understandably subsided until after the Second World War because the People's Party, with its claims to democratise Siam by means of the parliamentary system, wanted to disassociate itself from the royal projection of anti-royalists as anarchists and communists. The post-war international political climate and the rise of the US to the position of world's 'superpower' played a crucial role in the Thai government's anti-communist policy as discussed in the previous section. The victory of the Chinese Communist Party over the Nationalists and the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 significantly contributed to the fear of communist subversion during Phibun's second premiership (1948-1957). As Phibun increasingly depended on American financial and political support, his government passed the Un-Thai Activities Act (also called the Anti-Communism Act) in November 1952 following the line of the US Anti-American Activities. This legislation 'equated "un-Thai activities" with communism and sedition and defined them as any activity that could be construed as undermining nation, religion and king. Any political opponent could be branded a communist and jailed for ten years' (Handley, 2006: 119). With this oppressive law at hand, not only a political opponent, but any intellectual, journalist and press media who criticised the government and its accommodating policies towards America could also be accused of being communist.

The ‘communist subversion’ was interpreted, perceived and represented as a ‘foreign threat’ that infiltrated Thailand. Though the oppressive Un-Thai Activities Act was, arguably, passed to show the government’s commitment to the American anti-communist strategic line, it came to target any nationalist activities of the Chinese as well as local leftists and intellectuals. A well-known novelist/journalist Kulap Saipradit (1905-1973) who was jailed for promoting the peace movement in opposition to the Korean War exemplified those oppressed by this law. The government associated internal political activities with communist parties and influences exterior to Thailand, whether they were from China, Vietnam, Laos or the Soviet Union. For the Phibun regime, and later Sarit’s, *khommiwnit* was a ‘danger of attack and subversion by the foreign’ (Tamthai, 2003: 178).

The government’s propaganda of a communist as an enemy of nation, religion and king gathered political momentum under the Sarit regime (1958-1963) with the revival of the monarchy in order to serve Sarit’s political agenda (Thak, 2007). Sarit’s conscious revival of the king’s role as the ‘national patriarch, the sacral near-Bodhisattva, the self-less source of welfare’ (Handley, 2006: 119) and the ultimate symbol of Thainess served to justify his government’s acquisition of power by coup d’état as ‘the government of the king’ (Tamthai, 2003: 185). After the 1932 Revolution until the time of the Sarit regime, the role of the monarchy had been somewhat unclear. Sarit, Thak argues, ‘was able to incorporate the king into national politics by “elevating” his position as a legitimating authority of his regime and a symbol of the nation. Sarit’s government promoted some royal activities (which, in effect, meant increasing royal visibility) in the public arena, which had been banned during the Phibun regime. Court ceremonies such as the royally-patronised ploughing ceremony and, more importantly, for the first time since 1932, the *kathin luang* ceremony in which the king was sitting in the centre of a royal barge in a procession in the Chao Phraya river to offer robes at royal temples were revived. Sarit, in Gray’s words,

adopted the strategy of “latching on” to or “borrowing” the royal virtue. In 1959 he publicly observed that the king was upholding the ten virtues of the Dhammaraja [righteous ruler adhering to Buddhist morality], that he was far-sighted and had a personality worthy of worship. (Gray, 1991: 51)

The Sarit regime also allocated more funds so that the role of the royal members as the omnipotent benevolence would be carried out. Bhumibol (Rama IX r. 1946-

present) was enthroned after a ‘gunshot accident’ brought an end to the life of Ananda Mahidol (Rama VIII r. 1935-1946). After the 1932 Revolution, it was only when Bhumibol came to the throne that the figurehead status of the monarchy subtly gained its political significance and delivered an impact on national politics, ironically by being seen as not seeking political power (Handley, 2006: 119).

Under the Sarit regime, ‘the state ideology of “King/Nation, Religion” was placed upfront and forward’ (Thak, 2007: xvi). Nation, religion and king were once again put on a pedestal, and this time they were sanctified to be the irreducible, holy trinity of Thainess. Any political groups or individuals who opposed Sarit were accused of being enemies of Nation-Religion-King (*chat-sat-kasat*), i.e. *khommiwnit*. The propaganda of a communist as an enemy of the Thai holy trinity veiled the political nature of conflicts between the military government and its anti-military or pro-democracy opponent by turning them into conflicts between ‘patriotic and traitor’ (Tamthai, 2003: 187) based on an assumption that all Thai citizens must ‘naturally’ treasure Nation-Religion-King. Whoever could enact anything that could be construed to undermine the Thai holy trinity must not be Thai. Therefore, by this logic, *khommiwnit* was not Thai.

The extreme form of ‘communist as national enemy’ and therefore ‘non-Thai’ propaganda was enacted in its most violent form in the massacre of students and civilians on 6 October 1976. The most despicable use of this propaganda in combination with the nationalist mantra *chat-sat-kasat* was typified by a famous, right-wing monk called ‘Kittiwuttho Bhikku’ (Kittinak Jaraensathapawn) who told the press that ‘it was not sinful to kill Communists’ (Puey, 1977: 4). Kittiwuttho was also a co-leader of the Nawapol group, which was organized by the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) of the Thai military (ISOC was the legacy, if not the product, of American CIA counter-insurgency planning in the country). Nawapol operated as a psychological warfare unit whose targets were the privileged who were afraid of social changes along democratic lines, and antagonised the student and labour movements (ibid. 10-11). Nawapol’s strategy was ‘to convince the privileged that even a change towards democracy might deprive them of possessions’ (ibid. 11). In an interview published in the liberal magazine *Jatturat*, Kittiwuttho said:

I think that even Thais who believe in Buddhism should do it [kill leftists]. Whoever destroys the nation, religion and king is not a complete man, so to kill them is not like killing a man.

We should be convinced that not a man but a devil is killed.  
This is the duty of every Thai person.

*Question: But isn't killing a transgression?*

Yes, but only a small one when compared to the good of defending nation, religion and king. To act in this way is to gain merit in spite of the little sin. It is like killing a fish to cook for a monk. To kill the fish is a little sin, but to give to the monk is a greater good.

*Question: So the ones who kill leftists escape arrest on account of the merit they gain.*

Probably. (ibid. 11-12)

Such was *ad nauseam* the fear of communist subversion which fostered ill-conceived hatred towards any dissidents, communist or not. The dissidents were categorised by the state as traitors of 'the nation, religion and king' who deserved to be publicly lynched and whose corpses were mutilated amidst a mass of witnesses on 6 October 1976 in *Sanam-luang*, the green space adjacent to the Grand Palace and Thammasat University, the spiritual home of student activists.

By positing *khommiwnit* outside the realm of 'Thainess' and Thai identity, the military regimes of Sarit and later Thanom and Praphat constructed communists as the 'non-Thai' and justified their violent measure against them as the enemies of the nation. However, since the communist label also served as a political weapon, the anti-military, pro-democracy opponent and dissidents of the government's pro-American development programmes and American prerogative practice were branded *khommiwnit*. The extent to which the *khommiwnit* threat was propagated and internalised by the Thai will be explored in chapter two. While the American anti-communist lines determined how the development programme was delivered, American aid and its effects on Thailand were extensive. The next section discusses the extent of the aid and how the development programmes altered the relationship between the urban and the rural areas, which was manifested in different forms.

### **American Aid, Development, Modernisation and Thai Identities**

As examined in the previous section, Thailand's entanglement into Cold War politics impinged on the country's internal politics and posited anti-communist, nationalist identity as Thainess. Though Thailand had received a substantial amount of American financial aid since the second premiership of Phibun (1948-1957), the more decisive support which brought drastic changes to the country was injected

during the Sarit regime. With the establishment of the National Economic Development Board (NEDB) in 1959,<sup>20</sup> Sarit's implementation of *kan-phattana*, his counter-insurgency strategic plan, and his encouragement of foreign investment and privatisation of government enterprises into national policies 'accelerated social and economic changes' (Thak, 2007: ix). Extensive road building projects in the city and the countryside and economic boom in the city encouraged mobility and allowed unprecedented access, exchange and interaction between rural and urban areas. Villagers increasingly sought employment in factories and urban centres. 'From 1960 to 1970, the nonagricultural labour force increased by more than 1 million, from 2.12 million to 3.19 million' (Chai-anan and Morell, 1982:185). The widening gap between rural and urban earnings attracted migration and transformed the face of the city, the heartland of development itself, into an impersonal, profit-driven metropolis, albeit one endowed with wealth and opportunities.

Moreover, as physical mobility had become a common feature in Thailand since the late 1950s, 'migration' did not confine itself to rural migration to the city but also the mobilisation beyond the nation's borders, both to and from Thailand. An expanding cityscape thus offered more than the manifestation and representation of modernity. It also encompassed collision, negotiation and compromise between tradition, modernity and the 'desire' for the beyond, that is to go abroad or overseas to 'the West', the prototype of modern civilisation in the mind of the general Thai public discussed in the previous section. The 'desire' of the aspiring, though not always well-to-do and able, young urbanites to go abroad added to the already wide gap between the urban and the rural/provincial as it initiated what Anderson describes, not without implicit Eurocentric assumption, as a 'double provincialism':

The same social riptide that swept dispossessed peasants into the slums of Bangkok carried capable, ambitious children from local schools of Phetburi and Khorat, Chiangmai and Nakhon Sithammarat, up the steep, expanding pyramid of learning to the universities of the metropolis. If they lost their provincial accents on the way, they could not, in this first generation, lose

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<sup>20</sup> NEDB as an organisation was later changed to 'Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board' (NESDB) in 1972 to emphasise that the social development plan must go side by side with the economic one. The Office (1972-present) has been responsible for economic and social development policy-making and the four-year development plan called 'National Economic and Social Development Plan' (*phaen pattana setthakit lae sangkhom haeng chat*). The first plan was implemented from 1963-1966. The current is the tenth plan (2007-2010). (<http://www.nesdb.go.th/Default.aspx?tabid=72> accessed 17 November 2008) See also <http://www.nesdb.go.th/Default.aspx?tabid=139>.

the sense of their provincial origins. For the metropolis where they arrived was itself by then in some ways a provincial centre, from which others, often of advantaged social and metropolitan origins, had proceeded on to America and Europe. Where they were acquiring the speech and writing-style of Bangkok, these others were acquiring English, French, or some other foreign language. (1985: 42)

Double provincialism, in Anderson's term, looks at the dynamics of migration from the 'vantage' point of the Euro/American centre which implies that 'it rests on an assumption that Europe and America represent desired urbanity and modernity while Bangkok, as a "local centre," represents barbarian backwardness. As for rural Thailand, it is a marginal space which is even more barbaric than Bangkok' (Chusak, 2008a: 70). Chusak Phattarakulvanit appositely puts it that the double provincialism proposed by Anderson calls forth

an awareness of Thailand being crypto-colonised. Thus, in considering the unequal relationship between the city and the countryside, it is important to look at it in terms of the coloniser-colonised relationship. The relationship between the city and the countryside rests on the oppressive practice of discrimination and exploitation similar to the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. The countryside is the city's colony, feeding the city with raw materials and labour while simultaneously offering itself as the market for the city's production. (ibid. 70)

However, the countryside/rural area does not only serve economically as the market; it is also ideologically utilised as 'an important element in the creation of a national "culture"' (Rhum, 1996: 333), the meaning of which is defined by the cultural centre, the 'city', through both international and internal tourism. Rhum observes that 'the folklorization of regional differences can in fact be a most valuable use of "tradition" in broadening and deepening the sense of national identity, and therefore not just tolerated but actually encouraged' (ibid.). Government organisations such as the Tourism Authority of Thailand have played a crucial role in promoting regional differences and local regional cultures along the lines of 'diversity in unity' and 'Thailand's cultural richness'. The folklorization of regional differences that reinforces national culture is evident the short story '*Pai talat nam*' in chapter three which portrays cultural commodification, negotiation and exchange between urban and rural Thai people and American tourists in the context of tourism. In the story, a strong sense of 'national culture' and tourism complement each other as modern mass transportation opens up easy access across and within national boundaries. National

culture has become a consumer product that appeals to both the international market for foreign tourists and domestic consumption of the Thais. The construction of 'national culture', especially in response to tourism, is an area where the city plays a vital role in incorporating the rural into 'national cultural' precisely and ironically because the rural is its Other.

The infrastructure offered by American aid that facilitated the rural-urban access and the 'reassuring' American presence as a backdrop transformed Bangkok from the 1960s into both a destination and a hub for a tourist industry although a 'tourist industry had barely existed before 1960' (Porphant, 2001:165). The city was not only safe and convenient for tourists, but also 'offered an irresistible combination of modern luxury ... and exotic antiquities' (Anderson, 1977:15). The growth of the tourist industry in Thailand therefore must not be considered in isolation from the American presence in the country, especially with regard to the policy that welcomed the American servicemen to come to Thailand for Rest and Recreation (R&R) in 1967 that appeared to ignite both tourism and sex tourism. The policy to permit US forces to come to Thailand in this way immediately boosted economic growth. It increased US\$5 million income in 1967 to an estimated US\$20 million in 1970 (Jeffrey, 2000:39). The Thai government 'built up the tourist industry on the basis of the infrastructure developed for the American military. The bars, night clubs, and massage parlours built to entertain visiting American military personnel become part of a vast network of tourism-targeted infrastructural development' (ibid.38). Tourism has since become a crucial source of national income.<sup>21</sup>

The Sarit government established the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) in 1960 to promote tourism. The opening of the first overseas office of TAT in New York in 1965 unequivocally spoke that it targeted American tourists.<sup>22</sup> Van Esterik (2000) aptly put, 'heritage and tradition materialised as Thai culture are simultaneously trivialised, celebrated and exploited' (124). While the infamous sex industry is blatantly aimed at both domestic and international consumption, the

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<sup>21</sup> By 1993 national income from tourism contributed to 5.73% GDP and increased to 6.12% GDP in 2002 for details see [http://www2.tat.or.th/tatinfo\\_policy.php](http://www2.tat.or.th/tatinfo_policy.php) (accessed 5 March 2010). Although it does not seem comparatively high, its visibility, contribution to the economy of local communities and effect on local culture are extensive.

<sup>22</sup> See <http://www.tourismthailand.org/about-tat/> for details (accessed 28 February 2010).

official discourse that promotes tourism in Thailand captures the commodification of Thai natural resources, art and craft, heritage and tradition as exemplified by TAT's campaigns since 1990s such as 'Amazing Thailand', 'Amazing Thailand Grand Sale', 'Amazing Thailand, Amazing Value', 'Thailand Super Deal'.<sup>23</sup> Such slogans inevitably give an impression that the whole country and its people are saleable and indeed on sale!

Part one gave a comprehensive historical background to the Siam/Thailand-the West relationship and how the different notions and terminology of 'modernisation' disseminated and delivered in the country. It also discussed the political context that was central to the profound socio-economic changes of 1960s and 1970s Thailand. It refers to urban industrialisation and rural development programmes which also resulted in rural migration to the city for both livelihood and education. The discussion of an intellectual aspect of the period proceeds in the next part. Part two presents the four dominant approaches in Thai literary criticism and attempts to place the present study in the 'new' Thai literary studies that is Thai cultural studies.

## PART TWO

### OVERVIEW OF STUDIES IN THAI LITERATURE

Part two provides an overview of Thai literary studies in Thailand, a significant element of which evolved out of the Sarit regime's suppression of differing opinions. As discussed in the previous section, the communist threat was a national security issue that the Sarit government took forceful measures against. Sarit himself was empowered by Article 17 of the interim constitution to issue orders or decrees, with the Cabinet's approval, to protect the security of the nation (Nuechterlein, 1964: 845). He stated plainly that 'he would tolerate no opposition to his regime' (ibid. 844). It was within his power to issue search or arrest warrants and close down, on charges of *khommiwnit* and national security subversion, newspapers, magazines and publishing houses that circulated dissident opinions or 'un-Thai' messages. He ordered, for example, that the owner and director of Thewawet Press be arrested because the Press had published books with Marxist-Socialist content

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<sup>23</sup> See <http://amazingthailand.tourismthailand.org/index.php> for details (accessed 28 February 2010).

(Bayan, 1984:138). The situation led to self-censorship on the part of writers, journalists and editorial boards. Most of the fictional works available in the market were about “nonsensical romance, bloody action, and idiotic superstition” (Suchart, 1975: 29; Phonsak, 1975: 195; Sathian, 1974: 378) and there was hardly any writing of literary criticism, unlike the active and progressive literary atmosphere in the late 1940s and prior to the Sarit regime.

With the above situation as the backdrop, this section critically outlines the four dominant approaches in Thai literary criticism. It also attempts to shed some light on the ideological conflict between conservatism and the progressivism underlying the field of Thai literary studies. This section also reviews research on the corpus of literary works of the period in question in order to justify the deliberate selection of popular literary texts outside the scope of the ‘Literature for Life’ movement that are included in the present study. The following outline aims to give an overview of major trends in Thai literary studies rather than an exhaustive history of literary criticism in Thailand. Studies of Thai literature have been broadly dominated by four approaches. They are, broadly speaking, aesthetic, historical, ‘Art/Literature for Life’ and, the most recent one, interdisciplinary. They at times overlap, challenge, respond and engage in critical dialogues with each other.

### **Aesthetic Approach**

As traditional Thai literature is poetry and verse narrative, the first approach to its study and emphasises aesthetic appreciation and evaluation (Chonlada, Reunruthai and Duangmon, 1998: 149-152) based on ‘learning from the Masters’ or ‘one’s experience of prior texts’ (Trisin, 2006: 73). It gives literary conventions priority over literary innovation<sup>24</sup> and literary appreciation over interpretation. ‘The beauty of language and imagery, both aural and conceptual, was rated more highly than the originality or profundity of the message being communicated’ (Phillips, 1987, 12). criticism is an aesthetic approach or the study of ‘literary art’ (*wannasin*). The study of the art of literature focuses on aesthetic values, literary conventions and prosodic rules based on rhythmical patterns, rhymes and tonal constraints that contribute to ‘the musicality of words’ (Trisin, 2006: 70, 74). It also This approach became the first

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<sup>24</sup> See Worawetphisit, Phra. 1970. *Khu-meu lilit phralor* (Lilit Phralor Handbook). Phra-nakhorn: Ongkankha khong khurusapha.

established method of Thai literary studies. It is mostly applied to Thai verse literature ranging from the emergence of Thai poetry and verse narrative from the early Ayutthaya period (1350-1488) to the present (ibid. 70; Chetana, 1994: 21-22).<sup>25</sup> With the emergence of New Criticism in Anglo-American literary criticism in the 1930s<sup>26</sup> and its extensive influence on literary criticism in the following three decades, Thai literary scholars also introduced and applied ‘close reading’ as a technique and methodology in the study of Thai verse literature and later prose.<sup>27</sup> New Criticism and ‘close reading’ breathed a ‘scientific’ and ‘objective’ life into the seemingly ‘subjective’ aesthetic approach (ibid. 80-81 and Chetana, 1996a: 9). The emphasis on timelessness and universal humanistic values at the heart of New Criticism have worked hand in glove with the literary appreciation and aesthetic values at the heart of the learning and teaching of Thai literature in the arts and humanities (Chusak, 2005b: 55-57). For this reason, New Criticism is still widely exercised in literary criticism in Thailand and in the teaching of literary criticism at university level.

## Historical Approach

The second is an historical approach which investigates the ‘history’ of a specific piece of literature, mostly classical Thai literature (*wannakhadi baep chabap*) or ‘ancient’ literature (*wannakhadi boran*) in verse form, in order to verify its author,

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<sup>25</sup> For a current literary criticism that employs the aesthetic approach as a framework see Thanet Wetphada. 2006. *Horm lok wannasin: kan sang rot sunthari haeng wannakhadi Thai* (A Flagrant World of Literary Art: Creating Aesthetics in Thai Literature). Bangkok: Pajera.

<sup>26</sup> See Richards, I.A. 1924. *The Principles of Literary Criticism*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and by the same author, 1929. *Practical Criticism*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner.

<sup>27</sup> Here are some prominent examples of books on literary study and criticism that were influenced by New Criticism. They elaborate on meanings, key characteristics and values of literature. They employ understanding of literary tropes and ‘close reading’ as technique in a study and criticism of Thai literature and offer examples from both verse and prose texts. Narathipphongpraphan, Prince. 1963. *Witthaya wannakam* (Literary Knowledge). Bangkok: Phrae Phitthaya; Sathiankoset (pseudonym). 1964. *Kan-seuksa wannakhadi ngae wannasin* (Literary Study on the Art of Literature). Bangkok: Royal Institute; Chonthira Sattayawathana. 1970. *Kan nam wannakhadi wijan phan mai baep tawantok ma chai kap wannakhadi Thai* (The Application of Western New Approaches of Literary Criticism to Thai Literature). M.A. Dissertation. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University; Wibha Kongkanan. 1990 (1978). *Wannakhadi Seuksa* (Literary Study). Bangkok: Thai Wattana Panich; Wit Siwasariyanon. 1998 (1943). *Wannakhadi lae wannakhadi wijan* (Literature and Literary Criticism). 5<sup>th</sup>, Bangkok: Thammachat; Bunleua Thepphayasuwan, M.L. 2000 (1974). *Wikhro rot wannakhadi Thai* (An Analysis of Thai Literary Taste). 3<sup>rd</sup>, Bangkok: Sayam Press. In a preface of Bunleua 2000 (1974), the author stated in a preface that she did not employ any specific approach in her criticism apart from ‘practical criticism’ as a key framework (11). This statement actually shows how extensive and successful New Criticism has become in establishing itself as a ‘standard’ and ‘natural’ approach to literary study. The term ‘practical criticism’ came from an influential book by I.A. Richards (1929) of the same title mentioned in footnote 24.

author's biography, and the period and context of composition (Chonlada, Reunruthai and Duangmon, 1998: 148, 182-189). There have been a number of works of ancient verse literature whose authors cannot be ascertained or which are still contentious among scholars of their origins. The approach emphasises the positivistic aspect of literature and pays meticulous attention to details of a text's content such as the references it made to the material environment, characters or real figures mentioned and events or festivals recorded. Then, the details are compared to historical records, chronicles and other literary works produced in the same period or by the author and, in some cases where the author is unknown, works of other authors. It also includes a study of etymology and compares the text's particular verse form and style to other texts in order to ascertain its origin.<sup>28</sup> The historical approach also gradually branched out and evolved into studying the 'life and work' of a specific author (ibid. 187). This style of research covers prominent authors such as the poet Sunthornphu (1786-1855),<sup>29</sup> Thianwan (Thian Wannapho, 1842-1915),<sup>30</sup> Siburapha (Kulap Saipradit, 1905-1974),<sup>31</sup> Mom Chao<sup>32</sup> Akatdamkoeng Raphiphat (1905-1932),<sup>33</sup> Dokmaisot (Mom Luang Buppha (Kunchorn) Nimmanheminda, 1905-1963),<sup>34</sup> and other authors of

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<sup>28</sup> Some prominent examples of the study in this approach are Pleuang na Nakhorn (pseud. Nai Thamra na Muang Tai). 1951. *Prawat wannakhadi Thai* (History of Thai Literature). Phra-nakhorn: Thai Wattana Panich; Damrong Rajanubhab, Prince. 1967. *Tamnan sepha* (Legend of *Sepha*). In *Sepha reuang khun chang - khun phan chabap hor-samut haeng chat* (The *Sepha* of khun chang - khun phan, National Library Edition). Phra-nakhorn: Silapa bannakhan. There are other articles by Damrong Rajanubhab published in *Sepha reuang khun chang - khun phan chabap hor-samut haeng cha* that investigated, ascertained and gave explanation of the origin and development of *sepha* as a genre.

<sup>29</sup> See Damrong Rajanubhab, Prince. 1963. *Chiwit lae ngang khorng Sunthornphu* (Life and Work of Sunthornphu). 3<sup>rd</sup>, Bangkok: Khrang witthaya.

<sup>30</sup> See Saen Thammayot. 1952. *Wijan chiwit lae ngang khorng Thianwan* (Criticism on Life and Work of Thianwan) and Kulap Saipradit. 1952. *Thianwan...burut rattana khorng samanchon* (Thianwan...The Commoners' Great Man) in *Thianwan*, ed. Sa-ngop Suriyin. Phra-nakhorn: Ruamsan.

<sup>31</sup> See Smyth, David. 1988. A Study of the Major Fiction of Kulap Saipradit, Pseud. Siburapha. Ph.D. Thesis. London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London; Witthayakorn Chiangkun. 1989. *Seuksa botbat lae khwamkhit khorng Siurapha* (Study of Role and Thoughts of Siburapha). Bangkok: Phaleuk; Rungwit Suwan-aphichon. 2005 (1979). *Siburapha: si haeng wannakam Thai* (Siburapha: Progress of Thai Literature). 3<sup>rd</sup>, Minburi: Witchaya.

<sup>32</sup> The title 'Mom Chao' (M.C.) classifies the lowest rank of the royal title, which is still recognised as royal members. Those in the Mom Chao rank are mostly nieces, nephews or grandchildren of a king. Though considered royal members in terms of blood-line, the Mom Chao titled prince and princess are at the bottom end of the hierarchical pyramid. Social recognition for them is largely influenced by their financial status. The title 'Mom Luang' (M.L.) refers to the even lesser rank recognised only as a royal line that is the great-great grandchildren of a king.

<sup>33</sup> See Chali Iamkrasin. 1972. *Chiwit lae ngang khorng M.C. Akatdamkoeng Raphiphat* (Life and Work of M.C. Akatdamkoeng Raphiphat). Nakhornluang: Pramuansan.

<sup>34</sup> See Kwandee Rakpongse. 1975. A Study of the Novels of Mom Luang Buppha Nimmanheminda (pseud. Dokmaisot). Ph.D. Thesis. London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

later generations.<sup>35</sup> This chapter will later discuss, in part three, the significance of Siburapha and his works in terms of their commitment to society and the people, especially his proposal of ‘*suphaphurut*’ (the gentleman) relevant to the discussion of masculinity in this thesis.

Because of the historical framework involved in the studies of literary texts from different periods of time, this approach also yielded the writing of ‘literary historiography’ or ‘history of literature’ in Siam/Thailand, which was a relatively new way of looking at the corpus of literature at the time. Prince Damrong Rajanuphap (1862-1943) pioneered nationalist literary history, that is, Thai literary historiography centred on the royal dynasties and political events, in his periodisation of literary texts. He conducted his historical, literary and archaeological research from manuscripts and inscriptions at Wachirayan Library (or the Royal Library which later became the National Library) under his directorship (Chetana, 1996b: 46-49; Trisin, 2006: 75-77). The history of Thai literature he wrote clearly served a nationalist agenda in the sense that it presented the masterpieces produced in each royal kingdom/dynasty in a linear manner under succession of great kings with emphasis on these works being the national heritage that testified to the civilisation of Siam. The path of nationalist literary historiography that he created was followed by scholars of his contemporary and later generations who studied and challenged his proposals in terms of content in their research but nonetheless employed his historical periodisation as a conceptual basis of writing Thai literary history.<sup>36</sup> The most prominent example of this is Pleuang na Nakhorn or Nai Thamra na Muang Tai (pseudonym) who wrote *Parithat wannakhadi Thai* (Thai Literature Review) in 1941, which was later revised and published many times as *Prawat wannakhadi Thai* (History of Thai Literature) (Chonlada, Reunruthai and Duangmon, 1998:182-197). His book remains the standard Thai literary history to date as its thirteenth edition in

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<sup>35</sup> There are articles, theses and books on ‘life and work’ of the Marxist-socialist writers (other than Siburapha), to name but a few, Thawep Woradilok. 2004. *Jit Phummasak thi khapajao rujak* (Jit Phummasak that I know). Bangkok: Matichon; Wachira Buason, ed. 1997. *Chiwit lae phon-ngang: tamnam Nai Phi Atsane Phonlajan* (Life and Work: the Legend of Nai Phi Atsane Phonlajan). Bangkok: Khana-kammakan jat ngan Nai Phi khuen phandin mae (Nai Phi’s return to the mother’s land event organising committee). There are also studies of life and work of prominent writers who are still alive. See Chat Kobjitti. 2001. *Ngang lea khwamkhiti Law Khamhom* (Work and Thoughts of Law Khamhom). Bangkok: P A Living; Niwat Kongphian and Suphot Jaengrew, eds. 2002. *84 pi Seni Saowaphong: fai yang yen nai huajai* (84 years of Seni Saowaphong: Still the Cool Fire in His Heart). Bangkok: Matichon; Ornsom Sutthisakhorn. 1991. *Bon thang chiwit sawaeng ha Mala Khamjan* (A Path of Life for Searching: Mala Khamjan). Bangkok: Samanchon.

<sup>36</sup> See Pleuang na Nakhorn. (pseud. Nai Thamra na Muang Tai). 1951; Worawetphisit, Phra. 1953. *Wannakhadi Thai* (Thai Literature). Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University.

2002 shows. Despite the fact that the borders of Siam were drawn only in the 1890s and 1900s (Baker and Pasuk, 2009: 1; Thongchai 1994), the literary history that Pleuang Na Nakhorn wrote follows the nationalist history of the ‘Thai nation’. The formation of Siam started from the coming to power of the kingdom of Sukhothai in the upper Chao Phraya Basin in the thirteenth century in which the ‘Thai alphabet’ was believed to have been invented, to the expansion of the Ayutthaya kingdom from the lower Chao Phraya Basin in the mid-fourteenth century to the fall of Ayutthaya in 1767, a brief interval of the Thonburi period (1767-1782) to the present kingdom of Thailand under the Chakri Dynasty (1782-present).<sup>37</sup>

Although the nationalist literary history that follows the centre of dynastic power is not inclusive of literary works, such as regional literature, that do not fit the narrative of the great dynastic rulers, it dominates other attempts to establish a different history of Thai literature. This case is well illustrated by Sor Thammayot’s *Sinlapa haeng wannakhadi* (The Art of Literature) (1937), which categorised Thai verse literature according to ‘Western genres’ such as ‘epic poetry’ and ‘lyric poetry’, and categorised the Thai literature according to the ‘English literary tradition’ (author’s preface, 2000: no page number) such as Classicism, Romanticism, Parnassism (or Parnassianism) and Symbolism, and Realism (Sor Thammayot, 2000: 104-205). Sor Thammayot’s conception of Thai literature was more inclusive of literary works that were excluded from the canon (e.g. works by female poets (ibid.148-181)) and cultural centre (e.g. northern regional literature (ibid.184-194)). The book was strongly objected to by other contemporary scholars on the grounds of its use of Western literary tradition because ‘characteristics of Thai literature are different from Western literature’ (Chonlada, Reunruthai and Duangmon, 1998: 194). The underlying tension between nationalist-traditionalist thought and progressive thought became evident in the rejection of Sor Thammayot’s proposal (ibid.179-181). The author made it clear in his preface that his book was as much his challenge to the conservative elite and their monopolisation of literary culture as it was his attempt to show that Thai literature shares characteristics of ‘universal aesthetics’ (*khwam-phairor sakon*) or ‘world literature’ (Sor Thammayot, 2000: author’s preface).

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<sup>37</sup> For concise discussion of the dynamic demographic shift and the vulnerability of the early settlements in mainland South East Asia, which is different from a mainstream Thai national history, see Baker, Christopher and Pasuk Phongpaichit. 2009 (2005). *A History of Thailand*. Victoria, Australia: Cambridge University Press. 1-25. Sujit Wongthet. 2006. *Suwannaphum: Tan krasae prawattisat Thai* (Suwannaphum: Against Mainstream Thai History). Bangkok: Matichon.

The historical approach to literature has also been expanded to studies of development of specific genres such as *lilit* verse narrative,<sup>38</sup> *nirat* verse narrative,<sup>39</sup> especially of new genres influenced by Western prose narratives such as short stories and novels.<sup>40</sup> Thanapol Limapichart argues that studies of literary genres from the West cover studies of literary trends and movements such as ‘Literature for Life, social realism, and political novels’ (2008: 8). In terms of an approach to literary criticism, ‘Literature for Life’ (*wannakham pheua chiwit*), social realism as a genre, and political short stories and novels directly found their basis in a Marxist-Socialist political outlook and evolved from the ‘Art for Life’ movement and the approach to literary criticism dating from the late 1940s.

### Art/Literature for Life Approach

The Art/Literature for Life approach found its starting point in an introduction and discussion of the meaning and application of ‘Art for Life’s Sake’ or ‘Art for Life’ (*sinlapa pheua chiwit*) as literary criteria from 1949-1952 (Chonlada, Reunruthai and Duangmon, 1998: 199). It was proposed by progressive critics and writers<sup>41</sup> in opposition to ‘Art for Art’s Sake’ or the concept of *wannasin* which was closely associated with traditional and court literature (Thanapol, 2008: 278). The Art

<sup>38</sup> See Aim-on Chitasophon. 1982. *Wannakam lilit* (*Lilit Literature*). Chiang Mai: Chiang Mai Book Centre.

<sup>39</sup> See Wibunwan Musikanukhor. 2006. *Wannakhadi nirat* (*Nirat Literature*). Chiang Mai: Faculty of Humanities, Chiang Mai University.

<sup>40</sup> See Wibha Senanan. 1975. *The Genesis of the Novel in Thailand*. Bangkok: Thai Wattana Panich; Manas Chitakasem. 1982. The Development of Political and Social Consciousness in Thai Short Stories. In *The Short Stories in South East Asia: Aspects of a Genre*, eds. J.H.C.S. Davidson and H. Cordell. 63-99. London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

<sup>41</sup> Atsani Ponlajan (pseud. Inthrayut and Naiphi), Udom Sisuwan (pseudo. Banjong Banjoetsin and Phor. Muangchomphu) were two prominent figures who employed ‘Art for Life’ approach to literary criticism. There were also other progressive writers at the time who actively responded to the call for literature with socially committed messages and became the forbearers of ‘Literature for Life’, to name but a few, Siburapha, Isara Amantakun, Seni Saowaphong and Atsani Ponlajan himself. For a detailed discussion, historiography of ‘Literary for Life’, its ideological orientation and literary criticism in this approach see Sathian Janthimathorn. 1982. *Saithan wannakam pheua chiwit khong Thai* (The Stream of Thai Literature for Life). Bangkok: Chaophraya; Chonlada Ruangraklikit, Reunruthai Satjaphan and Duangmon Jitjamnong. 1998 (1989). *Thor mai nai sai-nam: 200 pi wannakhadi wijan Thai* (Weaving in the Stream: 200 Years of Thai Literary Criticism). 2<sup>nd</sup>, Bangkok Prapansan; Trisin Boonkhachorn. 1999 (1980). *Nawaniyai kap sangkhom Thai* (2475-2500) (Novels and Thai Society 1932-1957 A.D.). 2<sup>nd</sup>, Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press; Thanapol Limapichart. 2008. *The Prescription of Good Books: The Formation of the Discourse and Cultural Authority of Literature in Modern Thailand (1860s-1950s)*. Ph.D. Dissertation. Madison: University of Wisconsin-Madison. For the specific discussion of its political ideology and how politicized the progressive writers and critics were see Somsak Jeamteerasakul. 1991. *The Communist Movement in Thailand*. Ph.D. Dissertation. Melbourne: Monash University.

for Life approach adopted a Marxist-Socialist outlook and took class issues as its focal point in analysis (on the critic's part) and production (on the artist/writer's part). It was a call of literature that was committed to serve class struggle.

The emergence of the progressive voice in the literary arena was due to the brief easing of the government's restriction and control on literary content and censorship as well as the less restricted availability of paper after the end of the Asia-Pacific War (ibid. 230). The 'progressive literature' by the 'old Leftists' (*sai kao*) that evolved from Art for Life movement had been suppressed in the following decade by the government until its rediscovery in the mid 1960s by the 'new Leftists' (*sai mai*)<sup>42</sup> i.e. the socialist intellectuals and students who disseminated the idea and the works and produced more literary works from similar Marxist-Socialist ideology and called them 'Literature for Life' (*wannakhadi pheua chiwit*). The Literature for Life movement reached its apex during 1973-1976 when popular demonstrations on the 14 October 1973 successfully sent the dictators Thanom and Praphat into exile and gave people hope for social equality and democracy. But that hope came to an abrupt end in the 6 October 1976 massacre by the military and by a right-wing assault. The political context of the period and its relevance to literary production and consumption has been discussed in the previous section on the military state and the communist threat to Thainess.

The Art for Life movement advocated that values of literature lay in its social function, its commitment to 'Truth' and truthful portrayal of the life of the disadvantaged people and problems in society in order to raise social consciousness and inspire readers to transform their society into a better one.<sup>43</sup> Its explicit Marxist-Socialist outlook prioritises the content of a literary text over its form and style as it focuses on class issues in literature. Since its inception in the late 1940s, this approach posed an open and direct challenge to the aesthetic approach earlier mentioned because its criticism of some canonical Thai verse literary texts (revered for their aesthetic value) reached a verdict that those texts were feudalism literature, served the royal court, perpetuated a slave mentality and poisoned the minds of the people

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<sup>42</sup> The politico-historical context of the government suppression was already discussed in the previous part of this introductory chapter.

<sup>43</sup> See Wit Siwasariyanon, 1998: 150-155; Thipakorn (pseudonym). 1976. *Sinlapa pheua chiwit, sinlapa pheua prachachon* (Art for Life, Art for the People). Bangkok: Tonmakham; Nasini Withutherasan. 1976. *Wikhror wannakam naew prachachon* (Analysis of Literature for the People). Bangkok: Patichan; Sathian Janthimathorn. 1982; Reunruthai Satjaphan. 2000. Literature for Life. *Manusya: Journal of Humanities*. 3, 2: 92-107.

(Inthrayut, 1975; Sathian, 1982; Thipakorn, 1976; Somchai, 1980). Critics and writers of the movement also extended their criticism beyond classical literature into contemporary literature, performing art and cinema. The Art for Life movement elaborated the relationship between literature and the society in which it was created and also paved the way to the practice of reading literary texts in political terms and the coinage of the Thai term '*wannakam kan-meuang*', literally 'political literature'. The re-reading of classical Thai literature was couched in political terms such as through the analysis of the political power of the royal court, the ruling class' abuse and excess of power, and class struggle between the royal court/the feudal lord and the peasants/the proletariat.<sup>44</sup> *Wannakam kan-meuang* also includes literary texts with a clear political message<sup>45</sup> and a call for political change. Such a departure from the traditional approach of literary aesthetics and appreciation, together with a critical attitude towards the feudalist ideology of classical Thai literature and the introduction of the studies of folklore and anthropology at university level in Thailand from the late 1950s, and the opening of regional universities in the 1960s,<sup>46</sup> all encouraged the study of regional and folk literature (*wannakam thong-thin*) (Thawat, 1982:10). The study of local manuscripts and inscriptions, together with the comparative and thematic study of regional literature have contributed to the corpus of Thai literary studies.<sup>47</sup>

The revival of the Art for Life movement in the 1960s and 1970s resulted in the flourishing corpus of Literature for Life (*wannakam pheua chiwit*) that communicated a clear message for raising social consciousness and which was inextricably linked to the formation, growth and activities of the Thai intellectual and

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<sup>44</sup> The key examples of this type of literary criticism are Sombat Janthornwong. 2004 (1997). *Bot phijan wa-duay wannakam kan-meuang lae prawattisat* (Criticism on Political Literature and History). 2<sup>nd</sup>, Bangkok: Khopfai; Phonsak Jirakraisiri. 1979. *Wannakam kan-meuang* (Political Literature). Bangkok: Graphic Art.

<sup>45</sup> See Chaisiri Samudavanija. 1981. *Wannakam kan-meuang Thai 14 tula 2516 - 6 tula 2519: rak-ngao, kan-korkoet, kan-toep-to lae phatthanakan* (Thai Political Literature 14 October 1973 – 16 October 1976: Roots, Evolution, Growth and Development). Bangkok: Sangsan; Thawesak Pinthong. 2003. *Nawaniyai kap kan-meuang Thai: korn lae lang hetkan 14 tulakhom 2516 (phor. sor. 2507-2522)* (Novel and Thai Politics: before and after the 14 October 1973 (1962-1979 A.D.)). Bangkok: Rak Arksorn.

<sup>46</sup> In the north Chiang Mai University was established in 1964; in the northeast Khornkaen University in 1964 and College of Education, Mahasarakham in 1964; in the south the Prince of Songkla University, Pattani province, in 1967.

<sup>47</sup> See Anuman Rajadhon, Phraya. 1968. *Essays on Thai Folklore*. Bangkok: the Social Science Association Press of Thailand; Platt, Martin. 2002. *Regionalism and Modern Thai Literature: the Case of Isan*. Ph.D. Thesis. London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London; Veidlinger, Daniel. 2006. *Spreading the Dhamma: Writing, Orality, and textual Transmission in Buddhist Northern Thailand*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

student movements.<sup>48</sup> There was also a ‘Literature of the Quest Era’ or ‘Literature of the Era of Searching’ (*wannakam yuk sawaeng-ha*) (1963-1973) literary movement by the young, discontented writers who searched for some kind of meaning of life, questioned their society, and sought out ways of understanding the social environment in the intellectually-numb condition that existed under the military state control.<sup>49</sup> Its prominent group was ‘*Num-nao sao-suay*’ (The Young and the Beautiful), from which works by its two key members, Sujit Wongthet and Suwanni Sukhontha (pseudonym), are included in this thesis. The political context, intellectual oppression under the autocratic government and the profound socio-cultural change in Thailand under the rubric of modernisation and development were contributing factors in the evolution of the Literature for Life movement as previously discussed in part one of this chapter.

The penchant of the Marxist-Socialist literary works, criticism and political outlook within progressive and radical discourse in the 1960s and 1970s led to an attempt for a more liberal and humanistic view that combined a study of literary form and aesthetic aspects with the critical look at its content in order to find ideas and thoughts (*khon-khit*) that were useful to the understanding of the human condition and values that were true and unchanged (‘universal’ and ‘timeless’) for the human race and all society. The ‘practical criticism’ of ‘close reading’ that took into account the social context of a literary work was systematically introduced by M.L. Bunleau Theppayasuwan in her seminal work ‘*Hua liaw khong wannakhadi Thai*’ (The Turning Point of Thai Literature) first published in 1971. The combination of ‘artistic form’, ‘humanistic content’ and social context offers a means of reading that appeared to resolve underlying ideological conflict between the old conservative elitists and the new progressive Leftists for scholars and critics who tried to maintain their ‘neutral’ stance.

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<sup>48</sup> See Prajak Kongkirati. 2005. *Lae laew khwam-khleuan-wai kor prakot: kan-meuang watthanatham khong nak-seuksa lae panyachon korn 14 tula* (Moving at Last: Cultural Politics of Students and Intellectuals before 14 October). Bangkok: Thammasat University Press. For the discussion of Literature for Life and its treatment of rural-urban issues see chapter three of the thesis.

<sup>49</sup> For discussions of *wannakam yuk sawaeng-ha* see Manas Chitakasem. 1982. The Development of Political and Social Consciousness in Thai Short Stories. In *The Short Story in South East Asia: Aspects of Genre*, eds. J.H.C.S. Davidson and H. Cordell. 63-99. London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London; Kanha Saengyrai and Jetsada Thongrungrrote, eds. 2003. *Parithat wannakam Thai samai mai* (Reviews of Modern Thai Literature). Bangkok: Foundation of 14 October Academy of Thailand (FOATH).

Trisin Boonkhachorn, in her oft-quoted 1980 book *Nawaniyai kap sangkhom Thai* (pho. sor. 2475-2500) (Novels and Thai Society 1932-1957 A.D.), proposed a three-fold relationship between author, literature and society in which literature is first and foremost a reflection of the society in which it is created because ‘it portrays an author’s experience and some events in that society’ (1999: 5). Secondly, literature and author are influenced by the social environment. To understand the influence, attention should be paid to ‘how an author is affected by society and how he [or she] responds to the social influence’ (ibid. 6). Thirdly, literature and author also influenced society. Trisin based her third proposal on the idea of an artist/author as a gifted individual with more profound and greater vision and understanding of life and human condition: ‘Therefore, an author has the important role of being an intellectual and a cultural leader of the society’ (ibid.7). The society-author-literature relationship and the axiom that ‘literature is a reflection of society’ (ibid. 5) have dominated Thai literary studies to this day and have been substantiated by a number of research activities following a thematic approach under the rubric of ‘literature and society’,<sup>50</sup> and a discussion on the ‘artistic use of language’ in selected works analysed in the research. Trisin’s proposal is clearly based in the humanistic paradigm which would be later challenged by critics and scholars who introduced and applied new approaches such as structuralism, semiotics and poststructuralism to the studies of Thai literature and literary criticism in Thailand. These new approaches form what this survey, for the convenience of shorthand identification, loosely refers to as the interdisciplinary approach i.e. the fourth trend in Thai literary studies and criticism.

The massacre of students and civilians on 6 October 1976 at Thammasat University was not only the turning point of Thai politics and history but also of the Literature for Life movement. It caused Leftist writers, intellectuals and students who

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<sup>50</sup> There are studies of themes such as family, motherhood, drug abuses, rural and urban conflicts in a body of works by a particular author or in specific timeframe most of which rest on a assumption that literature is a ‘reflection’ of a society and reveals ‘truth’ about a society. See for example Em-on Niranrat. 1996. *Thatsana thang sangkhom nai nawaniyai Thai mai Samai Ratchkan thi 7* (Social Attitudes in Thai Novels during the Reign of King Prachathipok). Bangkok: Ton-or Grammy; Suvanna Kriengkraipetch and Larry E. Smith. 1992. *Value Conflicts in Thai Society: Agonies of Change Seen in Short Stories*. Bangkok: Social Research Institute, Chulalongkorn University; Honolulu : East-West Center; Mattani Moj dara Rutnin. 1988. ‘The Transformation of Values as Seen through *Si phaen din* by M.R. Kukrit Pramoj’ and ‘The Change in the Role of Women in Contemporary Thai Literature’. In *Modern Thai Literature: The Process of Modernisation and the Transformation of Values*. Bangkok: Thammasat University Press. 67-110, 111-121; Jintana Dityam. 1984. *Panha sangkhom kiawkap yaseptit nai nawaniyai khong Suwanni Sukhontha* (Social Problems on Drug Abuse in Suwanni Sukhontha’s Novels). MA Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University.

were also the crusaders of the Literature for Life movement<sup>51</sup> to get away from the government's violent urban repression and 'witch-hunt'. Some fled abroad; many joined the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) (1942-1987) camps in the jungle (whether they had or not already been its members). However, most students left the jungle between 1979 and 1981 due to internal ideological factions and external factors relating to other communist states<sup>52</sup> (Baker and Pasuk, 2009: 196). The fall of the CPT in the 1980s and the ideological effect,<sup>53</sup> if not crisis, that it had on those who were involved in the intellectual and student movements marked a crucial repercussion for the intellectual history of the Thai Left and for progressive literary production and criticism in Thailand, among other things. As Baker and Pasuk (2009) concisely put it, these activists continued to have 'a profound effect on following decades. ... [They were] allowed to return to the mainstream and resume their ascent to elite positions throughout society' (198). Not only were the radical activists allowed to return to the mainstream, the Literature for Life movement as political literary ideology was also absorbed into the liberal humanist study of Thai literature as a 'genre' and a 'literature and society' approach to literature.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Baker and Pasuk (2009) see that a contributing factor of this connection is the government development policy that increased the numbers in higher education. 'The catchment area for higher education extended beyond the old elite. Many drawn from the provinces to the colleges in Bangkok. In the short stories through which this generation shared their experience, the central character is often a provincial boy or girl who escapes from poverty through education, but remains angry at the exploitation of others less fortunate' (185).

<sup>52</sup> There were pro-China and pro-Vietnam factions. Cambodia's horrific experience under the Khmer Rouge, Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia and China's attack on Vietnam further undermined confidence and enthusiasm of the members. For a well-informed and concise discussion see Baker and Pasuk, 2009. 180-198.

<sup>53</sup> For the comprehensive discussion of communist ideology in Thailand see Somsak Jeamteerasakul, 1991; and Kasian Techaphira. 2001. *Commodifying Marxism: the Formation of Modern Thai Radical Culture, 1927-1958*. Kyoto Area Studies on Asia, v. 3.; Kyoto, Japan, Melbourne, Australia: Kyoto University Press; Trans Pacific Press.

<sup>54</sup> The appropriation of 'Literature for Life' as political ideology into the mainstream liberal humanism is encapsulated by the inclusion of both fiction and non-fiction works by the radical and progressive writers of the late 1940s and the 1970s generations in *Saranukrom naenam nangsud di 100 lem thi khon Thai khuan arn* (100 Good Books that Thai People Should Read: A Guide). This guidebook was a result of the 'Selection and Recommendation of Good Book that Thai People Should Read Research Project' (*Khrongkan wijai khat-leuak lae naenam nangsud di 100 lem thi khon Thai khuan an*) led by the academic, social critic and prominent writer Withayakorn Chiangkun who was an active member of 'Literature for Life' movement in the 1970s. The project was funded by Thailand Research Fund (TRF) in 1996 and comprised a team of ten researchers who were well-known academics, journalists and writers. Some of them were the activists who returned from the jungles and resumed the intellectual elite positions (Withayakorn Chiangkun et al., 1999: 44-45). It selected books published during 1865 to 1976 that were qualified as 'modern Thai classic' (ibid. 14). In terms of intellectual tradition, the research team leaders explained that these books showed two competing lines of thoughts: self-adjustment [to maintain one's power] thoughts from the ruling echelon and progressive/revolutionary thoughts from the intellectual group. The first and foremost criterion for selection was that they must be 'good books' (ibid.31). For the criteria, procedure and summary report

## Interdisciplinary Approach

In the 1980s, there emerged a new critical practice that was interdisciplinary in its theoretical foundation and represented a paradigm shift from Humanism to Poststructuralism. Never before has Thailand had so many foreign educated ‘commoners’ who have returned to work, among other places, in universities in Bangkok and, later, in regional universities, thanks to the support from the US government since the rise to power of Sarit’s pro-US, military junta in 1957 (Thanes Wongyannawa, 2010: 156).<sup>55</sup> These graduates, especially those in social sciences and some in the arts and humanities, were the first to translate seminal works by Continental European theorists into Thai via their acquaintance of these texts from sources in English. There were also young scholars who studied in France. One of them was Sukanya Hantrakul who introduced for the first time contemporary French structuralist thought to local audiences<sup>56</sup> in an article published in 1982<sup>57</sup> (ibid. 160). In the early 1980s, the rising popularity of Nidhi Eeoseewong’s historical studies paved the way for the emergence of French-influenced cultural studies in his employment of literature as an historical source (ibid. 158).

In literary criticism, Chusak Phattarakulvanit, an American-trained lecturer in English and a literary critic, and the late Noppon Prachakun,<sup>58</sup> a French-trained lecturer in French and a literary critic, both from Thammasat University, were the

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of the research project see ibid. 13-44. For the detailed discussion of this book and an analysis of discourse of ‘good books’ in Thai intellectual tradition see Thanapol 2008.

<sup>55</sup> The situation was portrayed in a community of Thai students at Cornell University in Sujit Wongthet’s *Met in yu. et. e. 1* (Made in USA) (1973) and *Ngo naao tao tun* (*Met in yu. et. e. 2*) (Complete Idiot (Made in USA 2)) (1973). The two novellas are discussed in chapter two.

<sup>56</sup> For the discussion of the dissemination of new critical theory by Thai social scientists see Thanes Wongyannawa. 2010. *Wathakam: The Thai Appropriation of Foucault’s ‘Discourse’*. In *The Ambiguous Allure of the West: Traces of the Colonial in Thailand*, eds. Rachel Harrison and Peter A Jackson. 153-171. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

<sup>57</sup> The article was the work of Sukanya Hantrakul. 1982. *Phasa: sanyalak: wannakadi* (Language: Symbol: Literature). *Loke Nangsue*, 5 (February): 24-45.

<sup>58</sup> Following his death in 2007, there was a postmortem publication of Noppon Prachakul’s articles collection in 2009 in two volumes *Yor ak-sorn yorn khwam-khit lem 1 lae 2* (Break Down the Words, Challenge the Thoughts Volume 1 and 2), Bangkok: Arn and Wiphasa. The comprehensive collection greatly contributes to the body of knowledge in critical theory as well as literary and cultural studies in Thailand. His expertise in the areas and his lucidity make the two volumes the crucial references for those who are interested in literary theory, cultural studies and criticism. His work on French literature and critical thinkers (2003) also encouraged the dissemination of new critical approaches in literary studies, cultural studies and social science to the Thai audience. He also worked as an editor in a translation of Michel Foucault’s *Les corps dociles* translated from French by Thorngkorn Phokkhatham (2004) and selected writings from Roland Barthes’ *Mythologies* translated from French by Wanphimon Angkhasirisap (2001).

first to introduce systematically structuralism, semiotics, poststructuralism, deconstruction, psychoanalysis, postmodernism and postcolonialism in their criticism of literature in English and French as well as classical and modern Thai literature. Chusak also extended his critical inquiry into the criticism of the contemporary culture of the affluent Thailand of the mid-1990s (Chusak, 1996). Both Chusak (1993; 2005) and Noppon (2009) have regularly published their articles in both academic journals and popular magazines since 1990. These approaches treat literary works as cultural texts where different discourses interact and are articulated. In their treatment of literary texts, the two critics employ these new approaches in their examination of literature as a text that is the site of interaction where a complex construction of code and conventions interplays. The interdisciplinary and cultural studies approach that they employ enabled them to illustrate and tease out the social and cultural undercurrents in literary texts, in contrast to the aesthetic and positivistic aspects and the study of 'literature and society', which had been undertaken in previous work on Thai literature. The extensive and systematic use of the interdisciplinary and cultural studies approach is also evident in work of the new generation of critics such as Sanoh Jaroenpon's study of the representation of 'progressive women' and feminist issues in literature of the 1990s affluent era, *Phuying kap sangkhom nai wannakam Thai yuk forng sabu* (Women and Society in Thai Literature of the Bubble Economy Era) (2005); Kham Phaka's feminist criticism that set sexual agendas in her reading of modern Thai literature, *Krathu dork thorng* (Queries from a Common Slut) (2003);<sup>59</sup> Chutima Pragatwutisarn's 'Naming the Unspeakable: Representing Rape in Thai Literature' (2005); and Soison Sakolrak's study of the transformation of a classical Thai literary text in popular culture, *Thai Literary Transformation: An Analytical Study of the Modernisation of Lilit Phra Lor* (2003), to name but a few. The new approaches in Thai literary studies pose a critical challenge to Thai literary study that has been carried out in departments of Thai Language in Thai universities in the last sixty years. The interdisciplinary approach to literary criticism has lately found its place in departments of Comparative Literature in Thai universities whose members of staff have often been educated abroad at some stage. It has also gradually become more prevalent among some lecturers and literary critics of Thai literature who are more susceptible to new critical theory.

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<sup>59</sup> For discussion of Kham Phaka's groundbreaking work see Harrison 2005.

The present study positions itself in the interdisciplinary approach. It is both a contribution and a continuation of a critical practice in Thai literature in the field of Thai cultural studies. Its choice of popular literary texts will be discussed in the last section of this part on studies of 1960s and 1970s literature.

