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Conventions of mate selection in twentieth-century Central Thailand

Bumroongsook, Sumalee, Ph.D.

University of Hawaii, 1992

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CONVENTIONS OF MATE SELECTION
IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY CENTRAL THAILAND

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN

HISTORY

MAY 1992

BY

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on conventions and practice of mate selection in Central Thailand in the twentieth century. Based on documentary and oral sources, it provides a historical perspective of cultural continuity and change in the family.

The research argues that throughout the twentieth century, all levels of the Central Thai society tend to have the same general conventions of mate selection. Endogamy, male initiation in courtship, and female modesty and chastity are encouraged by every class. A double standard of sexual morality has always been dominant.

However, the study of practices shows that there has been diversity in mate selection in Central Thailand among different socio-economic groups. Upper-class and well-to-do parents tend to have more control and influence over mate selection of their children than their counterparts in lower socio-economic levels. Lower economic classes have relatively more relaxed attitudes about sex and marital relations than the middle class.

The research also confirms the impact of socio-economic changes on the development of mate selection. Major factors of change are the growth of capitalism, industrialization, urbanization, and Western-style education. These factors have facilitated the shift from parental authority over mate
selection to individual freedom of choice in the second half of this century. Accordingly, ways of courtship and criteria for mate selection have changed notably. Changes in male-female relations suggest that society is moving towards more but not full gender equality. The economic success has also been openly emphasized as an important source of social prestige.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Several times in Hawaii and in Thailand, when I introduced myself as a history graduate student, working on a dissertation concerning mate selection in twentieth-century Central Thailand, the person I was talking to would raise his or her eyebrows and ask me again to make sure that I was really a history—not an anthropology or sociology—student.

I understand very well how this is puzzling to people outside the discipline of history. History, for many of them, is the study of politics, economics, and important figures and events in the past, such as wars, diplomatic relations, and lives and works of kings and generals. Some may know about social history. Yet social history, in their opinion, should deal more with big issues, such as ideas, customs, and ways of living of the whole society. Conventions of mate selection in Central Thailand in the twentieth century seemed to be a topic suitable only for the social scientists.

However, many to whom I talked seemed to understand why I, as a student of history, wanted to study conventions of mate selection in Thailand. "It's high time some historians start to study about the history of the family in Thailand," a political science professor told me. He was right. The
idea of this dissertation originated from the desire to bring more attention to the undeservedly ignored field of the history of the family in Thailand.

The family, a the fundamental institution in Thai society, provides a common baseline for the whole culture. In spite of its significance as a fundamental social unit, the family has become the subject of scholarly interest only within the past three decades. The systematic study of the family in Thailand was initiated by anthropologists and sociologists while most historians, due to their traditional interest in the ruling classes, together with the scarcity of documentary materials on the family, focused more on the study of politics.

The history of the family covers various topics, such as children, youth, women, and marriage patterns. In Thailand, except for a few research works on women's status as related to legal rights, literature, education, and religion, no systematic study has ever been undertaken on the history of the family.¹ The purpose of this dissertation is, therefore, to take the first step into this

field. The appropriate topic to be initially explored should be none other than the conventions of mate selection. This is a central issue because mate selection is an important stage in the process of family formation before the cohabitation of the couple.

**Literature Review**

In Thailand, the mate-selection process has always been considered a significant determinant of the success and happiness of the married couple. Yet, except for a number of advice works on love and marriage, very few books have been written on the development of mate selection in Thailand. Most of them usually cover only the practice of or attitudes regarding mate selection from the 1960s on. The latter category is the subject of this review.

An early account concerning mate selection in Thailand in the twentieth century was an article written by Phraya Rachawaranukun (Uam) in 1910.² He wrote a brief article on

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² Earlier accounts in the nineteenth century were reports by foreigners on Thai marriage and wedding customs, such as journals by John Crawfurd, the British ambassador to Thailand in 1825, and Frederick Arthur Niel, an Englishman who resided in Thailand in 1840-1841. There are two interesting documents on marriage customs from the late nineteenth century. One is a brief account of marriage customs "among the upper and more respectable classes" written by Captain Ames, the inspector of police in Bangkok in 1882. The other is a record of a peasant's wedding in Phetchaburi by Mrs. J. W. Van Dyke, a missionary's wife. Both documents provide more details on wedding ceremonies than on the mate-selection process. The latter gives a more vivid picture of the peasant's wedding day. In addition, it reveals that a determined peasant woman could choose her own spouse. See Carl Bock, Temples and Elephants: Travel in Siam in 1881-1882 (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1986
Thai marriage customs which was published in a compilation of articles on various cultures and customs in Thailand. Here he discussed in a few pages the mate-selection practice in that period. His article covered marriage customs in Central Thailand as well as in other regions. Most of the information was from his own observations or from reports of scholars in other regions. Information from his own experience reflects his upper-class background. According to him, it was the duty and responsibility of parents or senior relatives to choose a spouse for their children or dependents.

Phraya Anuman Rajadhon was another Thai scholar interested in marriage customs, but his interests extended to the peasants' way of life. He wrote several books concerning various customs and life rituals. Similar to those of Phraya Rachawaranukun, his accounts of marriage customs in Central Thailand were derived from his own experience as a bridegroom and observer of many marriages. Unlike his predecessor, however, Phraya Anuman Rajadhon, as a self-educated anthropologist, was a keen observer of the

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peasants' way of life and included reports of various peasants on marriage customs in his works.

His best accounts of mate selection and courtship of the peasants in Central Thailand are not in his book, Prapheni Kiewkap Chiwit: Taeng-ngan [Life Customs: Marriage], which deals more with customs of marriage negotiation and ceremonies on the wedding day. Information about courtship and mate selection is, however, to be found in abundance in two other works, Chiwit Chao Thai Samai Ko'n [The Life of the Thai People in Earlier Times] and Chiwit Chao Na [The Life of the Farmer]. His study of the peasants' way of life made him realize that in mate selection, free choice with parental approval was generally practiced in the rural areas in the first half of the twentieth century.4

In 1959 the Thai Department of Public Relations published a book called Aspects and Facts of Thailand to provide general information to foreigners. In this book, Vibun Thamavit and Robert D. Golden wrote about the family in Thailand, giving useful but sometimes contradictory information about contemporary mate selection and the concept of Thai marriage. One example of this useful but

contradictory information is about mate selection among peasants. Free selection was practiced in rural areas, they stated. The peasants courted while working in the fields. Yet, the authors claimed that parental selection was still the practice for about 60 percent of the rural population in the 1950s.\(^5\)

Their concept of marriage is interesting, as evidenced by the following passage:

> Marriage is not conceived of as a partnership, a union of hearts, following a prevalent American view, but rather as a juncture of complementary functions, each by and large exclusive of the other. The union is not necessarily based on love, and a girl, especially in the provinces, can be made a wife by the giving of a large enough sum of money to her and her parents.

For this girl, marriage was supposed to give her not love, but security, status, and the opportunity to exercise her function as a mother and mistress of the home.\(^6\)

\(^5\) The authors did not give any reason for this contradictory information. In my opinion, the contradiction may arise from a misunderstanding caused by the marriage custom. Though it was a love match, customarily, the man's parents or his senior relatives had to go and negotiate the marriage matters with the woman's parents. The man himself could not ask the woman's parents for her hand. With this custom, it may seem at first that the parents who negotiated the marriage for their son chose the spouse for him whereas actually the choice was his. I will discuss in detail parental authority over mate selection in the following chapter.

The collaboration between Vibun and Golden reflects a trend of rising interest in Thai studies among Western scholars starting after the Second World War. Mate selection has become an issue studied by many Western anthropologists, yet, often it has been studied simply as an aspect of marriage customs of the Thai peasants' life, such as in the works of John E. De Young, Jack M. Potter, and Howard K. Kaufman.7

Most of these works confirm what Phraya Anuman Rajadhon had already reported. De Young added that marriage was universal in Thailand and that only a few were single after 40. Potter noticed a double standard of premarital sex in Thai society. He maintained that distrust of women towards men regarding their sincerity during their courtship was a reflection of a sensitive distrust among all people in the village on almost all matters.

Later studies by other anthropologists in Central Thailand, such as Steven Piker and Donald J. Lauro, added richness to the knowledge of marriage and mate selection. Piker observed different patterns of mate selection between

the landed and the landless peasants.\(^8\) By using the method of life history in interviewing villagers, Lauro successfully traced a system of kinship in the village. Moreover, he learned about the age at first marriage of Thai and Sino-Thai villagers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.\(^9\)

Around 1970, demographers became interested in mate selection as a result of the growing problem of over-population in Thailand. Chulalongkorn University's Institute of Population and Mahidol University's Institute of Population and Social Research are two leading Thai academic centers for marriage and mate selection research. Most of the demographic studies from these institutes aim at an understanding of patterns of marriage among different groups of populations and at finding ways to control the fertility rate in Thailand.\(^10\)

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\(^8\) Steven Piker, *A Peasant Community in Changing Thailand* Anthropological research paper no. 30 for Arizona State University, 1983.


These studies, based mostly on data from the census and their own surveys, provide interesting demographic information, such as age at marriage, post-nuptial residence, and effects of education, migration, and occupation on marriage. Several studies cover people in both urban and rural areas. Nonetheless, the period of study is usually confined to post-1960. The demographic studies also neglect consideration of other interesting aspects of mate selection, such as ways of courtship and advisory literature. In addition, since most of them are quantitative studies, the reports often lack interesting details of the mate-selection process, courtship, and parent-child relations, which an historical study like the present one can provide.

From this general survey of literature on mate selection in Thailand, it is evident that past studies did not give adequate attention to the historical perspective of this topic. The study of mate selection has been treated in a monolithic, idealized fashion as if it had remained static over time. Moreover, before 1950, accounts of mate selection and marriage customs usually gave an impression of one uniform practice for the whole population in Central Thailand, regardless of the social and economic class. Differences in mate-selecting practices of the urban and rural populations in the first half of the twentieth century were also left largely unexplored.
Aim and Scope of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine in some detail the conventions of mate selection among various groups in Central Thailand from 1900 to the present. The study is based on three hypotheses. First, in Thai society, there is a diversity in conventions of mate selection rather than a uniformity. Hence, the study will focus on a comparison of mate-selecting methods among different social classes, between urban and rural populations, and between genders.

Mate-selection customs also vary among different minorities in the central plains, such as the Chinese and the Muslims. Here I prefer to limit the study to mate-selection practices among the Thai since another intensive study is needed for an understanding of these customs among the minorities. The mate-selection customs of different minorities will be discussed only to the extent that they have affected Thai customs.

Second, from the beginning of the twentieth century, there has been a gradual increase in the degree of involvement of young people in selecting their own spouses. The traditional custom of parental or elder authority in choosing a mate for their offspring or dependents has been challenged by the rising individualism in a capitalist society. The modern clash of interest over spouse choice is also explained by Caldwell's theory that it results partially from a broader transformation of family relationships.
which occur with the spread of mass education and capitalist production.\footnote{Quoted in Andrew Cherlin and Apichat Chamratrithirong, \textit{Variations in Marriage Patterns in Central Thailand} (Salaya, Thailand: Institute of Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, 1986), p. 42.}

Third, there is an interaction between the family and social and cultural changes. Attention will be given to the role of mate selection both as a dependent variable and as an agent of change. The effect of modernization, urbanization, and industrialization, three important twentieth-century social phenomena which customarily have been proclaimed as explanatory factors of almost all aspects of changes within the family, will be also explored.

Yet, this dissertation will not confine itself to these three social phenomena as the only guidelines for the study of change. It will be more open-ended so as to allow the historical evidence to reveal itself before any theory of change can be applied to it. Moreover, the impact of mate selection upon society and culture will also be discussed.

Why does the study begin at the year 1900? The scarcity of research materials, both documentary and oral, prevents the possibility of a systematic study of this topic prior to the twentieth century. Nonetheless, with regards to the effects of social change upon the family, the beginning of the twentieth century is an appropriate starting point. The result of the modernization initiated in the
last decades of the nineteenth century had already taken shape in many parts of the country. The area most affected by the process of modernization since then is Central Thailand.

As the land in this region is suitable for rice cultivation, the rising demand for rice from the world market starting in the mid-nineteenth century had led the rice farmers in many provinces in Central Thailand to become the major export suppliers. Cash cropping for export has changed the nature of the village economy from self-sufficiency to a market system, in which money replaces bartering.

In addition, because of its location within easy reach of the capital city, Central Thailand has always been the first region to be affected by new centralizing measures or development programs of the various governments in Bangkok. It is always open to reforms, especially in economics, administration, and education, three important factors in determining social and cultural changes.

The study period covers right up to the present. The period between 1980 and 1990 is the time when the effect of rapid economic development programs initiated during the period of military dictatorship (1958-1973) can be recognized. An investment-oriented economy has emerged and generated a remarkable degree of change in Thailand, particularly in the economic and social spheres.
Thailand has enjoyed a high economic growth rate since 1960; yet the imbalance in development, especially in income distribution, has resulted in alienation between the urban and rural populations and among the people within the urban and rural areas as well. This investigation of the interaction between the socio-economic changes and the changes within the family through mate selection can therefore contribute to a better understanding of the rising social crisis relating to the family at present.

Defining Central Thailand

Throughout the twentieth century, no standard division of Thailand has been set; the number of regions in the country and their boundaries vary from one study to another.\(^1^2\) It is not unusual for a writer, even in the

\(^{12}\) From 1900 to 1970, books on Thailand or Siam (as it was known among Westerners until officially changed to Thailand in 1939) used to divide the country into 4 regions: the north, the south, the central and the east or the northeast. The boundaries of each region often varied from one book to another. Since 1970, members of different disciplines have had different criteria in the partition of Thailand. Even geographers do not have the same guidelines. Robert L. Pendleton referred to 5 regions: the central valley of the Chao Phraya River; the continental highlands of the north and the west; the Korat Plateau; the southeast coast; and the southern peninsula. Charles A. Fisher described 6 regions: he divided the continental highlands into two parts, northern Thailand and the western hills. Wolf Donner combined the central plain with the western hills and the southeast coast, while maintaining the north, the northeast and the south as distinct regions. See David K. Wyatt, Thailand: A Short History (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), p.253; W. A. Graham, Siam: A Handbook of Practical, Commerce and Political Information, 2nd ed. (London: Alexander Moring, 1912); Ministry of Commerce and Communication, Siam: Nature and Industry (Bangkok: Bangkok Times Press, 1930); Ratchabanditsathan,
same book, to have chosen dissimilar ways to describe regions in Thailand.\textsuperscript{13} This remarkable variety is partly the result of different salient features noted by practitioners of different disciplines. A geographer may wish to identify Central Thailand with the uniform landscape of the Chao Phraya River delta, and thus leave the hills of Kanchanaburi to be classified as another region, the West. An economist would prefer instead to include the southeast coast of Chonburi and Chanthaburi in the central part as they have shared an almost-two-century's-long economic experience together.

Which then is the best way to define the "central" region for this dissertation? As social and cultural investigations are the main aim of this study, I find that the central region in question should include all areas in which the population has shared historically the same social and cultural experiences. In this socio/cultural sense, the "central region" here would cover the plains between four

\textsuperscript{13} National Statistical Office, 1976 \textit{Statistical Yearbook}. In an article on administration, the country was divided into 4 regions: the central, the north, the northeast and the south, but in an article on population, there were 6 regions: the central region was divided into 3 parts, the central, the west, and the east.
important rivers: the Chao Phraya, the Bang Pa Kong, the Mae Klo'ng and the Chanthaburi. It means that the hills of the west region and the southeast coast are included with the Chao Phraya delta to form Central Thailand.

The detailed boundary of Central Thailand in the twentieth century would thus extend to Uttaradit to the north, Prachinburi to the east, Chanthaburi and Trat to the southeast, Petburi to the south, and Kanchanaburi to the west.

This "central" region was considered in the late nineteenth century as "Siam Proper." Other regions, for example the North, the South, and the Northeast, were classified as tributary states where local rulers had considerable power to maintain "self-rule." All provinces in Central Thailand, except Uttaradit, have been under the tight control of the Bangkok governments since the early nineteenth century. In addition, many provinces in this area such as Petburi and Chanthaburi had industries or trade which were linked to and dependent upon the Bangkok market.

Graham stated in his 1912 Handbook on Siam that the central part was "the heart of the kingdom, the home of the greater part of the Siamese population." He explained

14 Beck, Temples and Elephants, pp.421-422.
15 Terwiel, Travellers' Eyes, pp. 4-5.
16 Graham, Siam, p.6.
that the population in the north and the eastern region (now called the northeast) were chiefly Lao. Twenty years later, a government publication also confirmed this fact. "(T)hose talking the Siamese language or King's Siamese are generally understood as the population living between the towns of Utaradit (sic) in the north and Petchaburi (sic) in the south and from Kanburi (sic) in the west to Saraburi in the east. . . ."\(^{17}\) It added that "(T)he population south of Petchaburi, peopling Siamese Malaya, speaks a peculiar dialect, a sort of "clipped" tongue, called "pasa chao talae."\(^{18}\)

This information may give a false impression of a homogenous Central Thailand, but in fact the region has also been populated by other ethnic groups. Villages of Mons, Khmers and Lao are scattered in many provinces close to Bangkok, such as Pathumthani, Ratburi, and Lopburi. They are descendants of refugees and/or prisoners of war allowed or forced to settle in the depopulated land of the central plains in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.\(^{19}\) In the 1930s, it was observed that apart from their own

\(^{17}\) Ministry of Commerce, Siam, p.97. However in this publication, the writer took pains to explain that the Lao in the north and the northeast called themselves Thai. "The Laos (sic) differ but little from the Siamese, and are in reality as much Tai as are the Siamese."

\(^{18}\) Ibid.

\(^{19}\) See detailed discussion in Terwiel, Travellers' Eyes.
language, however, these other ethnic groups did not differ much from their Thai neighbors as regards manner of livelihood, religion, customs, and clothes. 20

My field-study experience in three central-plain villages may illustrate how closely and harmoniously other ethnic groups have lived among the Thai. In my field-study, I chose three provinces in the central plains as the sites of my interviews, namely, Ratburi, Singburi, and Lopburi. These three provinces have all been settled for hundreds of years.

When I first visited Khlo'ng Khae, a village in Ratburi, I did not notice that this village was any different from other central Thai villages. To my surprise, I ended up interviewing informants who were descendants of the Khmers. Bansatoei, a village in Lopburi, is populated by descendants of the Lao Phuan or Thai Phuan as they prefer to call themselves. There are several Thai Phuan villages in this province. In Phromburi, a village in Singburi, I found that a village next to it was a Lao Wiangchan village. Some informants at Phromburi told me stories of the courtship between the Thai men from their village and the girls from the adjacent Lao Wiangchan village.

The Chinese are the other major ethnic minority in Central Thailand. It was generally believed that in the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries,

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20 Ministry of Commerce, Siam, pp.93-98.
the Chinese were living only in larger towns and in fishing
villages along the coast. Yet Terwiel has proved that even
in the early nineteenth century, the Chinese had already
settled in many provinces throughout the central plains.
There were Chinese settlements in sugar-cane plantations in
Nakhon Chaisi and Chachoengsao and in pepper cultivation
areas in Chanthaburi. These Chinese men usually married
Thai women, and their children, particularly the females,
were gradually absorbed into Thai society. 21

By the second half of the twentieth century, all the
ethnic groups seem to have been well assimilated into the
central Thai society. Wolf Donner, in his study of the
economic geography of Thailand, states that there is hardly
a region in Thailand that is more homogeneous with respect
to its ethnic composition than Central Thailand. 22 Apart
from the Chinese, the other ethnic minorities, with rather
similar cultures and physical appearance, have been absorbed
into the Thai society under the implementation of the
government's nation-building programs in the twentieth
century.

21 Terwiel, Travellers' Eyes, p. 254. The coming of
Chinese women in the 1920s had created closed communities of
Chinese in a few towns, such as Sampheng, the Chinatown in
Bangkok.

22 Wolf Donner, The Five Faces of Thailand: An Economic
Geography (London: C. Hurst & Company for the Institute of
Nonetheless, their existence in Central Thailand should be taken into account in this study of social changes. For instance, many of the villagers whom I interviewed in Bansatoei are fluent in the Lao Puan dialect, which they still use in everyday life. The close relationship between the Thai and their ethnic neighbors means that the possibility of cultural interaction is involved. This process has probably left some effects upon the conventions of mate selection in Central Thailand.

**Background of Central Thailand**

**Geographic Background**

"Central Thailand" as defined here covers three different geographical areas. The first area, the central plain, is formed by the Chao Phraya River and its tributaries, such as the Pa Sak and the Tha Chin. The warm climate, alluvial soil, flat terrain, and monsoon floodwater have made this area suitable for the cultivation of rice and other crops. This area has been the center of population concentration since the beginning of the century.

The second area is the Mae Klo'ng plain and the western hills. The low and flat fields of the Mae Klo'ng plain are devoted to the cultivation of rice, fruit, and vegetables. The western hills have been known for their timber and other forest products.

The third area, the southeast plain of the Bang Pa Kong and the Chanthaburi Rivers, consists of flat lowlands, which
are, however, above the rice-field level and whose soils are unsuitable for rice cultivation. The southern plain, famous for its pepper fields a century ago, now produces a variety of crops, such as cassava, sugar cane, and fruit.23

Administrative Background

The central region has always been under the close supervision and control of the central government in Bangkok. In the first half of the nineteenth century, government records and travellers' accounts reveal that direct Bangkok influence reached into most of the provinces in the central plains.24 When the administrative reforms were introduced during King Chulalongkorn's reign (1868-1910), the first few experiments in tax reform, monthly salary for government officials, and central government appointment of local officials were conducted in the central region.

In this period, the whole territory of the kingdom was divided into eighteen monthons (circles) and sub-divided into eighty-three changwats (provinces). The changwats were further sub-divided into amphoes (districts); the amphoes into tambons (communes), and the tambons into mubans (villages), the smallest administrative unit. The central

23 See more information about the central-region geography in Donner, Five Faces; Wilson, Thailand, pp. 16-17; and Ratchabanditsathan, Akkharanukrom, pp. 2-6.

24 Terwiel, Travellers' Eyes, p. 251.
region consisted of seven monthons. By the 1930s the monthons were abolished, but the division of changwat, amphoe, tambon, and muban continues to exist till the present day.

Research Sources

This study has been based primarily on two types of sources -- documentary and oral. Both sources have yielded important information and they differ from one another in interesting ways.

Documentary Sources

The documents used in this dissertation can be grouped into four categories. The first group consists of autobiographies, biographies, family genealogies, and memoirs. These works provide information mostly about the life and work of high-ranking officials, successful businesspersons, and other members of the upper class in the twentieth century. However, some short biographies of persons from the middle class are to be found in "cremation volumes."

The availability of these short biographies is the result of a custom initiated by Prince Damrong, a former Minister of Interior and leading scholar. In the late nineteenth century, at a cremation ceremony, it was the custom that the family of the deceased would give a gift to

25 Graham, Siam, p. 8. In the official document on Thai administration, the official English translation for the Thai word, "tambons" is "communes."

26 Donner, Five faces, p.44-50.
each guest as a memento of the deceased. Prince Damrong suggested to many of the noble families that they publish old and rare documents as gift-books in honor of the deceased. His advice was widely heeded, and soon it became a trend among the upper and middle classes. This kind of book distributed at a cremation ceremony is called Nangsu' Ngan Sop [Cremation volume]. Often, the cremation volumes are given to the National Library in Bangkok as well as to University libraries.

Usually in the first part of the cremation volume, there are articles about the deceased person's life and work, written by the family members and friends of the deceased. The personal life history of the deceased is often short and formal. Typically it provides information about his or her family background, his or her education, when and whom he or she married, and the number of his or her children and grandchildren.

Sometimes, though, the personal life history of a rare person can turn out to be very passionate and touching. Skimming through a large number of cremation volumes in libraries, I managed to gather some useful information about the practice of mate selection and courtship among the upper and middle classes. For example, a husband wrote about the first time he met his wife, a very romantic encounter in a streetcar. Chaloem Wutthikhosit (1905-1982) was a leading writer and illustrator. He married Sangwan Thangsuchat, the
daughter of an official. It was love at first sight for him. As he told the story of their first meeting:

We sat across from each other in the first-class car. She was alone, but did not appear interested in me. I took the liberty of observing her from head to toe. She wore a white short-sleeve blouse and a dhothi-like skirt. Her complexion was flawless, her face beautiful, her figure perfect. She had the most beautiful calves I had ever seen.  

In another cremation volume, the children retold a story they had heard from their parents of how their father was impressed with and had decided to marry their mother.

Mrs. Chusi Bunpan's children wrote the following:

During an annual fair in Photharam, a district in Ratburi, Mother sat watching an entertainment with her friends, eating sticky rice baked in a bamboo cylinder. A man teased her by scratching her back. The first time, Mother did not move. The second time, she turned back to give him a look. The third time, she hit the man with the bamboo cylinder. He ran away. Father saw the whole scene. He was impressed by the way Mother dealt with the man. He pursued and married her. He once told her, "I like you because you are fearless."  

To learn about the conventions and social attitudes regarding mate selection, I turned to the second group of documentary evidence. These consist of laws, court records, advisory works, courrier du coeur, and articles concerning this topic in books, magazines, newspapers, school year-

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books, and textbooks. These sources also reflect mostly the conventions and attitudes of the upper and middle classes.

The source used for legal evidence in the early twentieth century is Kotmai Tra Sam Duang [The Three-Seal Laws]. It is the compilation of ancient laws, some of which were made as early as the fourteenth century. These ancient laws were originally compiled in the late seventeenth century, and new laws were added later until the late nineteenth century. These ancient laws continued to be enforced until 1935 when Thailand promulgated its first modern Criminal and Civil and Commercial Codes.

The third group of documentary sources comprises literary works, such as classical literature, folk tales, short stories, novels, folk songs, and popular songs. I have used this evidence, considered by some as controversial, with great caution, knowing that the main purpose of literary works is to give pleasure, not provide historical records. Yet, the literary works often reflect the

29 In his study of age at first marriage in English society before the coming of industry, Peter Laslett has shown how literary works, such as Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, or Henry Porter's Two Angry Women of Abington, can mislead some demographers to a conclusion that marriage in the middle teens was familiar in sixteenth-century England. Other evidence, such as Church marriage records, show otherwise. Laslett perceptively concludes, "It is easy to see how a very similar distortion might come about if some future historian used Lolita or West Side Story as a source book for our own sexual habits, uncorrected by other evidence unliterary and statistical." Peter Laslett, The World We Have Lost: England Before the Industrial Age (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), pp. 81-87.
beliefs and attitudes of the authors, and sometimes, those of their readers. Moreover, most of the Thai novelists from 1930 to the present have used a realistic style in their works. The authors usually attempt to make the stories, scenes, and dialogues as similar to actual life as possible.

I have also made an effort to know the backgrounds of most authors whose works I have used as evidence in the text so that I may identify as to which class he or she represents. In addition, I rarely used the literary works as the only source of evidence for any conclusion. Other sources of evidence, such as biographies, memoirs, or statistics are always included as the main evidence.

The fourth group of sources consists of other studies of marriage, mate selection, and the family in Thailand and in some other countries, such as Burma, India, and the United States. I have already discussed many of the Thai works in my literary review; particularly useful for my research were the nationwide surveys by demographers and sociologists from the 1960s on. These works provide additional data about the people in provincial towns and the rural areas. Apart from substantive information, I also learned some interesting research methods from works on marriage and mate selection in other countries. These pioneer works gave me ideas about which questions to study, where to look for data, and how to interpret them.
Oral Sources

Except for some survey studies of rural population from the 1960s on, most of the documentary sources provide information about mate selection chiefly among the upper and middle classes and the urban population. Only a few novels, folk songs, and biographies of folk singers give information about the lower class and those in the rural areas. To gain more data about the latter groups, I interviewed 54 people in three villages in the central plains and four female workers in Bangkok.

These interviews gave additional insight into the practice of mate selection among the rural people. Most of the villagers I interviewed were over age 40. I was particularly interested in interviewing old, rather than young, villagers since I lacked data on rural people in the early twentieth century. Even if I had wanted to interview young villagers, I would have had more difficulty because most of the young people had left their village to work in provincial towns or Bangkok. They return home in the evening if the town is close to the village or during holidays if their workplaces are far from the village. Thus there were relatively few young people in the villages I visited.

The villagers cooperated very well in this study because I was introduced to them by their community leaders, such as the retired school principal at Khlo'ng Khae village in Ratburi; the village headman at Bansatoei in Lopburi; and
the village abbot at Phromburi village in Singburi. After the introduction, however, I generally talked with the interviewees alone.

I found that old informants could remember events from their youth very well and liked to talk about them. Women felt freer to talk to me about their personal life than men did, perhaps because of my gender. Sometimes I talked about this topic with a small group of men and women. As they were talking, they often teased each other about their personal lives, past courtships, or love affairs in each other's families. From this type of conversation, I learned about premarital sex, elopements, abductions, minor wives, and forced marriages in some families. Later, in a one-to-one interview, I could ask the relevant family member for more details.

**Study Outline**

This dissertation is divided into six chapters. After several attempts to find the best way to present the research, I decided to present it topically, instead of chronologically. Chapter I, *Introduction*, as you have already seen, concerns the aim and scope of the study, research methodology, and some other pertinent information about the text.

In Chapter II, *Authority Over Mate Selection*, I discuss the conventional method of mate selection and marriage and the change from parental authority in the early twentieth
century to individual freedom of choice in the 1950s. Individualism, more educational opportunities, and economic expansion are cited as important factors which account for this change. In Chapter III, Criteria For Mate Selection, I examine ineligible mates, mate selection within social classes, and desirable qualifications in mates.

Chapters IV and V are closely related. In Chapter IV, Initiation of Courtship, I explore male and female roles as initiators of courtship and the double standard of sexual morality, which cause sexual inequality in the process of mate selection in Central Thailand. In Chapter V, Ways of Courtship, I discuss ways of courtship from clandestine meetings in the early twentieth century, to going out with a chaperon in the 1940s, and eventually to dating in the 1970s. Premarital sex and the practice of force and black magic in courtship are also explored.

In Chapter VI, Summary and Conclusions, in addition to summing up the major arguments of the previous chapters, I also draw some tentative conclusions regarding future trends of mate selection and marriage and process of change in Central Thailand.

Method of Romanizing Thai Names and Words

In romanizing Thai works I have followed the transliteration method suggested by the Thai Royal Academy as outlined in a joint Proclamation from the Thai Prime
Minister's Office and the Academy. In this general system, no tonal marks are used. In addition, the letters which appear in the word but are not pronounced are not transliterated into English letters. Only those pronounced are transcribed.

There are some exceptions in this transliteration. Many Thais transliterate their names according to other older systems. Therefore, for Thais who have published English works cited in the notes or in the text, I have used the form of their name which appears in their own works, such as Bhassorn Limanonda, Visid Prachamob, and Uttis Chaovalit.

In addition, some personal names and Thai words have also been widely known in other methods of transliteration, such as King Chulalongkorn, King Vajiravudh, Prince Chula Chakrabongse, Phraya Anuman Rajadhon, Bangkok, and baht. Hence, I have used these more widely recognized transliterated forms instead of the Royal Academy forms—King Chulalongko'n, King Wachirawut, Prince Chula Chakraphong, Phraya Anuman Ratchathon, Bangko'k, and bat.

**Titles Appearing in the Text**

Titles for the royalty in Thailand are ranked downwards from the king to chao fa, phra-ong chao, mo'm chao, mo'm

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ratchawong, and mo'm luang. The children of mo'm luang have no title and are considered commoners. Here I have used "prince" and "princess" as titles for the royalty who have the ranks of chao fa, phra-ong chao, and mo'm chao. These people are considered the true royalty and are addressed in a special royal language.

For mo'm ratchawong and mo'm luang, I have used the abbreviated titles of M.R. and M.L. respectively. The persons holding these last two ranks, though they are no longer considered royalty, are still addressed and treated with respect by the Thai.31

Titles for Thai government officials during the Absolute Monarchy which ended in 1932 are ranked upwards as follows: phan, mu'm, khun, luang, phraya, chaophraya, and somdet chaophraya. These titles were not hereditary, but earned according to one's merit.

Titles for women appearing in the dissertation are mo'm, khunying, and thanphuying. Mo'm is the title used for a wife of the royalty from mo'm chao upwards when she herself is not a member of the royalty. Khunying and thanphuying are titles for married women who are awarded certain royal decorations for their services to the court.

31 The children of Mo'm luang have no title. They have teh surnames surviving from their ancestors—a son of a king—with na Ayudhya added. See more detail in Prince Chula Chakrabongse, Lords of Life: A History of the Kings of Thailand (London: Alvin Redman, 1967), pp. 256-58.
and/or to the country, or owing to their husband's merit. Thanhuying is ranked higher than khunying.
In the 1980s, an Indian scholar, Suraindra Chakrapani, told Sulak Sivaraksa (1932-), a leading Thai scholar, that Sulak should choose spouses for his children. "You should not follow Western customs and let the children choose their own mates. Parents should choose spouses for their children. Take me for an example. My parents chose a wife for me, and we have been living happily together since." Sulak refused. Though he agreed that the old custom had its merits, he did not believe that he should choose spouses for his children. He himself chose his own wife. His parents had also chosen their own spouses. And he would let his children choose whomever they liked.¹

The history of the Sivaraksa family suggests that Thai society has allowed freedom of choice on the issue of mate selection at least for two generations. Has it been true for society as a whole or has it been practiced only by a small group of people? The aim of this chapter is to study the transfer of authority over mate selection from parents and elders to the individuals involved at all levels in twentieth-century Central Thai society. In addition, as a

¹ Sulak Sivaraksa, Sak Pha Khwan [The Stump Splits the Axe] (Bangkok: Suksit Siam, 1988), p. 84.
background, the nature of the Thai family and social stratification in this century will be discussed.

