

CHAPTER 5



WIVES' PERCEPTIONS OF HUSBANDS

A farang woman's perceptions of her Thai husband's characteristics and behaviour are significant indicators not only of how she perceives the relationship but of how she perceives the influence of cultural differences and social environment on the relationship. The greatest age-generataional difference to be seen is the older-generation husbands' propensity to change when the couple came to live in Thailand. Two thirds of the older-generation, compared to only one new-comer, said their husbands changed dramatically when they came to live in Thailand. As this phenomena was not apparent among the new-comers, age-generational differences will be closely analysed to find if there are any social changes which may have affected this situation. Age-generational differences found in the pattern of courtship will illustrate the effects of the greater travel and broader life experiences of the new-comers on the factors that attracted them to their Thai husbands and better prepared them for their new way of life. In addition, substantial differences between the generations appeared in the husbands' charactersitics and behaviour which reveal aspects of Thai social change in marriage expectations and social roles over the past decades that in turn have affected the pattern of Thai-farang marriages. In what ways did the older-generation woman's husband change?

The average older-generation farang woman met her 'exotic' Thai husband in her home country, and within a year or two had married and come to live with him in this faraway land. Unfortunately, after a short while in Thailand, the farang wife often found that her husband was not the same man she had fallen in love with back home. The Thai man who appeared to be very 'Western' when she met him, 'became Thai' when the couple came to live in Thailand. The understanding and attentive friend she had married turned into a stranger as if over night. Her husband slipped naturally back into the many superior-subordinate roles required of him by the hierarchical Thai social order, such as parent-child, older-younger sibling, manager and employee, and there was no longer a trace of the 'westernised' man she used to know. Her husband's attentions were now directed towards his family and friends. He often went out late, leaving her alone at home while he and his friends drank and visited prostitutes. As Margaret says, "the pressure from friends and colleagues to go out, and NOT go home to your wife is very great - if not you get teased of being afraid of your wife." However, he could still be charming when he wanted to avoid disputes or ask a favor, giving his wife the impression that the man she once knew had not left her completely. It would appear that none of this behaviour was deliberate or premeditated for the husband himself seemed to be totally unaware of such change. He was simply being 'himself' in Thailand, the same as he had been 'himself' in England or America or wherever the couple had met. Indeed, the husband considered his behaviour to be only natural as his friends and 'all Thai men' behaved like that! As Thais are required from an early age to play socially ascribed roles, they can adapt their behaviour to conform to social norms and there appears to be little conflict between role change. Thus, it may be difficult for them

to separate themselves from the particular role they play at any one moment. Margaret summed-up the situation that,

it's difficult for (farang) women to understand, and for the (Thai) men too. It's so natural for them (the men) that they don't realise what they're doing. Meanwhile the woman doesn't feel she's changed at all, she thinks it's the man's fault and his problem!

Unfortunately, these older-generation Thai men could, or would, not realise that they had changed, nor did they appreciate that their farang wives felt alienated by their 'new' behaviour.

Thus, from being the caring and attentive boyfriend he was in her home land, the older-generation Thai man in his own environment withdrew socially and emotionally from his wife with whom he once shared his innermost thoughts and his whole social life. Her husband's frequent absences and refusal to discuss the situation led to other minor issues getting out of proportion until the women could no longer cope. As he could not see any problem with his behaviour the husband refused to discuss the situation with his wife, but the loneliness, hurt and isolation felt by the wives led to self-blame and loss of self-esteem for many women who then longed to return home where they had met and their relationship had flourished. There are many stories of older-generation women who have packed-up and left, unable to cope with their husbands' changes and unsympathetic response and this was presumably also a reason why some of the other women who were approached for interviews were reluctant to be interviewed, which suggests that those that remain and have been interviewed are the exceptions. Many of the respondents have remained in their marriages and found workable solutions and compromise but none of the older-

generation farang women would blame their husbands. Instead they placed the blame on Thailand and Thai culture for the changes in his behaviour. But is Thai culture really to blame? As the new-comers did not experience such behaviour, then what 'made' a Thai man change his behaviour in such ways? What do the age-generational differences tell about Thai culture and social change?