### **Resistance to Western Theory**

From the above overview of major approaches in Thai literary studies, it is worth noting that, as Harrison (2010) points out, ‘theoretically engaged treatment of Thai literature [...] occurs as an offshoot of the study of English and French literature’ (9). This fact, Harrison insightfully observes, shows ‘the experience of Thai literary studies and the particular difficulties it faces in engaging in wider, theoretically determined comparative debates on world literatures’ (ibid.).<sup>60</sup> Harrison’s observation is particularly pertinent here because, although new critical approaches have gradually broken into the established field of Thai literary studies, there has always been a pronounced ‘resistance to Western theory’ in Thai literary circles on the grounds of the ‘uniqueness’ of Thai literature. A case in point is provided in ‘An Analytical Report on Literary Criticism’ (Reunruthai Satjaphan, 2004: 22-106) of a research project on ‘Literary Criticism’ in Thailand under the umbrella project ‘Criticism as an Intellectual Force in Contemporary Society’, a multi-million baht research project funded by the Thailand Research Fund (TRF) and conducted between 1999-2002.<sup>61</sup>

The book published after the completion of this literary criticism research project comprises a report and an anthology of 50 articles selected from over 4,000 articles published from 1937 to 2001 (ibid. 20).<sup>62</sup> The research team asserts that these 50 articles ‘create a body of knowledge related to the history of criticism, concepts, forms, and give clear directions as well as an overall picture of Thai literary criticism’ (ibid.). Indeed, there are a number of articles that show the critically and theoretically engaged treatment of Thai literary texts and the report mentions in different places the

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<sup>60</sup> The rejection of Sor Thammayot’s *Sinlapa haeng wannakhadi* (The Art of Literature) (1937) by nationalist Thai literary scholars previously discussed also testifies to this observation.

<sup>61</sup> The ‘Criticism as an Intellectual Force in Contemporary Society’ project has been the biggest research project on criticism in the Arts and Humanities in Thailand. It branched out into five smaller projects on literature, visual art, dramatic art, music and contemporary criticism.

<sup>62</sup> Four articles by Chusak and three by Noppon are included in the anthology.

importance of new theoretical approaches as exemplified by the works of both Chusak and Noppon. However, the report also warns in many places against that ‘the use of theory [as an end in itself] without engaging with literature’ (ibid. 74, 84, 103). To reinforce the ‘caution against theory’, the report also gives a summary of an academic talk given by a guest speaker, Vridhagiri Ganeshan, from Hyderabad University organised by the research project.

Although Thailand has never been colonised like India, Western influence, in the guise of education development, has seeped through to perspectives and ways of thinking by Thai people in their literary evaluation according to Western criteria. Using literary jargon derived from foreign vocabularies, classifying Thai literature according to the pattern of Western literature, and using new theories from the West that have no relationship to Thai literature such as *Postmodernism* and *Post-colonialism* to analyse Thai literature show a lack of knowledge, understanding, thought and ways of Western thinking as much as a lack of understanding, intellectual roots and ways of Thai thinking. (Ibid. 73, my translation)

The caution against theory here, at best, misperceives the position of literary studies in Thailand and, at worst, misunderstands postmodernism and post-colonialism in its claim that Thailand and Thai literature have nothing do to with these two frames of critical enquiry. If post-colonialism provides critical strategies that effectively analyse the cultural legacy of colonialism, then ‘it is applicable to the study of literature and cultural artefacts from any country, in any language with the focus on the political, social and cultural process that made possible imperial domination’ (Chusak, 2005b: 57).<sup>63</sup> The fact that the research team reports this caution without assessing whether Thai literary studies has actually engaged *enough* with new critical approaches and whether the two critical enquiries bear any relevance to the study of Thai literature, implies an underlying reservation against the use of new critical approaches prevalent in the established Thai literary circle.

### **Studies of 1960s and 1970s Literature**

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<sup>63</sup> There are both Thai and foreign scholars of Thai Studies who have been arguing for an understanding of the experience of Siam/Thailand since the mid-nineteenth century as ‘semicolonial/crypto-colonial/auto-colonial and hence logically also in part postcolonial’ (Harrison, 2010a: 4). See Herzfeld, 2002; Hong, 2004; Jackson, 2004a, 2004b, 2005; Loos, 2006; Peleggi, 2002; Thongchai, 2004, 2000

The socio-political and historical background in part one of this chapter and the overview of Thai literary criticism in the previous section show that the discussion of the historiography of 1958-1976 literature and its criticism are concentrated within the framework of the Literature for Life approach. The Sarit regime (1958-1963) has been regarded as the ‘dark age’ in Thai intellectual history (Trisin, 1999: 375; Smyth and Manas, 1998: xiv; Bayan, 1984:138; Sathian, 1982: 344; Suchart, 1975: 29; Phonsak, 1975: 195) because of the extensive censorship, crackdowns and arrests of progressive writers and intellectuals as mentioned earlier. Most progressive and radical works of the Art for Life movement of the late 1940s disappeared from the literary market and became inaccessible to the public (Thanapol, 2008: 275). Prajak Kongkirati poignantly observes that the ‘disappearance’ was due to self-censorship by writers, publishers and the literary circle at large for fear of the repressive regime (2005, 384-386). The Thanom-Prapath regime (1963-1973) was also marked by military control, though less severe in its execution. There was the launch of *Sangkhomsat parithat* or *The Social Science Review* in 1963 under the editorship of Sulak Sivaraksa. The journal provided an intellectual forum for the circulation of information from abroad in the form of academic papers, articles and translated news articles from sources external to Thailand.<sup>64</sup> An increasing American presence, changes in Thai society, growing public discontent, the anti-war movement, and a popular and youth culture gradually gathered momentum in Thai cultural politics, resulting in the formation of the student and intellectual movements (Anderson, 1985; Prajak, 2005) and the revival of the concept of ‘Art for Life’s Sake’ and of Marxist-Socialist ideology in the late 1960s. There was also the formation of ‘Literature of the Quest Era’ or ‘Literature of the Era of Searching’ (*wannakam yuk sawaeng-ha*) (1963-1973) movement by the young, discontented writers as earlier mentioned. The three-year period during 1973 to 1976 marked the apex of Literature for Life because ‘young activist writers expressing their beliefs in the need for social change made literature for life the mainstream of Thai literature [*sic*] during that time’ (Reunruthai, 2000: 92).

The assertion that Literature for Life was the mainstream approach to Thai literature overshadowed the fact that the availability and popularity of popular market

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<sup>64</sup> For the role *Sangkhomsat parithat* played in the Thai cultural politics and the formation of anti-war movement among the students and intellectuals see Prajak Kongkirati, 2005 and Narong Phetprasert, 2006.

fictional works in the 1958-1976 period did not decrease. The political left in the intellectual and cultural arena made an impact by shifting a focus to Literature for Life as a mode of literary production, readership and criticism in studies of literature of the period, while popular fictional works were dismissed as ‘nonsensical’ (Chonthira, 1979: 5) by most critics, especially the progressive ones. Some asserted that ‘love and sex became the trademark of Thai writers after 1957’ (Chai-anan and Chaisiri, 1973: 74). Popular fictional works were always widely read. There were magazines for the popular market and the mass readership that published entertaining novels in instalments. Some of those novels were later published in book form because of their popularity. The popular works produced concurrently with the flourishing ‘Literature for Life’, aimed at reading for pleasure were called ‘*niyai nam nao*’, figuratively, ‘soap’ novels (Kham Phaka, 2003: 294) or, literally, ‘stagnant water’ novels because of their lack of serious content that brought change (‘new water’) to the readers’ thoughts and, by extension, to society at large.

There is only one piece of research on the popular works produced during the Sarit regime, that is Bayan Imsamran’s (1984), *Nawaniyai Thai rawang phor. sor. 2501-2506: kan wikhror naew khit* (The Thai Novels during 1958-1963: An Analytical Study of Themes). She found that there were actually more novels published during this period than in previous years because most editors chose to decrease social commentary, reduce contributions to literary criticism columns<sup>65</sup> and increase the publication of novels in instalments (ibid.11).<sup>66</sup> Bayan surveyed eighty novels, all of which were previously serialised in magazines before being published in book form, and found that there were five key themes. The theme of romantic drama with obstacles and a happy ending was the most prominent; followed by action novels of heroes fighting local gangsters for the wellbeing of communities or against communist terrorists for the nation (ibid.14-29). The third theme was family drama which portrayed either problems between husband and wife or parents and children (ibid.29-31). The fourth theme was social drama of which there were only six novels. Two presented the problems of ‘hedonistic and materialistic’ Bangkok (ibid.32) by Rong Wongsawan (one of which is included in this thesis). Two novels by two

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<sup>65</sup> Literary criticism columns often served as an arena where supporters of ‘Art for Art’s Sake’ and ‘Art for Life’s Sake’ critically engaged with the readers and each other. It was arguably a forum where ideological conflicts manifested through criticism of literature.

<sup>66</sup> Magazines that adopted this strategy were for example *Piyamit*, *Sayam samaii*, *Thai-sapda* and *Sansuk*.

authors portrayed different problems in rural communities, one due to the lack of a good leader, the other relating to the local mafia. And the last two showed problems in overseas countries, one in Africa, the other in Latin America, both by Seni Saowaphong (ibid. 32-33), a progressive writer who changed his writing style because of government repression. The last theme was horror, of which two novels were ghost stories and one was a semi-scientific ghost story (ibid. 34). Bayan concluded that most novels reinforced abstract values such as ‘love above material values’, ‘leading a valuable and simple life’, ‘a person’s value should be judged by merit not family fortune or background’ (ibid. 124-125). Although a large number of novels dealt with romantic love and male/female relationships, most of them emphasised the traditional values for women (ibid. 125) as a mother and a wife.

On the topic of women, research has been done on issues of feminism and female sexuality which have opened up an interest in the dismissed corpus of popular literature of the period. Rachel Harrison’s “ ‘A Hundred Loves’, ‘A Thousand Lovers’: Portrayals of Sexuality in the Work of Thidaa Bunnaak” (2002) focuses on the work of a prolific female author and rising star of ‘erotica’ between the 1940s and 1960s. Harrison argues that Thida’s *oeuvre* approaches the taboo topic of male and female sexual relationships and incorporated social commentary with political implications in its piercing criticism of sexual hypocrisy (ibid. 454). The contribution of Thida’s *oeuvre* to the tradition of modern female writing that questions and challenges patriarchal society will be discussed in part three of this chapter on issues of gender and sexuality in the modern environment.

As mentioned in the previous section, Art/Literature for Life has been the main framework in the studies and criticism of 1960s and 1970s literature. Nasini Withutherasan (1976) focused entirely on works with a clear message for social change aimed at a proletariat audience called ‘*wannakam naew prachachon*’ (the People’s Literature) which emphasises ‘lucidity, simplicity and beauty’ (*chat, ngai, ngam*) as three vital qualities of these works and uses them as criteria in analysing and evaluating literature (ibid. 5). Her argument for the social commitment of literature and writers exemplified the adoption and application of a Literature for Life approach and Marxist-Socialist ideology to the full extent, especially in her dismissal of literary works that did not have clear social and political message as ‘*reuang roeng-rom tam sut*’ (formulaic, entertaining fiction) (ibid.1). Nasini claims that formulaic entertaining fiction, both short stories and novels, like the works of Suwanni Sukhontha and Rong

Wongsawan (whose novels included in this thesis) ‘had narrow personal content, daily routines that reflected both good and bad social currents without recommending the right ideas’ to readers (ibid.1). Her assertion implies a key issue at the heart of Literature for Life i.e. the ‘writer’s responsibility’ to society at large. Suwanni and Rong’s response to this call was simply that writers were not preachers—their duty was to tell a story (Krasae, 1969: 177). Although works by both Suwanni and Rong are by no means nonsensical and simplistic, the radical and divisive idea of some critics polarised literature into ‘progressive’ and ‘popular’ and dismissed works with less obvious political statements by liberal writers. This polarisation hinders a more comprehensive overview of 1960s and 1970s literature and excludes the dynamics of the ‘popular’ literary market and readership from the corpus of literature of the period in question.

As the radical politics of Literature for Life has been appropriated by liberal humanism into Literature for Life as a genre after the fall of the CPT in the 1980s, studies of fictional works that were excluded from the Literature for Life corpus have often come under a thematic approach according to the contents or body of works of an individual writer.<sup>67</sup> These studies were also tagged ‘analytical study’, which means the study of themes, characterisation, composition technique and thoughts (*khorkhit*)<sup>68</sup> in a writer’s works. They were mostly a combination of historical, aesthetic and ‘literature and society’ approaches as they looked at the biography of the writer, literary form and technique, content of the works and social context.

There is also a group of studies of 1960s and 1970s literature which established more comparative and multi-disciplinary perspectives such as new historicism (Anderson, 1985), ethnographic interpretation (Phillip, 1987), sociology (Suvanna and Smith, 1992) and comparative migration literature (Boccuzzi, 2007). These studies are more inclusive of writers and literary works that are ‘progressive’

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<sup>67</sup> See for example Jintana Dityam. 1984. *Panha sangkhom kiaw-kap ya-sep-tit nai nawaniyai khong Suwanni Sukhontha* (Social Problems on Drug Abuse in Suwanni Sukhontha’s Novels). M.A. Dissertation. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University; Sukhon Makmak. 1997. *Wikhroh laksana tua-lakhorn a-pokkati nai nawaniyai khong M.L. Sifa Mahawan* (Analysis of Abnormal Characters in M.L. Sifa Mahawan’s Novels). M.A. Dissertation. Songkhla: Thaksin University.

<sup>68</sup> See for example Bunsiri Phinyanan. 1984. *Kan-seuksa choeng wikhroh nawaniyan khong K. Surangkhanang* (An Analytical Study of K. Surangkhanang’s novels). M.A. Dissertation. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University; Parinya Ritjaloen. 1984. *Kan-seuksa choeng wikhroh ngan-khian khong Nimit Phumthaworn* (An Analytical Study of Nimit Phumthaworn’s Writing) M.A. Dissertation. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University; Thanet Hanchao. 1990. *Wikhroh nawaniyai khong Vasit Detkunchorn* (Analysis of Vasit Dethumchorn’s novels). M.A. Dissertation. Songkhla: Thaksin University.

and some that might not be so 'progressive' in the strict sense of the term. Yet, the selected texts in these studies address issues concerned and prevalent in society that readers can relate to. These issues were, for example, alienation in the city, sexually corrupt urban life, the exploitation of disadvantaged people, Western presence in rural and urban areas, the expansion of capitalism, the desire to go overseas (Anderson, 1985), the 'internationalisation of Thailand and the development ethos', the 'deterioration of Thai life', the 'politicisation of experience' (Phillips, 1987), social transformation, conflicts between different sets of values such as tradition and modernity, rurality and urbanity (Suvanna and Smith, 1992), rural and urban poverty, and rural migration to the city (Boccuzzi, 2007). These studies are more inclusive of literary texts as their selected works shared the broad characteristics of representing experience of social change in the milieu and delivering socially committed messages. However, there was no inclusion of literary works that are aimed at the popular market. It is also notable that (female) gender and sexuality were increasingly debated in the public arena and become social issues in the form of prostitution, teenage sexual behaviour, women's changing roles, and inequality between men and woman. However, there has not been a real interest in engaging with gender and sexuality issues in ways that take into account complex socio-economic, cultural and psychological factors vital to the discussion of them in literature of the period in question apart from some of Harrison's works (2002; 2000; 1999; 1995).

A study of 1960s and 1970s literature that stands out from the above discussion is Soranat Tailanga's *Reuang-san Thai naew khati-niyom samai mai phor. sor. 2507-2516* (Modernist Thai Short Stories, 1964-1973) (2007). In her investigation of a hundred and one short stories from both the corpus of Literature for Life and the more inclusive body of Literature of the Quest Era, Soranat argues that they were influenced by 'Modernist literary works from the West' (2007, abstract, no page number) and show the formation of Thai Modernism. These short stories expressed 'the estrangement from modernisation as well as hostility towards social establishments and values, and dictatorship' (ibid.). She further contends that changes in form and employment of experimental modes of expression in these stories expressed the crisis of representation which was characteristic of Modernist writings. 'The radical changes in content and style in Modernist Thai short stories symbolised political and social crises in Thai society' (ibid), she concludes.

All the short stories selected were written by male writers<sup>69</sup> which Soranat categorically calls ‘male writings’ that expressed a ‘man’s world’ (ibid. 141-142). There are a number of stories about prostitution and changing female sexual behaviour as a result of modernisation. Her examination of these stories showed that one prominent characteristic of male writings was an expression of discontent with the national development that was underway. Most female characters portrayed in the stories symbolised the once innocent countryside ruined by the process of modernisation. Some were a metaphor of natural resources from the countryside that propelled the modernising engine of the city. However, these women were also sexually exploited by male protagonists who used them as a repository for their sex drive and for relief from the stress and anxiety that resulted from estranged urban life. In the stories, the male characters tend to direct their discontent with the modern environment against the bodies of prostitutes rather than the process of modernisation itself. These stories thus imply sexual prejudice, if not a misogynistic attitude on part of the writers (ibid.141-154).

From the discussion of studies of 1960s and 1970s literature given above, it is evident that there is a widely accepted division between ‘progressive’ and ‘popular’ literature. However, there were also a number of literary works that addressed social issues in their representation of contemporary society without committing to Marxist-Socialist political ideology and which had a wider appeal to the popular market and to public readership. This thesis thus takes a deliberate departure from Literature for Life as a mode of literary production, readership and criticism which has been the dominant focus of the studies of literature of the 1958-1976 period and enters into the domain of popular literature in its choice of primary literary texts. These primary texts are Rong Wongsawan’s *Sanim soi* (Unwilling to Endure) (1961), Suwanni’s *Thalay reu im* (The Insatiable Sea) (1972), Sujit Wongthes’s *Met in yu. et. e.* (Made in USA) (1973) and *Ngo ngao tao tun* (*Met in yu. et. e.2*) (Complete Idiot (Made in U.S.A. 2)) (1973) and Ta Tha-it’s *Pai talat-nam* (Going to the Floating Market) (1975). The current study adopts Benedict Anderson’s use of the new historicism approach to the literary texts (1985) from the period he terms the ‘American Era’ (1977:15) as a starting point. In its treatment of these literary works as cultural texts, the thesis explores the construction and negotiation of modern Thai identities under the dual

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<sup>69</sup> The most prominent female writer of Literature for Life in the 1970s is Sidaoreuang (pseudonym) who was then writing social realist short stories.

rubrics of ‘modernisation’ and ‘development’ in a social environment where ‘modern men and women [struggle] to become subjects as well as objects of modernisation, to get a grip on the modern world and make themselves at home in it’ (Berman, 1988: 5). In the context of profound changes and the underlying discursive ‘desire to be modern’ discussed in part one of this chapter, this thesis investigates issues of political identity and Thainess in chapter two, modern identities in the rural-urban contact in chapter three, modern youth identities in chapter four, modern female identities in chapter five and modern Thai masculinity in chapter six.

The current study contributes three chapters to the discussion and examination of power dynamics in gender relations and gender and sexuality issues. Its earlier survey has pointed out the paucity of a focalised investigation of the topic while it can be discerned that gender and sexuality issues such as prostitution, teenage sexual behaviour, women’s changing roles, and inequality between men and woman had been increasingly debated in the public arena and represented in literary texts of the period (Soranat, 2007: 141-154). These issues involved complex socio-economic, cultural and psychological factors and found their basis in deep-rooted cultural assumptions about female sexuality. The next part of this chapter is therefore dedicated to the discussion of cultural assumptions, the modern environment and its effects on the definition and construction of femininity and masculinity that are crucial to the examination of gender and sexuality issues in chapters four to six.

### **PART THREE**

#### **THE MODERN ENVIRONMENT AND GENDER AND SEXUALITY**

This section draws attention to the issues of gender and sexuality formulated and articulated from within, and in response to, the modern environment. The process of ‘modernisation’ that came to be ‘invariably synonymous with urbanisation, industrialisation and Westernisation’ (Darunee and Shashi, 1997: 86) did not only affect the material environment but also crucially informed the way in which men and women perceived, interacted and defined themselves and one another.

#### **Locating Thai Female Sexuality:**

##### **The Domestic(ated) ‘Madonna’ and the Strayed ‘Whore’**

This section argues that contrary to the Western perception/imagination of Thai women's sexual availability brought to international recognition through the thriving sex industry in the wake of the Vietnam War, the construction and control of female sexuality and identity in the Thai cultural context has been confined within matrimony and the institution of family and recognisably rigid. The long-standing division of women into 'good' women (*phuying di*) and 'bad' (*phuying mai di*, literally, not good women; figuratively, prostitutes)—the 'Madonnas' and the 'whores'—testifies to the Thai cultural prescription that women are defined in terms of their sexual behaviour and relationship to the family institution. Harrison contends that

to be a "good" woman means to remain loyal to that institution—to be a dutiful daughter, a faithful wife, and a faultless, all-giving mother. [...] However, when women become sexually available outside the conjugal relationship, whether voluntarily or a result of force, the predominant Thai response is one of contempt. (1999, 168)

Sexual contact of women outside the context of marriage and monogamy is often perceived as promiscuity-*cum*-prostitution regardless of whether there is monetary exchange involved or not (ibid. 169 and Harrison, 2001: 139). If a woman crosses the line from morally acceptable to unacceptable, she becomes 'tainted' (*paet peuan*), 'ruined' (*sia*), or 'lost value' (*sin kha*).

With the cultural prescription that morally acceptable female sexuality is (best) kept within the institution of family and the domestic sphere, it does not come as a surprise, albeit absurd in the country's demand for female labour force in the capitalist market, that women who are still on the street after nightfall might be suspected of being prostitutes. Even nowadays, most Thai girls once they reach puberty are often told by adults, 'Good women would not go out at night' (*phuying di-di mai ork nork ban torn khrang-kheun*). When Sarit came to power and instructed a campaign of 'social orderliness and proper conduct', his government passed the Prostitution Prohibition Act, 1960, as part of a social purification campaign. The Act penalised both street solicitation and brothel prostitution and delineated precisely the acts that constituted the offence of prostitution (Jeffrey, 2002: 24-26). 'It was sufficient for a person to "wander" or "loiter" about on the streets or public places in a "manner or way which *appears* to be an appeal to communicate for prostitution

purposes” for him or her to be charged’ (‘Act for the Abatement of Prostitution’, Section 5 (2) 561 in *ibid.* 26).

Moreover, the Act also ordered that convicted prostitutes be committed to a reformatory for up to one year after paying fines and serving a prison sentence (Sukanya, 1988: 119). Three reform institutes, with restrictions of freedom, rules and regulations not dissimilar to prison conditions, were set up under this law to provide the convicts with medical treatment and/or vocational training (*ibid.* 125-6). In a nutshell, the reform institutes served a disciplinary function while programmes of the reform system were ‘designed to domesticate women rather than to train them for new occupations’ in order to ‘turn problem women back into good women’ (Jeffrey, 2002: 27). In Sukanya Hantrakul’s seminal study of prostitution in Thailand (1988), it is evident from the training available at the reform houses (such as laundry work, sewing, setting a European table, cooking) that ‘these reform institutes equip most reformees for nothing better than employment as domestic servants’ (126). Sukanya concludes that ‘the ultimate goal of the reform process is to make the prostitute recognise her crime of being promiscuous and repent’ (*ibid.* 127).

The reform process heavily emphasises housework and domesticity. It therefore only reinforces the socio-cultural definition of femininity within the domestic parameters by the institutionalised means of controlling female sexuality and perpetuating gender roles. The reformation of the once strayed and wayward women is literally and figuratively meant to domesticate them. Rehabilitation for prostitutes is indeed domestication. The reform process cast them out as low-skilled labour force that fit the broader picture of modernisation, urbanisation and industrialisation that was underway as low-wage factory workers or those in service sector including domestic servants for the expanding middle-class. The income gap between what they previously earned in the sex industry and what they can actually earn from domesticated or ‘respectable’ jobs remains wide.

These reform institutes and the prostitution suppression policy did not address the initial economic factor, let alone socio-cultural one, that drew women to seek employment in the city and end up in prostitution in the first place. The reform process, its assumption and aim bring to the fore that ‘gender’, as Jackson and Cook (1999:3) explain, ‘concerns culturally and socially mediated understandings of femininity and masculinity and the way these inform other categories, including

transgenderism. “Sexuality” is a variable element in relation to gendered identities, denoting the role of eroticism in reinforcing not only a sense of self-understanding, but also contributing to and articulating one’s place within hierarchies of power and status’. It is, thus, ‘constituted in society and history and [...] it is not biologically determined’ (Ghosh, 2002: 1). Taking into account the definitions of ‘gender’ and ‘sexuality’ given above, the location of Thai female sexuality especially within the urban context of a market-based economy and the cultural definition of womanhood is by all means a site of tension and struggle. The issue will be explored further in chapters four and five.

### **Representing Female Promiscuity and Prostitution: An Anxiety over Modernity**

This section traces literary representations of female promiscuity within the context of modernity in Siam/Thailand in order to posit the discussion of this topic in the selected literary text in this historical and cultural formation. It aims to shed some light on an anxiety over female sexuality *vis-à-vis* modernity through an issue of female promiscuity and prostitution and shows how an attempt to control female sexuality has been articulated in moral, cultural and nationalist terms. Similar to other societies, prostitution is by no means new to Siam/Thailand and there is evidence of state-taxed brothels that were a part of Siamese urban life dated back into the Ayutthaya period (1350-1767) (Barmé, 2002: 5, 21). It has been, for domestic consumption, ‘a major element of Thai economic and cultural life’ (Phillips, 1987: 290). However, the public visibility, social presence, or, to use Phillips’s term, ‘brassy exhibitionism’ (ibid.) of prostitutes, especially when it became more complicated with the foreign clientele during the 1960s, was new to Thai society.

Though the ‘problem’ of prostitution became a social issue from the 1900s onwards,<sup>70</sup> prostitutes and prostitution, however, were not initially a subject matter in

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<sup>70</sup> The government of Rama V introduced ‘The Prevention of Transmitted Diseases Act’ in 1908 due to the increasing number of prostitutes after the abolition of slavery in 1905 and the spread of venereal diseases in the capital. The law enforced the registration of brothels and prostitutes within the Bangkok area for official inspection and taxation providing the great source of state revenue. The legislation also required that the brothel workers have regular medical check-ups and the brothel keepers cannot

literature. This absence may be due to the condemnable disposition of the profession and the supposed moral inferiority of women in the trade, as discussed earlier, which rendered them ‘inappropriate’ as literary heroines especially when traditional written forms of Thai literature are in verse and have long been associated with the patronage of the royal court and/or Buddhist texts.<sup>71</sup> Thus, it does not come as a surprise that prostitution and prostitute protagonists were not represented in limelight in literature. Literary works with a focus on prostitute characters were not circulated in the public domain until the early decades of the twentieth century with the widespread availability and popularity of Thai prose fiction among the educated commoners. The other crucial factor was the increasing production and consumption of literature that broke away from the court patronage and religious function. Literary representations of prostitution and female promiscuity clearly arose within the context of urban consumption of what modernity had to offer such as affordable print materials, habitual public readership and, more importantly, the condition of modernity itself. Prostitution has since become one of the social issues represented in literature and publicly discussed, especially from the late 1960s with the nascence of the Thai intellectual and student activist movements which found the artistic expression in ‘Art for Life’ (*sinlapa pheua chiwit*), and particularly ‘Literature for Life’ (*wannakam pheua chiwit*) discussed in the previous section..

The first prose fiction that directly dealt with the issue of the negative effects of modernity and urbanisation on Thai women and examined changing social behaviour and cultural values as a result of modernisation is *Khwam-mai-phayabat* (1915) (Non-Vendetta) by Khru Liam (pseudonym of Luang Wilat Pariwat). The novel has been known for its status as the first full-length novel written by a Thai author. However, contemporary literary scholars hardly knew of its actual content due to its disappearance from the public eye until its 1997 rediscovery and the subsequent reprint in 2001 which implies that it might not initially have been such a market success (Thak, 2009: 457). Thak Chaloemtiarana argues that the novel was written

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employ anyone under fifteen year-of-age as a prostitute (Barmé, 2002: 78-9). See also *ibid.* 75-83 and Sukanya, 1988: 115-136.

<sup>71</sup> Although prostitutes are mentioned in the Tipitaka, they are mostly portrayed as a source of defilement. ‘Vimala: The Former Courtesan’ (Thig 5.2), translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight*, July 4, 2010, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/thig/thig.05.02.than.html>.

before its time for it offered ‘a critique of modern Bangkok society and a didactic story about the pitfalls of modernity’ (ibid. 486) at the time when the public readership preferred to read about the ‘exotic’ places and stories from the West, the ‘home’ of modernity itself.

*Khwam-mai-phayabat* was written to negate the idea of vengeance in *Khwam phayabat* (1902), the translated/adapted *Vendetta* (1886) by Marie Corelli,<sup>72</sup> which was popular among urban readers. The novel opened with a Buddhist proverb emphasising non-anger and good deeds. It was the story of a plain, unassertive, well-educated man who marries a beautiful woman from the countryside and loses her to the modern hedonistic consumption and corruption of Bangkok social life that leads her to leave him for a wealthy, debonair man. Thak contends that *Khwam-mai-phayabat* ‘exposes the decadence of Bangkok high society, condemning both men and women who departed from traditional values and thus fell prey to the allure of modernity’ (ibid. 475). The hedonist behaviour and moral corruption were portrayed in material extravagance and freedom from moral restraint in the upper echelon of Bangkok society.

Apart from criticising the debauchery of wealthy, urbanite men, the novel significantly shows ‘the transformation of the traditional woman—innocent girl, good daughter and faithful wife—into the “modern” female’ (ibid. 483) who ‘is ready to consume and enjoy the promises of modernity’ (ibid. 484). What is interesting about such a portrayal is that the novel openly expresses doubts about women’s ‘ability to cope with the new freedom that modernity provides, a modernity that pries women away from traditional social structure’ of being mothers and wives (ibid.). It unequivocally articulates an anxiety over modernity through a concern for women’s sexuality, over which men have lost their hold. The socio-cultural anxiety over the rapidly changing world expressed by the author of *Khwam-mai-phayabat* in 1915 through men’s anxiety and inability to control women’s sexuality serves as a

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<sup>72</sup> Marie Corelli (1 May 1855 – 21 April 1924) was a British novelist. Her first novel published in 1886 was an immediate success. The popularity of her novels made Corelli the most widely read author in her time. Though her novels were disdained by critics for their melodramatic sentimentality, they sold more copies than the combined sales of popular contemporaries, including Arthur Conan Doyle, H. G. Wells, and Rudyard Kipling. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marie\\_Corelli](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marie_Corelli)) (Accessed 15 December 2010)

metaphor for their threatening lack of control over modernity. In retrospect, such an expression of anxiety is indeed a prelude to an articulation and interpretation of modernisation and Westernisation in gender terms in the following decades that were leading to the American Era when ‘the symbolic importance of women, and women’s sexual behaviour, in maintaining national culture and identity’ was forged (Jeffrey, 2002: 30).

Contemporaneous to *Khwam-mai-phayabat* was *Satri niphon* (1914), one of Siam’s earliest woman magazines, which featured an article entitled ‘*Sonthana rawang satri*’ (a conversation between ladies). The article raised the need to improve the status and position of women. The dialogue of the presumably educated echelon of women, however, imparted contemptuous and class-conscious attitudes towards prostitutes, referring to them as *phuak narok* (creatures from hell). Scot Barmé’s reading of the article suggests that ‘while gender was becoming an issue of public debate, it was class that functioned as a more profound category in terms of social definition and power’ (2002: 37).

By the 1920s, prostitution entered public discussion through print media as a social problem and was one of the most recurrent issues addressed in the press, as Barmé proposes in his seminal study *Woman, Man, Bangkok: Love, Sex, and Popular Culture in Thailand* (2002). The thriving sex trade, which had become ‘one of the most ubiquitous features of the urban landscape’ (ibid. 81) in the 1920s, was largely due to urbanisation and modernisation themselves. There was a growing demand from the immigrant Chinese workforce, Western seamen and travellers, and, most importantly, the expanding Siamese salaried-bureaucrat clientele that was a direct result of the major government administrative reform (ibid. 6) under Rama V at the turn of the twentieth century. On the supply side, the urban, monetary economic environment drew vulnerable women who had no education, means of livelihood, or familial/social protection into prostitution, especially after the abolition of slavery in 1905 (Hong, 1998: 343).

However, it should be noted that though attempts were made to look at the problem of prostitution in relation to polygamy (women abandoned by husbands had no means to provide for themselves), patriarchy (men having sexual license to use and abuse women) and women’s unequal rights (the lack of education and employment

opportunities), not all the concerns about prostitution were sympathetic. At best, prostitutes were looked upon as offensive public nuisances because of their pervasive and blatant presence (Barmé, 2002: 75, 81-2). At worst, they were considered a ‘danger’ to the well-being of the nation as they contributed to the spread of venereal diseases. ‘[P]rostitution impedes *national progress* and poses a serious threat not only to the family but also to the *country’s independence* and the *wealth* of the people’ (Sikrungs, 7 March 1927 *ibid.* 174, my emphasis). The uncontrollable female sexuality manifested in the bodies of prostitutes was perceived within the temporal mindset as an obstacle to modernity. Once again, the tension between female promiscuity and modernity implied an anxiety to define and by extension control what modernity meant by the middle-class at the expense of the underprivileged classes and discriminated bodies of the prostitutes.

Another representation of a concern over female sexuality, promiscuity and prostitution is in a novel called *Ten-ram* (Dancing) by Chamrong Wongkhalaung. The novel was serialised in *Thai thae* (authentic Thai), the popular newspaper, from mid-1931, the penultimate year before the end of absolute monarchy in 1932. It interweaved the issues of modernity, female sexuality and a criticism of the absolutist regime by posing the question, ‘Is Western-style dance suited to Siam?’ (*ibid.* 122). The novel also debated the appropriateness of the physically intimate dance in vogue among foreign-educated men such as the elite of the absolutist regime. It also addressed a common concern that ‘the intimacy inherent in Western dancing posed a threat to female virtue and thereby served as a contributing factor to the growth of prostitution’ (*ibid.*). Hedonistic consumption and male debauchery were expressed through the bodies of prostitutes in the urban modern milieu. The presence of prostitute characters served to reinforce the self-indulgent, licentiousness of the elitist men, for example, when one of the many prostitute minor characters was fondled by a high-ranked government official who boasted of his desire to ‘taste the “sweetness” of all the women [he] possibly can’ (*ibid.* 123). It clearly portrayed prostitution as a matter-of-fact phenomenon, a part of the urban landscape and sexual consumption and entertainment of men with means. More importantly, similar to *Khwan-mai-phayabat*, *Ten-ram* raised a concern over the moral restraint of women vis-à-vis modernity symbolised by Western-style dancing.

The problem of modernity and female sexuality was poignantly addressed to greater effect and commercial as well as literary success in *Ying khon chua* (A Woman of Easy Virtue) (1937), the first novel in book form that dealt exclusively with the issue of prostitution. The female author, K. Surangkhanang (pseudonym), took a progressive step in her choice of subject matter and utilised literature as a medium to address a social problem.<sup>73</sup> As the novel delved into the lives of prostitutes representing them as the heroine and the main characters, it showed how these women descended into prostitution and gave them a voice to tell their side of the story. Contrary to the society's condemnation of the prostitutes' 'wicked' nature, *Ying khon chua* represented male sexual exploitation of women. It significantly addressed the negative impacts of modernity on women through the juxtaposition of the urban and the rural environment. The city of Bangkok (*Krung-thep, meuang luang*) and its urbanites (*chao Krung-thep, chao krung, khon meuang*) were placed in stark contrast with the rural area (*ban nork*) and the rural dwellers (*chao ban nork*). The novel posited the former as the reservoir of social vice, corruption and material advancement while, at the same time, it established the latter as the source of innocence and traditional and moral values. *Ying khon chua* is arguably among the first novels to address the unequal relationship between the urban and the rural in gendered terms through the exploitation of the rural female by the urban male.

The novel represents a reluctant prostitute in the sympathetic role of 'a whore with a heart of gold' who was a victim of a corrupted man from the city, urban society, and the stigma attached to being a 'fallen woman'. The protagonist, a naïve village girl, is lured into prostitution by a pimp from Bangkok whose refined urban charm and confessed love for her convince her to elope with him. In a brothel, she symbolically changes her simple name 'Wan' (meaning sweet) to a more sophisticated 'Reun' (meaning pleasant). Reun is frequently visited and later becomes pregnant by Wit, a rich young man who falls in love with her and promises but then fails to rescue her. After Wit disappears, she escapes from the brothel with help from Samorn, a fellow prostitute, who later leaves the brothel. Samorn rents a humble

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<sup>73</sup> The author, Kanha (Wattanaphat) Khiangsiri (1911-1999), had to publish the novel, her third work, by herself because it was rejected by publishers on the grounds of its supposed 'lascivious' content (Harrison, 1999: 171). *Ying khon chua*, though 'scandalous', proved to be a financial success as the initial publication of 2,000 copies were sold out and the second edition of 2,000 copies followed within the same year. The figure is considerably high compared to the sale of other works of the same genre. (Prasit Sisomwong, 1939 in K. Surangkhanang, 1937 (1969): 442 and Smyth, 1994: vii)

accommodation and supports the frail Reun and the baby by prostituting herself. After Samorn dies of tuberculosis, Reun goes back to her old profession to pay an old couple to care for her daughter as she feels herself too contaminated to raise the pure child. Six years later fate brings her to Wit who is now married to a woman of his equal status. Upon learning of their daughter and Reun's struggle, Wit agrees to adopt the child. Reun then dies of life's hardships.

The tragic, if not melodramatic, yet socially conscious tone of the novel makes it possible for the author to portray a prostitute as a literary heroine. 'The "progressive" nature of K. Surangkhanang's text lies in its insistence that [...] Reun and her friend Samorn embody the highest moral values of their time. [...] [Reun's] conscientiousness as a mother, renders her a "good" woman, whilst it is only the way in which she earns her living that makes her a "bad" woman' (Harrison, 1999: 172). K. Surangkhanang represented Reun and Samorn as the exception to the community of 'bad' women. Reun's most redeeming quality is within the domain of motherhood that is her selfless dedication to her child which surpasses her 'bad' sexuality outside conjugal relationship, while Samorn's is also her selflessness towards her friend and her surrogate daughter.

In *Ying khon chua*, prostitution is emphatically articulated in relation to urban corruption (a pimp from Bangkok) and unequal opportunity (the women's lack of other means of survival) rather than female promiscuity or her supposedly 'wicked' nature. The anxiety over modernity also finds another expression in an unequal relationship between the urban and the rural that was manifested in gendered terms. While women's migration from the rural to the urban is shown as the gravitation towards corruption and vice, the only thing that can redeem them within the urban context is their adherence to the traditional definition of women's value as a mother.<sup>74</sup> Given the period in which it was written and the fact that the author was a woman whose act of writing about prostitution already challenged social conformity, *Ying khon chua* was considerably 'progressive'. However, underneath the 'daring' representation of prostitutes lies a confirmation of a conservative, traditional

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<sup>74</sup> For a critical and detailed discussion of *Ying khon chua* and a somewhat ambivalent attitude of female authors in representing prostitute characters, see Harrison, 1999. The Madonna and the Whore: Self/'Other' Tensions in the Characterization of the Prostitute by Thai Female Authors. In Peter Jackson and Nerida Cook (eds.), *Genders and Sexualities in Modern Thailand*. Chiangmai: Silkworm Book, pp. 168-190.

prescription of femininity and female sexuality. Suffice it to say that these attributions contributed to the novel's financial success, as evident in its two publications in the same year. The novel also has attained status in the literary canon of Thai modern classic literature<sup>75</sup> and a point of reference in the discussion of literary representation of prostitution,<sup>76</sup> as well as rural and urban interaction in gendered terms.

Despite its melodramatic tone palatable to a mainstream readership, *Ying khon chua* was arguably pathbreaking for its literary representation of prostitution in a critical light and its socially committed terms. The path was followed by literary works from 'Literature for Life' movement flourished in the late 1960s to 1976 as discussed in part two of the chapter. However, although *Ying khon chua* addressed the issues of prostitution and female sexuality and acknowledged the unequal rural-urban relationship in gender terms, it also cautioned against female sexuality that breaks loose from the traditional roles of wife and mother as well as the protection of community, family and the institution of marriage. Female sexuality and sexual desire did not seem to have a place or exist in and of themselves, particularly when anxiety over modernity found its expression in the (lack of) control over female sexuality as noted earlier. The representation of female sexuality in the context of the late 1930s or even today could present a moral challenge to the public<sup>77</sup>. This was the case with the works of Thida Bunnag—the prolific female author and rising star of 'erotica' between the 1940s and 1960s. She, however, disappeared from public view without a trace in the 1960s and was soon forgotten. That fact renders her publications severely difficult to come by and her life after that unknown.<sup>78</sup>

Much of Thida Bunnag's writing of some ten novels and short stories collections approached the taboo topic of male and female sexual relationships, some portrayed it in a sexually explicit manner and surprised Thai readers by the fact that

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<sup>75</sup> The latest publication of *Ying khon chua* was in 2002. The novel was also listed one of the hundred books that Thai people should read. The list was a result of a research project conducted in 1997-1998 and funded by Thailand Research Fund (TRF). It received criticism on ground of its lack of literary works that represent issues and interests of the ethnic minorities and marginalised groups.

<sup>76</sup> For example see Rong, 1961: publisher's introduction, no page number and Rong's interview on <http://www.tuneingarden.com/work/b-04sn09.shtml> (accessed 20 April 2009).

<sup>77</sup> See for example Harrison, Rachel. 2005. Cultures of Criticism, Constructions of Femininity and the Impossibilities of Female Desire. *South East Asia Research*. 13 (1): 91-111.

<sup>78</sup> Compared to her contemporary male author Rong Wongsawan (1932-2009), who also addressed the issues of eroticism and social hypocrisy in his writing, whose work is examined in chapter five and six here, the paucity of Thida's information is to the point that no one can ascertain if she is still alive.

they were penned by a female author (Harrison, 2002: 454). Her work transgressed conventional morality and cultural prescriptions of 'good' women in her representation of female sexuality and desire. Harrison argued that Thida's work also significantly incorporated social commentary with political implications, especially in its piercing criticism of sexual hypocrisy. Writing at a time of strict censorship during the Sarit military regime, 'sexually explicit passages may have served a purpose beyond that of titillation, namely to detract from the political sensitivity of her remarks' (ibid.). The majority of Thida's writing presented a cynical view of sexual exchange, particularly in the context of the urbanised, materialistic Bangkok, where money can buy happiness and even a 'romantic' relationship. She portrayed 'more disingenuous female characters determined not to be the losers in the sexual power game' (ibid. 462), exposed 'the double moral standards of Bangkok's elite', and decried those in political power, especially when her descriptions of middle-age, balding male characters could be interpreted as 'a direct attack on the womanising Sarit himself' (ibid. 466). Thida's *oeuvre* rightly contributes to the tradition of modern female writing that questions and challenges the patriarchal society that places the interests of man above and beyond that of woman. The unfortunate 'disappearance' of Thida Bunnag from the literary scene and the scantiness of her publications, however, obstruct the study of her work, its contribution to and the relevance it bears on the Thai female writing intellectual tradition.<sup>79</sup>

The above-mentioned literary references from as far back as the 1910s show the (male) anxiety and threatening lack of control over the extent and influence of modernity. Though it was welcome, there also existed ambivalence and distrust of modernity that was projected in a form of anxiety over the loss of control of female sexuality vis-à-vis modernity itself. An example of gendered bias distrust of modernity and the public perception of Westernisation and modernisation, which came to be synonymous with Americanisation, have been represented in gendered terms in 'official' discourse from at least the 1950s. The Public Relations Department published *Aspects and Facets of Thailand* (1958) in which female social behaviour, and by extension, sexual behaviour, urbanisation, and Westernisation/Americanisation were negatively intertwined.

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<sup>79</sup> See Harrison, 2002 for the comprehensive investigation and discussion of Thida Bunnag's works, her significance and the contribution of her work to the Thai female writing intellectual tradition.

Westernisation has lately received much comment in Bangkok. [...] Young girls are feeling the liberative influence of American ideas especially regarding dating and dancing, and this is considered to be affecting morality. The number of virgin brides in Bangkok where Western influence is strong, for example, is estimated 15% lower than in the country, and the wildness of Bangkok society girls imitating Western fashions taught by Hollywood film is notorious. (Vibul and Golden, 1958: 8)

There was no indication of the source of the statistical information used in the article. Nonetheless, the concern expressed here unequivocally posited Bangkok as a reservoir of social vice and an undesirable outside influence on national culture embodied in women's behaviour and sexual morality. Social activities such as dating and dancing participated by both sexes were viewed in moral term and only corrupting for girls whereas their male counterparts were not recognised to be negatively affected by the similar influence. The underlying assumption appeared to be that boys were impervious to moral and sexual corruption from Western influence. Or, perhaps, sexual corruption as a concept was inapplicable to men in the Thai perception. The passage poignantly shows a double standard and gender-bias social perception at the heart of Thai culture.

Such an articulation of anxiety over modernity in gendered terms was solely confined to women's behaviour. The seeming absence of direct criticism on male sexual behaviour and morality affected by modernity and Westernisation from official discourse finds its basis in the different cultural practices and expectations of men and women and the way in which the socio-political context has evolved in patriarchal society of Thailand. The task of locating and representing Thai female sexuality within the context of modernity cannot be undertaken without looking at male sexuality and *vice versa*, as the two are inexorably linked. The next section explores the representation of modern Thai masculinities and looks at the way in which they evolved and were informed by the socio-cultural and political context of modernity. It also examines how masculinities were defined and constructed in relation to female sexuality. The issue will be discussed at length in conjunction with selected literary texts in chapter six.

### **Representing Modern Thai Manhood: From Social Masculinity to Sexual Masculinity**

In order to explore the representation of modern Thai male identities in the context of the socio-political and cultural dynamics of the Cold War era, this section looks at different attempts to define/construct modern Thai masculinities from the creation of a more inclusive cultural space by the rising middle class in the 1920s up to the period in question. It also aims to establish how such attempts were indispensably informed by the changing socio-political climate and the concurrent modernisation. As discussed in the previous section, the issue of female promiscuity and prostitution was heavily informed by anxiety over modernity. It entered the public debate through commercial print media and thus arose from the context of modernity itself. The availability, popularity, and the extent to which print materials reached and engaged the public at large entailed the criticism of polygamy and patriarchy as well as the sexual exploitation of women by the wealthy section of the society.<sup>80</sup> Such criticism and negative representations of those in the upper echelons by the educated commoners must not be considered in isolation from the growing public discontent for the inefficiency of the absolutist government of Rama VI that continued into the reign of Rama VII (1925-1934).

From this brooding political climate and increasing social tension, the appearance and success of literary works that reflected the sentiment of the time testified to the fact that elitist power and cultural hegemony were neither monolithic nor uncontested. The works of fiction by ‘Siburapha’ (Kulap Saipradit), ‘Dokmaisot’ (M.L. Buppha (Kunchorn) Nimmanhemmin) and M.C. Akatdamkoeng Raphiphat<sup>81</sup> exemplified class-consciousness and an unprecedented contest over definitions of class-based identities as gentlemen (middle class), gentry (upper class) and royalty (high class), respectively. Not only the class-based identities were under challenge in the literary arena. Socially committed messages such as the criticism of inequality,

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<sup>80</sup> See Barmé, 2002: 97-131, 157-178.

<sup>81</sup> M.C. is abbreviated from ‘Mom Chao’ classifying the lowest rank of the royal title which is still be recognised as royal members. Those in the Mom Chao rank are mostly nieces, nephews or grandchildren of a king. Though considered royal members in terms of blood line, the Mom Chao titled prince and princess are at the bottom end of the hierarchical pyramid. Social recognition for them is largely influenced by their financial status. M.L. is abbreviated for ‘Mom Luang’ referring to the even lesser rank recognised only as a royal line that is the great-great grandchildren of a king.

poverty and hypocrisy were also addressed in literary works, especially by Siburapha and his commoner contemporaries. The fictional works of these commoners were consumed by the public and rendered fiction a permissible space where serious issues that concerned commoners could be represented and engaged in contrast to the contrary view that literary creation and consumption were purely leisure's activities.

At the time of political instability when absolute monarchy was gradually losing its firm hold on Thai politics and cultural monopoly before the coup in 1932, there emerged a group of young (male) writers/journalists called 'Khana-suphapburut' (the Gentlemen Group) led by Kulap Saipradit (1905-1973) well known by his pseudonym 'Siburapha'<sup>82</sup>. The group first released a fortnightly magazine called *Suphapburut* (the Gentleman) on the 1 June 1929, just three years before the end of absolute monarchy. Distinctively a literary magazine, *Suphapburut* became an immediate success with its short stories, serialised novels, poetry, articles, and question-and-answer column unlike other current newspapers in the market (Suchart, 2001b). The group's literary production gave it the accolade 'the landmark of modern Thai literature' (Suchart, 2001a: 62). Despite its success, the magazine lived only until 30 November 1930 (37<sup>th</sup> issue) though the members of Khana-suphapburut still worked together in writing/journalistic circles. The subject matter addressed by writers in the group through their fictional works and articles engaged the audience beyond reading just for pleasure and aimed at raising social consciousness. Informed by the rapidly changing modern environment, these works imparted socially committed messages and issues that were the reality of commoner's life such as the problems of poverty, social injustice, inequality and politics. They also aspired to social equality and equal right to life betterment for all people regardless of where they came from.

The progressive nature of works produced by Khana-suphapburut was captured in the name 'suphapburut' itself and the rationale behind it. The name was a kind of professional middle-class manifesto and a direct challenge to the noble elite and the upper class, who gradually came to connote the exploitation and 'old' corrupting power that hindered national progress. The formation of educated

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<sup>82</sup> For the detailed discussion of the life and works of Kulap Saipradit as well as his contribution to Thai intellectual tradition and literature see Smyth, 1988; Witthayakhorn Chiangkun, 1989; Phailin Rungrat (ed.), 2005; Samnakngan khana anu-kammakan fai prasanngan khrongkan 100 pi Kulap Saipradit (Siburapha), 2005.

commoners into an independent professional group of writers/journalists departed from the traditional career path for educated men in two ways. Firstly, it was outside the patronage and, therefore, the control of the noble elite who had previously led literary production because of their education and capital. And, secondly, it was a career choice outside the establishments and institutes of government civil service (*kha-ratchakan*) and military service (*nai-thahan*). The formation of ‘khana-suphapburut’ was thus concrete evidence of the changing zeitgeist and an act of self-differentiation. Calling the group ‘khana-suphapburut’ was itself a social statement. Kulap defined the meaning of what constituted ‘gentlemanliness’ (*khwam-pen-suphapburut*) and simultaneously advocated the social or, to be precise, humanistic obligations of masculinity in his usage of the Thai term ‘*khwam-pen-luk-phuchai*’. For the purpose of clarity and to render the significance and nuance of the idea, ‘*khwam-pen-luk-phuchai*’ is translated ‘social masculinity’ in this thesis. It is differentiated from ‘sexual masculinity’, translated ‘*khwam-pen-chai*’ as the latter term emphasises male sexual prowess and the sexual dimension of masculinity.

To appreciate the conceptual revolution that lies at the heart of ‘social masculinity’ in Kulap’s definition of the term, it is important to understand the rationale of his proposal and advocacy of ‘*suphapburut*’. Though ‘*suphapburut*’ is the direct translation of the English word ‘gentleman’, the meaning of ‘*suphapburut*’ in the context of Thai culture is significantly different from the English reflected in the saying ‘it takes three generations to make a gentleman’. As the word ‘gentle’ has its origin from an old French word ‘*gentil*’ meaning ‘high-born, noble’,<sup>83</sup> the Thai word that is closest in meaning and cultural implication to the English ‘gentleman’ must be ‘*phudi*’ (Chusak, 2005: 78). Naming his group ‘*khana-suphapburut*’, Kulap by all means differentiated his group from *phudi*, which denoted the noble elite and upper class. In the context of the late 1920s, this differentiation was crucial since *phudi* came to connote exploitative prerogative, social discrimination, and upper-class consciousness of self-entitlement and self-righteousness. Siburapha’s literary works and those of his group’s members, challenged the elite class-consciousness that segregated people into two categories—*jao* (noble elite, superior, *phudi*) and *kha/phrai* (commoner, subordinate)—and emphasised social justice and individual’s

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<sup>83</sup> [http://www.askoxford.com:80/concise\\_oed/gentle?view=uk](http://www.askoxford.com:80/concise_oed/gentle?view=uk) (Accessed 27 October 2009)

merit and commitment to the society as the basis of one's value as a person.<sup>84</sup> Kulap decisively proposed that the value of a person should be measured by his/her ability and conduct, not birth.

Kulap's rejection of the old feudal system and his proposal of the new (middle-class) consciousness of being a gentleman (*suphaphurut*), as opposed to the noble (*phudi*), emphasised the definition of *suphaphurut* in terms of social obligation. Kulap's resistance to the traditional hierarchy and elitist value system imparted and was informed by the commoners' struggle to assert 'their dignity in the present [...] and their right to control their future' (Berman, 1988:11) that is an element of the spirit of modernity itself. In the first issue of *Suphaphurut*, the editor and owner of the magazine, Kulap, in the column 'Speaking as a friend' (*phut kan chan pheuan*) proclaimed, 'the heart of "gentlemanliness" (*khwam-pen-suphaphurut*) is to sacrifice because sacrificing originates many other virtues. [...] "Whoever was born to be a gentleman, was born for others"' (Suchart, 2001b). '*Suphaphurut*' is, thus, a person of worth and good conduct who will sacrifice himself for the greater good and is desirable as a valuable member of society. Kulap's attempt to secure not only cultural but also social space for commoners in the changing political climate reinforces social commitment to the poor and the socially disadvantaged. His proposal of *khwam-pen-suphaphurut*, which included a strong sense of public moral, social justice and egalitarianism, was an articulation of the 'new' Thai masculinity in the spirit of inclusive modernity and social terms of dedication and selflessness. It was constructed and represented in a diametrically different light from the corrupting, exploitative behaviour of the 'old' noble elite, expressed in sexual terms by licentiousness and polygamy. The emphasis on the social dimension of masculinity (*khwam-pen-luk-phuchai* or *suphaphurut*) expressed in terms of social consciousness and commitment to both social and personal areas of one's life challenged sexual masculinity (*khwam-pen-chai*) in an era when the middle-class cultural politics played a crucial role in the change of national politics.