Thai Society

To understand the practice of authority over mate selection in Central Thailand in the twentieth century, some knowledge of Thai society would be beneficial. Here I would like to discuss two aspects of the society—social stratification and the Thai family.

Social Stratification (1900-present)

Until 1932 Thai society was officially stratified by law. The people were classified by their birth and their functions in society. Except for the king, every Thai, from a slave to a prince, was conferred a number of marks (sakdina) to rank his status in the society. Higher marks signified higher status, power, authority, and responsibility.

According to this dignity-mark system, Thai society was a hierarchy consisting of three levels. The upper level was composed of princes, nobles, big tax farmers,\(^2\) and their families, with dignity marks of 400 and over. They were considered the elite of the society, those who could ask for an audience with the king himself.

\(^2\) A tax farmer in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a concessionaire, usually a wealthy merchant, who received in return for the payment of a lump sum to the government the privilege of collecting taxes and keeping a portion of the proceeds as profit.
The middle level consisted of minor officials, scribes, small tax farmers, and their families, with dignity marks lower than 400 but over 25. They were the hands of the elite, working for them to govern the lower level, the masses. The lower level comprised all those with dignity marks lower than 25—farmers, fishermen, miners, woodcutters, and their families. They were the workers of the society, having the duty to do the corvee for the state.

Traditionally, government offices were the sources of power and wealth. Between 1900 and 1932, securing of government offices was still an important criterion for social prestige. Since the beginning of economic expansion in 1850, there had been an increase in the number of rich people whose wealth derived from trade and business. Wealthy as they were, they obtained lower status than the nobles who had dignity marks of 400 and over. As an old Thai saying puts it, "Ten merchants cannot compare to one phraya[lord]."

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3 A small tax farmer was a private individual who entered into a sub-contract to collect taxes with the government concessionaire mentioned in footnote 2.

4 To gain more information about the dignity-mark system, read Krom Silapako'n, Kotmai Tra Sam Duang [The Three Seal Laws] (Bangkok: Krom Silapako'n, 1988); Akin Rabibhadana, The Organization of Thai Society in the Early Bangkok Period 1782-1873 (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, data paper no. 74, 1969); Chaianan Samudavanija, Sakdina Kap Phatanakan Kho'ng Sangkhom Thai [The Dignity-Mark System and the Development of Thai Society] (Bangkok: Nam Akso'n Press, 1976).
There were, however, many traders who were given titles and ranks as they provided services for the government. These merchant officials were considered either nobles or minor officials depending on their rank. Nonetheless, they all secured higher status than their non-titled counterparts and were regarded as leaders of the trading communities.

The dignity-mark system was abolished after the end of absolute monarchy in Thailand in 1932. Under all the constitutions since that time, every citizen has been legally considered equal. However, the three levels of social stratification have persisted. The public uses social prestige and status, as determined by family, wealth, occupation, power, and education, to classify people in society.\(^5\)

There have been some changes in the categories within these three levels.

Princes, high government officials, and their families have continued to be categorized as the upper level of the society. Since 1932 rich businessmen and wealthy professionals have been gradually included in this upper stratum. Wealth has been accepted as another measure of social prestige, in addition to authority and power in the government.

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The middle level consists of professionals such as doctors, lawyers, teachers, engineers, and journalists. Petty traders, landed farmers, orchard owners, and boat-owning fishermen are included in this category as well as those who have no source of income other than their salary, such as minor officials and clerks.

The lower level comprises unskilled laborers and poor farmers who do not own the land they cultivate. The number of land tenants has always been higher in Central Thailand than in other regions. In a 1930 survey, 36 percent of farmers in the Central plains were landless. By 1975, the number of Central Thai farmers who had to rent land has increased to 41 percent. 6

Thai social stratification has never been rigid. Vertical social mobility has always been possible. High education has been one of the means to move up on the social scale. Until recently, the literacy rate had been low in Thailand. 7 Therefore, literate people have always been

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7 In 1911 only 11.16 percent of the population could read and write. In 1947 the literacy rate increased to 37.96 percent. In 1970 half of the population were literate. see Constance M. Wilson, Thailand: A Handbook, p. 30.
respected. As there are still rather few universities in Thailand, only a relatively small number of students can attend universities. The graduates, accordingly, are highly valued. After years of hard study, many young peasants who have graduated from the universities have been able to find good jobs in the government or business sector, earn high salaries, and elevate their social status. Unable to afford the high cost of formal education, some poor men have entered the monkhood and studied in Buddhist schools and universities. After finishing their studies, they can leave the monkhood and pursue another line of work with their advanced knowledge. 8

Though democratic ideas have been promoted in Thailand for half a century, the view that people are different and unequal is still very much dominant in Thai society. In her study of Thai attitudes as reflected in the use of pronouns, lexical items, idioms, and proverbs in the Thai language, Navavan Bandhumedha, a leading Thai scholar, concludes:

A Thai characterizes his fellow men in terms of sex, age, social position, and relationship to him, and compares their social status with his own. In general, he uses age, social position, and kin relationship as evaluating criteria of social

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8 In twentieth-century Thai history, there have been numerous cases of high ranking officials and big businessmen rising from their lower social status to higher positions through education and hard work. Take for example, an ex-regent, Chao Phraya Yommaraj (Pun Sukhum); a former prime minister, Pridi Phanomyong; a leading scholar, Phraya Anuman Rajadhon; a popular playwright and high government official, Luang Wichitwathakan, and a leading banker and former minister of finance, Bunchu Rochanasathien.
In the Thai culture, people of different social statuses should be treated differently and behavior appropriate to each is a requirement.\(^9\)

The Thai Family (1900-present)

In the first half of the century, the Thai generally assumed that the husband was the natural leader of the family, the one who took care of his wife and his children, protected them from danger, and provided for their needs. The wife, on the other hand, did not have to earn a living since that was the man's duty, but she had to look after her husband's needs, rear the children, and do household chores.\(^10\)

By 1900, the legal authority of parents vis-a-vis their children and the husband vis-a-vis his wife had been declining. In 1874 parents could no longer sell their children into slavery. Husbands could not sell their wives either.\(^11\)

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\(^11\) In 1867, King Mongkut(1851-1868) had decreed that parents could not sell their children, aged 15 and over, into slavery without their consent. In the same decree, he also forbade husbands to sell their wives against the wives' wishes. But the parents and husbands were able to sell their children and their wives with these people's consent until 1874 when King Chulalongkorn(1868-1910) abolished the
grateful and obedient to their parents and behave as the parents wished. Wives too had to obey and respect their husbands.

The relationship between parents and children will be discussed later when the topic of parental authority over mate selection is addressed. Here I would like to examine male-female relationships in the family. The social norm mentioned earlier gives an impression of male dominance and female subordination in the Central Thai family during the first half of the twentieth century. However, not all women were followers. Though it was the men's main duty to earn a living for the family, many women contributed to the maintenance of the family also.

In rural areas, women helped their men in the fields when the labor of all members of the family was needed. Markets in villages and towns were full of female vendors. In towns and cities, many women in the middle and lower levels worked in the family businesses. They ran the stores, kept the books, supervised the workers, and sold the merchandise. Some women in the upper level also helped increase their families' income by selling homemade crafted

products, speculating in land, lending money, and investing in businesses.\textsuperscript{12}

While acknowledging male authority, women had a good deal of informal influence and power which they could direct to their own interest. Women from noble to peasant families were known to practice this informal influence.\textsuperscript{13} In addition, usually a woman also had power in the household since she had control of the purse strings and effectively took care of the family spending. In practice, women who seemed to be subordinate actually had substantial power and influence in the family.

Due to economic and social changes after the Second World War, the relationship between husband and wife has been gradually changing. They are now perceived more as two equal members of a team. Thanks to government development programs started in the 1960s, more women have been able to pursue their educational goals. More and more women work full-time away from home to help support the family's

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finances. Under the Civil and Commercial Code of 1976, women can choose the jobs they want without their husbands' consent. A husband no longer has the right to execute certain legal acts alone. He is required to seek permission from his wife when he wants to buy or sell joint property or to be a guarantor. However, other aspects of responsibility sharing between husband and wife are still unequal as shown by the results of a social science research work at Thammasat University. For example, responsibilities regarding child rearing and household chores continue to weigh more heavily on the women than the men, though women often have a full-time job. 14

Other characteristics of the Central Thai family concern post nuptial residence and kinship. Traditionally a newlywed couple would reside with the bride's family for a few years before moving out to a house of their own. The son-in-law would work with the bride's family in the fields or the family trade. The couple would stay with the family or have a small house built for themselves in the same

14 Faculty of Social Sciences and Anthropology, Thammasat University, Satri Thai Samai Rattanakosin Lae Kan Suksa Wichai Kap Nuan Phattana Satri[Thai Women in the Bangkok Period and Research Education with Women's Development] a compilation of seminar papers, 1985, pp. 8-9, 25-59.
compound. For those who moved out of the compound, the new house was usually built near the bride's family.¹⁵

At present, the Thai no longer observe this matrilocal custom as strictly as in the early twentieth century. The newlywed couple is free to choose to stay wherever they are most comfortable. In a 1970 nationwide survey, half of urban residents reported that they began their marriage in a house exclusively their own. The practice of matrilocality, however, has continued to be dominant in the rural areas. Only a quarter of the rural women queried reported living separately from their parents.¹⁶

Bilateral kinship has also been observed in the Thai family. The Thai have different words to distinguish paternal and maternal relatives, such as pu and va for the paternal grandfather and grandmother, and ta and vai for the maternal grandfather and grandmother. However, since the new family has usually stayed close to the mother's family, the matrilineal relationship has always been stronger. If the wife dies, or there is a divorce or separation, the

¹⁵ Phraya Anuman Rajadhon, Taeng-nga, pp. 16-17. Prince Poon Pismai Diskul explained that the bride's parents usually offered to have the house built in their own grounds with a view to keeping an eye on their son-in-law's behavior. see Princess Poon Pismai Diskul, Thai Traditions & Customs (Bangkok: World Fellowship of Buddhists, 1973), p. 19.

offspring are often left in the care of the maternal relatives.\textsuperscript{17}

Parental Authority Over Mate Selection

In the early years of the twentieth century, Central Thai society generally accepted parental authority over mate selection as a norm. Parents did not have any doubt concerning their power and responsibility to arrange for the marriage of their offspring. Although parental authority dominated the mate selection process, it did not mean that an individual's freedom of choice was totally denied. In fact, many young people in the first half of the twentieth century were allowed to choose their own spouses. This will be discussed later in this chapter. First I would like to examine how society generally supported parental authority for the first half of the century.

Law and Parental Authority

Until 1865, the ancient law of Thailand stated that parents had the authority to marry their daughters to whomever they chose. A man and a woman who lived together in a house of their own would be considered a legally married couple. However, if the woman's parents disapproved of this cohabitation, the law would no longer accept this

\textsuperscript{17} Phraya Anuman Rajadhon, \textit{Taeng-ngan}, p. 21.
couple as husband and wife. In this way, a daughter was viewed by the law as property belonging to her parents.\(^{18}\)

In 1865 a petition from a woman to King Mongkut (1851-1868) caused a change in this law. Amdaeng Mu'an, a 21-year-old peasant woman, petitioned the king that she was in love with Nai Rid but that her parents had tried to force her to marry another man. She had then eloped to live with Nai Rid. However, her parents had had a government official arrest her, take her away from Nai Rid's house, and put her in prison. In prison, her mother had scolded her and demanded that she marry the man of her parents' choice. Afterwards she had managed to escape from the prison and petition the king.

King Mongkut decided that the woman was old enough to be allowed to choose her own husband. Thus he decided in favor of the daughter. Amdaeng Mu'an was allowed to marry her sweetheart, Nai Rid. The king decreed that henceforth a peasant woman over age 20 could marry a spouse of her own choice. Her parents could not interfere with her decision.

However, in the same decree, King Mongkut stated clearly that a woman from a noble family, whose father had 400 dignity marks and over, could not marry without her parents' consent. In the case of nobles, the king decided

\(^{18}\) It should be noted that this law did not apply to sons. There is no mention of parental authority over the mate selection of their sons. See Krom Silapako'n, \textit{Kotmai Tra Sam Duang}, pp. 297-99, 305.
in favor of the parents. Thus aristocratic parents
continued to have the authority to control the marriage of
their daughters.

In order to justify his decision, the king argued that
among the peasants, poor parents might marry their daughters
for money. Thus the law should protect the offspring from
parental exploitation. The peasant daughters should have
the right to decide for their own benefit. In the case of
nobles, on the other hand, parents had to safeguard the
honor of their families. Thus, parents could not permit
their daughters to choose their own spouses, for fear that
the daughters might select someone unsuitable from the lower
levels. The marriages then would bring disgrace to the
aristocratic families. 19

As for the king, it seems that the idea of aristocratic
parents' exploiting their daughters never came into his
mind. It could be argued, however, that by arranging
marriages of their daughters, the aristocratic parents might
also exploit their daughters for valuable things other than
money, such as power, fame, or special connections. While
peasant women were allowed to protect their own welfare,
upper class women were denied that right.

King Mongkut's 1865 decree continued to be in force
during the first three decades of the twentieth century.
Generations of upper and middle class young men in this

19 King Mongkut, Prachum Kotmai Pracham Sok, 1:198-205.
period protested this law. They wrote articles in newspapers and magazines, arguing for an individual's freedom of choice and a new method of courtship. Details about their ideas will be examined later in this chapter.

Eventually, their efforts bore fruit, for on October 1, 1935, the ancient marriage law was superseded by Thailand's first Civil and Commercial Code. The elite who had been working on drafting the new code since the first decade of the twentieth century consisted of generations of barristers-at-law educated in France and England. Their aim was to draft a new code which would be more suitable to the changing society of Thailand. The change in the new family law reveals that these barristers were in favor of the individual's freedom of choice on the issue of mate selection.

Under the 1935 Code, Thai men 17 and over and women 15 and over could marry. There was need for the parents' consent only if the man and woman were under the ages of 17 and 15 respectively. Thailand's new Civil and Commercial Code, which has been in force since 1976, increases the marriageable age of the bride to 17. Apart from the age change, the articles on marriage are similar to those of the 1935 Code. The marriage between a man and a woman of marriageable age becomes legal as soon as they register
their marriage with a designated government official.  

Under these family laws, marriage is no longer the family's affair but a matter which concerns only two individuals.

It should be noted, however, that parental authority over mate selection did not end abruptly after the changes in the family law. Many peasant parents have still exercised their power over mate selection of their offspring after the 1865 decree. Similarly, though the 1935 and 1976 family laws have given men and women the utter freedom of choosing their spouses, many parents, from every level of the society, have continued to play a dominant role in the mate selection of their children. Evidently, law is not the only factor that affects the practice of parental authority over mate selection in Central Thailand.

**Customs and Parental Authority**

Buddhism, which has been the dominant religion in Thailand for centuries, has been one of the factors that support parental involvement in the mate selection of their offspring. In Buddhist teachings, parents have five duties towards their children, one of which is to be helpful in the matter of an offspring having an appropriate spouse.  

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21 I have translated into English this parents'duty towards their offspring from the Thai translation of the original Buddhist Pali text in Phra Thepwethi's book, which
According to this teaching, it is not clear whether parents should select a spouse for their children or not. However, evidence shows that in the early half of the twentieth century, many Thai parents believed that it was their duty to choose a proper spouse for the children.\textsuperscript{22}

The traditional Thai society viewed marriage as an important process affecting the future stability of the bride and groom, which would influence also the prosperity

\textsuperscript{22} Consider the following examples. Queen Sukhuman thought it was her duty as a mother to look for a good spouse for her son when he returned from Germany in 1901, but she could not find one. M.L. Khru'awan Prasoetsongkhram's grandmother arranged for her marriage in 1905 when she was 15. In 1915, after the future Prime Minister Marshall P. Phibunsongkhram graduated from Cadet School, his parents negotiated for his marriage to the daughter of their well-to-do neighbor. In the 1930s, Phraya Prichanusat, the director of a leading boys' boarding school in Bangkok, arranged marriages for all his children married during this period. See Princess Siriratbutsabonge, Phraprawat Somdet Phra Chao Borom Wongthoe Chaofa Boriphat Sukhumphan Kromphra Nakho'nsawan Woraphinit [Biography of Prince Boriphat] in memory of the 100th anniversary of Prince Boriphat's birthday, 1981, p. 10; Anuso'n M.L. Khru'awan Prasoetsongkhram Cremation volume for M.L. Khru'awan Prasoetsongkhram, October 1969, p. 10; Charun Kuwanon, Chiwit Rak Cho'mphon P. Phibunsongkhram [Love Life of Marshall P. Phibunsongkhram] (Bangkok: Prasoet Akso'n, 1959), p. 21. and Khunying Mani Sirivorasasan, Chiwit Mu'an Fun [Life as a Dream] (Bangkok: Bangkok Press, 1987), p. 431.
of both families. In an article about marriage customs written around 1900, the author stated the following:

When the child reaches maturity and can earn his or her own living, parents should choose a spouse for that individual. The selection is very important to both families involved. The newlywed couple should be able to raise and support their own nuclear family. Each spouse will be a new member of his or her inlaws' family. If each spouse is a good person, all will prosper. If either is bad, all will suffer.23

Though the law no longer allows parents to force their daughters to marry against their wishes, many parents have continued to control the marriage of their offspring through Buddhist teaching and customs. Thai children have been taught to be obedient and grateful to their parents. Parents, therefore, can ask their children to marry the mate of their choice as the children's expression of obedience and gratitude to the parents. This practice has continued throughout the twentieth century. Take for example, Pong Talapmuk (1908-), a farm woman in Lopburi. I asked her why, at seventeen, she married the man chosen by her parents though she had been in love with another man. Her answer is as follows:

My parents did not like the man I loved. They didn't get along with his parents. My parents forbade me to marry that man. Since my parents did not like him, I was afraid to marry him because disobedient children will go to hell when they die. My future husband sent his senior relatives to ask for my hand. My parents liked him, so they accepted the betrothal. When I

23 Phraya Rachwaranukun (Uam) "Prapheni Taeng-ngan," p. 62.
learned about this, I cried every day. I didn't want to marry him. Afraid that I might elope with the man I loved, my parents had me marry only a month and a half later.  

In the same village in 1965, Taeng-on Rotchanakowit, a farm woman, married her husband, Thamrong, though she did not love him.

My husband is 15 years older than I. I thought he was old and I didn't want to marry him. But my father, my elder sister, and my elder brother all liked him. They said that Thamrong was a good choice for me because he had a good job. I had another admirer, but he was poor. My sister didn't like him.  

Taeng-on's story indicates the continuing of traditional marriage customs into the 1960s. It reveals that in some families, marriages continued to be viewed not as the individual's affair but as a matter that concerned the whole family. Not only parents but elder siblings and frequently other elder relatives such as aunts and uncles played an important role in the mate selection of young people.

24 Interview with Pong Talapmuk, Ban Satoei, Lopburi, 4 August 1989. Pong's husband was also from Ban Satoei, and was 7 years older than she. He had already been ordained and drafted before he married her. They had had 5 children. At the time of the interview, Pong was a widow and lived with her daughter's family.

25 Interview with Taeng-on Rotchanakowit (1946-), Ban Satoei, Lopburi, 4 August 1989. Taeng-on's father was a well-to-do farmer. He arranged marriages for all his children. He knew Taeng-on's husband, Thamrong, because Thamrong was working at the same place as one of his sons. Taeng-on still lives with her husband. They have 4 children.
It should be noted that Thai marriage has long been regarded as a social contract which must be performed before witnesses. The custom requires that the man's parents or his senior relatives approach the woman's parents and ask for her hand. This action proves to the woman's family that the man's family acknowledges and approves of the future relationship of the couple. It would be viewed as an insult to the woman's parents if the man were to ask for the woman himself. Therefore, Thai marriage customs have involved the families of both sides, not only the two individuals who love one another.

In addition, where the custom of matrilocal postnuptial residence has been strong, the woman's parents and senior relatives might feel the need to play an important role in choosing a spouse who can get along with the family. The marriage of Sombat Chanwongsa, a villager in Ban Satoei, Lopburi, was arranged by her elder siblings. She was the youngest daughter; as such, everybody in the family expected her to be the one who would stay home with the parents. This explains why her elder siblings played a prominent role in her mate selection. There was a soldier who asked for her hand, but her elder siblings did not like that man and were afraid that as a soldier's wife, she might have to follow him to other provinces. Later, when her future husband, So'n, asked for her hand, her family persuaded her
to marry him because, being a migrant worker from Roi-et, he was willing to stay with the family.  

The ways of courtship in the first half of the twentieth century also reinforced parental authority over mate selection. Central Thai society in this period did not allow men and women to go out to social functions together. Dating was not accepted. A leading Thai scholar, Chao-phraya Thammasakmontri, under the pen name Khru Thep, authored a 1932 article arguing against mate selection by the young people. Here is his argument:

Now parents do not want to keep their daughters at home. But they cannot let their daughters go out alone as there are still some men who will take advantage of the unaccompanied women. They may make advances to the women or talk to them in an indecent manner. Since women cannot be alone in society, men cannot be in touch with the women they are interested in. Men and women cannot meet and learn to know each other intimately. As long as this custom continues, I doubt that we can change the mate-selecting custom and let the young people choose for themselves. Several people who chose their own mates have realized later that they made mistakes because they did not really know their mates.

In the first half of this century, people who supported parental authority believed in the parents' wisdom to know the true nature of desirable spouses for their children.

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26 Interview with Sombat Chanwongsa (1940-), Ban Satoei, Lopburi, 4 August 1989. She still lives with her husband at Ban Satoei. They have 4 children.

27 More details about ways of courtship will be examined later in Chapter V.

They doubted the young people's ability to judge other people's characters, assuming that young people in love would be blind to the weaknesses and flaws of those whom they loved. Besides, they doubted that love between young people would last forever. In Si Phaendin, a novel about the lives of palace maidens in the early 1900s, one of the backers of parental authority commented about arranged marriages and love marriages as follows:

Suppose that you marry a man you love and you live with him. There is only your love and his love that will be the foundation of your married life. One day if your love and his love die down, you and your husband will have nothing left and will have to separate. If you marry a man chosen by the senior relatives of both sides, you will live together and have the love of your senior relatives as the foundation of your married life. And the love and good wishes of the senior relatives never run dry.

Arranged Marriage: Consensual or Forced

An arranged marriage is not necessarily a forced marriage. Traditionally Thai society has never approved of forced marriages. As an old saying regarding marriage puts it, "Build a house to please the dwellers; build a cradle to please the sleeper." The marriage, like the house and cradle, should feel comfortable to the participants. Parents should thus consult their offspring or at least make

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29 Poechoe, "Tang Panha Phayako'ɲ[Readers Respond to a Problem]," Wachirayanwiset 6 (December 1890): 55-58; and Khunying Mani Siriworasan, Chiwit Mu'an Fun, p. 431.

the choice acceptable to their offspring. Thus, with the children's participation and approval, the arranged marriage becomes a consensual marriage.

However, I could not find sufficient evidence to determine whether parents in the early decades of the twentieth century bothered to ask for their offspring's opinions on mate selection. In the early accounts about marriage customs in Central Thailand in the twentieth century, it was not mentioned explicitly whether or not parents consulted their offspring in the case of arranged marriages. According to Mom Siphroma (1889-1978), a palace maiden in the early twentieth century, parents did not consult with the children. "Parents talked the matter over. If they were pleased with the suitor, they agreed to the marriage. If they did not like the suitor, they refused." These accounts were written or told by members of the upper level of the society. Therefore, should we conclude that no consultation was the way upper class parents selected a spouse for their children?

I was able to find two pieces of circumstantial evidence which indicate that there might have been some consultation. One of these incidents comes from the


previous century; but if consultation prevailed then, it
would support a tentative conclusion that it was continued
in the supposedly somewhat less restrictive twentieth
century. In 1840 the wife of a government official was
arranging a marriage between her son, a navy officer, and
the daughter of a high-ranking official. She first
convinced her son how beautiful and accomplished the woman
in question was. After he agreed with her choice, she then
got to ask for the woman's hand from her parents.33

The other piece of evidence comes from the famous
historical novel Si Phaendin. When a suitor sent his senior
relative to ask for permission to marry Ploy, a palace
maiden in the early twentieth century, Ploy's guardian was
pleased. But before giving an answer, Ploy's guardian first
asked Ploy if she would agree to marry him.34 Since this
incident was based on historical facts, it may be possible
to conclude that in at least some cases, the young persons
were consulted.

By the 1930s, however, it was not uncommon for parents
to confer with their children before any final decision was
reached. Around 1928, when Princess Rudivoravan learned
that her senior relatives wanted to arrange a marriage

33 Krom Silapako'n, Chiwit Khwam Penyu Nai Krungsayam
Nai Thasana Khong Chaotangprathet Rawang R.E. 2383-2384 or
Narrative of a Resident in Siam by Frederick Arthur Niel,
1840-1841 trns. Captain Lichong Suwanphokin (Bangkok:

34 M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, Si Phaendin, 1:399.
between her and one of her cousins, she asked her father not to approve this marriage.\textsuperscript{35} Another incident involved Ngoen-ko'ng Hemachayat. Since she was the daughter of a rich businesswoman, many parents sent go-betweens to ask her mother to marry her to their son. Some were members of wealthy families, such as the Techaphaibun and the Sucharit-kun. However, when she was consulted, Ngoen-ko'ng refused to accept the proposals.\textsuperscript{36} If a woman found the proposal agreeable, she could say that she would obey her parents' wish. If she did not like the man, she might say that she was still young and wanted to stay with her parents.\textsuperscript{37}

Among the peasants, the traditional way of courtship had permitted young people of opposite sexes to get accustomed to one another. Men could go and visit the women they were interested in at the latter's houses. For the upper and middle classes, mingling between men and women was sporadically permitted by the 1920s. More and more men and women could socialize at public functions and men could also visit the women in their homes. These men could reveal


their feelings to the women. If the woman gave her consent to the man, she would tell the man to send his seniors to talk about their marriage with her parents. In this way it was actually the young people who chose one another.

However, parental consent to the marriage was generally very important. If they disapproved of the choice of their son, parents could refuse to go and talk with the woman's parents. In this case, the man might ask a senior relative, his boss, or a respected elder friend to do this negotiation with the woman's parents in lieu of his parents. However, he could not expect any help or gift from his parents, such as money for a bride price or capital to build a house. If the woman's parents learned about the displeasure of the man's parents, usually they did not want their daughter to marry the man either. They would feel insulted by the rejection of their daughter by the man's parents.38 One village I interviewed in Singburi province told me that she had to elope with her husband, Fung, in 1925 because his mother did not approve of his choice.

Fung's mother did not like my family. She said my family was poor and I had a father-in-law. My mother and my grandmother also gambled a lot. My family did not like Fung's family either. My mother forbade me to see him. Fung still wanted to marry me. He sent me many letters through my

38 The marriage of the son without parental approval became a common theme in novels between 1930 to 1960. See Dokmaisot, Khwamphit Khrung Raek [The First Mistake], and V. Na Pramuanmarq, Prisna trans. Tuchand (Bangkok: Chitra Book, 1964) and Chao Sao Kho'ng Anond [Anond's Bride] (Bangkok: Khlangwittaya, 1970).
female friends. When my mother caught the letters, she scolded me a lot. We continued seeing each other secretly for a few years, but his mother wouldn't come and ask for my hand. So we eloped and came back to ask for forgiveness later.\textsuperscript{39}

If the woman's parents disapproved of their daughter's suitor, they could disregard their daughters' feelings and refuse the proposal. For instance, Prince Sitthipho'n and Siphroma loved one another, so the prince sent his mother to ask for Siphroma's hand from her mother in 1903. Her mother, however, rejected the proposal, saying that her son-in-law should be able to provide a comfortable life for her daughter.\textsuperscript{40}

A peasant woman over age 20 could elope with the man she loved, and they would be accepted legally as husband and wife. But if an aristocrat's daughter eloped with her sweetheart, their cohabitation was not legally recognized as marriage until 1935. Her parents had the legal authority to take her away from her lover and marry her to someone else.

\textsuperscript{39} Interview with Prung Sifo'ngwong (1916-), Phromburi, Singburi, 27 June 1989.

\textsuperscript{40} Mo'm Siphroma, \textit{Attachiwaprawat}, p. 21-22. Later Siphroma became one of the lesser wives of King Chulalongkorn, but the marriage was never consummated because Siphroma honestly told the king in English that she respected him as the king but did not love him romantically. Prince Sitthipho'n also married another woman. After King Chulalongkorn died and the prince became a widower, King Vajiravudh sponsored a marriage between the prince and Siphroma in 1916. See also Pongsuwan T. Bilmes, trans. \textit{The Autobiography of Lady Siphroma Kridakon} Southeast Asia Paper No. 22, Center for Asian and Pacific Studies, University of Hawaii, 1982, p. v.

58
One example is the life of Om and Manas Chanyong. When Om Bunnag, the daughter of the governor-general of Ratburi Monthon, eloped with her violin teacher, Manas Chanyong, her father soon found out where the couple was staying in Bangkok and took his daughter back. He did not take her to his home in Ratburi but left her in the care of her aunt in Bangkok. Soon Om, who was a few months pregnant, escaped again to live with her husband.41

Elopements were not uncommon in rural areas in the early half of the century; however, they were rare among the upper class. If confronted with parental opposition, many couples preferred to wait and hoped that their determination could convince their parents to change their attitude. This may be the reason why U'a Sutho'nsanan and his sweetheart, Apha'n Kannasut, the daughter of a phraya, had to wait for 10 years before they could marry.42 In a 1913 short story, the heroine refused to elope with her boyfriend because she

41 After the second elopement, Om's father did not try to separate the couple. Later the father and the daughter reconciled. Her father gave her some money so that the couple could buy a house in Bangkok. See Om Chanyong, Banthu'k Kho'ng Om Chanyong [Memoir by Om Chanyong] (Bangkok: Roeng Rom, 1988), pp. 67-68, 117. and Yot Wacharasathian, Manas Chanyong Lae Mai Mu'ang Doem [Biographies of Manas Chanyong and Mai Mu'ang Doem] (Bangkok: Khret Thai, 1977), pp. 37-39.

wanted to protect her honor as she would protect her
life. To illustrate parental authority over mate
selection, I would like to relate an incident from a very
popular folk-tale, Sang Tho'ng. This folktale has been
widely circulated in Central Thailand for more than two
hundred years. Virtually every Thai knows the story by
heart.

A king, named Thao Samon, had seven beautiful daugh-
ters. When they were all grownups, he consulted with his
wife, Nang Montha, and they decided that it was time to
arrange marriages for their daughters. He said, "We are now
getting old and we have only daughters. Who will look after
our palace and our properties when we die? We had better
marry our daughters so that they will be settled down and
have husbands to take care of them." Nang Montha agreed
with her husband, but she suggested that they should let
their daughters choose their own spouses. She said, "As the
old saying puts it, 'Build the house to please the
dwellers,' I think that we should allow our daughters to
choose their own husbands. A wife who does not love her
husband can be adulterous, and thus disgrace her parents."

Therefore, all seven daughters were permitted to choose
their husbands. Every bachelor in the kingdom was invited
to the palace to be chosen by the princesses. All except

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42 N.K.B., "Khwam Phayam Khong Nai Praphi[Nai
Praphi's Endeavor] Sayam Muai no. 4 (November 1913): 4-5.

60
Rochana, the youngest daughter, chose princes as their husbands. Rochana's choice was an ugly poor man. Her parents were furious at her decision. They first threatened her and later begged her to change her mind. Since Rochana was firm in her decision, her parents banished her and the poor husband to live in a hut far from the palace.

There is much more to the story of Sang Tho'ng. But I prefer to stop here, as it is this part of the story which reflects the norm of parental authority over mate selection which continued up to the first half of the twentieth century. Generally parents were flexible and would listen to their offspring's wishes. But if the offspring's choice was not up to their standard or their expectations, parents were quick to exercise their power to bar the marriage or even punish them just as Rochana's parents had done. Frequently, parents neither believed in the offspring's right to choose nor respected his or her judgment. However, by the 1950s, this attitude, which had been challenged since the late 1890s, was declining and disappearing.

An Individual's Right of Choice

In 1950 Phraya Komarakunmontri wrote a biography of his ancestor, Chaophraya Mahasena (Bunnag), in which he told a story about the marriage between Chaophraya Mahasena and Khun Nuan in the mid-eighteenth century. According to the story told in his family, Khun Nuan's elder sister, Tan Nak, arranged to marry Khun Nuan to Chaophraya Mahasena, who was
at that time a close aide to Tan Nak's husband. He explained to the readers the marriage customs in that period.

In those days, family unity was highly valued. The senior members of the family did not like to allow young women under their supervision to choose their own spouses. . . . At present, when most people have been educated to think in a Western way, readers may judge Khun Nuan as a woman who did not think for herself. How could she marry a man whom it might appear to the reader she did not love? But Khun Nuan and Chaophraya Mahasena were not strangers to one another. They probably had met each other occasionally. It is possible that Khun Nuan might have already worshipped, admired, and loved Chaophraya Mahasena before the marriage.44

Actually what is important to note in this passage is not whether Khun Nuan had loved her future husband before their marriage or not. Rather, what is most revealing is that the author made an effort to convince the readers that Khun Nuan might have loved her future husband and that the marriage might have been consented to by the couple. It indicates that by 1950, the social norm, particularly that of the upper class, had already changed from support of parental authority to an advocacy of the individual's freedom of choice in mate selection. In this section, I will investigate as to how society had come to advocate the

44 At that time, Khun Nuan lived with her elder sister. Probably her parents had died. That is the reason why her elder sister became her guardian. Phraya Komarakunmontri, Prawat Chaophraya Mahasena(Bunnag) [Biography of Chaophraya Mahasena] (Bangkok: Kurusapha, 1961), pp. 16, 18.
right of the individual in mate selection. In addition, the continuing influence of parents will also be addressed.