The three most common ways in which the older-generations' husbands changed and the problems they experienced were those of the separation of social lives and the husband's infidelity; the influence of family and social roles and peer pressure; and the break-down of communication between the partners. The older-generation women interviewed have dealt with these changes and remain to tell their stories and strategies for coping with such problems. Their experiences will be quoted and compared with the new-comers who have not encountered such difficulties in order to answer the major questions posed in this chapter.

This chapter aims to trace the patterns of these relationships in order to perceive the variables which have influenced them. Thus, starting from the beginning of the relationship it will be asked if the following factors have had any effect: where the couple met, what attracted the farang women to their Thai husbands as well as how long they knew each other before marriage and how long they were married before coming to Thailand. Then, once the couple were living in Thailand, the ways in which the husbands change and the factors that influence them will be discussed, for example: Why do Thai men visit prostitutes and have *mia nois*?* Why are Thai men reluctant to discuss their behaviour? What reasons or

* Minor wives.

excuses do they give their wives? Is their behaviour a Thai phenomena, or a universal male trait?. How can western wives stand-up to their Thai husbands and what can be said about the position of all women in Thai society? And finally, do the age-generational differences to be found in these Thai-farang marriages illustrate a change in Thai male/female social roles?

Courtship and Moving to Thailand

What attracts a farang woman to a Thai man? Does the place where the couple met, and the length of time they knew each other before marriage and before coming to live in Thailand have any affect on the relationship once it has been transferred to Thailand and Thai society? In the majority of marriages over 20 years ago, and certainly those before "the second world war, the couple met in the woman's home country where the man was a minority and exotic attraction. Like the women interviewed in Khambhu's study of the 1960's most of the respondents in this thesis who met their husbands in their home countries were attracted by the difference and romantic thoughts of far-away places. Many women also felt that they themselves were unique individuals within their own societies saying that they too had 'always been different'. Perhaps feeling unusual in their own society these women felt attracted and somehow connected to a 'real' outsider. A 'typical' older-generation woman, Catherine met her husband in her home country, and said he was very good-looking, charming and attentive, and she was flattered that he was interested in "little old me". She married him within a year and came to live in Thailand immediately afterwards.

Place Where the Couples Met.

As previously discussed, an age-generational difference can be seen in the women's opportunities to meet their husbands elsewhere than home, but what effect does this have on the husband's propensity to change? Two thirds of the older-generation women met their husbands in their home country, 3 met in Thailand and only one couple met in a neutral country. In comparison, just over a third of the new-comers met their husbands in Thailand, a third met in their home country, and just under a third met in a neutral country. That only one of those women (a longtimer) who met their husbands in Thailand has experienced her husband changing and that none of those who met their husbands in a neutral country have experienced this, suggests that if a woman meets her husband in Thailand or a neutral country the likelihood that he will change is very low. Thus, the place where the couple meet appears to have some correlation on the chances of a husband changing. Does the place where these women meet their husbands also have any affect on the factors that attract them to these men?

Attraction

Most of the older-generation, but only 2 new-comers were attracted by his 'difference', with a quarter of the older-generation, and 3 new-comers being attracted by his 'charm' and the 'attention' paid to them. However, two thirds of the new-comers compared to only 2 of the older-generation said they were not necessarily interested at first, until the husband's personality (usually gentleness, calmness, confidence and politeness)

shone through. Thus differences in place of meeting do coincide with the differences in terms of attraction.

The women who met their husbands in their home country (mostly the older-generation) were attracted by his 'difference' and thought he was 'exotic'. Karen met her husband in her home country and remembers, "He was charming, had a cute accent, and I had never seen an Asian close-up - I guess I thought he was exotic." Others, compared these foreign men with the local males in whose behaviour and attitude they may have been disappointed and they were attracted by the lavish attention that was paid to them. Tracy met her husband in her home country and said, "he was very considerate, polite and attentive - compared to American men he was way above them." However, those who met their husbands in Thailand or a neutral country (mostly new-comers) tended to get to know their husbands 'as a person' before they really became interested in them. Alison met her husband in Thailand and was not really attracted to him at first. She said they were friends for a long time because they shared a common interest, and then one day she began to notice and appreciate him in a different way. She says she was most attracted to him because he was tolerant, flexible, loving and patient and they could talk about everything.