Despite the fact that Kulap's proposal of *khwam-pen-suphaphurut* was (male) gender-oriented and (female) gender-blind, since it failed to include women in this new social consciousness, this shortcoming should not denigrate his aspiration for a more

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<sup>84</sup> See for example *Lukphuchai* (1928), *Prap phayot* (1928), *Songkhram chiwit* (1932).

inclusive society. Kulap's idea, his works and those by local intellectuals and journalists that criticised the government were a part of a continuing attempt to pave the way for the formation of civil society in keeping with the spirit of modernity. After the end of absolute monarchy in 1932 through the political turmoil and rivalry for power from various sectors in the political arena in the early decades of 'democracy' in Siam/Thailand, the middle class increasingly gained social footing. However, the formation of civil society in the new 'democratic' environment that Kulap and his contemporary intellectuals/journalists contributed to was disrupted by the struggle for political power between civilian and military leaders. The civil society formation came to a halt when power gravitated to military leaders who exercised strong state control. As discussed in part one of this chapter, the military-led government increasingly distrusted any activities and groups that criticised its inclination towards American anti-communist policy; it finally targeted the local leftists and intellectuals. Kulap was jailed for promoting the peace movement against the Korean War in 1952. Even before his imprisonment, however, the call for freedom, equality, and social commitment that was encouraged in '*khwa-m-pen-suphapburut*' had faded in the crescendo of the rigorous government campaigns and pronouncement for the 'New Thailand' under Phibun's first premiership, and the fear of communist subversion in the second premiership and after.

The wartime regime of Phibun's first premiership (1938-1944) was called '*yuk-ratthaniyom*' (the state convention period) because he enforced nationalist cultural policy by means of the twelve Cultural Mandates issued between 1939 and 1942 as discussed in part one. The new 'cultural' practice was imposed in a military manner on private life of citizens. The state also asserted its control of literary production by establishing the Literary Society of Thailand (*Wannakhadi samakhom haeng prathet-Thai*) in 1942 with Phibun as president (Trisilp, 1999: 83). Censorship of political content and, particularly, moral behaviour and the simplification of word spelling were enforced on literary production. Yot Watcharasathian, one of the most recognised writers of the period, recalled

[Fictional works] or novels cannot at all portray any behaviour of a married man interacting with other women in ways that might suggest sexual interest. [...] Not even if a married man thought to himself that he desired other women. Moreover,

only the use of four pronouns was allowed—*chan* [I/me], *than* [you], *thoe* [she/her] and *khao* [he/him].<sup>85</sup> [...] [Because of that], those who were already writers just stopped writing. (Yot, 1963: 319)

The state's interference in literary production conspicuously showed its attempt to police public morality, especially in sexual terms. The passage above emphasises men as sexual actors while censorship on extra-marital sexual interest in literature ironically implies what it meant to suppress, that is the fact that men's practice of having mistresses still prevailed, although polygamy had been made illegal in 1935 (Sukanya, 1988: 116). The public display of high (sexual) moral ground reflects 'a tension between the desire to present Thai women to the world as modern wives and mothers within an equitable gender system and a continued [latent] defence of male sexual prerogative' in post-absolutist Thailand (Jeffrey, 2002: 15). A germane example of this tension is the government's attempt to promote the status of women by organising a beauty contest as a part of Constitution Day's celebration (*wan chalong ratthathammanun*)<sup>86</sup> and the fact that the contest also became a flesh feast for men in uniforms to find would-be mistresses and wives among the contestants. The beauty contest and what it stands for in Thai cultural currency and practice offer an exemplary site where masculinities and female sexualities converge and inform each other.

An intersection of masculinities and female sexualities in the context of modernity finds an apt expression in the sanctioned public display of female bodies in beauty contest. Because of publicity and visibility, beauty queen became 'role modal' of modern female. It is thus relevant to give the brief background of the Thai beauty contest and how it relates to masculinities and the construction of a modern, fertile and virile nation. Whether beauty contests have promoted the status of women in more ways than the financial one still begs the question and is open to debate. The first Miss Siam Contest (*kan-prakuat nangsao sayam*) started in 1934 with the clear political mission to attract, entertain and encourage people to visit the Constitution

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<sup>85</sup> In Thai, there are many different pronouns. The choice of words expresses the speakers' relationship to and attitudes towards the person spoken/referred to as the pronouns also imply social position and stratification.

<sup>86</sup> Constitution Day (*wan chalong ratthathammanun* or *wan ratthathammanun*) was officially celebrated on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1933. It was a big event of the year and celebrated nationally thereafter. The celebration in the capital began to include the beauty contest in the second year (1934). The government stopped organising Constitution Day's celebration in 1954.

Day's celebration site as a way to promote the public understanding of and participation in democracy. Constitution Day quickly came to be identified with public entertainment more than anything else. With the name change of the country in 1939, Phibun in power, and his aspiration for the 'New Thailand', the contestants' costumes changed from the relatively demure traditional costumes<sup>87</sup> to the comparatively revealing modern ones and, of course, the title became Miss Thailand Contest (*kan-prakuat nangsao Thai*). The beauty contest provided 'a setting to display the new Western fashions [Phibun] wanted Thai women to adopt' (Van Esterik, 2000: 140). The change of the costumes reflects Phibun's aspiration for 'the Thai Empire' encapsulated in a kind of modern identity that was asserted and manifested by the female bodies clad in modern costumes. The contestants sported a silk dress, open-back top, trousers and knee-length skirt for the public spectatorship. In the following year, the more revealing 'sport wear' consisting of shorts and sleeveless, open-back top was introduced.<sup>88</sup>

Since the Phibun's government publicised the Contest as a way to promote women's status and social role, the successful contestants were to campaign for the government's state convention policy (*nayobai ratthaniyom*)— the vessel, Phibun believed, that would carry Thailand and its people to be on a par with other modern (Western) nations. These women, in effect, performed the duty of the government's 'modernity ambassadors'. This new role of women with heightened social visibility and public duty might have appeared to resolve the ambivalence gathered around the idea that modernity and the urban capital corrupted female sexuality. With publicity, 'the beauty queen became a new national icon' (Jeffrey, 2002:15). However, the unpublicised but widely acknowledged notoriety also accompanied the beauty contest as a channel for ambitious young women to become famous and financially better off, and for the military elite and the rich to find wives or mistresses.

In this context, modernity and the city were at once a site of an opportunity for life betterment for women and an intersection of an unequal interest between men

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<sup>87</sup> In the first four years of the Contest, the contestants wore a traditional costume of *sabaichiang* (a wrap-around top with one end of the garment crosses over a shoulder leaving the long end down the back of the wearer) and foot-length *phasin* (a female sarong, double-folded at the front).

<sup>88</sup> See for details of the history of Miss Thailand Contest <http://www.missthailandcontest.com/missthailandHistory.php?Check=false&s=CNN&t=0.0083858966827393> (Accessed 30 October 2009).

and women. The beauty contest became the juncture where a kind of masculinity and female sexuality converged and interplayed. 'For years in Thailand the model of masculinity was the military man (head of the military-bureaucratic state) complemented by his beauty queen wife. This was illustrated most clearly in the Phibun-Sarit era of the 1940s and 1950s [...] [within] the military discourse of male sexual prerogative and state power' (ibid. 96). 'The beauty contest was supported by military-bureaucratic elites who, like Prime Minister Sarit, married former beauty queens or took them as minor wives' (Jeffrey, 2002: 41). Just like in the glorious time of absolutism, polygamous practice has never ceased to give out the aura of 'prosperity, mystical power and magical virility' (Sukanya, 1988: 116).

The freedom enjoyed by the print media to openly criticise the licentious behaviour of the noble elite in the pre-democratic time disappeared because of the strict press control of the militarised society. Despite the fact that polygamy was made illegal, the 'old-style' sexual masculinity never died and came back in vogue among the military elite, who by then had already secured political power from the hand of the royal elite after the end of absolute monarch in 1932. The proud culture of male virility was now exemplified by powerful men in uniform with the accompanying presence of beautiful women. The Thai (male) liberal view of (male) sexuality within the hetero-normative norm was uncontested by any class ideology or alternative models of social masculinity until the nascence of intellectual and student political resistance against military dictatorship in the late 1960s and 1970s and the widespread of 'Literature for Life'.

The practice of gender double standards aptly exemplified by male polygamy found its basis in the different assumption and expectation of men and women deeply rooted in the culture. While Thai culture demands that women stay chaste and pure prior to marriage and dedicated and faithful after marriage, among the laypeople outside the Buddhist monkhood's practice of celibacy, broadly speaking, 'there is no self-disciplinary or self-denying attitude to sex among men in Thailand' (Jackson, 1995: 46). Jackson's argument rested on the widely-held cultural assumption and practice that engendered 'fundamental' difference between girls and boys and, by extension, male and female sexualities.

While as a rule girls are confined, boys are free to do as they please. To sleep out at night or to stay away from home is

neither unusual nor badly regarded for a boy. They generally have their first sexual experience at the age of sixteen or seventeen with a prostitute. There is no stigma attached to the frequenting of prostitutes by either married or unmarried men. Prostitution is legal. (Vibul and Golden, 1958: 2)

The sexual cultural assumption and practice were officially reported in English in a publication by the Public Relations Department. As pointed out in the previous section, the same report claimed Westernisation and urbanisation negatively affected urban female sexual behaviour but did not recognise any influence on male sexual behaviour because of this kind of sexual cultural assumption. The editor of *Aspects and Facets of Thailand* (1958) stated in the foreword that a criterion of selecting the material for the book was to choose ‘what may be regarded as the fundamental characteristics of Thai life’ in order to disseminate ‘honest and unbiased information about Thailand’ (Wit Siwasariyanon, 1958). Such an ‘official’ assertion and attitude reinforce not only sexual double standard at the heart of Thai cultural practice, but also an accepted construction of sexual masculinity and the ‘stereotyping of Thai men’s extramarital sexual relations’ (Cook and Jackson, 1999: 14). The ‘naturalised’ male sexual licence is ‘predicated on images of unrestrained male libidinousness and sexual profligacy’ (Lyttleton, 1994: 265) across the board regardless of individual and different social backgrounds.

Given the heterosexual double standard and permissible discourse of male sexuality within a society where ‘premarital sexual relations (apart from men’s relations with prostitutes) have traditionally been tabooed’ (Jackson, 1995: 195), the construction of Thai masculinities and the initiation of manhood have often involved commercial sex service. This sexual cultural practice and the assumptions it rests on indispensably interrelate to the cultural division of female sexualities into the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’. The issue of modern male and female gender identities will be specifically examined in chapter four to chapter six.

## Conclusion

This chapter has explored in three parts, the historical context, the literary intellectual context, and sexual/cultural assumptions and their literary representation. The three parts are indispensable in the discussion of Thai political identity, modern Thai identities in the rural-urban contact, youth identities, female identities and Thai masculinities in chapter two to chapter six. These issues capture and portray changes and challenges that came with modernisation as represented in the literary texts. The first part provides an historical survey of the relationship between Siam/Thailand and the West and the different discursive practices engendered by the ‘desire to be modern’ that affected Siam/Thailand from the mid-nineteenth century up to the ‘American Era’. The Siamese royal elite started the ripple of the first wave of ‘being modern’, that is to be *siwilai* (‘civilised’), in accordance with the supreme sources of power in the West. Although not without ambivalence, the privileged Others from without were looked up to while the inferior ‘Others within’ were constructed as such by the home-grown *siwilai* class. With the end of the absolutist regime came the new military elite class, who drew on different resources, fabrication and aspirations to assert the modernised new Thailand’s national identity as *khwam-mi-araya*, on a par with other (Western) nations at the expense of discarding court tradition. Thailand’s entanglement with the Cold War produced unprecedented American presence and intimacy between Thailand and America in many ways. Part one of this introduction also pays specific attention to the intricate web of relations between the constellation of modernity in Siam/Thailand, the Thai military state, American presence, anti-Communist policy, development and modernisation, all of which had an extensive impact on the construction of modern Thai identities from the late 1950s onwards.

Part two looks at the intellectual tradition of Thai literary studies in Thailand. It critically surveys the four main approaches in Thai literary criticism and contends that, in this area, there has been a fundamental ideological conflict between conservative groups and progressive groups. It also reviews studies on the divided corpus of literary works of the period in question and posits the current study’s deliberate selection of popular literary texts in the interdisciplinary and cultural

studies approach. This second part also opens up the discussion of gender and sexuality issues in the literary texts of the 1960s and 1970s and emphasises the pertinence of the historical and cultural background of sexual cultural assumptions in the discussion of this topic in chapters four to six.

Part three examines the formulation and articulation of issues of gender and sexuality within this modern environment and how modernisation and urbanisation has raised concerns and been perceived in gender-specific terms. It also includes a discussion on the impact of both Thai culture and the modern social environment on the ways in which men and women perceive, interact and define themselves and each other. Modern socio-political context also allows an attempt to define masculinity in social terms.

With the increased American presence, the 1950s and 1960s were marked by tension ‘over the maintenance of male sexual prerogative and the desire to maintain female purity in the face of foreign influence’ (Jeffrey, 2000: 22). Not only in gendered terms, social and cultural tensions also manifested in the increasingly violent collision between ‘modern’ and ‘tradition’ in both urban and rural areas. The attainment of modernity and of being modern became a defining factor of how members of different social groups defined themselves in relation or opposition to one another. Performing ‘modern behaviour’ and consuming what modernity had to offer became a way of attaining modern identities, which in effect showed how un-uniform modernity has been.

The following chapters examine the questions of modern identities faced by the fictional characters who, compelled by the zeitgeist, differently engage with modernity and the ‘West’ in order to define themselves as modern subjects. Their process of identity construction dynamically involves defining what it means to be ‘modern’ or ‘traditional’. While the characters define themselves as being modern that is to see themselves as *modern* subjects in opposition to being traditional, they in effect simultaneously give meaning to what tradition is and place themselves in opposition to it. The dynamic strategy of defining and defying also operates in the way that characters do not only define themselves in accordance with modernity as they understand it but also give meaning to what it means to be modern in ways that

serve their desire. 'Being modern' is indeed malleable. Therefore, neither the meanings of 'modern' nor 'traditional' remain static and unchallenged. The analysis of selected literary texts in the following chapters shows that the process of identity construction in this period dissolves the rigid binary opposition of 'modern' and 'traditional'. More importantly, it illustrates that the achieved identities that the characters have attained are un-uniformed, always evolving and by no means immutable to change.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE INSUFFICIENCY OF STATE-DEFINED MODERN THAI IDENTITY

This chapter examines the companion piece novellas *Met in yu. et. e.* (1973) (Made in USA hereafter *Made in*) and *Ngo ngao tao tun (Met in yu. et. e. 2)* (1973) (Complete Idiot (Made in USA 2) hereafter *Ngo ngao*) by Sujit Wongthes (b.1945). The two novellas significantly represent Thai perceptions of Americanness especially in its being the embodiment of ‘modernity’ and democracy as propagated by the Thai military government. Such perceptions inform the construction of Thai identities in the context of Thailand under military rule in the Cold War climate. With reference to the fear of ‘communist subversion’ discussed in chapter one, this chapter looks at the way in which the anti-communist mindset played a crucial role in the construction of modern Thai political identities. ‘Communist subversion’, ‘communist insurgency’ and ‘communist infiltration’ served as the government’s justifications to assert its oppressive and extensive control over the population from the 1950s to the 1970s, as they were also the rationale to gain decisive support from the US government. The label ‘communist’ was also employed as a political weapon against dissident groups despite the lack of clear understanding in the public arena of what ‘communism’ actually was. Through a critical reading of these two novellas, this chapter investigates how Thais’ perceptions of Americanness, communism and Thainess interplay in the ongoing process of modern Thai identity construction. It also focuses particularly on the dramatisation of normative Thai identity, previously informed by rigorous government anti-communist and pro-American propaganda, in turmoil because a different set of information challenges the main character’s understanding of his home country. The character’s internal struggle is brought to the fore by a juxtaposing his old ‘knowledge’ about Thai-American relationship and understanding of Thailand and America with new information, first-hand experience of Americanness and the ‘reconciliation’ between the US and the People’s Republic of China. Furthermore, the chapter looks at the extent to which Thai internal politics was subsumed into the international politics of the Cold War and how such an entanglement informed Thai national identities.

## Locating the Texts

For the purpose of understanding the groundbreaking significance of Sujit Wongthes' *Made in* and *Ngo ngao*, it is important to reiterate here the oppressive control of public knowledge imposed by the Thai military state under the Sarit regime and the rigorous anti-communist propaganda that was underway since Phibun's second premiership in the 1950s. In the late 1950s, the 'communist' label signified 'foreignness' (*khwa-m-pen-tang-chat*) and by extension 'un-Thainess' (*khwa-mai-pen-thai*). By contrast, 'America' was propagated and therefore perceived as Thailand's 'Great Friend'. 'American foreignness' was thus desirable particularly because it was synonymous with modernity and advancement, the prototype of Thai state *kan-phatthana* (development) ideology. On the contrary, *khommiwnit* 'foreignness' was projected by the military regime and perceived by the public as the imminent enemy of nation, religion and king. Pro-Americanism was intensified alongside anti-Communism, which also came to be identified with anti-Chineseness.

The two texts emerged from the context of the anti-Vietnam War movement spearheaded by Thai intellectuals and students who criticised and posed a challenge to the military junta with their anti-American nationalist discourse and anti-war discourse, already discussed in chapter one. Because of strict press control, the paucity of public knowledge of the government military activities and the consequent lack of public pressure, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs only admitted to Thai-American military collaboration in 1967, after the decade-long American communist-suppression operations in Vietnam. However, despite the press control, news of Thailand's close collaboration with the US in both Laos and Vietnam had been seeping through since the early 1960s and gradually poured in by the second half of the same decade from both the 'communist world' and 'the free world'. The Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) sourced information from the communist world and attacked the military government on issues such as 'traitor' (*khai chat*) and 'sidekick of American Imperialism' (*samun jakkaphatniyom amerikan*) via a pirate radio programme airing from China called '*Siang prachachon haeng prathet Thai*' (Voice of the people of Thailand) (Prajak, 2005: 194-212). News reports from the American press media such as *Time*, *Newsweek* and *Washington Post* on the Vietnam War and Thailand's collaboration with the US were also increasingly sent back to

Thailand by the Thai students in the US and circulated among students, intellectuals and press media in the country (ibid.212-244).

The reports from overseas Thai students/amateur correspondents were the primary source of published information. The launch of *Sangkhomsat parithat* or *Social Science Review* in 1963 under the editorship of Sulak Sivaraksa provided an intellectual forum for the circulation of information from abroad in the form of academic papers, articles and translated news articles from sources external to Thailand.<sup>1</sup> Between November 1968 and May 1970, the *Prachathippatai* (Democracy) daily newspaper published a weekly column called ‘*Khit-theung meuang Thai*’ (Missing Thailand), which featured letters from a group of overseas Thai students (*nakrian-nork*), from Cornell, Harvard and M.I.T. in the US, and Oxford and the University of London in the UK, writing to a personified Thailand. The letters reported on the problems of the Vietnam War in American politics, on the anti-war movements, demonstrations, activities of students in Europe and America, and, more importantly, the kind of American democracy that allowed its citizens to disagree with the government. The column was so well received that the letters were reprinted in two pocket books in 1970.<sup>2</sup> Sujit’s articles written in the US for a Thai newspaper as well as *Made in* and *Ngo ngao* exemplify the same process of sending back new(s) information contrary to the government’s publicity and propaganda. The crucial difference between the two novellas and the previous publication on those issues is the dramatisation of the highly personalised account of an individual dealing with the kind of Americanness that is different from the internalised projection of the Thai military junta. *Ngo ngao* particularly dramatises the crisis of anti-communist, pro-American Thai identity amidst the wind of change in the US government’s international affairs policy. The companion piece novellas were published four months apart in 1973 (March and July) after the Paris Peace Accords were signed in January the same year, which in turn enforced the ceasefire and subsequent withdrawal of US troops from Vietnam.

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<sup>1</sup> For the role *Sangkhomsat parithat* played in the Thai cultural politics and the formation of anti-war movement among the students and intellectuals see Prajak Kongkirati, 2005 and Narong Phetprasert, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Letter to Editor’ in *Khit-theung meuang Thai lem neung* (Missing Thailand Volumn One) and *Khit-theung meuang Thai lem song* (Missing Thailand Volumn Two) by ‘*Nakrian-nork*’, 1970, no page number.

Even before the publication of *Made in* and *Ngo ngao*, Sujit was already a well-known writer in his own right. Since the 1960s, he was an active member and a co-founder of the literary group ‘*Num-nao sao-suay*’ (The Young and the Beautiful)<sup>3</sup> together with his literary confidant, Khanchai Boonpan (b.1944). The group was largely based in Silpakorn University, Bangkok, where the two writers graduated from the Faculty of Archaeology. Sujit and Khanchai published collections of poetry and short stories that were critical of Thai social conditions and the changing Thai culture and society. The two of them were such prolific, popular and socially-engaged writers of the literary scene at the time that they received the accolade ‘*Sornng kuman sayam*’ (the two Siamese sons) from their contemporaries (Narong, 2006: 96).<sup>4</sup>

Sujit and Khanchai typify the 1950s generation of ‘capable, ambitious children’ who mostly came from local primary schools in the provinces and were swept by social riptide to Bangkok for secondary schools and universities, as described by Anderson (1985: 42). The two of them made Bangkok their home and built their career in the metropolis, which by then had already become the ‘local centre’. According to the implied Eurocentrism embedded in the idea of ‘double provincialism’ proposed by Anderson (Chusak, 2008a: 70), Bangkok was only the ‘local centre’ because some urbanites had already left Bangkok for America and Europe for higher education.<sup>5</sup> Apart from the representation of Americanness in *Made in* and *Ngo ngao*, Sujit’s story of leaving Bangkok for the US, the representation of the Thai postgraduate students there, and the ‘awakening’ of his chief protagonist Thorngboem Bandan, a country bumpkin in the ‘real’ metropolis in America, portray ‘double provincialism’ vividly and concretely. This issue will be discussed at greater length below with reference to the two novellas.

While Sujit was writing *Made in* and *Ngo ngao* in the US from April 1971-April 1972, he was on leave of absence from his journalist job at *Sayam-rat rai wan* (Siamrath daily), one of the top-selling newspapers that was read by white-collar

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<sup>3</sup> For the formation of ‘*Num-nao sao-suay*’ group as a part of ‘*wannakam yuk sawaeng-ha*’ (Literature of the Quest Era or Literature of the Era of Searching) (1963-1973) literary movement by the young, discontented writers who searched for some kind of meaning of life and questioned their society see Manas Chitakasem, 1982; Kanha Saengyrai and Jetsada Thongrungrrote, eds. 2003. See also Sathian Janthimathorn, 1982. Another popular and prolific member of the group whose work is also included in this research is the female writer Suwanni Sukhonthiang, pseudonyms ‘Suwanni’ and ‘Suwanni Sukhontha’.

<sup>4</sup> For the titbits and anecdotes of the Thai literary scene and circles from the 1960s to the 1970s see Narong Janreuang, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> See chapter one part one for the discussion of this issue.

professionals and the middle-class, and had high circulation from the 1950s to the 1970s. He went to America for an apprentice journalist job in New York City, Syracuse and Ithaca, where he also mingled with Thai postgraduate students, especially those at Cornell University. Not only was Cornell one of the centres of the American students' anti-war movement, it was also the informal intellectual centre of Thai students, especially those who studied Political Science, Anthropology, Sociology and History because of its Thailand Project, Southeast Asia Program and the library that held the most materials about Thailand in America. Most of the Thai students at Cornell received scholarships from American organisations in Thailand or the Thai government. At Cornell there were at least two Thai postgraduate students, Chanvit Kasetsiri and Warin Wonghanchao,<sup>6</sup> who joined the 'Nakrian-nork' (overseas students) group and sent letters that contributed to the weekly column '*Khith-theung meuang Thai*' in the daily newspaper mentioned earlier.

During his stay in the US, Sujit wrote articles for *Siamrath rai wan*. Some of them were translated into English and published in *The Nation* (a leading English language newspaper in Thailand). Those articles formed the basis of *Made in* and *Ngo ngao* (Sujit, 2004: 14).<sup>7</sup> The author ended his career as a journalist at *Siamrath rai wan* by the time he finished the manuscript for the two novellas in 1972 because, in his own words, he 'disagreed with the censorship of international political news' (ibid. 276). The voice of the anti-war conscience is unequivocal in the statement of the author (*kham-hai-kan khong phu-khian*) accompanying *Ngo ngao*.<sup>8</sup> The effect of such an outward journey and experience gained from travelling on an inward, self-reflective, contemplative journey is more explicitly dramatised by the character of Thorngboem Bandan in *Ngo ngao* than the character of Sujit the journalist in *Made in*.

Both *Made in* and *Ngo ngao* can be loosely categorised as travelogues or travel literature. Travel literature that comprises the emotional expression of the author, who is also the first-person narrator, and the factual record of people and places encountered, is by no means alien to the Thai literary tradition. *Nirat* or travel poetry is a long-established tradition of the Siamese verse composition on a lengthy

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<sup>6</sup> Both Chanvit and Warin also frequently contributed to *Social Science Review*. They later became well-recognised academics in history and economics, respectively.

<sup>7</sup> All page numbers referred to in this chapter are from Sujit Wongthes. 2004 (1973). *Met in yu. et. e.: Ruam 'Met in yu. et. e.' lae 'Ngo Ngao Tao Tun (Made in U.S.A. 2) (Made in U.S.A.: Including Made in U.S.A. and Complete Idiot (Made in U.S.A. 2))*. Bangkok: Modern Masters series, Open Book.

<sup>8</sup> In the 2004 edition of *Made in and Ngo Ngao Tao Tun*, the 'statement' was included at the back.

journey and links a material environment to the author's emotional expression of pain and loneliness caused by separation from a loved one. The emotional expression of the *nirat* genre may also include a sense of displacement, melancholy and homesickness while travelling to and in unknown places (Harrison, 2010b: 98). Though different in its prose form, each novella maintains a link to the *nirat* genre in its content. Travelling in unfamiliar geographical locations, each shows the main character/first-person narrator's perception of Americanness both in relation and as opposed to Thainess and dramatises how each character copes with new information that challenges his Thai identity.

### **Outward Journey, Inward Reflection**

*Made in* and *Ngo ngao* are by no means the first prose travelogue in Thai literature. They are the continuation from Siam's first prose travelogue inaugurated by the 1929 novel *Lakhorn haeng chiwit* (The Circus of Life) written by M.C. Akatdamkoeng Rraphiphat (1905-1932). Akat's novel is still on the recommended reading list for Thai people<sup>9</sup> to date and a representative of 'the heady tones of voyage and exploration, mixed with those of emotional tension, abandonment and isolation [that] further typify Thai literary encounters with the West at the turn of the twentieth century' (Harrison, 2010b: 99). *Lakhorn haeng chiwit*, Harrison argues, is a transitional text that emerged from a 'transitional moment of Siamese history' that is 'the nascent, modern Siamese state' (2003:183-4), composed in the brooding years before the end of absolute monarchy in 1932.

*Lakhorn haeng chiwit* is set in an expansive foreign locales ranging from London, Paris, Berlin, Monte-Carlo, New York to Japan, Shanghai and Hong Kong, and narrated in the first person with quasi-autobiographical elements. It tells the adventures of Wisut, a lovelorn, melancholy young man who, prior to his departure to study in England, feels acutely ill-at-ease among Thai graduates from overseas: 'In their company I felt that I was in a place in which I had no right to be, as if I was

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<sup>9</sup> *Lakhorn haeng chiwit* is listed one of the hundred books that Thai people should read recommended in *Saranukrom naenam nangsu di 100 lem thi khon Thai khuan arn* (100 Good Books that Thai People Should Read: A Guide). The guidebook was a result of a research project 'Selection and Recommendation of Good Book that Thai People Should Read Research Project' (*Khrongkan wijai khat-leuak lae naenam nangsu di 100 lem thi khon Thai khuan an*) funded by Thailand Research Fund (TRF) in 1996. See chapter one footnote 54 for a brief discussion of the research project.

trespassing on Mars. The students saw me as a *barbarian* who knew nothing about the civilized and modern cultures that *we should imitate*' (Akatdamkoeng, 1995: 67, my emphasis). Wisut's discomfort sums up the attitude of the more privileged echelons of Bangkok urbanites towards the West as the prototype of modernity and progress. It encapsulates the widening gap between the home-grown and overseas graduates and captures the desire of the young Thai to experience the Western locales. Bangkok in the 1920s was already the 'local centre' representing 'barbarian backwardness' and 'provincialism' in the eyes of the Thai elite who deemed Westernness to be a measure of being civilised. Wisut renames himself 'Bobby' in England and, in a rather unlikely turn of events, becomes a reporter at *The London Times* whose 'experiences at being set free from the social constraints and hierarchies of his homeland [permit] him to recreate and shape his identity afresh in the encounter with the *farang*' (Harrison, 2010b: 100).

The liberating effect of being in the West is also evident in *Khwam-rak khong Wanlaya* (Wanlaya's love) by Seni Saowaphong (pseudonym of Sakchai Bamrunghong, b.1918). The novel was initially serialised in *Sayam samai* (Modern Siam or Siam Current), a weekly newspaper, in 1952. Though *Khwam-rak khong Wanlaya* departs from the protagonist's first-person narration travelogue of the *nirat* tradition and *Lakhorn haeng chiwit*, it is described in the preface of the eleventh edition (1996) as an 'exotic story' (*pairat niyai*)<sup>10</sup> as it tells a story of an overseas, foreign locale. Despite its title and the fact that it is set in Post-Second World War Paris, the novel is far from being a romantic love story. It tells the story of Wanlaya, an idealistic young woman from an underprivileged background, who receives a Thai government scholarship to study music in Paris, and her decisive rejection of her elitist, English-educated, complacent boyfriend on the grounds of different attitudes towards 'love' (for the people on Wanlaya's part), 'life' (with meaning and sacrifice) and (pro-working) class ideology. In his anger at being rejected by her, Rewat, her boyfriend, condemns her as 'a crazy radical' (radical *sia-jarit*) (Seni, 1974: 19). Equally important in terms of its content is the socially-engaged message and criticism of overseas graduates who are plagued by self-entitlement and take advantage of their education to intimidate others from less privileged backgrounds. This group of graduates, who will become government officials and diplomats,

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<sup>10</sup> '*Pairat*' means foreign. '*Niyai*' is a generic term for fiction.

represents the self-aggrandised, aspiring commoner elite who perpetuates social stratification and hierarchical order, not dissimilar to the military elite who ruled Thailand at the time.

A crucial recurrent trait that runs through *Lakhorn haeng chiwit*, *Khwam-rak khorng Wanlaya*, *Made in* and *Ngo ngao*, apart from their being set in foreign locales, is collision, conflict and negotiation between old ideas and new ones vis-à-vis modernity represented by the foreign locales themselves. The old ideas or traditions represent constraints and oppressive authorities while the new ideas and information gained from experiencing the West celebrate liberation and egalitarianism. Such liberation comes at the price of having to challenge one's Thai identity constructed by the official discourses of Thainess and social hierarchies in the case of *Lakhorn haeng chiwit* and *Khwam-rak khorng Wanlaya*, and Thainess and military-led political ideology in *Made in* and *Ngo ngao*. No matter how vague, at times elusive or rigid and monolithic 'Thainess' is, it reveals itself more clearly in relation to as well as in opposition to Western culture.

### **Made by the US, Bought by the Thai**

*Made in USA* and *Ngo ngao tao tun* (*Made in USA 2*) arose from the milieu of the 'American Era' in modern Thai history (Anderson, 1977: 15) and the hype of 'Americanness' among the urban middle classes (Baker and Pasuk, 2005:150) as the phrase 'made in USA' poignantly suggests. Though the title initially connotes the meaning of the phrase as guaranteed quality and in turn functions to certify the work, it renders itself ironic just after reading the author's preface and even more so after reading the work. In the author's preface to *Made in*, Sujit writes:

The phrase 'made in USA' is printed on a wide range of products, from big machines, [...] radios, televisions to bombs and all sizes of bullets. ...

Of course, 'made in USA' is so widespread that it even labels a human being, whether he comes in a form of horticultural expert or a university lecturer. It can easily turn a 'made in Thailand' person into an unworthy, clearance sale item.

I have no rights to object to or antagonise the phrase 'made in USA' but I also do not adore it so much as to place it on my headboard. I use it as a title of my book because it is worth noting that, at this very moment in my life, the phrase influences and looms large over South East

Asia. Also, it is simply because I wrote the book in America. (2004: 12-3)

Far from presenting the connotative fashionableness of 'made in USA' products, quality, trend and social status, *Made in* and *Ngo ngao* encapsulate the mixed-feelings of the Thai public towards what 'America' stands for, whether it is 'freedom' and the 'home of democracy', or 'coercion' and the 'self-acclaimed world's police' in Cold-War Culture made by USA.<sup>11</sup> Rather than the American government *per se*, the two novellas direct this resentfulness towards the Thai military government for its hypocrisy, excess of power, for being 'the running dog country' of America (Sujit, 2004: 166) and, more importantly, for its suppression of information or 'truth' about what is happening in the region and about communism. The two novellas criticise the Thai self-acclaimed democratic, yet military-led government, by juxtaposing the suppression of information and freedom of speech with the kind of American democracy and freedom that allowed Americans to find out about the 'opposing' political ideology that is communism. Americans can criticise and protest against their own government and even uncover information that subverts the US government, such as the Pentagon Papers on the front page of the *New York Times* in 1971.

Through the eyes of the first-person narrator, Sujit the journalist, *Made in* portrays the American students' anti-war movement, the lives of Thai students at Cornell University and their attitudes towards the Vietnam War, as well as the Thai military government and its policies on international affairs at the time. *Ngo ngao* portrays the 'awakening' of its first-person narrator, Thorngboem Bandan, in America. Thorngboem is portrayed as a country bumpkin who, since childhood, has been indoctrinated by the military regime's anti-communist propaganda into believing that the American anti-communist heroes would protect Thailand from communist villains, especially China, until his life-changing journey. In America, socialising with postgraduate Thai students at Cornell University and working as an apprentice in a publishing house and at *Herald Journal* Newspaper, Thorngboem is dumbfounded by Richard Nixon's offer of an olive branch to Mao Zedong, American Sinophilia and

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<sup>11</sup> There were also demonstrations against American and Japanese goods in the early 1970s. National Student Centre of Thailand (NSCT) organised a weeklong campaign on 'Boycotting Japanese goods' in 1972 as a result of the imbalance of trade between Thailand and Japan. For detailed discussion on the role of Thai student movement on social changes see Khaneungnit, 1986 and on cultural politics see Prajak, 2005.

daily encounters with new(s) information inaccessible at home. Nixon's change of heart has such an impact on Thorngboem, who is a representative of the Thai 'unknowing' people at large, because he believed the 'accepted' version understood by most people in Thailand that 'North-Vietnam, the communist, gangs up with China to invade South-Vietnam. So America goes to war to help and so do Thai soldiers' (Sujit, 2004: 148). Now that the two gravest enemies, America and China, are meeting for tea, the 'unknowing' Thais are 'shocked'. The 'shock' is sarcastically encapsulated in the title *Ngo ngao*, which means 'complete idiot' or 'absolutely stupid' in Thai.

### ***Made in USA: Experiencing Land of the Free and Home of the Brave***

Despite the sarcasm that renders the title of the works ironic, the appeals of *Made in* and *Ngo ngao* lie in the popularity of the author and the thirst for information different from the government's and, more importantly, derive from the fact that the two texts both cater to and counteract the hype for 'Americanness'. As much as they deal with Thai people and their concerns for Thailand, both narratives are also about America (the extent of American freedom, the anti-war movement in America and the narrator's experience of the country), Americans (American students who campaign against their own government and the Washingtonians' reaction towards the anti-war demonstration) and American universities represented by Cornell.

*Made in* comprises eleven chapters over the span of twelve eventful days starting from the departure of the narrator/main character from Bangkok on April 22, 1971 to the anti-Vietnam War demonstration in Washington DC on May 3 of the same year. The short time-span delivers a sense of immediacy similar to journalistic report. The first three chapters do not only comically portray the sarcastic and streetwise narrator, his faux pas and journey from Bangkok to New York via Bombay, Athens, Rome, and Frankfurt, but also show the narrator's personality and social circle, and give details on how he gets to go to America. His first sentence of the first chapter mockingly says, 'Still don't know even now (while I'm walking smartly at Don Muang airport) why I'm going to America' (Sujit, 2004: 30). The chapter ends with a note on his nervous mixed-feeling of wanting to take the flight but uncertain about what the future has in store for him. With sarcasm, the narrator tells his friends, 'Don't do anything to heal this infectious society just yet. Wait till I come back from

America 'cos at least then I'll be called 'made in USA'. Crap! This kind of good's pricey and in popular demand' (ibid. 37). The opening sentence of chapter one sarcastically reflects both the apprehension and desire to go abroad that plagued the young Wisut in the 1929 novel *Lakhorn haeng chiwit* discussed earlier in this chapter, though in a different manner. Sujit the narrator and main character shows no clear purpose in his temporary, willed migration to the US and mocks his unarticulated desire to go. His closing sentence, however, reveals his ambivalent feelings towards the journey and its *raison d'être*. As much as it satirically reflects popular attitudes towards *nakrian-nork* or anything-*nork* (the suffix '-nork' means 'from overseas'), his remark also shows that, for the narrator, going overseas is at once the treat (of becoming 'pricey' and 'on popular demand' though he says it mockingly) and the threat (of parting from the known though 'infectious society'). Though the tone is humorous, the remark also criticises overseas graduates who suddenly become privileged upon returning home simply because they have been overseas, as already echoed in *Khwam-rak khornng Wanlaya*.

In chapter two, the anxiety and desperation of the first-time flyer with the language barrier is light-heartedly presented. Once settled on the plane, the narrator recalls his difficulties in dealing in a straightforward manner with a discriminating, ineffectual bureaucratic Thai official in order to obtain his passport and juxtaposes it with the convenience in getting his American visa from an efficient American consular personnel. While he was interrogated by the official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he modestly yet knowingly replied that he worked as a journalist at *Siamrath rai wan* newspaper and in turn received a polite answer to his query and had his document processed quickly. The narrator concludes that 'it is actually these government employees who give 'privilege' a meaning it has' (ibid. 43). The point of comparison between 'the Thai way' and 'the American way' starts here.

In chapter three the narrator's restlessness visibly increases as he flies from Rome to Frankfurt. His playful tone is suspended, he earnestly ponders 'the reason I'm so nervous especially now is because I'm travelling so far outside my country. I'll have to mix with people who speak different languages, have different cultures and complexions. It won't be so bad if we could communicate but this is impossible' (ibid. 53). At JFK International Airport, he finally struggles through passport control and buys a domestic flight to Syracuse, New York, to meet his Thai girlfriend who studies for her MA at Cornell. The 'threat' of travelling to the unknown is captured in

the narrator's anxiety over language, which explicitly reveals his loss of control and ability to communicate.

The narrator's journey ends in chapter four where his new adventure begins as he wakes up in Ithaca. A Thai student at Cornell invites Sujit to see the notorious musical 'Hair'.<sup>12</sup> He agrees out of curiosity having heard so much about the play's nudity. He says, 'I've been wanting to see *farang*'s 'meat'. Will watch it to my heart's content this time' (ibid. 65). His attitude can be seen as an attempt to reverse the Western male gaze to which Thai women are often subjected by posing himself as a subject of the male gaze upon Western women (and men). Sujit briefly introduces the Thai Project at the Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University in chapter five and talks to nine Thai postgraduate students. He presents their stories in their own voices using an interview style in an attempt to render the impression of an objective report. These Thai students tell him about their backgrounds, study programmes, and their plans after graduation.

However, his attempt at maintaining journalistic distance fails the narrator when he comments on American interests in Thailand that 'Thailand the beloved country of others and mine is like a virgin who blundered with an American guy. There isn't a single pore left to interest the fellow. He only has to keep watch and ward over her so that no other guys would seduce her into being his mistress' (ibid. 71). Of course, the analogy refers to Thailand as a strategic location along the line of the domino theory and how the US was using the country as the frontline in its anti-communist operations in South East Asia. However, it also significantly speaks of the unequal relationship between Thailand and the US or, to use Baker and Pasuk's term, Thailand as 'a US client-state under military rule' (2005:146), in highly sexualised and gender terms. The analogy of Thailand as a 'blundered virgin' who has lost all the 'sexual' abilities to entice 'the fellow' assumed the Thai cultural division between the 'virgin' and the 'whore' / the 'good' and the 'bad' women as discussed in the introductory chapter. Thailand has become a 'fallen woman' because of such an

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<sup>12</sup> *Hair: The American Tribal Love-Rock Musical* was the first rock musical. It was created as an original idea by Gerome Ragni and James Rado. They collaborated on the story, text, characters, dialogue and lyrics beginning in late 1964. Its music was composed by Galt MacDermot. The musical hit Broadway in 1968. In the musical *Hair*, 'youth protests against war and military service, against intolerance, brutality and the dehumanization of society. The hippie existence is shown as a possible alternate way of life in which love, happiness and freedom dominate'. Several of its songs became anthems of the anti-Vietnam War peace movement. ([http://www.hairthemusical.com/en00004musical\\_content.html](http://www.hairthemusical.com/en00004musical_content.html)) (<http://www.hairthemusical.com/history.html>) (Accessed 5 September 2010).

entanglement. The analogy is not only sarcastic, but also misogynistic and patriotic in tone. It implies an anxiety over the loss of control over what has been going on Thailand, as seen in the body of knowledge about the country gathered by American researchers. The anxiety is expressed in gender terms that is the loss of protection of and control over female sexuality. The analogy shows a link between national identity and female sexuality: Jeffrey (2002) pointed out that during the American Era, ‘the symbolic importance of women, and women’s sexual behaviour, in maintaining national culture and identity’ was forged (30).

In chapters six and seven the narrator functions as an interviewer. Two Thai library staff brief him on the Thai collection at Cornell library in chapter six, while chapter seven introduces M.R. Akin Rabibadhana, a PhD student in anthropology whose Masters thesis, ‘The Organization of Thai Society in the Early Bangkok Period, 1782-1873’, was published by the Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University. Though the narrator is travelling in a supposedly ‘unknown place’, he has found a miniature Thailand in the form of the Thai intellectual community and a body of knowledge about the country, although the latter also reminds him of the extent of American ‘interest’ in Thailand. The encounter with the familiar in a different context permits the narrator to later reflect on what he has known in Thailand vis-à-vis the different opinions and new information found in the US.

The narrator then shifts his focus from the miniature Thailand at Cornell University to the overwhelmingly democratic America represented by American students campaigning for their anti-Vietnam War demonstration in Washington DC in chapter eight. He receives a booklet about Vietnam which features ‘Viet Quiz’—different sets of questions imitating exam questions on South East Asian countries, for example:

### **Matching**

Instruction: Supposed you are an American pilot on a bombing mission. If you were flying over the following countries, where would you drop the bombs?

- |             |  |
|-------------|--|
| A. Vietnam  | 1. Weapon depots and farmers                                   |
| B. Laos     | 2. Enemy villages and farmers                                  |
| C. Cambodia | 3. Strategic roads and farmers                                 |
| D. China    | 4. Archaeological sites, where enemies are hiding, and farmers |

(Sujit, 2004: 90)

The narrator highlights ‘the American students’ frustration and sense of humour’ (ibid. 89) embedded in the quiz, which sarcastically criticises the US government’s international political policies, especially those on South East Asia.

The anti-Vietnam War atmosphere becomes increasingly intense from chapter nine to the end of the novella in chapter eleven. Chapter nine reports President Richard Nixon’s monthly press release on national television, the students’ antagonistic reaction, the circulation of anti-Vietnam War printed materials, and the preparation for the demonstration which emphasises non-violence, no weapons and no vandalism. The narrator’s depiction of all that happens underscores the students’ right to disagree with, and protest against, their government. The incident throws into sharp relief concealment of truth and condemnation of dissident opinion in Thailand. His impression is that though some of them do not even know what or where ‘Vietnam’ is, at least they know from the American media that their government is responsible for the killing and dying there. The chapter ends on the last day of April, when many students are leaving Ithaca for Washington DC, and the final sentence said by one of the students that wraps it up, ‘Certainly, they’re all prepared to be arrested by the police’ (ibid. 102).

Chapter ten depicts the narrator’s road trip to Washington DC together with his Thai and American friends and the harmless disturbances such as marching, blocking the streets and stopping traffic executed by the demonstrators who aim to make it known to other Americans what the Vietnam War is and why it should be stopped. The narrator is impressed by the well-thought out organisation of the demonstration and the openness of both the demonstrators’ disturbance plan and the government’s suppression plan. Each is well aware of the other’s strategies and implements plans of action accordingly. In his puzzlement at the transparency of this government-citizen confrontation, he wonders, ‘Is this the *bad karma* of the USA or the *sins* of the American people?’<sup>13</sup> [...] I don’t know. I have no idea. And I don’t want to think about it’ (ibid. 109, my emphasis). His rhetorical question and a somewhat anxious and dismissive response reflect that he cannot comprehend civil disobedience as a strategy and the civil obligation between the state and its citizen. The demonstrators want to get their voice heard and to express disagreement with their government, whereas the government has no right to harm any citizens just because

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<sup>13</sup> The question reads in Thai ‘Ni pen kam pen wen khorng saharat reu pen bap khorng khon amerikan’.

they disagree with government policy. Such an extent of active democracy that means more than just casting one's vote in an election is so incomprehensible and alien to the Thai that the narrator, perhaps mockingly, tries to make sense of it through Buddhist concepts of 'bad karma' and 'sins'. In Thailand, the two 'universal answers' have been exploited to explain away any social injustice and to subdue calls for equality by the ruling elite throughout Siamese/Thai history. Once the demonstration is underway, the narrator and his Thai friend part with the American students. He thinks, 'We absolutely shouldn't be with them because we work on different things' (ibid.110). His remark emphasises an assumed 'journalistic distance' because he does not want to get involved with the demonstration but observes and bears witness to it.

In chapter eleven he walks around Washington DC witnessing the demonstration and talking to the local people of Washington. Some agree with the demonstration, some do not, and some express their anger caused by the disturbance. *Made in* ends with students leaving Washington DC after the demonstration and the dialogue between the narrator and George, his American friend:

'Those enraged Washingtonians are the students' success,' George explained.  
 'I don't get it.'  
 'The students wanted to warn the Washingtonians of what's going on in the world. Because before our demonstration, they didn't have any idea of what's happening in Vietnam.'  
 'Don't forget that they're furious.'  
 'They're furious...yes,' George confirmed, 'from now on they'll think—think—and think why they're furious. Why did we have to do it? And in the end, they'll know what's happened in Vietnam.'  
 'What would it entail then?'  
 'Well, what would it entail if you did nothing?'  
 (ibid. 121)

*Made in* does not only report back information to the Thai reader, but its mixture of journalistic style of news summary and interviews with personal experience in the form of creative writing also enables the narrator to effectively impart his personal opinion and political message. It allows Sujit the narrator to express his anxiety, uncertainty, even self-mockery and doubt towards himself as a Thai who is 'lucky' enough to see America. At the same time, the narrative also allows him to criticise the kind of 'Thai democracy' that conceals information and

silences the people. The last sentence that ends the novella is articulated by George, an American student, in a form of a rhetorical question. It appropriately comes from the American who is politically conscious and actively engages in democracy. Its germane implication directly addresses the Thai reader as if to challenge one to think about 'Thai democracy' and to emphasise the people's active participation because no action means no chance for change.

***Ngo ngao tao tun: I am an Anti-Communist, Therefore I am Thai?***

The parenthesised part of the title *Ngo ngao tao tun* (*Made in USA2*) does not mean that *Ngo ngao* is a sequel of *Made in*; there is both continuation and rupture in *Ngo ngao*. It contains the same theme of encountering and coping with the concealed truth and also complexly responds to the hype for 'made in USA' in the same way *Made in* does. However, the significant difference between the two texts lies in the narration and the narrators: while there is no differentiation between the author (Sujit Wongthes) and the first-person narrator (also Sujit Wongthes) in *Made in*, the first-person narrator/main character in *Ngo ngao* departs from the knowing journalist Sujit. Thorngboem Bandan is an understated character and narrator whose overly old-fashioned name speaks of a rural, unsophisticated background and its implicit naivety.

*Ngo ngao*, contrary to an assumed 'journalistic distance' of *Made in*, presents a more engaged, politicised-personal look at the US government's change of heart in establishing diplomatic relationships with China from the point of view of the narrator, an 'anti-communist' Thai who has been indoctrinated about China and communism by the Thai government. More importantly, the personalised perception and narration offer an intense reflection on Thai identity that has internalised anti-communist propaganda and law that were directly influenced by the US anti-communist legislation. As is widely acknowledged, the rationale 'of the [Thai] anticommunist act (1952), whose model was the un-American activities legislation, was that communism is un-Thai in its ideas and as a way of life' (Thongchai 2004: 6).

In the narrative of *Ngo ngao*, Thorngboem, in his interior monologue, always refers to himself as 'ku', as opposed to 'phom' used by Sujit in *Made in*. The first-

person male pronoun '*phom*' is an equivalent of an English pronoun 'I'. It is neutral, polite and can be used in most situations. As for the first-person pronoun '*ku*', it was commonly used by both genders between people of the same social standing or by the higher to the lower in the old days. It is still used in both rural and urban Thailand within intimate circles of friends or by those from a 'working-class' background. However, '*ku*' is considered impolite, if not rude and insulting, in formal situations. Thus, the use of the pronoun '*ku*' in the narratorial voice of this book does not only state the narrator's down-to-earth, unsophisticated rural background and grass roots Thai identity, but it also significantly reinforces his rebellious attitude against all kinds of institutions, appropriation and deferential power structures as the story unfolds. The use of '*ku*' therefore functions as the personal statement/proposal of another kind of Thainess that is different from the sophisticated, modern Thai identity desired by most people and the Thai government in its attempt to modernise the country and people along American strategic lines.

However, as the over-determined use of the pronoun '*ku*' by the country bumpkin Thorngboem also emphasises rural naivety, both the narrator and the title *Ngo ngao tao tun* (complete idiot/absolutely stupid) serve to accentuate how the military government at the time 'stupefied' Thai people by making them oblivious to what was happening in Vietnam and Laos, enforcing strict press censorship and propagating only a 'sanitised' image of America as the champion of democracy. Thorngboem's bewilderment and 'naivety' become a narrative device that at once questions the US new attitude towards China and juxtaposes the new American Sinophilia, represented by President Nixon's official visit to China in 1972, with the Thai Sinophobia which is a result of the Thai government's propaganda that valorises and polarises the democratic America against the 'demonic' communist China.

Despite the long commercial, cultural and inter-racial relationship between Siam and China visible in the whole social fabric of modern Thailand, Thorngboem and his post-WWII generation have been indoctrinated into hating 'communism' represented by China without knowing what it actually is. One of the typical myths about communism widely circulated by the government from the late 1950s is, as Thorngboem automatically replies when asked why he thinks the communists are worse than the Thai or the American, that 'the communists kill people'. As he goes on to report, 'If they enter our country, they will demolish all temples, make monks

plough fields, and the elderly too. They will also kill all small children' (Sujit 2004: 138). Such a myth is so widespread that a 'communist' becomes a public enemy. An accusation of 'being a communist' could damage and turn an individual into a victim of social sanction and unlawful state action.

*Ngo ngao* comprises four chapters, which are chronologically marked by either an international or Thai political event at the beginning of each. They are summarised as follows:

- July 15, 1971, President Richard Nixon announces his official visit to China.
- October 26, 1971, China is admitted to the United Nations in place of Taiwan.
- November 17, 1971, General Thanom Kittikhajon stages a coup d'état seizing power from his own government and remains the leader.
- February 21, 1972, three leading channels of American national television broadcast President Richard Nixon's visit to China. (Sujit, 2004: 124, 172, 200, 238, respectively)

Though Thai internal politics seems unrelated to other international affairs, the narrative in each chapter frames each event in relation to Thorngboem's often failed attempt to understand what is happening through his old indoctrinated 'knowledge' of the relationship between America, China, Vietnam and Thailand. The new information increasingly challenges his old 'knowledge' and proves how unfounded it is. In all chapters, Thorngboem observes American students' reactions, talks to different Thai students about what is happening, asks their opinions, discusses relevant issues with them and contemplates everything on his own. There are noticeably more interior monologues wherein he freely expresses his own opinions, confusion, anger and frustration at length on the 'stupefied' state in which the Thai government has confined Thai people by means of rigorous campaigning and propaganda.

Like most Thai people of his generation, Thorngboem has been 'brainwashed' into believing that China caused the Vietnam War while America was the heroic helper who protected Vietnam from being turned into a communist country. Therefore, after learning of Nixon's plan to visit China, Thorngboem is bewildered, if not shocked. He admits:

I'm confused because I don't have the slightest knowledge about Mainland China. From newspapers in Bangkok, I only read some titbits about Mao Zedong which

didn't tell anything more than that we (—meaning every Thai) have to be anti-communist especially anti-Red China. To be honest, I'm an anti-communist without being conscious of it. But if I'm asked what communism is, all I can answer is I don't know. I only know that *it destroys nation, religion and king*. (Sujit, 2004: 127, my emphasis)

Thorngboem cannot make sense of the planned visit. He does not understand why the president of the US, 'leader of the free world' and great ally of Thailand, would want to go to China, the home of the communists who would 'maliciously destroy Thailand, those evil communists' (ibid. 130-1). Once again the popular indoctrinated belief that communism is an enemy of the three pillars of Thainess which are nation-religion-king (*chat-sat-kasat*) is reiterated in Thorngboem's interior monologue. Only this time it is tinted with doubt and self-questioning.

The myth that China caused the Vietnam War and America protected Vietnam from being turned into a communist country is demythologised by the other side of 'the story' from Than, a female student from South Vietnam who is doing her PhD in political science at Cornell. It is the first time that Thorngboem encounters someone who has the first-hand experience of the War, especially a citizen of war-torn Vietnam. Than tells him:

We don't know communism. We neither hate nor love democracy. But Western countries and powerful countries never leave us to solve our own internal affairs. Why do they always have to tell us what to do and be? [...] Ho Chi Minh has only love for the country and for our independence—of all the Vietnamese. Communist or not Communist is not an important issue for us. [...] America endorsed Ngo Dinh Diem's government and tried every possible way to obstruct the general election because the truth is that most Vietnamese respect Ho Chi Minh. And he has become an enemy of the western countries [...]. I'm neither a South Vietnamese nor a Northerner. I am a Vietnamese who knows who is corrupting or sincere to our people. [...] We want to [get rid of poverty] by ourselves, with a leader who would really lead us. Not a leader who is backed by America to suck the people's blood. [...] While I am studying and working in my room here, I can hear the sounds of gunshots, bombs, war helicopters, people's cries, the farmers' cries for help and the crying of bomb-injured small children. (ibid.150-1)

Than's story is Thorngboem's wakeup call and his initial reaction to her story is

anger. It is anger against what Western countries have done to Vietnam and against himself for not knowing any of this which consequently leads to his anger against the Thai government for its control of information and propaganda. His old world in black and white now turns into an expanding grey area.

Thainess (*khwa-m-pen-thai*) that politically identified with pro-American democracy (despite the country's military-led government) and anti-Chinese communism turns problematic as a result of the US government's change of diplomatic policy towards China. The change in the American international political current brings forth repercussions on part of the Thai government as encapsulated by Thanom's coup d'état against his own government—this is the explanation offered by the *New York Times* (ibid. 206). Thai students in the story, however, discuss the coup d'état as also caused by the conflict between the members of parliament and the Thanom government over the distribution of the budget that Thanom promised during his election campaign (ibid. 212). The fact that the military-led 'elected' 1969 government chose to execute a coup d'état instead of dissolving parliament followed by a new election is also brought up. This scene of political discussion and freedom to express political opinions by Thorngboem and other Thai students in the US starkly contrasts with the martial law following the coup d'état that banned political gatherings of more than five persons in Thailand.