Protest Against Parental Authority

In the early decades of the twentieth century, only a few newspapers and magazines were in circulation, almost exclusively among the upper class. Some articles and short stories published in these media reveal the general practice of parental authority over mate selection of their offspring. This practice, however, was not totally accepted. It was challenged by a group of young Western-educated men, who voiced their arguments in the press.

Between 1890 and 1910 the topic of who best should choose a mate, the parents or the prospective bride and groom, was debated in many magazines. Most of the articles argued in favor of the latter group.45 As one of the articles put it:

If we want to buy something, which is the better way: Let other people choose for us or decide for ourselves? Everyone must agree that it is better for us to choose it ourselves, since we know best our own minds. The more valuable and important the thing is that we want, the more careful we must be in making the choice. . . . Selecting a spouse is more difficult than picking any other thing. It is not proper to allow the senior relatives to choose a spouse for us. They do not really know the character of the future in-law. Even if they choose a good person to be their in-

law, it is possible that the couple may not get along. The couple may not love one another and often quarrel. Eventually the disagreement may spread to the senior relatives who have arranged for their marriage.\(^4^6\)

Compatibility and love between the couple as emphasized by the authors was the most important factor in a successful marriage. It was thus argued that only the future bride and groom, through socialization, could judge the compatibility of each other's character and develop a love relationship. Therefore, the authors suggested that the young people should be allowed to socialize freely with each other, choose their own spouses, and report their selection to the parents. The parents should then approve and help arrange the marriage ceremony.

There were some articles arguing in favor of parental authority, but by the 1920s, the viewpoints published in magazines, such as Dusitsmit, Benchamanuso'n, and Suphap-burut, tended to confirm support for the freedom of the individual to choose his or her own spouse. For example, in his article concerning benefits and disadvantages of marriage, King Vajiravudh discussed arranged marriage as follows:

As for the couple who marry for other reasons apart from love, such as for wealth or social prestige, if their marriage lasts, it may result from their consideration for their parents, the pity for their children, or their love for each other after the marriage. However, there are many couples who do not live happily together. The

\(^4^6\) Wachirayanwiset 6 (November 1890):35-36.
husbands take minor wives, and the wives have to stand the suffering. 47

Another example is an article by an advice columnist, Lilasat. He encouraged young people to go out and socialize with the opposite sex so that they would get to know each other's character. In his opinion, many arranged marriages failed because the husbands and wives did not know each other well enough before the marriage. 48

Many short stories in this period criticize arranged marriage and support love marriage. A short story in a university magazine tells a story of an arranged marriage in which the husband later became a gambler and lost all the family's wealth. It shows that parents could make a mistake and choose a bad person to marry their daughter. 49 In another short story in a Bangkok school magazine, a young man who had been orphaned refused to marry the woman his aunt had chosen for him because he did not love her. He finally met and married the woman of his dreams, who was very compatible to him. 50


49 "Wasana Nam Song [Fate]," Mahawittayalai 2 (1924):39.

In this period, some people believed that love could improve a man's character. In a short story, "A Model Woman," P. Chotiniyom told a love story involving a bar waitress and a millionaire's son. The woman asked her rich boyfriend to work and be useful to society. She wanted him to stop going to bars and night clubs, start working, and build a factory so that the poor could work there. The author ends the story as follows: "Ah! Love can change the character and behavior of this arrogant man. He does not drink, go to bars, mingle with prostitutes, or feast with immoral friends. He obeys her words as if he were her tame cat." 

It seems that the traditional norm of parental authority had to give way to the desire of the children. However, it should be noted that these magazines were circulated among the modern, young, upper-class readers who mostly supported the idea of choosing their own spouses.

Khunying Mani Siriworasan, an upper-class socialite in the 30s, discussed parental authority among the upper class in that period as follows:

The year 1935 was a transitional period. Most parents continued to arrange marriages for their offspring. However, more brides and grooms were allowed to meet and be accustomed to each other before the wedding. It became more and more difficult for parents to force their sons to marry without seeing the brides as in the old days. There was an increasing number of couples who had

met and loved each other and later asked for parental consent. Though men and women could not yet go out alone together, they could mingle at social functions, such as dances or parties at friends' homes.⁵²

Biographies of several upper-class people between 1910 and 1950 support Khunying Mani's account that more young people married someone of their own choosing. Former prime ministers and ministers of Thailand such as Marshall P. Phibunsongkhram, Marshall Thanom Kittikhachon, Pridi Phanomyong, Khuang Apaiwong, M.R. Seni Pramoj, and Thanat Koman married their sweethearts. So did many leading scholars, socialites, and social workers, such as Khunying Chintana Yotsuthorn, Khunying Ditthakanphakdi, Mo'm Ngamchit Burachat, and Khunying Mani Siriworasan herself.

Middle and lower class parents possibly had less control over the marriages of their children than the upper-class parents during the first half of the twentieth century. From biographies, interviews, and surveys by anthropologists about marriage in the middle and lower classes before 1950, it appears that many of them were love marriages. Biographies of folk singers in the early decades of this century show that most of them made their own choice.⁵³ Chusi Bunpan (1907-1983), the mother of a leading journalist, Khanchai Bunpan, and Thung-ngoen

⁵² Mani Siriworasan, Chiwit Mu'an Fun, p. 130.
Chayawong (1906-1977), the mother of a famous writer-activist, Chit Phumisak, also married the man they loved. Phirom, Thung-ngoen's daughter wrote about her mother's married life as follows:

My father was a philanderer. . . . When my mother was young, she was not good at judging people's character. She believed all the sweet talk my father gave her. Because she loved and chose her husband herself, she had to endure all the suffering without complaining.54

In his study of Banoi, a village in Ayutthaya, Steven Piker interviewed 32 people who married in the 1920s, 1940s, and 1960s. He found that in 21 cases the young man courted his bride-to-be and that marriage arrangements were undertaken by his parents only after the young man indicated that he wished them to do so.55 My 1989 interviews of 22 villagers who married before 1950 shows the same pattern. Sixteen of them chose their own spouse. The rest, five women and one man, married a spouse chosen by parents. All but one woman did not have any serious boyfriend or girlfriend before marriage.

In 1966 Jeremy H. Kemp found that in Hua Kok, a village in Phisanulok, marriage was considered not a matter of the alliance of family groups but one of individual choice. According to him, elopement was the most popular form of

54 Phirom Phumisak, Khit Thu'ng Mae [Thinking of Mother] (Bangkok: Do'kya, 1980), p. 28.

55 Piker, A Peasant Community, pp. 80-81.
marriage and was common from 1930 to 1960.\textsuperscript{56} In his study of a village in Central Thailand, Bangkhuad, from 1953 to 1954, Howard K. Kaufman also found that elopements had occurred in 20 percent of the village unions.\textsuperscript{57} The elopement might have occurred because of parental disapproval of the marriage or because the man and his parents could not afford a bride-price.\textsuperscript{58} In either case, it shows that in the rural areas, parental authority over mate selection of their children had been declining.

A 1969 survey of parents' attitudes toward mate selection in the rural areas throughout the country found out that 65.2 percent of the parents said that they would let their children choose their own mate.\textsuperscript{59} Another survey in the same year revealed that the number of marriages resulting from individual choice was highest in the rural areas---65.18 percent. In towns and in Bangkok, the figures


\textsuperscript{57} Kaufman, Bangkhuad, p. 151.

\textsuperscript{58} In my interview with Tho'ngkham Koesucharit, a retired school teacher, she told me that before she married her husband, she had a boyfriend and they planned to marry. However, one day his father met her and told her to elope with his son because he could not afford the bride-price. Tho'ngkham viewed this as an insult to her, so she broke off the relationship. Interview with Tho'ngkham Koesucharit, Khlo'ng Khae, Ratburi, 8 April 1989.

\textsuperscript{59} Vimala Chiamsakol, "Factors Influencing the Attitudes of Parents in Rural Thailand Towards the Marriage of Their Children," an M.A. thesis for the Department of Social Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1972, p. 71.
were 58.89 and 58.45 percent respectively.\textsuperscript{60} These statistics reveal that individual freedom of choice over mate selection had already been widely practiced among the peasants before 1969.

**Factors Contributing to the Changing Trend**

There are five major factors that affect the changing trend from parental or family authority over mate selection to individual right of choice. They are (1) social acceptance of love as a reason for marriage, (2) male-female socialization, (3) anti-polygyny attitudes, (4) financial independence of the new generations, and (5) change in parental attitudes towards mate selection. These five factors are actually interrelated.

1) **Love as a reason for marriage**

In arranged marriages in the early twentieth century, love was not denied its important contribution to marital success and happiness. The parents or the senior relatives who arranged the marriage usually told the couple that they would learn to love one another as time passed. But it seems that young people since the end of the nineteenth century preferred to have romantic love before the wedding day. Love, according to them, should be the reason for marriage, not its result.

\textsuperscript{60} Calculated into percentages from statistics in table 24 in Rujee Aroonsilpa, "A Comparative Study of Nuptials and Related Characteristics in Urban and Rural Areas," an M.A. thesis for the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Chulalongkorn University, 1978, p. 98.
A popular writer in the early twentieth century, Prince Phitthayalongko'n, advocated that marriages should result from romantic love. According to him, romantic love is the perfect love, which occurs only when a man and a woman know each other very well. They will adore one another, think only of each other and love no one else. The couple who love one another, though they stay in a hut, are much happier than those who live in a mansion without love.\(^{61}\)

King Vajiravudh(1910-1925) was another backer of the love marriage. Many of his literary works, such as Matthanaphatha, Phra Non, Sakuntala and Savitri, vividly describing the beauty of romantic love relations, had greater impact on young readers’ minds than the romantic love of old folktales. One female writer, K. Surangkhanang, recalled her generation's reaction to the king's romantic literary works as follows:

The meeting between Romeo and Juliet is more convincing than that of Nang Yopraklin and Phra Maniphichai(old folktale characters). Savitri's faithfulness and Thommayanti's love are different from the love of Phranang Chantra and Phram Keso'n (other old folktale characters). Impressed by the beautiful imagery of the king's romantic literature, young men and women have started worshipping love, dreams, and faithfulness. They close their eyes and chant love dialogues between Chaiyasen and Matthana (characters from Matthanaphatha). The love and gentleness described in the king's works hook the youth on

\(^{61}\) Prince Phitthayalongko'n, Chotmaichangwangrum, pp. 98-99, 103.
love, fantasy, and the desire to master the art of love.\textsuperscript{62}

Many champions of love marriage and the right of choice in the first half of the twentieth century were those who had been exposed to Western-style education either in Thailand or abroad. However, one should not jump to the conclusion that the desire for romantic love and freedom of choice was influenced exclusively by Western ideas. Thai classical literary works and folktales in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as \textit{Inao}, \textit{Phra Aphaimani}, \textit{Sang Tho'ng} and \textit{Khun Chang Khun Phaen}, also advocate romantic love between heroes and heroines. Passionate love was not new to the Thai. However, among the upper class in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries romantic love was not usually accepted by parents as a reason for marriage. Nonetheless, with protests from younger generations, using Western standards as supporting criteria to their ideas, love gradually became the first reason for marriage.

2) Male-female socialization

For love marriages to be possible, men and women need more opportunities to socialize and get to know one another. The custom of female seclusion, particularly among the upper class, was first relaxed in the 1850s on the initiation of King Mongkut. Grownup daughters of the king were allowed to meet and converse with foreigners, both male and female, at

state functions. During King Chulalongkorn's reign (1868-1910), upper class women enjoyed more opportunities to socialize with the opposite sex. There were more social functions for men and women to meet in addition to religious festivals—theaters, charity fairs, school exhibitions, and up-country trips.

In King Vajiravudh's reign (1910-1925) more social mingling between men and women was encouraged. Women now acted in plays with men. Nurses were allowed to work side by side with doctors. When King Prajadhipok ruled from 1925 to 1935, trendy men and women went walking, driving, golfing, dancing, and swimming together. A woman could receive a male visitor at home alone in her living room and host a birthday tea party for guests consisting of both sexes. More details about male-female socialization will be addressed in Chapter IV.

The change in male-female socialization in the first half of the twentieth century resulted from the continuing improvement in the status of women since the late eighteenth century.

64 M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, Si Phaendin, 1:338.
century. Education had always been a means of elevating women's status in Central Thailand. The literacy rate among upper-class women had been rather high since the mid-nineteenth century. Princesses and high-ranking women were allowed access to Western education almost at the same time as men. When King Mongkut hired Western teachers for his children, both sons and daughters attended the school. In addition, he asked missionary wives to teach English to many of his wives and palace maidens who wished to study.  

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Generally, upper-class women had Western-style education a decade later than their male counterparts. The first public school for boys in Bangkok was established in 1885. In 1892 a public school for girls was founded. In provincial towns, women's opportunity to have formal education in schools started a generation later than men. In the first generation to receive this education, only males would attend schools; then their daughters would be the first female generation in the families to go to school. In remote areas, it took a longer time for women to have formal education. Here it would be the granddaughters rather than the daughters of the first male generation who

would be the first female generation to obtain a formal education. 67

Going to school exposed women to other spheres outside the home and broadened the scope of their experience. They were no longer content to be secluded from the outside world. Many of their male contemporaries also had a desire for female companionship and supported the idea of more socialization between the sexes. 68 This change thus facilitated the practice of an individual's selection of his or her own spouse.

3) Anti-polygyny attitudes

Polygyny has long been practiced in Central Thailand, but mostly among the upper level of the society, who can financially afford many wives and a large number of children. The practice of polygyny was first criticized vigorously in Thailand during the 1850s by the American missionaries. Chaophraya Thiphako'rawong was the only


68 Education seems to have a positive effect on the individual's choice of spouse. In a 1988 survey of young people age 15-24 throughout the country, 75 percent of the respondents who had less than fourth grade education preferred choosing their own spouse while the percentage of those with twelfth grade education who preferred choosing their own spouse rose to 96.4 percent. See Phichit Phithakthepsombat, Yaowachon Thai B.E.2531 [Thai Youth 1988] a research report no. 163/32 for the Institute of Population Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1989, p. 61.
nobleman who publicly defended this practice. Since then, there has been no public defense of polygyny. On the contrary, the elite in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries denounced the practice of polygyny. They saw it as an injustice to women, a path to immorality and corruption, and a sign of an uncivilized nation.

The continuity of the open practice of polygyny in the early decades of the twentieth century might be a result of the attitudes of the upper and middle class women, who accepted the custom. According to Malcolm Smith, the court physician of Queen Saowapha, a consort of King Chulalongkorn, the queen and her sister, Queen Sawang, another consort of the same king, saw nothing wrong with polygyny. He reported:

On several occasions the young girls of their (the two queens) households had become wives of the

69 In his book, Kitchanukit, Chaophraya Thiphako'rawong admitted that Buddhism did not approve of polygyny and that those who had many wives were not practicing the Buddhist middle way. However, he argued that Buddhism did not absolutely forbid the followers from having more than one wife. In his opinion, the fact that a husband had more than one wife could benefit the woman too; because if the woman was not well or pregnant, the husband could be attended to by his other wives and would not bother the woman. see Chaophraya Thiphako'rawong, Kitchanukit (Bangkok: Khurusapha, 1971), pp. 225-26.

king. The request for them had in the first place come from him, and the fact that he had picked one of their hand-maidens was a source of pleasure and gratification to them (the two queens).71

A few upper and middle class women, knowing the philandering character of their husbands, also allowed them to have minor wives.72

However, the attitudes of most upper and middle class women towards polygyny changed in the 1920s. They did not accept and tolerate polygyny as their mothers had done. When King Vajiravudh married his first wife, Princess Lakshmi, he promised her that there would be no other queens, consorts, or concubines for him, but Lakshmi. But a year later, he took two concubines. Princess Rudivoravan, the queen's half sister, explained the reaction of the queen after the king took the second concubine as follows:

Our father(Prince Narathip), long accustomed to the problems of court life, had tried to comfort and reassure her(the queen). He had told her that the king's devotion was hers; that her position was dignified and secure; that she must accept these other relationships, as Chulalongkorn's queens had done before her. But Lakshmi had found it impossible. She remained fond of her husband, but the first great love was gone. Soon, although friendly, they preferred to live apart.73


73 Ruth Adams Knight, The Treasured One, p. 89.
Princess Rudivoravan (1911-) herself also disapproved of polygyny. She explained that she could accept the practice of polygyny among past generations as it was their custom, but that she could not approve of this practice among the people of her own generation.\textsuperscript{74} Her attitude was shared by the middle-class public. King Vajiravudh's many love affairs were criticized and satirized by the press. As Yot Wacharasathian, a journalist in those times, recalled:

Writers and journalists used the king's "many love affairs" as a plot for their novels, under titles such as "Kin Mia [Eat Wife]," and "To'k Krapo'ng [Falling from Favor]." There were a few other novels written by different authors about these affairs. Each made sarcastic comments on his practice of polygyny. The jacket cover of one of these novels carries an illustration of a man with a close physical resemblance to that of the king.\textsuperscript{75}

The widespread approval of monogamy in the 1920s encouraged the young generation, who were determined to practice monogamy and wanted to choose the spouse who suited them most. This contrasted with the previous periods when polygyny was socially acceptable. Then some men married a

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., p. 104.

\textsuperscript{75} Yot Wacharasathian, Kanpraphan Lae Nakpraphan Khong Thai [Writing and Thai Writers] (Bangkok: Prae Pittaya, 1963), p. 109. In Thailand, there has always been a law against lese majesty. The writers who criticized the king risked being arrested and imprisoned. According to Yot, King Vajiravudh read some of these novels. Yot once asked one of the king's retainers, Phraya Narenracha (M. L. Chuk Khancho'n), whether the king was angry at these satirical novels or not. Phraya Narenracha answered that the king was not angry. The king told him, "If I make a big issue out of these works and have the writers arrested, I will become a bully king."
spouse chosen by their parents, but later married the woman of their choice, or took many minor wives. King Vajiravudh in one of his article referred to a rich mother who arranged marriages for all her children. When one of her sons complained that he did not love his future bride, she told him to marry the woman and later take as many minor wives as he wanted to. His wife would not be able to do anything.  

This practice might have been common in previous times, as it was also mentioned in many novels, such as Si Phaendin and Phudi. When the husband took other women as minor wives, usually the major wife could not forbid him. She had two choices, either put up with this practice or separate from him. However, by the 1920s, as I have discussed earlier, upper-class young people, both male and female, saw polygyny as a corrupt custom of the past and preferred to practice monogamy. Thus to be able choose the right person to be their life-long companion by themselves became a very important issue for these people.

In the 1920s, though the law still permitted the practice of polygyny, judges, reflecting the social attitudes, gave more support to wives whose husbands took another wife. In a 1925 divorce case between Chao Noi and Chuang Apaiwong, the judge allowed Chao Noi, the wife, to

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77 See M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, Si Phaendin; and Dokmaisot, Phudi.
divorce her husband, Chuang, who married another woman on the ground that the social and emotional welfare of the first wife had deteriorated as a result of the new marriage. The judge's statement is as follows:

When the defendant remarried, the plaintiff's status deteriorated. She had to move to another house. The defendant (her husband) came to see her only two or three times, which is considered unnatural for husband and wife. The plaintiff is still young; she is not 20 yet. The court, therefore, allows the plaintiff to divorce the defendant. The law does not forbid the husband to have more than one wife; however, in the case that the first wife's social and emotional welfare have deteriorated as the result of the new marriage, the law allows the first wife to divorce if she wants to.\footnote{Thammasatwinichai, 1 (April 1925):50.}

It is not surprising that in Thailand's first Civil and Commercial Code (issued in 1935), the law permitted the man to officially register one marriage only. But the law did not forbid him from entering into unregistered marriages with other women. Polygyny has therefore never been outlawed.

\textbf{4) Financial independence of the new generations}

Economic factors have had a great effect on methods of mate selection. Traditionally, young people, especially men, followed the trades of their families, either as farmers, craftsmen, soldiers, or administrators. Usually boys would learn how to read and write from the temples, but families were their professional or vocational schools. Women also learned their families' trades and businesses,
such as pottery, goldsmithing, or weaving. As grownups, they worked with their families. Thus young people's ability to earn their living depended much on the support of their parents and relatives.

The money economy generated from the expanding export trade with China and other Asian and Western countries in the 1850s created new paid jobs outside the family tradition. This development occurred first in Bangkok and then spread to other booming towns in Central Thailand in the late nineteenth century. Due to the administrative reform begun in 1900, the government sector became a major employer of new graduates from middle and high schools and universities. Many people found jobs in hotels, rice mills, lumber mills, shops, factories, and with Chinese and Western firms and companies.

Before the Second World War, the cost of living was still low. When a pound of beef cost twelve satang, a carpenter with a wage of one baht a day could have a family and live comfortably. This low cost of living coupled with the economic expansion provided the young generations between 1900 and 1950 with more financial independence from

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their families, which in turn became a factor in their freedom to choose their mates. An illustrative example is the marriage of Phraya Anuman Rajadhon (Phraya Anuman, 1898-1969).

At 21, Phraya Anuman worked in the Customs Department. With his high salary, he became the main provider for his large family, including parents and siblings. At 22, he fell in love with a young Christian woman. His parents did not approve of his choice since the woman was an orphan, living with a poor aunt. Though he had always been a dutiful son, Phraya Anuman married the woman against his parents' will. One of his daughters later commented that he might have been able to do this because he was providing for the family, and his parents felt dependent on him. However, the relationship between the mother and daughter-in-law was strained.81

The second phase of economic expansion, which started in the 1960s, also provided independence for more middle and lower class young people from their parents and families. Many young men and women in the rural areas have migrated to work in provincial towns and Bangkok. Distance from home has relieved them from parental supervision and enabled them to exercise their own power of mate selection. In addition,

with their earning ability, young men may depend less on parents for their financial support for the bride-price.

In my interview survey, several middle-aged villagers reported that their offspring who lived far from home had chosen their own spouse. After a marriage proposal had been accepted, the offspring only came back to ask for parental approval and assistance in finalizing arrangements with the future spouse's family. Many parents told me that their migrant offspring, mostly sons, married without asking them to arrange any marriage ceremonies. Many of the children who worked far from home asked respectable friends or bosses to arrange the marriage ceremonies in lieu of their parents. A few decided to marry without any ceremonies. Usually, most of them were from the lower level of the society and could not afford fancy ceremonies or substantial bride-prices.

5) Changes in parental attitudes

Changes in parental attitudes regarding mate selection, though addressed last, is not the least important factor which has contributed to an increase in individual freedom of choice. Since the first decades of the twentieth century, there have been many parents who sympathize with the desire of young people to choose their own spouses. Many of them believe that it is a better way to allow the young people to choose for themselves. In a 1916 short story, a parent character gave a following reason:
We, adults, are not close to young people. Usually we don't talk much with them. So how can we really know their character? As for young people themselves, they often play and talk to one another, thus they learn very well each other's character. Even though we can inquire about their character, the knowledge we gain won't be as good as the first hand knowledge of the young people.  

Some parents, however, might have preferred this freedom of choice themselves when they were young but were denied. Therefore, when they become parents themselves, they allow their children the right of choice.  

A second group of parents, on the other hand, such as Phraya Anuman Rajadhon and Phraya Sihasaksanitwong, did exercise their own choice and wanted their offspring to do the same. For them, the parents' role in mate selection of their offspring is to give advice when asked.  

A third group of parents have yielded to the change in social norms and simply follow the trend of society. They see other parents allowing their offspring freedom of choice and thus follow their lead. A fourth group, composed mainly of peasants, feel the alienation between themselves and their offspring who have higher education or who have been exposed more to new experiences outside the villages.

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Several said that they could not choose spouses to suit their children's standards and expectations. "They have more education than I do and know more than I do; they do not want me to choose a spouse for them. I am not sure whether I can choose a spouse who pleases them either. So I let them choose whomever they want," said one mother.85 Another villager pointed out, "I let my children choose their own spouses. I am not going to take care of them or live with them. So let them choose whomever they like."86 These are typical answers of peasant parents interviewed during my field research in 1989.

Continuing Influence of Parents in the 1990s

By 1960, individual freedom of choice had become the social norm for mate selection in Thailand. Several surveys in Bangkok, towns, and rural areas in the 1970s and 1980s confirm that parents and young people generally believe that an individual should choose his or her own spouse. In two 1979 surveys, one of university students in Bangkok and the other of 1,500 people aged 15-20 throughout the country, over 90 percent of the respondents expressed a desire to choose their own spouse.87

85 Interview with Udom Changthong, Ban Satoei, Lopburi, 4 August 1989.

86 Interview with So'n Rattanaprisit, Khlo'ng Khae, Ratburi, 9 April 1989.

87 Khanitha Phochrunukun, "University Students' Attitudes Towards Selecting Mates and Family Planning," an M.A. thesis for the Faculty of Social Administration, Thammasat
Gender, age, and financial status seem to have an effect on differences in freedom to choose a spouse. In a study of a Bangkok polytechnic school, approximately 90 percent of both men and women expressed a desire to choose their own spouse. But a much larger percent of the women (78.5 percent) than of the men (59.3 percent) said that they would consult their parents about their selection.\textsuperscript{88}

In a 1986 survey of 1004 Bangkok career women, over 70 percent of the respondents said that they would put off their marriage if their parents did not approve of their boyfriend. Among those who said that they would marry their boyfriend without parental approval, more women under age 30 (14.5 percent) than over age 30 (11.8 percent) would favor this approach.\textsuperscript{89} In the same survey 82.6 percent of the respondents who considered themselves not so well off said that they would choose their own spouse whereas 71.4 percent

\textsuperscript{88} Uttis Chaovalit, "Attitudes Towards Marriage: A Case Study of Polytechnic Students in Bangkok Metropolitan Area," an M.A. thesis for the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Chulalongkorn University, 1978, p. 64.

of those who considered themselves rich said that they would exercise their freedom of choice.  

Interestingly, the surveys just cited reveal that though the pattern of mate selection has already shifted from arranged marriages to love matches, parental consent has continued to play an important role in the decision of the young people, specifically among the women and the well-to-do. A 1970 research project found that more than 60 percent of parents throughout the country allowed the individual freedom of choice over mate selection but that parents in towns and cities tended to allow their offspring to choose the spouse more than parents in the rural areas. In addition, highly educated parents gave more freedom of choice to their children than less educated parents.

The same survey indicated that while well-off parents in urban areas agreed that children should choose their own spouses, they frequently specified that the children should choose only with the parents' approval. 91 Another survey, this one conducted in the rural areas, showed that land owning parents also tended to participate in the mate selection of their offspring more than landless parents. 92

90 Ibid.


92 Piker, A Peasant Community, p. 81.
Actually, without directly exercising their authority, parents have already subtly influenced the marriage of their offspring through their method of upbringing, such as their choice of neighborhoods, schools, recreational activities, and vacation spots. These kinds of subsurface control direct young people's love interests towards an appropriate pool of eligible mates.\footnote{93} 

In fact, the effectiveness of these subtle influences shows up in the marriage statistics. For example, marriages between people of different strata are relatively rare, particularly among those who belong to the higher strata of the society.\footnote{94} In addition, over 90 percent of university student respondents in a 1979 survey believed that an important criterion in their choice of spouse was that he or she should get along well with their families.\footnote{95}


\footnote{94} see short biographies of upper class celebrities, such as Khunying Cha-umsri Viranuwart, Mom Kobkoe Apakorn, Khunying Lekha Apaiwong, Thanphuying Usana Pramoj, Pot Sarasin and his family, Marshall Thanom Kittikhachon and his family, Yot Uechukiet, and Kasem Chatikawanich in Thaemsin Ratanaphan, Khropsangkhom[Whole Society] (Bangkok: Prachum Khao, 1965), Thaemsin Ratanaphan, Khropsangkhom 2 (Bangkok: Odeon Store, 1967) and Chuphong Maninoi, Chiwit 25 Mahasetti chutti 2[25 Lives of Millionaires, vol 2] (Bangkok: Kan Ngan Thanakhan, 1986)

\footnote{95} Khanitha Phochnukun, "University Students' Attitudes," p. 40.
Conclusion

In the first decades of the twentieth century, parents and senior relatives could generally control the mate selection of their children and dependents, particularly among the upper class. Law, marriage and courting customs, and religious teachings were their support. However, more and more young people asked for freedom of choice. They regarded marriage as an individual rather than a family affair and wanted to choose their own spouse.

The young elite voiced their ideas in the media. Using customs of mate-selection in contemporary Western countries, especially England and the United States, as their models, they argued that love marriage was the way of civilized people. Later they managed to change the marriage law which allowed freedom of choice in 1935. The peasants, fortunately, were less controlled by their parents. Many had freedom of choice. Some of them who were denied their rights of choosing sometimes used elopement as a last resort.

By the second half of the century, the public generally accepted love as the major reason for marriage. Accordingly, self-selected marriage became the approved way of mate selection. Economic expansion and educational reform were major contributions to this social change.

While the social norm has shifted to individual freedom of choice, it does not mean a total end of the practice of arranged marriages. Nonetheless, parents who openly control
the marriages of their children no longer receive social approval as did their counterparts in the early decades of this century. In addition, the child who submits to an arranged marriage is also regarded as weird or as having a weak character, instead of being praised as obedient and grateful.96 The desire for romantic love marriages has finally changed some parts of the Thai moral framework.

96 See this attitude in novels such as Mathurut, Faisaneha [Love Fire] (Bangkok: Chokchaithewet, 1966); Ketwadi, Nisaneha [Love Debt] (Bangkok: Chokchaithewet, 1984); and W. Winichaikun, Setthi Tin Plao [Barefoot Millionaires] 2nd ed. (Bangkok: Ton 0, 1990).
CHAPTER III

CRITERIA FOR MATE SELECTION

Criteria for mate selection differ according to who is selecting and why. Parents who see a marriage as a means to the future stability of their offspring might look for wealth and good character in their future inlaws. Young people searching for love marriages might be attracted first by the physical appearance of their prospective spouse.

During my interviews with villagers in 1989, I found that the majority of them had chosen their own spouse. When I asked why they chose to marry their spouse, many seemed puzzled as to why I needed to ask this question. "Because we love each other," was the typical answer. "Why do you love him/her?" I kept on asking. Answers varied, but many of them concerned the character and appearance of the spouse. Yet several villagers simply answered as follows, "It was our destiny. We were destined to be husband and wife."

Traditionally, Thai people believed that married couples were those who in their previous life had either been married to one another or had performed merit together

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1 Actually, most of them answered in Thai as follows, "Ko rao cho'ppo' kan [Because we like each other enough (to marry)]" Cho'p means "to like" and pho' literary means "sufficiently or enough." These middle-aged villagers rarely used the word, rak, which means "love."
and had prayed to be married to each other in their next life. It is the simple working out of the law of Karma. According to this belief, mate selection was not performed by a free choice or according to any logical reasoning of the couple, but was a fait accompli predestined by the acts of the individuals involved in their previous lives. At present, some Thais continue to believe in this predestined selection. However, many believe that they can exercise their own judgment.

In this chapter I want to discuss criteria which parents and young people use in mate selection. First, I will address those whom society views as ineligible mates. Second, mate selection and social classes will be discussed. Finally, desirable qualifications in spouses will be examined.

Ineligible Choices

Generally incest and marriage between close-blood relatives have always been frowned upon by the Thai public. Marriages with certain foreign nationals were legally forbidden by the ancient law. In spite of their legitimacy now, marriages with foreigners are usually not encouraged. Monks are also regarded as ineligible choices for mate selection. Here I will explore laws and customs which have affected the social attitudes against these ineligible choices.
Close Blood Relatives and First-Cousins

In order to avoid incest, the ancient law, which was enforced until 1935, forbade the marriage between close blood relations, such as between parents and offspring; between brothers and sisters; or between uncles, aunts, and grandparents and their nieces, nephews, and grandchildren. According to the law, incest was considered a sin and a bad omen for the country. Those who committed incest were expelled from the community.²

This law was observed by the common people, who also viewed the practice of incest as abnormal and unfortunate for their families. However, occasionally the law was ignored by the royalty and the aristocrats who wanted to consolidate their power and influence within their families. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, we find kings and nobles breaking this law. For example, King Mongkut married two of his half brother's nieces. All of King Chulalongkorn's queens were his half sisters. Prince Chakrabongse married his half brother's daughter. Several noblemen in the Bunnag family married their half sisters.

However by the 1920s, there was a reaction among the aristocrats against close-blood marriages. According to Malcolm Smith, a physician to Queen Saowapha, the queen wanted to arrange a marriage between her son, King

² Krom Silapako'n, Kotmai Tra Sam Duang, p. 284.
Vajiravudh, and one of his half-sisters. But the king expressed his view against marriage with a close relative.³

In the 1935 and the 1976 Civil and Commercial Codes, the law continues to forbid the practice of incest. The law states clearly that a man and woman who are blood relations in the direct ascendant and descendant line, or brother or sister of full or half blood cannot marry each other. According to the 1976 Code, parents and their adopted children cannot marry either.⁴

Phraya Anuman Rajadhon, a leading scholar, reported in the 1960s that marriage between relatives was allowed if the bride and groom were not close relations. According to him, close relations included three generations up and down counting the person involved as the center—the grandchildren, the children, the person involved, the parents, and the grandparents.⁵ Anthropological research in the 1970s found that in several villages, marriages between people of any known genealogical connection were frowned

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³ Smith, A Physician at the Court, p. 220.