The animated debate about the coup d'état, democracy, communism and Thailand in relation to the new American policy on China leads to the topic of Nixon's visit to China. The Americans in general are consequently embracing the hype for 'Chineseness', especially in arts and culture. Two Thai postgraduate students sarcastically mock another fellow Thai student and the Thai government for antagonising China as a result of following American (old) international policies while the American government now wants to initiate diplomatic relations with its former 'enemy':

'[...] well, what do you think now that Nixon's going to China and the country has joined UN? Isn't half of the world, including America, stupid [for contacting China] and only the Thais and the Thai government are smart?'

'Before long, you'll have to be anti-American too because America's about to establish diplomatic relationship with China. Nixon and Mao Zedong are having tea together soon.' (ibid. 216-7)

The sarcasm here plays upon the anti-Chinese ‘logic’ held by the Thai government that because communist China is evil, any countries that contact China must be evil too and thus should be opposed. By the same token, now that America is contacting China, Thailand has to become ‘anti-American’ too if it is to follow the same logic. Such a brief sarcastic comment captures the insufficiency, if not the crisis, of state-defined modern Thai identity that intertwines *khwa-m-pen-thai* (Thainess) with being anti-communist and, by extension, anti-Chinese.

The discontent towards the Thai government becomes more intense in a conversation between Thorngboem and other Thai students. One of them poignantly sums up the ‘double-privilege’ of overseas students:

The point is only those who leave Thailand can access the fact, like us who are in America now. We see the atrocity of American government that has been uncovered by the American. [...] But people in Thailand never get to know about it. Overseas students are already considered demigods because they have gone overseas. They become doubly divine because they get to know what people at home don’t. (ibid.159)

The idea put forth here reiterates ‘double-provincialism’ in a different way. As Bangkok has turned into a ‘local centre’ and ‘backwardly barbarian’ in comparison with the Western metropolises, the absence of factual information and access to it in comparison to the rapid flow of information in the West represented by America also makes Bangkok and Thailand a ‘land of ignorance’. The Thai government and its control of public knowledge are the force that moves Thailand and its people into the realm of ‘ignorance’, just like the Thai elite, and later the privileged middle-class, adopted Euro-Americancentrism and perceived Siam/Thailand as ‘barbarian’ in the 1929 novel, *Lakhorn haeng chiwit*. However, unlike the hegemonic disparity between the ‘civilised’ and the ‘barbarian’ acutely felt by the young Wisut in *Lakhorn haeng chiwit*, the privileged status of the overseas ‘knowing’ ones does not widen the gap between them and the ‘ignorant’ at home. Both *Made in* and *Ngo ngao* are in face a part of an attempt to bridge the gap. Therefore, the representation of Americanness in the novellas at once challenges the Thai government and subverts its projection of America. More importantly, it specifically questions the insufficiency of the state-defined Thai identity as deferential, anti-communist.

### Awake and Contemplating

The crisis of the state-defined Thai identity is dramatised by the character of Thorngboem whose 'naivety' serves as a crucial narrative strategy. The 'ignorant' reader can identify and empathise with him, while the 'knowing' reader can also sympathise with him. Both, however, are presented with the unsolved problem of the 'modern, state-defined Thai identity' that seems to find itself in a catch-22 situation. While the modern Thai identity runs into a political dead-end when America befriends China, the author seems to propose an alternative drawn from a 'pre-modern Siamese' state which insisted on a strong connection between Siam and China. Then, the narrative of a Buddhist monk is inserted into the story, since Buddhism is believed to be an 'essence' of Thainess despite its Indic origin, as a way out of the 'crisis'.

In chapter three of *Ngo ngao*, while Thorngboem is listening to his friends talking about Nixon's planned visit to China, his interior monologue goes back in time to the early thirteenth century. The narrative turns to an account of the good cultural and commercial relations between Sukhothai, Ayutthaya, down to the Rattanakosin kingdom and China. During the reign of Rama III (1824-1851) of the Rattanakosin dynasty, the relationship between Siam and China was especially strong (ibid.217-8). The insertion of this specific historical account here points towards the pre-modern, close relations between Siam and China that are still visible in everyday life of modern Thailand. Another Thai student also asserts that the Chinese have lived in Siam/Thailand in peace and with less conflict than in other places. It is only recently that China has been identified by the Thai government as threatening communism which, as a consequence, has created a sense of antagonism between the two governments and among the Chinese and the Thai peoples in Thailand.

Not only is the pre-modern Siam-China relationship invoked to counter the insufficiency of a state-defined modern Thai identity, an anecdote of a humble travelling Buddhist monk is also narrated and used as a hopeful, though vague, final image in *Ngo ngao*. The monk was spending the lent months of the rainy season in a cave in an up-country area near the Thai-Burmese border, where an unidentifiable character who is narrating the anecdote met him. The narrative says that the monk did not preach reincarnation, the Five Precepts (*pañca-sila*) and the Eight Precepts (*attha-*

*sila*), merit (*bun*) and *karma*. They are the ‘staple’ concepts that most Buddhist lay people are taught as a part of their upbringing, although not many self-acclaimed Buddhists can even uphold the Five Precepts in their daily life.<sup>14</sup> The monk instead preached *mak paet* (the Noble Eightfold Path or The Way to the End of Suffering) and *Kalama sutta* (Instruction for the Kalamas). *Mak paet* is the eight principles/practices that would end suffering. The Noble Eightfold Path comprises wisdom (*panya*) (1. right view; 2. right intention), ethical conduct (*sila*) (3. right speech; 4. right action; 5. right livelihood) and mental development (*samathi*) (6. right effort; 7. right mindfulness; 8. right concentration).<sup>15</sup> *Kalama sutta* is the ten principles used in contemplation of what to believe and to safeguard against believing without critical thinking or false belief.<sup>16</sup> *Kalama sutta* is inserted in the narrative of the story together with an image of the monk in order to emphasise that a solution to the problem of the government’s dupery of the Thai people lies in Buddhism, the ‘essence’ of Thainess.

*Kalama sutta* is introduced in the story as a kind of answer to the intellectual and emotional turmoil of Thorngboem, a representative of the ‘ignorant’ Thai people, who is the product of the government propaganda, now caught in the whirlwind of new(s) information and facts all of which are causing his suffering. The Noble Eightfold Path offers a guideline of practices that would alleviate suffering of a layperson in any situation. It is deliberately chosen to complement the *Kalama sutta* as a potential defence for an individual caught in the ideological war. Though both the Noble Eightfold Path and *Kalama sutta* do not directly solve the problem of the

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<sup>14</sup> The Five Precepts are to refrain from destroying living creatures; taking that which is not given; sexual misconduct; false speech; and imbibing intoxicating drinks and drugs which lead to carelessness, respectively. For the Eight Precepts, three more additional practices are to refrain from eating at the forbidden time that is after noon; to refrain from dancing, singing, music, going to see entertainments, wearing garlands, using perfumes, and beautifying the body with cosmetics; and, lastly, to refrain from lying on a high or luxurious sleeping place. See <http://www.accesstoinight.org/ptf/dhamma/sila/pancasila.html> and <http://www.accesstoinight.org/ptf/dhamma/sila/atthasila.html> (accessed 16 May 2010). The further discussion of the Buddhist Five Precepts in relations to Thai male sexual cultural practice will be in chapter six.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.thebigview.com/buddhism/eightfoldpath.html> (accessed 16 May 2010).

<sup>16</sup> The ten principles state that one should not believe something simply because it (1) has been passed on for many generations; (2) has been traditional practice; (3) is well known every where; (4) is cited in a text; (5) is on the grounds of logical reasoning; (6) is in accord with one’s philosophy; (7) appeals to one’s ‘common sense’; (8) is the idea that one likes; (9) seems acceptable or the speaker seems trustworthy; and (10) comes from one’s teacher. See <http://www.aimwell.org/Books/Suttas/Kalama/kalama.html>, <http://oaks.nvg.org/kalama.html>, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalama\\_Sutta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalama_Sutta) and <http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/an/an03/an03.065.than.html> (accessed on 16 May 2009)

modern Thai identity, especially when the core of Buddhism is ‘non-identity’, the novella seems to propose them as a kind of ‘measure’ that one can utilise in order to defy the imposition of a constructed identity, hegemony and any discourse.

### **Conclusion: an Emergence of an Alternative Thai Identity?**

The chapter illustrates how the narratives of the two novellas juxtapose the propagated ‘old knowledge’ in the Thai perceptions of Americanness with ‘new information’ and ‘new understandings’ of Americanness in the American citizens’ anti-war demonstrations against their own government and in the Chinese-American diplomatic relationship. The incongruity between the old knowledge and the new information dramatises the crisis of state-defined modern Thai identity as ‘anti-communist’. Facing the identity crisis, the main character evokes the ‘pre-modern Thainess’ exemplified by the Chinese-Thai historical anecdote and the ‘essence’ of Thainess that is Buddhism as counter-discourses to the awkwardness and insufficiency of ‘modern Thainess’ vis-à-vis Americanness. Such an attempt, however, seems to be at least inverted conservative and nationalist, in the fact that both the historical account and the Buddhist doctrine are impervious to Western influence. The narrator invokes the reign of Rama III as it was the last before the Siamese ruling elite’s ‘quest for “*siwilai*” ’ discussed in chapter one and before an extensive Western presence in South East Asia. By the same token, the time and place of encounter between the anonymous character and the monk are almost allegorical. The site is on the Thai-Burmese border, far from American influence and presence. The narrative of the anecdote is on a different plain of existence from the novella’s present time and setting as one of the characters has to bring the narrative back to the present time by mocking the narrator of the anecdote that he must have dreamed it because of an upset stomach. The out-of-place joke serves as a discordance that pulls both the narrative and the reader back from the allegorical time. The author’s attempt to emerge out of ‘Westernness’ in search of a kind of ‘purer’ Thainess that would redeem the insufficient modern Thai identity is futile because it implies the exclusion, if not denial, of ‘living’ elements in the fabric of people’s lives in the modern world of constant intercultural contact and interaction. It is important to emphasise here that the role of cultures in the construction of cultural identities, such as ‘Thainess’ and ‘Westernness’, lies in the fact that ‘cultures are

not discrete phenomena; instead, they are always in contact with one another, and this contact leads to cultural mixed-ness' (Huddart, 2006: 7) that is hybridity.

Despite the explicit attempt of *Ngo ngao* to search for a 'solution' to the modern Thai identity problem in a preferable past and in Buddhism, the analysis of both *Made in* and *Ngo ngao* shows that the problem of the modern Thai identity in question lies in the government's attempt to define cultural identity in political terms and its control as well as concealment of information in the modern world where the flow of information and ideas transgresses any geographical boundaries. The above discussion of the two novellas shows that their narratives confine themselves neither to exclusively represent American people/Americanness nor Thai people/Thainess. In *Made in*, Sujit Wongthes the narrator always defines himself as an observer who is interpreting cultural phenomena and cultural behaviour enacted by both the Thai and the American. In doing so, despite the assumed 'journalistic distance', he is actually engaging himself in what is happening by comparing and interpreting it according to what he has learned at home similar to what Thorngboem does.

Consequently, in both *Made in* and *Ngo ngao*, the unfamiliar (Americanness) is selectively perceived, interpreted, negotiated and defined by the familiar (Thainess) both by means of negative and positive identification (Thongchai, 2004: 1-6). The two texts represent the dynamic interaction, negotiation and interpretation between the familiar and the unfamiliar. Such activities can only take place when one is removed from one's context and placed in the 'betwixt and between' state. Americanness in both texts is mediated through the eyes of the Thai characters. Simultaneously, Thainess is unsettled and put under rigorous scrutiny and intense reflection in relation to Americanness. It is between the borderlines of two mediated cultures that *Made in* and *Ngo ngao* emerge. In this way, travelling and writing in a liminal space unsettle the concept of 'home' especially in its capacity as the source of 'self'. The two novellas thus offer themselves as liminal works on the borderline between the 'Thai self' that has informed the narrators and the 'American other' that they are experiencing. Despite the attempt in *Ngo ngao* to locate 'Thainess' in history and religious doctrine impervious to Western influence, the narrative of the novella itself works against such an attempt. *Ngo ngao* is marked as much by fluid cultural

contacts, interaction and negotiation as *Made in* is. The two texts effectively portray the possibility of the emergence of new Thai cultural and political identities that are evolving, alive, dynamic and pluralistic as they are under constant challenge and redefinition by the subject, instead of a rigid and narrowly defined identity imposed by the state authority.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### MODERN IDENTITIES IN THE RURAL-URBAN CONTACT

Chapter two examined a reaction to the Thai government's attempted monopolisation of power to define the modern Thai identity in the context of the Cold War ideological warfare. It revealed the construction of a 'modern, state-defined Thai identity' and the insufficiency of such an imposed identity in the modern world marked by the flow of information, intercultural interaction, interpretation and negotiation represented by selected literary texts. This chapter discusses the two-volume novel *Thalay reu im* (The Insatiable Sea) (1972) by Suwanni (pseudonym of Suwanni Sukhonthiang, 1932-1984) and a short story *Pai talat-nam* (Going to the Floating Market) from the *Kai phi Bangkok/Kai Bangkok* series (1975) (Bangkok freelance guide/Bangkok guide) by Ta Tha-it (pseudonym of Chusak Rasijan). In the absence of conspicuous state authority, it looks specifically at the way in which the characters attempt to locate, define and negotiate their identity amidst the socio-economic and cultural changes brought about by 'development' (*kan-phattana*) and modernisation (*kan-tham-hai than-samai*). The development blueprint was implemented into Thailand's policy-making during the military regime of Sarit Thanarat (1958-1963) and carried forth by his successors Thanom Kittikhajon and Praphat Jarusathian (1963-1973). As discussed in chapter one, *kan-phattana* undeniably implies the very idea of (Western) modernity and modernisation as seen in government projects resulting from development policy on rapid industrialisation, building of infrastructure and rural development supported by the US government and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) under the World Bank. As development and modernisation discourse gathered momentum and was underway in both rural and urban areas, the ubiquitous presence of material development was felt in people's daily lives in a more invasive manner.

This chapter aims to illustrate, through an analysis of these two key literary texts, how modernity and modernisation play a crucial role in the dynamic relationship between the rural and the urban which, by means of the characters' interaction, informs how each perceives and defines oneself in relation to the other. In an attempt to understand the interplay between the subject's image of itself and the other's perception of it (Marshall, 1992: 93) in the transculturation phenomena, the

discussion of *Pai talat-nam* employs Mary Louise Pratt's concept of the 'contact zone' (2008). The concept offers a framework for discussing the case of American tourism to Thailand, as well as domestic tourism for Thai consumption within the context of rural-urban contact as portrayed in the short story.

From the focus on a tourist attraction site as a site of encounter with various 'Others', the chapter then turns its attention to class and social relations in the rural-urban contact. The more inclusive modernity in the form of mass transportation and easy rural-urban access for recreation that brings people into contact with one another also has another manifestation, i.e. modernity that 'produces difference, exclusion and marginalisation' (Giddens, 1991: 6). Suwanni's *Thalay reu im* shows how the characters grapple with changing social relations and the dynamics of modernity. The chapter makes use of Bakhtin's key terms 'polyphony' and 'heteroglossia' in order to render forth different voices and speech that resound in the novel in their capacity to express the characters' attempts to define themselves and find their place under the rubric of modernity in which different trajectories intersect.

### **Rural-Urban Contact and 'Literature for Life'**

The theme of rural-urban contact is by no means an unfamiliar subject matter in Thai prose literature. As discussed in chapter one, the first piece of prose fiction *Khwa-mai-phayabat* (1915) (Non-Vendetta) by Khru Liam (pseudonym) focused on the lives of inhabitants of modern Bangkok and offered criticism of the negative effects of modernity and urbanisation through the character of a rural woman who was removed from a 'pure' rural setting and came in contact with urban people and the heartland of modernity in the city (Thak, 2009). However, the focus on rural areas and the countryside in terms of poverty, life's hardship, the lack of infrastructure and social services, backwardness, and changes as a result of development and coming into contact with the urban became prevalent with the rise of *wannakam pheua chiwit* (Literature for Life) from the 1960s onwards. As discussed in chapter one part two, Literature for Life movement was part and parcel of the Thai intellectual and student activist movements and branched out its artistic expression from *sinlapa pheua chiwit* (Art for Life). 'Wannakam pheua chiwit' is also translated as 'literature for the sake of life, literature for the people' (Phillips, 1987: 57).

‘Art/Literature for Life’ was vitally influenced by Marxist ideology that art and literature must serve the people and society at large whether by rousing consciousness, representing social problems, criticising oppressing social institution or empowering the disadvantaged. Jit Phumisak (1930-1966), the great advocate of the Art for Life movement, wrote under the pseudonym Thipakorn: ‘Art that is truly great must be something that ordinary people can understand and admire on a par with high-level intellectuals, even though they look at art from different standpoints’ (1978:78). Literature for Life became a prominent landmark on the literary landscape of the 1970s, especially between 1973 and 1976, a brief period when freedom of expression was possible and permissible.<sup>1</sup> Writers on the political left gave voice to characters from disadvantaged backgrounds such as poor farmers, factory workers, prostitutes and the disabled (Platt, 2002: 87). However, the violent right-wing and military assault on civilian protesters on 6 October 1976 destroyed the intellectual and student movements, drove activists to the jungle and so disrupted the production and readership of Literature for Life, as discussed in chapter one, part two. By 1982 and with the decline of the Communist Party of Thailand, Literature for Life had also lost its ability to inspire and capture the attention of the readers because of ‘the political stridency and artistic simplicity (or simple-mindedness)’ such as ‘formulaic plots, stock characters, and repetitive themes [that] had made the literature predictable and dull’ (ibid. 170).

However, one of the most iconic literary works and the predecessor of ‘Literature for Life’ of the 1970s that has stood the test of time and initially foregrounded an issue of rural poverty and the hardship of peasantry is *Fa bor kan* (The Sky Cannot Divide Us) (1958), a collection of short stories by Lao Khamhom (pseudonym of Khamsing Srinawk b.1930).<sup>2</sup> Not long after *Fa bor kan* was published, Sarit executed a coup d’etat, declared martial law and established a military government. Many progressive writers were arrested and Lao Khamhom was warned to keep a low profile. All copies of *Fa bor kan* were recalled from retailers and the book disappeared from public readership until its second reprint in 1969 (Chusak, 2008b) and has since been resurrected.<sup>3</sup> Most of the stories in the collection are narrated through the eyes of the peasants/villagers who are dealing with some

<sup>1</sup> See Manas, 1982; Harrison, 1994; Platt, 2002; Prajak, 2005; and Boccuzzi, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> It is available in English under the title *The Politician and Other Stories* by Khamsing Srinawk, translated by Domnarn Garden with introduction by Michael Smithes, 1991 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition).

<sup>3</sup> The book’s fifteenth reprint was in 2002.

form, of modernisation such as the government's development policy embodied in the figures of doctors, horticultural experts, state officials and election campaigners all of whom claim to be dispelling rural backwardness. These stories focus on the confrontation and negotiation between the villagers and incomers from the city who assume authority, knowledge and the high moral ground, thus exercising their power over the powerless, 'ignorant' and 'morally weak' peasants whom the urbanites condemned as 'stupid, stingy, poor, pain' (*ngo, ngok, jon, jep*).

However, Chusak Phattarakulvanit poignantly argues that despite the tendency of the critics to interpret the peasant characters in the collection as 'ignorant and superstitious' (*ngo-khrao ngom-ngai*), albeit in euphemism, these characters actually approach the matter at hand with a different set of values, which were unrecognised by official authority, as they assert and negotiate their subjectivity (2008b). The urban and middle-class readers and critics assumed their 'moral superiority' to judge and condemn the peasants for their 'moral inferiority'. In the same article that critically looks at *Fa bor kan* and its reception, Chusak concludes with the argument that the 'middle-class morals' and values were constructed by the process of modernisation itself, since it was the middle and upper echelons of society who most benefited from the development and modernisation process. The 'middle-class morals' and values have been a luxury product that only the middle class can afford and utilise as moral criteria to judge and dismiss other (poor) people who cannot uphold them (ibid.93) or, to be more accurate, have a different set of morals and values. Chusak's argument and conclusion explicitly criticise and challenge the middle-class readership and the intellectual elite who, with their self-righteousness and 'moral superiority', failed to recognise and encourage the inclusion of the poor into national policy-making and politics as a way to solve problems of poverty and disenfranchisement that is the ultimate aim of 'Literature for Life'. The criticism implicitly revisits the question 'why is socially reflective literature unable to solve society's problems?' that has undergone many attempts to answer it.<sup>4</sup> Chusak seems to answer that it was the failure of the Thai middle-class who were the main consumers of Literature for Life.

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<sup>4</sup> The question is the title of an article by Noppon Prachakul. 2009 (1998). *Tham mai wannakam sathorn sangkhom jeung kae panha sangkhom mai dai*. His article engaged a response from another critic, Duangmon Jitjamnong. 2004 (1999). *Seup neuang jak khamtham 'Tham mai wannakam sathorn sangkhom jeung kae panha sangkhom mai da'* (On the Question 'Why is Socially Reflective Literature Unable to Solve Society's Problems?')

Though both Suwanni and Ta Tha-it found their literary matrix in the Literature for Life movement, their works depart from the socialist-realist mode of literary expression. This is by no means to say that their works are devoid of social engagement. The two writers maintained rural-urban contact and the effects of modernisation as their key issues, albeit in different writing styles and approaches. Each writer thus appeals to different audience groups. While Suwanni's readers are mainly female, Ta's are male. The readership of their works concentrated in the urban areas, the provincial cities and rural market towns where there were bookshops or magazine stalls and, more importantly, buyers of magazines in which these works initially serialised. Another vital characteristic shared by both Suwanni and Ta Tha-it is that they were both educated migrant writers of the same generation who benefited from seeking higher education in the capital. They came to Bangkok to pursue higher education and were successful in different ways; Suwanni remained in the capital, built her career and made it her home, whereas Ta Tha-it finally returned to Uttaradit province, his hometown, to work in education and later become a writer. Leaving their provincial hometowns in pursuit of education and opportunities in the city, both of them were fully aware of the fact that 'the same forces made possible their own success and the degradation of the people and the environment with which they had grown up' (Anderson, 1985:43). The two writers' social commitments found expression in the selected works in this chapter. The chapter aims to illustrate how each text employed the rural-urban 'contact' as a means to represent the characters' attempt to construct their identity amidst the flux of modernity.

### **Tourism as a 'Contact Zone' and a Site of Negotiation in *Pai talat-nam***

The following discussion of the urban-rural contact in the context of tourism as portrayed in the *Kai phi Bangkok/Kai Bangkok* Series (hereafter, *Kai phi*) by Ta Tha-it makes use of Pratt's concept of the 'contact zone' as a framework. As Pratt defines it,

contact zone...refer[s] to the space of imperial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict. [...] The term 'contact' foregrounds the interactive, improvisational dimensions of imperial encounters so easily ignored or

suppressed by accounts of conquest and domination told from the invader's perspective. A '*contact*' perspective emphasises how subjects get constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among colonisers and colonised, or travellers and 'travelees', not in terms of separateness, but in terms of co-presence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, and often within radically asymmetrical relations of power. (2008:8, my emphasis)

Despite the fact that the selected work to be investigated does not involve the situation of direct colonisation or long-term relations, the form, contents and context of *Kai phi* offer an arena where urban-rural and Thai-Western encounters reveal themselves dynamically and intensely in various ways. The relations among American or urban Thai travellers and rural Thai travelleses reveal interaction, (mis)interpretation and practices wherein 'subjects get constituted in and by their relations to each other' (ibid.). Tourism in Thailand, as Anderson argues, was the by-product, if not the direct result, of three inter-locking forces that brought rapid and expansive changes to Thai society from the 1960s (1977: 15). These forces were, first, the American post-World War II expulsion of the European colonial powers from South East Asia; second, the US government's decision to use Thailand as the heartland of its expansionism; and third, 'the technological revolution that made mass tourism a major industry in the Far East after World War II' (ibid.:14). As mentioned in chapter one, these three forces, together with the infrastructure built with American support for the US counter-insurgency strategy, equipped Bangkok from the 1960s both as a tourist destination in its own right and a gateway to South East Asia and the Far East. Thailand and particularly Bangkok were safe, convenient and exotic.

Bangkok did not only function as the economic and political centre, but also the cultural centre that defined a 'national culture' through both international and, to a lesser degree, domestic tourism. The city as national cultural centre actively and selectively utilised the countryside and exercised 'the folklorization of regional differences' in the construction of national culture (Rhum, 1996: 333). That is to say acceptable regional differences can 'stimulate the interest of people in other regions in the nation as a whole' (ibid.) and, in this way, the folklorization turns regional differences into '“authentic” expressions of regional Thai culture' (ibid.334). While modern mass transportation offered unprecedented access across and within national boundaries, the construction of national culture and tourism complemented each other. 'National culture' has become a commodity that is exportable and appeals to

both the international tourist market and domestic consumption.

Stories comprising the whole series of *Kai phi* (12 collections) were published weekly from 1971 (under the Thanom-Praphat military dictatorship after the peak of the American Era in Thailand) over several years until after the bloody coup of 1976. Most of the stories in the series appeared in *Fa meuang Thai rai sapda* (Thai Sky Weekly, 1969-1988), one of the most popular weekly magazines of the time, read by the urban population. From the collection entitled *Talui ke khlap: kai Bangkok chut 7* (Venturing into a Gay Club: Bangkok Guide Collection 7) (1975), the short story *Pai talat-nam* (Going to the Floating Market) provides a representation of the construction of Thainess in relation to modernity and Westernness which evolves within a framework of urban and rural contact.

The author's name, Ta Tha-it, is the pseudonym of Chusak Rasijan, one of the most prolific and popular writers of his time (1970s-1980s), who became famous overnight after one of his *Kai Bangkok* stories was published in *Fa meuang Thai rai sapda*, as a substitution for Rong Wongsawan's<sup>5</sup> belated story. Once famous, Ta also wrote adventure, action and erotic novels and short stories for other magazines. His touristic, semi-documentary style for the Thai reader is the first to use this formula (Chris Sarakham, 1999: 230). As a documentary, the story functions as a tourist guide and authenticates itself as a real experience giving factual information of time and place as well as historical background and anecdotes, and even direct quotations from historical texts. If there is any omission of facts, this evasiveness and confidentiality reinforce the supposed truth of the account. Each episode, however, is also self-contained and qualifies as a short story having a main character(s), a plot, certain complications and resolution at the close. This style enables the narrator/main character to orchestrate both factual and fictional elements in order to create a story palatable to a mass readership.

The first-person narrator of the stories, Ta Tha-it himself, is a 'ghost guide' (*kai phi* or unauthorised/freelance guide) who approaches clients on his own. Most are rather 'atypical' tourists who prefer not to book a package tour from an

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<sup>5</sup> Rong Wongsawan (1932-2009) started his writing career as a journalist/columnist since the late 1950s. He became increasingly recognised in the 1960s for his unconventional and creative use of language in his documentary, articles, short stories and novels such as changing of the spellings of old words so that they delivered new meanings, coinage of new words, direct translation of English words into Thai. His subject matters reflected the world of the common, often underprivileged, people who were neglected and dismissed by society at large. His iconic novel *Sanim soi* (Unwilling to endure) (1961) which deals with lives of prostitutes is discussed in chapter five.

established company but travel on their own or randomly find a private guide. These tourists are likely to be approached by freelance guides at Bangkok International Airport, hotels (some hotel staff receive commission from freelance guides), and major tourist attractions in Bangkok. As much as it is illegal and one risks being conned, the *kai phi* offers a personal and flexible service, and specially catered-to-preference programmes that one would be unable to find from a travel agency's packages with their fixed schedules and stock programmes. The *kai phi* narrator is, thus, on the borderline and able to move across between different versions of Thainess in trying to accommodate his clients' desire. However, he usually asserts himself as a pseudo-Thai cultural ambassador and concludes his stories in a nationalistic, moralistic, even conservative tone.

The combination of semi-documentary, semi-short story style together with the narrator's presentation of himself as a *kai phi* with tongue-in-cheek yet earnest narrative voices are not the only factors that contribute to the work's success. Its popularity is crucially due to Thai people's interest in the *farang* experience in Thailand and the intertwining of different narratives such as English lesson titbits, background stories about *farang* clients, and Thai historical anecdotes. As the guide/narrator takes his Thai reader on a sightseeing trip in Thailand through *farang* eyes and experiences, he also tells stories of their *faux pas* due to cultural difference and teaches English to the reader. Travelling around Bangkok and Thailand, the narrator (re)introduces Thailand's tourist attractions to the Thai reader, who consequently learns about little-known places in her/his own country. If the places are well known, the stories he has to tell about them are often less heard of. If both places and stories are well known, they become interesting because of the *farang* point of view and reaction that Ta depicts. Thailand therefore becomes exotic for the Thai as seen through the eyes of *farang* tourists. Such a situation is lightheartedly portrayed in the short story *Pai talat-nam*. It is evident in the story that as the narrator represents Thailand and Thainess to his *farang* clients as well as to the Thai reader, he is at once defining them, himself and his fellow Thai. *Pai talat-nam* depicts cultural assumption, negotiation and exchange in the context of tourism and urban-rural contact and illustrates how the city plays a crucial role in the incorporation of the rural into 'national identity' precisely and ironically because the rural is its Other.

### **Orientalisation from within: *Pai talat-nam* and the Rustic and Royal Routes to the Modern Thai ‘Self’**

In *Pai talat-nam*, the urban, confining space of Bangkok stands in stark contrast to the rural and liberating setting of Damnoen Saduak which lies fifty miles to the west of Bangkok in Ratchaburi province, where the floating market is located. Before embarking on his trip to the floating market with three young American women, the narrator tells the story of the discovery of Damnoen Saduak as a tourist attraction by an anonymous guide who was fired from his company for taking *farang* clients off the set itinerary. After the sacrifice of the guide, Damnoen Saduak became one of the most popular attractions among tourists. The narrator then imparts the tale of his own adventure with three young American women travelling on a tight budget and hoping to experience the ‘real’ Thailand. The women (Dunes, Cathy, and Joan) meet the narrator at a famous temple in Bangkok and ask him for directions to Damnoen Saduak and the River Kwai<sup>6</sup> Bridge as they plan to go there by themselves. Given detailed directions, the women end up wanting to hire him at a much lower rate than he usually charges for a River Kwai trip. The narrator is so compelled by their youthful beauty, easy, outgoing manner and ‘pitiful look’ (*du na-song-san*) that he agrees to take the job and feels excited to be surrounded by these sexually attractive women and to gaze at them to his heart’s content. They arrange to meet for the trip the next day. Before parting, one of the women asks if the narrator lives by himself and if he has enough space for them to stay with him, explaining that they want to see how ordinary Thai people live and will pay him rent. Once again he agrees out of fun and tries unsuccessfully to refuse to take the money as the women insist on paying. An insistence on paying rent when a host welcomes a guest to stay at his/her house is uncommon, if not rude, in Thai culture. The narrator explains to the reader that his clients insist on paying him, though it is only a little money, because it is an American custom. One of the women says, ‘[In America] we just don’t do anyone a favour for free. Each earns one’s own money. We can be friends. But money, once spent, you need to earn it again and that’s difficult’ (Ta, 1975:88). Then, each pays two baht for a bottle of Pepsi, including the narrator who comments on it as specifically

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<sup>6</sup> Despite the fact that the name of the river is pronounced ‘Khwaë,’ the river is known as ‘River Kwai’ following an Academy Award-winning film in 1957 ‘The Bridge on the River Kwai’. The name of the river becomes a joke among tour guides as *khwai* means ‘water buffalo’ in Thai. It also indicates, by association, ‘stupidity’.

‘American-style friendship’ (ibid.88).<sup>7</sup> The story that follows shows different cultural interpretations and assumptions between the Thai and *farang*, such as the women’s view of the narrator’s ‘poor’ living condition as ‘pleasantly simple’. It describes the journey from their cheap hotel near Hualamphong railway station<sup>8</sup> to the narrator’s one-room, rented house in an orchard on the outskirts of Bangkok, the bus and long-tailed boat trip to Damnoen Saduak and the exciting encounters at the floating market. Upon telling how lively the market and how happy Thai life are, the narrator inserts a lengthy reference to an official account of Rama V’s private outing to the region describing the fun the king had while he was there. The story ends with a description of the narrator and his three tourists’ return to the bus terminal from the floating market and their readiness to continue with their trip. The ending emphasises the narrator’s conclusions on how cheap it is to travel in Thailand, if one only knows how.

Despite the focus of *Pai talat-nam* on atypical American tourists, it reveals that in their earnest rejection of being stereotypical, touristy *farang*, the three women in the story become yet another stereotype, that of the ‘*farang khi-nok*’ or low-class *farang*. The term ‘*farang khi-nok*’ plays on the pun of *farang* as it means both (Caucasian) foreigner and guava in Thai. The phrase literally means ‘bird-dropping guava’, a guava tree that grows from a seed in bird dropping. Figuratively speaking, it is therefore used to indicate the rootless, low-class *farang*. To other Thais in the story and in general, the three women differ from other Western tourists because they declare themselves to be poor and reject travelling in the comfort and ease of the classy tourist way. They insist on using public transportation and strive to do things ordinary Thai people do. Their underlying assumption is that their tight budget style will enable them to see the ‘true Thai’, which in effect turns out to be what they indiscriminately see as ‘the Orient’. These women travelled to the Philippines before their arrival in Thailand. They had started their itinerary in Japan where they had lived for some years because their parents are military officers posted at an American

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<sup>7</sup> This particular scene can be read as an attempt to remind the reader that American aids for Thailand are not free and the cost of which might come at a high price.

<sup>8</sup> Hualamphong is the common name of the Bangkok Railway Station, the biggest and oldest train station in Thailand built in 1910 and opened in 1916. The iron-and-glass station hall resembles that of the Frankfurt (Main) Hauptbahnhof. It has been a doorway to Bangkok for rural migration, a ‘contact zone’ *per se*. There are many shop houses converted into run-down cheap hotels around it as well as job agencies. The area around Hualamphong at night is notorious as an area for sex workers. From the 1960s to early 1980s the Hualamphong was famous among backpackers for cheap hotels (Tony Wheeler, *South-East Asia on a shoestring*, Lonely Planet, Imprint details unavailable).

base there. The three young women appear to come from well-to-do families and are unlikely to be poor. They tend to familiarise things they find in Thailand by associating them with what they have seen in Japan and what they have read about the Orient. Their Orientalist tourist perspective reveals itself on various occasions. For example, when they are unable to pronounce the narrator's Thai name 'Ta' in the high tone with which it is said and also refuse to call him by the Anglicised version of his title, 'Mr. Guide', as he suggests, they choose to call him by their Japanese friend's name 'Yoda' instead. Thereby reinventing him within their own framework of the 'foreign' and 'exotic'. Moreover, when these women see the narrator's rented wooden house, contrary to his confession to the reader that its bareness is due to his being poor, they see it as pleasantly rustic and the epitome of the simple happiness and peacefulness of real Thai life. One of them adds, 'It's very appropriate we call you 'Yoda' because you are exactly like the Japanese eating on the floor' (ibid.:92). As much as they strive to find Thainess, they readily appropriate the Thainess represented by the narrator into the gloss of Orientalist discourse. These tourists actually seek to have their expectations of Thailand or, more precisely, the Orient met; not to have them challenged.

The women's adherence to authentic Oriental/Thai life as rustic and backward but endowed with simple happiness and comfort is foreshadowed early in the story. For them, it does not matter what Thainess is or whether it has ever existed, they already have the 'ideal Thai' in mind and will not be satisfied until they find themselves such an experience. When they try to convince the narrator to let them stay with him, one of them announces, 'We want to see how ordinary Thai people live. In the Philippines, we stayed in a house of a student and a mother who sold grilled fish. It was such fun, though kind of difficult' (ibid.:88). With the underlying assumption about the Orient as such, it is no surprise, though of course a faux pas, when one of the women guesses that a small police booth (*pom tamruat*) by the canal is a toilet. She rationalises, 'A book I read about the Orient said that the Asians usually relieve themselves into rivers. Surely, that is the toilet' (ibid.:97).

Another way in which their expectations are met is in finding 'exotic food'. Walking past a *khanom-jin* (fresh rice noodles topped with curry) peddler, one of them asks, 'Is that Thai food? Why is it covered by muslin?' (ibid.:103). The guide struggles to find a translation for it, knowing that the somewhat direct translation of

*khanom* (snack)-*jin* (Chinese) as ‘*Chinese noodles*’ and ‘*Chinese cake*’ (ibid.:103-4) will not do.<sup>9</sup> He finally replies, ‘Thai spaghetti!’ (ibid.:104). The women exclaim, ‘Wow [...] Unbelievable. Thai people eat spaghetti! Let’s see if it is like real Italian spaghetti’ (ibid.:104). The guide sees that his clients are determined to try *khanom-jin* thus he leads them towards the peddler who then lifts up the muslin cloth.

‘Why are they all white, Yoda?’ [asked Dunes]  
 ‘They’re made from plain rice flour with no added colour, so they’re white’.  
 ‘No eggs too?’ asked [Dunes] and put some in her mouth.  
 ‘Not yummy at all, Cathy!’  
 I pointed to the curry in a green pot.  
 ‘If you don’t top them with the sauce, they won’t taste of anything. Let the peddler serve you first’. (ibid.: 104-5)

The peddler tells the guide that this is the first time any Western tourists have actually tried her food. Some of them showed an interest before but their guides always stopped them, she says. The three tourists certainly enjoy their ‘Thai spaghetti’. As they expect to encounter the exotic, the fact that they are told the food is Thai spaghetti is unexpected and the only way they can make sense of it is to relocate the food back into what they know, that is, ‘Italian food’. The unexpected turns out to bring forth an expectation of the familiar (not white, with egg) which is challenged by the fact that it is not spaghetti as they know it. The ‘familiar-yet-unknown’ Thai spaghetti in effect fulfils their quest for exotic Oriental food. Note that their backward, rustic Orientalist discourse is so extensive that Dunes feels free to suspend all etiquette snatching the white noodles from their container and putting them into her mouth without asking the peddler (and immediately reproves them though in a language unknown to the woman). The representation of the ill-mannered American woman also serves to reinforce a stereotype that Thai people have of the American as uncouth (*yap-khai mai riap-roi*). The incidents of the police booth and the *khanom-jin*, the women’s attitudes towards the guide’s rented house and their ideas about travelling evidently demonstrate that these tourists travel to have their expectations of an ‘encounter with the exotic other’ met and confirmed, rather than interrogated and challenged. Regardless of the notion of ‘Thainess’ that they construct and the fact that they engross themselves in an Orientalist-tourist discourse wanting to visit places such as Damnoen Saduak and the River Kwai Bridge like

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<sup>9</sup> The literal translation of *khanom-jin* is ‘Chinese snack’ which also does not convey what kind of food it is. It is actually a proper name that cannot be translated directly into English.

other tourists in search of ‘exotic Thailand’, these Americans differentiate themselves from other tourists by going independently or at least travelling in the same way that they assume Thai people do, as opposed to the tourist way.

Having met many of these ‘impoverished tourists’ (*nak-thong-thiaw anatha*) before, the narrator is by no means surprised by their style of travelling and even asserting that they are better than some pathetic tourists who thoughtlessly spend their money. He is impressed and inspired by their ‘authentic traveller’ discourse, as opposed to that of the ‘package tourist’. He dreams of following suit and tells his reader:

One day if I have a chance, I’d travel the world with only a backpack and a little money in my pocket. Life would be such fun providing that I wouldn’t run into a foreign gangster’s knife or get my throat cut by thieves before returning. It’s really risky travelling in this style. Look at these three white women who dare ask to stay with a Thai man they met for only a few minutes.  
(*ibid.*:89-90)

The narrator’s dream of travelling is visibly informed by an exotic Orientalist-tourist perspective. With its notion of the romantic loner hero and the aura of an adventurous odyssey that have always inspired the West to travel and conquer the East, the narrator’s concept and definition of travelling is a ‘Westernised’ one. Note that while he asserts himself as an individual traveller in the above passage, he ironically confirms the Thais’ stereotypical notions of American people, particularly the women, as adventurous, fun-loving and sexually free. He defines Thai women in contrast by following the abovementioned passage with his comment, ‘Thai women aren’t like this. Even my girlfriend thought I was ill-intended inviting her to my house. Sigh...what a stress’ (*ibid.*:90). In his comment, it is unclear whether he was disappointed because his girlfriend assumed that he invited her home to have sex with her or because she viewed his assumed sexual intention as ill-willed. His tongue-in-cheek tone makes it uncertain whether he actually wishes Thai women to be more free-spirited or he is quite glad that they are more reserved and ‘being Thai’, unlike these American women.

The narrator’s assertion of Thai women’s difference from *farang* women and, by implication, of Thainess as uniquely different from *farang*-ness is unequivocal in his narratorial voice to the Thai reader rather than through his character’s voice to his clients. When the narrator decides to go along with these women’s attempt to find

‘real Thainess’, he at once collaborates with and is subsumed into an Orientalist discourse. Without realising it, he is actually perpetuating their need to locate and fix the ‘quintessential rustic Orient’ and adopts their Orientalist discourse in his polarisation of the urban and the rural, defining the latter as ‘quintessential Thainess’. In doing so the narrator discursively exercises a process of ‘Orientalisation from within’ by turning the rural into the object of an Orientalist gaze. And, by the same token, he is enacting a process of ‘Thaification’ as he authenticates the rural as ‘truly Thai’.

The narrator sets his timeworn rented house in Bangkhunnon, Bangkok’s ‘provincial’ area across the Chaophraya river to the west, in contrast with the hustle, bustle and heat of the capital, represented by the contrasting image of the city’s central Hualamphong railway station. He describes the orchard surrounding his house, ‘...the shady fruit trees stand and the canal looks soothingly cool’ (ibid.:90). The women’s impression further reinforces this ‘rural’ Thai atmosphere, ‘We’ve never thought Thai people would live in such happiness. You’ve probably never felt hot, Yoda’ (ibid.:91). However, despite it being deceptively rural, the fact of its being a rented house in Bangkok amidst all the city’s money-driven activities and corruption is pointed out when he replies, ‘It isn’t hot at all if I’m in the orchard, but a human being needs to earn a living. [...] I can’t just sit listening to bamboo leaves rustle in the breeze. Can’t live on rose apples either. The landlady is waiting with her hand open at the end of each month’ (ibid.:91). The image of the Bangkokian capitalist landlady is put in sharp contrast with a lady who offers to help him hand the boat fee to a boatman in Damnoen Saduak. The narrator imparts this scene with overly emphasised appreciation: ‘I’ve never met someone with such kindness. Hearing that fills my heart. No one in Bangkok, the City of Angels,<sup>10</sup> is willing to help anyone else. I fall in love with Damnoen’s local kindness right from that minute’ (ibid.:96). Bangkok is demonised as a profit-driven city of selfishness; the only way to truly experience Thainess is to go rural.

Damnoen Saduak not only contrasts with Bangkok in terms of the people’s genuine kindness, it also comes to stand for an innocent way of life not yet contaminated by tourism and the *farang*. Though the narrator imparts snippets of a boy selling souvenirs to tourists and some boatwomen chaotically halting tourists in

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<sup>10</sup> Bangkok is called *Krung-thep* in Thai. *Krung* means city and *thep* angel.

order to sell them their goods (ibid.:99), he deliberately asks the reader to gloss over these anomalies and instead focus on a spectacle of innocence. He painstakingly depicts the lively, narrow canal packed with boats whose owners are busy selling their goods unaffected by the tourists' gaze because 'this is the daily life they've lived from birth to death' (ibid.:99). Damnoen Saduak's rural space is therefore uncontaminated and 'truly Thai'. Trying to authenticate the rural scene, its agricultural abundance, and 'rural non-materialistic richness' as features of 'quintessential Thainess', Ta further delineates the account of King Chulalongkorn's visit to the region in disguise. The king and his retinue were invited to stop for a meal by an old village woman who served them simple food in bowls made of coconut shell, not knowing who they were. The royal anecdote here crucially appeals to middle-class sentiments, since the middle-class have always been the majority of literary consumers. Traditionally held as the ultimate symbol of Thainess, the king's presence in the story certifies the genuine kindness and simplicity of the rural as being 'authentically Thai' and guarantees it as a site worthy of visiting.

Foregrounding Damnoen Saduak's characteristics in his narrative of the rural, the narrator's emphasis on the simplicity and liveliness of Thai happiness found in the scene explicitly reveals his definition of Thainess and what it stands for. His perception of Thainess is innocence, generosity and non-materialism and belongs exclusively to the rural. The narrator single-mindedly associates 'authentic Thainess' with rural space in a way that is similar to the American tourists' postulation that being rustic and backward yet simple and happy is quintessentially Oriental.

The final point to be made about the short story directly involves its exoticisation of Thailand for domestic consumption. This point specifically relates to the aforementioned middle-class readership and how the royal element appeals to them. To see why it is necessary to emphasise the role of the middle-class, it is important to keep in mind that, as a matter of fact and in the temporal context of the work's readership (1970s), sightseeing around Thailand for recreation and holiday was the leisure mostly enjoyed by the middle-class who had both the time and money for it.<sup>11</sup> They did not go sightseeing around Thailand like the three women in search

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<sup>11</sup> Even though from the 1930s onwards an extensive railway system was operated by State Railway of Thailand and connected major towns and provinces to Bangkok, 'travel for pleasure' was a new concept in Thai society and (upper and middle) class-bound. Pilgrimage (travel for religious aims) to places of Buddhist significance in the country was also carried out by those with more means and combined with pleasure. Physical mobility for the working-class and peasantry often relates to

of real Thainess by insisting on using public transportation and doing things that ordinary (poor) Thai people do. The constructed Thainess in the story as rustic and simple might not appear so attractive to the middle-class. The narrator's appeal to encourage sightseeing in the country by emphasising its cheap cost and rustic adventure, following the *farang* style, offers itself as a way to restore this constructed Thainess. Moreover, as the readers follow the rustic path to exotic Thailand, they also simultaneously re-tread the royal route to the heart of Thainess.

Damnoen Saduak, the rural tourist attraction, is presented in the story as a site of encounter with various 'Others'. The space offers a series of otherness from different aspects: the royal ruler's encounter with his naïve yet loyal *chaoban* (villager), inferior Other; the tourists' with the exotic, Oriental Other; and the tour guide's with his exotic, rural Other. While a touristy rural site like Damnoen Saduak permits the construction of a 'national culture' and modern Thai identity which embraces the court and the foreign, the expanding landscape of the capital also offers itself as a site of contest between the 'traditional' value system and the 'modern' capitalist mode of relationship. Such an issue will be examined in the following section.

### ***Thalay reu im* (The Insatiable Sea): Consuming the Modern World**

Suwanni's *Thalay reu im* (The Insatiable Sea) (1972) portrays the bright-turned-bleak lives of a group of Bangkokian teenagers in the 1970s as a result of modernisation, urbanisation, rebellious behaviour and drug abuse. Most of the events are set in modernised Bangkok and the recreational rural areas that attract the urbanites. The settings emphasises both the landscape of the expanding capital and the mindscape of the people coping with and struggling in the flux of rapid socio-economic and cultural currents. The novel represents and critiques the perception and attitudes of these middle-class Thai teenagers towards modernity (*khwam-than-samai* or *khwam-pen samai-mai*) which comes to be a synonym of Westernness (*khwam-pen-tawan-tok*) or *farang* (see chapter one for discussion of this term). However, it

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livelihood and seasonal migration for work. Since the inception of Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) in 1960, it was clear that tourism in Thailand targeted Western visitors. The first overseas TAT office was open in New York in 1965 whereas the first local office was opened in Chiang Mai three years later. See <http://www.tourismthailand.org/about-tat/> (accessed 28 February 2010) and <http://www.trangtrip.com/index.php?mo=10&art=178801> (accessed 4 June 2010) for background information about TAT.

does not do so by simplistically putting these teenagers into sharp relief against adults who represent traditional values, authority and beliefs in order to validate the latter and disprove the former. Instead, the novel addresses how adult characters from various backgrounds perceive, strive to comprehend and no less struggle to cope with the new social dynamics.

*Thalay reu im* is not only about the blunders and troubles of teenagers, broken families and drugs. It significantly presents those issues through the depiction of Bangkok in transition, with these teenagers like guinea pigs exploring modernity amidst the different voices and forms of speech that orchestrate the novel. Though the reader follows the story of the main characters, s/he does not only 'hear' their voices but also the minor characters' whose presence is scattered throughout the story. These characters from the less advantageous class are, for example, the main female character's family chauffeurs, gardeners, maids and housekeeper as well as nameless figures from the service sector of Bangkok, low-rank police officers, striptease dancers, prostitutes and taxi-drivers. Though these minor characters are insignificant in terms of plot, they offer contrasting voices and comment on what is taking place in the scene. These voices and comment, inaudible to the main characters, open up yet another layer of meaning and a means of communication to the reader. The novel makes audible the characters' contentious voices and forms of speech due to differences in age group, social class, set of values and personal agendas, which in turn show how these characters are, in different degrees, affected by modernisation and its attendant social dynamics.

The subject matter that *Thalay reu im* directly deals with, teenage drug abuse and promiscuity, is exemplary of Suwanni's unconventional and 'daring' novelistic representation. She seemed to go a step ahead of her contemporary female writers. Though her subject matter revolves around family problems and/or the lives of her female characters, the lifestyles and attitudes of these female characters often challenge social norms and female gender roles.<sup>12</sup> Most of her female characters are by no means innocent or confined to a conservative literary representation of 'good woman' whose virginity and reputable virtues are crucial to her 'value' as a woman. Suwanni's characters are fallible and flawed, ranging from intelligent-but-naïve

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<sup>12</sup> Suwanni divorced her husband, Thawi Nanthakhwang, a well-known artist, on the ground of unfaithfulness and flirtatious behaviour and raised their four children by herself. Her decision was, at the time, perceived as unconventional since such a male behaviour was mostly tolerated by Thai women (Orathai, 2005: 75).

country girls surviving in Bangkok; rebellious rich teenagers learning about life the hard way; single-mothers struggling to raise their children; and ambitious, poor, beautiful women who would do anything to be famous. Though the writer's representation of these female characters is non-judgemental, 'progressive', heavily informed by social reality and by no means simplistic, studies of her works are rather 'conventional', with only a few exceptions. On the one hand, there are summarisations and categorisations of the female characteristics and plots in her novels (Ing-on, 2004); a 'mechanical' classification of her literary devices (Phlearnphit, 1982) and poetic language (Ing-on, 2004); and a treatment of her novels as a 'realistic mirroring' of social problems such as the broken family and drug abuse (Jintana, 1984). On the other hand, there is a treatment of her work as a crucial contribution to the representation of women in modern Thai literature (Kepner, 1996); and a focus on the representation of female gender roles and sexuality as well as male and female relations and sexuality in her work (Orathai, 2005). In *Thalay reu im*, the treatment of issues of modern Thai male and female identities calls for close examination in its own right, especially when Suwanni presents the issue of teenage promiscuity as symptomatic of modernity. Therefore, in order to extensively discuss the topic, it seems appropriate to tackle Suwanni's 'daring' novelistic representation of modern Thai male and female identities specifically in the following chapters four and six.

### **Theoretical Framework**

By means of Bakhtin's key terms 'polyphony' and 'heteroglossia', this section aims to discuss the different voices and speech varieties rendered in *Thalay reu im* in their capacity to express the characters' attempt to negotiate, locate, and define themselves within the context of modernity. The two general forms of heteroglossia are ' "social languages" within a single *national* language' and ' "different national languages within the same *culture*" ' (Vice, 1997:19). These two forms, within the genre of novel, are manifested in three ways: 'first, characters' dialogue and inner speech; second, the various kinds of "speech genre" [...] [which are] languages of a professional, class, literary school, newspaper, and so on; and third, texts which reproduce a culture's various dialects and languages' (ibid., my editing). In the context of *Thalay reu im*, the discussion will focus on the first form of heteroglossia,

that is the social languages within the Thai national language which are expressed through the characters and various kinds of social speech types they employ. A differentiation between polyphony and heteroglossia and the significant role of the characters in relation to them are offered by Sue Vice as follows:

[P]olyphony is a way of realising heteroglossia in the novel, without being identical to heteroglossia. 'Polyphony' means 'multi-voicedness', while 'heteroglossia' means 'multi-languagedness', and this apparently small difference in meaning is very significant. Polyphony refers to the arrangement of heteroglot variety into an aesthetic pattern. One of the principal ways of ensuring the presence of the different voices of heteroglossia in the novel is the creation of fictional characters. These characters may contribute in a number of ways to the heteroglot whole of the novel, both by using a particular kind of language and by having a particular viewpoint on the world around them. (1997: 113)

The emphasis on multi-voicedness (polyphony) and multi-languagedness (heteroglossia) is evident in Bakhtin's definition of the novel. Bakhtin proposed that,

the novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types [...] and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organised. The internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behaviour, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups [...]—this internal stratification present in everyday language at any given moment of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre. (Bakhtin and Holquist, 1981: 262-3) (my editing)

The diversity of social speech types and the diversity of individual voices which signify the internal stratification in everyday language indeed foregrounds differentiation and makes discernible the implicit or even latent conflicts within the novel. As Vice points out, citing Allon White (1994) in her clarification,

heteroglossia does not simply consist of a neutral series of different languages; these languages are bound to conflict at the very least with the 'author's' language, with each other, and with any surrounding languages which do not necessarily appear in the text. [...] Heteroglossia is thus a double-voiced discourse, as it 'serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author'.<sup>13</sup> (1997: 19) (my editing)

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<sup>13</sup> Fully aware of the arguments concerned the concept of the author, Vice often clarifies 'author' in her citations of the term as 'narrator'.

Such foregrounding of conflict and difference rendered by heteroglossia in the novel makes Bakhtin's notion applicable to the discussion of *Thalay reu im*, wherein the diversities of social speech types and individual voices, either contentiously or harmoniously, come into play and reveal that both the main and minor characters are similarly, i.e. differently in degree but not in kind, affected by the rapid social changes brought forth by modernisation.

The above-mentioned definition of the novel and heteroglossia as a defining feature of the novel are evident in Suwanni's *Thalay reu im*. The novel distinctively shows one of the most admired characteristics of Suwanni's writing style that is her use of language. Kepner comments on her colloquialism: 'Suwanni had a wonderful ear for the style, slang, and cadences of everyday conversation, and was by turns hilarious, morose, wanton, and self-deprecating in her inimitably self-forgiving way' (1996: 112). Suwanni's use of language does not restrict itself to colloquialism, but also includes her poetic sensitivity and attention to detail. Two literary critics and lecturers, Bunleua Theppayasuwan and Ranjuan Intharakamhaeng, remark on Suwanni's writing, respectively: 'she was graceful in describing her characters' emotions' (Bunleua, 1977: 114 cited in Orathai, 2005: 76); and 'the charm of Suwanni Sukhontha's work is her sincere and simple yet meaningful use of language' (Ranjuan, 1978: 31 in *ibid.*). The characteristics of her writing style have rendered Suwanni's work popular among the reader and recognised among her peers. Her signature style in *Thalay reu im* is particularly apposite to the application of Bakhtin's key concepts in order to unveil the novel's multi-strand signification.

### **'Who cared whose children those two were?': Of Kinship and Currency, Defining One's Modern Social Identity**

The following scene from Suwanni's *Thalay reu im* volume one well illustrates how polyphony and heteroglossia uncovers the undercurrent of the situation and reveal the effects of modernisation on the characters. Note the setting:

Past the suburb, Wilan slowed her car looking for the restaurant that Sukhum had suggested. He would meet her there, each driving one's own car for mutual convenience. (1972: v. 1, 33)

[...]

She ordered a cocktail telling herself that this kind of drink was much better than orange juice, milk or other babyish drinks.

Wilan was a woman therefore she would not drink the babyish stuff. ... She suddenly thought of her mother...and excused herself that *khun-mae* did not forbid cocktails. *Khun-mae* only forbade alcohol and also...did not forbid marijuana.<sup>14</sup> (ibid. 34)

[...]

The whole world was hers when the cocktail glass was in her hand...so Wilan felt. The world was hers. [...]

*Khun-mae* should not forbid it. Wilan thought of her again. Alcohol made the world really pleasurable. Mother should not... (ibid. 40)

The cool breeze was soothing. It was so comfortable and pleasant that Wilan wanted to sing out loud. The atmosphere was different from an air-conditioned room in the city.

The rice field stretched out. There was no rice farming any more as the land in this area had been wholly and cheaply bought by the rich. Then, they built a road and sold the land by plot. There were houses here and there in the vast field. It would be a long while before the field would be transformed into a housing estate.

Wilan did not notice the way Sukhum looked at her. She was singing along a *farang* singer from a record. (ibid. 40-1)

[...]

Wilan's cocktail was again finished and so was Sukhum's. He gestured two with his fingers to a waiter who was already waiting.

Who cared whose children those two were. They'd got the money to buy drinks so he sold them...that's it...the restaurant's owner thought.

'Those two kids ordered two more', said the waiter to a bartender. 'Will surely give them a good smack if they were mine! Drinking at that age'.

'None of your freaking business', said the bartender. Having said that, he could not help thinking of his own children. The alcohol he mixed in Wilan's drink was thus less and more on syrup and other ingredients.

'Probably not even 15', the waiter guessed.

'Stay out of it', warned the bartender, 'Your god father's looking. Just do your job or else you wouldn't get nothing to eat'.

The waiter smiled. He put the two drinks in a lavish silver tray and walked pass the owner in an overly polite manner. He served the cocktails and elegantly bowed.

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<sup>14</sup> *Khun-mae* means mother having *khun* as a polite term of address. Apart from in front of words signifying kinship and occupations, *Khun* is normally put in front of a first name similar to an English usage of Mr or Ms in front of a last name to show politeness. I keep the Thai word in my translation here to show that although the narrator is using third-person narration in the story, in this particular passage, the narrator is imparting Wilan's thoughts through Wilan's own voice using her term of address to the mother.

Wilan gave him some tip like a big spender who never had to earn her own money.

‘Thanks’.

He bowed till his head almost touch the ground. (ibid. 46-7) (my editing and translation)

The restaurant where this scene takes place is located on the outskirts of Bangkok. It serves as a microcosm, depicting both the expanding cityscape and the changing mindscape of the people. The restaurant seems to be isolated and out of place with the surrounding abandoned rice fields, yet the space it occupies is gradually converting from agricultural land into a would-be residential area of the city. The space is traversing from one form of capitalism to another—from market-based agricultural production to a housing estate accommodating the middle-class urbanites. Though the ‘rural’/local members seem to have disappeared from the space, the restaurant is literally positioned at the point where the urban meets the rural. More importantly, it emblematises the modernisation that is taking place. This scene might be less unusual and signify differently if it were a kind of ‘rustic’ restaurant that served Thai whisky and beer, was less ‘refined’ and played country music (*phleng luk-thung*) for local customers. However, *farang* music, the bartender on duty, the cocktails and the ‘lavish silver tray’ denote that the restaurant is not aimed at local customers, who are presumably low-income and would not care what kind of tray is used. The two customers mentioned in the scene, Wilan and Sukhum, drive there. The highly mobile urbanites and the city expansion inform each other, not only for a utility purpose such as housing but also for entertainment and recreation. This kind of restaurant-*cum*-bar that is garnished with ‘city-standard’ service on the outskirts of Bangkok offers the attraction of open space and ‘cool breeze’—as opposed to the closed, air-conditioned coffee shops or restaurants in the city centre. It testifies to the modern world that is at once inclusive of everyone since it allows access, exchange and opportunity, yet it reinforces social stratification, class disparity and difference based on capital. An income gap between the owner of the business establishment and the residents in the area and between the customers and the restaurant staff is assumably wide. The local people (the waiter and the bartender) can only partake in modernity as the labour force that contributes to the process of modernisation itself.

Another important issue represented in this brief scene is how a supposed social obligation between ‘kids’ and ‘adults’ is overwritten by the capitalist modes of

exchange represented through the attitudes and reactions of the three adult male characters. However, note that all three characters—the restaurant owner, the waiter and the bartender—first relate themselves to Wilan and Sukhum in terms of a relationship based on kinship—‘whose children’, ‘if they were mine’ and ‘thinking of his own children’, respectively. Seeing the underage drinkers, the adults cannot help identifying the two in relation to themselves and empathising with their parents’ concern. However, each reacts differently to this initial recognition of social obligation, if not a supposed ‘familial’ relationship. Firstly, the indifferent restaurant owner ‘who [does not] whose children those two were’ represents a typical capitalist not dissimilar to Wilan’s mother. Sidara owns so many properties, including shop houses which are burnt at her order once they get too old so that the new ones can be built, the rent increased and a surcharge fee (*ngoan-kin-plao*) applied. Secondly, the babbling waiter who futilely articulates his concern and does nothing but actually ‘encourages’ the ‘kids’ through his flattering service. He typifies a hypocrite adult who unduly assumes the high moral ground and says what is supposed to be said for the sake of it but is always ready to refashion one’s expression for one’s best benefit—‘an overly polite manner’, ‘tip’, ‘bow’. Thirdly, the concerned bartender who does what he can safely do within the given situation (which actually is not much) depicts conscientious individuals in the capitalist system. He knows that something is not right and feels bad about not doing anything, yet he is unwilling to risk himself or his benefit for it.

The representation of different discourses and attitudes through the characters’ voices is an effective technique in depicting contentious ideas, whether on the surface of an incident or as a latent tension. The seemingly mundane restaurant scene renders in full the conflict that runs deeper than personal disagreement. Applicable to the three male characters in the scene above is Pam Morris’s description of Dickens’ technique of allowing the characters to speak with their differentiated voices without naming them in *Little Dorrit* (1857), the chapter ‘Fellow Travellers’:

Each character’s sharply particularised ‘voice’ or ‘discourse’ articulates a recognisable social viewpoint—of class, or profession, or religion and so on. Orchestrated together, these voices offer us a verbal image of the contentious social dialogue taking place in mid-Victorian England. (1991: 26 cited in Vice, 1997:113)

Though the selected scene here is far from mid-Victorian England, the articulation of different viewpoints well expresses the new social dynamics and value system which have resulted from rapid urbanisation not too dissimilar to that in the modern world of the late-nineteenth century Western capital in which the change in mode of production allowed the middle-class to develop. While urbanisation and industrialisation in nineteenth century Britain testified to the impact of the industrial revolution on all areas of the social fabric, Thai national development policy exacerbated social disparity and brought forth economic-based relationships which rendered a more complex, multi-stranded social relationship. Bangkok, the heartland of industrialisation, bore witness to rural-urban migration, urban slums and poverty as well as extravagant display of wealth, material advancement and fashionableness.

The three attitudes represented here reveal the extent to which capitalist economic dynamics dictate individuals' reactions to different degrees depending on how much one's 'benefit' is at stake. The restaurant owner's obligation towards his business, which is to make as much profit as possible, overwrites his obligation as an adult towards a young person. Though there is a slight sense of guilt (recognising the underage drinkers in terms of parental concern), he quickly justifies himself using the business discourse of profit making. On the part of the waiter, his tip depends on providing the service that pleases the customers. Even if he could recognise them as both 'kids' (young persons) and '[children of] mine' (son and daughter), his hypocrisy turns Wilan and Sukhum into big-spending customers, not underage drinkers. As for the bartender, he is paid to mix drinks and, thus, has the least at stake here and is able to ease his sense of guilt by mixing Wilan's drink with less alcohol. In conclusion, the three characters' attempts to locate their sense of modern identity grounded in a world based on familial relationship/kinship are a failure and have to give way to capitalist modes of relationship based on exchange (of goods and service) and social stratification.

On the part of the main female character, Wilan, though the only word she actually articulates in the selected scene is 'Thanks', her 'voice' imparted here is audibly polyphonic and shows how she is negotiating her identity as a modern woman. Polyphony, Vice explains, 'refers precisely to the construction of the voices of characters and narrator in the novel' (1997: 112). In a polyphonic text, 'character and narrator exist on the same plane, the latter does not take precedence over the former but has equal right to speak' (ibid.). Without judging the character, the

narrator is imparting Wilan's contentious voice through 'free indirect speech' or 'free indirect style'. It is 'a way of narrating characters' thoughts or utterances that combines some of the features of third-person reporting with some features of first-person direct speech, allowing a flexible and sometimes ironic overlapping of internal and external perspectives', as it also 'adopts the idiom of the character's own thoughts' (Drabble, 2000).<sup>15</sup> The overlapping of internal (character's) and external (narrator's) perspectives which, in effect, blurs the boundary of the narrator's and Wilan's voices is evident in the aforementioned passage quoted from page 34 (from 'She ordered' to 'forbid marijuana') and page 40 (from 'The whole world' to 'Mother should not'). Though the selected passage grammatically and syntactically belongs to the narrator's narration, it polyphonically renders Wilan's voice by means of free indirect speech.

Though there is an absence of quotation marks that distinguish Wilan's speech, the reader has no difficulty in singling out her voice in the narration because of the particularly childish outlook and the narrator's withholding of comments and disruption.

She ordered a cocktail telling herself that this kind of drink was much better than orange juice, milk or other babyish drinks. Wilan was a woman *therefore* she would not drink the babyish stuff. (my emphasis)

By delivering the narration in Wilan's 'idiom' or 'language' and not interfering with her justification, the narrator delivers to great effect Wilan's childish justification. The first sentence, narrated in the past tense with the reporting verb 'tell' and the conjunction 'that', is indirect speech reporting Wilan's 'utterance'. The second sentence, in the past tense without reporting verb and the conjunction, is free indirect speech. The two sentences function well as 'a double-voiced discourse' or heteroglossia (Vice, 1997: 19). They simultaneously serve two speakers and express two contrary intentions. The first speaker, Wilan, has the direct intention to say that she is an adult, a woman as opposed to a girl; whereas the second speaker, the narrator, by reporting Wilan's thoughts, achieves the intention of showing how immature and self-indulgent Wilan is.

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<sup>15</sup> 'free indirect style' The Oxford Companion to English Literature. Ed. Margaret Drabble. Oxford University Press, 2000. Oxford Reference Online. Oxford University Press. School of Oriental and African Studies. 20 February 2009  
<<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t113.e2920>>

The use of ‘therefore’, in the context of the passage, especially defeats the word’s function which is ‘to maintain logical sequence’ (Bakhtin and Holquist, 1981: 305) as it reinforces how illogical Wilan’s reasoning is. Wilan sets up a (false) binary opposition between orange juice/milk and cocktails, assigning the former the signification of ‘babyish drinks’/‘babyish stuff’ unsuitable for an adult, and the latter, because it contains alcohol, a woman/adult’s drink. However, when ‘the babyish stuff’ in the second sentence is replaced by ‘orange juice/milk’, ‘Wilan was a woman *therefore* she would not drink orange juice/milk’, the ill-logic shows. Being a woman as opposed to a girl, or an adult as opposed to a child, in Wilan’s (ir)rationality, requires ‘not drinking orange juice or milk’ and the prerequisite of drinking alcohol.

The flow of Wilan’s thoughts leads to her mother. Once again the same pattern of indirect speech, followed by free indirect speech, is used here. ‘She suddenly thought of her mother...and excused herself that *khun-mae* did not forbid cocktails. *Khun-mae* only forbade alcohol and also...did not forbid marijuana’ (34). Addressing the maternal character as ‘mother’ or *khun-mae* instead of the title and the name ‘*khun-ying* Sidara’ or Sidara as in other places in the novel emphasises that the above two sentences are Wilan’s thoughts referring to her mother in her own terms from her own perspective. Heteroglossia delivers contradictory intentions by the two speakers similar to the previously analysed sentences. Wilan, acknowledging her mother’s order, feels guilty and yet ‘innocently’ turns it around by taking it literally and excludes alcohol-mixed cocktails (*lao phasom*) from alcohol (*lao*). Her desperate attempt to excuse herself by twisting around the order only testifies once again to her childishness and self-indulgence rather than her (mock) mature rationality. Vainly, so it seems, Wilan is trying to define, defend and justify herself as an adult woman who enjoys what the modern world has to offer (i.e. mobility, cocktails by the rice field, imported English language music on records). However, the modern world that she narrowly defines as enjoyment and freedom to do as she pleases actually detaches from reality since she can only lure herself into believing she owns it with the help of alcohol.

Although the primary focus of this novel is a discussion of teenage sexual relations and drug abuse, the discussion of its content in this chapter necessarily opens an assessment of its focus on the rural and the urban as illustrated above. In the contact zone of the outskirts of Bangkok, the rural represents the ‘traditional’ world of kinship-based relationships and gives in to the urban, the modern world of commodity

and the capitalist mode of relationship based on exchange. The three male characters offer an example of how one's attempt to locate one's sense of self as an adult towards children in the 'traditional' value system is challenged and fails. As for Wilan, she is trapped in the conflict between the insatiable desire to define herself as a modern woman and her inability to come to terms/compromise with the tradition represented in her case by parental authority, control and order. Her attempt to embrace what the modern world has to offer from her point of view only serves to reinforce her conflict. The best she can do with her unceasing conflict is to pretend it does not exist and to indulge herself in a narrowly defined 'self'-definition of being a modern woman.

### ***The Insatiable Sea, Inexhaustible Reading***

Wilan's process of defining herself as a modern woman, especially in terms of her sexuality, is beyond the scope of this chapter and will be discussed elsewhere, in chapter four. It should be noted that though *Thalay reu im* contains issues and scenes of teenage sexual relations, Suwanni offers no explicit depiction of them. Her message of the worldly pleasure that the characters enjoy is clear, yet the scenes are by no means obscene or vulgar. Such a characteristic of her writing renders the novel impervious to negative criticism on the grounds of its dealing with sexual relations, and directs a focus on its socially committed message. Since the majority of incidents in the novel involve troubled teenagers, sex, drug abuse and family drama, it is not unpredictable that most criticism on *Thalay reu im* focuses on teenage/family problems and often reinforces family values, the importance of motherhood and appropriate teenage behaviour. Ing-on notes in her commentary on the novel that Wilan's problems—'drug abuse, promiscuity and pregnancy in M. 3,<sup>16</sup> bad friends, not going to school—are all caused by the fact that her parents do not have time for her. They are too busy with charity work to the point of neglecting their own child' (2004: 297). Ing-on's reading focuses on family values and emphasises that the broken family is the main source of problems in a teenager's life. Her interpretation reinforces that teenagers also should not demand too much freedom or subject themselves to peer pressure and family problems can be solved by each member's

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<sup>16</sup> 'M.' here is an abbreviation for '*Mathayomseuksa*' which means secondary study. M.3 (*mor sam*) is secondary study year three when students' age ranges between 14-16 years old.

participation and compromise (ibid.: 298). The other point she raises is that ingrained human desire or lust (*kilet tanha*) is to be restrained as it only leads to downfall and destruction.

Apart from the family-oriented reading of *Thalay reu im*, drug abuse as a social problem is also a topic of study. Jintana proposes that socio-political change in the 1970s plays a crucial role in Thai literary circles as censorship of printed materials was strictly reinforced. Therefore, 'many writers chose to present in their work the social problems that do not contradict the government policy or the official's controlling measure' (Jintana, 1984).<sup>17</sup> As drug abuse found its way onto the national agenda, 'Suwanni presented her work from a point of view of a humanistic writer who was committed to addressing the problem of drug abuse earnestly and sincerely' (ibid.). Jintana perceives *Thalay reu im* and Suwanni's four other novels which deal with drug problems to be an 'educating mission'.<sup>18</sup> They 'enable the reader to understand the problem better. Suwanni's five novels purposefully explore the cause of drug problems widely and deeply' (ibid.). Such perceptions of Suwanni's *Thalay reu im* (as well as her other novels) along the lines of the 'domestic' and 'humanistic' novel tend to be the most widespread and accepted ones despite the fact that the novel depicts more than just family/teen and drug problems.

The 'dramatic' elements in the novel such as troubled teenagers, broken families, sex and drug abuse also seem to direct *Thalay reu im* towards being a 'family drama', and it was made into a film in 1976<sup>19</sup> and a TV series in 2008. In the TV series production in 2008, the story and characters were adapted to suit the 'popular taste' for 'melodrama' (*lakhorn nam nao*): Wilan became an innocent victim of adult mistakes and peer pressure; *khun-ying* Sidara became an adulterous wife causing family rupture; and Sukhum became a drug dealer and the playboy son of a drug agent.<sup>20</sup> Some characters were also turned into total 'antagonists' such as Marasi and Sukhum. The actors (Bow Benjasiri Wattana and Nam Raphiphat Akephankul) who played them said in an interview:

<sup>17</sup> Thesis abstract database [http://www.arts.chula.ac.th/~complit/thesis/thesis\\_th/2527.htm](http://www.arts.chula.ac.th/~complit/thesis/thesis_th/2527.htm)

<sup>18</sup> The other four novels are *Dokmai nai padaet* (1973) (Flower in the sun-lit jungle), *Kheun ni mai mi phrajan* (1973) (This moonless night), *Phrajan si namngoeng* (1976) (Blue noon) and *Maya* (1979) (Illusion).

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.thaifilmdb.com/th/tt03171> (Accessed 12 December 2007). No other information about the film is available apart from the year of release and names of main actors and actresses.

<sup>20</sup> [http://movie.sanook.com/drama/drama\\_05836.php](http://movie.sanook.com/drama/drama_05836.php) (Accessed 12 December 2008)

Bow Benjasiri Wattana: Marasi's a drug addict. She's unrestrained, behaving badly, sleeping around with men. She doesn't care about morality, sense of right and wrong. She only wants to live day-by-day and have fun. I'd like the audience, both parents and children, to see and not to follow her example because her action leads to self-destruction at the end.

Nam Raphiphat Akephankul: I think the series has a really good message. Teenagers especially should watch it and take as their moral lesson the good and bad characters. And don't follow the bad ones. Just take the series as a mirror. No matter what we do, sooner or later we'll have to bear the consequence.<sup>21</sup>

The assumed high moral ground and simplification of characters so that the audience can 'learn' something from it actually reveal how the signifying potential of the novel is confined within a 'regressive' and 'conservative' outlook. *Thalay reu im* is turned into a 'moralistic' novel despite the complexity of issues involved. The previous studies and the adaptation of the novel into the TV series scarcely render in due significance the tension between the socio-economic changes, the desire to be modern and the 'traditional' value systems in the social fabric of the novel's setting. These issues and the tension arising from them should be taken into account as they play a vital role in the characters' perception, behaviour and construction of their identities as members of society and their sexual identities as modern (young) man and woman. The topic of sexual identities will be critically examined in the following chapters.

### **Conclusion: Altered Relationships in the Modern World**

This chapter discusses the issue of urban-rural contact in the context of modernisation and development in early 1970s Thailand through an analysis of *Pai talat-nam* and *Thalay reu im*. It illustrates how each subject, in such a context, to use Pratt's terms, '[gets] constituted in and by [one's] relations to each other' (2008:8). Moreover, the analysis of each primary text also emphasises the crucial role played by the socio-economic changes which allow transgression, geographically, culturally and socially.

In *Pai talat-nam*, the relationship between international and domestic tourism reveals its connection. With unprecedented economic growth and the expansion of

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<sup>21</sup> [http://star.sanook.com/gossip/gossip\\_05860.php](http://star.sanook.com/gossip/gossip_05860.php) (Accessed 12 December 2008)

infrastructure and modern mass transportation, sightseeing as a recreational activity became available to most people (who have time and money). Foreign tourists are encouraged to take part and Thai tourists to both take part and take pride in Thai 'national culture'. Rural tourist attractions like Damnoen Saduak and its local characteristics such as water transportation and the floating market were highlighted, appropriated and incorporated into 'national culture'. In the story, it is evident that while the narrator is representing Thailand and Thainess to his *farang* clients, he is simultaneously defining them, himself and his fellow Thai. As he decides to accommodate his American clients' search for 'real Thainess', he is immediately participating in and subsumed into an Orientalist discourse. He polarises the urban and the rural, demonises the former represented by Bangkok as a profit-driven, capitalist society and posits the latter represented by Damnoen Saduak as 'quintessential Thainess' of agricultural abundance and 'rural non-materialistic richness'. He discursively turns the rural into the object of an Orientalist gaze. In effect, Damnoen Saduak, the tourist attraction where the urban meets the rural, as discussed in this chapter, is the site of encounters with various 'Others'. There is the series of otherness encountered in the site: firstly, the inferior Other, the naïve yet loyal *chaoban* (villager) subject encountered by the royal ruler; secondly, the Oriental Other by the American tourists; and thirdly, the rural Other by the tour guide/narrator. While the rural touristy site of encounter like Damnoen Saduak is incorporated into the construction of 'national culture' and modern Thai identity which embraces the court and the foreign, the expanding landscape of Bangkok in *Thalay reu im* becomes the site of the contest between the 'traditional' value systems based on kinship and the 'modern' capitalist modes of relationship.

In *Thalay reu im*, the outskirts of Bangkok where the selected scene takes place is space undergoing transformation within the capitalist mode of production. It is being converted from a market-based agricultural land to a would-be housing estate of the city. The restaurant-*cum*-bar in the scene is the site where the urban meets the rural. It is also a microcosm of how a class disparity aggravated by modernisation affects individuals on a personal level and consequently extends to social interaction and attitude towards young people. It also serves as the site of conflicting value systems in which the old one (familial/kinship based relationships) fails to assert its hold on the individuals' definition of their modern social identities. The new one, that is the capitalist mode of exchange, overwrites the supposed social obligation between

kids/underage drinkers and adults/service providers. In the analysis of the scene, the three male characters—the restaurant owner, the waiter, the bartender—give in to capitalist modes of relationships based on the exchange of goods and service. They actually facilitate the alcohol consumption of the two underage drinkers—Wilan and Sukhum—and dismiss their initial concerns based on the ‘traditional’ value systems of kinship and familial relationships. The other conflict between the attempt to define oneself as a modern subject on the one hand and tradition on the other is exemplified by Wilan. She struggles to define herself as a modern woman in the context of consumerism and choice. She defines being an adult woman as buying power and the freedom to buy and enjoy to the fullest what the modern world has for sale (mobility, cocktails, politeness, exemption from law enforcement). However, Wilan is unable to either compromise with or completely dismiss the tradition represented by parental authority, control and order. She is trapped in the tension between being modern and recognising tradition, which is expressed in her not being either an adult or a child. She is caught in the ‘self’-illusion of being a woman brought about by the power to purchase what modern world has for sale.

The two primary texts discussed in the chapter illustrate how urban-rural contact entails different effects in the process of defining one’s modern identity. On the one hand, *Pai talat-nam* is something of a ‘success’ story of a modern Thai identity that enjoys ‘tradition’ and ‘national culture’ as well as modernity through the discursive practice of Orientalisation. On the other hand, *Thalay reu im* represents a rather grim portrait of the irreconcilability between the traditional value systems and the modern ones. However, both of them emphasise the process of ‘self’-definition and identity construction as interactive and dynamic. Thus, the modern identity which each character arrives at should be viewed as a temporary subject position rather than a static, monolithic self that is impervious to change.

The physical mobility and urban-rural access resulting from development programmes allows and encourages contacts at both national and international levels. The interactions among the main and the minor characters in the two selected texts show that their different assumptions, interpretations and perceptions of an event are informed not only by their cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, but also by the ways in which they are affected by the modern world. As the chapter has shown in the context of rural-urban contact, modernity ‘alters the nature of day-to-day social life and affects the most personal aspects of our experience’ (Giddens, 1991: 1). The

representation of how modernity has altered the personal and social life of individuals with regard to class, gender and cultural specificity of Thai society from the late 1950s to the 1970s will be examined in the following chapters with the specific focus in chapter four on youth identities, in chapter five on female identities and in chapter six on male identities.

## CHAPTER 4

### NEGOTIATING MODERN THAI YOUTH IDENTITIES

This chapter examines the two-volume novel *Thalay reu im* (The Insatiable Sea) (1972) by Suwanni (pseudonym) against the backdrop of the rapid socio-economic and cultural changes which resulted from the development and modernisation policies carried forth by the American supported military regimes (1958-1973), as discussed in chapter one. The chapter specifically scrutinises the way in which the selected young characters attempt to construct their identities as modern women and men. It gives more emphasis on the main female character, Wilan, who struggles to define and negotiate her sexuality as a modern young woman through her sexual relations with the three male characters.

As illustrated in chapters one and three, the modern environment, especially in terms of market based economy and consumption, has played a crucial role in the construction of one's identity and gender role. The state prescribed gender roles and, more importantly, cultural definition of femininity and masculinity were perpetuated and deeply imprinted in the public consciousness. From the formative years of adolescence, the restricted location of Thai female sexuality, particularly with regards to the cultural definition of womanhood, has been in many ways a site of struggle and negotiation, while manhood has been endowed with the more permissive (heterosexual) male sexuality. The chapter draws together the concepts of 'teenager'/'youth' and 'adolescent' in the young person's ambiguous zone of being neither a child nor an adult, his/her capacity to resist and challenge established norms and social prescriptions, albeit potentially self-destructively, and the young person's use of performativity in negotiation with the adult world (Valentine *et al.*, 1998:3). Focusing on the young female protagonist, the chapter illustrates how the category 'adolescent' challenges the cultural definitions of 'good' woman and 'bad' woman which segregate women into the 'pure'/'impure' or 'virgin'/'whore' dichotomy. The concept of 'adolescent' destabilises the dichotomy as the female protagonist moves back and forth between the two ends. The chapter argues that if Thai society condemns female sexual exploration outside marriage as prostitution, its disapproving yet protective attitude towards teenage sexual activity actually render the virgin/whore dichotomy untenable.

## The Adult World and the Transgressing Teens

‘Youth’, including ‘teenage’ and ‘adolescent’, is not a universal category and ‘is often described as a Western concept’ (Ansell, 2005: 13). The concept was introduced to Thailand as a body of knowledge in the 1950s (Natchaliaw, 1963: 79). ‘Adolescent’ is evidently a modern concept different from the traditional Thai paradigm. Traditionally, in central Thailand in particular, once a child (11 years old for girls and 13 for boys) performed a rite of passage, that is the cutting of the hair knot (*phithi khone phom juk*),<sup>1</sup> s/he then came of age and would wear gender specific clothes and grow his/her hair. This marked a different phase of life to childhood in which children, regardless of their sex, wore non-gender specific children’s clothes (and could go about semi-naked) and had a hair knot on the top of the head (*phom juk*) while the rest of the head was completely shaved. The auspicious Buddhist and Brahmanic ceremony of ritualistic initiation into the world of adulthood and the change of appearance reinforced the end of childhood. It emphasised the understanding that the initiated must take on adult responsibilities, perform appropriate gender roles and behave accordingly.

However, the tradition has become old-fashioned and unfeasible in terms of practicality, as it is also economically unviable for children to grow a hair knot and have a costly ceremony. With the mass education system put gradually in place, children are no longer confined in the space of the home for a girl and the temple for a boy’s education. The traditional rite of passage that marked a clear entry into adulthood became irrelevant and out of step with modernization and the modern world, especially in urban areas. It was replaced by discourses of child development and psychology, more context-dependent rites of passage and youth cultural practices.

The term ‘adolescence’ was coined by American psychologist, G. Stanley Hall, only in the early twentieth century, to describe ‘a period of “storm and stress” observed in young people’ (Ansell, 2005: 18). However, the perception of such a

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<sup>1</sup> For details on the ceremony see <http://www.thaifolk.com/Doc/culture2.htm> (Accessed 21 May 2008). In 2003, there were around 20-30 children, aged between 3-13 years old, registered for the cutting of hair knot ceremony at a Brahmanic temple in Bangkok. As the ceremony contains both Buddhist and Brahmanic rituals, it involves a detailed, costly preparation and lengthy procedure. The Brahman temple offers a communal ceremony once a year free of charge. See <http://www.muangboranjournall.com/modules.php?name=News&file=print&sid=824> (Accessed 21 May 2008).

transitional or ‘quarantine’ period as ‘a breathing space between the golden age of “innocent” childhood and the realities of adulthood’ (Valentine *et al.*, 1998:4) began in early eighteenth century Europe according to the historian Aries (1962). Even the notion of ‘childhood’ generally known and accepted nowadays as a time of freedom and innocence set apart from the adult world and a developmental phase separate from adulthood came into existence only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century with the expansion of mass education (Valentine *et al.*, 1998:3). Following the growth of industrial capitalism, the middle-class would afford longer schooling for their children. ‘The transitional stage became prolonged and young people became more separated from the adult world’ (ibid.). Moreover, ‘the teenager’ was invented in the 1950s in the West, as the young offered a new market niche of the period of affluence. Goods and services were developed and catered to the style and leisure for the consumption of the young (Hebdige, 1988 in Valentine *et al.*, 1998: 4). ‘This imagining of what it means to be young was a definition of “youth-as-fun” ’ (Valentine *et al.*, 1998: 4) is in contrast to the dominant perception of ‘youth as trouble’ which has endured over the past 150 years.

As much as ‘youth’ is a relatively new concept in human history, it is equally a modern, imported concept in the Thai paradigm of knowledge and social category. The introduction of the body of knowledge regarding youth and adolescence to Thailand took place under the rubric of education development and ‘social sciences’. Social and educational psychology and family and child development studies were given attention and significance under the umbrella of ‘social sciences’. The adoption of this knowledge was carried out with ‘a belief that a further development of training in, and application of, the major social sciences is highly desirable for Thailand—for the optimum development of its academic and governmental institutions and [...] for the welfare of its people’ (Skinner, 1956: i). ‘Teenager’ is translated as ‘*wai-run*’ (literally, young age) or ‘*yaowachon*’ (young people) in a formal context. The two Thai terms also include ‘youth’ and ‘adolescence’ though the English terms can as well be translated as ‘*num-sao*’ (young man, young woman). ‘*Wai-run*’, ‘*yaowachon*’ and ‘*num-sao*’ in Thai usage cover the range of the teenage years and extend into the early twenties. Thus, under the rubric of development and social sciences, ‘*wai-run*’ (teenage) or ‘*dek-wai-run*’ (teenager, as *dek* means child) as a social category came into existence as a ‘visible’ and distinguishable group with issues and problems of their own demanding different approaches and solutions from those of the adult from

the 1950s.<sup>2</sup> The group increasingly became an object of study along the lines of social development in a national development policy, since ‘youth remains a major point of symbolic investment for society as a whole’ according to McRobbie (1993: 31). However, it should be noted that research and studies of ‘*wai-run*’ mostly resulted from the ‘problematic’ behaviour of teenagers ranging from ‘public nuisance’, petty crimes to gangs and street fights. The coming into existence of such a social category and an accompanying body of knowledge as well as the negative connotation gained public attention under the long spell of the Sarit and Thanom-Praphat military regimes (1958-1963 and 1963-1973). These factors were also intertwined with maintaining public control and order central to the authoritarian government. Consequently, any kind of teenage behaviour that could be interpreted as disturbing public order or stirring public peace demanded attention from the authorities, whether they were in the shape of police officers, social scientists, educational and governmental institutes or parental control. From the 1950s to the early 1970s, the dominant public knowledge and perceptions of society towards ‘teenagers’ tended to be ‘youths as trouble’, and adolescence was seen as a time of ‘storm and stress’. However, a different notion of youth and adolescent also gathered momentum and positively manifested in the 1970s when the student movements and socio-political activities that came underway from the 1960s eventually brought the military regime to an end in 1973. The students’ demand for democracy and participation in solving social problems opened a new chapter of ‘the power of youth’ and introduced positive definitions of youth and adolescent to the public domain. The public perceptions of teenagers and youths have since come to embrace both the creative potential and subversive potential of youth power.<sup>3</sup>

### **Neither Child Nor Adult: A Performative, Reformed Madonna in *Thalay reu im* (The Insatiable Sea)**

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<sup>2</sup> See for example Natchaliaw Sumawong (1963), ‘*Phanha wai-run nai prathet Thai*’ (Teenage Problems in Thailand). The article talked about contemporary researches and research methodology on problems both experienced and caused by teenagers in Bangkok. Her research in 1953 under the Council of National Culture (*Sapha watthanatham haeng chat*) addressed the behavioural adjustment of both teenagers and parents in the current social situation.

<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, it is important to bear in mind that, as definition belongs to the definer, the creative potential of youth, especially in political terms, can be viewed as subversion by state authorities and governing bodies. The specific focus on the history of youth in Thailand is beyond the scope of this research, however.

*Thalay reu im* (The Insatiable Sea)<sup>4</sup> (1972) represents the public perceptions of *wai-run* as a life phase of ‘storm and stress’ and ‘youth as trouble’.<sup>5</sup> The title *The Insatiable Sea* metaphorically compared the appetite for life of teenagers, especially its destructive potential, to the sea’s unfathomable devastative force. The novel raises a concern for teenage unbridled desire as if it is symptomatic of modernity. From at least the late 1950s Bangkok increasingly became a prominent expression of urban ‘sophistication’, fashion and advancement as well as a reservoir of social vices. It was a time of continuing economic boom as a result of American financial aid and military presence in Thailand. The rapid socio-economic changes in the country were epitomised by the capital Bangkok and often equated with westernisation.

As mentioned earlier, the concept of ‘adolescence’/‘youth’/‘teenage’ is new, if not alien, to the Thai social paradigm. Consequently, the represented perceptions of adults in the novel, especially their attempt to appropriate the behaviour of the teenage characters, express the conflict between the traditional beliefs and values, on the one hand, and the desire to keep abreast with the fast-paced, modern world, on the other. *Thalay reu im* represents teenage related-problems that are often thought to be a result of the modernisation/westernisation of Thailand such as sexual promiscuity, drug abuse, youth gang and broken families. More importantly, the novel raises the much-concerned-but-less-debated topic of teenage promiscuity, especially when the novel shows that young female characters negotiating their sexuality by means of having sexual relationships. The novel emphasises that ‘adolescence is a key phase of life in which sexual and gendered identities are explored and established’ (Valentine *et al.*, 1998:11). The fact that there is no explicit description of sexual scenes permits the novel’s narrative of promiscuous teenagers and the discussion of female sensuality in the Thai cultural context,<sup>6</sup> where ‘explicit sexuality [is] an intransigent taboo in Thai public discourse’ (Harrison, 2000: 88). The novel, however, simultaneously voices the age-old, but not unbiased, concern that ‘delinquency in girls was linked to their sexuality’ (Finn, 2001 cited in Ansell, 2005: 18).

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<sup>4</sup> The Thai title is also a kind of rhetorical question and its direct translation is ‘would the sea ever be satiable?’.

<sup>5</sup> The Thai public discourses of ‘adolescence’ (*wai-run*) especially from the 1960s and 1970s are such as *wai-run jai-rorn* (hot-tempered teen), *wai-run wun-wai* (chaotic teen), *wai-run wun rak* (love-obsessed teen), *wai-run wai-rak* (teenage, love-age), *wai-run wai-rian* (teenage, study-age). A later invention that attempts to bring out its positive side is to euphemistically call *wai-run* ‘*wai-sangsan*’ (creative age).

<sup>6</sup> Suwanni’s writing style plays a crucial in such a narrative permission. See chapter three for details.

‘Adolescence’ as the novel represents it is the intersection of physiological, psychological and social categories which seem to be incongruous with the clearer traditional distinction of child (asexual) and adult (sexual—female within marriage institution; male somewhat without institutional restriction) categories. While the categories of ‘child’ and ‘adult’ seem to be at opposite ends, ‘teenage’ occupies a rather ambiguous space between the two, especially in terms of teen sexual activity which defies the child/adult dichotomy. More importantly, the Thai cultural dichotomy of ‘good’/‘bad’ woman (virgin/whore) renders it difficult for the adult to cope with teenage sex, since the category ‘teenager’ includes, by definition, sexual curiosity as a result of the natural process of hormonal changes. Teenage female sexual activity, thus, challenges the virgin/whore category as it evokes disapproving yet protective attitudes from Thai adults. What seems to be ‘problematic’ with ‘adolescent’ is not just the discursive and social construction of what it means to be a teenager or the connotations that come with it. It is more importantly the interaction and relations between society (that is the adult world) and adults, on the one hand, and young people on the other. While they are trying to find their space, ‘adolescents are denied access to the adult world, but they attempt to distance themselves from the world of the child. [...] Adolescents may appear threatening to adults because they transgress the adult/child boundary and appear discrepant in ‘adult’ spaces’ (Sibley, 1995: 34-5). This is also an issue with teenagers in the context of urban Thai society, as represented by the fifteen-year-old Wilan and her friends in *Thalay reu im*. Wilan’s transgression into the places where her presence should be forbidden (such as strip club, a ‘love’ motel) and her rejection of the spaces which she should occupy (such as home, school) are actually her negotiation with the adult world and her attempt to define her identity.

As discussed in chapter three, the character of Wilan represents the attempt of a young woman to define herself as a modern woman in the context of urban consumerism. Coming from a wealthy echelon of an urban society, the spoiled and beautiful Wilan has all that money can buy—a well-established, expensive school good home environment, comfort, her own car (although the legal age for driving a car in Thailand is eighteen), the most fashionable items available in Thailand:

Everything for Wilan has to be first-class.  
Her private music teacher is a famous musician but  
Wilan is just hopeless at music. *Khun-ying* [Wilan’s dame  
mother] was upset for a long while that her daughter could not

play the piano the way she expected. She wanted Wilan to be a 'first-class' woman. Thus, she tried to cast Wilan using the perfect mould. If only Wilan would let herself be cast, she would leave the mould as a beautiful, elegant lady with all the qualities fit for the upper-classes. (Suwanni, 1972: v. 1, 139)

As much as her mother tries to 'buy' Wilan a 'proper womanhood', the daughter defines being an adult woman by spending power and the freedom to enjoy to the fullest what the modern world has for sale (as discussed in chapter three). Wilan recognises her mother, *khun-ying* Sidara, to be a fashionable, successful, strong, independent woman who takes pride in her 'perfect' life endowed with beauty, wealth, gentry (*phudi*) background and social recognition. The mother's definition of the 'modern' woman is evidently class-bound as they comprise propriety, upper-class femininity and ladylike qualifications. What seems to be contradictory in her rather 'Victorian' prescription of womanhood is the fact that she insists on raising Wilan in a 'modern' way (*baep samai-mai*), which is to allow Wilan to have friends of the opposite sex from when she was a small child (Suwanni, 1972: v. 1, 75), and even host a (supposedly non-alcohol) party in the absence of her parents (*ibid.* 1-19). Such common practices in child socialisation in the western world turn out to be 'awfully modern' (*samai-mai leua koen*) in the eyes of the old nanny, *mae* Chaem,<sup>7</sup> who raised both Sidara and Wilan. However, Sidara's definition of 'modern woman' in relation to her daughter and herself is ironically encoded in Victorian middle-class values imported into and circulated in Thai society with the auspicious forebears like Rama V and VI and the royal Siamese court, thus, attaining an aura of 'upper-class' gentry (*phudi chan-sung*).

On the contrary, the teenage daughter detests propriety as much as her mother's control and craves freedom outside the confinements of home and school. For Wilan, as well as other young women in the story, the image of 'modern woman' (*phuying samai-mai*) suggests links between beauty and 'active, mobile participation in urban society' (Mills, 1992: 88). She defines being an adult as spending power and freedom to do as she pleases and to enjoy everything an adult could—smoking, drinking, nightclubbing and having sex. More importantly, Wilan also perceives

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<sup>7</sup> 'Mae' literally means mother in Thai. In the old days, it was used in front of a female name as a polite term of address to the person. Nowadays, such a usage is mostly used by and applied to the elderly women. In the context above, it is put in front of Chaem's name to show politeness and respect to her as an old maternal figure.

being a modern woman (*sao/phuying samai- mai*) as opposed to being a traditional woman (*sao/phuying boran*), and as being sexually active and having sexual freedom.

[...] Wilan did not love Sukhum as a boyfriend. She liked him as a friend.

Wilan hugged and kissed him just as friends do. She was born in a modern time. Why would she behave like a traditional woman? Well-pampered, over-protected. Not knowing the flavour of life, not knowing how to be happy. Born to know only one man, love only one man. Marry and live with only one man all her life... Wilan cannot bear that. (Suwanni, 1972: v.1, 43)

Wilan's thoughts are narrated in free indirect speech<sup>8</sup> by the third-person narrator who uses the character's own idiom, allowing the direct expression of her feeling. It is evident that for Wilan, being modern as opposed to traditional, and being a woman as opposed to being a girl, are all perceived and enacted in sexual terms. Her claim to adulthood is to be a sexual being, an owner of her own body whereas a child, on the contrary, is an asexual being, dependent on adult care. Thus, in order to be a modern woman, so Wilan feels, she must be sexually active and have sexual freedom so that men would find her attractive. By the time she turns fifteen, her body has fully developed into its womanly form and proudly attracts attention from the opposite sex. The theme of beauty and how it functions in her sexuality is emphasised throughout the novel.

Wilan's perception of being a modern woman is put into a sharp relief with Chaem's, the old nanny, who is a representative of a mainstream, traditional, middle-class adult's perception. In the following scene, after Wilan got drunk and had unprotected sex for the first time with her male friend/admirer Sukhum, her dialogue with the old nanny uncovers cultural assumptions regarding child/adult and male/female discourses.

'What's wrong with you, Miss?', *mae* Chaem asked again, 'I heard you vomiting'.  
 'Pregnant', Wilan lifted her eyebrows playfully, trying to stay clam, 'what would you say, *pa* Chaem?'<sup>9</sup>  
*Mae* Chaem gave a long pause.  
 'Really, Miss?'

<sup>8</sup> See Chapter three pages 110-111 for the significance of 'free indirect speech' or 'free indirect style' as a narrative technique.

<sup>9</sup> '*Pa*' literally means aunt as an older sister of one's mother and father. Though Chaem is unrelated to Wilan by blood, the fact that she raises both Sidara and Wilan earns her a familial status from both of them. Wilan should be calling Chaem '*yay* Chaem' (granny Chaem) instead of *pa* Chaem as her mother calls the old nanny.

‘Woh...I was just kidding’.

‘It’s not good talking like that, miss. Inauspicious to yourself. You are a child. That thing is adult business’.

‘Can’t I just vomit?’, Wilan began to get angry.

‘It must be caused by something, Miss’, Chaem made a straight face pretending not to know that her Mistress was displeased.

‘I was drunk’.

‘Oh, my goodness’, Chaem hit her chest loudly, ‘You are a woman. How could you drink alcohol?’

‘You just said I was a child’, Wilan argued, ‘Only a minute passed and I become a woman’.

‘Don’t mind me. I’m just an old woman, Miss. Did you really drink alcohol?’

‘Yes, I did’. [...]

[...]

‘Please promise [not to tell mother]. Drinking isn’t such a bad thing. It tastes good. My mother also drinks.’

‘She’s an adult’, Chaem reminded her Mistress.

‘My father also likes alcohol’.

‘Well, he is a man’. (ibid. 77-8)

The dialogue shows that for an elderly person like Chaem, there is a clear hierarchy that prescribes who can do what. At the top of her pyramid is the adult male, then the adult female and the child is at the bottom. However, what seems to be problematic here, as Wilan picks up, is the arbitrariness as to where she fits. Although Chaem already suspects that Wilan might be pregnant because she has male friends and what could be a morning sickness, she prescribes sexual activity within the cultural and moral domain of propriety that is the marriage institution, not Wilan’s physiology. She thus emphasises that sexual activity is adult business, using the adult/child dichotomy in socio-cultural terms. When it comes to drinking alcohol, instead of reasoning with Wilan that it is also an adult activity, Chaem uses male-female cultural double-standards to define what is appropriate, or not, for Wilan. Chaem’s change of discourse results from her one-track minded perception that drinking is only associated with adults. Once Wilan says that she has already done it, she conceptually places herself in Chaem’s perception of adulthood. Thus, the only discourse that comes to Chaem’s mind is ‘drinking as a male activity’. Wilan is female, therefore, she cannot drink! By pointing out the fact that Chaem is inconsistent in defining her, Wilan moves on to argue with Chaem in terms of a ‘parents as role models’ discourse rather than in child/adult and gender terms. As she evokes her mother as a figure of authority whom she fears, Wilan can then argue that drinking is fine because her

mother, the ultimate role model, does so. Once she uses the ‘parents as role model’ discourse, Wilan discursively moves back into childhood and consequently gives Chaem an opportunity to utilise the child/adult discourse again. As Wilan keeps using the same discourse by mentioning her father, Chaem retreats to gender terms. In the selected dialogue, Wilan demonstrates that defining her adult female identity is a matter of negotiation whereas Chaem tries to bring it home to her that the ‘adult world’ here is actually the adult male world.

### **Three Boys and a Girl: Teens’ Forbidden Romance and the ‘Foreign’ Sensations**

The following three post-coital scenes capture the different relationships between Wilan and the three young men—Sukhum, Sophan and Phutawan, respectively. They also show how Wilan’s sexuality has evolved along the way as she transforms from a curious-yet-fearful young girl to an experienced temptress. More importantly, they also implicitly represent the stereotypical perceptions of the Thai public towards ‘the West’, which, in this case, are expressed through the male characters’ contacts with the West and how those contacts inform their relationships with Wilan. In all the three scenes, apart from the dialogue, the characters’ thoughts are told by the third-person narrator who represents different voices that shift through different characters in free indirect speech. The selected passages show both the characters’ external expression and internal emotion, which can be either in contrast or in accordance with each other.

#### **The ‘American Hippy’**

Wilan’s first sexual encounter is with 19 year-old Sukhum, who is an Americanophile playboy from a nouveau riche family. His adoration for anything American does not only show in his ‘hippy’ style (‘long hair, big necklace with coin pendant’) (Suwanni, 1972: v.1, 9). Sukhum also imitates the perceived American and ‘hippy’ culture seen from magazines and movies (‘Posing as if he was bored with the world, loved only music and believed that only music made the world go round’ (ibid. 37)). Despite Wilan’s feeling for him as a friend, Sukhum’s open infatuation for her and the help of alcohol are enough for Wilan to ‘lose herself [*sia-tua*] so easily just because of curiosity’ (ibid. 97). The following scene is Wilan’s post-coital flashback.

Note Wilan's concerns and Sukhum's expression of and attitudes towards masculinity.

Sukhum must have skipped school just like Wilan. Thinking of him, she started to get worried. What if her mother knew?

Her mother would never know...Sukhum told her that. Our bodies belonged to us, not to our parents or to anyone else. If Wilan did not say it, how would anyone know?

'My mother is so wickedly smart', Wilan could not help disagreeing. She was lying naked next to him but hiding her embarrassment by pulling a blanket up to her neck. The face over the blanket was the girl's who was still so young. Her lovely fresh skin said that she was well pampered. [...] Her eyes were half-opened and red because of the alcohol that she had just got to know. It made her brave enough to do the thing she never thought she would.

'No matter how smart she is, she'll never know', Sukhum lit a cigarette, holding her with one arm.

'She will know', Wilan frowned, 'What should we do?'

'No need to do anything,' Sukhum smoked relaxingly.

'Let me smoke some', she snatched the cigarette from him, 'I'm so worried Khum'.

'It's trivial', he handed her another one, feeling that he had become a man tonight. So, he had done it all now—alcohol, cigarettes, ganja and ... woman.

*Good woman, especially. Wilan, a daughter of a director-general father and a millionaire mother.*

How could he resist feeling so proud?

'Trivial what!' Wilan chided him as she was smoking and blowing out the smoke just for the sake of it. She had started smoking only a few days ago.

'We are modern people [*khon samai-mai*]', said Sukhum, 'It's modern time, nobody minds. People sleeping together isn't an unusual thing'. (ibid. 50-1, my emphasis)

[...]

He pulled Wilan towards him and kissed her lips copying a love scene from a movie.

Wilan kissed him willingly. Sukhum's role swept Wilan off her feet.

It was a new sensation that Wilan had never felt before in her life. It was gentle, sweet yet burning at the same time as if her body was melting and burned with dark passion.

'Wi', Sukhum whispered.

'Huh', Wilan replied.

'Do you love me at all?'

'Don't ask', Wilan spoke softly, 'Why don't you ask yourself?'

'I love you'.

'Don't say that'.

‘Why?’  
 ‘Don’t say it. I don’t want to hear’, Wilan sighed heavily and thought of Sophan briefly.  
 What if he knew? ... Wilan paused to think. No way. No one would ever know about this. Wilan would just keep being the little Miss Pretty Wilan for her father and mother as she had always been. (ibid. 57-8)  
 [...]
   
 ‘What’re you thinking about darling?’ Sukhum can be sweet.  
 ‘I’m thinking about my mother,’ Wilan said softly, ‘if she finds out, what should we do?’  
 Sukhum did not reply.  
 ‘She’ll be very upset,’ Wilan murmured,  
 ‘Er...Sukhum... er...will I become pregnant?’  
 ‘How’d I know?’ Sukhum replied curtly, ‘I’m not a woman’. (ibid. 59)

On Wilan’s part, this post-coital scene implies her sexual satisfaction and fulfilled curiosity. However, it also shows that she actually feels unattached to Sukhum. She is most concerned with being found out especially by her mother that she is no longer the innocent, virgin girl she used to be. Her worry indicates the sense of guilt that she might disappoint her mother, father and Sophan, her sweetheart, rather than the penitence that she has done something wrong. Wilan’s next worry, which she only realizes at the end of the scene, is of becoming pregnant as a result of having sexual intercourse. As Wilan learnt about sex on the sly from ‘type-written/underground pornographic literature’ (*wannakam phim-dit reuang phet*) (ibid. 197) she got from friends, her sexual curiosity is aroused but presumably she does not know of any contraceptive methods and the importance of safe sexual practice. For Wilan, sex is all about sexual excitement and sensation which she is much curious about. Her sexual sensation is described as ‘gentle’, ‘sweet yet burning’, ‘melting and burnt’. It stops her feeling self-conscious about her nakedness.

More importantly, it should be noted in this scene that Wilan does not only break the taboo of woman’s pre-marital sex, she also counters the myth that woman cannot have sex without love. Contrary to Thai gender stereotypes, she shows that love does not have to be a pre-requisite of sex for a woman. Wilan’s justification, if not excuse, for having a sexual relation with Sukhum is ironically the gentlemanliness of her boyfriend, ‘If only Sophan were not so good, Wilan would not need Sukhum to satisfy her sexual curiosity’ (ibid. 96). Wilan had her first sexual experience with

Sukhum in a 'love motel'<sup>10</sup> after getting drunk. Her experience de-romanticises a romantic expectation typical of young women for their 'first time'. Wilan's 'first time' is simply a release of carnal desire unattached to any romantic notions and cultural value given to women's virginity, something that can be liberating in terms of female sexuality. However, in this particular case, Wilan's 'unattached sex' cannot deliver its liberating edge as the scene mixes the feeling of sexual satisfaction and her two worries about parental authority and pregnancy, and shows the role that alcohol played in this sexual encounter.

The character of Sukhum is created to represent Thai teenage Americanophile. He consciously adopts 'American', 'hippy', ganja culture that he has seen from the mass media such as magazines, movies and music. Adults use the term 'hippy' as a label for wayward behaviour and disrespect for authority, which are only superficially spotted in unkempt (young) men wearing long hair, untidy clothes and jewellery that oppose school regulations and social norms. For state authority, any public disturbance caused by teenagers is said to be carried out by 'hippies'. Young people, on the contrary, take the label 'hippy' almost like a badge of honour. It represents style and fashion imported from America. Any young men wearing long hair and jewellery can be called a 'hippy'. Neither the adults nor the young people in the novel recognise that being a 'hippy' has also a political statement and the hippy rebellious attitudes and life-style were meant to antagonise the social establishment. Sukhum's expression of indifference towards education, his self-conscious imitative pose from movies, and his being a promoter of sexually free behaviour (*fri-loop fri-sek* or 'free love, free sex', as the young characters call it) are his expression of being modern (*than-samai*) that is 'hippy'. They also particularly serve his self-interest in being a playboy and constitute his 'sexual masculinity', as opposed to the 'social masculinity' discussed in chapter one.<sup>11</sup>

Sukhum interestingly merges his code of being modern with a code of masculinity. After having sex with Wilan and knowing for a fact that he is her 'first

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<sup>10</sup> It is a discrete motel without a reception desk where a guest just drives in and parks a car in an individual parking space right in front of a room. Each parking space is separated by a high opaque wall so the guests from different rooms cannot see one another. After the guest parks the car, motel staff will draw the curtain to cover up the parking space hiding the car from sight. It is nicknamed 'curtain-drawn motel' (*rong-raem man-rut*). The guests can rent the rooms for a few hours or overnight without having to register. This kind of motel is quite cheap and often associated with prostitution and casual sexual relationships.

<sup>11</sup> The issues of 'sexual masculinity' and 'social masculinity' will be explored further in chapter six.

time', he takes pride in his masculine prowess. With Wilan's help, Sukhum 'became a full man tonight' completing his checklist—'alcohol, cigarettes, ganja and ... woman' (ibid. 51). Sukhum's code of modern masculinity is actually not dissimilar from the code of '*nak-leng*' (local mafia or gangster) that reinforces a man's place in a patriarchal society where a 'man' who gains respect from his fellow men and admiration from (some) women must be sexually experienced. There is no stigma attached to male pre-marital sex. On the contrary, it is almost compulsory for men to have sexual experience prior to marriage. As Sukhum once boasts to his friend who asks how many women he has slept with, 'I don't remember. [...] Whores don't count, and the same goes for those nightclub women [*phatnoe*]. I fucked them countless...Count only good women...that's a real man' (ibid. 121). For Sukhum, thus, 'good women' can loosely mean women who are not involved in prostitution, are not promiscuous and from whom he has to earn affection in order to have sex with, just like Wilan, who comes from a good, rich family.