⁵ Phraya Anuman Rajadhon, Kansu'ksa Ru'ang Prapheni Thai, p. 358.
upon. Unions between first or second cousins were usually not encouraged, though not prohibited.6

From my interviews in 1989 in Central Thailand, I found that Thai villagers tended to accept marriages between relatives more than the villagers who were descendants from the Khmer or Lao. When I asked what the village community thought of marriages between relatives, such as first cousins, many villagers in Phromburi, a Thai village, answered, "It is all right. They can choose whomever they like."7 Three villagers talked about wealth consolidation among the rich families. "Usually in the rich families cousins marry each other. They want to keep their wealth intact. As the old saying puts it, 'If a boat carrying gold sinks in a small pond, it will be easy to recover the gold.'"8 The gold here represents the bride-price and the pond, the extended family. When a groom pays the bride-price to a cousin's parents, the money remains within the family (the pond).

Some descendants from the Khmer and Laotian peoples in Khlo'ng Khae and Ban Satoei thought that those who married

6 Piker, A Peasant Community, p. 77; Kaufman, Bangkhuad, p. 27.

7 Interview with Lamchiak Wichitphan, Pun Choechom, and Prung Srifongwong, in Phromburi, Singburi, 27 June 1989; Interview with Fu'n Imsam-ang; Phromburi, Singburi, 28 June 1989.

8 Interview with Fu Uafu'aphan, Phromburi, Singburi, 28 June 1989.
their close relatives might not prosper. There was a belief that first-cousin marriage was possible if the groom was the son of an elder sibling and the bride was the daughter of a younger sibling. The reverse would bring bad luck to the couple. However, this belief is common primarily among the older people. Middle-aged villagers do not put much credence in it.

**Certain Foreign Nationals**

In the ancient law, there was a decree forbidding all citizens, specifically the Thai and the Mon, from marrying their daughters or nieces to "foreigners: English, Dutch, Javanese, and Malay, that is, those who have different religions." The reason behind the restriction was the fear that the offspring from these unions would convert to the religion of their father, and side with their father's nation in time of conflict. The punishments for the breaking of this law ranged from death and property confiscation to monetary fines.

It is apparent that this law, decreed in the seventeenth century, was neither strictly enforced nor well-known. There is no record of any foreign visitor to Thailand between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries ever mentioning this law. In the nineteenth and early

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9 Interview with Yod Sangwan; Ban Satoei, Lopburi, 3 August 1989; Interview with Praphai Lichinta; Khlo'ng Khae, Ratburi, 7 April 1989.

10 Krom Silapako'n, Kotmai Tra Sam Duang, p. 480.
twentieth centuries, many foreigners who stayed in Thailand married Thai women. Captain Knox, the British consul in Bangkok in the mid-nineteenth century, was married to a palace maiden in the court of a high-ranking prince. It meant that the prince approved of this marriage.\textsuperscript{11} In 1897, the government officially made a law regulating marriages between foreigners and Thai citizens. The couple had to register their marriage at the Ministry of Metropolitan Affairs if they lived in Bangkok and at the governor's office if in a province.\textsuperscript{12}

However, it seems that traditionally marriages to foreigners were not popular among the Thai, as reflected in a popular play from the late eighteenth century. A scene in this play is about a mother who was upset that her daughter wanted to marry at a very early age. The mother scolded her daughter as follows:

You want to have a husband though you can hardly weave. What a girl! If you want to have a husband, I will marry you to an Indian. Or do you want a Thai? You had better marry a Mon, a Malay, or a shaven Japanese. Oh! I should marry you to a


\textsuperscript{12} Satien Lailak, \textit{Kotmai Pracham Sok[Laws in Each Reign]} 45 vols (Bangkok: Daily Mail, 1935) 16: 144-46. Foreigners in this 1897 law referred to those who officially had other citizenship, such as the Chinese who had British passport and were considered British subjects. Note that at this time, Thais were not required by law to officially register their marriages.
Chinese who will embrace you so tightly you cannot breathe and die.\textsuperscript{13}

The play explicitly reveals the public prejudice against marriages between Thais and foreigners. Unions with Indians, Mons, Malays, Japanese, and Chinese were not favorably regarded in the late eighteenth century.

In the first half of the twentieth century, a few upper class parents reacted strongly against mixed marriages of their offspring. When King Chulalongkorn's favorite son, Prince Chakrabongse, married a Russian lady, the king and the queen were very upset. Though the queen finally received her Russian daughter-in-law, the king never received her.\textsuperscript{14} One phraya disinherited his son who married an English woman after the Second World War.\textsuperscript{15} However, most parents accepted mixed marriages when they were faits accomplis.\textsuperscript{16}

Social objection to intermarriages seems to have its root in the fear of misunderstandings and incompatibilities.

\textsuperscript{13} Phichit Aknit, \textit{Wannakan Thai Samai Krung Sukhothai Samai Krung Si Ayutthaya [Thai Literature in Sukhothai and Ayutthaya Periods]} mimeograph for the Thai Department, Faculty of Humanities, Chiangmai University, n.d., pp. 420-21.

\textsuperscript{14} Prince Chula Chakrabongse, \textit{Lords of Life}, p. 259. Though he did not receive her officially, eventually the king sometimes asked his son about his wife and expressed his pleasure that she shared some of the king's hobbies.

\textsuperscript{15} Mani Siriworasan, \textit{Chiwit Mu'n Fun}, p. 503.

which will arise from the different cultures, religions, and languages involved. In the 1960s and 1970s, the society continued to be wary of mixed marriages, particularly between Thai women and foreign men. The author of a book on love and marriage expressed his idea as follows:

Love must have a boundary. Love is not like the sexual instincts which have no confines. Love is born from the cultural development of each civilization. Having her virginity only once, a woman should think carefully before she decides to marry a foreigner. . . . Several Thai women married Dutch soldiers after the war and returned with their husbands to the Netherlands. The news has arrived that many of them were deserted and had to become prostitutes. 17

A nationwide research study about divorces between 1969 and 1978 also confirms that marriages between Thais and foreigners have less stability than those between Thais. 18

However, since the 1970s, intermarriages have become more common as there has been an increase in the number of Thais travelling abroad and the number of foreigners coming to Thailand. In addition, Western men have become increasingly interested in having Asian wives since they view Asian women as gentler, more obedient, and more willing to wait on them than Western women. Some Thai women also


have a high regard for Western men, believing them more hard-working and more faithful than Thai men. 19 Besides, for some Thai women, marriage to a foreigner is a means of improving their status. In her book, Confessions of A Mail-Order Bride, Wanwadee Larson admitted that she wanted to marry an American man because she yearned to go to the United States in order to have opportunities to be rich and drive fast cars. 20

Interrmarriage for a better financial status is not new to Thai women and men. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, rich Chinese immigrants and their offspring were desirable mates for Thais who wanted to improve their financial status. Though many Chinese immigrants failed to realize their dreams of becoming millionaires in Thailand, there was a widespread belief among the Thai that the Chinese were hard working, thrifty, successful, and rich. Marriage to a Chinese or his offspring often meant marrying into money. As an old saying puts it, "Marry a Chinese, eat a lot; marry a Thai, have naught." A few Thai government

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19 In the 1991 August issue of a popular magazine called Khu Saeng Khu Som [Destined Couples], a reader wrote a letter to Damrong, the editor, saying that she preferred marrying a Western man. In another issue, another reader asked Damrong to find her a Western husband. She said that her parents also agreed that a foreign son-in-law would be better than a Thai one. But in the same issue, another Thai women wrote a letter to Damrong, giving her opinion against intermarriage. See "Damrong To'p Panha[Damrong Answers the Questions]," Khu Saeng Khu Som 12 (August 1991): 71; and 12 (October 1991): 71.

officials also married daughters of rich Chinese merchants. The unions benefited both sides—improving financial status for the grooms and gaining a government connection for the brides' families.\(^2^1\)

It should be noted that there continues to be unequal treatment of Thai men and women in Thai law concerning their marriages to foreigners. The law evidently shows the social prejudice against Thai women marrying the foreigners. As soon as a woman is married to a foreigner, she cannot buy or own land in Thailand. The children from this union, if born out of the country, are not considered Thai citizens. On the other hand, Thai men who are married to foreign women are not affected by this law. In 1972, in order to preserve national security, the government made a special announcement barring a child born in Thailand to an alien father from acquiring Thai nationality. Under this rule, at present over 2,500 half-blooded children have no citizenship and lose their rights as Thai citizens. Many are denied entrance to public schools and universities.\(^2^2\)

**Monks: Ineligible But Desirable Choices**

In theory, Buddhist monks, who have to observe celibacy, should not be included in the mate-selecting market. They should be ineligible choices for laywomen.


\(^{2^2}\) Ryratana Suwanraks, "When blood ties are not enough," *Bangkok Post*, 1 July 1991, sec. 3, p. 29.
However, since the monks are allowed to leave the monkhood whenever they want and can live as laymen in society without being discriminated against, many women consider monks as desirable choices.

Monks can leave the monkhood for various reasons, apart from marriage, such as for poor health, for the family's need of labor, or for the desire to lead a secular life. When a monk leaves the monkhood and leads a layman's life for a while and later marries, he will be considered a secular mate, not a monk. Only the monks who leave the monkhood to marry are considered as ineligible but desirable mates, and they are the object of this discussion.

The fact that some monks leave the monkhood in order to marry has not been uncommon in Thailand. According to King Mongkut, this practice was common in the mid-nineteenth century. In the king's opinion, the women who were interested in monks as eligible mates were divorcees, widows, or old maids. It was difficult for them to find appropriate bachelors to marry because usually men who were their age had already married. Therefore, these women planned to lure certain monks to leave the monkhood and marry them. The targeted monks were those who were learned and had received recognition from the state or those who had saved a lot of money.

Having spent 27 years as a monk before ascending the throne, King Mongkut should have known well how these women
courted the monks. According to him, the woman or her parents would send a male relative to the temple to serve the targeted monk. She or her parents would frequently visit the monk, offer him food, and talk with him. Many monks courted in this manner left the monkhood, married the women, and led a secular life. This situation irritated the king. However, he could not stop or outlaw this practice except by declaring that any monk found having an affair with a woman while still a monk would be punished and disrobed and the woman involved would be heavily fined.23

Marriages between men who had left the monkhood and laywomen usually did not result from the schemes of the women or their parents alone. Many would happen naturally from attraction or familiarity between the two persons involved. In the twentieth century, marriages between former monks who had been lured away and their laywomen friends continued to occur occasionally. A former monk in Chainat recollected that around 1952 he met his future wife in Phisanulok while he was still a monk. He was traveling from village to village in Phisanulok, chanting a Buddhist jataka tale to the peasants. At that time he had been a monk for 15 years and was well-known for his skill in chanting the jatakas. When they married, he had in his possession only four baht. Owing to their hard work, they finally had 500

rai of land, and one of their sons became a district official.\textsuperscript{24}

Because monkhood is also a means of social ascension, there have been quite a few cross-class marriages between former monks of a lower status and upper-class women. One example is the case of Thao Thammacharoen (1877-1962), a peasant from Chachoengsao, who was ordained and later moved to a temple in Bangkok. After being a monk for 16 years, he left the monkhood and married the daughter of M. L. Chaloem Asuni na Ayudhya in 1913. Later he worked in the Ministry of Finance.\textsuperscript{25}

Society has never encouraged romantic relationships between monks and laywomen. Among certain groups, these relationships are harshly condemned.\textsuperscript{26} However, once the monk involved leaves the monkhood and marries the woman, society usually accepts the couple without any prejudice. The former monk, if well-behaved, will continue to be

\textsuperscript{24} Rai is a unit of land equivalent to 1,600 square meters or four-tenths of an acre. Baht is the main unit of Thai currency. See Phra Phawana Wisutthikun, "Phra Phuttharup Pen Het [A Buddha Image Is the Cause]," Kot Haeng Kam Thamma Patibat [Law of Karma and Dharma Practice] (Singburi: Amphawan Temple, 1991), p. 159.

\textsuperscript{25} Anuso'n Khunpho' Thao Thammacharoen Cremation volume for Thao Thammacharoen 1965, n.p. See also biographies of Chao Phraya Yomaraj (Pan Sukhum) and Phraya Upakitsilapasan (Nim Kanchanachiwa) in La-ong Srisukun, Chiwaprawat Bukkhun Tuayang Khong Thai [Biographies of Distinguished Thai] (Bangkok: Khlangwittaya, 1963), pp. 442-43, 597-603.

\textsuperscript{26} Sirani, Panha Huachai [Love Problems] (Bangkok: Kaona, 1962), pp. 422-35.
respected. However, sometimes scandals break out involving important monks, such as the one in 1990 which involved an abbot and a pregnant young woman. The woman accused the abbot of being the father of her child. The abbot denied it and accused the woman and her family of trying to blackmail him. The sangha committee which investigated this charge found the abbot guilty and disrobed him. This scandal was widely played up in many newspapers because the former abbot had a large number of followers and the woman was the niece of an important representative.\textsuperscript{27}

\textbf{Mate Selection And Social Class}

There has always been a tendency towards endogamy in Central Thai society. Cross-class marriages were advocated during the 1930s and 1950s along with the promotion of democracy. However, since 1960, the trend has shifted back to endogamy; mate selection has continued to be practiced within the same classes.

\textbf{Tradition of Endogamy}

Biographies of the aristocratic families, such as the Bunnag, the Amatayakul, and the Singhaseni, indicate clearly the continuing practice of endogamy between the eighteenth and early twentieth centuries. They married within their own group of nobility. Most of the major wives of these noblemen were either their cousins or women from other

\textsuperscript{27} See \textit{Matichon} December 1990.
aristocratic families. An old proverb describes a couple who suit each other as, "A golden branch and a jade leaf (king tho'ng bai yok)." Both are priceless objects fit to be together.

Class consciousness is reflected explicitly in King Mongkut's personal letters and announcements. They reveal the king's repugnance to marriages between the nobility and commoners. Through the prevalence of polygyny in his reign, noblemen frequently took lower-class women as concubines. This practice was, however, frowned upon by the king. He once declared that he would not take a common woman as a concubine since a child born out of this liaison would dishonor him.

Apart from class consciousness, there was a politico-economic reason behind the king's discouragement of the marriages between the nobility and commoners. King Mongkut complained that after a common-class family married a female member to a prince or a nobleman, it would often refuse to provide corvee obligation to the state. The responsible officials would not dare to enforce the law upon this family

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28 Piyanat Bunnag, Kanwikho' Okat Nai Kan Lu'an Chan Thang Sangkhom Thai Samai Ratanakosin To'n Ton [An Analysis of Social Mobility in Early Bangkok Society] (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 1986), pp. 242-44.

for fear of infuriating the prince or the nobleman involved. Hence, the state would lose the labor.  

Like the Indians, the upper-class Thai saw that the family was dishonored when the female member married below her status. As discussed in Chapter II, a law was decreed in King Mongkut's reign discouraging upper-class women from marrying men of lower classes by requiring the consent of the women's parents. According to the king, the commoners viewed this kind of liaison as an honor to their class. Before 1865, some princesses married commoners and lived upcountry. The children born to these commoner fathers were technically commoners as well. However, they were addressed and dealt with respectfully as low-ranking princes and princesses. They were omitted from corvee and received special treatment in juridical affairs. This fact both irritated and concerned the king.  

In the early twentieth century, generally the royal men married other members of the royalty or, in some cases, members of the nobility. Royal women, on the other hand, married only within the royalty. The nobility also married within the same stratum. A 1910 short story describes how aristocratic parents selected a spouse for their daughter;  

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the mother wanted a learned man, but the father argued for a man from a noble family. He reasoned as follows:

Ranks and families are very important criteria. Those who married their daughters off to their servants had to do so because no one wanted to marry them or because the daughters had done something shameful. Men from the noble families can be royal pages or government officials. They don't have to serve corvee. This privilege also extends to their offspring. Men from the commoner class, though they have a lot of knowledge, cannot be government officials yet. The only commoners who can enter the government service are highly educated monks who have left the monkhood. To be omitted from corvee, the commoners have to pay fees to their leaders every year. 32

The story ended with the parents marrying their daughter to a man who was both learned and a noble, the nephew of a phraya.

Sent to school in Europe at an early age, a few princes and noblemen married foreign women. Notice that it was emphasized that the foreign brides were also of the upper class in those lands. For example, when Prince Chula Chakrabongse wrote his autobiography, he made it clear that his Russian mother, though she used to work as a nurse during the Crimean war, came from an aristocratic Russian family. She had been a nurse for humanitarian reasons, not out of financial necessity. 33


In the early twentieth century, class consciousness was reflected in regional discrimination. The people in Central Thailand regarded the people in the North and the Northeast regions of the country as Lao and looked down upon them. Since the administrative reform in the late nineteenth century, young government officials and military officers had been sent from the Central region to the North and the Northeast. Romances often occurred between these young men and the local women. Some ended in marriage, but many did not. In the central plains, there was a general prejudice against "lazy and ignorant Laotian women," whereas in the North, the men from Bangkok were considered unreliable philanderers.\textsuperscript{34}

In the 1900s, when Prince Narathip Praphanphong adapted Madame Butterfly into a Thai musical drama, Sao Khrue Fa, he changed the setting from a seaport in Japan to Chiengmai, a city in the north of Thailand. It was a romance between a Central Thai officer and a Northern woman, which ended in a tragedy. In the same period, one of the most popular classical songs, Lao Duang Du'an, was composed by a young prince during his trip to the Northeast. The lyric is about a man saying goodnight to his sweetheart.

\textsuperscript{34} There existed some prejudices in Central Thailand against the southerners too. But there were not many popular romances between the Central Thai and the local southern women. The northern women with their fair complexion and long hair were considered more beautiful.
Oh! Bright Moon. To thee, my beautiful golden moon, I have come to serenade. But it is getting late at night; I have to leave. Yet, with thee, my love, my heart is still lingering on. What a beautiful scent! A fragrance of flowers reminds me of your aroma, my beloved. Oh! your perfumed body I have smelled but dare not touch.

It was rumored that the prince composed the song after he was separated from his Northeastern sweetheart. He was not allowed to marry the woman, who was the daughter of a local official.  

Cross-class Marriages

In the 1920s, when love was gradually accepted as a reason for marriage among the young upper and middle classes, class difference seemed to these young people an irrational and uncivilized obstacle to marriage. In 1920, Prince Mahidol, the father of the present king of Thailand, asked permission from King Vajiravudh to marry a commoner, an orphan who was a retainer of his princess sister. It created a great scandal in the court. Many princes had commoners as minor wives or concubines, but no one had ever officially married a commoner and made her the major wife before. Since the prince's mother, Queen Sawang, approved

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35 According to the northeastern courting customs, young men have been allowed to go and court the girls they like at the girls' home at night. Prince Phichai, the composer of this song, might himself have gone to court the woman he loved at her home too.
of her only son's choice, the king finally also gave his consent.36

While princes could marry lower class women in the name of love, it was impossible for princesses to marry lower class men. Before 1932, no princesses were allowed to marry commoners. They either married princes or simply stayed single.37 Though a new mode of male-female socialization permitted princesses more opportunities to meet worthy young commoners and romances between them may have occurred, these relationships were certain to end in separation and sadness.38 A young commoner who fell in love with a lovely princess at Hua Hin beach resort explained to his Western friend why he could not approach and court the princess.

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37 Prince Damrong, a former Minister of Interior and leading scholar, inferred that the Chakri kings were not willing to allow high-ranking princesses to marry because they were afraid of problems on succession to the throne. See Princess Poon Pisamai Diskul, Sing Thi Khapsachao Phop Hen [Things I Have Seen and Heard] Cremation volume for Princess Poon Pisamai Diskul, 1990, p. 70.

38 Around 1930 there was a rumor that Princess Sasiphatana, a daughter of Prince Phithayalongko'n, the champion of love marriage in the early twentieth century, had fallen in love with a commoner, a good tennis player. Upset by this incident, the prince ordered his daughter to be "imprisoned" in the palace. See Mani Siriworasan, Chiwit Mu'an Fun, p. 87.
In Siam only a prince can have anything to do with a princess; for the rest of us to kiss a princess just means seven years' imprisonment and chains from neck to feet. She also has to be imprisoned, but merely in her house alone with her maid, who has to carry the chains in a basket.\footnote{Ebbe Kornerup, \textit{Friendly Siam} trans. M. Guiterman (London: G.P. Putman's Son, 1929), p. 154.}

While princesses were forbidden to marry commoners, upper-class women were discouraged from marrying lower-class men. The upper-class women were taught to be aware of social differences. In her autobiography, Khunying Mani Siriworasaran related that in 1930 she was staying with her uncle, a high ranking official. There she met Kim Suan, a young Chinese Thai student who was allowed to stay in the same compound. Since Mani's English was very good, Kim Suan asked her to tutor him in English, and he taught her Thai grammar in return. Khunying Mani recalled their relationship as follows:

I believe that Kim Suan might have liked me or even secretly loved me. However, since I was the niece of the master of the house, there was a great difference in our status. Kim Suan had to know his place. It was impossible for him to express his love for me. In the time of the Absolute Monarchy, it was meaningful to be born in a noble family. It was unthinkable that people of Chinese descent would put themselves in the same level as the aristocratic offspring.\footnote{Mani Siriworasaran, \textit{Chiwit Mu'an Fun}, p. 73-74.}

However, love between upper-class women and lower-class men occurred occasionally. As in the previous chapter, since the upper-class parents continued to have legal authority
over the marriage of their daughters until 1935, elopement sometimes became the last resort for unions of this kind in the early decades of this century. It is not possible to know how many cross-class marriages actually took place during this period. It might not have happened very often since once it did, it caused a great scandal.\textsuperscript{41}

It should be noted that one of the most popular themes in novels written between 1925 and 1935 was that of love conflicts between classes. Several middle-class writers in this period believed that their birth should not deprive them of the right to be the equal of the upper class. Many of them had received a high school education and read Western literature extensively. They mingled with the upper class either at school or at work. Some, such as the famous writer Sriburapha, had bitter experiences of unjust treatment at the hands of their teachers when there were quarrels between boys of different classes. Some, such as Malai Chuphinit, Pako'n Buranasinlapin, and Manas Chanyong, had romantic relationships with upper-class women.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{41} Somsi Sukumalanan, "Rochana Lu'ak Khu[Rochana chooses a spouse]," Rak Luk, June 1989, p. 169. She recalled a big scandal in 1929 when the daughter of a nobleman eloped with a chauffeur. Another elopement which took place at roughly the same period was between Khun Om Bunnaq, the daughter of a phraya, and Manas Chanyong, her violin teacher, who later became a famous writer. This elopement has been mentioned in Chapter II.

\textsuperscript{42} Yot Wacharasatian, Khut Chak Adit [Digging in the Past] (Bangkok: Odeon Store, 1971), p. 236; Suthira Sukhniyom, Malai Chuphinit Lae Phon-ngan Praphan Choeng Sangsan [Biography of Malai Chuphinit] (Bangkok: Karawek,
These writers poured out their experiences into the novels, embellishing them with their beliefs and ideologies. Their works criticized the social prejudice against the lower classes and idealized love, pure love without material interest. In his novel, Chatchai, Yot Wacharasatian criticized society for honoring only the dignitaries and the rich.

There are different measures to evaluate a man's value. In the world of Karma, a man's value is measured by his deeds. One who leads his life morally is priceless. But in the earthly world, money, title, and the family become yardsticks to measure the value of a man.43

Phaen, the hero in Chatchai, was looked down upon by the upper class. His marriage proposal to an upper-class woman was turned down twice only because he came from a commoner family. His sister, resenting this social prejudice, rejected in turn a marriage proposal from an upper-class man. She reasoned,

Because he is much richer than we are, I don't want to marry him. He is the son of a phraya, a descendant from a line of angels. These people are very proud and look down upon commoners like us. They don't even think that the common people like us are also human beings and feel the same feelings.44


44 Ibid., p. 43.
In a short novel, *Koet Pen Ying* [Born a Woman] by Malai Chuphinit, a young princess fell in love with a commoner. She refused to marry a prince chosen by her parents. In a letter to a close friend, the princess confessed,

> Love in my opinion is uncontrollable. No punishment, such as imprisonment, chains, beating or killing, can make people afraid and stop loving. Love must take root by itself; it grows without any outside forces involved. When two persons become one in their thoughts, hopes, and faith, nothing in the world can separate them.\(^{45}\)

Class consciousness affected both men and women who married lower than their status. People who married lower were criticized, but actually society tolerated lower marriages of men more than those of women.\(^{46}\) This attitude was clearly reflected in the plots of novels between 1920 and 1932.

Novels about love between upper-class men and lower-class women in this period often had happy endings whereas the novels concerning love between upper-class women and lower-class men mostly ended in tragedy. In these romance novels the upper-class heroines who loved the lower-class heroes were usually forced, in order to preserve their honor, to marry the men from the same class. Broken hearted, the heroines often died young. On the other hand, the upper-class heroes who fell in love with the lower-class


women, though they had to confront many obstacles, finally married the women they loved.\textsuperscript{47}

The reason for this attitude might be the social expectation that the husband should be the leader of the family. As such, the husband should be in a higher position so that he can gain respect from his wife. It is generally believed that a wife who comes from a higher-class or richer family than her husband will dominate and manipulate him.

The democratic atmosphere after the revolution in 1932, which ended the absolute monarchy in Thailand, had some significant effects on mate-selection customs. One of the two laws passed during the first meeting of the parliament was one permitting a princess to marry a commoner.\textsuperscript{48} According to the law, a princess who wanted to marry a commoner had to renounce her royalty before the marriage. This condition, however, did not stop several princesses from marrying commoners.

Between 1932 and the 1960s there were many cross-class marriages. Several princesses married commoners, such as Princess Rudivoravan, Princess Marasi Sukhumphan, Princess Charuphatra and Princess Inthuratana. Many daughters of dignitaries from the royal regime were also married to lower-class men. For example, Apo'n Kannasut, the daughter

\textsuperscript{47} Suphani Waratho'n, \textit{Prawat Kanpraphan}, p. 236.

\textsuperscript{48} Princess Poon Pisamai Diskul, \textit{Sing Thi Khaphachao Phop Hen}, p. 28.
of Phraya Suntho'nburi, married U'a Sutho'nsanan, a musician who was the son of a small orchard owner in Samutsongkram.\footnote{Society of Song Writers, \textit{Wan Sunthrapho'n}, p. 20.} Lalinthip, the beautiful daughter of Phraya Niphonwichitra-nond, a Bangkok landlord, married Wanlop Thanrawanichkun, a leading businessman and son of a Chinese merchant.\footnote{"Obituary for Wanlop Thanrawanichkun," \textit{Matichon} 25 June 1991 p. 6.}

The trend towards cross-class marriage was astonishing to the older generation, who had been raised during the strongly class-conscious period of Absolutism. In a novel, \textit{Khrai Kamnot} [Who Destined?], one of the characters, a retired low-ranking official, expressed his bewilderment at the marriage between his grandson and the daughter of a very high ranking official. As he put it, "If it had been ten years ago, I would have thought that you [the grandson] were dreaming. A son of a Luang, a grandson of a Khun, is going to marry the daughter of a Chaophraya!"\footnote{Sipha Ladawan, \textit{Khrai Kamnot} [Who Destined?] (Bangkok: Bannakhan, 1979), p. 120. The titles for Thai government officials in the period of Absolutism were ranked upwards as follows: \textit{khun}, \textit{luang}, \textit{phra}, \textit{phraya}, and \textit{chaophraya}.}

Why did these phenomena occur? Dokmaisot, a writer popular from the 1920s to the 1950s, had a character in one of her novels explain these phenomena as follows, "At present, if a man has a good education, it doesn't really
matter who his parents are. The family is no longer as important an issue as it used to be in the old days.\(^{52}\)

Cross-class marriages occurring between the 1920s and the 1950s were due either to the democratic ideology itself or the resulting politico-economic upheavals in the early decades of the democratic period. Some backers of cross-class marriages truly believed in human equality and accepted no boundary for love. However, many cross-class marriages in this period took place as a result of a shift in social stratification after the 1932 revolution.

In the early phase of the democratic period in Thailand, some people from the middle class were obtaining more political and economic power while many aristocratic families from the royal regime were losing theirs. Many aristocrats who married lower than their status actually married people who, despite their humble origins, were rising high in the newly-structured society. These people were going to be the new elite of the society—high government officials, high-ranking military officers, or leading businesspersons. Therefore, these types of marriages, which at first seemed to be cross-class marriages, might be considered as marriages within the class of the elite, old and new.

The Shift Back To Marriage Within the Class

The democratic movement between the 1920s and 1950s helped encourage to some extent the idea of equality among classes. Unfortunately the budding democracy in Thailand had a short life. After a 1958 coup d'etat, Thailand was ruled by military dictatorships for almost 20 years.

A general examination of popular novels written in the 1960s might give an impression that the literary world continued to support cross-class marriages. The preferred plot of these romances was still love between different classes--a worker and the daughter of his master; a graduate from the United States and a tomboy granddaughter of a fisherman; or a ranch owner and an orphan woman.

However, a closer look at these plots would reveal a great difference between these 1960 novels and those of the earlier period. In the 1960 novels, at the end of the stories, the heroes or heroines from the lower origins usually turned out to be disguised or lost members of the upper-class families. The worker was in fact wealthy man who had quarreled with his parents; the poor tomboy was an heiress; and the orphan was actually the deserted daughter of a rich widow.53

Instead of advocating cross-class marriage, these novels, on the contrary, confirm the old belief of marriage

53 See Mathurut, Faisaneha; Mathurut, Saen Phayot[Very Naughty] (Bangkok: Chokchai Thewet, 1966); Ing-on, Nori (Bangkok: Prae Pittaya, 1966), pp. 792-826.
within the class. They reproduce the old theme of folktales such as Sang Thong, Sano Noi Rua'n Ngam or Thao Saen Pom. The hero or the heroine who were misunderstood at first by others as members of the lower class were eventually revealed as having high status.

Between the 1960s and 1970s a few authors discussed family problems in cross-class marriages. Do'ktoe Luk Thung [A Peasant Ph.D.] by Boonlua shows how cultural differences between the urban upper class and the rural middle class affected and almost wrecked the married life of a young couple from these two classes. In a Southeast-Asian-Award-winning novel, Ru'a Manut [A Man's Stormy Voyage], an upper-class middle-aged man realized that his tastes, viewpoints, and background and those of his lower-class young wife were much too different to live happily together.54

These authors, similar to many family writer-advisers in this period, did not approve of class as a barrier to love marriage. Nonetheless, they believed that the married couple should not have too many dissimilarities in their educational, social, and economic backgrounds because these differences might cause unnecessary quarrels, alienation, and misunderstandings. Since these qualifications are

54 In a 1950s novel by K.Surangkhanang, Khwam Khit Khamnu'ng [Contemplation], a middle-aged government official married his peasant servant and lived happily with her. See Boonlua, Do'ktoe Luk Thung [A Peasant Ph.D.] (Bangkok: Phadungwittaya, 1973); Krisana Asoksin, Ru'a Manut [A Man's Stormy Voyage] (Bangkok: Chokchaithewet, 1980).
usually determined by class, marriages across classes are, therefore, not encouraged.\textsuperscript{55}

This is reflected in a 1989 novel, \textit{Ban Rai Sai Sawat} [Love in the Countryside]. Saichon, the 24 year-old sister of a ranch owner was disturbed to learn that a worker was in love with her and was trying to win her heart. Her annoyance was caused by the fact that the worker was from a lower class, dared to express his emotions, and hoped to have her love in return. The worker's behavior upset the social etiquette which required that people of different social statuses should be treated differently and appropriately.\textsuperscript{56}

This situation is much different from a plot in a once-very-popular short story by Malai Chuphinit, \textit{Klin Lep Mu' Nang} [The Fragrance of The Flower Tree]. In this short story, written in the early 1930s, Thapthim, the 18 year-old daughter of a rich man in Kamphaengphet was in love with a young gardener working for her father. Though he was her servant, the daughter loved him for his good character; and he loved her in return.\textsuperscript{57}


\textsuperscript{56} Kunrat, \textit{Ban Rai Sai Sawat} [Love in the Countryside] (Bangkok: Chokchai Thewet, 1989).

With these two simplified plots, the readers might judge Saichon as arrogant and vain and see Thapthim as polite and kind. Yet, a careful reading of these two stories reveals that Saichon was also as polite and kind as Thapthim. Her initial gentleness towards that worker misled him to believe that she also cared for him. Yet, it seemed unthinkable for Saichon to return her love because he was so much different from her in educational achievement and social background. The socio-economic development started in the 1960s has widened the gap between the upper and upper-middle class on one hand and the lower class on the other hand. Thus cultural alienation exists among classes. With this alienation, a marriage union between different classes seems virtually impossible.

Recent research and surveys depict the trend towards marriage within the same class after the 1960s. An economist, Kroekkiat Phiphatseritham, found that the consolidation of economic power by the private sector after 1960 had been achieved in part through marriage connections between a few business families, such as the Sarasin, the Wanglee, the Uachukiet, the Techaphaibun, and the Lamsam. Biographies of socialites also reveal the consistent pattern.

of marriages within the high-class families, such as the Krairoek, the Sucharitkun, the Kittikachon, the Charusathien, and the Kanchanajari. A 1980 demographic survey concerning marriages in Bangkok also found that respondents in every educational group tended to marry persons who were in the same occupational group.\textsuperscript{59} This pattern is also observed in the villages. A peasant from Lamphun who came to work as a servant in Bangkok gave a vivid picture of marriage within the same class in her village. She told her mistress, "The people who own a brick house marry those who also own a brick house. Those who own a wooden house marry people from a wooden house. As for the people living in a hut, they marry people from a hut."\textsuperscript{60}

\section*{Desired Qualifications in Mates}

Here I will discuss criteria that men and women have generally used to judge the suitable qualifications of their suitors. Character, appearance, education, and wealth are the most frequently mentioned criteria. Age and horoscope are also often considered. In addition, I will include married men, the divorced, and the widowed, who are also eligible for the mate selection market in Thai society.