Sukhum's expression of modern sexual masculinity is presented in his indifference towards Wilan's concern about her mother. Calling it trivial, he neither empathises nor sympathises with her. The two reasons he gives Wilan so that she stops worrying are, first, that their bodies belong to them and not to the parents and, second, that modern people in modern time just have sex and no one actually cares. His claim of their ownership of their bodies is his assertion of adulthood and a rejection of the world of childhood, where children are dependents of parents and are often denied the right to make a decision about or by themselves. As for the second reason, the emphasis is on being modern. His assumption lies in the binary opposition between 'modern' and 'traditional'. By assuming that the traditional code of female sexual behaviour excludes pre-marital sex, Sukhum's focus on 'modern people' (*khon samai-mai*) and 'modern time' (*samai-mai*) aims to encourage Wilan's sense of being a modern woman as sexually free. He is telling Wilan that if she is a modern woman, she should not worry about having sex outside the institution of marriage just for the pleasure of it. 'Modern sex', by implication, does not involve anything or anyone else but the two persons who engage in the act. He equates being sexually free with being modern, that is, 'hippy' and therefore American. Another point that should be noted about Sukhum's expression of modern sexual masculinity is his self-conscious, performative act of masculinity. He imitates a typical love scene from a movie in the way he kisses and holds Wilan. The whole scene between Wilan and Sukhum is

almost like a post-coital cliché from an American film—smoking relaxingly after sex, caressing Wilan with one hand and smoking with another hand.

However, what might seem incongruous in Sukhum's attitudes towards masculinity and being modern here is his question as to whether Wilan loves him. His question seems to emerge out of the blue. Yet, if it is placed in the context of his attitude towards being 'a real man' and consideration given to his dismissive answer to Wilan's concern if she would become pregnant, Sukhum's question and declaration of love might not be as sentimental as they seem. For Sukhum, having sex with a 'good woman' also means that he has to earn her affection and willingness, as opposed to an exchange of money for sex with a 'bad woman'. His question could be a result of his need for confirmation of his sexual and masculine prowess. It is the myth created by Thai romance and melodramatic novels that a man could make a woman love him after having sex with her or even raping her! When Wilan replies to Sukhum's question by saying 'don't ask' and turns the question back to him, his answer comes out almost automatically. He tells her that he loves her just to demand the return of the same courtesy. Once she repeatedly tells him not to say it for the simple reason that she does not want to hear it, Sukhum stops and there is no sign of him feeling upset or hurt by her cold answer.

The post-coital scene between Wilan and Sukhum portrays her '*fri-loep fri-sek*' encounter with Sukhum, his performative act of modern sexual masculinity, and the emphasis on Wilan's sexual sensation rather than any other aspects of a sexual relationship. Wilan's attempt to define and claim her modern female sexuality is an evolving process and her later sexual encounters also inform the negotiation of her sexuality in different ways.

### **The 'Responsible German'**

The scene between Wilan and Sophan shows another dimension of a sexual relationship as Wilan continues to negotiate her sexuality. Sophan has long been a friend of Wilan. The eighteen-year-old man comes from a rich, gentile family (*khroep-khrua phudi*). He left Thailand to study in Germany and came back for a visit during his school break. At the time when anything from the West is associated with 'being modern' (*than-samai* or *pen samai-mai*), thus, fashionable and desirable, Sophan an overseas student (*dek-nork*) is envied by other boys in Wilan's group of

friends who have never been abroad. His *dek-nork* aura attracts a lot of attention from the promiscuous Marasi who is Wilan's friend and already has a boyfriend. Knowing that Wilan and Sophan like each other more than just friends, Marasi still seduces him into having sex with her. Wilan suspects him of giving in to Marasi, throws a tantrum and interrogates him. Sophan admits to the heartbroken Wilan and tries to calm her down by spending the day with her. In the end, he gives in to Wilan's tantrum and reassures her in the way that she wants him to, i.e. to have sex with her despite the fact that he has always wanted to cherish her and had never even kissed her on the lips. Of course, their love scene is omitted. Only the post-coital scene is narrated to the reader, as follows:

She seemed completely over the sulkiness and anger about Marasi.

Did modern women compete with each other by sleeping with a man? Sophan could not help feeling disturbed.

‘Wi...’, Sophan held her closely. Her body felt like heaven to the touch. He loved her a lot more and it was also mixed with jealousy. It was a new kind of love that he was just coming to know.

But his heart also questioned if she ever was as loving to any others the way she was with him. Who would dare to ask her?  
(Suwanni, 1972: v.1, 230)

[...]

Wilan kissed him lovingly. The smell of his skin strangely enticed her to want to stay in his arms days and nights.

‘Please wait for me Wi’, Sophan whispered. ‘I promise I’ll never have the kind of problem that made you so angry, with anyone ever again. Either abroad or in Thailand, I’ll keep it all to love only you Wi’.

[...] ‘I don’t want you to skip school Wi. I just want you to stay focused so you’ll finish soon, but we did to turn ripe even before we become mature. This isn’t good’.

‘But we love each other’, argued Wilan.

‘Yes, darling...we love each other’, Sophan ran his hands over Wilan’s body.

She was so smooth everywhere he touched. Her hair was so soft just like what people called as soft as silk.

His conscience was in strong conflict. On the one hand, what he did was neither right nor appropriate. But he was flesh and blood, a mortal human being. The bodily nature was not as easy to control as he would hope it was. ‘But I keep thinking that we did wrong...we’re still so young [*dek*]’.

Wilan smiled.

‘We’re adults darling’, she disagreed. ‘Anything adults do, so could we. Our bodies are ours. No one else owns them. What’re you afraid of?’

Sophan twitched... Wilan's words sounded as though she was so experienced in sex.

Or perhaps she was only babbling like that, just like the way modern kids who were spoiled do.

'There's only one thing that I'm afraid of'. (ibid. 232-3)

'Yes, darling?' he appeased her, drifting off thinking about what just occurred in his mind. [...]

'I'm afraid I'll have a baby'.

Sophan startled. [...]

Wilan in Sophan's arms like this, she felt like being caressed by happiness, as if it was tangible.

'I'm afraid I'll have a baby. Do you think we'll have it?'

Sophan was silent. He touched Wilan here and there feeling worried about what she had said.

He did not know anything about birth control.

Sophan never thought of it and did not even think he would have to worry about it. Sophan was good at studying and textbooks only. He would have to learn about this kind of thing from now on.

It should not be too difficult.

What about what was done? Sophan sighed

'What would you do if I have it?'

'You probably...probably won't', he stuttered.

'What if I do?'

'We...we'll...get...married then'.

Sophan made it sound as if it was not such a matter but in his heart he was more scared than Wilan.

'Married!' Wilan cried, 'How could we get married? ...We haven't even finished school'.

'That's true', Sophan muttered.

[...]

'Oh...', cried Sophan, 'We wouldn't have it...believe me darling'. Wilan was a little relieved though not entirely, it was better.

Sukhum never consoled her like this. He had only ferocious lust.

Wilan believed that if it would actually happen as she feared it, Sukhum would not take any responsibility.

But Sophan would not be like that. (ibid. 234-5)

Wilan in this scene is no longer concerned with being found out. Once she realises that neither her mother nor anybody will ever know of her sexual activity as long as she does not tell them, the confidentiality leads to confidence. She becomes guilt-free in her and Sophan's sexual activity. She takes on board Sukhum's claim on their ownership of their bodies as a claim on adulthood. For Wilan, her sexual relationship with Sophan is a deliberate and justifiable act of 'love' that does not involve alcohol. She decisively counter-argues his reflection that their sexual relationship is premature ('turn ripe before becoming mature' or *ching suk korn ham*) by saying that they love

each other. The sexual relationship with Sophan offers her both emotional and sexual fulfilment, a marked difference from the 'unattached sex' with Sukhum initiated by curiosity and alcohol. The portrayal of Wilan's emotional fulfilment as opposed to the emphasis on sexual sensation and her sense of guilt and anxiety in the previous scene is evident. The kissing is done 'lovingly' rather than 'willingly'. The scene also depicts Wilan's emotional and sexual attachment to Sophan, the longing to be with him, and the happiness she feels. The reassurance derived from the underlying romantic notion of 'love', physical intimacy and Sophan's expression of responsibility temporarily relieves Wilan from her fear of becoming pregnant.

Wilan's fear of pregnancy now becomes more real than just a passing thought. Despite Sophan's immediate response to Wilan that he would marry her if Wilan gets pregnant, both of them know that it is not a feasible solution and only hope for the best that she would not. The real possibility and the seriousness of what Wilan's pregnancy might entail conclude the scene, though Wilan wishfully consoles herself that she can count on Sophan. In this scene, Wilan has transformed herself from a curious-yet-fearful, sexually free girl who is excited by sexual experience into a sexually liberated girl who learns about an emotional dimension of a sexual relationship. However, her claim on adulthood and her sexuality is still undermined by her fear of becoming pregnant. The fact that she has learned nothing from the blunder of having unprotected sex with Sukhum, which already brought the fact home to her that she could get pregnant, undermines her assertion of adulthood. Wilan is unable to take a mature responsibility that comes with the claim of ownership of her body and sexuality. Thus, her argument against Sophan that they are adult and that they can do anything adults do only reinforce how childish she still is.

On the part of Sophan, though his feelings for Wilan are genuine and sincere, his doubt-laced thoughts imply a certain expectation of female behaviour. First, he is disturbed by the fact that Wilan is only completely pacified after they have had sexual intercourse. Second, he wonders if she ever has sex with anyone else. And third, he is not pleased with Wilan's assertion of her sexuality. Although he sees both Wilan and Marasi as modern women (*phuying samai-mai*), Sophan ultimately expects a well-raised girl like Wilan to be sexually innocent, shy and a virgin since he has until then kept his relationship with her non-physical. In his perception, Wilan should belong at a different, if not opposite, end from Marasi whom he earlier described as a prostitute trying to calm Wilan down, 'Can you think of it as if I went with a prostitute? I didn't

love, didn't even like her. She knows that' (v.1, 226). Sophan's attitude shows that he takes it for granted that it is common for men to visit prostitutes, and that 'good women' like wives and (supposedly virgin) girlfriends should not be bothered by it.

Such an attitude towards men visiting prostitutes and Sophan's intention to cherish his romantic relationship with Wilan in the non-physical realm is diametrically different from the 'hippy' Sukhum's definition of 'real man', which means having sexual experience with 'good women'. On the contrary, Sophan, who is often described as a 'good boy' (*dek-di*), a 'gentleman' (*suphaphurut*), and as 'being genteel' (*pen phudi*), has never been physical with Wilan whom he places in the 'good girl' category. Once he has sex with her, Sophan is marked by an acute internal conflict. Sophan's internal conflict between what he thinks is right (having an asexual relationship with Wilan) and the thing he actually did (having sex with her) is juxtaposed with Wilan's relaxed and 'worry-free' attitudes towards their sexual relationship. For Sophan, it is wrong because neither of them have even finished school and are 'so young' (*dek*, which is supposedly asexual). He is fully aware that he is not in a position to take responsibility for the consequences of a sexual relationship, especially when pregnancy is involved. Thus, while it is wrong to have sex with Wilan for whom he intends to take responsibility but could not yet do so, it is not so wrong to have sex with a prostitute since it does not entail any responsibility.

Sophan's understanding and 'rationale' of men visiting prostitutes actually perpetuates the discourse of prostitution as a 'necessary evil' that men are able to maintain their 'noble intentions' towards the 'good women' with 'help' from prostitutes. Moreover, 'good women' are also able to maintain their 'virtue and sexual moral' because there are 'bad women' to take care of men's sexual needs. Sophan's masculinity hence is expressed through his intention to take responsibility for the ('good') woman he loves, which includes learning about safe sexual practice, and his responsibility to fulfil what his family expects of him, that is completing formal education. His insistence that he and Wilan are so young, therefore, shows his maturity and the recognition of being a responsible adult according to social norms. His sense of masculinity encompasses a familial obligation expressed by his determination to fulfil the expectations of his family and, by extension, of his own society. This issue will be discussed at greater length in chapter six. Another point that should be noted here is the fact that Sophan promises to Wilan that he will be monogamous. With his permissive attitude towards prostitution, however, it seems

rather dubious whether his monogamous intent would be a kind of ‘Thai monogamy’, which culturally and legally endorses men’s visits to prostitutes.<sup>12</sup>

### The ‘Conservative Englishman’

The third and last young man with whom Wilan gets sexually involved is Wilan’s puppy love, Phutawan, the Laotian prince-turned-pauper. He and his family have been in exile in Thailand as a result of the political situation in Laos. Formerly rich and successful in business, however, the blue-blooded family have now become financially insecure to the point of being considered penniless by *khun-ying* Sidara. Phutawan was sent to study in England when he was thirteen years old. Both he and Wilan had just turned sixteen when they were reunited while Phutawan was visiting his family in Bangkok. Phutawan is an earnest, wholesome young man whose frugal life in England has taught him to be reasonable with money. His mother insists that he must graduate from England against the odds. His upbringing as an eldest son who will be the head of the family and the reversal of family fortune has taught him to live a sensible and thoughtful life.

The different lifestyles of the two youngsters take them in different directions in life. While the young man was away studying, Wilan was skipping school and having sexual relationships with Sukhum and Sophan, became pregnant as a result, and was not sure who the father was. She was aware of her pregnancy after Sophan left for Germany and decided to have an abortion with no regret, no remorse, only relief. Wilan’s attraction for Phutawan lies in their childhood affection, his attractiveness, his being reliable and his *dek-nork* aura from England. Wilan imagines Phutawan as her modern, Westernised prince charming. Their innocent childhood affection turns into a sexual relationship, though Phutawan is dumbfounded by Wilan’s sexual freedom. Their sexual encounter happens after they go out clubbing and get drunk, which was Wilan’s idea. Phutawan does not even know where they are since it was Wilan who drove them to a love motel. Note their different reactions in the following scene:

Phutawan slowly moved his body. His skin was cold and he was shivering as he did not have any clothes on. Now he was certain of what happened. If he could just disappear, he would not hesitate. He

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<sup>12</sup> The links between masculinity and prostitution will be elaborated further in chapter six.

was ashamed of what he did to Wilan whom he loved. (Suwanni, 1972: v. 2, 228)

[...]

*Khun-ying* Sidara definitely knew that Wilan had gone out with him. He would have to take responsibility for everything that happened.

[...] He glanced at Wilan [who was sleeping]. It would be better if it had been someone else entirely. (ibid. 231)

Phutawan walked away from the bed to sit in front of the mirror which reflected Wilan, her beautiful arms and breasts. Her skin was like a fine silk, so flawless was her beauty.

He should have been proud that he had had her completely. However, Phutawan was not in the least proud, why? All he felt was regret for his thoughtless action.

[...]

Wilan turned from her previous posture, she was looking at his reflection. When Phutawan saw her, she smiled. It was so sweet that he regretted it. She should have cried for what she had lost to him because she was a Thai woman, not a *farang*. It should be like that, shouldn't it? (ibid. 232)

'Have you been awake long?', she asked joyfully as if her life was a bed of fragrant roses.

He would not have been disturbed if she had woken up in his arms in the first morning of their marriage. But he had not yet finished his studies and still had to ask his mother for money. Nothing was ready.

Thus, he could only manage a fake smile.

[...]

Then, she walked towards him, caressed his head from behind and pressed her soft flesh against him as if to tease.

Was this really Wilan who he always dreamt of all these years he was overseas? She erased his dream completely.

'I like it', she bent down rubbing her cheek [against his over-night bearded face], 'You look like a *farang*, a tanned *farang*'.

She should have spoken of the relationship between her and him, or at least be embarrassed of what she was wearing [a white, thin lace slip].

But she simply seemed unbothered by everything. Or, he thought ...while he was abroad, was she used to behaving like this?

He moved away from her, feeling a slight disgust. As he felt it, his face did not hide it.

Wilan looked at him and paused; she then laughed. 'If it's hatred, we should just go different ways', she said.

Phutawan twitched. She talked as if she was reading in his mind.

'No, no', he refused, 'Who told you that?'

'Your eyes', she went back to the bed, arm-crossed as if she was cold.

'You're over-reacting...I'm only worried'.

'What are you worried about?'

Her question cut through him and called forth his suspicion. He could not help but think.

‘Is this normal for you?’ he turned towards her and asked frankly, ‘Please, pray tell...have some pity on me.’

Wilan realised that she should not be so stupid.

‘Why did you think that?’ it was a while before Wilan was able to get something out, ‘Don’t you love me, Tawan?’ (ibid. 232-5)

[...]

‘What should we do then?’ he finally said something.

‘I don’t know’, she said though she actually wanted him to just be normal.

Being an overseas student, how come he was so traditional, so old-fashioned? Wilan sighed and paused.

‘What would your mother say?’ [...] ‘We’re still so young [dek]’.

Wilan’s hidden smile got even bigger. Who said overseas students were so brilliant?

She thought that she was in an era when one’s body was not to be treasured, but simply to be used for bringing pleasure. Virginity was laughable, if it was to be treated as life’s most precious thing. (ibid. 236)

In the scene, Wilan smiles sweetly, seems happy, freely and teasingly expresses her sexual affection for Phutawan. She likes his scruffy *farang* look. It is evident from her carefree and affectionate manner that Wilan assumes Phutawan to be the modern, Westernised prince charming who is no less ‘sexually progressive’ than Sukhum and Sophan, if not more. Though she finds him attractive and feels affectionate towards Phutawan, once she realises what is going on in his mind, Wilan is ready to detach herself from him. Her decisiveness is a rejection of his judgement and an assertion of her sexuality and of herself as a sexual being. However, the sexual freedom and carefree sexual practice that are normal for Wilan, turn out to be rather offensive, if not condemnable, for Phutawan. His uneasiness and appalled facial expression that lead to a straightforward question about her sexual behaviour take her by surprise. Wilan neither denies nor answers him but, in response to his unexpected reaction and question, she resorts to asking him back using the only seemingly justifiable reason for her behaviour, i.e. ‘love’.

However, it should be noted that Wilan is not apologetic about her behaviour and also negotiates her sexuality through the question she asks. She does not tell him that she loves him and does not ask if he loves her but she asks, ‘don’t you love me’. Wilan is reminding him of his initial affection for her and, in turn, her question can be interpreted as her statement that ‘if you love me, you should be glad that I had sex

with you'. Silence falls between them for Phutawan also understands her message. The fact that Wilan actually wants him to be 'normal' about their sexual relationship implies that she does not attach any other meaning to it other than that having sex is a part of having a relationship. Wilan's attitudes towards the body as a source of sensory pleasure and that the cultural value of virginity is laughable are indeed sexually progressive and liberating. Wilan actually defines 'sexual freedom' as 'being in a modern era'. For Wilan, the modern era makes it possible for her to be sexually free so that she can be part of it, rather than being 'so traditional, so old-fashioned' as she describes Phutawan. Finally, her stereotypical expectation of Phutawan as an overseas student comes to the fore. Wilan defines 'overseas students' as a categorical equivalence of being modern, fashionable and having sexual freedom or being sexually progressive. Her condescension for Phutawan, despite his *farang* look, reveals how superficial her attraction for him is though she might not be aware of it. Wilan's expectation of Phutawan as an overseas student and her attitude towards her body, sexuality and virginity are juxtaposed with Phutawan's expectation of Thai women's sexual behaviour.

The Laotian prince's expectation of the Thai woman's sexual behaviour is expressed in his implied stereotypical notions of 'good woman' and the binary opposite of 'Thai/*farang*'. His definition, if not expectation, of a 'good (Thai) woman' from a good family like Wilan, is of a virgin, sexually innocent and conservative, shy, modest and protective of one's body. Phutawan thus expects Wilan to react in a certain way, 'She should have cried for what she lost to him because she was a Thai woman, not a *farang*' (v. 2, 233). It can be implied from his attitude that, in his understanding, a *farang* woman would not mind having a sexual relationship prior to marriage. She would not be a virgin but sexually experienced, liberal, bold, immodest and unprotective of her body. In a nutshell, a *farang* woman is the opposite of what he expects from a Thai woman like Wilan. Phutawan seems to fully adopt a Victorian sexual moral code but discriminately imposes it on Thai women and stereotypically sees '*farang* women' and 'Thai women' as monolithic and static entities.

As Phutawan perceives sexual relationships and activity only within the institution of marriage, he thinks of his and Wilan's sexual relationship as her loss and his gain. Whether he sees it as the loss of her virginity (*sia khwam-borrisut*) or her body (*sia-tua*), he finds Wilan's apparent happiness, carefree attitude, and sexual

expression distasteful and disappointing. The innocent Wilan whom he loved only exists in his memory. His strong feelings of guilt, shame, embarrassment, self-blame, regret, and responsibility turn into disgust at the thought that Wilan might be promiscuous and sexually impure. Her untroubled, unaware question of what he is worried about is the last straw. It compels him to confront the 'new' Wilan and to ask about her sexual behaviour. Phutawan's love for the innocent Wilan dissipates and leaves him with only sense of responsibility that he can by no means fulfil.

In conclusion, Wilan's perceptions of 'modern' and 'tradition', and Phutawan's of 'Thai' and '*farang*' actually operate on the same (il)logic of stereotype. What Wilan finds desirably 'modern' is for Phutawan the undesirable, stereotypical *farang*/Western behaviour. On the contrary, he finds stereotypical Thai female behaviours as defined by patriarchal society, which is repulsively traditional and old-fashioned for Wilan, desirable. The character of the English-educated Phutawan is juxtaposed with the homegrown, 'American wannabe' Sukhum, and each is the other's opposite. Sukhum takes pride in having a sexual relationship with Wilan, asserts himself unduly as an adult and adores being modern/'American hippy', which means sexually free and disregarding one's responsibility and society. Phutawan, on the other hand, feels ashamed of and regrets his sexual encounter with Wilan. He recognises his being dependent on an adult and detests Wilan's expression of her being 'modern', as he equates it with the undesirable *farang* behaviour. Phutawan represents restricted, conservative 'traditional' values. The Thai stereotypical perception of the uncouth, uncultured, 'ugly' American is represented through the character of Sukhum. The equally biased, Thai stereotypical blue-print of the civilised, cultured, conservative, English *phudi* (gentry) is, by the same token, represented by Phutawan. Sophan, the German educated boy comes to represent 'sensible' behaviour as there is no decisive stereotype of the German circulating in Thai public perception.

### **Conclusion: Either Sexual Whore or Asexual Girl?**

Through Wilan's interaction and sexual encounters with the three young men discussed above, it is clear that for Wilan 'being modern' (*pen samai-mai*) is expressed primarily in sexual terms. For Wilan, being modern means being sexually free and having sexual freedom. Moreover, with her claim of her sexuality and body

comes Wilan's assertion of adulthood. However, the problem here is that Wilan asserts her adulthood but does not show any awareness of its social and cultural constitution, the way Sophan and Phutawan do. Her assertion is centred solely on her sexual interest and womanly form. Wilan narrowly defines being modern in ways that serve her interest as a sexualised teenager. Her character makes clear how personalised one's perception of modernity and being modern can be. Wilan's experience of 'life's possibilities and perils', as Berman proposes to call this collective 'body of experience' 'modernity' (1988:15), only concentrates on her sexual experience and her exploration of the side effects of material economic development such as nightlife, hedonistic lifestyle and drugs.

Towards the end of the novel, Wilan and her friends had been arrested in a police raid and charged with drug abuse, 'illicit gathering' (*mua-sum*) and disturbing public peace (*kor-kuan*). She was 'disciplined' and 're-educated' through uniformity, discomfort, hardship and domestic work at a Juvenile Observation and Protection Centre (*sathan phinit lae khum-khorrng dek lae yaowachon*) and then returns home 'reformed'. Wilan regresses into a symbolic form of 'childhood' as she becomes dependent on her mother and turns 'asexual' by not going to meet her supposed boyfriend, Sophan, alone. Instead, she invites her mother to come along with her to greet him at the airport. She suspends her female sexuality (the fact that she is a sexual being) in order to resume the social and cultural definitions of good girl (*phuying di*) or 'madonna' as asexual (no sex outside the institution of marriage). In the end, the desirable, tempting and mobile modern world is clearly marked from the safe and domesticated world of traditional values. The novel suggests that being modern when mediated and enacted in sexual terms brings downfall to young women.

Although the potential subversion of the category 'teenager' proves the virgin/whore dichotomy to be fluid, performative and by no means static, it is still impossible to introduce different nuances of female sexuality without making social and cultural value judgments. The juvenile reform house in the story functions to 're-educate' the wayward young women in order that they become 'good girls' or 'dutiful daughters'. It is similar to the reform houses discussed in chapter one, part three of this thesis that turn former prostitutes into 'domestic goddesses' in the guise of domestic servants. Wilan, the teenage female protagonist, is 'reformed' and appropriated to fit an 'acceptable' cultural standard. It looks like Suwanni is being protective of the young woman at the expense of female sexual liberation. The old

Thai saying '*jap sai takra lang nam*' meaning 'putting [bad fish] in the basket to rinse [off the bad smell]' compares a defiled daughter to bad fish. It implies that there is a way to redeem a 'fallen' daughter through a certain performative act. However, the fact that she needs to look clean (i.e. 'good'/'virgin') also proves that the 'good' woman/'bad' woman dichotomy has always asserted its hold on a woman's sexuality. This old idea that controls women remains unaltered in the modernised social environment.

In Harrison's study (1999) of the characterisation of the prostitute by Thai female authors in a novel written in 1937 and short stories from 1966-1983, she highlights an authorial consensus drawn from the short stories produced in the 1960s that the family is represented as the reservoir of the moral backbone, of 'good' moral values. 'A broken family, on the other hand, is frequently suggested as being a cause for a daughter's slide into prostitution or for a young girl's lack of respect for her own sexual worth' (Harrison, 1999: 175). The accepted theme of 'family as the locus of female sexual virtue' (ibid. 178) is expanded and, to a certain extent, challenged by Suwanni's focus on teenage characters in *Thalay reu im*, especially the character of Wilan. Suwanni broke away from such a theme and introduced the teenage character who is neither virgin nor whore in her attempt to challenge the rigidity of the virgin/whore dichotomy. The novel also suggests that the single-minded emphasis on family absolves society and the state of their responsibility towards young people. What Suwanni, through an increasingly assertive narratorial voice, tries to instigate in the reader is that everyone is complicit in adolescent delinquency—the teenage subject, family, school, male-female double standards, the lack of constructive public spaces for teenagers, the lack of moral obligation on the part of entertainment business owners and the state's one track-minded aim for economic advancement.<sup>13</sup>

The problem with 'adolescent' as portrayed in the novel is precisely the fact that the adult does not treat the teenager as someone who has his/her own agency. The Thai adult's approach to solving teenage delinquency is to '*dat sandan*', literally, to control/change an inclination or ingrained behaviour of a teenager by means of 're-educating' them. '*Dat sandan*' as a concept implies the imposition of external force and control as a means to disciplinary and behavioural change. It is seen as a

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<sup>13</sup> This case is not dissimilar to the attitude of technocrats and policy makers towards prostitution in the late 1950s and the 1960s that once Thailand became prosperous and 'developed', prostitutes would just disappear as a result (Pasuk, 2000: 67).

punishment for a teenager's wayward behaviour in order to 'put one back in one's place', which from the adult perspective, is childhood. *Thalay reu im* represents the trap of denying young people access to the adult world while they are longing to distance themselves from childhood. However, it also perpetuates the virgin/whore dichotomy despite the fact that it has strategically challenged this polarisation. That Wilan has to resume a child's role at the end as a way of purifying herself from her sexual promiscuity clearly demonstrates that there is no alternative space for woman's sexuality even in modern Thai society.

However, it is noteworthy that, despite Wilan's 'reform' and 'suspension' of her female sexuality, the novel provides no definite indication whether Wilan will permanently turn into a good girl. In the closing paragraph, Wilan receives a phone call from her friend who was released from the Juvenile Centre at the same time. It is an invitation to a wild party and Wilan is considering whether she should go. The inconclusive ending indeed encourages the reader to think about Wilan's choice, those decisions she has made throughout the novel and also about how one should make an entrance to the modern world in one's own way and navigate through both the possibilities and perils that the modern world offers. Despite the didactic tone of the novel in its treatment of female sexuality in young women, the inconclusive ending implies that retreating into the world of traditional values as represented by domestication might not be a feasible solution for adolescents in their attempt to find their way in the modern world and make themselves at home in it. In the end, the novel leaves it open for the young character to make that choice. The negotiation of women's sexuality and modern Thai female identities in the context of modern Thailand will be explored at greater length in chapter five.

## CHAPTER 5

### NEGOTIATING MODERN THAI FEMALE IDENTITIES

The cultural definitions of ‘good’ woman and ‘bad’ woman which divide women into the ‘pure’/‘impure’ or ‘madonna’/‘whore’ dichotomy have been discussed in chapter one. While the previous chapter demonstrates how the category of ‘adolescence’ destabilises this dichotomy, this chapter challenges the dichotomy further especially in the representation of women who are labelled as ‘whores’. It looks at the novel *Sanim soi* (Unwilling to endure) (1961)<sup>1</sup> by Rong Wongsawan (1932-2009) and its representation of prostitutes and their mundane daily life in a ‘high-end’ brothel (*song chan-sung*)<sup>2</sup> against the backdrop of the modernisation initiated by state authority, and how the dynamics of the epoch permeate urban lives. Being a landmark work of an iconic writer who ‘transformed the landscape of Thai literature through the topicality of his work and the originality of his language’ (Leyland, 2009: 36), *Sanim soi* was called a ‘whore epic’ (*mahakap kari*) by Rong’s contemporaries (Narong Janreuang, 2006: 123). Without making a moral judgement, the novel explores the personal dimensions of the prostitute characters and those involved in the business rather than generalising them as types. Through the selected two female characters, Samorn, the madam (*mae lao*),<sup>3</sup> and Wongdeuan, the youngest prostitute, the chapter examines how Rong’s representation contests the pre-conceived, condemning attitudes of the general public towards prostitutes. More importantly, it illustrates how the characters negotiate their sexuality and identities as women in the high tide of socio-economic and cultural changes of 1960s modern, urban Bangkok and against the social branding of them as ‘bad’ women.

*Sanim soi* is narrated against the backdrop of the early ‘American Era’ in modern Thai history (Anderson, 1977:15) under Sarit’s military regime (1958-1963). To reiterate the introduction, it is important to recall at this point some aspects of the

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<sup>1</sup> All the page numbers of *Sanim soi* refers to the first publication of the novel. Rong Wongsawan, 1961. *Sanim soi*. Bangkok: Phadungseuksa.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Song’ originally means a secret meeting place connoting a negative tone such as *song jone* (a criminal house) or *song sopheri* (a whore house, brothel). In current usage, ‘song’ on its own comes to mean a brothel. In the novel, Kan, the first-person narrator, sometimes refers to a brothel as ‘*ban*’ (a house).

<sup>3</sup> Harrison offers a concise explanation of the word *mae lao* (literally, mother of a coop) in that it comprises two words, ‘mother’ and ‘cage’ or ‘coop’, respectively. ‘This combination covers the madam’s dual role as a custodian and warder of the prostitutes with whom she works. They, in turn, address her as “mother” and frequently refer to themselves in their relationship with her as *nu* (“little girl”) or *luk* (“daughter”)’ (1995:125, footnote 1).

broader context in which *Sanim Soi* was written. Thailand's close collaboration with the US since Phibun's second premiership (1948-1957) after the Second World War became even more intensified under Sarit. Thailand in the 1950s and after was described as 'a US client-state under military rule' (Baker and Pasuk, 2005:146). American military bases in the East and Northeast of Thailand brought blatant American presence to the provinces and boosted the local economy. The sensational and fashionable Americanness was also prevalent in the city and changed the face of the expanding Bangkok as Thailand was chosen as a place of 'Rest and Recreation' for American GIs in the region. The policy to permit US forces to come to Thailand in this way boosted economic growth due to tourism and the expansion of the sex industry in particular.

Though *Sanim soi* does not deal directly with the 'American scene' in Bangkok, the impact of modernisation and the desire to be modern as exemplified by American popular culture and fashion pervade the novel. Most of the clients at the brothel where all the events take place are middle-class Thai and Chinese-Thai men of means. The brothel is the site where social changes and the latest fashion are staged by those who are taking part in modernity and want to be modern, that is, Western (*than-samai baep tawan-tok* or *baep farang*). The use and abuse of state authority by the police, the government employees' corruption and the common practice of bribery are woven into the fabric of the story in the life of this expensive brothel as visiting prostitutes was and is a form of entertainment to be enjoyed as part of an evening out, after a party or a celebration after a successful business deal. The representation of female sexuality and modern identities takes another complex turn in *Sanim soi*, especially when discussed in relation to prostitution. This chapter further explores an anxiety over modernity as expressed by the female characters.

### ***Sanim soi* (1961): The Unbearable Lightness of Being in the Hard Life of a Prostitute**

The story of how a naïve, provincial beauty who was seduced/deceived by a charming urbanite, then abandoned and subsequently forced into prostitution has become a somewhat 'familiar pattern', if not a cliché, of the urban corruption of women. It also brings to light the pitfalls of rural development and modernisation as one of the key themes in the 'literature for life' in the late 1960s and the 1970s. *Sanim*

*Soi* is different from *Ying khon chua* (A Woman of Easy Virtue) (1937)<sup>4</sup> in the way it approaches the topic of prostitution and represents the prostitutes.

The novel amalgamates anxiety over modernity, social criticism, slight ‘eroticism’, and the representation of the prostitutes with agency, their own desire and active sexuality. Such a combination breaks away from what had been previously said and done on the issue of prostitution in ‘received’ literature such as *Ying khon chua*, which was the point of reference in the discussion of the representation of prostitute in literature to date.<sup>5</sup> An exception can be made for Rong’s contemporary, Thida Bunnark, the prolific and once popular female writer whose ‘sexually explicit and morally challenging’ (Harrison, 2002:459) works dealt with sexual relations between partners and female sexuality, as discussed in chapter one. However, her ‘disappearance’ from literary scene and the scarce, if at all, availability of her works hinder study and further reference.<sup>6</sup>

Contrary to the tragic, if not melodramatic, tone of the canonised and readily available *Ying khon chua*, *Sanim soi* (1961) was narrated in the tragic-comic, black-humoured, socially sarcastic tone. Rong Wongsawan did not resort to characterising his prostitutes as ‘whores with the hearts of gold’ in order to talk about them, their lives or the issue of prostitution. Rong’s brothel madam and prostitute characters simply have hearts no different from any other ‘good’ women. *Sanim soi* shows the daily lives of prostitutes in a brothel with all the mundane triviality, the women’s hopelessness, regrets, and daydreams in great detail without any moral judgement. It attests not only his inventive style and creative use of language, but also his perceptiveness on aspects of human life. These qualities have been admired by his contemporaries and younger generation alike. The novel reveals that ‘concealed

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<sup>4</sup> See chapter one [section ‘Representing Female Promiscuity and Prostitution: an Anxiety over Modernity’] for a concise discussion of *Ying khon chua* [(A Woman of Easy Virtue) (1937)], the first novel in book form that dealt extensively with an issue of prostitution by K. Surangkhanang (pseudonym). The discussion there looks at the representation of prostitute characters in literary limelight and concludes that the author was able to portray prostitutes as literary heroines because of the emphasis on the prostitute characters’ redeeming quality within the domain of motherhood.

<sup>5</sup> A reference to *Ying khon chua* was also made in the publisher’s introduction of Rong’s first edition of *Sanim soi*. See Rong, 1961: no page number. See also Rong’s interview on <http://www.tuneingarden.com/work/b-04sn09.shtml> (Accessed 20 April 2009). The website [www.tuneingarden.com](http://www.tuneingarden.com) compiles the most comprehensive information about the works of Rong, his interviews, biography, and anecdotes from his personal life and writing career. It creates a community among his fans, between the readers and the writer himself as well as the young writers who are inspired by Rong. It also offers space for amateur writers to publicise their selected works. Though Rong recently passed away (15 March 2009), the website continues to serve its initial purposes.

<sup>6</sup> See Harrison, 2002 for the investigation and discussion of Thida Bunnark’s works, her significance and the contribution of her work to the Thai female writing intellectual tradition.

underneath an artificial edifice of public morality are the “paid women” who service the sexual needs of society’ (Leyland, 2009: 36).

The title, *Sanim soi*, implies the sarcastic undertone of the novel. It derives from a derogatory idiom describing behaviours that are deliberately wimpy, giving up without trying, lacking perseverance and endurance, which gives the translated title ‘unwilling to endure’. The content of *Sanim soi* effectively renders its title ironic. When the author was asked about the novel’s title in an interview, he said, ‘I just used [*sanim soi*] as a kind of irony. Actually, prostitutes do take life seriously. It’s the hardest job, even harder than being a female minister [*ratthamontri ying*]. I used it rather sarcastically because the elderly often tell lazy girls off as *sanim soi*’ (Rong, 1984: 33).

Though superficially the prostitute characters appear happy and content with an ‘easy’ lifestyle, once examined closely, their painful past and futureless present have taught them to hold on to any possible ‘happiness’ that passes their way and to live for the day. In this respect, coupled with the ironic thrust of the title, *Sanim soi* can be seen as a ‘modern’ counter-discourse to the representation of prostitutes as ‘wayward women’ in archival documents of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century (Hong, 1998: 342).<sup>7</sup> More importantly, it counters the male-gazed, popular ‘historical’ portrayals of prostitutes in the brothels of the same period as ‘workers seeking fulfilment’ who were ‘pleased to be of service’, as portrayed in Thepchu Thapthong’s *Ying khome khiaw* (Women of the green lamp) (1983) (ibid). The novel explores their personal dimensions and subjectivity, and shows that their lives are empty and pervaded with a sense of hopelessness yet filled with a thirst for life. The first-person narrator, Kan, a pimp (*maengda*)<sup>8</sup> who intimately observes and interacts with them on and off ‘duty’, describes them:

Their lives had only yesterday and now. [...] Somsong never spoke of tomorrow. She liked drinking and yesterday. Just like Kripphaka loved eating and yesterday; Wongdeuan dancing and yesterday; Bang-orn American cigarettes, paperback romance, and yesterday; Im-ta men and yesterday. They all seemed to like yesterday. [...] No one including myself liked to

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<sup>7</sup> See Hong, 1998: 341-346 for the discussion of Thepchu’s anachronistic reconstitution of prostitutes in the nineteenth century as enthusiastic sex workers in his book *Ying-khome-khiaw: prawattisat an khomkheun khong sopheni nai sangkhom thai* (Women of the green lamp: a bitter history of prostitutes in Thai society) (1983).

<sup>8</sup> The word ‘*mangda*’ in Thai originally ‘refers to a horseshoe crab which survives by clinging to the back of its female mate and which dies when she does’ (Harrison, 1995:125, footnote 1).

talk about tomorrow because it hasn't arrived yet and perhaps  
will never come. (Rong, 1961:134-5)

The seemingly hedonistic lives of these women filled with drinking, eating, dancing, American cigarettes, paperback romance and men are juxtaposed with their preference for yesterday only to reinforce the emptiness, the lack of purpose and the hopelessness that they have to cope with day after day. *Sanim soi*, thus, portrays the lives of prostitutes and the brothel business in a somewhat 'realistic' manner filtered through the eye of the observant pimp, Kan. The prostitutes get to tell their own stories with their own voices through their interaction with Kan who is the first-person narrator. The author's representation of the prostitutes and prostitution shows that it is the corrupting society that makes prostitutes, not the prostitutes who corrupt the society. The argument stands in sharp relief to the assumption lying at the heart of the social 'purification' campaign against prostitution led by the political leader of the country at the time.

The background of the story was the early years of the 'American Era' in Thailand under Sarit's military regime. Sarit's regime bears direct relevance to the discussion of *Sanim soi* as the novel comes to an end with the police raiding the brothel as a result of the 'Prostitution Suppression Act, 1960' passed under Sarit, partly as a response to UN pressure (UNIFEM Gender Fact Sheet No.2).<sup>9</sup> More importantly, 'prostitution also came under the personal purview of Sarit, who believed sexual solicitation encouraged crime. He ordered that all prostitutes arrested be reformed by sending them to institutions that would train them for new professions' (Thak, 2007: 122). Two reform institutions were especially established to treat and train prostitutes as discussed in chapter one. The Act brought to an end the system of registered prostitution establishments. While it enforced no penalty on the clients, the Act discriminately subjected the procurers, prostitutes and brothel keepers to fines and imprisonment.<sup>10</sup> It was a part of Sarit's campaigns on social order or social purification through law enforcement and state control.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The country came under pressure to reform its prostitution laws as, by the late 1950s, Thailand 'was the only Asian member of the United Nations to have legalised brothels' (Jeffrey, 2002: 20). For discussion of gender, prostitution and Thai military regimes see Jeffrey, 2002: 11-28.

<sup>10</sup> The detail of the Prostitution Suppression Act, 1960 is available in Thai at: [www.thailaws.com/law/thaiacts/code1699.pdf](http://www.thailaws.com/law/thaiacts/code1699.pdf) (Accessed 30 July 09)

<sup>11</sup> Although Sarit's government made prostitution illegal by the Prostitution Prohibition Act of 1960, the Entertainment Places Act of 1966 allowed 'special services' in licensed entertainment places such as massage parlours, bars and night-clubs and made it possible for 'special service providers' to offer sexual services to customers 'on the sly'. The 1966 Act, in effect, prepared service and entertainment

Sarit's social purification campaigns directly evolved out of his purview of national development/modernisation project. The 'rationale' behind the campaigns was that 'to create a social atmosphere that would be conducive to his leadership, an atmosphere characterised by *proper* development and modernisation. [...] It appears that he believed that any attempt to achieve national modernisation and progress must start by ensuring that the nation's citizens are in the *correct* state of mind' (Thak, 2007: 121, my emphasis). The '*proper* development and modernisation' and '*correct* state of mind' are at best ambiguous and at worst oppressively totalitarian in their imposition on the people. 'People with long hair, tight pants and flashy clothes, which were then in vogue in the United States and had found their way to Thailand, were arrested as *anthaphan* [hoodlum/ hooligan]. [...] Rock and roll music was banned from government parties, and the police were told to be on the look out for illegal dancing of the 'twist' in public places' (ibid.). Sarit's attempt to direct the people, society and the country towards what he saw as 'proper' and 'correct' conduct, no matter what he meant by them, tended to be in conflict with how the people and society actually evolved, especially with regard to the pervasiveness of the American presence in Thailand—the R&R destination of American GIs. Being modern (*than-samai*) was already associated with the consumption of American popular culture and imported goods.

The leader's attempt to assert his hold on 'proper development' for the country and a 'correct state of mind' for the people can be carried out only externally by means of state authority. Thailand in the 1960s, as seen in some urban and urbanised sectors, was in the whirlwind of material modernisation, the desire to be modern, hedonistic consumption, state control against 'subversive' behaviours, panoply of poverty, and unshakeable 'traditional' beliefs. As the narrator of *Sanim soi* poignantly observes:

Television or American movies may have changed many things in our daily life. They taught us to be extravagant and urged us to be fashionably half a step forwards. But they would not have enough influence to make us throw amulets and unreasonable beliefs away from an amulet shelf. *Phi* Samorn or others may drink alcoholic drinks imported from Europe and may use *Madam Rubinstein's* cosmetics. But before using

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industry for the 1967 policy that permitted the US forces stationed in Vietnam to come to Thailand for the 'Rest and Recreation' activities. For details of the Entertainment Places Act of 1966 see <http://www.sexwork.com/Thailand/legal.html> (Accessed 19 January 2011).

whatever number of the foundation, she would not forget to base her make-up with some mantric powder from a witchdoctor. (Rong, 1961:179)

The material modernisation embodied in Western consumer goods such as ‘television’, ‘American movies’, imported alcoholic drinks, and ‘*Madam Rubinstein’s* cosmetics’ at once stands in contrast and co-exists with Thai ‘amulets’, ‘unreasonable beliefs’, and ‘mantric powder’. In the context of the story, Samorn’s different kinds of amulets are believed to bring wealth, and the mantric powder to enhance her charm and, in turn, attract clients. The implication can be drawn from the passage that ‘tradition’ has already been absorbed into the capitalist world of market economy in two ways. First, ‘tradition’ (amulets/mantric powder) encourages consumption (of sexual service) by the force of some supernatural power and, second, it is the consumption of ‘traditional goods’ within the context of market economy. The desire to be (or appear) up-to-date is expressed here in consumerist terms, that is to consume what modernity has to offer is to be modern. Thus, no conflict between being modern and traditional is perceived within the frame of reference of consumerism. It is in the capitalist market economy and the earlier-mentioned modern whirlwind that women in sex trade are committed consumers as well as commodities, the condition in which the characters struggle to survive and negotiate their identities and sexuality.

The following sections discuss two selected characters, Samorn, the madam who never was a prostitute, and Wongdeuan, the youngest and only prostitute who is deceived into life in a brothel. Though Samorn is an atypical madam in the sense that she has never been a prostitute, the fact that she runs the business puts her in the cultural category of ‘bad woman’ similar to the sex workers in her brothel. Samorn and Wongdeuan, however, are placed in different situations in terms of power relations and express the anxiety of modernisation in different ways. In Samorn’s case, this anxiety is manifested in a masochistic tendency whereas in Wongdeuan’s it is a subjection to an imposed refashioning of identity.

### **Samorn: The Sexualised CEO of Sado-Masochism**

The character of Samorn represents a tension within the ideas of ‘new woman’ who is independent, embraces her active sexuality and desire, and determines to make a career for herself in the sex trade. She is able to achieve and maintain these

characteristics of 'modern woman' by perpetuating a patriarchal social structure as well as exploiting the market economy and the commodification of the female body. Though it seems as if she is able to exercise her agency and gets the better of men both as a woman and a businesswoman, in the realm of her female sexuality, Samorn's masochistic tendency implies a symptom of anxiety over modernity figured in a body of a sexualised woman who is in need of control from a man.

The self-made, thirty-six-year-old, attractive madam successfully runs her brothel, though she moved it further out of Bangkok city centre, perhaps due to the need to move away from strong state control.<sup>12</sup> Despite her impoverished background, years of 'managerial' experience in one of Bangkok's famous brothels owned by an elderly madam enables her to transform a big, rented two-storey detached house compound into a modern, hedonistic paradise where women are fashionable commodities. The main house has a large lounge, well-made wooden furniture, a sparkling clean wooden floor, and is also equipped with the modern luxury items that one would expect to see in any upper-middle class houses in early 1960s Bangkok, such as record player, radio, electric fan and refrigerator. The brothel, 'Samorn's house', is frequented mostly by Chinese businessmen, journalists, writers, policemen, white-collar professionals and university students who have money to spend in this expensive place.<sup>13</sup>

The character of Samorn is portrayed through Kan's observant eyes, his sense of adoration for her includes admiration, protectiveness and sexual attraction. Though Samorn is actually the 'boss', the fact that they have been through a lot of ups and downs together, both in terms of life difficulties and business, creates a strong bond between them. Her kindness touched Kan so deeply since they first met at the elderly madam's over ten years ago. In Kan's narration or conversation, he always calls her

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<sup>12</sup> In Bangkok each district has its own police station. The police stations in districts in central Bangkok that have high profile business areas are often the focus of the Royal Thai Police for corruption and bribery. It might be easier in those further away from central for 'grey business' owners to form some kind of 'beneficial relationship' with the local police force.

<sup>13</sup> The novel was published in March 1961. In the context of the late 1950s-early 1960s, what Samorn charges her client is considered very expensive. While the Thai National Income per capita per annum of the year 1960 was 1,806 baht (Ornsi, 1987: 89), Samorn charges a client 200 baht for one 'session' and 300 baht if he would like to take the woman out to stay the night outside the brothel. Samorn takes fifty percent out of the total sum and the other fifty percent goes to the woman who provides the service. This rate applies to 'in-house' women whereas the thirty percent cut is taken from 'out-source' women (Rong, 1961: 277).

*phi* Samorn or *phi* Morn<sup>14</sup> (literally, older sister Samorn), which shows not only that she is older than him but also that he sincerely respects her.

### Samorn, the Business Woman

Samorn's power relation to the women in her brothel is in more than one area of their lives. Her role as the madam includes teaching them manners and enhancing their sexual attractiveness, that is how they should conduct themselves in the presence of the clients, how to take care of their appearance, sexual health and servicing the clients in bed. She is considerably kind to them in terms of providing them with physical comforts, yet strict when it comes to enforcing house rules, and ruthless in making money for business. The following scene shows the power relation between Samorn and the women. Note the attitudes each side assumes:

[Samorn was moody because the heavy rainstorm had made the brothel quiet for the last few nights. She saw the women sitting in a circle playing cards. Wanting to take it out on someone, she shouted:]

'Keep playing the damned cards and forget about day and night!'

'I just get annoyed with the rain', Somjai spoke softly.

Samorn seemed pleased now that someone joined in, so that she could have a go at them.

'Huh! Mind you! So, you feel annoyed as well? You lot are annoyed and then get into a group playing cards. What about me? *I pay for your keep. You lot don't pay for mine.* Do you know how much the rent is? And the food? You all eat like freaking pigs. I pay the maids for your comfort. You lot never have to be concerned with anything. What do you have to do? Huh? I just want to know...'

'I only said just a little', Somjai murmured while pushing her cards to the side.

'Not even just a little! *Your job is to sit and listen. Don't talk back.* Understand?' (Rong, 1961:225, my emphasis)

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<sup>14</sup> '*Phi*' actually means older siblings. However, it is commonly put in front of a personal name as a non-gender specific term of address to someone older although the addressee is not related to the addressor by blood. One can also address to oneself as *phi* when speaking to a younger person. In some cases, a wife addresses her husband as *phi* if he is older than her.

What is most striking in this scene is not the fact that Samorn can take it out on the woman according to her whim, but the compliance to Samorn's assertion of power, the madam whose 'favours' are owed by the prostitutes, on the part of Somjai who is the representative of the women working there. There is neither resistance nor negotiation from any women to Samorn's declaration that they owe it to her, 'I pay for your keep. You lot don't pay for mine'. Though the women are neither 'owned' by Samorn nor confined in the brothel, the relationship by no means resembles an 'employer-employee' model but rather the 'provider-receiver' relationship in its most hierarchical form, where the 'provider' is the 'superior' (*jao nai*) with complete authority over the 'receiver' who is the 'subordinate' (*luk norng*) taking orders.

Despite the fact that Samorn's source of income comes from taking a fifty percent cut from the women's earnings and that she should be in the position of 'receiver', the income the women bring does not empower them to negotiate with Samorn in terms of power relations and to define who is the 'provider' and the 'receiver'. It is Samorn who controls the definition, since the women are fully aware that their handsome income, despite the cut, is possible only because of her. Im-ta, another 'in-house' woman, offers an acute example. She previously earned thirty baht for one 'session' working in a brothel in the Phraengsapphasat area<sup>15</sup> before moving to Samorn's (ibid. 660), where she earns 200 baht for the same service and 300 baht if a client takes her out to stay the night somewhere else. Though half of the amount goes to Samorn, it remains a considerable sum of money, especially when compared to the 1,806 baht Thai National Income per capita per annum of the year 1960 (Ornsi, 1987: 89). The income is not the only crucial factor in the women's subjection to Samorn. The security she provides also plays a vital role in their relationship. In a 'high-end' brothel like Samorn's, the prostitutes are untouched by hoodlums (*anthaphan*), less likely to be troubled by roguish clients, and live in a comfortable environment where they eat the same food that Samorn eats and do not even have to do domestic chores. According to Samorn, the maintenance of such an environment and the brothel is costly, especially when she has to pay-off the corrupt police who take both money and free services from the women. These 'operating costs' further justify her attitude that she 'earns' their keep and, thus, has the 'right' to silence them.

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<sup>15</sup> One of many 'red-light' areas in Bangkok at the time.

In this modern setting of the brothel full of fashionable items, 'pre-modern' style relationships persist alive and well.

However, the evidence of Samorn providing the women with a decent standard of living points to the fact that a certain equilibrium needs to be maintained in the relationship. Though she exercised her power on them as the provider/superior, she knows that such expensive commodities contribute to the prosperity of her business in the tough competition of the sex trade. It is better for them to stay at her brothel than at others. On the part of the women, the income they earn enables them to support their families with many dependents and to maintain their economic independence which, in turn, transforms them into avid consumers in order to fill the void of their existence as discussed previously.

### **Samorn, the Sexualized Woman**

An analysis of the following scenes aims to illustrate how Samorn's sexuality is a manifestation of an anxiety for being an assertive, autonomous modern woman. Samorn's intense experiences as a young woman in her early twenties 'managing' a brothel inform her sexuality significantly. First, resisting the pressure to become a prostitute, she has established an uncompromising sense of sexual agency. Second, being a sexualized woman who paid a high price for her emotional involvement with men, she becomes emotionally protective of herself by not loving anyone. And third, Samorn's experience of coercive sexual violence initiates her masochism. The three intertwined factors play a crucial role in her sexuality, as the discussion of the following scenes demonstrate.

One of Samorn's troubling experiences while she was managing the old madam's brothel is her love affair. Kan describes Samorn 'as flirtatious as she was beautiful, blooming in her early twenties' (Rong, 1961: 165). In his narrative,

*Phi* Samorn had at least two lovers. One of them was a government administrative officer. The other was an insurance salesman. Samorn told herself that she loved them equally. I knew it from reading their correspondence in the letters she kept in a draw. I never saw them because she did not want them to come to the house. However, my nosiness led me to find out that she saw them outside during the day. (ibid.166)

[...]

The selfish, old madam of the house often nagged her, 'Be careful! They will suck your blood dry'.

'What difference would it make?! I also suck the blood of others, don't I *mae*?'<sup>16</sup>

(An old, rich man who owned a rubber plantation was courting her at the time.)

[...]

*Phi* Samorn knew that the old hag was regretting her wasting her youthfulness on personal love affairs instead of openly exchanging it for money like the other women in the house. However, no coercion would be forced upon her as long as she practically controlled all the business herself. [...]

She thus often said, 'If you dare to meddle in my business, be warned, don't call me ungrateful. If I get crazy one day, you wait and see, I'll go away and be an A. myself, competing with you.'<sup>17</sup> I just want to see who'd even come here again. Someone even offered me capital. I'm telling you'.

'I mean well for you'.

'Huh! Mean well', I remembered *phi* Samorn with her back straight, full of confidence. 'You? Being well meaning to anyone? You just regret that I'm not doing it for money. It cuts your income a lot a night, doesn't it?'

Once she had finished speaking, *phi* Samorn gave out a piercing, scornful laughter.

'You don't love yourself. I don't want to talk to you', the old woman said sulkily walking to her room. (ibid. 167-8)

'I don't love anyone, none at all'.

I heard her shout it out like a roar and I did not understand what she meant by that at all. (ibid. 169)

With an 'unusual' job like managing the brothel, the beautiful, flirtatious, sexually active Samorn consciously differentiates herself from the other women in the house by doing 'it' for pleasure/affection, not money. Although she is not a prostitute, it would not be presumptuous to say that she feels embarrassed by her job, especially when it comes to dealing with her supposedly respectable, middle-class lovers, an administrative officer and an insurance salesman. The fact that she does not want her lovers to visit her there and instead goes out to meet them in the daytime shows that Samorn separates her job from her personal life.

The old madam's nagging and Samorn's response to her bring to light the tension between sex, love, and money. The old woman has seen that no men will ever be sincere to women involved in the sex trade in any way. All they are after is sex and money. It does not make any difference to them whether Samorn is a prostitute or not.

<sup>16</sup> *Mae* literally means mother. See footnote 1 for explanation of its usage in this context.