\textsuperscript{60} Interview with Siraporn Nathalang, Honolulu, Hawaii, 22 August 1991.
Character, Appearance, Education, and Wealth

Parents and people involved in choosing spouses usually consider these four aspects in a prospective mate. Which aspect is more important and decisive than the others varies according to who is using these criteria and for whom it is used—a prospective groom or a future bride.

1) Character

Since Thai society tends to expect a man to be the leader of the family, it is of paramount importance that the future groom be a man of good character. Conventionally, character has generally been chosen as the most important criterion. Diligence, honesty, faithfulness, and abstinence from gambling, alcohol, and drugs are highly valued character traits.

"Rich or poor is not important. If he is hard-working, though he owns only a scythe, I will give him my daughter," used to be cited by parents regarding the qualifications of a preferable son-in-law.61 Women also tend to look for good character and conduct in their suitors. Seventy-four percent of the female respondents in a Bangkok vocational school in 1978 chose good conduct as the most important criterion in selecting their spouse.62

61 This statement is quoted from a very popular eighteenth-century literary work, Khun Chang Khun Phaen.

Character is also an important criterion in selecting a bride. In the survey just cited, 71.5 percent of the male students thought that good conduct should be the first criterion in choosing a wife. What are the characteristics of a good wife? Qualities that will make her a good housekeeper, mother, friend, and follower—gentle, polite, faithful, well-mannered, thrifty, hard-working, and sober. "A big mouth, sharp tongue, and drunken wife will make your life very miserable," said one author of an advice book.63

To learn the character of a prospective mate, parents and young people are advised to inquire about his or her family. The Thai have long believed in the importance of heredity. "The fruit does not fall far from the tree," or "Judge an elephant by its tail, judge a girl by her mother," are the Thai proverbs equivalent to the English, "Like father, like son" or "Like mother, like daughter."

2) Appearance

Usually men are more interested in the appearance of the woman they are interested in than are women in that of the man.64 "A man always wants to have a beautiful wife," wrote an author in a late-nineteenth century magazine. "That's why the old saying put it, 'A woman's looks are her

64 Uttis Chaovalit, "Attitudes Towards Marriage," p. 60.
"That's why the old saying put it, 'A woman's looks are her wealth,'" he continued. In 1930, another writer echoed this view. He claimed that beauty and charm were more important for women than intelligence because their objective in life was to marry, not to work.

Because men have generally put too much emphasis on female beauty, there is an old saying warning men: "Beautiful to behold but not sweet to kiss." This is somewhat analogous to "Beauty is only skin deep" in English. Some beautiful women are criticized as useless wives since they only take care of their appearance and are not interested in household chores. A beauty without any womanly skills is not acceptable. In the early twentieth century, palace maidens were highly valued in the mate-selecting market because they were well-known for the great care they took of their looks and personal hygiene and for their refined womanly skills, such as cooking, embroidering, flower-arranging, and music-playing.

In twentieth-century novels, plays, and movies the heroes and heroines are usually extremely handsome and

65 Wachirayanwiset, 1 (February 1885): 135-36.


beautiful. Fair complexion is regarded by every class as beautiful for both men and women. Generally Thais are prejudiced against black or dark complexion, viewing it as a sign of working people.\footnote{Recently there is a trendy fashion among a few socialites to have a tanned skin. In my opinion, they may follow the Western criteria for beauty.}

3) Education

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, education has been highly valued in Thai society. People with high education are potential choices for spouses because high education implies future success in their occupations. Over 50 percent of second and third-year students at three Bangkok universities queried in 1979 thought it was necessary that the spouse should have the same level of education.\footnote{Khanitha Phochanugool, "Students' Attitudes Towards Selecting Mates," p. 31.}

However, the same survey shows that more women (78.7\%) were concerned about the education of their spouse than men (58.3\%). From my survey of advice literature, those who complained to advice columnists about their less-educated sweethearts were all women. They did not want to marry someone who had less education.

4) Wealth

Though it is discussed last, wealth is not the least important criterion in the mate selection process. Until
the 1960s, the public did not openly admit that wealth should be a determining criterion in selecting a spouse. Buddhist teaching against greed and indulgence in material accumulation may be a reason behind this attitude. Wise men have always said that wealth could be made and destroyed by men. Thus character should be the most important criterion in mate selection.

However, the expansion of capitalism in Thailand since 1960 has changed the social attitude towards wealth. The prime minister's motto for the whole nation in the 1960s was, "Work is money; money is work; money gives you happiness." Now society openly measures a person's success by his or her income.

Several advice columnists asked their readers not to use wealth as a decisive criterion in mate selection. Yet, many writers advised their readers to choose a spouse who has similar economic status and educational background.\(^7\) In a 1979 survey of Bangkok university students, over 67 percent of the respondents believed that spouses should have the same economic status. More women (81.02%) were concerned

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with the economic status of their future spouse than men (67.75%).

The Bride-price custom has been used by some women's parents as a measurement to screen out inappropriate suitors. Bride-price is the money and gifts given by the groom or his family to the bride's family to keep after the marriage negotiation has been settled. In the early twentieth century, the bride-price was customarily 40 baht. But well-to-do parents would demand higher bride-prices for their daughters. One Phraya set the bride-price for his daughters at 8,000 baht each. The bride-price for the daughter of rich merchants consisted of one to four chests of gold, worth approximately 2,000 baht each. Middle-class parents would ask for from 15 to 300 grams of gold and 200 to 800 baht in currency.

This trend of setting a high bride-price gradually spread from the urban upper class to the provincial and rural well-to-do. In the 1960s, many hit folk songs touched upon the problem of high bride-price in the villages.


Suraphon Sombatcharoen, the king of folk singers, sang in the 1960s as follows:

The marriage procession is now coming to your house, my sweetheart. . . . At first I wanted to ask you to elope with me. But I was afraid that you would be ashamed. So I worked really hard and saved money to pay for your high bride-price. I have with me several ten thousand baht notes. It is all for you to put in the safe.

In the 70s and 80s, many singers reflected the resentment of poor village men towards the rising bride-price. In a song called Sip Mu'n [One Hundred Thousand], the singer claimed that his future mother-in-law had asked for 100,000 baht as the bride-price. "Are you earning a living by selling your daughter?" he asked.

Actually, from the interviews, I learned that the usual amount of the bride-price in villages in the 70s and 80s was not as high as the singer claimed. The bride-price usually consisted of 4,000 baht and 100 grams of gold or 10,000 baht and 50 grams of gold. At that time 15 grams of gold cost approximately 4,000 baht. Some poor men whose family could not contribute to the bride-price had to save the money themselves. Thus another singer lamented, "Please wait for me; I'm collecting money for your bride-price. How unlucky we are! We love each other but cannot marry. Money is our

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obstacle. Now I have only a heart, not a ring, to engage you."  

In the 1920s when there was a trend towards high bride-prices among the upper class, criticism against the practice of the bride-price appeared sporadically in newspapers and magazines. Many urged the end of this practice. However, it has persisted. In the 80s, about 50 percent of female respondents in Bangkok thought that the bride-price practice should continue. Twenty-nine percent of them wanted the practice to end, and 21 percent had no opinion.  

Age and Horoscope

1) Appropriate age at marriage

What has been considered the appropriate age for marriage in different periods in the twentieth century? It had varied according to class and gender. According to Mo'm Siphroma Kridako'n (1888-1978), in the early twentieth century, well-to-do parents married off their daughters when they were 14 or 15 years old. "A 16 year-old woman was considered old. At 18, she was already a mother," she said. For men, the marriageable age started at 15. Though traditionally parents preferred their son to have

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75 Bhassorn Limanonda, Thai Women's Attitudes Towards Marriage, p. 77.

76 Mo'm Siphroma Kridako'n, Atsachiwaprawat, p. 213.
served as a monk (usually from three to twelve months) before marriage, many highborn men married before they reached 20, the compulsory age to be ordained.77

Education delayed the marriage of some aristocratic men and women in the early 1900s. Some, such as Prince Boriphat, Phraya Anurakratchamonthien, Thanphuying Phua Watcharothai, and Mo‘m Siphroma herself, married late in their 20s. A similar background explains why they married quite late. They were all well-educated in Western-style schools.78

M. L. Boonlua Debyasuvarn, a leading scholar, generalized that Thai peasants in the early twentieth century married between the ages of 15 and 17, when they started to have their sexual drive. In her opinion, at these ages, the men and the women were also ready to earn their living and establish a family. The economic environ-


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ment of the agrarian society was thus in harmony with human growth and needs.\textsuperscript{79}

However, biographies of and interviews with people living in the early twentieth century reveal that it was more common for the peasants, particularly men, to marry after 20. Donald J. Lauro found that the average age at first marriage of villagers in Ban Tang Chang who were born between 1882 and 1926 was 25.4 for men and 23.3 for women.\textsuperscript{80} A 1970 nationwide demographic study by the Institute of Population at Chulalongkorn University also confirmed Lauro's finding. The average age at first marriage of rural people born between 1900 and 1925 was 25.6 for men and 21.4 for women.\textsuperscript{81}

Lauro's research and other demographic studies in 1970 suggest that there was a gradual decrease in men's age at first marriage between 1900 and 1960 both in rural and urban areas. In 1900, the average age at first marriage for men was 26.4 in the rural areas and 28.3 in the capital. In 1960 the average age at first marriage for men was 23.5 in the rural areas and 26.1 in the capital. The data for women, on the other hand, do not indicate clearly a trend

\textsuperscript{79} M.L. Boonlua Debyasuvarn, Khwamsuk Kho'ng Satri, p. 43.

\textsuperscript{80} Lauro, "The Demography of A Thai Village," p. 183.

\textsuperscript{81} Calculated from Table 18 Average Age at First Marriage by Sex--Ever Married Rural and Urban Population in Visid Prachuabmoh, The Rural and Urban Populations, p. 49.
toward younger marriage. The average age at first marriage for women in rural areas in 1900 and 1960 was 21.9 and 21.0 respectively. In the capital, the average age at first marriage for women in 1900 and 1960 was 22.1 and 22.5 respectively.\textsuperscript{82}

After 1960, however, demographic studies suggest a return to later marriage for men and women in both rural and urban areas, particularly in Bangkok and Central Thailand. Data from the national censuses of 1960, 1970, and 1980 show the average age at first marriage of women in Bangkok as 23.4, 25.0, and 25.9 respectively. The average ages of the women in Central Thailand, not including those in Bangkok, are lower (22.2, 22.7, and 23.4 respectively) but still higher than the nationwide figures (21.6, 21.9, and 22.8 respectively).\textsuperscript{83}

Usually, Thais prefer the husband to be a few years older than the wife. Statistics show that the average age at first marriage of the total male rural population was just less than 3 years older than that of the women in 1970.

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., pp. 44-51; Sommai Wansorn, "Socio-economic and Demographic Factors Influencing Age at First Marriage in Rural Thailand," an M.A. thesis for the Department of Social Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1971, p.47.

\textsuperscript{83} Bhassorn Limanonda, Thai Women's Attitudes towards Marriage, pp. 7-8.

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The comparable difference in both the provincial urban areas and Bangkok was over 4 years.84

2) Factors influencing age at first marriage

To understand why there was a gradual decrease in age at first marriage for men between 1900 and 1960 and a return to later marriage after 1960, a more intensive research study is needed. Here I attempt to give, however, some tentative explanations. It seems that economic status, government policy towards marriage, education, and social attitudes towards ordination have had a substantial influence on the variation of age at first marriage.

In the early twentieth century, the peasants had a strong belief that a man should be ordained a monk for at least a year before he married. Having their son ordained when he was still a bachelor meant that the parents would gain full merit from his ordination. If the son was ordained after he married, parents had to share the merit with his wife.85

In addition, usually the woman's parents also considered a man more learned and more cultured after the ordination because at the temple he might have learned the

84 Visid Prachuabmoh, The Rural and Urban Populations, p. 50.

Buddhist dharma, manners, and other beneficial knowledge. That was one reason why the peasant men generally married over the age of 20.

According to Easterlin, a leading economist on the family theory, the decision by young adults to marry and found a family is influenced by the living standards they experienced while they were growing up. If the current income is high relative to this standard, they will tend to marry early and have high fertility.

From 1920 to 1950, the population in the central plains faced a series of economic problems, such as crop failures due to droughts, the economic depression caused by the Great Depression, and World War II. People born and raised during this troublesome period might not have had great expectations for their family's future, would feel that their income, though insubstantial, was sufficient to support a family and they marry young.

On the other hand, since 1950, Thailand has been experiencing a postwar economic boom. The people born and raised during the affluent period would have high expectations for their family's future and want to delay their marriage if they felt that they could not provide for the family up to their standard. A 27 year-old factory worker

86 Phraya Anuman Rajadhon, Taeng-ngan, p. 36.
87 Quoted in Robert J. Willis, "What Have We Learned from the Economics of the Family," in The Family 77(May 1987):71.
in Bangkok told me in 1989 that she did not think seriously about marriage because she was afraid that if she married a fellow worker, both of them could not earn enough money to support a family.  

In addition, government policy may have affected the age at first marriage of the people. Between 1942 and 1949, under the nation-building policy, the Thai government encouraged young people to marry and have children so that the population would increase. A marriage-promoting organization was established; group-marriage ceremonies sponsored by the government were held occasionally in Bangkok and other provinces. The couples were given money and presents from the government. Government officials who married and had children had a priority over their single counterparts concerning a yearly salary raise. The censuses in 1929, 1937, 1947, and 1960 reveal a big increase in population and the number of married people in 1947 and 1960. The population figures for these four years were 11.5, 14.5, 17.4, and 26.2 millions respectively. The number of married people in 1937, 1947, and 1960 was 1.9, 2.5, and 5.3 millions respectively. The government after

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88 Interview with Riam Yindi, Bangkok, 4 June 1989.


90 Wilson, Thailand: A Handbook, pp. 30-31. Note that many Thai did not take trouble to register their marriages officially. This may be the reason why the percentage of registered married people were low.
1960, however, put an end to the marriage and population promoting policy.

As mentioned earlier, education has also delayed the age of first marriage. Society discourages students at every level from being involved in love affairs and mate selection because they are regarded as minors who cannot earn their own living. The public also believe that romantic love will make young people less attentive to their studies and they will not complete their education. Thus, except for two open universities, schools and universities do not allow their students to marry. Because more young people have attended high school, colleges, and universities since 1960, there has been a consequent increase in the number of young people who have delayed their marriage.

In addition, there is a tendency for better educated people to marry late. Approximately 74 percent of students from three Bangkok universities in 1979 responded that the appropriate age for marriage should be between 26 and 30. A 1978 survey in a Bangkok vocational school found that the respondents who had completed only elementary education, on the other hand, believed that the appropriate age was between 25 and 26 for men, and 19 and 20 for women.  

91 Khanitha Phochanugool, "Students' Attitudes towards Selecting Mates," p. 31; Uttis Chaovalit, "Attitudes towards Marriage," p. 32. The vocational school where Uttis conducted his survey was Rongrian Saraphatchang, a special vocational school which allowed students from different educational backgrounds to attend. Some students had already completed a college education, whereas others had
Economic status and profession also affect the age of first marriage. A survey of 550 Bangkok married couples in 1980 suggested that those who had professional occupations tended to marry later than people in other occupations. The average ages at first marriage of the professional men and women were 28.2 and 25.9 respectively. Those of the male and female service workers were 25.6 and 23.2 respectively. For male and female laborers, the average ages at first marriage were 26.1 and 21.4 respectively.\(^2\)

3) Horoscope

Thais have believed that people born on certain dates or in a certain year are not suitable to marry one another. If they marry, their lives will be a disaster: their marriage may end in divorce or one of the couple may die prematurely. Therefore, before the marriage negotiation will be settled, parents of both sides may ask for the couple's birthdates, including the hour of birth, and consult an astrologer to see whether the horoscopes are compatible or not. If the horoscopes do not match, the marriage may be called off.\(^3\)

\(^2\) Piengjai Sompong, "Marriage Behaviors in Bangkok," p. 56. The survey indicated that male laborers married later than their counterparts in the service sector. It might be possible that the male laborers had to delay their marriage because of their poverty.

\(^3\) Hrit Ru'angrit, Tamra Promchat Chabap Sombun Lae Tamra Noralak Chabap Luang Nai Rachakan Thi Nu'ng [The First Reign's Text on Fortune Telling Through Body Signs and
The compatibility of horoscopes has a greater effect on mate selection in the case of arranged marriages than in that of love matches. A 1969 survey found that among parents who wanted to arrange marriages for their children, if the horoscopes of the prospective bride and groom were not matched, just over 70 percent of the parents would cancel the marriage negotiations. 94

Understandably, in the case of a love match, the couple are more interested in the person they are going to marry than in the horoscopes. The appearance and the character of his or her sweetheart is more important than the mismatching horoscopes of both parties. Loet Setthabut (1872-1944), who later became Phraya Phakdinoraset, a notable businessman, asked a learned monk to give him a new "birthday" which would be compatible with the birthday of the woman he loved. 95

In a number of cases, even though their horoscopes do not match, the couple decide to marry. In some cases, the

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prediction of disaster turns out to be true. In other cases, the husband and wife live happily for a long time.\textsuperscript{96}

\textbf{Marital Status}

Actually, married men, divorced men and women, and widows and widowers are not highly valued in the mate selection process, particularly the married men. However, since married men have never been socially prohibited from taking minor wives, some of them are considered desirable for mate selection. Likewise, there has been no social prohibition against the remarriage of divorced and widowed men and women in Thailand.

1) The married men

In the early twentieth century, when polygyny was prevalent in Central Thai society, married men were eligible and desirable among some women, particular those in the upper class. It was not as widely practiced nor as highly valued in the middle and lower classes. Many folktales illustrate how polygyny became the cause of tragedy and unhappiness in many families. Jealousy between wives and half siblings often wrecked the families.\textsuperscript{97}

Usually the position of a minor wife depended on the whim of her husband and his first wife. Frequently, she

\textsuperscript{96} Sulak Sivaraksa, \textit{Chuang Haeng Chiwit Kho'ng S. Sivaraksa}, p. 123; Akrawat Osathanukro', \textit{Anuso'n Khunying Lo'm}, n.p.

\textsuperscript{97} For example, \textit{Pla Bu Tho'ng, Sang Tho'ng}, and \textit{Ramakien}. 

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stayed in a different house but in the same compound with the first wife and was likely to be under the control of the first wife. As an old Thai proverb concerning marriage to a married man put it, "A woman who has to be content to drink water beneath the elbow of another woman is indeed a minor wife." Thirsty she may be, yet she must wait for the few drops of water which may leak sparingly to her mouth from the first wife's palms (cupped as a drinking vessel). Thus, the middle and lower class married men were not likely to be chosen as desired mates, except those who were very handsome or very skillful with women.98

According to Phraya Anuman Rajadhon, in the early twentieth century, in rural areas, sometimes a woman wanted to be married to a big man in the village. She did not mind whether that man was already married or not. Being one of his wives, she would gain some important status and other men would not dare to meddle with her.99

Polygyny was practiced, though, mostly among the upper-class families. Forming kin relationships through marriage was a popular way to strengthen the tie between patrons and clients. Ambitious or loyal subordinates were not reluctant

98 Kumut Chandruang's step grandmother, Lieb, married Pin even though she knew that he was already married. In her opinion, Pin was similar to a legendary hero, Khun Phaen, who was a dashing, brave, and romantic hero who had many love affairs and adventures. see Kumut Chandruang, My Boyhood in Siam, p. 8.

99 Phraya Anuman Rajadhon, Chiwit Chao Thai Samai Ko'n, pp. 386-87.
to offer their female relatives as minor wives to their superiors. The children born of these marriages would elevate the status of the minor wives' families.

Nonetheless, if an upper class family married their daughter to a married man of the same class, they would do so only on the condition that their daughter, even though not the first wife, should be honored as the major wife. 100

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the 1935 family law, though it allowed a man to officially register a marriage to only one woman, did not outlaw polygyny. It was not illegal for a man to have more than one wife at the same time, but it was not as socially acceptable as previously. Today, the practice of polygyny persists, particularly among the upper class. However, those who have a minor wife make an effort to hide the fact from their first wife and the public. The minor wife usually has a separate house far from the major wife's house. 101

100 When Prince Chulalongsorn married Khun Phae, a granddaughter of Chao Phraya Si Suriyawong, the prime minister, he already had two wives. However, Khun Phae was officially regarded as the royal daughter-in-law [Saphai Luang] because King Mongkut, the prince's father, arranged for the marriage himself. Prince Damrong, Prasanom Ek [The Major Consort] (Bangkok: Chomrom Damrongwittaya, 1983), pp. 16-23. See also Dokmaisot, Khwamphit Khrung Raek.

101 Former prime minister Marshall P. Phibunsongkhram was known to have three minor wives. One of them had two children with him. After he was ousted from power in 1958, he lived in exile in Japan. A Thai journalist later interviewed him about his wives. He replied, "I have only one wife, Thanphuying La-iad. Khun Khanu'ngrnit is my friend. She came to stay with me in Tokyo as a friend. We have children together." See Charun Kuwanon, Chiwit Rak
A 1967 survey of highly educated people in Bangkok found that most of the female respondents disliked men who had more than one wife but that only a few male respondents shared the same feeling. Most of the men said that they would like to have more than one wife but that they did not want a woman to have more than one husband. Generally public opinion is against the minor wife. She is considered as a wicked and shameless woman who steals another woman's husband. Then why does a woman want to put herself in this position? Why does she choose a married man as her spouse?

In most cases, the husband is much older, richer, and in a more powerful position than his minor wife. To gain financial benefits is often cited as a reason for a woman to be a minor wife. For many Thai women, marriage is not for love but a way to raise their status and to help out their families financially. In exchange for her beauty and her faithful services, her future husband may offer her a house, a car, a piece of jewelry, a sum of money, and a monthly salary. If she has a child with him, the law allows the husband to register the child as his; accordingly the child

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will have the same rights as his other children born within the legal marriage. ¹⁰³

Polygyny exists among the middle and lower classes too, but it is not a subject of public interest as in the case of the upper class. In some cases, the husband has his wife's sister, her cousin, his female colleague, or his subordinate at work as a minor wife. The liaison may result from proximity and mutual affection rather than a desire for economic gain on the woman's part. In a few cases, it is the married man who gains financial benefits from the union because his second wife, usually an old maid, a widow or a divorcee, is richer than he. ¹⁰⁴

Many letters to advice columnists concerning love with a married man reveal that the woman involved often believes at first that the man will divorce his wife and marry her. But soon she will realize that the man is not in a position

¹⁰³ Chaiyot Hemarachata, Panha Kotmai Chaoban, p. 45.

¹⁰⁴ Steven Piker reported in his research that between 1962 and 1968 there was only one case of a man taking a minor wife in Banoi village. Villagers reported that such occurrences were rare. A married man from a neighboring village took up residence with a widow and her children in Banoi. "As she was a landowner and he was not, he more or less lived off of her estate, all the while occasionally residing for a few days with his original family and passing some of his newly acquired wealth on to them." Piker, A Peasant Community, p. 79. See also Mani Siriworasan, Chiwit Mu'an Fun, pp. 508-42. In her autobiography, Khunying Mani confessed her relationship with a married man after she divorced her husband. The relation continued for 10 years. During that time, the man helped look after her property.
to divorce or separate from his first wife. She thus ends up being his minor wife.\textsuperscript{105}

2) The divorced and the widowed

Central Thai society has never discriminated against the remarriage of the divorced and the widowed. The ancient law allowed a married couple to divorce if they wished, reasoning that their capacity for performing good deeds together (in the Buddhist sense of "merit") as husband and wife had ended. As soon as the divorce took place, both the male and female were free to marry whomever they chose. But the 1935 and 1976 family laws ordered the divorced woman to wait for 310 days before she could remarry to insure that she was not pregnant.\textsuperscript{106}

According to John Crawfurd, a British envoy to Thailand in the early nineteenth century, divorces were frequent among the lower classes. M.L. Boonlua Debyasuvarn, a leading Thai scholar, pointed out that if a Thai (man or woman) was asked how many husbands a Thai woman usually had in her life, that person might answer proudly that a woman would generally have only one husband. However, she stated that in fact a substantial number of female workers in rural


\textsuperscript{106} Chaiyot Hemarachata, \textit{Panha Kotmai}, p. 19.
areas in the mid-twentieth century had more than one husband in their lifetime.\textsuperscript{107}

A 1972 survey of the rural and urban populations of Thailand also confirmed that separation, divorce, widowhood, and remarriage were not uncommon among Thais. The researchers concluded as follows:

(\textit{T})he data indicate that a considerably larger proportion of rural women had remarried than urban women and that between the two urban categories, remarriage was a more common event for women residing in the provinces than the capital. . . . This result comes somewhat as a surprise since according to conventional sociological knowledge greater marital stability might be expected among traditional, rural populations than among urban populations. On the other hand, within an agrarian context, where the husband and wife usually work as a team operating the family farm, there may be greater pressures for remarriage following the desertion or death of a spouse.\textsuperscript{108}

Though society allows the divorced and the widowed to remarry, it seems to approve more of the remarriage of the male than of the female.\textsuperscript{109} Therefore, it is not


\textsuperscript{108} Visid Prachuabmoh, \textit{The Rural and Urban Populations}, p. 51.

\textsuperscript{109} King Mongkut allowed his concubines who did not have a child with him to leave the palace and remarry. He said that several who left later got married. However, in one of Dokmaisot's novels, a Phraya commented, "If the husband is dead, I don't blame the woman for remarrying. I think that a woman can have more than one husband, but all her husbands shouldn't be on earth at the same time. I often wonder when the old husband and the new one meet, how the wife can keep her head on her shoulder!" Dokmaisot, \textit{Chaichana Kho'ng Luang Naruban} [Luang Naruban's Victory] (Bangkok: Prae Pittaya,
surprising that the same researchers found that the topic of separation, divorce, widowhood and remarriage seemed to be a sensitive area of inquiry to some women. The interviewers for this survey reported that respondents occasionally seemed reluctant to discuss their marital histories in detail.

From my research and interviews, the topic of remarriage appears to be more sensitive to middle-class women over age 40 than any other groups. Upper and lower-class women and middle-class women under age 40 were more open to discuss their remarriages. This attitude might result from the fact that the upper and lower-class women have been exposed more to divorces and remarriage. In addition, better educated women tend to look more favorably on the remarriage of women. This may explain why middle-class women under age 40—generally better educated than their older counterparts—were more open in their discussions.

It should be noted that it is more common for a divorced man or a widower to marry a single woman. A


110 From biographies of the aristocratic families in the mid nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it appears that separation, divorce, widowhood, and remarriage took place occasionally. In a 1959 handbook on the family in Thailand, the authors stated that divorce among the upper class (or leisure group) is more frequent than among the middle class. See Vibun Thamavit and Robert D. Golden, "The Family in Thailand," p. 10.

111 Bhassorn Limanonda, Thai Women's Attitudes Toward Marriage, p. 57.
divorced woman or a widow, on the other hand, usually
marries within her own group of divorced and widowed people. Because female virginity has been highly valued in a
prospective bride, a bachelor who marries a divorced woman
or a widow may face mockery from his peers and family. 112

Conclusion

This study of criteria in mate selection shows that
Thai society has been rather flexible towards marriage.
Except for incest and marriage between close blood rela-
tions, there are hardly any restrictions against marriage.
For example, until recently, Thais generally believed that
women over age 35 were too old to marry; however, these
women could marry if they wanted to. In a 1986 survey which
asked at what age a single woman should stop thinking about
marriage, just over 64 percent of the respondents (females
working in Bangkok) thought that there should not be any age
limit at all. 113

Another example of social flexibility is the age
difference between husband and wife. Traditionally the
husband was expected to be a few years older than the wife.
However, many men married an older woman. Interestingly, a
1978 survey shows that more female students (95.5%) than
male students (77.9%) thought that the husband should be

112 Sirani, Panha Huachai, pp. 276-79.

113 M.L. Boonlua Debyasuvan, Saphai Maem, pp. 145-52; Bhassorn Limanonda, Women's Attitudes towards Marriage, p. 56.
older than the wife. Another survey also shows that more male students (77.82%) than female (62.96%) believed that it was not improper for a wife to be older than her husband. In their opinion, love, not age, should be the most important determining factor in marriage.\textsuperscript{114}

These studies also reveal that women have tended to be more conventional in their ways of choosing a spouse than men. Generally women are more concerned to choose their spouse according to the standard criteria—an older man with better or at least equal educational and economic background. More studies are needed before any conclusive explanations for this attitude can be presented. In my opinion it seems that a large number of women continue to look for security and leadership from their husband.

CHAPTER IV

INITIATION OF COURTSHIP

Traditionally who would make the first move in courting, a man or a woman? It seems that throughout the eighty years of the period under study, at all levels of Thai society, initiation of courtship has continued to be in the hands of men. Although sometimes women have made the first move, it has usually been considered improper for a woman to first approach a man she fancied. Modesty has always been regarded as a necessary female virtue.

**Men as Initiators**

The custom of male initiation in courtship had been dominant in Central Thai society long before the twentieth century. In *Khun Chang Khun Phaen*, a Thai classical romance composed in the early nineteenth century, all the courtings were started by men. One episode about Simala and Plai-ngam, two leading characters in this work, clearly illustrates the roles of men and women in courtship.

Simala, the young daughter of a provincial governor, was deeply in love with Plai-ngam, whom she had just met. She was tormented by the desire to know whether Plai-ngam loved her or not. She lamented the fact that she could not approach him first and confess her love for him. She moaned, "If I were a man and Plai-ngam a woman, tonight even
death could not have stopped me from seeing my love."
Fortunately for her, late that night, Plai-ngam, who was
also in love with Simala, came to see her.¹

The roles of men as initiators and women as respondents
were confirmed in the most popular work of advice litera-
ture, Suphasit So'n Ying [Proverbs for Women]. Though
written in the mid-nineteenth century, this work has since
been published many times and widely read and quoted. In a
cremation volume for Mrs. Suan Chanthrema (1898-1969), her
children chose to publish Suphasit So'n Ying as a gift for
guests. They explained in the preface why they picked this
book.

We chose to publish Suphasit So'n Ying as a
cremation volume for our mother because she loved
to read books, either poetry or prose. She
usually recited verses from Suphasit So'n Ying to
teach and advise her daughters, nieces, and female
dependents. She recited them fluently and never
forgot a line. She really wished that women in
general should behave properly like a virtuous
woman.²

In the mid 1970s, Naret Naropako'n, a famous newspaper
columnist, suggested that Suphasit So'n Ying should be a
guideline for all Thai women.³ This book taught women not

¹ Krom Silapako'n, Khun Chang Khun Phaen (Bangkok:

² See the preface in Suntho'nphu, Suphasit So'n Ying
[Proverbs for Women] Cremation volume for Suan Chanthrema,
1969.

³ Naret Naropako'n, Sao' Oei Cha Bo'k Hai[Advice for
224.
to approach men first, not to give men gifts first, not to let men know their love for them until they were engaged or married. To illustrate the moral conduct taught in this advice work for women, here are some examples:

It is natural for a man and a woman to love each other, however, a woman should not openly express her emotion. Take a tree for an example. Even though it is blown by a storm and its branches are swaying, it still stands firm and does not move. Similarly, a woman should be reserved and not be moved by the sweet talk of men. She should keep her honor like a yak which keeps its hair all clean.

Do not believe match-makers; they all want money or a reward from men. If a man really loves you, he will ask your parents for your hand. Do not simply follow him home, or you will be abandoned soon.

These passages show clearly that modesty and reservedness were praised as women's virtues.

A survey of advice literature from the 1920s to the 1980s reveals the continuity of this trend. In the 1920s, an article in Dusit Smit, a leading elite magazine, discussed mate selection. "Who chooses a mate, the man or the woman?," the article asked. The answer was clearly made that it must be the man who first approached the woman. The woman could choose among the suitors whom she would like to marry. But it was a very "ugly situation" if the woman first approached the man she was interested in. The woman

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4 Suntho'n Phu, Suphasit So'n Ying, pp. 93-99, 105, 117.
should not express openly her tender feelings toward a man.\textsuperscript{5}

This attitude was widely accepted among the upper and middle strata of the society. Thawi Bunyaket (1904-1971), a former prime minister of Thailand, in a letter to his daughter in 1950, advised her to be reserved toward men. According to him, "It is better for women to be criticized as being too proud than too friendly with men. The latter will bring disgrace to women."\textsuperscript{6}

In \textit{Silapa Kannatphob} [The Art of Dating], published in 1979, the author approved of dating as a good way for men and women to meet, learn about each other's characters, and adapt themselves before marriage. Still she urged the readers to follow the Thai custom that women should wait until men approach them, then they could respond. As the author put it, "According to Thai customs, in a meeting, a woman should wait until a man speaks to her first. A woman should not be audacious or loud; she will be considered too bold and of easy virtue."\textsuperscript{7}

Numerous short stories and romances from 1930 to 1980 also preached the virtue of modesty for women. In popular  

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{5} "Khrai lu'ak khu, phuchai ru' phuying [Who chooses a mate, the man or the woman?]," \textit{Dusit Smit} 11 (May 1921): 102.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{6} Thawi Bunyaket, \textit{Pho So'n Luk} [Father Teaches His Children], 4th ed., (Bangkok: Bannakit, 1978), p. 277.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{7} Duladda, \textit{Silapa Kannatphob} [The Art of Dating] (Bangkok: Wongpan, 1979), p. 12.}
novels before the 1970s, such as Phudi, Prisna and Kha Kho'ng Khon, the heroines are proud women who never run after men, even those whom they love. In many novels, misunderstandings between the heroes and the heroines arise from the pride and reservedness of the heroines. They refuse to reveal their love towards the heroes until these men prove their sincere love for them. 8

Popular writers after 1970, such as Suphakso'n, W. Winichaikun, Sophaksuwan, and M. Mathukari, who grew up after the Second World War, continued to present modest, though more lively, heroines. This reflected the fact that young women of the 1970s enjoyed more freedom of expression than their counterparts in earlier decades. In courtship, however, the traditional pattern prevailed. For example, in most of Suphakso'n's short stories about university students, young men would still approach the women first. Predictably, the women would treat them badly, making fun of them or criticizing them strongly for a period of time before confessing that they were actually interested in these young men. 9 In one of the stories, a young woman fell in love with a man and was disappointed that the man did not return her love. "I deserve it," the young woman

8 see Dokmaisot, Phudi [The Noble] (Bangkok: Phraephittaya, 1962); V. Na Pramuanmarq, Prisna (Bangkok: Chitra Book, 1964); and Roselarain, Kha Kho'ng Khon [Human's Worth] (Bangkok: Khlangwittaya, 1965).

told herself. "I shouldn't have let myself love him first." 10

The custom of male initiation of courtship was also practiced among the peasants in Central Thailand in the twentieth century. Men went to visit women whom they were interested in at the women's place. When young people engaged in musical repartees during festivals, it was always the men who started the game, wooing with romantic verses to the women, who answered back in rhyme. 11

The social value that men are initiators and women are recipients in courtship persists in modern country folk songs (Phleng lukthung), which have been popular among the peasants and workers since the 1930s. A very popular country folk song in the 1980s called "Rice-Farmin' Guy, Salt-Farmin' Gal" reflects clearly the continuing impact of moral conduct taught in Suphasit So'n Ying. The lyric is as follows:

(male) My family farms rice.
(female) Mine farms salt and sells it to buy rice.
(male) My home is in Kalasin province.
(female) Mine is in Samut Sako'n.
(male) I am glad I met you here when you are visiting Dowkhano'ng (a district in Bangkok).
(female) It is my good fortune that you spoke to me first.
(male) I want to live in Samut Sako'n.
(female) I'm afraid you are not sincere.


(male) I, a rice-farmin' guy, love you, the girl with rosy cheeks.
(female) I am only a salt-farmin' gal.
(male) I promise I won't leave you. I want to ask your father for your hand. What will you say?
(female) I will be very happy if you really ask for my hand.
(male) As a rice-farmin' guy, I promise I won't leave you.
(female) If you really love me, please don't leave me, a salt-farmin' gal, alone.\footnote{So'npet Pinyo, "Num Na Khao Sao Na Klu'a [Rice-Farmin' Guy, Salt-Farmin' Gal]," in the Committee for National Culture, Ku'ng Satawat, p. 125.}

A study of modern country folk songs composed between 1962 and 1978 reveals that love songs sung by female singers usually do not express admiration for men directly. Many of them reveal the feelings of women waiting for their boyfriends who were working away from home. Women who seduce men or ask men to marry them are all criticized sarcastically in these modern country folk songs.\footnote{Kobkul Phutharaporn, "Country Folk Songs and Thai Society," Traditional and Changing Thai World View (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 1985), pp. 156-157, 160.}

**Women as Initiators**

Notwithstanding the traditional precedence of male initiation of courtship, there is evidence to show that at least some women have broken the rule of modesty and approached men first. The fact that there exist in the Thai language two derogatory expressions to describe this situation indicates that it undoubtedly has occurred. These two expressions--tho't sapan, meaning "to put down a bridge," and haitha, meaning "to provide a pier,"--have a
straightforward as well as a veiled courtship meaning. As courtship terms, the two expressions give a picture that women are separated from men by an imaginary river or a canal. Immodest women would provide access for men to come to them by lowering down a (hanging) bridge or by inviting them to climb the dock in front of their houses. As Kanchanakphan, a Thai language scholar, explains in his book, Samnuan Thai [Thai Expressions], these two expressions are used with reference to women who give physical or verbal hints to men, revealing their attraction towards them.¹⁴

There are many ways for women to invite attention from men. In the early 1900s, to cover the lower part of the body, Central Thai women wore a chongkrabaen, a kind of wraparound which is similar to an Indian dhoti. When a bold woman saw that a man she liked was near by, she could lure him by adjusting her chongkrabaen in a way that her upper thighs could be seen. In those days, upper thighs, which were always covered, were considered stimulating parts of the female body.¹⁵

Many women have also visited men at their homes. There is a story that in 1909 when former prime minister Marshall P. Phibunsongkhram (1897-1965) was a cadet, he would come back to stay with his parents at their boathouse in

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¹⁵ Sulak Sivaraksa, Chu'ang Haeng Chiwit, p. 18. This story was told to the author by one of his aunts.
Nonthaburi on weekends. Young female neighbors used to paddle boats and stop in front of his house in order to see the handsome young man. Occasionally, a few bold women would get into the house, pretending to visit his parents. The shy cadet would escape to his room and not leave until the women left the house.  

One informant, a retired schoolteacher in Ratburi, claimed that before he married in 1944, many women showed their interest in him first. "Usually women didn't show their feelings explicitly. But when they liked you, they told you by their special way of looking at you. Many women gave me the eye." Recently, with the wide use of telephones in towns and cities, young women have found a new means of approaching men. I still remember seeing my brothers answering calls from their female friends in the 1970s.

Not all the women who first approached men were daring. A few might do it because they were desperate. In his autobiography, Kumut Chandruang recalled that it was his mother, then 15, who confessed first to his father, then 24, that "she had long loved him, and that she would immediately

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16 Charun Kuwanon, Chiwitrak Chomphon P., p. 21.

17 Interview with Worasak Chunchoem, Khlo'ng Khae, Ratburi, 8 April 1989. In the interview, Mr. Worasak used the word "Thing hangta," which literary means looking from the corner of her eyes. It is a Thai female gesture, which indicates that she is interested in the man she is looking at.
accept his proposal if he should ask her to marry him." According to the author, his mother, who had known his father since she was young, was afraid that her mother would marry her to another man. 18

In the late 1970s and early 1980s there were two popular folk songs in which the female singers complained openly that they did not have a boyfriend and wanted to have one. The singers did not approach any particular man, but stated openly that they were looking for a good boyfriend. They admitted that they were desperate because they had shortcomings; they were poor and not beautiful. It should be noted that in both songs, the names and lyrics make it clear that the women were not from the central region; one was from the South and the other from the Northeast. 19

All the examples of female initiators given thus far are from the middle and lower levels of society. Information about the exercise of female initiation in the upper level was derived from literary works. Novels written by princesses and daughters of nobles between 1920 and 1980 illustrate socialites who wanted to "catch" good men and approached them first subtly or openly. Their ways are quite similar to those of the lower levels--visiting men at

18 Kumut Chandruang, My Boyhood in Siam, p. 31.
their homes, showering them with presents and attention, and showing explicitly their feelings towards the men they are interested in.\textsuperscript{20}

\textbf{A Call for Equal Rights}

While the mainstream writers continued to condemn female initiation in courtship as shameless, there have been a few sporadic attempts on the part of some progressive writers to challenge this norm since the mid 1920s. These protestors believed that women should be treated as equals of men. Sriburapha, one of the leading writers and promoters of democracy between 1930 and 1960, wrote in his novel, \textit{Luk Phuchai [A Real Man]}:

\begin{quote}
It is not fair that a woman cannot be the first to tell a man that she loves him. The woman should have the freedom to express her feelings without being condemned by society.\textsuperscript{21}
\end{quote}

In the same period, Lilasat, the author of an advice column in \textit{Suphappoburut} magazine, urged Thai women to be more aggressive in the mate-selecting process. As opposed to the conventional teaching in \textit{Suphasit So'n Ying}, Lilasat maintained that a woman should not sit patiently at home, waiting for men to come and court her. She might be old

\textsuperscript{20} See novels such as V. Na pramuanmarq's \textit{Prisna} and \textit{Chaosao Kong Anond}, Dokmaisot's \textit{Ni Lae Lok} and \textit{Sam Chai}, K. Surangkanang's \textit{Dokpha}, Suphon Bunnag's \textit{Mai Ruam Ko}, and W. Winichaikun's \textit{Setthi Tin Plao}.

before she could choose a spouse. Instead, the woman should socialize more with many men, carefully observing each man's character. Thus, she would know better whom she should marry. He gave the following reason:

Conventionally, it was a man who approached the woman he loved. A woman could choose a husband only among those who courted her. Thus, she could not expect that she would marry the man she really loved. A woman who marries the first man who courts her can make a wrong choice. She had better socialize with a lot of men so that she can choose the man who suits her most. Certainty, socialization between men and women is new in Thailand. Many may think that it is dangerous for women. But there are appropriate ways for men and women to meet too. A woman can have a party at home, inviting male and female friends. A brother should take his younger sister to social functions and introduce her to his "suitable" friends.22

The author, absorbed with his progressive ideas, concluded that if a woman did not go out and mingle with men, it would be her own fault if she did not find the right man to marry.

As he put it sarcastically,

At present, we have equality between the two sexes. If the woman still ignores her right, it is her own sin. She cannot ask why men do not bring candles, joss sticks, and flowers to pay respect to her and ask for her love at home.23

However, the public was not ready to accept openly the progressive idea of an equal right in courtship. Most articles in magazines and newspapers between 1930 and 1980 spoke against the idea of women taking an active role in

23 Ibid., 237.
mate selection. In the 1930s many writers did not accept the idea of equality between the sexes. They believed in different roles for men and women due to the differences in their natures. According to these writers, men, stronger and bolder, should be leaders; whereas women, weaker and gentler, should be followers. A few authors also cast doubts, without providing any evidence to support their claims, on the rationality and judgment of women.24

Between 1950 and 1980, most journalists who answered readers' love problems in their advice columns in newspapers or magazines were heavily influenced by the nineteenth century work of advice literature, Suphasit So'n Ying. An advice columnist, Krisna Chiraprapha, suggested that it was proper for a woman to phone a man first if it was a business call. But she should not talk too long and in too friendly a manner lest her call be interpreted as a call to court a man. In her opinion, a man would only feel contempt for a woman who approached him first.25


M. R. Kukrit Pramoj, when asked by a teenaged girl whether she could send a letter and her photo to a male friend first, commented that this behavior was too bold for a woman. In Thailand, sending a photo to a non-relative of the opposite sex can imply the sender's special interest in the receiver. According to a biography of Suraphon Sombatcharoen, a leading folk singer during the 1950s, his future wife, Sinu'an, was one of his fans. She sent him a letter and a picture of herself first. Impressed by her beautiful handwriting, her refined writing style, and her beauty, Suraphon fell in love with Sinu'an.

However, since 1980 there have appeared again a few liberal advice writers, such as Seri Wongmontha and Riangfon, who have advocated sexual equality in courtship. As Riangfon pointed out, "Normally, a man should approach a woman, but a woman can take the initiative too. A timid and shy man might be pleased that a woman would approach him. Both men and women should have equal rights to start the courtship."

So far no one has studied how much the idea of equality in courtship is accepted in the Central region. In the mid

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1970s a few women wrote to advice columnists saying that they were thinking of approaching the men they liked first but that fear of social condemnation prevented them from taking any action. This attitude seems to be rooted deeply in the women's mind. In one of his public talks in 1986, a leading psychiatrist, Dr. Udomsin Sisaeng-nam was asked by one listener, "Is it wrong for a single woman to love a man first? What should she do to find out whether he loves her or not?" The doctor's answer was liberal. "The woman should find a way to be closer to him. She doesn't have to wait for the man to move first. There are many opportunities to be close to him, to know him better--go to the same party, join the same sightseeing trip, or attend the same social function. She should not wait for him at home." 

Does this new trend of progressive counselling mean that Central Thai society in the 1990s will sanction female initiation? To answer this question, I believe we should discuss why Thai society has long supported male and opposed female initiation in courtship.


30 Somsi Sukumalanan and Dr. Udomsin Sisaeng-nam, Tham Yang Rai Chwit Khu Chu'ng Yu' Yao [How Can We Prolong Our Marriage?] (Bangkok: Plan Publishing, 1986), p. 44.
Double Standard of Sexual Morality

Social approval of male initiation in courtship likely results from the long-time practice of a double standard of sexual morality in Thai society. Male premarital promiscuity has been allowed and in some groups encouraged as a symbol of masculinity. On the other hand, female virginity prior to marriage is highly valued.

A popular model for Central Thai men in the early part of the twentieth century was Khun Phaen, a legendary hero in the Thai classical work, Khun Chang Khun Phaen. He was a macho man: a great warrior and philanderer at the same time. An abbot who taught him magic and martial arts also advised him, "It is all right to have love affairs with young women, old maids and widows, but do not get involved with other men's wives."31

However, not all Thais agreed with this abbot. Thawi Bunyaket, in letters to his son, taught him not to be a philanderer. He asked his son: "How would you feel if a man took advantage of your sister?"32 However, replicas of Khun Phaen appeared again and again as heroes in popular novels from 1930 to 1980. For instance, Chadet, a hero in one of the most popular novels in the late 1930s, had love

31 Krom Silapako'n, Khun Chang, p. 50. At present many Thai men still believe that if they wear an amulet called Phra Khun Phaen, they will succeed in charming any woman they want to.

32 Thawi Bunyaket, Pho So'n Luk, p. 138.
affairs with many women. One of the famous lines in this novel is when Chadet is asked why he can love two women at the same time. His answer is, "I loyally love Chanthra (his first love), and I romantically love Kusuma (his second love)."

It is interesting that some women admired and accepted the philandering character in men as a quality of manhood. According to Kumut Chandruang, his grandmother boasted that their family was related to the legendary hero, Khun Phaen, because their family was known to have been established in Khun Phaen's home town in Suphanburi. In many novels written by Wimo'n Siripaibun (better-known under her pen name, Tommayanti), the heroes are men who are sexually promiscuous before marriage.

In a 1979 survey of students' attitudes in a Bangkok high school, 50 percent of the students believed that to be accepted in society, men should sometimes drink, smoke, gamble and see prostitutes. Another survey in 1983 found

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34 Kumut Chandruang, My Boyhood in Siam, pp. 7-8.

35 See her works, such as Kha Kho'ng Khon, Sai Chai, and Sut Huachai

36 Nopphorn Phanichsuk, "A Study of Attitudes and Needs of Teachers and Students of Ramkhamhaeng Demonstration School for Sex Education," a research study for Thammasat University, 1979, p. 23.
that the freshmen at Thammasat University thought it was normal for men to have sexual experience before marriage but that it was disgraceful for women to do the same. 

Central Thai women have long been taught to regard their virginity as the most precious possession in their life. "Women are good or valuable only when they are virgins" was the ideal in Suphasit So'n Ying. Parents, teachers, writers, and advice columnists have continued to prescribe this concept to young people.

Why did society attach so much importance to female premarital chastity? A villager in Ratburi explained that if a female member of the family lost her virginity before marriage, the spirits of ancestors who looked after the whole family would feel insulted. The angry spirits might then bring ill fortune to the whole family. Usually the misfortune would come in the form of a sudden illness and the death of a family member.


38 Interview with Sermsong Chanchoem, Khlo'ng Khae, Ratburi, 8 April 1989. According to her, the misfortune happened once in her family due to the misconduct of one family member. She did not understand why the ancestor spirits did not punish directly the wrongdoers. The belief in misfortune caused by female premarital sexual misconduct has been widely spread among the Khmer and Lao villages in Central Thailand. see Kennon Breazeale and Smit Smakarn, A Culture in Search of Survival: The Phuan of Thailand and Laos (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Southeast Asian Studies, 1988), p.163.
Scholars have traditionally viewed the practice of premarital chastity as a social means of controlling premarital pregnancy when other methods of contraception were not available or reliable.\(^{39}\) An advice columnist also presented the view that society taught women to use their virginity as a bargain for marriage. Traditionally a woman had to make the man realize that he could not have her virginity without marrying her first. The concept of premarital chastity also benefited men. When a man "had" the virginity of a woman, the woman would feel that she belonged to that man, and that man alone.\(^{40}\) Luang Wichitwathakan, a popular writer and high ranking government official, once explained the importance of virginity for women as follows:

A husband who "breaks" the virginity of his wife will always honor her and be considerate of her feelings forever. On the contrary, if the husband knows that his wife has lost her virginity before marriage, he will not honor and respect her. Thus, virginity is still important for Thai women. Those who keep themselves chaste will find a good husband.\(^{41}\)

Why has premarital chastity of men not been practiced? A common answer has been that men should have sexual


experience before marriage because men have to lead and women respond. It has reflected the patriarchal character of the Thai family. In addition, in sexual relationships, Central Thai society considers that the man "gains" from the sexual intercourse and the woman "loses." When a woman loses her virginity before marriage, it is a mark of shame for her family. The Thai language has an idiom for an unmarried woman who loses her chastity. She is considered "soiled," and her parents have to "put her in a basket and wash her in the water (like washing dirty vegetables)."

If a woman has many sexual experiences, she is regarded as "sia khon," meaning one who has gone astray. A man is regarded as "sia khon" when he indulges too much in gambling, drinking, or using drugs. Jeremy Kemp, in his study of a village in Phisanulok, noticed that women in Hua Kok were shy of admitting to an outsider any previous marriages which had ended in divorce, whereas men frequently appeared proud of their sexual adventures.

The burden of maintaining chastity has always weighed heavily on women. Though premarital chastity for women has

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been practiced among all levels of Thai society, it has been
more emphasized among well-to-do urban and rural families,
who have enough economic resources to maintain the seclusion
of female family members from non-relative men. Sukanya
Hantrakul, a well-known writer and woman activist, makes a
good observation relating to this moral code as follows:

Lower economic classes have relatively more
relaxed views about sex and marital relations, but
this is certainly not to the extent that
premarital sexual relationships or female
promiscuity is encouraged or accepted. With the
increasing influence of middle-class values in
many spheres of life, working class women's
sexuality is more and more defined and shaped by
the discourse on sex put forth by their middle­
class sisters."

The double standard of male and female premarital
chastity has affected the relations between single men and
women. Women have been taught not to trust male strangers.
They have always lived in fear that all men wanted to take
advantage of their body. To protect their virginity and
their reputation, adolescent women have been advised to keep
their distance from men as much as possible.

A 1903 magazine article gives a vivid picture of male­
female relationships in a noble family. The author, a young
man, had just returned from Europe. One day he took a male

"Sukanya Hantrakul, "Prostitution in Thailand," in
Glen Chandler, Norma Sullivan, and Jan Branson, eds.,
Development and Displacement: Women in Southeast Asia paper
on Southeast Asia no. 18 for the Center of Southeast Asian
Studies, Monash University, Australia, 1988, p. 117.

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friend home. On the porch, they met his younger sister, an
18 year old woman.

At first she tried to run away, but as she could not do so, she sat down, bending her body like a ball, facing downwards, not looking at my friend. I reproached her for not greeting my friend. She did not answer but pressed herself more towards the wall. My friend asked me to let my sister go. When I told this story to Mother, she laughed and pretended to scold me. But when Father learned about it, he was furious. He said he was proud that he had an obedient daughter and scolded me for "using my sister to tempt a man."45

The experience of women 60 years later was not much different. A female doctor remembered the sex education she received at her girls' school as follows:

Teachers taught us not to wear a sleeveless and wide neckline blouse. Not to lick our lips or scratch our arms and legs in public. They told us that these gestures meant we were "haitha" or luring men. We were inviting them to look at that part of our body. Later as some of us moved to a co-ed senior high school, we were very nervous and tense because we had to be on our best behavior all day. A friend, bitten by mosquitoes, dared not scratch her legs for fear that a male friend next to her might think that she was inviting him to look at her legs. Those who had long hair had to braid it or wrap it in a pony tail. Letting your hair hang loose was also considered a way to lure a man.46

This courting norm has not only put much stress on women but has also placed great demands on men as well.

While Central Thai women have been expected to be lady-like,


Thai men have felt social pressure to act manly; i.e., to be bold, to always act as a leader, and to take up occasionally such activities as gambling, drinking, and visiting prostitutes to prove their masculinity. It was a custom among certain groups of male university students that seniors would take freshmen to brothels and pay for them. One informant said that though he did not like to go to brothels, he went there because of the peer pressure.

Government policy in a certain period also contributed to sex differences in Thailand. In the 1940s, the Thai government ordered men and women to have a name appropriate to their gender. For men, their name should have a meaning of strength and bravery. For women, beauty, fragrance, and gentleness. During that period, a now former prime minister; General Kriengsak Chamanan had to change his name from "Somchit," meaning "fulfilled wish," which was considered female, to "Kriengsak," meaning "full of dignity."

The strict code of conduct between the sexes has been gradually relaxed since the mid-1960s when co-ed high schools became common in Central Thailand and more women worked outside home. Men and women, being more accustomed to the opposite sex, learned to be friends at school and at the workplace. They went out in groups together without supervision of the elders. In villages, elder people complained about too much intimacy among young people of different genders. As one villager put it, "Teenagers
nowadays tell their parents they are going to school but don't mention where they are going afterwards. Boys and girls go to town to see movies or go shopping. Parents now are not strict enough. I won't let my children go anywhere after school." ⁴⁷ Two villagers thought that there had been an increase in elopements in their villages because more male and female teenagers were allowed to go out together. ⁴⁸

In 1990, a retired professor in Bangkok witnessed a courting scene in a bus. A teenaged girl and boy sat close to each other. The boy sat still while the girl kept moving her face to touch the boy's cheek. As the professor watched them, her face must have revealed her disapproval of the girl's behavior. When the professor was getting off the bus, the girl said to her in a loud voice: "You're really out of it, Auntie." ⁴⁹

Is it true that female modesty is out of date now? Is premarital chastity for women losing ground? A survey of recent advice literature and sex education textbook provide a different picture. In a 1981 sex education textbook for high school students, the authors discussed relationships

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⁴⁷ Interview with So'n Rattanaprasoet, Khlo'ng Khae, Ratburi, 9 April 1989.


⁴⁹ Somsi Sukumalanan, Satri Phattana, p. 53.

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between genders. One comment concerning female behavior is as follows:

It is very difficult for a woman to behave properly when she is out in public. If she is too reserved, she may be criticized as too arrogant. If she is too friendly, again she is reproached as too easy. . . . Women, therefore, have to be very careful in their relations with friends of the opposite sex. A woman should avoid going out alone with a male friend. She should have a trusted female friend going with her too. This way she can prevent an ugly rumor.\textsuperscript{50}

Somsi Sukumalanan, a retired university professor and advice columnist, gives a perceptive opinion on this issue:

Traditionally, society urged a woman to keep her virginity for her husband. Now, women have more roles in society. They are more independent. Should they still follow the old teaching of acting modesty or should they have the freedom of showing their expression as openly as men can? Some maintain that if a young woman wants to express her feelings in public, she should have the right to do so. They say that everybody does it now. The Westerners do it too. . . . I prefer that young women keep their modesty. Not for others but for themselves. Our body (our chastity) is a valuable possession. Women can be equal to men without behaving like men. They shouldn't use physical contact to express their feelings and emotions.\textsuperscript{51}

Recently there was a controversy over a television sitcom concerning the sexual promiscuity of a female character in the series. The leading female character is an independent single woman who interacts sexually with many men. Many of the audience wanted the government to ban the show,


\textsuperscript{51} Somsi Sukumalanan, \textit{Satri Phattana}, pp. 56-57.
believing that this program would affect the younger audience and cause immoral conduct. It became such a big issue that even Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun remarked that the show did not give a good example to the young audience. Eventually, the program was shifted to a late night time slot.\textsuperscript{52}

In a study of high school students' attitudes in Bangkok in 1989, 39.3 percent of male and female students agreed that men should have sexual experience before marriage. In the case of women, 15.7 percent of the students agreed.\textsuperscript{53} More study is needed before any definite conclusion can be reached. However, in my opinion, this survey reflects the prevalence of the double standard of premarital chastity among the teenagers. Since this double standard persists, Central Thai men and women do not yet have the same right of initiating courtship.

\textsuperscript{52} Matichon, March 1991. This television show was based on a novel, Mae Bia, written by Vanich Charungkit-anand. A SEA award writer, Krisana Asoksin, wrote a novel, Nu'a Nang, concerning a liberal single woman who also indulges in premarital sexual relations with several men. The author illustrates clearly that Thai society does not accept this behavior from women. Plappha, the leading female character, eventually falls in love with a man, who turns her down because of her previous sexual promiscuity.

Conclusion

The study of initiation of courtship clearly illustrates the difference in sex roles in Thai society. Men have always been viewed as leaders and thus the appropriate initiators in courtship whereas women should be the followers. This attitude is shared among all levels of the society.

Though there have long been progressive writers and columnists advocating an equal right of freedom of expression in courtship for both genders, the public continue to regard assertive women in courtship as shameless or of easy virtue. The cause of this social prejudice may result from the double standard of sexual morality, which allows only male sexual promiscuity.

With this double standard, relationships between single men and women have been affected by women's fear and distrust of men. They are afraid that men may want to take sexual advantage of them. More study is needed to understand why society has traditionally valued female chastity higher than male. With this knowledge, it will then be possible for society to reconsider its social norm and possibly abolish the double standard altogether. The abolition of the double standard will not necessarily mean that society is advocating promiscuity for women. Rather both men and women may learn to adjust to a new relationship free of exploitation and intimidation. Thus, Thai men and
women may be able to develop an improved relation of mutual trust and respect.
CHAPTER V

WAYS OF COURTSHIP

Courting has traditionally been an important stage in the mate selection process, particularly in the case of love matches. The relationship between a Thai woman and her lover has usually been based on the woman's chronic fear of the man's insincerity. Parental teaching and old sayings have always warned women of men's desire to take advantage of the female trust. It was during the period of courtship that women could test the sincerity of their suitors and that men could convince the women of their true love.

The aim of this chapter is to study the custom and practice of courtship in Central Thailand from the beginning of the century until the present. Here two topics will be discussed—the development of courtship and attitudes and practices regarding premarital sex in different socio-economic strata.

Development of Courtship

Changing social attitudes toward authority over mate selection have had great effects on methods of courtship in Central Thailand in the twentieth century. The more the society approved of an individual's freedom of choice, the more the young people could socialize openly with the opposite sex. Ways of courtship in the Central region have
thus changed a great deal within the eighty years under study.

**Clandestine Courtship (1900-1930)**

When parental authority over mate selection was still a norm in Thai society from 1900 to the 1930s, courtship which left mate selection to the young people was not socially encouraged. Young people who wanted to choose their own spouses had no choice but to conduct courtship secretly. When ready to marry the woman of his choice, the man would ask his parents for consent and for their help in negotiating marriage conditions with the woman's parents.

There was no special social function arranged for Thai men and women to meet. They met by chance at temples, festivals, markets, in the fields, or at home. In Bangkok in the 1920s and the 30s, young men would stroll in front of theaters, watching pretty women who came to see movies with their elders.¹

As separation of the sexes was observed more strictly among the upper and middle levels of the society, men in these strata found it more difficult to be in touch with the women they fancied. M. R. Kukrit Pramoj's novel, *Si Phaen-din*, provides a vivid picture of aristocrats' courtship in the early twentieth century, as shown below.

Ploy, the heroine, was a nobleman's daughter sent to the palace to be educated as a palace maiden. She was

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¹ Yot Wacharasathian, *Khut Chak Adit*, p. 163.
courted twice. Her first suitor was the elder brother of her best friend, whom she had known since she was young. Childhood intimacy turned to love when they grew older. The man sent her, through his sister, gifts and love letters composed in verse, which were called in Thai, Plaeng Yao or long songs. Modesty forbade Ploy from answering his love letters. But she let him know her tender feelings toward him by accepting his gifts and sending him food and a scented blanket when he travelled up-country. The relationship ended sadly when the man later married a peasant woman pregnant with his child.

Her second suitor and eventual husband, Khun Prem, was a royal page. He first saw Ploy at a palace play. Impressed with her beauty and manners, he made efforts to meet her many times when Ploy, with her friends and the elders, went shopping near the palace and during a trip to the Summer Palace in Ayutthaya. In addition, he made friends with her elder brother, and through him, showered her with presents. Though they saw each other, they never really exchanged words. Soon Khun Prem's aunt came to ask Ploy's royal patron for permission for Ploy to marry Khun Prem.²

Biographies of the noble and middle-class people in this period show the same patterns of courtship as described in Si Phaendin. As socialization between young people of

² M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, Si Phaendin, 1:118-446.
the opposite sex was not widely practiced, it occasionally occurred in the 1920s that a few married couples did not know each other intimately before the wedding day. Sawat Osathanukro', a merchant who later became one of Bangkok's millionaires, told his grandson that he watched his future wife, Khunying Lo'm, every day as she walked past his house to school, with a relative and a male servant. In her youth, Khunying Lo'm was not healthy and often went to see a doctor. The doctor, a friend of Sawat, knowing that Sawat was in love with this patient of his, would call and tell him when she would visit the clinic. Khunying Lo'm, embarrassed to see Sawat at the clinic, often scolded her servant in front of him.

In those days, a lady was not supposed to talk to a stranger, particularly a man. When seeing Sawat in the waiting room, Khunying Lo'm must have known that Sawat came to see her. Her scolding the servant in front of him was a way to show her displeasure towards him and to tell him that she was not encouraging his courtship.³

Another example from the 1920s is the courtship between Luang Phisutphanichlak(Phisut) and his future wife, Khun Thawi, the daughter of a diplomat. Luang Phisut, the son of a nobleman, had graduated from England and continued his

³ They married in 1923. Khunying Lo'm was 22. Akrawat Osathanukro', "Interview Sawat Osathanukro'," in Anuso'n Ngan Phraratchathan Ploeng Khunying Lo'm Osathanukro' Cremation volume for Khunying Lo'm Osathanukro' n.p. 182
family's tradition by becoming a government official. Luang Phisut's aunt was married to a relative of Khun Thawi. This aunt suggested that Luang Phisut go to see Khun Thawi. She would ask Khun Thawi's mother when the family would go to see movies at a particular theater. Then she would take Luang Phisut to see the woman.

Later, when the aunt knew that the family was going to the Phramen ground, she took Luang Phisut along to see Khun Thawi again. In that period, in the evening, rich people would drive to the Phramen ground and park their car in front of the Front Palace's wall, which is now part of Thammasat University. The men would get out to watch the various amusements such as kite flying and ball playing. The women, meanwhile, would stay behind in the car. The roof would be opened, allowing them to see the amusements from afar, and, more importantly, to be viewed by the young men passing by.

Not long after that the aunt arranged for Luang Phisut's father to invite Khun Thawi's family on a train trip up-country. Khun Thawi was curious that on that day her mother had urged her to dress up and put on a lot of jewelry. At the station, both families met, but not many words were exchanged. Not long after that train ride, Luang
Phisut's father sent a go-between to ask for Khun Thawi's hand. 4

Though there was more intimacy in courtship between cousins, relatives, and neighbors than between strangers, even in these more intimate settings, courtship still had its clandestine elements. For example, Nu'athip Samerasut, a former school teacher, wrote on her 36th wedding anniversary that though she and her future husband, Amnuay, were cousins,

our elders did not let us go out together. We could discreetly meet and talk together when the elders played cards. My aunt would run to warn us when the elders stopped playing. She did not want the elders to come and see us together. When I sang for the elders, Nuay would come and listen. Sometimes he put his hand under a satin blanket to touch the tip of my fingers (covered by the blanket.) 5

In the 1920s women were taught not to let a man except their father or brother hold their hands. To let Amnuay touch her fingertips was a rather daring way for Nu'athip to reveal her love for him.

Usually the peasants and other people in the lower level of society had more intimate courtship than their

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4 They married in 1928. Luang Phisut was 25. They had their own separate house given by Luang Phisut's father. Anuso'n Nai Ngan Phraratchathan Ploeng Sop Luang Phisutphanichlak [In Memory of Luang Phisutphanichlak] Cremation volume for Luang Phisutphanichlak (M.L. Poemyot Issarasena) 26 October 1985, p. 44.

counterparts in the upper and middle levels. Their working conditions permitted the mingling of the sexes. Harvest time was also the season of romance, for men and women would meet in the fields and the threshing grounds. The man could later visit the woman he was interested in at her house. As a farm woman in Lopburi recalled:

A man could come and talk with me at my house in the evening. But there had to be other people around, usually my female friends. My father was very strict. No men were allowed to be in the house; they had to be outside, or under the house where my mother sat weaving.  

Festivals such as Buddhist holidays and Songkran or Thai New Year's Day were a few occasions when lower-class men and women mingled freely. During the festivals, there were many activities which permitted interaction between single young men and women, such as dancing, singing, and playing games. Both men and women would put on their best clothes; women wore their jewelry. During the dancing, a woman or sometimes two or three of them would step into the dancing circle and sing a short song. When they finished, men who were interested in these women would answer in rhyme and step out to dance with them. On New Year's Day, there was a tradition of throwing water on one other. Usually

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6 Interview with Pliw Sangwan (1912-), Ban Satoei, Lopburi, 3 August 1989. Pliw married Yot when she was 20. It was an arranged married because Pliw did not love her husband before. They have 8 children and are now very well-off.

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women chose to throw water at the particular men they liked.  

In the 1930s, as literacy rose, a few men secretly sent love poems to the women they admired. As a 75 year old farm woman recalled:

These admirers were men from other villages. They sent me love poems, written on a small piece of paper and folded into a very small piece. Usually they sent them through boys in my neighborhood. I had to hide them carefully so that my parents wouldn't find them. If found, Father would undoubtedly have beaten me for receiving love poems from men. They always wrote that they loved me and wanted to see me again.  

As a boy in Uthai Thani, Kumut Chandruang was once a messenger of a love letter. His father's clerk, Muang Song, was in love with Kumut mother's maid, Nang Onn. Muang Song asked him to carry a note to Nang Onn. "Please guard it as your secret," he asked. As Nang Onn did not know how to read, Kumut read it for her.