<sup>17</sup> An 'A.' here is an abbreviation for 'agent' that is a madam.

Thus for the old madam, especially with her financial agenda, Samorn should trade her youthfulness and active sexuality for money rather than for something as precarious and fleeting as love or even affection. As for Samorn, her position in the brothel confirms to her that she can make money without having to trade her sex. Thus, she asserts her sexual agency, autonomy and the sense of self-differentiation against the market-economy logic of the brothel by choosing her own sexual partners and pairing sex with the erotic love and emotional pleasure/fulfilment that comes with it.

The other point that should be noted from the scene is the different meanings of 'love' that the characters used. Though it describes Samorn's feeling for the two men, her emphasis on not loving anyone including herself calls attention to the different meanings she uses at different times. In the broad spectrum of meanings of 'love', her declared rejection of love at the end of the scene objects 'idealised love' and its implied humanist-idealist paradigm of 'noble ideas' such as 'dedication' and 'selflessness'. Her love for the two lovers is erotic love and its accompanying carnal desire, pleasure, bodily fulfilment, as well as affection and emotional fulfilment as opposed to lust. Samorn's rejection of love thus expresses her cynicism towards 'idealised love'. On the part of the old madam, who reads Samorn's behaviour as not loving herself, the term denotes the practicality of self-protectiveness, of not putting oneself in a vulnerable situation and the comfort brought about by financial security.

Samorn ends up paying the price for asserting her autonomy and sexual agency through having relationships with the two men. It turns out that the prophesy of the old woman is fulfilled. Within almost a year, Samorn is swindled out of all her money by the two men, who are actually siblings scheming out to deceive her. She calmly receives the news of her misery. The most she does if someone unwittingly asks about it is to laugh and say, 'It's just my expensive investment in buying happiness' (ibid. 170). Samorn simultaneously summarises and transforms her tragic, heartbreaking pain into an unfortunate incident by using a detached tone and commercial terms, 'investment' and 'buying', as if to accept that a relationship is also a kind of commodity and that she wrongly pairs off sex with erotic love. Though 'expensive investment' could mean both the money and the emotion that she sincerely gave but which turned out to be in exchange for 'happiness', her strategic transformation of 'love pain' into 'bad investment' is a wilful act of asserting her agency. Moreover, Samorn's case is also a reversal of a common, straightforward

situation in a brothel, where men exchange their money for ‘happiness’ derived from prostitutes. What happened here is that Samorn, the ‘bad woman’, *de facto* buys her ‘happiness’ from the two, ‘respectable’, middle-class men who ‘sell’ themselves in effect, hence, Samorn’s answer is a criticism of the hypocrite morality and superficial, high moral-ground assumed by the middle-class when it comes to prostitution.

Samorn’s most painful experience of men is sexual violence. Though it is known among the clients that Samorn is the ‘manager’ of the house, not a prostitute, men often attempt to exchange their money for her sexual favour. From Kan’s observation, they know that she wants love and that she does not define it as something that is invaluable (ibid. 171). That fact invites them to try their luck. One of them is a local police inspector, who turns her personal experience of men as a young woman even more bitter, if not traumatic.

First, he came with masculine vigour and a bouquet in his words.

She was not interested.

Then, that clever man came with condemnations and threats.

*Phi* Samorn scornfully laughed and refused.

He came again for the last time embodying the law. And every word he said meant the opening or closing of the business, which meant the destiny of all the women in the house.

Only then could he take her out, so that everyone involved could see how brutalised she was when returning the next day.

‘He might actually love you’, the madam tried to console her.

[...]

‘Don’t ever mention that man to me again’.

‘Anyhow, I won’t forget I owe you my gratitude in doing this’, said the old woman.

‘Huh!’, she trampled a cigarette butt with the heel of her shoe. (ibid. 172-173)

[...] Though *phi* Samorn was smiling and joyful, deep down, deeper than the bottom of her heart and mind, I knew she unfathomably hated life. She hated everyone. Some she hated more, some less. All the lovers after that, she also hated. Me, she hated but only less. Even herself, she hated and hated the least. (ibid. 174)

The police inspector’s increasing aggression in his approach to Samorn is by no means unusual. The corruption and excess of power of the police force has always

been notorious to the Thai public even before Sarit's premiership.<sup>18</sup> The police inspector character is a subtle political commentary on Sarit's leadership and campaigns on social purification and modernisation, suggesting that they are only a re-package of the old, corrupting content. Moreover, the police inspector's recourse to abusing state power is not dissimilar to a local gangster/hoodlum (*anthaphan*) who disturbs public peace and resorts to brute force and violence to get what he wants, the kind of troublemaker and behaviour that Sarit wanted to wipe out. Within the context of prostitution being condemned as a 'social vice', the presentation of Samorn as a victim turns the shadowy figure of the police inspector into a symbol of the abusive power of the state. The political commentary here offers an example of how *Sanim soi* shows the forces of modernisation that are brought about by authoritarianism.

More importantly, Samorn's brutalised body is a profane display of the high price she has paid for asserting her agency. Her indifference to the police inspector's offer and her scorn towards his offence are her insistence on autonomy and resistance to his male authority. Only when he assumes state power and other women are also at stake can he then pressure Samorn against her will. Though no one knows what actually happened, in the aftermath her brutalised body unequivocally says that it must have been a traumatic experience for Samorn. Her emotional injury is worsened by the lack of sympathy from anyone and turns more painful by a contemptible consolation and useless gratitude. Samorn's adherence to her sexual agency and autonomy to choose her own partners and enjoy her active sexuality as shown in the two scenes brings upon her traumatic experiences, emotional scars and physical pain.<sup>19</sup> It also fosters hatred and makes her incapable of love.

The psychological impact of Samorn's assertion of herself as a 'modern woman', which 'backfires' on her is revealed in the following scene between Samorn and Thiat, an ex-police sergeant major, her latest lover. The masochistic love scene between Samorn and Thiat takes place after the younger man has finished smoking vaporised heroin,<sup>20</sup> to which the author dedicates space in the main narrative in order

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<sup>18</sup> See chapter one for the discussion of the power conflict between Army Chief Sarit Thanarat and Police Chief Phao Siyanon during Phibunsongkhram's second premiership 1948-1957.

<sup>19</sup> Samorn's predicament in this case can render her character symbolic of the nascent modern woman who could potentially put oneself at stake in an assertion of one's autonomous sexuality.

<sup>20</sup> The heroin here, nicknamed 'capsule', is placed on aluminium foil which is heated from underneath by a candle. The drug turns into thick liquid then it boils and gives off the smoke which Thiat inhales through a straw. The author inserted a footnote (see Rong, 1961:182-184) giving an explanation of 'capsule' as he wrote the chapter of *Sanim soi* in September 1960. At the time, 'capsule' was plaguing Bangkok and some big provinces. He also described what it was and raised concern for its abuse.

to elaborate its effect and a lengthy footnote to explain the drug-abuse situation. This authorial insertion expresses a deliberate attempt on the part of the author to raise awareness of a social problem. Thiad was under the influence of the substance when he and Samorn engage in the violent foreplay as if each is suddenly given a cue and knows the role to play in this lovers' game.

'Don't touch me!', he shouted furiously.

'Please let me touch you...I love you...Can you hear me Thiad? I love you...', her voice sounded out of breath as she tried to grab him. Thiad moved away towards the corner at the end of the bed.

'Thiad, where're you going? ... Can I just touch you please? ...Just a touch...Are you bored with me? ...Thiad...Thiad...My darling...'

She was bewailing and walking towards him.

Thiad jumped to the front of the bed.

'Don't come near me! Can you hear? Don't come near me!'

Samorn laughed painfully.

'Aren't you mine? ...You promised you'd be mine'.

(ibid. 185)

[...]

Only God and Thiad know what Samorn wanted.

The well-built man steadied his legs to centre himself and opened his arms to hold her as she collapsed onto his chest.

'You're mine...Thiad darling...Please...be mine and only mine...'

Samorn was crying without tears. Her two hands grabbed a hold of his waist. Thiad struggled to get out of her embrace. He freed himself from her hold then pushed her away at arm's length. Samorn moved back half a step. She was about to mumble something but it was slower than the back of his hand which slapped her cheek.

!

[...]

Thiad clutched his hand—released—clutched—and swung his hand to pull her hair and slapped her again twice.

!!

The slaps of passion drew her close.

'Kill me...Thiad...Just kill me...', she cried out hysterically.

Thiad looked at her contused face and stood still. He was gauging—a god and a devil were fighting in the heart of this man.

'Why are you standing like that?...Slap...Slap me, my dearest', she laughed with her tears.

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Similar use of an authorial footnote to reinforce the drug problem also appears on page 523 when he emphasised the danger of heroin addiction.

Thiad waited no more.

!!

Two more slaps. Samorn collapsed on the floor. He leaped towards it almost at the same time she did.

He knelt down till almost crawling, panting. He bowed to kiss her feet and kept apologising. Samorn pulled her feet away, pushed herself up with an arm, and steadied herself by leaning on the side of her hip. (ibid. 186-187)

[...]

'Haven't you been hurt enough?'

'Slap me...Slap me till I am crushed by your hand...Thiad... Don't pity me...Don't you love me anymore?...'

'Love more than anything...' (ibid. 188)

[...]

Tears of pity went down between his cheeks and his nose.

While the man with heartache was crying in his thoughts, Samorn with her bruises was laughing. (ibid. 189)

This scene reveals to the reader Samorn's sexual 'taste' for the first time. Moreover, as it is sequenced after the flashback of Samorn's traumatic experiences as a young woman, it is necessary to look at this scene in relation to the previous one earlier discussed. The fact that Thiad is an ex-police sergeant major also serves as a link between the two scenes. Being a drug-addict, ex-policeman who is living off a woman puts Thiad in a negative light and the suspicion that he must have been corrupt while serving the force. He resembles a figure of corrupting authority not dissimilar to the police inspector. The present scene actually discloses what might have happened in the past, which is in effect the 'cause' of it.

The masochistic foreplay scene is marked by a tension between the two lovers and the shifting roles between an 'aggressor' and a 'nonbelligerent'. Though capable of violence, Thiad is evidently not a sadistic type since his sorrowful hesitation and emotional conflict stand in stark contrast to Samorn's pain-induced pleasure. What is striking in this scene is that the roles of Samorn and Thiad shift half-way through. From the first line of the scene starting with Thiad's shouting to Samorn's vigorous plead for him before he slaps her, it is Samorn who is pursuing Thiad. He assumes the role of a rejecting, defensive nonbelligerent while Samorn is a demanding ('asking') aggressor who takes action and is persistent in her desire for him. Once slapped, Samorn turns into an aggressive receiver of violence, a 'nonbelligerent' of sorts while Thiad becomes a reluctant aggressor.

To see how the Samorn-Thiad scene serves as the re-enactment of what might have happened between Samorn and the police inspector, see table 1 and 2:

Samorn	Thiad	Samorn
- pursues	- rejects - slaps her in rejection (she 'asks' for it)	- is satisfied

Table 1

Police Inspector	Samorn	Police Inspector
- pursued	- rejected - being slapped because of her rejection (she 'asked' for it)	- was satisfied

Table 2

The fact that Samorn starts off as a pursuer but ends up a receiver of violence should not overshadow the satisfaction she derived from it since 'being satisfied' is the key condition of the act. As mentioned earlier, the present scene could retrospectively uncover what might have happened in the past as a causal revelation. The Samorn-Thiad scene, therefore, could be interpreted as a kind of re-enactment of Samorn and the police inspector's sexual violence. The re-enactment is the temporary relief of Samorn's trauma by re-living it in within a 'safe' environment. From what can be gathered from the aftermath of the sexual violence against Samorn by the police inspector together with the 'revelation' from the present scene, the parallel, plausible scenario of Samorn-police inspector trauma can be worked out as shown in table 2. As the police inspector forced Samorn to go with him against her will, he was the pursuer/aggressor whereas Samorn was the pursued/rejecting nonbelligerent. Within an abusive, vicious 'logic' of male authority, her rejection 'caused'/'asked' [*sic.*] him to take the violent measure in order to satisfy himself.

Putting the two scenarios side by side, it becomes clear that Samorn-Thiad's role reversal completes the re-enactment and that Samorn, through the change of the locus of power, actually takes on the role of her initial aggressor, the police inspector, in the scene. Samorn is, therefore, 'working through' her trauma in the masochistic re-enactment. However, her re-enactment is not a 'cure' to her trauma. Her repetitive masochistic re-enactment implies yet another psychological impact that the traumatic

experience of sexual abuse has had on her. The masochistic re-enactment is a chronic symptom of her anxiety to assert her sexuality and her subjectivity which should be read in parallel with Samorn's attempt to define herself as a modern woman.

The fact that Samorn needs to be in pain in order to be sexually satisfied suggests that she turns the pain-afflicting experiences against herself rather than the aggressors. It expresses her anxiety for being a sexually assertive, autonomous modern woman. Samorn's masochistic tendency suggests a chronic symptom of anxiety over modernity figured in a body of a sexualised woman in need of control from man to curb her active sexuality and autonomy. Her assertive sexuality and autonomy have cost her traumatic experiences yet they irrevocably constitute her identity and modern womanhood. Samorn psychologically takes recourse in masochism as self-punishment and a relief of guilt for being a modern woman, a product of a capitalist market economy and modernity. The pain gives her an illusion of being sexually subjugated and submissive which compensates for her assertive sexuality and autonomy, thus giving her sexual gratification. Her masochistic tendency, that is receiving/enjoying male aggression and mutilation of her female body, is actually paralleled with the fact that she can maintain her identity as modern woman by perpetuating a patriarchal social structure through the commodification, that is the capitalist mutilation, of female bodies in prostitution. The character of Samorn, therefore, represents the ultimate anxiety of modernisation.

### **Wongdeuan: A Childish Whore and Her Refashioned Identity**

Contrary to Samorn's assertiveness and autonomy is Wongdeuan's compliance to an imposed, refashioned identity. Wongdeuan is the only one who is deceived into the brothel life at a young age after being verbally, physically and sexually abused in her own family. Although it is not her initial choice to become a prostitute, Wongdeuan is cast out to be a prostitute 'with her life and mind' (*thang chiwit lae jit-jai*) (ibid. 472) according to Kan's ideal. The brothel becomes her home, the madam, the pimp and fellow prostitutes her 'family' of sorts.

Wongdeuan was fourteen years old when she was raped and sold to Samorn's brothel by Yort, a partner of her mother. Her carpenter father died of tuberculosis when her mother, Lamom, was two-months pregnant with Wongdeuan. The mother was left a widow at the age of twenty-three. Lamom's anger towards her late husband,

her mean-spirited nature and a life of hardship and poverty in a Bangkok slum fostered in her an unfathomable hatred for her only daughter. Wongdeuan was neglected and abused by her mother. The drunkard widow with a meagre wage from a dye factory job was notorious for her licentiousness as she always ‘picked up’ random men from the street. Yort, her latest and richest, earned a decent salary being a chauffeur of a *farang* employer. Lamom brought the unconscious Yort home one evening from a restaurant where they met and got drunk together. She took his money and was determined to make Yort stay with her as a partner.

Noticing Yort’s increasingly intense, lustful look at her beautiful daughter, Lamom implicitly offered Wongdeuan to him as an incentive to stay and deliberately left the house to give him the opportunity. She returned home and caught him in the act. Despite Wongdeuan’s plea for help, Lamom disowned her daughter on the grounds of betrayal and turned her out. Her plan to get rid of Wongdeuan out of jealousy and to lure Yort to stay was accomplished, or so she thought. However, it was Yort who got the most out of the situation. He had contacted Samorn a while back about selling Wongdeuan in order to get back the money Lamom had taken from him. Yort phoned Kan, the pimp, to find Wongdeuan and tell her that her bus conductor boyfriend, Prasit, had heard of what had happened and had sent him to take her to a safe place because Prasit was injured after a fight with other bus conductors. The truth was that Yort had beaten up the young man to stop him from helping the abused Wongdeuan. Yort’s ploy and Lamom’s selfishness cause Wongdeuan’s entry into the life of a prostitute.

Wongdeuan’s dramatic background shows that everyone who is involved in her misfortune, her merciless mother and Yort, the business-minded Samorn and the knavish Kan, are motivated by money. Wongdeuan the prostitute is the outcome of poverty and the force of market-based economy in a modern society that alters and dictates human relation. Kan’s grooming of her into being a prostitute ‘with her life and mind’ (ibid.) implies that Wongdeuan is his construction right from the beginning. The following is Wongdeuan’s ‘début’ scene in *Sanim soi*:

Wongdeuan woke up the latest this morning. Wearing only a small towel, she walked out of her bedroom in *cha-cha-cha*. She was learning to dance and speak the *American* language. Only seventeen and wild-hearted [*jai taek*], she was so energetic at this phase in life.

*'Everybody cha-cha-cha'*, she jerkily shook her head and swung her waist. *'One two three cha-cha-cha one two three'*.

'Bonkers!', Kripphaka looked askance at Wongdeuan smiling and chewing *thorng yort*,<sup>21</sup> the side of her cheek bulging out.

*'Why-don't-you-talk-to-me* like this. Why did you say I'm bonkers? *Cha-cha-cha'*.

Wongdeuan playfully moved her head from side to side swinging her hip all the time. The knot of the towel at the front of her waist came undone. She grabbed it and swung it up to cover her hair.

*'cha-cha-cha, cha-cha-cha'*.<sup>22</sup> (ibid. 119)

Wongdeuan is coming out in a towel that barely covers her naked body and dances cha-cha-cha into a roomful of her house members. Apart from this scene, there is no suggestion of any exhibitionist behaviour in Wongdeuan at all throughout the novel. What is interesting in the scene is the combination of Wongdeuan's playful, excessively childish behaviour and her 'semi-public' nakedness that is unlikely to be the behaviour of a seventeen-year-old who has been a sex worker for 3 years. Note that the scene emphasises her playfulness rather than sexualises her bare body. The exaggeration of her childishness implies that her 'commercial value' and 'product identity' lie in her girly liveliness, childishness and sex appeal as a young and supposedly innocent girl. Though she has been transformed from a deprived, neglected, abused child into a fashionable, wild-hearted, urban young woman who is also an enthusiastic consumer of sensational American culture such as dancing and speaking the language, Wongdeuan maintains the impression of the young and 'innocent'.

Wongdeuan's broken English sing-a-song and the dance portray the pervasiveness of Western culture in the fabric of Thai life in the late 1950s and early 1960s. However, she has to mix her English sentence with Thai in order to finish it, though wrongly, as she actually wants to say 'Why do you talk to me like this?' but uses 'don't' instead of 'do' and the colloquial Thai words '*yang ngi*' in place of 'like this' in English. In her context, no one would know whether she is speaking it rightly

<sup>21</sup> *Thorng yort*, literally dropped gold, is a kind of Thai dessert made from egg yolk and rice flour. The mixture is dropped into boiling syrup to cook and maintain its bite-size droplet shape. Once cooked, *thorng yort* pieces are left to soak up and cool off in syrup before they are removed to serve.

<sup>22</sup> Words and sentences in italic indicate that they are transliterated from English and used in combination with Thai.

or wrongly. Accuracy does not matter, only the fact that she speaks the 'fashionable language' does. English thus becomes yet another accessory for the young urbanite.

Though Wongdeuan seems to be a prove of to Kan's career success as a pimp in his creation of her as a prostitute, her background situation needs to be taken into account in order to understand why there is no resistance from Wongdeuan to the idea of her becoming a prostitute. Having been abused by her own mother all her life, Wongdeuan is also raped at the age of fourteen because of the mother's betrayal and abandoned to a life on the street, which potentially means a more violent degree of physical and sexual abuse. Her isolated nucleus family in the context of urban poverty leaves her no familial support. Her destitute life deprives her of social and educational support. The other latent yet crucial factor that asserts a strong hold on Wongdeuan and other women in the story is a cultural assumption that a raped woman is impure and already ruined, too damaged to reclaim a 'normal' life of a 'good woman'. These factors compounded with being young, inexperienced and put into a comfortable environment, though in the brothel, for the first time in her life make becoming a prostitute appear like a 'reasonable' decision.

### **The Refashioning of Wongdeuan's 'Whore Identities'**

Wongdeuan's 'product identity' as young, lively and 'innocent' whore is refashioned by Kan. He creates a melancholic, university student Wongdeuan so that she can work for the daytime opening hours as well as from the usual night time opening.

'...So you mean I'll have to be two persons at the same time?'

'Yes! It's just like day and night.'

I told her to get herself some university student's uniforms in the Maensi area.

'Do I need to get a pair of white shoes?' she asked laughingly.

'No, you don't. Just perm your hair and wear lipstick. You're in the fourth year finishing your degree', I was so delighted by my evil thought. 'The most important thing you've to remember is be serious and reticent. Exclaim in English every now and then. And...er...practice smiling sadly to the mirror frequently, too'. (Rong, 1961:289-90)

Wongdeuan perceives Kan's refashioning as something alien to the way she sees herself. His vision is another 'person' entirely as she says, 'I'll have to be two

persons' (ibid.289), which means the person who she normally is and an invented university student persona. Though she understands that she has to become a university student for a daytime job, she pictures herself differently from Kan. Wongdeuan asks about the white shoes, which are worn by the first year students in some government universities as part of their uniforms, yet another emblem of an 'innocent' fresh(wo)man that she might be able to somewhat relate to. However, Kan's refashioning of her is not just the change of clothes. He wants her to assume a different identity. His projected image of her is actually accompanied by a kind of assumed, unspoken sad story of a 'respectable' educated young woman driven by some misfortune or unpredictability into a life of 'side-line' prostitution. Being serious, reticent and sad (though smiling) is diametrically different from the Wongdeuan who is bursting with youthful liveliness in the earlier scene. He reinvents her as another kind of modern woman who is educated, sophisticated, fashionable and, more importantly, sexually available. The two things that the young, lively whore shares with the university student are using English and sexual availability. Hence, here the cultural currency of English is revisited as sign of education, sophistication, fashionableness and cultural accessory, but not as a means of communication.

Wongdeuan seems to accept the refashioning of her identity as a 'sexualised, sophisticated modern woman' by Kan. Perhaps she just takes it as a role to play or a temporary subject position. The lived experience of how fluid an identity is, as manifested by Kan's refashioning of her, does not open Wongdeuan up for the possibility of empowerment or identity construction that she might be able to negotiate for herself and in order to assert her sense of agency. The following scene is a case in point, where her assumed student identity greatly affects Kan in ways that are incomprehensible to Wongdeuan. She proves to be so popular among daytime clients that she is exhausted; even Kan lusts after the product of his own creation and training. Though it is implicit that sexual intercourse between Kan and women in the house including Wongdeuan is normal, Kan's make-belief of her incites his imagination and unbearably arouses him.

Newly refashioned Wongdeuan was a world away from the one with a towel on her head dancing *cha-cha-cha*. With hair cut so short that the back of her neck showed, a uniform skirt in the dome-shaped Parisian style fashionable among

female students and the genteel manner trained by myself, my blood rushed when our eyes met.

Another glass of beer was emptied. I deceived myself till I believed that Wongdeuan actually came from a university. Suddenly, the ambition deeply seized the core of my heart.

I was only familiar with women we picked up from the street. And now Wongdeuan was just within my reach. Had she descended from the sky above?

'How are you now? Feeling any better?', I asked trying to appear as polite as possible.

'Yes'.

'I'll open another bottle of beer. Then, we'll take it to the room up stairs to drink and relax. Ok?'

'Whoa, what's got into you, *phi* Kan?', she exclaimed.

I smiled embarrassingly and looked down feeling a bit awkward. Well, she was a university student after all.

'Wongdeuan'.

'Yes?'

'Should I open another bottle of beer?'

'Can't it be another day, *phi* Kan?', she begged with the weary look in her eyes, 'I don't feel so well. I'm tired and feverish too'.

'Well,' I reached down to the horizontal refrigerator for a bottle of beer, 'Break a bit of sweat and it might just go away'.

'Oh you! I don't want to listen to you. Well, don't you tell me I'm no good then.' (ibid. 341-2)

Wongdeuan the student whore epitomises men's 'desirable modern woman' who is educated, fashionable, refined yet sexually available, similar to Wilan in *Thalay reu im* discussed in chapter four. Kan projects his desire onto Wongdeuan, who is oblivious of it at first as her reaction to him shows. In this scene, Kan sees the dynamics between himself and Wongdeuan as a man-woman relationship which involves a certain level of negotiation and courting. He tries to be polite and feels embarrassed and awkward. On Wongdeuan's part, despite being unwell and disinclined, she feels obliged to have sex with him on the grounds of their pimp-prostitute relationship. Her feeling of sexual obligation towards him as the prostitute dissolves a potential empowerment she could have had as Wongdeuan the student, a 'good' woman as opposed to a prostitute. She does not use an empowered subject position to assert her agency and negotiate with him in the situation.

In the same occasion, Kan imposes himself upon Wongdeuan again after feeling aroused by the sound of her having a shower. Although there is no physical

violence involved, Wongdeuan is again unsuccessful in her refusal and cries afterwards.

‘What got into you?—Eh—No, don’t—I’m in a rush to get dressed’.

‘There’s plenty of time, my Wongdeuan’.

‘What about you, to whom do you belong?’

‘You, Wongdeuan’, I looked up and smiled at her.

‘As if someone like you will ever belong to anyone, you’re selfish’. (ibid. 348)

[...]

‘What time is it now?’, I turned and asked her when I finished from my waking dream once again.

‘Probably around eight’, she replied indistinctly, curling herself up just a palm apart from me and breathing softly.

I sprang up to get dressed. [...]

‘Thank you, Wongdeuan’, I bent over to tell her.

She turned her face to me and gave a sad smile. I was just about to leave the room when the light in there showed me the tears brimming in her eyes as I heard the gentle sobs.

They sounded as if they came from the deepest part of her body.

‘What’s wrong with you?’, I asked, ‘Are you unwell or sad about something?’

‘No, it’s nothing’.

Her voice was caught between breathing and sobbing.

I sat down and reached the back of my hand to touch her forehead. My goodness! It was fiery. Wongdeuan turned her face away from me.

‘Yes, you have a fever. I’ll ask someone to bring you some medicine’.

‘I already told you I wasn’t well’, she said. Her sad, offended feelings [*khwaam noi jai*] fell between the two of us. (ibid. 349-350)

[...]

‘My body’s all aching. I don’t want to move even an inch, *phi Kan*’, she said breathlessly.

‘Are you having your period?’ I was guessing the cause of her illness.

‘No, it isn’t that otherwise I wouldn’t be able to work today, you silly’.

‘Well, not having one then. How long has it been late?’

[...] ‘...if there’s a blunder’, I said again, ‘...tell me sooner rather than later, Wongdeuan. Don’t hide it or else it’ll be trouble’.

‘*Phi Kan*, what’s wrong with you? You worry too much [*khit mak*]. I had my period a week ago’, she sulked. (ibid. 351-352)

Claiming her casually as ‘my Wongdeuan’, Kan tries to convince her that this moment is on a personal level. Wongdeuan does not reject his claim but instead negotiates with him by asking him to whom he belongs. Unconvinced by his meaningless answer, she rebukes him as selfish on a personal level but also gives in to him. Wongdeuan’s derogatory remark bears no effect on Kan because she does not act on it but passively takes his sexual advance. Her crying is a result of both a physical illness and emotional pain of being exploited by Kan, who denies her agency. Though he appears to engage with her on a personal level, immediately after the second intercourse Kan resumes the professional level of the relationship and treats her as his subordinate, who deserves only a dispassionate ‘thank you’ for her sexual service. For Wongdeuan, the sexual engagement becomes the selfish man-exploited woman relationship. Though Kan acknowledges her ‘sad, offended feelings’ (ibid. 350), he does not return to the personal level in dealing with her. He does not even think of bringing her the medicine by himself. At this point, Wongdeuan has completely lost her ground. His inquiring into the cause of her illness is clearly impersonal and assumes ‘superior-subordinate’ relationship. He asks if she is having her period as if they did not just have sex twice! In his pimp repertoire, a woman feels unwell because she is either having a period or not having one. Kan’s presumptuous suspicion of Wongdeuan’s pregnancy annoys her, not because he actually worries too much (*khit mak*) but because he does not care enough to understand that he has done something wrong against her. Wongdeuan is in a disempowered position in both ‘man-woman’ and ‘pimp-prostitute’ modes of relationship with Kan.

Wongdeuan’s body-ache and fever are symptoms of primary-stage syphilis. She is left untreated and receives only basic fever relief/painkillers, penicillin tablets and care from a fellow prostitute. Wongdeuan gets very ill but asks this friend to keep her illness a secret because she wants to see if Kan will ever think of her and care about her. This secret means she is risking her own life by not getting treated properly. Her illness becomes critical and life-threatening. Samorn and Kan finally find out and call a real doctor because a quack doctor (*mor theuan*) who visits the brothel every now and then cannot cure her with his penicillin shots. Wongdeuan is admitted into a clinic to receive proper medical treatment and is later cured.

Though Wongdeuan is able to recognise different levels of relationship in which she and Kan operate, she fails in her negotiation with him because she is

unable to use the fluidity of her identities to her advantage. She is aware that there is more than one 'desirable modern woman' identity. She is a youthful, lively, fashionable, innocent yet wild and desirable modern woman. Also, she can pose as an educated, sophisticated, fashionable, refined yet sexually available modern woman. However, Wongdeuan does not use these two empowering subject positions to assert her agency with Kan. She finally retreats into being the lovelorn victim of an unequal relationship between a man and a woman in her attempt to test Kan's feeling for her at the expense of her own life. It is a willing subjection to his power over her and shows that she accepts the disempowered position of being an abused woman. Wongdeuan is completely subsumed into patriarchy and is unable to use to her advantage the other possibilities that come with the modern world. In the final instance, she fails to make a place for herself and to thrive in the context of modernity.

### **Conclusion: The Unbearable Desire to Be Modern**

Against the backdrop of modernisation led by a military regime and driven by the ways in which the dynamics of the epoch permeated urban life, the earlier discussion of *Sanim Soi* shows that the state of being modern is defined by two interrelated factors. Firstly, the consumption of what modernity has to offer, whether consumer products such as imported alcoholic drinks, cigarettes, cosmetics; or cultural accessories such as Western-style dancing and the English language. Secondly, the behaviours that evolve out consumerism and turn a consumer into a product of modernisation, such as a wild, youthful, fashionable character compounded with sexual availability (i.e. Wongdeuan); or an urbane sophisticate who is available sexually (i.e. the university student identity of Wongdeuan). Though Samorn is not a prostitute and prides herself on not being one, she is culturally considered to be one through her involvement in prostitution as discussed earlier. Samorn and Wongdeuan represent the opposing sides of the argument which has evolved out of the issue of prostitution. That is, a prostitute with agency in her wilful act of 'getting the better of men and male-dominated society' (Hong, 1998: 348), on the one hand, and a prostitute as a 'hapless [victim] of traditional mores operating in the context of uneven capitalist development' (ibid.), on the other.

*Sanim soi* approaches prostitution as the manifestation of how sexual labour, market-based economy and consumerism are intertwined and intensified by the conditions of the modern world. It also represents prostitution through complex individual layers that challenge cultural prejudice against prostitutes. The novel shows in an intimate, personal dimension how prostitution functions in the Thai socio-economic and cultural system. As Truong (1990) proposes, ‘the emergence of capitalism intensifies the utilisation of sexual labour in prostitution owing to the intensity of social and economic dislocations’ (75). Prostitution is a capitalist transformation of ‘an indispensable activity within all forms of production’ that is women’s reproductive labour—procreation, sexual pleasure and domestic labour (Lewis, 1999: 135). However, while reading *Sanim soi*, one should be wary of falling into the polemical trap surrounding the issue of prostitution. In other words, it is seeing prostitution as either a ‘wilful career choice’ with an emphasis on female autonomy and an ability to make decisions regardless of circumstances such as poverty, experiences of sexual abuse, the virgin-whore cultural discrimination of women, or the ‘complete exploitation of women’ where women have no agency or resistance and are entirely forced by external factors such as parental authority, poverty and deception. As the novel illustrates, the two characters live in the complexity and contradiction of rapid modernisation, being both consumers and commodities, utilising others and being utilised.

The discussion in this chapter on the topic of modern Thai female identity negotiation, with its focus on the modern environment and the power relation between men and women, reinforces the crucial roles that a market-based economy and consumerism play in the construction of one’s identity and gender role as also illustrated in chapter three and four. This chapter has further explored the dynamic, complex and at times violent power relation between men and women in a way that proves women’s identity negotiation to be inextricably connected to that of their counterpart. In the final instance, the painful experiences of Samorn and Wongdeuan as modern women serve as a reminder of the ‘fundamental polarisation in Thai society between the interests of men and those of women’ (Nidhi, 1994a in Hong, 1998:351). The next chapter will examine the construction of modern male identities and how it relates to women, prostitution and modernity.

## CHAPTER 6

### NEGOTIATING MODERN THAI MASCULINITIES

This chapter explores the issue of modern Thai male identities in the context of Thailand's rapid urbanisation, encapsulated by Bangkok. The capital, though previously resembling more 'an old-fashioned "port-of-trade" than a modern metropolis' (Pasuk, 1982: 7), from the late 1950s increasingly became an expression of materialistic advancement, urban 'sophistication' and fashionableness as well as a reservoir of social vices such as prostitution, drug abuse and criminal gangs. It was a time of continuing economic boom as a result of American financial aid and military presence in Thailand. Under the rubric of modernisation, Bangkok epitomised the country's immersion in a socio-economic whirlwind that was often equated with Westernisation.

The selected literary texts examined in this chapter portray the attempts of the various male characters from different generations to define their heterosexual masculinity against the backdrop of a Bangkok in transition from the early 1960s to the mid-1970s. They are *Sanim soi* (Unwilling to Endure) (1961) by Rong Wongsawan and *Thalay reu im* (The Insatiable Sea) (1972) by Suwanni. With reference to the analysis of the three young male characters from *Thalay reu im* in chapter four on modern Thai youth identities and a father-son relationship mediated through commercial sex in *Sanim soi*, this chapter looks at the construction of masculinities<sup>1</sup>, specifically in terms of male hetero-normative sexual culture intertwined with the female counterpart. In a society where most men enjoy cultural endorsement of their casual sexual engagement in the context of commercial sex, the sexualised aspect of masculinity is a part of male public and social life. Cultural assumptions in gendered terms that lead to male sexual licence and the 'fundamental polarisation in Thai society between the interests of men and those of women' (Nidhi, 1994a in Hong, 1998:351), mentioned in chapter five, need to be scrutinised. More importantly, the chapter examines the way the characters define, negotiate and attain their masculinities within the context of Thai heterosexual male sexual culture caught in the whirlwind of modernity where the aspiration for advancement resulted in the development of the material environment than human resource.

Although the focus of this chapter is the construction and negotiation of modern Thai masculinities, it does not seek to define ‘modern Thai masculinity’ (or masculinities) as a fixed entity definable by empirical data. It approaches the topic in question with the understanding that ‘“masculinity” does not exist except in contrast with “femininity”’ (Connell, 2005:68) and both exist as ‘various ideologies and fantasies, about what men [and women] *should* be like’ (MacInnes, 1998: 2). However, ‘masculinity is not just an idea in the head, or a personal identity. It is also extended in the world, merged in organised social relations’, (Connell, 2005: 29) and involves socio-cultural practices. In its approach, the chapter construes ‘masculinity’ ‘simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture’ (Connell, 2005: 71). In the following discussion, therefore, references are indispensably made to female sexualities, since masculinities and femininities including their different nuances are constituted in gender relations as they interact and inform one another.<sup>1</sup>

In the context of the late 1950s onwards, commercial sex in Thailand took a different turn. Although prostitution had always been an element in Thai economic and cultural life from domestic consumption alone (Phillips, 1987:290), the infrastructure, modern means of transportation that gave access to and from rural Thailand sponsored by American financial aid, and American military personnel in the country encouraged the growth of sexual service industry. Despite the fact that many bigger towns often had brothels in those areas which were hidden from sight, the unprecedented public presence of prostitution in the 1960s went beyond Bangkok and the provincial commercial towns. It was blatantly witnessed in the towns and provinces that hosted American military bases. The particularity of the prostitution situation in the 1960s and after, with ‘its brassy exhibitionism’, brought about the ‘acknowledgement of its public, institutionalised nature in the writing of Thai literary figures and critics’ (Phillips, 1987: 290). More importantly, it triggered, for the first time, systematic studies, researches and reports on the problems

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<sup>1</sup> Jackson (1995) argued that in traditional Thai patterns of masculinity, a Thai male has been regarded and has regarded himself, ‘as either a man or a *kathoe*’ [feminine male] (224). ‘The Thai male who dresses, talks and acts in ways expected of a Thai man, who take a dominant position in sex, and who fulfils his social obligations by marrying and fathering a family is honoured by being considered to be a man (*phu-chai*)’ (224). ‘[A] male’s masculinity is defined relationally with respect to other males. [...] Females exist largely outside the domain over which Thai masculinity is defined’ (225). Jackson’s argument, however, raises the question of how the ‘ways expected of a Thai man’ and his ‘social obligations’ came into existence in the first place. They become criteria, a norm, only within cultural prescriptions and practice where there is ‘the established gender order’ (Connell, 2005: 90) that is heterosexuality. This is precisely why ‘masculinity is necessarily in question in the lives of men whose sexual interest is in other men’ (ibid.)

regarding prostitution in different approaches and fields of study.<sup>2</sup> Despite the Prostitution Prohibition Act of 1960 passed by Sarit's government mentioned in chapter one, the pervasiveness of prostitution and the state revenue it brought led to a repercussion on the part of the law. The Entertainment Places Act of 1966 allowed the delivery of 'special services' in licensed entertainment places such as massage parlours, bars and night-clubs<sup>3</sup> which deliberately made it possible for 'special service providers' to offer sexual services to customers 'on the sly'. These entertainment places, of course, were not only frequented by Western customers, but also gradually became popular among those Thai men who could afford them.

As discussed in chapter one, four and five, modernisation/Westernisation and urbanisation from the 1950s were perceived in gender terms as having a negative effect on female sexual behaviour, whereas male sexual behaviour received less, if any, criticism, apart from individual flaws of character in cases when such behaviour ever entailed any problems. A sexual double standard fundamental to men's sexual licence became more visible in a modernising society like Thailand then because the capitalist mode of production and consumption encouraged participation of both men and women in the changing social space. Thus, the modern social dynamics that allowed contacts between these men and women outside the control and protection of their families and communities put their sexual opportunity that came along social opportunity into a sharp relief with traditional cultural practice according to which 'premarital sexual relations (apart from men's relations with prostitutes) have traditionally been tabooed' (Jackson, 1995: 195). Therefore, despite the 'freedom' and opportunity that men and women increasingly had, Thai manhood and its initiation often involve commercial sex services and are indispensably interrelated to the cultural division of female sexualities into the 'good' and the 'bad'.<sup>4</sup> This issue will be explored in the following section.

### **Thai Men and Prostitutes: Cultural Endorsement**

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<sup>2</sup> For the insightful and critical survey on the studies of prostitution in Thailand, see Bishop, Ryan and Lillian S. Robinson 1998. *Night Market: Sexual Cultures and the Thai Economic Miracle*. London: Routledge. 16-59; and Jeffrey, Leslie Ann. 2002. *Sex and Borders: Gender, National Identity, and Prostitution Policy in Thailand*. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books. 29-95.

<sup>3</sup> For details of the Entertainment Places Act of 1966 see <http://www.sexwork.com/Thailand/legal.html> (Accessed 9 August 2010).

<sup>4</sup> See chapter four for the discussion of the control of Thai female sexualities.

This section examines how the male practice of visiting prostitutes intertwines with the 'virgin-whore' cultural division of women and especially how the two factors contribute to the cultural construction of manhood. Though female public visibility and recognised importance in terms of socio-economic and cultural contributions are relatively higher in Thailand than other South East Asian countries, the country and its culture are male-dominated. A Thai proverb that appositely captures a cultural belief and attitude towards 'masculinity' and 'femininity' is '*chai khao-pleuak ying khao-san*' (men are rice with husk, women are rice without husk). It means that boys and men, like rice with husk, would grow anywhere if fall even without attention whereas girls and women, like rice without husk, if it fell, would only be wasted and soiled (Sukanya, 1988: 116). Therefore, girls require 'constant vigilance and careful upbringing' (ibid.). Traditionally in the context of agricultural society, daughters/women are expected to stay domesticated and take care of the family with tasks such as managing household finances and the use of resources, and only move within the known space and community which is within familial/communal control (Nidhi, 1994c: 113). On the contrary, sons/men are expected to 'bring honour and power to family, [...] to go adventuring or "going out and about" [*pai thiaw*] in order to find better opportunities' and gain experience. It is also acknowledged that for men 'the way to honour and power must be accumulated by "making friends" and socialising' (ibid.).

However, even when the situation changed with urbanisation, modernisation and rural migration, the same attitude towards the upbringing and expectations of daughters and sons has remained rather intact. Boys and men are permitted to go out and about socialising, gaining life experiences and making connections. Though already mentioned in chapter one, it is necessary to reiterate here the male sexual behaviour that was normalised and officially published/condoned by the Public Relations Department in 1958.

[T]o sleep out at night or to stay away from home is neither unusual nor badly regarded for a boy. They generally have their first sexual experience at the age of sixteen or seventeen with a prostitute. There is no stigma attached to the frequenting of prostitutes by either married or unmarried men. Prostitution is legal. (Vibul and Golden, 2)

Regardless of the legal status of prostitution, the consensus is that most Thais, men and women, 'hold relatively tolerant attitudes regarding sex with prostitutes in the case of single men' (Chanpen, et al., 1999: 80). However, the assertion that married men visiting

prostitutes bear no stigma does not go unchallenged and will be discussed later in this section.

For the adolescent male, the first sexual experience has always been a rite of passage, and gaining sexual experience is often constituent to masculinity. In the Thai cultural context, normally an older brother, relative or friend will take the 'uninitiated' to a commercial sex establishment, legal or illegal, since men visiting prostitutes is mostly done in a group as a concluding act after a male social gathering including dining and drinking alcohol (Chanpen, et al., 1999: 80-1). Though having a sexual intercourse with a prostitute is done privately, the practice of a group visit to a commercial sex establishment as a social activity is explained by Buchbinder (1993) in hetero-normative, homo-social terms. He concisely conceptualises the practice of group visits to prostitutes in terms of the crucial role of the male in conferring manhood upon other males:

A male is recognised as being a man when he is so regarded by other males who have already achieved the status of manhood. [...] [M]asculinity is a currency exchanged between males [...]. [I]n Thailand visiting a female prostitute is one of the most common signifiers of masculine status and is often practised as a group activity. (Jackson, 1995: 224-5)

This is by no means to say that Thai men do not visit prostitutes privately by themselves but frequenting prostitutes, apart from for immediate pleasure, has a performative function to be witnessed by other men as a proof of one's sexual vigour. Visiting a commercial sex establishment and 'visibly being a well-known, respected and popular client' (Brody, 1999: 3) signify two masculine codes. It is, first, an expression of one's sexual vigour and, second, a visible mark of one's personal charisma (ibid.). This prescription of male virility will be explored in the reading of *Sanim soi* that follows in the second section of this chapter.

This less restrained sexual behaviour, including the sexual rite of passage and the supposed sustenance of sexual vigour of male sexual practice, is at the opposite end of the taboo against premarital sexual practice for women. Similar to the Thai proverb mentioned earlier, Jackson and Cook concisely state that in both popular and formal Thai discourses 'men and women are consistently portrayed as being essentially different in both gender and sexual characteristics, and this difference is used to justify applying distinct criteria for judging men's and women's behaviour' (1999: 15). As Allyn observes,

Decent girls don't flirt and don't encourage boys to flirt back, so gaining the attention of a boy is done circumspectly, often through a third party. Good boys want decent girls and playing around with

decent girls is [considered] bad. Prostitutes are not decent [...] but it is better to go to her [...] than defile a decent girl. (1991: 153)

Because of the assumed gender behaviour and cultural behaviour code for women are in contradiction with the valorisation of male virile sexuality, the 'good' women, although desirable, are sexually forbidden. The violation of the code often entails a responsibility which may lie beyond what men are prepared to take. This cultural prescription of male sexual practice will be discussed more in an analysis of *Thalay reu im* which again proceeds below in the third section of this chapter.

The idea that men should abstain from sexual engagement with sexually available but culturally forbidden women also finds its basis in Buddhist teaching. In the Five Precepts that lay Buddhist people should observe, the third one is to abstain from sexual misconduct.<sup>5</sup> 'Misconduct' is defined as 'the volition with sexual intent occurring through the bodily door, causing transgression with an illicit partner'.<sup>6</sup> Also, a sexual act must not be engaged in the wrong time (*phit kala*); in the wrong place (*phit thesa*); without mutual consent (*phit khwam-pho-jai*); or with a forbidden person (*phit nai buk-khon tong-ham*).<sup>7</sup> Though the definition of 'illicit partner' or 'forbidden person' is clearly listed in the Buddhist Canon, it is also subject to debate in current gender studies especially in relation to homosexuality. However, given the hetero-normative context of Thai sexual cultural practice, the third precept is evidently directed towards the heterosexual male as there is the elaboration on the twenty types of women with whom if men sexually engage, with or without the women's consent, would deem breaking the third precept. Regardless of the listed details, the twenty types of women can be summarised into three categories. The first is a woman who is under the protection and guardianship of her family, relatives, elders or other authorities charged with her care. The second is a woman who is prohibited by convention such as close relatives under family tradition, nuns and women who vow to observe celibacy. The last is a woman who is engaged or married to another man, even one bound to another man only by a temporary agreement.<sup>8</sup> Evidently, the fundamental idea of forbidden women is that they are property marked by guardianship and ownership

<sup>5</sup> The Five Precepts are the abstinence from taking life; taking what is not given; sexual misconduct; false speech; and fermented drink that causes heedlessness, respectively. For details see <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/wheel282.html#prec2> (Accessed 9 August 2010)

<sup>6</sup> Translated from Majjimanikaya Atthakatha, Vol. I, p. 202 (Burmese ed.) In 'Going for Refuge & Taking the Precepts', by Bhikkhu Bodhi. *Access to Insight*, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/wheel282.html> (Accessed 10 August 2010)

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.oknation.net/blog/print.php?id=590161> (Accessed 9 August 2010)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/wheel282.html#fn-8> (Accessed 10 August 2010)

of others. The last category includes the prostitute, who engages temporarily with different men at different times.

The detailed description that elaborates the third precept clearly aims to control men's sexual engagement with women and implies a broader implication in the maintaining of social order. However, the details have often been left out of Buddhist teaching in school curriculum and textbooks and even books on Buddhist teaching for general audience. Therefore, these details are not widely known among Buddhist lay people. Moreover, it should be noted that although the English translation of the third group of women is those who are 'engaged or married' to another man, the Thai translation from Pali is 'being one's wife' (*pen mia* or *pen phariya*). As the definitions and boundary of 'being one's wife' has also evolved from the time of its Buddhist inscription, the concept has come to encompass not only physical engagement, the articulation of a man's claim of ownership of a woman and a legal aspect of matrimony, but also includes a nuance of woman agency, social dimension and power negotiation. The fact that visiting a prostitute is actually an un-Buddhist act is hardly a factor in the sexual cultural practice of Thai self-acclaimed Buddhist men, especially when it has been argued that a prostitute is both *de facto* and, if she is legally single, *de jure* 'the wife of no man'.

Research on Thai male extramarital sexual behaviour and the attitude of married women towards Thai men's extramarital sexual relationships with commercial sex workers and non-commercial sex partners shows that less consensus is given to premarital sexual relations outside the context of commercial sex (VanLandingham et al., 1995: 27-28 and Chanpen et al., 1999: 80). Both men and women's permissible attitude towards premarital sexual relations for men reinforces the cultural dichotomisation of women into the 'good', that is only sexually available within the institute of marriage, and the 'bad', that is just sexually available. 'Defiling' a 'good' girl of 'wife/mother-material', is culturally disapproved of whereas 'having sex' with a 'bad' girl, a 'promiscuous whore' who does it for money, hardly offends public morality. The pervasiveness of prostitution in Thailand and the cultural tolerance, if not acceptance, of men's patronage is accurately explained by Kinsey and others: 'Men go to prostitutes because they can pay for the sexual relations and forget other responsibilities, whereas coitus with other girls may involve them socially and legally beyond anything which they care to undertake' (1948: 607 in Harrison, 1995: 143-4). This point will be further elaborated in the discussion of *Thalay reu im*.

Though single men's visiting commercial sex workers is generally tolerated, the same behaviour undertaken by married men, contrary to the aforementioned assertion, is known, is disapproved of by women. Chanpen and others find that 'most Thai women consider extramarital sex to be neither a normal [*thammada*] nor an appropriate [*mo-som*] practice for men who already have their own family' (1999: 82), though men's views show more acceptance. Moreover, when it comes to an issue of non-commercial sexual encounter, the dominating attitude is that it is more 'worrisome' and 'threatening' because the sexual relation, if continued, may lead to a long-term extramarital relationship like having a minor wife (*mia noi*) and involve some kind of financial support and emotional bond from the man. Such a relationship, if known, would undoubtedly undermine the marital relation (ibid. 84). However, the most crucial finding from the research lies in the fact that, though none of the women would like her husband to have any kind of extramarital relations, 'if in practice the wives have to choose between commercial sex workers and non-commercial partners, most are inclined to choose commercial sex patronage as the lesser of two evils' (ibid. 90). This is because a commercial sexual exchange ends after each transaction and does not entail further obligation (ibid.).

From the examination of male sexual cultural practice in relation to prostitution, the conclusion can be drawn that within the Thai deep-rooted discourse of the prostitute as a 'necessary evil' lie the two interconnected cultural assumptions. First, since 'good' women are forbidden to have sexual relations outside the marriage institution, it is the 'bad' women's job to offer young men their sexual rite of passage and enhance their sexual experience. Such an idea that 'good' women are sexually forbidden also finds its basis in Buddhist prescription of 'forbidden persons' or 'illicit partners'. Second, it is the belief that men must be sexually experienced and have more sexual need than women and that it is impossible for them to contain it. The two assumptions work so well in controlling and denying women's sexuality that women themselves internalise them. They will continue to be perpetuated and passed on from one generation to another by both men and women so long as the Thai gender discourses accept the cultural construction of sexual femininity and masculinity as a fact. Moreover, the two assumptions propelled by the whirlwind of market-based economy, the modern culture of consumerism and the fact that prostitution contributed to the national economy somewhat condoned the commodification of women because of economic necessity (*khwa-m-jampen thang setthakit*). The impact of these combined forces on the process of perpetuating culturally

constructed sexual masculinity and the possibility of different kinds of masculinities to evolve will be explored with reference to relevant literary texts in the following section.

### **The Male Legacy of Visiting a Prostitute in *Sanim soi* (1961) and Romance of the Three Young Men in *Thalay reu im* (1972)**

This section looks at *Sanim soi* (1961) in conjunction with the issues of Thai heterosexual masculinity in relation to prostitution. It argues that, despite (or perhaps because of) the dominating discourses of sexual masculinity, different kinds of masculinities may evolve and find their expression in various forms, as *Thalay reu im* (1972) illustrates. *Sanim soi* by Rong Wongsawan, as noted in chapter five, explores the personal dimensions of prostitutes and those involved in the skin trade on both the supply and the demand sides. Chapter five discussed how the novel represents the anxiety of modernisation manifested through the female body, Samorn's masochistic tendency and Wongdeuan's subjection to an imposed refashioning of identity. A critical look at one particular male client will instead be undertaken here.

#### **From Father to Son: the Male Legacy of Visiting a Prostitute in *Sanim soi***

There are several male characters in *Sanim soi* but this section looks at one particular father-son relationship. Thanin is a character who represents well the attitude of Thai middle-class heterosexual males in relation to prostitution, masculinity and familial responsibility. A married man in his forties, the father of a teenage son and a successful writer, Thanin regularly visits Samorn's hi-end brothel. Commercial sex is a form of entertainment for him. After he received a large sum of money for his manuscript, Thanin gives himself a treat of imported cigarettes, expensive alcohol and fine dining before ultimately concluding it with a solo visit to the brothel (Rong, 1961:65). He keeps it discreet for a reason. Kan the pimp observes:

[Mr. Thanin] was always well mannered and consistent. He much preferred the low-lit, secluded corner as much as he was generous. Though visiting a brothel [*kan-thiaw tre*] was not such an offence in our pleasurable metropolis, it was not exactly appropriate for a famous person like him to bathe in bright light like other visitors. And the worse was that he may risk himself running into someone whom he had no desire to see in this place. That person was his own *theen et* [teenage] son.

‘It’d be like seeing my wife, Kan’, he told me, ‘... the boy and his mum are like two peas in a pod’.

‘But he also has something that resembles you, Sir’. I said, more to partake in the conversation than to pry into his privacy.

Mr. Thanin smiled in good temper, ‘...Maybe so with drinking like a fish just like me. The way he walks is also quite similar to me. But studying’s bad though, I mean, I did it so badly. My son got over 80% in his exams every year. I could never do that. Ah—has he come here often lately?’

‘Only every once in a while, Sir’, said I.

‘Don’t hide it from me, Kan’, his voice and temper remained as joyous. ‘I know well what kind of person he is. And equally well how strict or relaxed I should be with him. Kids these days grow up fast, unlike the old days. What matters more is giving him advice, so he knows that being out and about [*kan-thiaw tret tre*] or, to be precise, sleeping with women is not important. It is normal; illness can be cured. There are things much more important than that, whether when he’s leaving home or school...’ (ibid. 67-69)

As a married man, the father of a teenage son, the breadwinner and a successful writer, Thanin has proved his manhood and sexual prowess. The homo-social conferring of masculinity becomes less important and visiting a prostitute takes a pleasurable turn of private entertainment. Though keeping a low profile, Thanin is a popular client both among the women in the brothel and also for Kan, who admires him for his manner, temper, generosity and life experiences—his charisma. Thanin once saved the day for Samorn the madam and everyone in the brothel from a drunken troublemaker with a gun by challenging the man to a whisky-drinking duel with him. He intimidated the man into silence by drinking half a bottle in one go from a straw. The whisky in the bottle was actually cold tea prepared for serving as ice-tea. Thanin’s characteristics are marked by what Pattana Kitiarsa pointed out as ‘certain sets of “masculine” conduct’ that define being a manly man in Thai culture such as ‘*saksi* (‘dignity’, ‘pride’), *liam* (‘wit’, ‘trickiness’), *chan choeng* (‘style’, ‘grace’) and *jai* (‘heart’, ‘fighting/competitive spirit’)’ (2005: 60).

Thanin’s discretion serves to avoid not only the awkwardness of seeing his own son in the brothel (perhaps, a reminder that they might even have had sexual intercourse with the same woman), but also the risk of his wife hearing it on the grapevine. The fact that he is avoiding the son who reminds him of his wife implies that his regular visits to the brothel have always taken place on the sly without her knowledge, let alone her consent. The secretive behaviour of most husbands regarding their visit to a commercial

sex establishment contradicts the generalised assertion (by men) that Thai women accept married men's calling on prostitutes. It is perhaps more accurate to say that married men's patronage of prostitution is inoffensive as long as the wives do not know about it and it is kept within a closed circle of friends, in other words homo-socially private. Such selectively secretive behaviour offers itself as an example of what Morris called 'logic of visibility and invisibility' (1994: 32) and because of this 'virtually any [sexual] act is acceptable if it neither injures another person nor offends others through inappropriate self-disclosure' (ibid.).