In this world, everything has a companion.
Even the sun has the moon,
The day has the night.
When I see a pair of blue birds
On the tree branch jumping gaily,
And hear their serenade, a happy love song,
My heart becomes lonely for someone
to be by my side.
Since the first moment I met you, I have nourished my hope

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7 See more details of peasants' dancing and games in Kumut Chandruang, My Boyhood In Siam, pp. 90-98, 109-124.

8 Interview with Chaem Prasomthong(1914-), Ban Satoei, Lopburi, 4 August 1989. Chaem married a man of her parents' choice. At first she was reluctant to marry but her mother asked her, "Do you want me to farm the land alone?" The couple have 6 children.
That you are my "someone,"
The only one I wish for my life-long companion.  

Kumut did not tell Onn that Muang Song borrowed these words from a famous old song. He told her instead that they probably had come from Muang Song's heart. Onn was thrilled. The lovers met at a farm nearby that night.  

Peasants who had developed a special feeling toward each other could meet more privately. Their meeting place might be behind a haystack at night like Muang Song and Nang Onn. Or there might be the village canal where they took water buffaloes to bathe. Behind the tall grass, the couple would hug or kiss and talk about their future.

The period of courtship among all classes of young people was usually short; it lasted for only a few months. The couples found it difficult to keep their secret for long, particularly when they had to depend on go-betweens such as servants and hair-dressers. The woman would ask her boyfriend to send his elders to ask her parents for her hand

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9 Kumut Chandruang, My Boyhood In Siam, p. 121.

10 Ibid.

11 Mai Muang Doem, Plae kao[The Scar] (Bangkok: Soemwit Bannakan, 1977). Though Mai Muang Doem himself was from an aristocratic family, his knowledge of the peasantry was widely accepted by his contemporary writers as he travelled far and wide in the Central plains.
as soon as possible, before their relationship became known.\textsuperscript{12}

\textbf{Going out with Chaperons (1930s-1960s)}

Thai men and women traditionally did not mingle in social gatherings. Each group would gather within the same gender and stay separate from the other. At a folk dance, women would assemble at one end of the dancing ground and men at the other end. They would dance together and, at the end, return to their own groups. In town, taking a tramway to school, schoolgirls usually sat in the first class car while schoolboys rode in the second class. When a married couple went to a party, the husband would sit among the male guests and the wife would be with the female.\textsuperscript{13}

In the early twentieth century, the custom of social separation of the sexes was criticized vigorously by a few young men educated in Europe. In the mid 1920s, with approval of King Vajiravudh, a former graduate from England himself, social mingling between the opposite sexes was gradually practiced among the nobility and the well-to-do. Single women were permitted to participate more in public functions, such as going to exhibitions and Western-style


\textsuperscript{13} Kumut Chandruang, \textit{My Boyhood In Siam}, p. 112; Khunying Ditthakanphakdi, \textit{Hok Ro'p Haeng Chiwit}, p. 27; Khru Thep, "Kan Samakhom[Socialization]," \textit{Thai Khasem} 9 (April, 1932):1348.
dances, acting in plays, and selling crafts and food in the charity fairs. Yet, never did they go alone. They had to have as their chaperons either elder married siblings, relatives, female friends, or old servants, keeping them company.\textsuperscript{14}

Since parental authority over mate selection started to decline in the mid 1920s and more people were demanding freedom to make their own choice, the mode of courtship consequently changed. The need to know the prospective mates required more socialization. In cities, with the proliferation of public places, such as shops, theaters, restaurants, and charity fairs, men and women were not satisfied to conduct their courtship only at home. Going out with a chaperon was first practiced among the upper and well-to-do classes in the mid 1920s and slowly spread to the lower levels of society.\textsuperscript{15}

It was not necessary for the women to provide the chaperons. Sometimes, men arranged for their own chaperons, having their sisters go out with them and their girlfriends. This way, the girlfriend could contact her boyfriend through

\textsuperscript{14} Princess Siriratbusabong, \textit{Phraprawat Somdet}, p. 10; Knight, \textit{The Treasured One}, pp. 52, 124; Keo Kanchana, "Nai Ngan Poed Sapan Phraram Hok [Rama Six Bridge Opening Day]," \textit{Suan Akso'n} 1 (January, 1926):713.

the chaperon. For example, when Chaloem Sivaraksa, an upper-middle-class businessman, courted his girlfriend, Suphan, after they met at Suphan's school fair, the couple usually went out with Lo'm, one of Chaloem's elder sisters. When Chaloem did not visit her for a few days, Suphan, angry and deflated, sent a complaining post-card addressed to Lo'm. The greeting was "Dear Phi," which in Thai ambiguously refers to either "older brother" or "older sister." But the content of the letter reveals clearly that she was actually sending the message to her boyfriend.

Benchamarachuthit School January 3, 1924
Dear Phi:
How are you? Haven't heard from you. Are you so sick or so busy that you can't answer my letter or come to see me? I had no idea that you were so unkind. From Dec 30, I've been waiting, but nobody has come. No letter either. I can't go anywhere. I can't do anything, just thinking of you and wondering if you think of me or not. What a disaster! I'm crazy alone. I would appreciate your answer.¹⁶

In the 1940s in Bangkok and provincial capitals, going out with chaperons became a common practice among the well-to-do. When courting moved out into the public, it was the man who took care of the expenses. He paid for the meals, tickets, fares, and often for the merchandise bought by the woman and her chaperon.

¹⁶ S. Sivaraksa, Chuang Haeng Chiwit, p. 124. The couple married in 1929. They had one son and later divorced because Chaloem took a minor wife, who was one of Suphan's cousins.
Between 1930 and 1960, many women in the upper and middle levels of Thai society did not have professions which they could enter after they finished school. Courtship in this period put men in the position of providers for women. It seemed to foretell the role of man as the breadwinner after marriage.

During courting, men had to prove, in addition to their sincerity towards their sweethearts, their ability to work and earn for their future family. Among peasants, when going out was not frequent, suitors were judged by their capacity for hard work. The peasant women might speak to young men who came to help their family during the harvest, "I adore a strong man. I won't marry anyone unless he cuts one hundred bushels a night." 

In 1943, under the national policy to increase marriages and population, social gatherings between the sexes, such as circle dancing at night, were encouraged throughout the country. But the peasants were not eager to accept the new mode of courtship. Frequent socialization between individual male and female couples was not common in the rural country. Men and women continued to depend on exchanging their feelings through letters. One school-

18 Kumut Chandruang, My Boyhood in Siam, p. 120.
teacher remembered receiving love letters from her boyfriend, a teacher in a school across the river, through a female vendor who crossed the river frequently to sell her wares.  

The common meeting place for boyfriends and girlfriends was still usually the woman's home. In the 1950s, there always had to be someone around when the young couple met. And even though friends or relatives would volunteer as chaperons, the couple's parents would not allow the young people to go out as often as they would like to.  

A housewife in Khlong Khae told me that she and her boyfriend never met alone. "He always came to see me at my house. We were never allowed to be alone. Either my sister or my neighbors would be around. We never went to see movies together."  

Dating (1970s-present)  

Dating was not new in Central Thai society in the 1970s. By the late 1920s, dating was already practiced in

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20 Interview with Soemsong Chanchoem, Khlong Khae, Ratburi, 8 April 1989.


22 Interview with Somsri Waiyakit (1932-), Klo'ng Khae, Ratburi, 7 April 1989. Somsri married her husband in 1947. They have 8 children.
Thailand but only within a small group of elite described as "the salt water group," which referred to those who had crossed the ocean to experience Western culture firsthand. They held parties where men and women mixed amicably. In this group, women could go out with their male friend without any chaperon. They went shopping, driving, dancing, golfing, or playing tennis. Physical contact, like holding hands and even kissing hands, was permitted.\textsuperscript{23}

It should be noted, however, that not all the people who went abroad would practice going out without a chaperon. Actually, many disapproved of dating. "Modern" women, not men, became the target of criticism. Women who went out alone with their boyfriends were viewed as too loose. In a novel by Dokmaisot, a mother shows her contempt toward her son's girlfriend because the woman always goes out with him without any chaperons.\textsuperscript{24}

Between the 1930s and 1960s, the public continued to frown upon dating. It was still a big issue in the 1960s for a woman to go out alone with a man, even though that man was a friend, a boyfriend, or a co-worker. Influential writer M.R. Kukrit Pramoj advised that a woman should not go out alone with any man but her fiance. A college student asked an advice columnist if she could take a ride home with

\textsuperscript{23} See novels by Dokmaisot such as, \textit{Nung Nai Roi}, \textit{Satru Kho'ng Chao Lo'n}, and \textit{Sam Chai}.

\textsuperscript{24} See Dokmaisot, \textit{Phudi}.

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a male friend and was advised not to do so. A novel by a popular writer in the 1960s tells stories of young women taken to motels by in-laws or bosses who gave them a ride. One woman was forced to sleep with her uncle-in-law at the motel.25

However, economic and social changes after the Second World War which affected the structure of society resulted in the transformation of courtship. Economic growth and government administrative expansion since the 1950s have created a great demand in both the professional and labor sectors of the work force. To supply the labor need, more women were given opportunities for education and encouraged to work outside the home. Before the war, educated women had started to work as teachers, nurses, and telephone operators. Since 1950, more professions have been opened for women, such as medicine, university teaching, social work, and government administration in every ministry. There has also been work for female laborers in factories, construction, and various industries.26


As women in larger numbers studied and worked side by side with men, the custom of separation by gender gradually lost ground. The notion of platonic friendship became more acceptable to a greater number of young people. In the 1970s, the liberal ideas of democracy and sexual equality became widespread among university and even high school students. Women were regarded as being capable of taking care of their own welfare, which included their body, their emotions, and their reputation. Confronting a man, a woman of the 1970s no longer felt as shy and nervous as her sister in the early twentieth century.\(^27\)

By the 1970s, the individual's right of choice had already replaced parental authority over mate selection for two decades. Men and women felt it was their right to go out with the person they liked and learn more about his or her character. Since the 1960s, increasing numbers of students and workers have moved from their homes in the country to stay in Bangkok and other provincial capitals for further study and employment opportunities in factories and industries. These students and workers enjoyed freedom from strict parental supervision, as most of them moved from home to stay in dormitories or share rented houses with friends.

\(^{27}\) Klum Phuying Thammasat University, Thang Lu'ak [Choices] (Bangkok: Mitsayam, 1974), p.58-70.
or relatives near schools and work places. Benchawan Phuho'y, a 24 year old village woman in Khlo'ng Khae, worked for a year in a canned food factory in Bangkok. She told me about her life away from her parents.

I rented a room in my friend's home. She was from the same village, married, and worked in the same factory. Actually she was the one who told me about this job... After work, the foreman often took us, some of the workers, to discotheques, to movies, or shopping centers. On Sundays, he drove a pickup and took six or seven of us sightseeing. He was 25 or 26 years old. One of his relatives was a shareholder of the factory.

Newspaper columnists and educators also pinpointed Western movies and musical videos as major influences on changes in teenagers' attitudes towards dating and courtship as well as ways of dating. Raised in the affluent society after the war, young people since the 1970s have had more recreational places to go to, such as shopping malls, cinemas, coffee shops, fast food restaurants, zoos, amusement parks, skating rinks, discotheques, and night clubs. Holding hands between young couples is not uncommon in those places. In a 1983 handbook for dating, the author

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29 Interview with Benchawan Phuho'y (1965-), Khlo'ng Khae, Ratburi, 8 April 1989. At the time of the interview, she told me that she had moved back home because she had quarrelled with her friend, the landlady. She is still single.
talks about sex education and kissing and approves of a woman's accepting a date from a man she met in a bus.³⁰

Dating has been widespread among all levels of society. With the improvement in transportation, young men in the village, in addition to visiting their girlfriends at their homes, often invite them to restaurants and movies in towns.³¹ Likewise, temple fairs near factories have remained social centers for migrant workers in Bangkok and provincial towns. According to Phayao Songkhacho'n, a 22 year old female worker in a plastic flower plant in Phrapra-daeng, Pathum Thani, men introduce themselves to women they are interested in, asking for their names and addresses. As she told the story:

There are a lot of factories in Phrapradaeng. There are a lot of rooming houses and food stalls and small restaurants for workers. I made many friends at food stalls or at the restaurants I visited. Sometimes, when there was a fair at the nearby temple, we would go there. Men would approach us, ask for our names and where we worked. Usually my friends and I would chat with them. And they would walk us home. . . . How did I meet my boyfriend? He is a soldier, a draftee from Roi-et. He is stationed now in Bangkok. I met him first when he visited one of his friends, who happened to be my neighbor.³²


³¹ Kaufman, Bangkuad, p. 227.

³² Interview with Phayao Songkhacho'n. It is not uncommon for a man to introduce himself first to a group of young women at the fair. Suni Kanhali, a 40 year old schoolteacher, told me that when she was a teenager going with a group of friends to hear a band concert in the provincial town of Ratburi, a soldier came up and introduced
Later the men ask the women out, first in the company of friends, and later, if they become serious, alone. Letters are sometimes exchanged. If interested, the woman might exchange photographs with the man. In a popular country hit of the early 1980s, "Chanthana Thi Rak [My Dear Chanthana]," a male worker writes a letter to Chanthana, a cloth-factory worker he is interested in. Here is an excerpt from the song.

Please forgive me for my poor handwriting. I don't have much education. If I said anything that wasn't pleasant or annoyed you, forgive me. I'm from the woods; I don't know how to talk sweetly, but I'm sincere. I send you my photo with my signature as a new year's present for you. If you hate me, read the message on the back of the photo, and throw it away. Or tear it or burn it; don't keep it to irritate your eyes. But if you pity me, please send me your photo. So I can look at it in lieu of you. Please sign the photo, "Given from the heart of a female cloth-factory worker." I will worship it everyday. . . .

Like their counterparts in other social strata, male workers always take care of all expenses during the dates.

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himself to the group. He asked for their names and addresses and later turned up at her house. The soldier she mentioned is now her husband, Khwanchai. Interview with Suni Kanhali, Khlo'ng Khae, Ratburi, 5 April 1989.

33 Suchat Thiantho'ng, "Chanthana Thi Rak," in the Committee of the National Culture, Ku'ng Satawat, p. 113. See also other modern country songs in Winai Siriseriwan and Suriphan Chamkhamso'n, "Thai Popular Folk Songs and Their Reflection of Thai Culture and Society," a scholarly paper for a B.A. from the Faculty of Archaeology, Silapako'n University, 1981.

34 Interview with Phayao Songkhacho'n. However, in 1979, because of the increasing cost of living, dating handbook talks about women help sharing the cost of dating. See Dutladda, Silapa Kan Natphob, p 100.
Nonetheless, dating in the 1970s and 1980s has usually been practiced by those in a serious relationship. Men and women have preferred to go out in the company of friends when they are in the stage of observing one another. Women tend to take a more serious view of dating than men as they have to keep their reputation intact. Women who date a lot with several different men might be suspected of being too intimate with men and considered loose, if not just flirtatious. Some young men date because it is considered macho to have a girlfriend. Some young women date because they feel flattered to have admirers.\textsuperscript{35}

While some young people may feel this way, a majority of adults view dating as a serious preparation for marriage and not as a popularity contest. Parents and teachers have encouraged the young people not to date until they have finished their education and can earn their own living. One male informant told me jokingly that, "When I was in high school, my mother told me, 'Don't have a girlfriend while you're a student.' Now I'm studying for my Ph.D., and she asked me once when I'm going to have a girlfriend."\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{35} Interview with Toi Bukkana, Honolulu, 1 August 1990; Interview with Po' Nathaphong, Honolulu, 1 August 1990; Suwani Sukhuntha, \textit{Thale Ru' Im} [Bottomless Sea] 2 vols (Bangkok: Khlangwitthaya, 1972).

\textsuperscript{36} Interview with Sethapho'ng Lekhawattana, Honolulu, Hawaii, 23 January 1990. See also Suree Pothongsunun, \textit{A Comparison of American and Thai Family Relationships} a paper in a theses and scholarly paper division in Thammasat University Main Library, n.p. n.d., p. 25.
When Courtship Fails: Abduction and Black Magic

When courtship fails, some men turn to violence or black magic to win the women they love. Abduction or kidnaping was not uncommon in rural area from the beginning of the century until the 1960s. It occurred sporadically even in the mid-1970s. Kidnaping has always been a crime, and some abductors have been imprisoned. Thus kidnaping has tended to be only the last resort when the man in love feared that the woman of his desire would marry another suitor. However, it should be noted that some abductions were staged elopements. The man, wanting to preserve the reputation of his sweetheart, would make it appear that she was coerced and did not cooperate in the project.

Usually men would kidnap women from different villages, not from their own village. Regarding abduction as an adventure, men saw no crime in helping a friend in love kidnap the woman he desired. Fu'n Imsam-ngan, an old villager in Promburi, told me proudly that one of his brothers got his wife through abduction. His story is very interesting.

One of my elder brothers got his wife by abduc­tion. Actually he didn't mean to abduct that


38 A few couples decided to elope because their parents did not approve of their marriage, or the man did not have enough money to pay the bride-price. See Piker, Peasant Community, p. 80.
woman for himself. . . . A friend of my elder brother loved a woman from another village, but it seemed that she didn’t love him. So that man wanted to kidnap her. He asked some of his friends, including my elder brother, for help. One day there was a temple fair. The woman and her friends went to the fair and stayed late at night. My elder brother and his friends, eight of them, hid behind trees along a narrow path leading to the woman’s home, waiting for the woman on her way back. It was really dark. When the small group of women walked past the spot, they attacked them, grabbed one of the women, and hurried back to their village. It turned out that they had kidnapped the wrong woman. She wasn’t the woman they intended to kidnap. Everybody was stunned. The kidnapped woman cried and asked, ‘Who will marry me now?’ They didn’t know what to do. All except my brother were already married. As my brother was the only bachelor in the group, he decided to marry her.39

In the early twentieth century, some kidnappers used swords and horses. But later in the 1960s, kidnappers used guns and cars. At Ban Noi, Ayutthaya, two kidnapings occurred in the 1960s. In both cases the young man and a few male friends, all armed, waylaid the chosen woman on a lonely path, fired their guns into the air, and bundled the lady off in a conveniently waiting car.40

After the abduction was completed, a few days later, a reconciliation procedure would be arranged. The man’s parents or elders would approach the woman’s parents, ask for pardon, and offer a substantial bride-price as

39 Interview with Fu’n Imsam-ang (1912-), Phromburi, Singburi, 28 June 1989. Fu'n's brother and his wife still live together.

40 Piker, A Peasant Community, p. 80.; Interview with Fu'n Imsam-ang. Interview with Taew Mali, Bangkok, 7 September 1989.
forgiveness money. The woman's parents, seeing that their daughter and her reputation had already been blemished by the abductor, would have no other choice but to forgive him. In some cases, marriage ceremonies were held afterwards to save the honor of the woman's parents.\(^4^1\)

It often happened that in the case of marriage by abduction, the couple would not stay with the wife's parents as other newlywed couples would usually do. They stayed in the man's village or on another plot of land in the wife's home village. It should be noted that, whether the reconciliation was successful or not, couples resulting from kidnapping were regarded as fully married by those among whom they resided, just as is the case with common law marriages.\(^4^2\) The abducted women usually had no choice but to comply. Some later came to love their husbands and had many children.\(^4^3\)

In addition to the use of physical force when courtship failed, some would turn to the practice of black magic,

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\(^4^1\) Piker, *A Peasant Community*, p. 80; Interview with Pin Ratanaprasit. In some cases, the kidnappers would wait for a few years until a child was born before coming to ask for forgiveness from the woman's parents.

\(^4^2\) Interview with Pin Ratanaprasit; Interview with Lamchiak Wichitphan; and Piker, *A Peasant Community*, p. 81.

\(^4^3\) Pin Ratanaprasit of Khlo'ng Khae, Ratburi, told me that one of her younger sisters was abducted by a co-worker from a jar factory on her way home. Now they married for 18 years, having three children. The husband was very hardworking and attentive to his wife's desire. Interview with Pin Ratanaprasit; See also Kaufman, *Bangkhuad*, p. 151.
which could be practiced by both men and women. In the 1950s, in Bangkhuad, a village 25 kilometers from Bangkok, one woman of 60 who was married to a young man of 30 was suspected by some members of the village of having used special medicinal charms to win her husband. 44

On another occasion the mother of a young girl from Bangtoej, a village near Bangkhuad, complained to the abbot that her daughter was under the spell of a young man who had tried unsuccessfully to court her, and who had stolen her undershirt while it was hanging out to dry. When later he returned it, the daughter put it on and fell in love with him. The mother asked the abbot to break the spell, which he did by using a special incantation. 45

The belief in black magic has declined with the coming of scientific progress through western style education. Many middle-aged and teenaged villagers, when asked about the practice of black magic, showed much doubt or uttered disbelief. Yet a number of villagers interviewed, as well as some city dwellers, still believe in black magic. One informant claimed that his uncle knew a lot about black magic and wanted to pass it on to him but that he refused to


45 Ibid.
learn, believing that this knowledge was dangerous and sinful.  

When the fear of black magic was strong during the first half of the twentieth century, it influenced the behavior of women during courtship. Mothers taught their young daughters not to be impolite to any suitors for fear that the angry and upset suitors would take revenge by using black magic upon them. Women tried not to be physically close to men, for men could put magic oil over their arm; and they would fall madly in love with those men. They had to be very careful with their clothes so that men could not take an article of clothing and put magic on it. 

It seems to me that black magic has been used by a woman's friends and relatives as an explanation for her explicit displays of love towards a man, which has generally been considered uncommon and improper conduct for women. For example, a mother said that her eloped daughter was charmed by the magic potion put in a love letter sent to

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46 Interview with Worasak Chanchem, Klo'ng Khae, Ratburi, 8 April 1989.

47 In Thailand dead bodies are not often immediately disposed of and are kept embalmed for future cremation at a convenient time. A sort of oil exudes from the dead body particularly due to the embalming. It is believed that if a man collects a small quantity of this oil and manage to throw a bit of it on the girl who is not responding to his love overtures, the woman will immediately return his love or be mad. See P. C. Roy Chaudhury, Folk Tales of Thailand (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1977), p. 14.
Recently, women's fear of men using black magic to lure the women they love has declined immensely. References about the practice of black magic now deal more with minor wives who use magic to charm their husbands. It appears as if black magic is also used by major wives to explain unusual irresponsible behavior on the part of their once well-behaved husbands.  

Premarital Sex

Traditional advice literature in Central Thailand frowned upon premarital sex. However, evidence reveals that the practice of premarital sex has existed in every stratum of the society. It should be noted that some social strata have dealt with premarital sex differently from others.  

Social Attitudes Towards Premarital Sex

Traditional advice literature, such as Suphasit So’n Ying, did not approve of premarital sex. Interestingly, though, in such nineteenth-century classical works, such as Khun Chang Khun Phaen, Phra Aphaimani, and Inao, heroes and heroines usually engaged in premarital sex and were considered husband and wife without any marriage ceremony or consent of the women's parents. This is true in many contemporary folk tales as well. Many of these fictional characters--brave princes and faithful princesses--were

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48 Interview Thiemchit Thongthi, Ban Satoei, Lopburi, 4 August 1989.

49 See Yok Burapha, Mo' Sane [Witch Doctor] (Bangkok: Kaniso'n, 1985)
often regarded as role models for the readers and listeners. A Thai academic commented that the theme of premarital sex in Thai folk tales and literature may have been an outlet against the strict moral code regarding sexuality in Thai society.\(^50\)

In addition, one of the major characteristics of these nineteenth century romances and folktales is the graphic depiction of love scenes, called, "miraculous scenes [bot mahatsachan]," between the young lovers. The poets would narrate a scene in which the lovers were intimately involved. They would relate the lovers' kissing and fondling of each other. However, the sexual intercourse scene was never explicitly mentioned. The display of sexual intercourse was always implied or symbolized by comparisons to natural phenomena, such as a bee fondling a blooming flower, a fish swimming through an underwater cave, or a fighting tournament between two flying kites. A few poems about this kind of love scene were so beautifully composed that they were turned into songs. These splendid love scenes gave readers the impression that premarital sex between the lovers was a wonderful and natural bonding.\(^51\)

In my opinion, the narrators and authors of this literary genre did not really approve of or condemn premarital sex between the couples. They seemed to

\(^{50}\) Pichit Aknit, *Wannakam Thai*, p. 223.

\(^{51}\) Ibid.
understand that it was something which naturally happened between two lovers. Yet, they would accept premarital sex only when it took place between those who would finally marry. One folktale from the Northeastern region clearly illustrates this point. A princess had secretly slept with her fiance. However, there was a grave misunderstanding between her mother and her fiance's mother. As the parents were angry, they broke up the engagement of their children. The princess's mother, being upset and knowing nothing of the princess' secret sexual relationship, arranged to marry her to another prince. The poor princess could not confess her sexual indiscretion to her mother, or submissively marry another man. Eventually she committed suicide.\(^{52}\)

Contrary to the nineteenth-century literature, heroes in most twentieth-century novels and short stories do not have any premarital sex with their heroines. The most intimate display of affection between heroes and heroines is kissing and fondling. Love scenes are not common. They often happen between a hero and a corrupted woman or between unscrupulous couples. The determination of the heroine to keep her chastity and the firmness of the hero to respect

the heroine's purity before marriage are praised as most valuable virtues.\(^{53}\)

It seems that the message against premarital sex in the twentieth-century romances has been due to changes in courtship. Since the mid 1920s, separation of the sexes has diminished. Society has allowed more intimate socialization between men and women. However, the value of female chastity before marriage has persisted. Therefore, in order to protect female chastity, premarital sex must be strongly denounced and a stricter self-control in both men and women must be advocated. The method most commonly used to prevent premarital sex is teaching young women that yielding their chastity to their sweetheart before marriage only makes the man feel contempt for them. Here is an example of these preachings:

A pretty woman who allows any man who goes out with her "to know" her very well actually makes herself worthless in that man's eyes. A good man, who is not a rake, won't want to marry or honor a woman whom he can "know very well" very quickly. Certainly no man wants a loose woman to be the mother of his child. If a marriage has to happen because of "an unexpected necessity," then this will often cause the husband to have contempt for his wife.\(^{54}\)

\(^{53}\) See samples of these novels and short stories in K. Surangkhanang's *Kha Kho'ng Chiwit Sao* [The Valued of A Virgin Life], Chuwong Chayachinda's *Tamrup Rak* [Love's Lesson] and Chamloei Rak [Love Defendant], and Suphakso'n's *Chiwit Rak Naksuksa* [Students' Love Lives].

It might not be wrong to say that this attitude against premarital sex in the twentieth-century literary world reflects the perspective of the upper and middle levels of the society, as these two groups have always been the authors and readers of literature. This anti-premarital-sex view has also been dominant among the peasants. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, villagers have always regarded premarital sexual conduct on the part of female family members as a disgrace and bad luck for the family as a whole. In addition, in a 1988 nationwide survey of 15-24 year-old people's attitudes toward premarital sex, 91.5 percent of young people in rural areas were against premarital sex. In urban areas, the percentage of those who were against premarital sex decreased to 87.7.\textsuperscript{55}

Noteworthily, the same research reveals the correlation between higher education and more acceptance of premarital sex relations. More young people who had only elementary level education (92.4\%) disapproved of premarital sex than those who had senior high school education (87.4\%).\textsuperscript{56} Another survey of 568 university students, natives of Bangkok and migrants from provinces, shows that more students approved of premarital sex relations between

\textsuperscript{55} Pichit Phithakthepsombat, \textit{Yaowachon Thai}, pp. 26, 47.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., p. 45.
engaged couples than they did between girlfriends and boyfriends.  

Premarital Sex in Reality

In spite of social censure, evidence shows that premarital sex has existed in both urban and rural areas among all strata in twentieth-century Central Thailand. Court records show that premarital sex took place among city dwellers in the early twentieth century. From advice columns in newspapers and magazines since the 1940s, we learn that premarital sex between boyfriends and girlfriends has existed. In 1956, Khun Lilasat, an advice columnist, wrote that a large number of female readers had told him that they had had premarital sex with their boyfriends or intended husband. 

However, it is not possible to precisely determine the magnitude of premarital sexual practices in the society at large. In the 1988 nationwide survey mentioned earlier, 17.1 percent of young people in Thailand admitted that they had had premarital sex. The researcher, however, thought that the percentage might be lower than the actuality. 


58 Thammasat Samai 1 (1897):274-80.

59 Khun Lilasatsuntho'n, Khai Panha Chiwit 2, pp. 113, 182, 396

60 Phichit Phithakthepsombat, Yaowachon Thai, p. 50.
Many research works have found that Thai men practice premarital sex more than the women. The result is not surprising as Thai society has always tolerated male sexual promiscuity as discussed in the previous chapter. Urban men could visit prostitutes for their sexual outlets. Village men could have premarital sexual experiences with young women in other villages and/or with spinster women in their own village and other villages. As means of transportation improved and the cash economy expanded after the 1950s, cavorting with prostitutes in provincial towns or in Bangkok became more and more a pattern for villagers, though fear of venereal disease was a strong deterrent.\(^6^1\)

In his study of Thai society in the 1950s, John E. De Young gives the impression that young villagers in that period did not practice premarital sex.\(^\) According to him, young men did not touch a girl before marriage. Only the most daring young man would attempt to brush the hands of his sweetheart with his fingertips while dancing. Some men visited prostitutes in the market towns or provincial capital. They visited only when they were in the army and then only in a group when they had been drinking.\(^6^2\) In my opinion, De Young's observation about villagers' visits to prostitutes in the 1950s might be correct, but his account about courtship is contrary to that of Kumut Chandruang and

\(^{6^1}\) Kaufman, Bangkhuad, p. 149.

\(^{6^2}\) De Young, Village Life in Modern Thailand, p. 62.
accounts of some informants, which indicate that villagers are more daring than those described by De Young.

As for women, it has been generally believed that premarital sex relations have been practiced at a minimum. Separation between men and women has always been a deterrent to premarital sex relations. Where strict female seclusion has been enforced, such as in the palace in the early twentieth century or in girls' boarding schools, lesbian relations have been maintained among a few. Usually lesbian relations have not been socially encouraged, but one author said that this relationship was beneficial for young women because love for a friend of the same sex helped maintain good mental health, preserve virginity, and keep behavior in a moral framework.

In a 1983 survey of first-year university students, all the female students queried who admitted having premarital sex claimed that they had had it only with their boyfriends who were expected to be their future husbands. Thai society's emphasis on female chastity has been anchored deeply in the people's mentality through the process of child upbringing, particularly that of the women.

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63 Mani Siriworasan, *Chiwit Mu'an Fun*, p. 78.

64 Ibid.

Surveys about attitudes toward premarital sex all reveal that women disapprove of it more than men. In a 1979 survey of Bangkok university students, 40.58 percent of the male students and 68.10 percent of the female students were against premarital sex between boyfriends and girlfriends. In a 1988 nationwide survey of young people, 83.9% of the men and 98.0% of the women queried were against premarital sex relations.

During courtship, the ethical burden of keeping female chastity has lain heavily on the women. It has been their responsibility to draw the line, while men have felt their natural right to make advances as far as they can. From a perusal of letters to advice columns between 1940 and the present, we see that some men have asked their girlfriends to have premarital sex with them as "a pledge of love."


68 Pichit Phithakthepsombat, Vaowachon Thai, p. 45. In my opinion, the big difference in percentage of people disapproved of premarital sex in these two studies may result from difference in education and how the questions were asked. The 1988 study is a nationwide survey of 15-24 year-old people in the country. Almost half of the people queried had elementary education. Around 20 percent had junior high school education and 21 percent finished senior high school. Only 5.4 percent had higher education than high school. In this survey, the people were asked to express their attitudes toward premarital sex of single men and women, not between boyfriends and girlfriends.
Many women have complained to advice columnists that after they yielded to their boyfriends, the boyfriends lost interest in them and frequently left them.  

One letter to Sirani, a leading advice columnist in the 1960s, reflects clearly the general attitudes of men and women towards premarital sex. Here are some excerpts from the letter:

I am a 20-year-old student. I have a close friend. Last year my close friend and I fell in love with the same woman. ... I decided that my friend was more important than the woman, so I stepped back. ... Since then the relationship between my friend and that woman became more intimate. I saw them often going to the movies together. Sometimes they went with group tours to other provinces. It seemed to me that they would marry soon. ... Last month I met a relative of mine. He told me that my friend had broken up with the woman. I asked for the reason. He told me that my friend said that the woman was too loose. She did not deserve to be his wife. He took her to a quiet hotel in Thonburi for only an hour, and she readily gave herself to him. If he had married her, he would have been sorry later. 

The young man asked whether he should go back to the woman and console her or not. Sirani advised that he should instead persuade his close friend that the woman was not loose but that she loved him very much. Sirani concluded as follows:

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70 Sirani, Panha Huachai, pp. 5-6.
It is a very difficult question for a woman. If she does not do what her boyfriend wants, she is reproached that she does not really love him. If she does what he wants, she is condemned by him as too loose. Every woman should know this lesson. She should know how and when to please her boyfriend. If a woman makes a wrong decision, she often receives contempt like this.\textsuperscript{71}

The value of female virginity has been deeply anchored in Thai society. In a 1987 advice column, a letter from a university student reflects the same situation cited above. A man revealed his disappointment that he and his girlfriend had sexual relations before marriage. Virginity is still considered an important qualification of a wife.\textsuperscript{72}

It should be noted that it was not always men who made sexual advances to women. Some women have also made sexual advances to their boyfriends. These women have been criticized as bad, loose, fast, assertive, and having unusual sexual cravings.\textsuperscript{73}

Where could Thai lovers meet for sexual encounters before the booming of drive-in motels in the late 1960s? Single grownup men and women continued to stay with their parents though they could earn their own living. As the lovers did not have a place of their own, columnists and writers mentioned that in the city, the couples could use public parks, zoos, special rooms in restaurants, cars, and

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., p. 8.