Thanin's attitude towards married or unmarried men visiting a prostitute reflects the heterosexual male sexual culture. Though visiting a brothel *per se* is hardly considered a moral offence among men, 'monogamy'—as one marker of 'being civilised' and 'modernised' introduced to Siam by the first monogamous king, Vajiravudh (r.1910-1925)—has become the modern *public* morality and the social norm of 'appropriateness' (*khwam-mo-som*). Monogamy is considered an appropriate, respectable practice, despite some married men's *private* engagement in extramarital sexual activities.<sup>9</sup> Most men then and now would assert that having a 'minor wife' (*mia-noi*), an affair, or a 'social' activity such as visiting prostitutes (as noted earlier) are not morally wrong as long as the participating women consent to the sexual engagement.

Though a wife's discovery of her husband's visit to a prostitute might undermine their marriage, albeit in differing degrees depending on the relationship and background of each couple, it arguably will not lead to divorce unless it is habitual and threatens the wife's and family's welfare. As Jackson puts it: 'Thai men are expected to try to be faithful to their wives, but the Thai rarely consider visiting a prostitute as adultery' (1995: 50). Such a perception finds its basis in Buddhist religious discourse. Though the Buddha neither condemned nor condoned polygamy, he forbade sexual relations with the wives of other men as mentioned earlier. However, despite its disciplinary purpose, the third precept and the twenty types of women who are 'illicit partners' is often selectively 'interpreted to mean that as long as the woman is not the wife of somebody, it is not a demerit to have a sexual relationship with her. A prostitute is *ipso facto* a wife of no man, is thus accessible, and an affair with her cannot therefore be considered adulterous' (Sukanya, 1988: 117).

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<sup>9</sup> See Jackson, Peter. 2004 for the discussion of 'an intense concern to monitor and police surface effects, images, public behaviours, and representations combined with a relative disinterest in controlling the private domain of life' in the discursive practice of the Thai forms of power.

As for the son, though there is no direct portrayal of him in the brothel, Thanin's reference to the young man uncovers what kind of relationship the father and son have. It is unclear in the story how the son has been introduced to Samorn's brothel or whether the son knows of his father's visit there but Thanin seems to know well about the son's visits and takes it light-heartedly like a 'cool dad'. In the years before HIV/AIDS, the practice of safe sex was apparently not included in the kind of advice a well-educated, middle-class father like Thanin would pass on to his son. Even the risk of contracting a sexual transmitted infection (STI) does not present itself as a reason for Thanin to mention safe sex, let alone to refrain from visiting prostitutes, or to discourage the young man from commercial sex simply because 'illness can be cured'. The father clearly endorses his son's visit to the brothel and is proud of the son's manly behaviour of heavy alcohol consumption (without getting drunk).

What is interesting in the father's pride and praise for his son is the fact that he brings up the son's being good at school to balance out the boy's alcohol consumption and visits to prostitutes. His comment on the son's good grades serves to give completion to the two kinds of knowledge regarded by the Thais as constituent to the prototype of men's success in an era when education is accessible to all (with enough money). One is 'knowledge' from outside the book/school (*khvam-ru nork tamra*) or 'life experience' and the other is knowledge from formal education (*khvam-ru nai tamra*). Such a concept of knowledge reinforces what Nidhi observed earlier, that the sons have been encouraged to gain experience through 'going out and about' or *pai thiaw* (1994c: 113). The Thai term '*thiaw*', '*thiaw tre*' and '*thiaw tret tre*', depending on the context, can mean either 'visiting a place or a person', 'going/being out and about' or 'visiting a prostitute', as in '*thiaw phuying*', or in the passage when Thanin says '*kan-thiaw tret tre*' to mean 'sleeping with a woman' (Rong, 1961:69). Therefore, for boys the life experience or *khvam-ru nork tamra* gained by going out and about, by implication, includes sexual experience.<sup>10</sup>

Though Thanin perceives sex as a right, it is unclear whether he endorses his son having sex only with prostitutes or whether it also extends to 'decent girls'.<sup>11</sup> However, he

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<sup>10</sup> The daughter's equivalent of *khvam-ru nork tamra* that pairs with her formal education is '*kan-ban kan-reuan*', or housekeeping. Being out and about to gain knowledge and experience is culturally reserved for boys.

<sup>11</sup> A 'decent girl', 'good woman' or '*phuying di*' in the Thai cultural context does not only mean 'well-behave, sexually pure' female, it is also implicitly and culturally acknowledged that a 'decent girl' is decent because she has parents/guardians to inculcate good values, protect her and be vigilant in her upbringing. Therefore, 'decent girl' also means or is referred to as 'other people's daughter', *luk-saw khong khon-eun*, which also emphasises that she is the 'property' of her parents.

does not mention the practice of safe sex in the ‘man-to-man’ conversation about advice thought to be suitable for his teenage son. The absence implies that it does not cross his mind that his son might have sex with other woman than a prostitute (i.e. a ‘decent girl’) and that the son might get her pregnant. He seems to accept active male teenage sexuality and sexual activity only within the context of commercial sex. For young men, whether teenage or young adult, it seems that parents ‘prefer’ their sons to have sex with prostitutes than ‘decent girls’. Though frequenting a prostitute is not a habit to encourage, it is condoned because responsibility-free commercial sex exempts a man from taking responsibility for a ‘decent girl’ (who would suddenly turn ‘indecent’ as a result of her sexual behaviour) if she became pregnant. Having sex with a ‘decent girl’ could involve—apart from the personal dimension between the two participants—social, cultural and economic dimensions such as, if the truth is known, the girl’s family pursuing some kind of ‘compensation’ or ‘settlement’ (mostly in the form of marriage) for the ‘damage’ that has been done to the daughter. What might appear to be a somewhat economic frame of reference is actually intertwined with two sets of cultural assumptions. First, it is the belief that men and women are essentially different, a woman’s value lies in her reputable sexual virtue and a daughter is a ‘property’ of her parents. Second, it is the underlying perception that ‘premarital sex is [...] construed as a stepping stone to marriage’<sup>12</sup> (Lyttleton, 1999: 35). Thus, seeing his son as ‘school age’, it is unthinkable for Thanin to envision the young man in any sexual contact outside the ‘permitted’ sexual space of the brothel.

Thanin’s advice to his son that ‘sleeping with women is not important’ (Rong, 1961: 69) does not only imply the misogynistic undertone that women only sexually serve men, it evidently applies to commercial sex which is readily available for exchange with money. Thanin normalises, if not naturalises, commercial sex and assigns its meaning as ‘insignificant’, whereas the unmentioned non-commercial sex is unconsciously put in socio-cultural norms outside of the brothel’s ‘permitted’ sexual space. When it comes to young heterosexual male sexuality, because of male sexual licence, most Thai parents are concerned that their sons might ‘lose their future’ (*sia anakhot*) or become ‘spoiled rotten’ (*sia khon*) because of their being ‘obsessed with women’ (*tit phuying*, literally, addicted to women). Most middle-class Thai parents, as represented by Thanin, tend to be concerned more with the ‘direct effect’ of ‘woman addiction’ on the sons’ study than on the moral,

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<sup>12</sup> Though the quotation is taken out of its context of Lyttleton’s research on adolescent sexuality in northeast Thailand from data gathered in the early 1990s, his finding of the cultural assumption is also applicable to other regions of Thailand in the earlier decades.

social, emotional characters of their sons derived from engaging in commercial sex. The typical concerns for the ‘side effects’ of ‘woman addiction’ could potentially take two forms: first, if a son has a girlfriend, he might get a ‘decent girl’ pregnant; or, second, he might habitually visit prostitutes if he does not have a girlfriend and can afford to pay.

Trivialising commercial sex by its ever ready availability, Thanin brings attention back to the ‘real’ world outside the brothel and things which are harder to earn than commercial sex. His praising of the son’s academic performance finds a further implication here that, for a middle-class father like Thanin, as long as the son is doing well at things that are more important than getting commercial sex, he is allowed to entertain himself with it. Thanin is indeed casting his son in his own image. Since he made a large sum of money from selling his manuscript, he celebrates by consuming what he can buy (ibid. 65). He is actually spending his free time and resources relaxing but not raising his child. Despite his projection of himself as a ‘cool dad’ and ‘loving father’, he might as well be a distant father who works long hours, then relaxes outside the family home and replaces his absence from child rearing with money that the son spends on sex workers in this expensive brothel.<sup>13</sup> (Note that he asked the narrator, Kan the pimp, if his son frequently visited the brothel!). The ‘Thai monogamy’ in which a husband allows himself a visit to a prostitute finds its life and breath in this father-son legacy. Thanin exemplifies the self-justified married man who excuses himself by postulating that visiting a prostitute is fine as long as he is the breadwinner, a responsible father (as Thanin is to his son) and a ‘reasonably thoughtful’ husband (e.g. Thanin does not offend his wife by not letting her know).

The final point to be made about the passage is Thanin’s comment, ‘Kids these days grow up fast, unlike in the old days’ (ibid. 69). In the ‘old days’, children crossed the threshold into adulthood once a certain rite of passage has been performed such as *phithi kone phom juk* (the cutting of hair knot ceremony) or finishing compulsory education (14-16 years old), when they assumed adult responsibilities economically and culturally. His stress on formal education for the young man emphatically renders his own comment ironic as modern formal education actually extends ‘childhood’. The rite of passage becomes more context-dependent and marked by youth cultural practices. Middle-class young people in formal education are, more often than not, devoid of any economic

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<sup>13</sup> For the discussion of the distant father as a recurrent image of Thai male gender see Newland, James Matthew. 1994. Images and Portrayals of Thai Masculinity: Through the History and Development of Politics, Buddhism, and Literature. MA thesis. University of Oregon, Eugene. 170-173, 184.

responsibility towards their families, as education becomes a new kind of investment for parents to guarantee their child's opportunities in the market-based economy. Thanin's attitude towards the son's education typifies the middle-class parents' investment in their children's education as a means to a financial end (i.e. a 'study so that you have the means to make money' attitude). Therefore, 'being good at school' potentially means a 'financially promising future' in the increasingly competitive, money-oriented, modern world of capitalism where one can indulge in anything money can buy. Since 'adolescence is a key phase of life in which sexual and gendered identities are explored and established' (Valentine *et al.* 1998:11), the fact that Thanin permits his adolescent son to explore his sexual and gender identity in the context of commercial sex encourages only the sexual dimension of masculinity (*khwam-pen-chai*) and absolves sexual responsibility. Moreover, the social dimension of masculinity (*khwam-pen-luk-phuchai*) (as mentioned in chapter one) that includes, among other things, many different kinds of responsibilities towards others and oneself is reduced only to one's performance in education.

The analysis of the father-son relationship represented in *Sanim soi* in the context of male sexual cultural practice, commercial sex and modern capitalist society shows that the implication of commercial sex on sexual masculinity hinders the construction of social masculinity as defined in chapter one. The fact that the son is not referred to by his name is a metaphor that he is a representative of many nameless other young men who have been brought up by this parental attitude and cultural assumptions. The selective exploitation of Buddhist discourse and the Thai middle-class attitude towards young people's education and premarital sex play a critical role in perpetuating male casual sexual practice and a 'light-hearted', exploitative attitude towards prostitution. Male sexual cultural practice and casual attitudes towards commercial sex significantly affect the cultural prescription of female sexualities. The next section of this chapter examines the novel *Thalay reu im* and explores how the social dimension of masculinity (*khwam-pen-luk-phuchai*) meets the sexual dimension of masculinity (*khwam-pen-chai*) in the context of masculine sexual responsibility towards a 'decent girl' with whom one has a sexual relation. It also explores three kinds of masculinities that evolve and manifest themselves differently.

### **Romance of the Three Young Men in *Thalay reu im***

The teenage male characters—Sukhum (nineteen), Sophan (nineteen) and Phutawan (sixteen)—from Suwanni's novel *Thalay reu im* (1972) represent urban, upper and middle-class young masculinities in an era when young people presented themselves and were perceived as a social category with issues and concerns of their own, different to those of the adult. Following the systematic introduction of 'adolescence' to Thai society in the 1950s under the rubric of 'social sciences',<sup>14</sup> by the 1970s young people (both male and female) became the focus of social attention as one of the groups that bore the effects of modernisation. They also represented most visibly a site of contention between traditional values and the desire to be modern. The discussion of these three characters in chapter four evolves around the young female protagonist Wilan and shows how their relationships with her are informed by their contacts with 'the West' as stereotypically perceived.

This chapter, however, would like to draw particular attention to the three young men's attempts to define and negotiate their masculinities within the context of Thai heterosexual male sexual culture examined earlier in this chapter and in chapter one. It views them as representations of modern young masculinities (school age/dependent teenagers) that have stepped out of the 'permitted' sexual space of commercial sex which has been a 'norm' into the 'forbidden' sexual space of non-commercial sex that is a 'teen romantic relationship'. It particularly looks at how having a sexual relationship with a 'decent girl' (a well-groomed, presumed virgin from a well-to-do family) serves as a pivotal point where the social and sexual dimensions of masculinity (*khwa-m-pen-luk-phuchai* and *khwa-m-pen-chai*, respectively) converge and the masculine sexual responsibility, which often culturally assumed to exist, is tested.

### **Sukhum: a Good-for-Nothing 'Real Man'**

Sukhum is an Americanophile playboy from a nouveau riche family. Despite the meaning of his name, 'prudence', Sukhum's character typifies the Thai teenage craze for 'American hippie culture' externally expressed as a fashionable trend through wearing long hair, untidy clothes, big jewellery and an outward expression of music adoration and indifference to social norms. American popular culture such as movies, music and imported fashion in Thai magazines are also sensational and avidly consumed by the young urbanites of the time. Not only does Sukhum exemplify the hippie fashion and

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<sup>14</sup> See chapter four for the discussion of the concept of 'adolescence' in the Thai context.

assumed attitude at the time, he is also able to bring it to the higher level than other teenagers because of his money. Sukhum becomes a trendy rebel without a cause, is disowned by his family and gradually descends into the dead-end life of a drug addict. He then turns into a petty criminal, gets arrested and assaulted by the police and dies in hospital.

As illustrated in chapter four, Sukhum merges his own code of being modern, that is 'American', 'hippie' and 'sexually free', with a code of masculinity that is virile, proud and sexually permitted. The following passage shows his perception of the connection between drinking alcohol, masculinity and ability to impress a woman.

Sukhum drank only mixed whiskies. He did it as if to show that he could really hold his drink, as if he was a *nak-leng* drinker. He wanted to impress Wilan the way she was impressed by Sophan's excelling in his study. Sukhum was not good at school, quite useless in fact. He studied each class for two years. If he did not show her that he was good at something, how would she ever love him? (Suwanni, 1972: v.1, 36-7)

Sukhum's attitude towards drinking and manliness is by no means 'modern'. Similar to Thanin and his son, Sukhum uses heavy alcohol consumption to signify a masculine 'quality' and thinks that he can use it to 'wow' a girl. Outside the norm of commercial sex, getting attention, let alone affection, from a 'decent girl' takes effort and he knows it. Comparing himself to Sophan, another friend from childhood who also admires Wilan and shares a mutual affection for her, an acute sense of competition arises. The underlying cultural assumption of the two types of knowledge discussed earlier pervades the passage, and Sukhum adopts it in order to put himself at once in the same league and juxtapose himself with his competitor. While he admits that Sophan is more academically able (*khwa-m-ru nai tamra*), he relegates himself to having superior life experience (*khwa-m-ru nork tamra*), in other words heavy alcohol consumption and more sexual relations.

Though 'masculinity is a currency exchanged between males' (Buchbinder, 1993 in Jackson, 1995: 224-5), in the absence of Sukhum's male peers and the presence of Wilan, the anxiety to impress the woman is visible. However, it is arguable that making an impression on Wilan with his masculinity is not an end in itself for Sukhum. Winning Wilan's admiration for his manly 'knowledge' of life also means that Sukhum can beat Sophan. Thus, for Sukhum, Wilan is metaphorically a 'currency' exchanged between him and Sophan as proof of his masculinity. This point becomes more evident as the story proceeds.

After Wilan has had sex for the first time with Sukhum, his male pride and strong sense of masculinity are exceedingly boosted.<sup>15</sup> Sukhum's rite of passage is completed by Wilan.

[He] became a full man tonight. So, he had done it all now—  
alcohol, cigarettes, *ganja* and ... woman.

A good woman too. Wilan, the daughter of a director-general  
father and a millionaire mother.

How could he resist feeling so proud? (Suwanni, 1972: v.1,  
51)

Though the same scene was already discussed in chapter four, it is worth looking at again at this point with specific focus on masculinity. Having sex for the first time with 'decent girl' Wilan, Sukhum breaks away from two Thai masculine norms discussed previously: first, men's licence to responsibility-free commercial sex; and second, the conferral or authentication of his manhood by those who have already attained the status. His first sexual experience is an individual act done secretly with non-commercial sexual partner who is, however, turned into an item on his checklist of manhood not dissimilar from a 'functional whore' in the sexual norm. The only difference is the proud factor of sexual intercourse that is 'earned' rather than 'exchanged'. Wilan adds even more to Sukhum's male pride because of her family background and beauty that make her a 'strong currency' of masculinity. The fact that Sukhum emphasises the social standing of Wilan's parents further shows that the issue of class also plays a part in his perception of 'good woman'.

Sukhum also normalises the sexual activity in which he and Wilan engage and utilises the discourse of 'being modern' or being sexually free to give sexual licence to both man and woman. Though already mentioned in chapter four, Sukhum's attitude is worth reiterating here again in the current context of the discussion of masculinity: 'We are modern people [*khon samai-mai*]. [...] It's a modern time, nobody minds. People sleeping together isn't an unusual thing' (ibid.). His argument that sex is a normal activity and a private act of individuals outside the confinement of any social institution is indeed liberating. However, Sukhum's 'liberating attitude' needs to be put in the context of the story and how he arrived at this conclusion. What Sukhum says brings out that he and Wilan share the assumption of the binary opposite between 'tradition' (woman's premarital sex is a taboo) and 'modern' (woman's premarital sex is normal). This assumption consequently creates a kind of implicit pre-requisite that one must be sexually free in order to be modern.

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<sup>15</sup> See chapter four for an analysis of Sukhum and Wilan's interaction in their post-coital scene.

Sukhum's 'sexual liberal' attitude is portrayed as questionable when his answer to Wilan's question if she will become pregnant is 'How'd I know? [...] I'm not a woman' (ibid. 59). As a self-proclaimed hippie and a promoter of 'free love' (or '*fri loep fri sek*' as the young characters use it to mean 'sexually free') who exploits Thai male sexual licence, Sukhum's answer reinforces once again how superficial his hippie deportment is. More importantly, his answer confesses how his sexual attitude is deeply immersed in the responsibility-free behaviour of consuming commercial sex. The kind of 'sexual liberal' attitude that Sukhum assumes as part and parcel of the 'cool' hippie culture and his '*fri loep fri sek*' motto is the misperceived and misguided claim of the 'hippie' sexual revolution. The 'sexual liberation' in the context of the 'hippie' culture was partly allowed by the revolutionary availability of effective contraceptives for both men and women who benefited from unprecedented control over reproduction. Thus, the real spirit of 'sexual liberation' that freed sexual activity from the confinement of marriage and the religious view of sexual activity for procreation and assisted women from unwanted pregnancy does not apply here. For Sukhum, his pseudo-sexual liberal attitude simply liberates him from the 'confinement' of the commercial sex establishment.

The following passage concisely summarises Sukhum's kind of masculinity.

From women to alcohol, Sukhum had to be better at all of them than other friends the same age.

He said he had experienced many women, both good and bad.

'How many?' Kamjorn asked seeing a chance.

'I don't remember', Sukhum said arrogantly, 'Whores don't count, nor do those nightclub women [*phartnoe*]. I fucked them countless times. Count only good women...that's real'.

Sukhum had not even finished high school [...] but he was well experienced in everything—alcohol, cigarettes, women—such an old hand at life.

The only thing Sukhum was not good at was studying. He told his friends that learning from the classroom was trivial. A real person...to genuinely be a real man, one must learn about life from experience. Learning from the classroom was for children. (ibid.121-122)

Sukhum's masculine currency of cigarettes, alcohol and women is partially similar to what Thak Chaloemtiarana describes as 'one stereotype of Thai masculinity, that of the *nak-leng*' (2007: x) (literally, local mafia or gangster). 'Desirable masculine traits would include, among other things, physical strength; mental fortitude and decisiveness; combativeness; loyalty to friends; heavy alcohol consumption (without getting drunk); and awkwardness with the ladies (he gets them at the end nevertheless)' (ibid. x-xi). Such

masculine traits of Thai manly men, Thak proposed, have a long tradition of Thai classical literary heroes and are engendered in the modern figures of military leaders especially Field Marshall Sarit. The code of *nak-leng* manhood is constituent to what life experience or '*khwa-m-ru nork tamra*' should impart to a man, being 'an old hand at life' as the narrator sarcastically describes Sukhum. However, while the code is a combination of both positive and negative behaviour that serves to gain a man respect from his fellow men and admiration from (some) women, Sukhum selectively adopts and adapts it at his own leisure, exploiting male sexual licence, heavy alcohol consumption and the male norm of *khwa-m-ru nork tamra*. These characteristics are Sukhum's modern subjectivity i.e. his modern masculinity. What he values as life's lessons and the quality of a 'real man' is nothing but the self-indulged consumption of alcohol and sex which he uses them to detach himself from the world of supposed childhood symbolised by schooling. His adolescent rebellious attitudes are an expression of his struggle to define himself as a man.

Sukhum's masculinity is single-mindedly sexual and devoid of familial and social dimensions, which are often expressed through responsibility, acknowledgement and fulfilment of one's duty as a male member of family and society. The seemingly liberal attitude of his character towards premarital sex discussed earlier is also deceptive. Although he does not emphasise the women's virginity in his boast to a friend, his take on 'good women' or 'decent girls' is actually more conventional than it appears. He does not only mean the women who are involved in commercial sex or who sleep around (for all he knows), but those who are 'respectable' socially and sexually, from whom he must earn affection and willingness in order to gain sexual access. This implicit class-based assumption comes out in the scene of his first sexual encounter with Wilan discussed previously. Sukhum perceives Wilan to be the ultimate 'decent girl' who is only sexually available to him because she is still under the guardianship of her respectable family who are supposed to control her sexuality.

Sukhum boastfully defines masculinity in terms of non-commercial sexual relations and uses it as a measure of sexual masculinity. His attitude shows that the mundanity of commercial sex has somewhat turned it into a norm and an 'accepted' practice. For the 'modern' generation like Sukhum and his '*fri loep fri sek*' peers, commercial sex cannot deliver the same currency of masculinity among men as it has previously done. As represented by the character of Sukhum, the 'only good women count' attitude comes into existence because of male sexual licence, and the objectification of women and the division of women into 'good' and 'bad'. All women, as

it turn out, are similarly reduced to ‘numbers’ to be counted or not. Sexual responsibility, however, is not emphasised and has no place in Sukhum’s subjectivity and his definition of masculinity because he exploits the two ‘traditional’ discourses, first, a man gaining ‘life experience’ and, second, male sexual licence initially given in the context of commercial sex. The discourse of *khwam-ru nork tamra* (‘knowledge’ from outside the book/school i.e. life experience), by implication, includes ‘trial and error’ and gives permissive space for a man while a woman’s body becomes a depository of his ‘error’. The case is evident in Wilan’s pregnancy and her decision to take the matter into her own hands by having an abortion at a backstreet clinic, since Sukhum is not capable of doing anything, not even of consoling her.

The effect of modernisation epitomised in the young Sukhum is that he defines himself by the long established male sexual culture of responsibility-free commercial sex and misguidedly explores and exploits the ‘modern’ discourse of ‘sexual liberation’. His kind of sexual masculinity is therefore out-of-step with both the existing male sexual culture of commercial sex consumption that he undermines, and the ‘sexual liberation’ discourse that he celebrates. Sukhum’s ‘modern’ sexual masculinity is marked by a sexually free attitude, a refutation to take any kind of sexual responsibility and by responsibility-free sexual relations. It is symptomatic of modernity in the sense that it encapsulates the irreconcilability between the desire to be modern as expressed in ‘sexual liberation’, which is part and parcel of sexual revolution of the 1960s and its emphasis on individual sexual responsibility, and the existing male sexual culture of responsibility-free commercial sex consumerism.

### **Sophan: ‘Jekyll and Hyde’ Thai Masculinity**

Sophan’s foil is Sukhum. His character represents a ‘sensible’ teenager who can smoke, drink and party but does only in moderation and gives his first priority to studying. Though it is quite clear that he has had sexual experiences prior to his encounter with Marasi, the character of Sophan never measures his masculinity by means of manly *nak-leng* behaviour of heavy alcohol consumption or male sexual licence as Sukhum does. Being sent to study in Germany by his genteel family (*khroorp-khrua phu-di*), he comes back for a visit during a school break and becomes the only young character in Wilan’s close circle of friends who has actually studied abroad in an era when being an overseas student (*nak-rian nork* or *dek nork*) gives one a cachet of being modern. He neither boasts nor intimidates others because of it, yet his *nak-rian nork* aura gains him admiration from

his female peers and envy from the males. It appears as if being an overseas student endows Sophan with masculine currency immeasurable by other men who have not attained the same 'status'.<sup>16</sup> His direct contact with the West i.e. Germany does not influence Sophan in the same way Sukhum's striving to be modern, fashionable and American affects him. The only outward sign of Sukhum's being 'modern' and fashionable is his long hair. Sophan's demure manner, self-discipline and sensible behaviour are no more exclusively perceived as 'German traits' but are a proof of his good upbringing and family background. Sophan has also had unprotected sexual intercourse with Wilan but has gone back to Germany to study and never knew of her pregnancy.

What is interesting about Sophan's masculinity lies in his contrasting attitudes towards having a sexual relation with an assumed 'good woman' who he genuinely cares about, and having one with a 'bad woman' such as Marasi, Wilan's friend who seduced him. In his perception, both Wilan and Marasi are modern women (*phu-ying samai-mai*) who are immodest and expressive with their bodies. On the one hand, Sophan categorically sees the well-raised, rich, yet typically spoiled and implicitly rebellious Wilan to be sexually innocent and virgin. He has kept his and Wilan's shared affection non-physical and never even kissed her until the time they have sex in order to prove his feeling for her and appease her (after Wilan found out he has had sex with Marasi). On the other hand, Marasi is categorically a promiscuous 'bad girl' outside commercial sex because of her openly available sexuality. She pursues Sophan sexually even though she already has a boyfriend. Marasi's behaviour, thus, puts her in an unfavourable light in comparison to Wilan. The post-coital scene between Wilan and Sophan discussed in chapter four focused on Wilan's negotiation of her sexuality and touched on Sophan's conflicting feeling towards his transgression into non-commercial sexual relations with a 'good woman'. It also looks at his permissive attitude towards commercial sex, which comes to include casual sexual relation with a 'bad woman'. His diametrically different attitudes towards non-commercial sexual relations with the two young women particularly in relation to his masculinity will be further explored here.

Sophan relegates his 'accidental' sexual relation with Marasi along the lines of a casual sexual encounter similar to commercial sex, though there is no monetary exchange.

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<sup>16</sup> The cachet of going abroad to the West is nothing new to Thai cultural currency. The (male) royal elite members were sent to be educated in England, Europe and Russia during the reign of Rama V (Chulalongkorn, r. 1868-1910), followed by the elitists with means and commoners with outstanding academic performance from the reign of Vajiravudh (r.1910-1925) onwards. 'The West' and what it has stood for represents the reservoir of civilisation, advancement and modernisation in the Siamese/Thai imagination. See chapter one for details discussion of this issue.

Although already pointed out in chapter four, it is relevant to reiterate here again Sophan's permissive attitude according to which men's visits to prostitutes is a common practice and 'good women' like the (supposedly virgin) girlfriends should not be bothered by it. Such an attitude is evident in his attempt to pacify the heartbroken Wilan who catches him out by saying, 'Can you think of it as if I had been to a prostitute? I didn't love, didn't even like her. She knows that' (Suwanni, 1972: v.1, 226). His analogy imparts the underlying assumption that a sexual relationship which does not involve any emotional bonding is not different from commercial sex—functional, factual and unattached. This attitude unequivocally comes to light in his post-coital reaction to Marasi.

Sophan got dressed slowly looking the opposite way from Marasi who was lying wearily in bed.  
 He both despised her and was disgusted by her.  
 But he had spent his lust on her only a short while ago.  
 What would Wilan think?  
 He would never let her know, not even on his deathbed.  
 'Sophan', [Marasi] said his name in an intimate tone of voice, 'Are you leaving?'  
 He nodded, inexplicably hating himself.  
 [...]
 'I do love you', she kisses him here and there while Sophan was holding his breath, feeling so disgusted that he wanted to push her away. Yet he still had manners.  
 [...]
 'Do you love me?'  
 Sophan was silent.  
 His face turned somewhere else that was not towards her busty chest. What kind of woman is she?  
 And he was bad enough to bring her here [to a love motel].  
 'Huh?', she repeated, 'Do you love me?'  
 'You should know it', Sophan pushed her off at arm's length. 'Go...get dressed...or else I'll leave you here'.  
 [Marasi was smoking. They were still in the motel room.]  
 'You probably don't want Wilan to know, do you?' (ibid. 208-10)  
 [...]
 'Wilan's just like me', she said, 'We're *free love...free sex*. Ask Khum if you don't believe me'.  
 Sophan was silent, did not believe a word she said.  
 Wilan was from an old *phudi* family and respectable.  
 Though she was a bit rebellious, she would not be all completely *free* like Marasi accused her of being. (ibid. 211)  
 [...]
 [Marasi was persistent and tried to arouse Sophan again.]  
 'Do you love me much?'  
 Sophan forced out a laugh.  
 'Not at all'.

[...]

Marasi kissed his neck zestfully. Sophan was so charming. Apart from being handsome, he was also from genteel family, had a rich father and was even an overseas student. (ibid. 213-4)

[...]

'Why don't you love me?' Marasi annoyingly repeated, really asking for a slap.

Had it been Kamjorn, Marasi would probably get one. But this was Sophan, the only son in a genteel family of long tradition. Thus, he could only think of doing it.

[...]

'So you said it's *free love...free sex*', Sophan touched her breast impassively because she had put his hand there.

'Yes, it's *free*'.

'So, why would you care if I love you or not?'

'Well, but isn't love better than love not?'

What she said was quite right, but Marasi's love seemed worthless like leftover stock, going cheap. (ibid. 215-6)

While the post-coital scene between Wilan and Sophan discussed in chapter four shows Sophan's loving, sincere and earnest interaction with Wilan, Sophan in this scene is angry with himself and full of contempt for Marasi. His feeling of self-hatred and of being disgusted by her and despising her is caused by his regret for losing control of himself. He was not drunk prior to this encounter though Marasi was. He drove his own car to the motel and had sex with her out of his own free will because the 'invitation' was there and it was abundantly clear that it entailed no obligation. There is no demand for any kind of responsibility or regret from Marasi, no mention of potential pregnancy (she takes contraceptive pills) and no sense of obligation towards her from Sophan's part. The only demand Marasi makes is 'for more' and for emotion as she confesses her 'love' for him and keeps asking for the return of the same courtesy. She makes it clear that she does it out of her feeling for him, and although the feeling is not mutual, it does not really matter for her. The problem with this encounter is the risk of being found out, since Marasi and Wilan are 'friends'/'enemies'.

Apart from feeling angry, Sophan finds Marasi's available sexuality and sexual forwardness off-putting in the aftermath. He marks the clear boundary between love (emotional commitment) and lust (simple carnality). As the feeling of affection is not mutual, he finds her emphasis on the emotional dimension of their sexual act out of place. Marasi's demand for affection aggravates his contempt and guilt as he sees the act as purely physical. Sophan's thought of Wilan unveils how his perception of women is socially and conventionally wrought. In the scene, the more he is appalled by Marasi's

sexual behaviour, the firmer his conviction of Wilan's sexual innocence. He cannot separate sexual behaviour from family background. Later on, though he experiences first-handedly that both Wilan and Marasi transgress the behavioural code of 'good women' in their premarital sex, he suspends his judgement on Wilan partly because of her family background, his emotional commitment to her, and the assumption of her commitment to him.

When Sophan has sexual relations with the woman whom he is emotionally committed to, social factors play a crucial role in his attitude. With Wilan, he is conscience-stricken and acutely struck by the sense of wrongdoing as he intends to take responsibility for her but is not yet able to do so. He brings up social factors such as that they are still dependent (*dek*, literally, children), that their priority is to study and that they are incapable of being responsible for the consequences of the sexual act (pregnancy) even though he is willing to be. As pregnancy is the public side of the private act, in the sense that it is publicly visible as opposed to a sexual act, for Sophan Wilan's potential pregnancy calls for a social approach in handling it that is marriage (social acknowledgement of the sexual relationship). His sexual masculinity thus converges with social masculinity here.

On the contrary, Sophan's sexual relation with Marasi lacks an emotional dimension on his part. Therefore, it resembles that of commercial sex, which does not entail any responsibility or social factors. As a non-commercial sexual partner, from Sophan's point of view, Marasi's casual sex lacks emotional, social and even commercial value. There is not even an expression of sexual satisfaction from him in the scene. Marasi's 'vulgar' behaviour is contrasted with Sophan's composed demeanour which emphasises his gentlemanly/genteel/*phu di* upbringing and social standing in relation to her and should be examined. While the narrator praises his upbringing for his withholding of offensive, aggressive or violent manner (pushing Marasi away or slapping her on the face), the fact that he accepts Marasi's 'invitation' (having sex with her, touching her breast) is not perceived within the same framework. His 'gentlemanliness' thus seems to apply only to the 'visible' side of things such as demureness and deportment rather than 'gentlemanliness' in the sense of Siburapa's definition such as, among other things, respect for women, whether 'good' or 'bad', and social-consciousness.

Sophan selectively applies his social masculinity and sexual masculinity depending on the context in which he finds himself. His socio-sexual masculinity is context-dependent because he has internalised the cultural division of women and perceives 'bad'

woman as ‘lesser of a good woman’ and, therefore, to be treated differently. Moreover, the ‘social’ part in his masculinity restrictedly applies to what can be externally perceived. It is in his appearance, social decorum and public norms rather than ‘social-consciousness’. His ‘split’ masculinity is ideologically in keeping with and perpetuating the cultural division of women as discussed in chapter four.

### **Phutawan: the Prince of *Post-coital Triste*, Duty before Desire**

Phutawan is the Loatian prince in exile in Thailand with his family because of the political situation in Laos. He was Wilan’s childhood friend/puppy love until he was sent to study in England at the age of thirteen. As the eldest son of a formerly rich, dignified, blueblood family, Phutawan’s upbringing is marked by propriety, a sense of duty and responsibility fit for the future head of noble family. His financially insecure family draws upon their resources so that he can graduate from abroad, which further reinforces in him familial expectation, commitment and modesty. At sixteen he returns to Bangkok for a family visit and rejoins the formerly innocent Wilan who by then has been through a cycle of partying, sex and abortion. In their sexual encounter as discussed in chapter four, the post-coital scene juxtaposes the prudish, English educated Phutawan’s expectation of ‘good’ Thai woman with the home-grown, Westernised/modernised Wilan’s expression of sexual freedom and carefree sexuality. The analysis of the scene in chapter four found Wilan’s evolving sexuality and concluded that both Phutawan and Wilan see female sexual behaviour in two different sets of a binary opposite. That is, Wilan understands ‘female sexual restriction as opposed to female sexual freedom’ in terms of ‘tradition as opposed to modern’. Female sexual restriction belongs to tradition while having sexual freedom is being modern. Similarly, Phutawan perceives female sexual restriction as opposed to female sexual freedom in terms of Thai women’s behaviour versus *farang* women’s behaviour. Using the same scene this chapter specifically focuses on Phutawan’s negotiation of his masculinity.

The character of Phutawan is marked by an acute *post-coital triste*. Waking up in a love motel with a slight hangover with Wilan sleeping next to him, Phutawan’s initial reaction is wishing he could ‘disappear’, feeling ‘ashamed of what he did to Wilan whom he loved’ (Suwanni, 1972: v.2, 228), ‘not in the least proud [to have her]’ and ‘regret for his thoughtless action’ (ibid. 232). He is regretful and guilty thinking that he has violated her, ‘Everything that happened must be his responsibility’ (ibid. 231), for he sees the

sexual relation as her loss at his gain. However, he finds Wilan's untroubled manner and carefree sexual behaviour offensive to his earnestness and behavioural standard.

[...] She should have cried for what she lost to him as she was a Thai woman, not a *farang*. It should be like that, should not it?

[...]

He would not have been disturbed if she had woken up in his arms in the first morning of their marriage. *But he had not yet finished his studies and still had to ask his mother for money. Nothing was ready.*

[...]

[He saw how sexually expressive and immodest she was and thought]

Was this really the Wilan he had always dreamed of during all those years he was overseas? *She erased his dream completely.*  
(223, v.2, my emphasis)

Phutawan is visibly disappointed by Wilan, whose expression does not conform to his perception/expectation of 'Thai woman's sexual behaviour code' which, for him, is a categorical equivalence of being 'sexually pure' as opposed to that of the *farang*'s as discussed in chapter four. Coming of age in England, Phutawan's restricted attitude towards female sexuality expresses in racial terms of 'Thai woman's behaviour' and '*farang* woman's behaviour' but he instead imposes a Victorian sexual moral code on a Thai woman, not a *farang* one. His reaction to Wilan together with his post-sex guilt and humiliation implies that he disapproves of premarital sex on cultural and social grounds. His rationale is he is Laotian, Wilan is Thai; he is still a dependent student, his family is financially insecure, 'Nothing is ready', whereas Wilan, on the contrary, sees sexual relation as sensory pleasure and a common part of a relationship.

After the awkward sexual encounter with Wilan, Phutawan is so driven by guilt that he needs to express his responsibility and commitment to her. He discreetly confers with his mother who suggests that engagement will be appropriate to their situation. Yet, the proposal is rejected by Wilan's millionaire mother, who does not know what actually happened apart from the fact that the two youngsters are dating. Only after the responsible action is taken, though refused, does Phutawan see Wilan again, and this time he avoids all suggestions from her that might lead to them engaging sexually. And that is the last time they meet because he soon leaves for England without telling her in person. In his letter to Wilan, Phutawan explains the reasons for his abrupt departure, 'I'm not sure that, if we'd been close, it wouldn't happen again. [...] One of these days, if my family restores our finances, your mother might give us some consideration. But if it is the way it is, I or,

to be precise, my family wouldn't have dared asking for your hand. [...] For what happened, I'm asking you to forget about it. So you'd feel comfortable when you meet someone who deserves you, unlike myself who has been rejected in every way ' (ibid. 351).

Though assuming the chivalry of a defeated forlorn young man, Phutawan's decision to bluntly bring their relationship to an end and all the reasons he gives actually show that premarital sex is unacceptable to him and that Wilan has broken the taboo. He cannot see sexual relations within the framework of a romantic relationship as a private act of two consenting (though young) individuals devoid of social attachment. As Phutawan wholly perceives sexual relations in social terms as existing within marriage, as long as social factors are not ready for marriage, sexual relations cannot get underway. More importantly, though financially middle-class, his upper-class background has taught him how 'appropriateness' plays a crucial role in one's life as a social being in a real sense, especially in marriage. The upper-class marriage depends more on familial approval, social and financial suitability than in the middle class and working class as it has a consolidating function (Nidhi, 1994b: 65-6). This underlying understanding thus renders marriage among the upper class a highly traditional and conservative practice, even when they are exposed to modern culture and society in the West through education as in the case of Phutawan.

Phutawan's masculinity is completely defined in social terms as a sense of duty and a fulfilment of what is expected of him as a son and future head of a family. Despite his romantic relationship with Wilan, he effectively does not see her in sexual terms but rather as the embodiment of a social currency. This is by no means to say that his initial feeling for her is disingenuous, but that his feeling is tampered by social factors which turn Wilan into something more than herself as an individual sexual being. His obligation and responsibility towards his family and a secure future (and by extension to his would-be wife) overwrite personal desire. It is, however, the internalisation of the upper-class value that transforms the personal into the familial and therefore social. Phutawan's masculinity, thus, is not represented in sexual terms of virile manhood, sexual licence and male sexuality. It posits itself at the opposite end of the spectrum from Sukhum and is endowed with an intricate web of social meanings outside the realm of sexualised masculinity. Though the 'social' part in Phutawan's masculinity is not so dissimilar from Sophan's, since it also means social appearance, decorum, appropriateness but not 'social-consciousness', Phutawan's social masculinity is not permissive of commercial sex.

## Conclusion: the Old (Male-Oriented) Order in the Modern World

This chapter has investigated heterosexual male sexual culture and the construction of masculinities in *Sanim soi* and *Thalay reu im*. In the discussion of *Sanim soi*, it shows that the endorsement of commercial sex in a young person encourages the formation of responsibility-free sexualised masculinity and removes sexual activity out of the ‘real world’ in which every action has its consequence, every freedom demands responsibility. Thanin and the shadowy figure of his son in *Sanim soi* and Sukhum, Sophan and Phutawan in *Thalay reu im* represent the middle- and upper-class mentality that education is the first and foremost priority at the expense of absolving other kinds of responsibility.

While the brothel visited by Thanin and his son discreetly existed out of public spectatorship even before the Prostitution Prohibition Act of 1960 was passed, Sukhum, Sophan and Phutawan belong to the generation of young men who, in different degrees, experience the public visibility of prostitution and urban nightlife in full swing because of the Entertainment Places Act of 1966. Easily accessible (latent) commercial sex venues in the form of nightclubs and massage parlours with ‘special services’ were abundant and glossed over as part of economic development and modernisation. The mundanity of commercial sex has somewhat turned it into an accepted norm of male sexual culture and culturally backfired on sexualised masculinity and femininity, in that all female bodies become a sexual currency, as Sukhum’s case shows.

Sukhum’s modern sexually-free masculinity which attempts ‘sexual liberation’ simply turns to self-interest as it loses its liberating edge because of his lack of sexual responsibility and social awareness, which leads the so-called sexually liberated young woman to a backstreet clinic for an abortion. He represents the symptomatic effect of the desire to be modern that is the irreconcilability between Western/modern sexual liberation and Thai male responsibility-free commercial sex consumption. Sophan’s selective socio-sexual masculinity further reinforces the deep-rooted cultural division of women which accommodates men’s interests at the expense of women’s. Phutawan’s masculinity portrays the social side of personal affairs which could potentially lead to more responsibility-oriented sexual relations and the subversion of women’s categorisation. It is, however, class-based and negates female sexuality. Despite their absentee fathers, these three young men illustrate how each can evolve differently out of the existing gender relations and male sexual culture as they explore and define their masculinities.

The discussion of the selected literary texts in this chapter has shown that modern Thai masculinities, just like masculinities in other cultures, are constituted through gender relations. The focus on the masculinities in question here emphasises, to use Connell's terms, 'the processes and relationships through which men and women conduct gendered lives' (2005, 71). Those gendered lives in the specific context of Thai sexual cultural practices are both constituted in and constituting gender relations, which are by no means static and impervious to change, as the chapter has shown. However, the discussion of the construction and negotiation of modern Thai masculinities within the specific frameworks of 'sexual masculinity' (*khwam-pen-chai*) and 'social masculinity' (*khwam-pen-luk-phuchai*), and the socio-cultural context of Thailand in the 1960s and 1970s illustrate that the legacy of patriarchy remains unaltered in the social fabric of people's lives. The old (male-oriented) order presides firmly over a new social milieu of the modern world where women also strive to gain equal access to what modernity has to offer. The gendered lives of young men and women and how they converge show that the interest of men has been placed above and before, if not at the expense of, that of women. Though this situation might not be unique to Thai society, the idea that modernity also encompasses the principle that all human beings, regardless of their sex, are equal did not deliver a realistic impact in a society where the 'desire to be modern' was felt in the material reality of people's lives.

## CONCLUSION

The present study has sought to expand on the study of 1960s and 1970s literature and its criticism which is concentrated within the framework of the Literature for Life approach and corpus. It specifically focuses on selected popular literary works and addresses the question of modern identities in the developmental context of Thailand in the period in question. In its treatment of the literary works as cultural texts, this study employs an interdisciplinary approach in its critical examination of fictional characters from different walks of life. These characters, in their own ways, engage with the West, with material reality and the various ideologies that came with modernity, socio-cultural and politico-economic changes, and the military government-led development programmes. The characters under analysis represent modern men and women who strive to 'become subjects as well as objects of modernisation' (Berman: 1988:5) in the sense that they are at once subsumed into the whirlwind of modernity and also struggle to define their subjectivity and gendered life from within it. As modernity is marked by the experience of 'life's possibilities and perils' (ibid. 15), to reiterate Giddens' argument, it also 'alters the nature of day-to-day social life and affects the most personal aspects of our experiences' (1991:1). By probing into both the day-to-day social life and the personal aspects of the represented human experience, gendered life and relationships which are affected by the 'desire to be modern' and the modern environment itself, chapters two to six demonstrate the possibilities and perils as well as conflicts and tensions that the characters confront.

Although the thesis has used the term 'American Era' as a form of shorthand for the historical context, the socio-cultural presence and the various influences of the extensive American involvement with Thailand from the 1950s to the 1970s, it does not argue that the changes in the country were exclusively motivated by the American 'input' into Thai society. In the introductory chapter of the thesis, the survey on the 'desire to be modern' in the context of Siamese/Thai society shows the long historical and cultural formation and various expressions of the desire from the mid-nineteenth century to the period in question. The appeal of 'being modern' has been irresistible in the perception of the Siamese/Thai elite as the three key historical moments illustrate that, Harrison argues, 'since the mid-nineteenth century the West has represented a privileged Other in the Thai imagination' (2010: 10). The privileged position of the West, its position of power and its discourses of civilisation and advancement render the idea of being 'modern' (that is,

Westernised) to imply ‘a state of advancement, betterment, progress, even [supposed] goodness or virtue’, Thongchai (2004:19) argues. The implication of the term modern means that it ‘claims superiority over its counterpart, the premodern and traditional’, although that is not necessarily true (ibid.).

However, the ‘pitfalls of modernity’ (Thak, 2009: 486) become apparent when embodied in the lack of moral restraint of men and women who abandon traditional values and exceedingly and hedonistically consume what modernity has to offer. The emphasis was also given to women as more susceptible to the negative influences of modernity. The issue was addressed in such a way arguably for the first time in the prose fiction of the 1910s. The anxiety over the negative impact of modernity was expressed in gender terms as the loss of control over female sexuality. Thus, modernity and ‘being modern’ must also be resisted on (male-oriented) ‘moral’ ground that aims to control female sexuality in the guise of ‘protection’. The gendered lives of men and women and their relations with each other were constituted in and by the specific context of Thai sexual culture and, especially, gender double standard. The latter came under challenge by the newly modernising environment and ideologies as addressed in chapter one, part three and illustrated in chapters four, five and six. In retrospect, the literary representation of ‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’ in terms of value judgement in some works produced by the ‘Literature for Life’ movement from the late 1960s found its forebear in Khru Liam’s *Khwa-mai-phayabat* (1915) (Non-Vendetta).

The tendency to view the ‘modern’ and the ‘traditional’ as fixed categories with intrinsic values in studies of literary works produced during the ‘American Era’ is what this thesis challenges. Of course, the launch of the first National Economic Development Plan in 1961 exacerbated social disparity and rendered it most visibly in the unequal rural-urban development and relationship as discussed in chapter one, part one and chapter three. Rural Thailand became ‘the fuel and fodder used to fire the engines of rapid economic development which benefited the urban sector’ (Thak, 2007: XV). Natural resources from the countryside and cheap labour from rural migrants allowed the city to expand and to enjoy economic growth and material advancement. Rural areas also turned into sites of nostalgic longing as they came to embody traditional values as illustrated in chapter three. However, with its latent conservative stance, the value judgment approach to conflicts between tradition and modernity in the unequal relationship between the rural

and the urban often glorifies tradition and condemns modernity<sup>1</sup>. It neglects the fact that the 'traditional' hierarchical power structure, subjugating deferential mentality and patriarchy were also challenged by 'modern' ideas such as human equality, justice and women's agency.

The attempt to fix 'tradition' and 'modernity', and by extension 'Thainess' and 'Westernness', disregards the dynamics of the cultural formation and the psychological complexity of the construction process of cultural identity. It retreats into what Harrison calls, 'comfortable binaries' which need to be displaced by 'an alternative emphasis on the contradictions and ambiguities that colour interactions between Siam/Thailand and the West' (Harrison, 2010a: 3). This thesis has destabilised the 'comfortable binary' between 'tradition/traditional' and 'modernity/modern'. It proves each category to be relative and malleable by examining how the 'desire to be modern' and the attempt to define oneself as a modern subject are enacted in an individual's social interaction and 'self' perception. In this thesis, each individual chapter, from two to six, is dedicated to the examination of specific cases, to tease out contradictions in the characters' existence and to analyse their processes of identity construction as subjects in modernity.

During this process, the represented characters demonstrate that in order to emerge as a subject or attain a subject position in modernity, they differently perform 'behaviour' that is deemed 'modern' because it poses intellectual, social and/or personal challenge to that which they have been informed about and brought up to believe and to act upon, under the umbrella of 'tradition'. The characters' behaviour, as chapters two to six show, is clearly not uniform. Some characters are at times self-destructive and marked by self-interest and consumerism (as in *Sanim soi* and *Thalay reu im*); pose a direct challenge to state authority (as in *Met in yu. et. e.* and *Ngo ngao tao tun*); and even partake in Orientalist discourse and embrace harmoniously both the foreign and the royal court (as in *Pai talat-nam*). The critical examination of all these literary texts shows that it is spurious to identify 'modern/Westernised elements' that are alien to 'Thai tradition' in order to preserve what is believed to be 'Thainess' or Thai cultural identity that is immutable. The construction and elevation of 'Thainess', as opposed to 'the West', as a nationalist ideology, in effect antagonises the cultural pluralism in the fabric of people's lives and lived experience. As Thongchai poignantly states,

[A] Western, or any other foreign, element stops being purely Western (if it ever was) and becomes a localized Western element

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Suvanna Kriengkraipetch and Larry E. Smith, 1992; Ozea, Matthew J., 2008.

the moment that it is translated into a Thai context. To put it the other way round, that element becomes Thai-ized and is no longer Western in the sense that it comes to exist and operate in a Thai context. In Thailand 'The West' is in fact always the Thai-ized West. (2010: 148)

Thongchai's proposal puts the process of agential localisation to the fore. The modern identity construction of a subject, as this thesis illustrates, is already a representative of myriad local contexts.

Education offers an example of the localisation of 'the West' in the context of Thailand. The first text book of Thai language and poetics was based on 'a desire to emulate French missionary education in the seventeenth century' and 'written on royal command by a former monk' (Wyatt, 1994: 221). The centralisation of education in Siam in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the offer of subjects such as Thai, English and maths in vernacular schools were also the result of Western models that had been adjusted to the local demands of expanding bureaucracy (also because of Western influence and adapted from Western models) as well as the politico-economic situations of the period (Wyatt, 1994). The mass education system had gradually become more systematic and extended to the provinces. However, a higher education institute was not available outside Bangkok until the opening of the first regional university in Chiang Mai province in the north of Thailand in 1964. It was thus common practice that aspiring and able youths were sent by their families to continue their secondary school education and to pursue higher education in Bangkok, which meant better opportunities and life advancement.

The writers whose works are selected in this thesis are educated migrant writers of the same generation who were benefited from seeking higher education in the capital<sup>2</sup>. Suwanni, Rong Wongsawan, Sujit Wongthes and Ta Tha-it all left their provincial hometowns in pursuit of education and opportunities in the city. Except for Ta Tha-it, who returned to his hometown in Uttaradit province, the other three remained in Bangkok to pursue their careers. Rong and Sujit started their career in journalism, whereas Suwanni taught fine arts at Silpakorn University and later became a full-time writer. To reiterate here Anderson's description of this generation of educational pilgrims that placed them in the broader social context of the 1960s, 'the same social riptide that swept dispossessed peasants into the slums of Bangkok carried capable, ambitious children from local schools

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<sup>2</sup> Though Rong and Suwanni were thirteen years Sujit's senior, all three of them produced their works contemporaneously. Ta Tha-it's date of birth is not available but it can be estimated from publication of his works that he could be several years younger than Rong and Suwanni.

of [the provinces] [...] up the steep, expanding pyramid of learning to the universities of the metropolis' (1985:42). Coming from provincial origins and maintaining contact with their rural backgrounds while also experiencing life in the capital at the height of the American Era, these writers bore witness to the fact that 'the same forces [of modernity] made possible their own success and the degradation of the people and the environment with which they had grown up' (ibid. 43). Although the selected works in the thesis are mostly 'urban' in content, the authors, especially Suwanni and Rong, profoundly portrayed the force of modernity in their representations of people in changing social relations and personal relationships. They represented the characters' struggle to define themselves as subjects in ways that are at once comprehensible, engaging and thought-provoking for readers.

Among the selected texts, only Sujit's *Met in yu. et. e.* and *Ngo ngao tao tun* are set in a foreign locale. Though Sujit, as represented in the works, had gone to America for work, apprenticeship and personal purposes rather than formal education, his journey is the equivalent of an educational pilgrimage. Both Sujit and Thorngboem, the narrators of the two novellas, are on a pilgrimage which detaches them from 'their position in the social structure, allowing new kinds of experiences and relations to take place in the "betwixt and between" state' (May Adadol and MacDonald, 2010:123). Sujit's encounter with student demonstrations and counter-culture 'generated a new experience of politicisation' (ibid.). The two novellas thus unsettle the meaning of 'home' as a source of 'self' and bring the reader back to face the 'tyranny at home' because of the portrayed overseas experience. The novellas emerge from the author's liminal experience and disrupt both the Thai people's understanding of their 'home' and their perception of America. Consequently, despite the evocation of pre-modern Siam and Buddhist doctrine at the end of *Ngo ngao tao tun*, the two accounts cannot function as a reliable source of Thai identity simply because they are believed to be impervious to Western influences. On the contrary, pre-modern Siam's strong connection with China and the Indic origin of Buddhism unequivocally speak of the cultural pluralism at the heart of what is believed to be 'Thainess'.

Each of chapters two to six portrays the dynamic process of identity construction in different thematised case studies in conjunction with the relevant historical, political and socio-cultural backgrounds. The thesis dedicates three chapters to discuss the issues of gender identities and sexuality and to analyse male-female power relations in terms of gender identity construction within the hetero-normative context. It concludes that unequal

power relations stem from the deep-rooted patriarchal order at the heart of Thai culture that places the interests of men above those of women. The analysis of the popular literary texts in this thesis has broadened the corpus and critical studies of 1960s and 1970s Thai literature which has remained the fertile ground for further studies. It contributes to the interdisciplinary approach to the studies of Thai literature and the theoretically engaged treatment of popular literature of the period in question.

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