\textsuperscript{72} Rungro'ng, \textit{Laeo Rau Ko' Pruksa Kan}[And Then We Talk] (Bangkok: Phraeo, 1988), pp. 31-33, 92-98.

\textsuperscript{73} Sirani, \textit{Pantha Huachai}, pp. 247, 419-21.

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houses temporarily borrowed from friends in lieu of hotel rooms.  

In the village if a girl showed a preference for one of her suitors, she might slip away with him during one of the crowded festivities. More common, although practiced by only a few because of the danger of detection, was for the girl to allow her favored suitor to come into her mosquito net after her parents were asleep. The young man would leave before the parents woke up.

In one of her novels, W. Winichaikun makes a perceptive observation on premarital sex among the peasants in the 1980s in Nako'n Pathom, a province in Central Thailand. The Santhitho'n referred to is a leading character in the novel, a professor who turns farmer.

One of the local customs is a puzzle that Santhitho'n does not understand very well. Evidently, the villagers pay particular attention to premarital sexual relations between young men and women. Generally speaking, the peasants continue to hold tightly the tradition of female premarital chastity. However, young men and women in this district seem to have considerable sexual freedom. Santhitho'n remembers Nat telling him, "Pu'k had another affair. He made a young woman pregnant. Her parents demanded that Pu'k send his senior

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75 Interview with Tho'nglo' Puio'n (1922-), Phromburi, Singburi, 27 June 1989. Tho'nglo' told me that he visited his girlfriend many times and slept with her in her room. One day her mother knew about it, so she hit her daughter very hard. The daughter decided to elope with him. See also Kaufman, Bangkhuad, p. 149.

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relatives to ask for her hand. How can he do that. Pu'k already has a wife." "Dam," said Nat, referring to a 15-year-old woman in the village, "eloped with a man. Her father said that he wouldn't try to follow them. He didn't want to waste his money on the bus fare. Soon the couple had to come back home." A young woman here acts as a grownup at an early age. At 14 or 15, she may have a boyfriend. The relation starts simply; she and a young man in the same neighborhood go to see outdoor movies a few times, go to markets in town, and decide to be lovers. Whether the couple will be serious and get married or not depends on each individual case. Many of the young women in this village have a child before they are 18.  

My own experience from interviews in the villages and another interview with an anthropologist who studied a Central Thai village in the 1980s confirm this observation. However, the "known" practices of premarital sex were found more often among the people from the lower economic levels.  

Many of the couples who have had premarital sex eventually marry. A number of elopements in villages occur because the couples have already had sex and they want to marry in spite of their parents' disapproval.  

In case of premarital pregnancy, most suitors involved marry the women with whom they had relationships. Thai society generally does not take harsh measures against the indulgent couples.

76 W. Winichaikun, Setthi Tin Plao, p. 295.

77 Interview with Siraporn Nathalang, Honolulu, 22 August 1991.

As long as they live together as husband and wife, the community accepts them as such. The child born out of wedlock is not branded as illegitimate. 79

If the suitor does not marry the women, or the women's parents do not allow them to marry, adoption or abortion might be an alternative. Sometimes a pregnant woman is sent away to stay with relatives until the child is born. The child is usually given to sisters, aunts, or other relatives to be brought up. 80 A child born out of wedlock to a well-to-do mother might be secretly put up for adoption. Some might leave the child in the care of a hospital or midwife clinic. The Bangkok midwife clinic of Khunying Pien Wechabun, a doctor devoted to public service, has raised and educated many such abandoned children. Sahathai Foundation is another agency for deserted children. According to the foundation's 1988 report, 80 percent of the mothers in Bangkok who left their children were not married. Fifty percent were students in high school and colleges. 81

Abortion has been another choice for an unwed mother. Illegal, unethical, and dangerous, abortion seems to be the last resort for women in distress. Herbal potions or

79 Interview with Sanit Selanon, Klo'ng Khae, Ratburi, 5 April 1989.

80 Kaufman, Bangkhuad, p. 150.

pressing techniques have been used as abortifacients by midwives for centuries. In the 1950s some women attempted to abort by wearing a very tight belt and imbibing peppery, hot foods, or by getting injections from a doctor in Bangkok for 25 baht. A drug called phutsa was taken orally after the third month by some of the poorer women. This last resort was quite dangerous, causing violent reactions, and was seldom successful.\textsuperscript{82}

A 1970 study of Ban Taeng Chang, a village in the Central plains, reveals that as the various methods of abortion are dangerous, abortion has been used only in cases of exceptional need, such as a pregnancy from incest. In the village, since pregnancy outside of wedlock has not been a great concern, abortion has been relatively rare.\textsuperscript{83} In cities, however, social workers suspect an increase in abortion among unwed mothers due to improved abortion techniques and facilities. A 1983 survey of first year university students indicates that 41.54 percent of the respondents accepted abortion as a method of family planning.\textsuperscript{84}

\textsuperscript{82} Kaufman, Bangkuad, p. 181.

\textsuperscript{83} Lauro, "The Demography of A Thai Village," p. 111.

\textsuperscript{84} Chariya Phongwiwat, "A Study of Knowledge," p. 130.
Conclusion

Courtship has changed a great deal in the twentieth century. At present, social norms permit dating between grownups as a way of courtship, thus giving social approval to a custom that has been practiced earlier, especially among the upper class. Female premarital chastity, still highly valued in Thai society, particularly among the middle class, has always been an important deterrent to dating.

While society has generally disapproved of premarital sex, the code of conduct has been observed in a stricter manner in the middle class than in the other two classes. The premarital sexual practices of the upper class have been influenced by Western dating customs. The peasants and workers, on the other hand, carry on the folk attitude toward premarital sexual behavior between lovers as something not necessarily good but natural. For them, premarital sex should be prevented; but once engaged in, it should be tolerated.
CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

When my first husband, Prince Asdang, died, I was 25. I had to move out of the palace to a house called Tamnak Thai. Tamnak Thai was in an orchard just across from the palace, but at that time it was a very lonely and deserted place. There I was always afraid of gangsters because I had no husband to protect me. One day a burglar broke into the house and stole many things. . . . After the prince died, I became very poor. Finally I decided that I would marry anyone who was good enough to support me.

Thanphuying Phoe Sanitwongseni (1903-)¹

When I was 16 or 17, a man sent his senior relatives to ask for my hand. They said I was very good, rich, skilful, and hardworking. So I understood why he wanted to marry me: he wanted another helper. I had already worked for my parents. I worked hard because I wanted my parents to be comfortable. If I married that man, I would have to work very hard for him. Why should I endure that hardship for him? No, I didn’t want to marry him. I don’t want to marry now. I can earn my own living. Why should I bother to marry and have a family.

Somchit Yanwattana (1960-)²

A woman should be a virgin before she marries. This is very important for me. I didn’t want to marry a woman who had had sexual experience before

¹ Thoed Kiettikun Thanphuying Phoe Sanitwongseni [In Honor of Thanphuying Phoe Sanitwongseni] (Bangkok: Amarin Kanphim, 1986), pp. 39-40. Thanphuying Phoe Sanitwongseni married Prince Asdang when she was 15. At that time, she was one of the dancers in his palace. After Prince Asdang died, she married a military attache.

² Interview with Somchit Yanwattana, Phromburi, Singburi, 28 June 1989. Somchit lives in the provincial town of Singburi. She has a junior high school education. Now she owns a shop selling dry food and miscellaneous products.
marriage. I didn't want to be compared to other men.

**Sergeant Major Khwanchai Kaniali (1948–)**

I don't think that we should have a double standard of sexual morality. Sex is very important to married life. I think it is beneficial if both husband and wife have sexual experience before marriage.

**Setthaphong Lekhawattana (1961–)**

These four quotations reflect the striking diversity of opinion which exists in Central Thailand concerning mate selection in the twentieth century. Attitudes vary according to differences in age, gender, education, social class, and economic status. Central Thai society has changed a great deal in this century from a self-sufficient agrarian community to an export-oriented agricultural and industrial society. Modernization, urbanization, and industrialization have all affected the family structure. Consequently, conventions of mate selection in the central plains have also changed along with the family.

In this chapter, I will attempt to summarize major changes in authority over mate selection, methods of courtship, and criteria in mate selection. In addition, I

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3 Interview with Sergeant Major Khwanchai Kaniali, Khlo'ng Khae, Ratburi, 6 April 1989. Khwanchai graduated from a police school for sergeants in Ratburi. He married his sweetheart, whom he had been dating for 6 or 7 years. His wife, Suni, is a schoolteacher in Khlo'ng Khae.

4 Interview with Setthaphong Lekhawattana, Honolulu, Hawaii, 23 January 1991. Setthaphong is a native of Bangkok. He came to continue his M. A. and Ph. D studies at the University of Hawaii. He is still a bachelor at 31.
will discuss process of change and trends in mate selection among the young generation in the 1990s.

Continuity and Change in Mate Selection

Authority over Mate Selection

Twentieth-century Central Thai society has witnessed a degree of change from parental authority over mate selection to freedom of choice. During the early twentieth century, the marriage law forbade aristocratic women from marrying without parental consent but allowed the middle and lower-class women to marry whomever they wished to despite their parents' disapproval. However, Buddhism and marriage customs discouraged marriage without parental consent among the lower classes also, as discussed in Chapter II above.

Thai children were traditionally raised to be obedient and grateful to their parents. In addition, marriage was considered the business of both the bride and the groom's families. Customs required that the man's parents or his senior relatives approach the woman's parents and ask for her hand. It was regarded as an insult if the prospective groom asked permission from the woman's parents himself. Moreover, in order to raise a new family, the couple might need financial support from their parents. Marriage against the parents' will meant the curtailment of financial aid from the family.

Parental authority over mate selection was vigorously criticized by upper-class young people in the late
nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, perhaps due to the impact of Western education. They saw marriage as an individual's private affair and wanted to choose their own spouse. They used mate-selection customs in Western countries as their models and argued that these customs practiced in civilized nations should be the guidelines for Thais too. Love, for these young people, should be the reason for marriage, not its result.

Their effort bore fruit in 1935 when Thailand's first Civil and Commercial Code allowed Thai men (17 and over) and women (15 and over) to marry. Parents' approval was needed only if the man or the woman were under the marriageable age. Those who made the new law, all having had a Western-style education, agreed that freedom of choice should be the way of mate selection for a civilized people like the Thais.

Around 1950, an individual's right to choose his or her own spouse was widely practiced. Economic growth in the first half of the century enlarged the job market for young people. Since they could earn their own living by working outside the family's trade or business, the young people depended less on the family's support and could more readily exercise their freedom of choice in mate selection. In addition, the new generation of parents also approved of the practice of individual choice. Some parents, particularly peasants, felt alienated from their children, who had been exposed more to higher education and new experiences outside
the villages, due to a rapid Western-style modernization. They thus doubted their ability to choose a suitable spouse for their children and thus allowed their children to choose their own mate.

Though the norm has shifted to freedom of choice, parental approval and consent are still generally important for young people of all classes, especially women. If her parents do not approve of her boyfriend, the woman tends to delay her marriage until she can convince them to change their opinion. Some parents, particularly the well-to-do in both urban and rural areas, continue to control the mate selection of their offspring. They promote a match they think desirable; however, the children have the right to veto. Forced marriage is now illegal in Thailand and socially condemned. Many parents are satisfied to act as advisors and manipulators of the pool of eligible spouses for their children and no longer dictate their destiny.

Methods of Courtship

Throughout the twentieth century, men have continued to be socially accepted as initiators of courtship. Though some women make the first move in courtship, they are often regarded by the public as too pushy and aggressive. Modesty has always been considered a virtue for Thai women. Many still believe that a good woman should not go to one she loves but rather wait for him to come to her. More details on initiation of courtship are discussed in Chapter IV.
Courtship in Central Thailand has always been dictated by a double standard of sexual morality. Female virginity prior to marriage is highly valued whereas male premarital promiscuity is quietly accepted. In order to protect female virginity, male-female socialization among non-relatives was traditionally restricted as much as possible. Mate selection was, therefore, generally directed by parents and senior relatives.

In the early twentieth century, the practice of male-female separation was stricter among the upper-class and the well-to-do than among the lower classes. A peasant was allowed to visit the woman he was interested in at her house, but they could not meet alone. Her mother, siblings, or friends had to be nearby.

Nonetheless, young people in love, regardless of class, always found ways to exchange their feelings and meet secretly. A man could send love letters to his sweetheart through her siblings, friends, and servants. The woman's hair dresser and sometimes food vendors were also popular go-betweens. Now and then, a secret rendezvous between the couple was arranged with help from the go-between.

As society approved more of individual freedom of choice, the young people could socialize more openly as well as more frequently with the opposite sex. Changes in the ways of courtship in Central Thailand from the 1920s to the present have been much influenced by the style of courtship
practiced among the upper class. In the late 1920s, the upper class introduced going out with chaperons as a trendy way of courtship. Soon, this practice was imitated by the middle class and later by the lower class. When courtship moved out into the public, it was the man who took care of all the expenses.

In the 1930s, dating was practiced among some upper-class socialites. However, this way of courtship was viewed by the public as too risky for the woman's reputation and thus considered too controversial. Dating was not generally accepted until the 1970s. Yet among the middle and lower classes at present, dating is considered an appropriate way of courtship only for a couple who are seriously committed to one another. Usually, at the beginning of the relationship, when they want to learn about each other's character, a man and a woman prefer to go out in the company of a group of mutual friends.

Female premarital chastity, still highly valued in Thai society, particularly among the middle class, has always been an important deterrent to dating. Thais generally believe that proximity between a man and a woman may lead to premarital sex; thus, it should be discouraged.

Though the public disapproves of premarital sex, it occurs now and then at all levels of society. Failure to abide by this rule of moral conduct is held to reflect more harshly upon the woman's reputation and her family's name...
than that of the man. However, the upper and lower classes tend to be less strict towards premarital sex between lovers than the middle class. For these two strata, premarital sex should be prevented, but once engaged in, it should be tolerated as discussed above in Chapter V.

Criteria for Mate Selection

The analysis in Chapter III of criteria used for mate selection in twentieth-century Central Thailand clearly reveals that society has been strongly class conscious throughout the period. Marriage across social classes has been commonly discouraged. However, society tends to accept lower marriages of men than those of women.

Character, appearance, education, and wealth are important criteria in selecting a spouse, apart from mutual affection. Except for appearance, which is related more to romantic-emotional fulfillment or reproductive value, the other three qualifications are determinants of the future welfare of the family. Both men and women look for responsibility in their prospective mate; they want a hard-working, faithful, polite, and sober person. More women are concerned with the education and financial standing of their suitors than men.

Age and horoscope are important considerations in arranged marriages. Parents prefer a prospective son-in-law to be a few years older than their daughter. Matching
horoscopes are also desired. For love matches, these two criteria are the least important of considerations.

The widowed and the divorced can remarry, but often they marry within their own groups. Until 1935, men could be legally married to more than one woman at the same time. Polygyny was practiced more in the upper class than in the middle and lower classes. The Civil and Commercial Code of 1935 allowed a man to register one marriage only. But it did not forbid him from taking other wives. Now polygyny is not socially approved, but it is tolerated, particularly by men.

**Future Trends**

I have already examined the changes in mate-selection customs in twentieth-century Central Thailand. Here I want to discuss some general trends in the mate selection practices of the 1990s, which would be suitable topics for further studies in the future. One noteworthy issue is that at present many Thai women think that marriage is no longer a necessity for them. Another important issue is how the AIDS epidemic in Thailand will affect mate selection customs in the future.

While Chinese women in the 1980s believed that women had to marry even when they had no desire, a 1986 survey of Bangkok women's attitudes towards marriage shows quite the
opposite.\textsuperscript{5} Just over 79 percent of the women queried said that it was not extraordinary for women to remain single. Most of them believed that society accepted the idea of single women more than in the past. When they were asked whether marriage made life more meaningful, 18.3 percent disagreed, 18.9 percent said they had no opinion, and 62.7 percent agreed.\textsuperscript{6}

What was the opinion of women in earlier times towards marriage? It is difficult to find evidence on this topic. The extant evidence generally consists of the opinions of men. A great poet and journalist in the first half of this century, Prince Phitthayalongko'n, summed up his idea of women's attitudes towards marriage as follows: "Since no flower hates bees, no woman detests having a husband. As a rice-field cannot refuse to be plowed, so a woman cannot refuse to have a husband to protect her."\textsuperscript{7} In a 1938 article concerning marriage, Phraya Anuman Rajadhon observed that the problem of too many single people in Thailand was caused by men who did not want to marry and take responsibilities and by women's parents who demanded high bride-

\textsuperscript{5} For Chinese women's attitudes, see William R. Jankowiak, "Sex Differences in China," p. 66. For Thai women's attitudes, see Bhassorn Limanonda, "A Study of Thai Women's Attitudes Toward Marriage."

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., pp.79, 81.

\textsuperscript{7} Prince Phitthayalongko'n, Kanok Nako'n [Golden City]. Quoted in Somsi Sukumalanan, Satri Phatthana, p. 36.
prices for their daughters. It seems that Phraya Anuman Rajadhon also believed that generally women wanted to marry.

Until recently Thai women in general tended to believe that it was their destiny to grow up and get married. In the early twentieth century, many people still thought that a woman's fate was to marry and become a housewife. In the 1920s, when parents or senior relatives objected to sending girls to school, their reasoning was as follows: "Why does a girl have to learn a lot? Soon she will marry and become a mother and housewife."9

Even at school, girls were prepared to become good wives and mothers. In the same period, the principal of Rachini School, a famous private girls' school in Bangkok, Princess Phichit Chitrapha, gave her objective in providing education for girls as follows: "An educated woman will know how to be a good wife and mother. If she has to be single all her life, she will know how to earn her own living. Though she may not be rich, she won't be in debt."10 To the present her opinion has always been the school's policy.

In a 1921 Christian school magazine, there was a short story about a woman who had decided not to marry and had

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10 Quoted in Yupapho'n Chaengchenkit, "Kansu'ksa Kho'ng Satri," p. 86.
worked and supported herself since 18. She told her story as follows:

When I was exhausted from work, I thought that I should marry so that I wouldn't have to work any more. But when I was fresh again, I thought staying alone was better. After I was 25, I realized that the chance to depend on another person was becoming less and less. So I decided that I should depend on myself.\textsuperscript{11}

Another short story, first published in a 1930 Chulalongkorn University yearbook, was about a woman who did not want to marry. Her sister said that a grownup woman had nothing better to do than marry and be secure. The woman's argument was as follows: "If I marry, I will have a man and several children follow me everywhere I go. Oh! If I am bored with him, I can't do anything. Besides, I will have to take care of 1,000 responsibilities. Most of all my dream of getting a B.A. will vanish."\textsuperscript{12} However, in the end, the woman who did not want to marry fell in love with a handsome young judge. She did not doubt for a minute that she should marry him.

The 1986 survey of Bangkok women cited earlier found that factors affecting the desire to delay the marriage or remain single were professional ambition, a yearning to be independent, and an aversion to the responsibilities and

\textsuperscript{11} "Kit Mi Ru'an Chon Samret [Success in Finding a Mate]," Chotmai Het Saeng Arun 27 (June 1921): 139.

demands of married life and family. 13 My interviews with some female factory workers and peasants who did not want to marry also support this finding. The women were afraid that they could not earn enough money for their future family. Some workers were satisfied with their lives in the factory, staying in a free dorm and having many friends. They all admitted also that they had not met the right man yet. Many men they knew caroused a lot. 14

A 1982 study of male and female factory workers in Bangkok, Samut Prakan, and Samut Sako'n confirms the validity of the workers' fear of financial instability after marriage. Only 13 percent of the workers queried said they had any savings. Two-thirds of them were women textile workers in Bangkok, living in free dormitories. A majority

13 Bhassorn Limanonda, "Thai Women’s Attitudes towards Marriage," p. 89.

14 Interviews with Riam Yindi, Bangkok, 4 June 1989; Phayao Songkhachon, Bangkok, 3 September 1989; and Benchaphan Phuhoi, Khlong Khae, Ratburi, 8 April 1989. In a 1984 study of 903 factory workers in Bangkok, Samut Prakan, Samut Sako'n, Noko'n Pathom, Nonthaburi, Ayutthaya, and Pathum Thani, 75.53 percent of those queried believed that married women or women who had children had less chance to get a job than single women. Some factories provided dormitories for single workers. It was generally believed among workers that those who got married had to move out of the dorm. See Suphachai Manatphibun, Sitthi Manutsayachon Kap Lukchang Nai Prathet Thai [Human Rights and Employees in Thailand] (Bangkok: The Thai Khadi Institute, Thammasat University, 1984), pp. 39-40.
of the married workers claimed that their income was not enough. They managed by moonlighting on other jobs.\textsuperscript{15}

Since 1960 the economic expansion has provided job opportunities and financial independence for women. Administrative improvement has also provided relatively more law and order in urban and not-too-remote areas. Single working women are more confident that they can earn their own living. They realize that there is less necessity to marry. However, this does not indicate that their desire for marriage is diminishing. Rather it means that they do not have to rush into a marriage which they do not want. They can wait and choose. This may result in a future trend of higher age at first marriage for women.

The other trend which interests me is the effect of the AIDS epidemic in Thailand on mate-selection practices. At present AIDS is recognized by the government and private health organizations as a major epidemic in Thailand. No study, however, has focused on social aspects of the AIDS epidemic. It may, in fact, simply, be too early to assess its impact on the culture as a whole.

The rapid spread of this disease makes sex education necessary for people of all ages, particularly the young. More and earlier exposure to sex education may affect the young generation's attitudes towards sexuality and marriage.

\textsuperscript{15} Jan Odhnoff, \textit{Industrialization and The Labour Process}, p. 57.
Male sexual promiscuity, which is sometimes and in some groups encouraged as a symbol of masculinity, may now be diminished for health reasons. The Thai marriage law, which does not require physical check-ups of both parties before marriage, should be changed. Sooner or later, the most important criterion in choosing a spouse may be his or her health. Courtship and mate-selection practices of the twenty-first century may be much different from those of the twentieth century because of this epidemic. There should be another study in the near future.

Process of Change

The study of mate selection in Twentieth-century Central Thailand has contributed to the understanding of cultural change in this region. Here I would like to discuss briefly some major changes in cultural values as reflected in development of mate selection. These changes concern parent-child relations, male-female relations, and social prestige.

With respect to parent-children relations, one can see a trend of value change from submission to autonomy. As mentioned earlier, since the second half of this century, the public has approved of mate selection by young people as opposed to parental choice. People generally regard mate selection and marriage as an individual's own affair rather than as a family's collective concern. The control of parents and senior relatives over their children and
dependents seems to have declined. When there are conflicts of interest, society now usually allows personal goals and well-being priorities over the demands and concerns of the family. Children who resist arranged marriages can no longer be reproached as ungrateful offspring.

Changes in male-female relationships, especially among the upper and lower socio-economic classes, appear to move in the direction of openness and some signs of egalitarianism. The middle class seems to favor traditional views and values more than the other two classes. The custom of female segregation is considered outdated and male-female socialization has been permitted more and more at all levels of the society. Platonic friendship between the opposite sex, once considered impossible, has been gradually received as acceptable. Although the practice of sex differentiation exists, the public appears to sanction more equal treatments between the two genders. Yet it is still too early to conclude that society is moving towards full sexual equality.

The last major change worth mentioning is a shift of ranking in criteria for judging social prestige. The study of criteria for mate selection in this century reveals that the most important source for high social prestige has switched from holding of government office and obtaining high level of education to being successful in business and finances. Traditionally, high education was valued as it
often led to a high position in the government. Governmental positions, in turn, led to power, authority, (in some cases) wealth, and eventually prestige. Rich as he was, a merchant usually did not receive as much respect as did a high ranking government official. However, since the 1970s, the economic growth in Thailand has reached a point where the business sector has become an important source of power and influence in society. This change in socio-political structure has consequently transformed social values and prestige. Young people after the 1970s have been more open to show their appreciation of material wealth, and thus value business skill and financial success over other non-profit achievements.

These three changes appear to result from two major factors--modernization or westernization and the growth of capitalism. In the case of Thailand, modernization and westernization can be used interchangeably because the Thai elite, since the mid-nineteenth century, have "modernized" the country by looking towards Western "civilized" or "developed" countries as their models.

Capitalism has changed Thai economy from self-sufficiency to market-oriented and globally interdependent economy. Modernization also has affected various aspects of society--finance, administration, legislation, education, habitation, transportation, entertainment, and recreation.
Together, these two factors contributed to structural and ideological changes in Central Thai society.

**Structural Changes**

In the case of Thailand, changes in occupational structure, habitation, and the educational system were the major causes of the structural changes. As discussed in Chapter II, due to the administrative reform, economic expansion and industrialization since the early twentieth century, new industries and more jobs have been developed in Bangkok and in many towns in the central region. While these changes have weakened the family's role as a unit of production, they have provided great opportunities for young people to leave home and their villages to find jobs in towns and cities.

Therefore, a substantial number of young people do not have to follow their family's tradition and work as farmers, gardeners, or fishermen as their parents and grandparents had done. With appropriate education and training, they can switch to other jobs, such as teachers, administrators, lawyers, clerks or other sales and service workers. Those who have less skill can be factory workers, construction workers, taxi-drivers, and servants. With regard to their new occupations, these young people have confronted a new horizon of experience.

The young people's financial independence has resulted in a redefinition of parent-child relations. Parents have
less authority and control over their children. Many parents, chiefly the lower economic classes in the rural areas, on the contrary, have to depend on financial support from their better-paid offspring. With this role reversal, these parents have to be more considerate of their children.

The economic expansion and industrialization, together with an expanding population and a shortage of arable land, have also been the grounds for another important structural change in Central Thailand—the growth of urbanization. In comparison with the rest of the developing world, Thailand is not a highly urbanized country. According to registry figures in 1970 only 14.6 percent of the total population lived in municipal areas. Nevertheless the fact that Thailand is now experiencing a trend towards urbanization is demonstrated by the fact that the proportion of the population living in municipal areas has been increasingly steadily in the last few decades. Between 1960 and 1967 the registry enumerations indicate that the urban population grew at 4.8 percent annually while the rural population grew at 3.1 percent. A similar differential existed between 1947 and 1960 according to census figures. Thus although the rural population is growing, the urban population is growing even faster and Thailand is steadily becoming more urbanized.

The major contribution to the rapid growth of urban population is the migration of rural people looking for jobs in the provincial towns and cities. The migrants, though most of them continue to keep contact with their villages, have to adapt to a new way of life in urban areas. They have different patterns of working and living, different sets of friends and neighbors, and are exposed more to different ideas and media.

While villagers are generally bound by tradition, the urban dwellers are more receptive to changes and innovations. Parental control over the migrated children is usually declining. The urban youth have more recreation spots than their rural counterparts—shopping malls, coffee shops, skating rinks, discotheques, theaters, and amusement parks. Hence the ways of courtship have been changing.

Courtship has been moved from the woman's home to the public. When courtship was conducted at the woman's home, it was controlled in some degrees by the woman and her family. At least they could end the courtship whenever they wanted. With the shift of courtship into the public, the power over the courtship has moved more towards the man, who will take the woman out, pay for the expenses, and bring her home when he wants to. In addition, since young people are allowed to go out alone without chaperons, they have more opportunity to display their affection and be more intimate than they could at the woman's home.
The reform in educational system is the last but not the least important factor to the structural change in Central Thailand. For centuries the educational needs of Thai society were met by its Buddhist monasteries. Monasteries provided a basic education of reading, writing, and simple mathematics only to the boys; the girls' education were left in the care of the family. Modern education, with its emphasis on Western sciences, languages, and mathematics, came to Thailand in the mid-nineteenth century. Initially, the modern education was limited among the privilege classes in Bangkok—the royalty and the nobility.

Public education has become an important state concern since the early decades of the twentieth century. The educational services expanded into provinces and the monastery schools were brought into the government system. Gradually, these monastery schools and their monk teachers were replaced by Western-style schools and their Western-educated teachers. With the expansion of modern schools, more boys and girls from all levels of classes can obtain basic education. A compulsory elementary education for boys and girls under age 15 has been required since 1921.

The shift from monastery schools to modern schools has caused two important changes in the educational system—the teacher-student relations and that of the boy and girl students. In a monastery school, generally a teacher who
was also a monk was highly respected by his students for he not only taught them scholarly knowledge and morality but also led a model life of moderation and self-restraint. In addition, usually the monk teacher did not ask for any money or material wealth in return of his service to the students. Generally Thai students continue to have high regard towards their modern-school teachers. However, it is difficult for the layperson teacher in a modern school to lead a model life as a monk teacher, though he or she is socially required to be a model for the students as well. Moreover, with the commercialization of private schools since the 1960s, many private schools have demanded high tuition fees for their service. The relationship between a teacher and students is somewhat altered by this commercial enterprise. Many students regard their teacher as being "hired" by their parents to provide them the teaching services.

The change in the educational system also affects the male-female relations. In the monastery school system, girls were not allowed to attend school since the Buddhist rules require that monks should restrict their contacts with females as much as possible. In the modern school system, at the beginning, there were separate schools for boys and girls. In some rural areas where teachers were scarce, girls and boys in the elementary level were allowed to study in the same school. However, as the female students reached their teenage years, they had to leave school. In a few
cases, when their parents approved of education for women, the female teenage students were sent to another female school in a provincial town nearby.

The co-ed school system gradually became popular after the second World War due to the influence of new generation of educators graduated from the United States and other Western countries. The widespread co-ed high schools have undermined the tradition of male-female separation. These co-ed high schools help encourage platonic friendship between male and female students and provide them opportunities for practicing public interactions with the opposite sexes within a close supervision of the school teachers.

**Ideological Changes**

Apart from the structural change, the modern educational system also brings forth an ideological change. The modern educational system has been developed with the intention to produce civil servants, professionals, technicians, and service personnel for expanding governmental administration, domestic and international trades, and industries. Accordingly, students have been exposed more to modern sciences, knowledge, and values than to Buddhist teachings and values. The study of values of Thai university students in Chiangmai conducted by Julian Wohl and Amnuay Tapingkae in 1968 shows that their values are functional, not esthetic; materialistic, not idealistic;
practical, not theoretical; secular, not religious; and rational, not romantic. In their essays on values, references to philosophical, moral, or religious concepts are virtually absent. 17

The mass media is another important factor towards ideological changes in the central plains. The mass media plays an important role in teaching and reinforcing old cultural forms and in introducing and molding new ones. Since the 1960s, because its forms have multiplied and because it has reached a greater number of people, the mass media in Central Thailand has been even more important.

All forms of the mass media present models of male-female relationship. Thus all have a potential influence on a young person's understanding of what these relationships should be, especially when such information is so difficult for young people to get from parents, teachers, and even old siblings. 18 Television and radio seem to be the most influential media. In a 1988 nationwide survey of young people age between 15-24, over 50 percent of the respondents


18 From a national survey in 1988, 75.4 percent of the young people queried never received an explanation from their parents about the physical change in their body when they were reaching puberty. See Phichit Phithakthepsombat, Yaowachon Thai, p. 15. In my interviews, most of the old and middle-aged interviewees also admitted that they did not discuss much about male-female relationship with their parents or children, particularly about the sex education.
said that they watched the television and listen to the radio every day.\textsuperscript{19}

All forms of the mass media in Thailand have been much influenced by Western cultures. Most of them have introduced modern attitudes towards male-female relationship and the family in general. The previous chapters illustrate the role played by Western-style educated Thai writers, advice columnists, and composers in the introduction of the ideas of romantic love, female equality, and individual freedom of choice. Directors and producers of television dramas and movies also preached the same themes. However, it should be noted that some traditional values, such as the social value of bridal virginity and the attitude against premarital sex, persist in most forms of the Thai mass media.

Of all the Western mass media, foreign movies, music, and music video are the most important sources of Western, especially American influence regarding love and dating behavior in Central Thai. A writer, Kumut Chandruang, reported that in the 1930s American movie stars became the fashionable patterns for Thai women and men to follow.\textsuperscript{20}

The foreign films shown in Bangkok have Thai subtitles and are usually dubbed when shown in provincial towns. In the 1970s, the popularity of the Western films among the Thai

\textsuperscript{19} Phichit Phithakthepsombat, \textit{Yaowachon Thai}, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{20} Kumut Chandruang, \textit{My Boyhood in Siam}, p. 169.
viewers was so dominant that the Thai filming industry, lacking sufficient audience, almost collapsed. Western music has also been popular, but the difficulty in understanding the Western lyrics prevents it from enjoying the same popularity as the movies. Nonetheless, Western-style Thai popular music is composed by Thai musicians with Thai lyrics, conveying the same themes of love and romance.

Evidently, no one can deny the impact of westernization on cultural change in Thai society. Yet, it should be noted that westernization does not affect the whole society in the same way. The upper and middle classes have been exposed more to the Western ways than the people in the lower socio-economic levels. A few have first-hand experience with Western cultures, while most only learn about the Western ways second or third-handedly through other ways of cultural transmission. In addition, one should not overlook the importance of indigenous culture in the process of cultural change. Thai audience exposed to Western cultures through the mass media can select what they are willing to accept and adapt some of them to their tastes.

In sum, this study of mate selection in twentieth-century Central Thailand shows that there has been diversity in the practice of mate selection according to different levels of society. Modernization, urbanization, and industrialization have had great effects on the family and mate-selection practices. The current social norm is
tending more towards individual freedom of choice. However, some parents, particularly the well-to-do, continue to subtly control the mate selection of their children.

This study of mate selection shows that Thais live their lives with flexibility. Rules are made, but they are overlooked sometimes. People from other cultures may view this way of life as too inconsistent, but for the Thai, this is the true way of living. For it ensures there will be room for everybody to live the way he or she chooses to live.
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