Indeed, most of the women from all generations found their Thai boyfriends to be attentive, caring, considerate and understanding. Thus, if after marriage and moving to Thailand he withdrew the characteristics which had first attracted her, she felt cheated and confused - where had her loving partner gone?

Length of Time Before Marriage/Coming to Live in Thailand.

Does the length of time these women knew their husbands before marriage, and/or coming to live in Thailand affect the pattern of these relationships? Half the older generation knew their husbands less than 2 years before they married (a quarter knew him less than a year). Interestingly, two thirds of the new-comers also knew their husbands less than two years before marriage. Thus there appears to be little correlation between how soon the couple married with the husband 'changing'. However, there is a distinct age-generational difference upon the length of time the married couple lived together outside of Thailand before making Thailand their home, and the husband's behaviour.

As has already been noted, a third of the new-comers, but a quarter of the older-generation were already in Thailand when they met their husbands which, as has been suggested, reduces the likelihood of change. Of the other women, more than half of the older-generation came to live in Thailand within 2 years of marrying their husbands compared to only a sixth of the new-comers. In contrast, less than a quarter of the older-generation women had been married more than 3 years, while over half the new-comers had been married for more than 3 years, indeed a third of the new-comers had been married more than 10 years, before they moved to Thailand.

From the interview data it appeared to follow that those who meet their husbands in their home country and follow them over here immediately, will have the double burden of adapting to married life plus a new culture and

environment at the same time. Those who have already adapted to one or other (husband or Thailand) before getting married or living here appear more able to cope. Christine, a new-comer says that having been married 11 years before coming here, she and her husband had got most of their personal adjustments out of the way. She described their time in the States as a 'break into' period during which they developed a strong relationship. But she says, "the true test came here" and she believes that had they come straight away their relationship would not have survived. Therefore, as the problem of husbands changing predominantly affected the older-generation and that over half of these moved to Thailand within 2 years, the length of time the couple spends together before coming to Thailand perhaps helps to reduce the likelihood of the husband changing and may be an influence on the success of the relationship.

Husband Changes when Returns to Thailand

As mentioned, this phenomena was most common among the older-generation women. In what ways did these husbands change and what can age-generational differences tell about the factors that influenced the older-generation husbands behaviour? The three main areas of change found among the older-generation were the separation of social lives and the husband's infidelity, the influence of family and social roles and peer pressure; and the husbands' reluctance to discuss problems. Comparisons with the new-comers will be made to highlight the issues and the influence of Thai social change upon the relationships.

Separation of Social Lives

A very common problem for the older-generation was the separation of social lives when they arrived in Thailand. Most often, this was due to the fact that the kinds of activities the men enjoyed, such as drinking and visiting prostitutes were not 'for ladies'.

When courting in the woman's home country, the couple went everywhere and did everything together, but once married and living in Thailand they seldom enjoyed any social life together. Only one older-generation woman said her husband came home for dinner nearly every night, compared to two thirds of the new-comers! Less than half of the older-generation women said that they have shared their social lives with their husbands since they have been in Thailand, compared to over two thirds of the new-comers. Over half the older-generation women have resigned to the fact that their social lives are separated and have hence tried to build their own support networks and strengthened their independence. In comparison, the few new-comers whose social lives are separated believe this to be a temporary phase while their husbands establish their own businesses.

Husband's Infidelity

A quarter of the older-generation women acknowledged that their husbands were unfaithful. Half of these have separated from their husbands while the others have stayed in Thailand and in their marriages for reasons of their own (children and financial security). In comparison, only one new-comer (who's been here nearly

14 years) admitted that her husband changed in this particular way; but for her this change did not last long. Christine said she had heard many horror stories before she came here, and personally knew four other women who had married Thai men, gone to live in Thailand and had divorced within 2 years because of their husbands' promiscuity. She therefore made her husband swear not to do the same but, when they came to Thailand he started going out with his friends until very late at night. She says that because she had heard so many horror stories and was terrified of being alone here, she clung to him too much. However, she soon realised that she had to trust him, or if she did not trust him she would have to leave. She decided to take the risk and says,

I gave him slack and he could have taken advantage of it - but once he asked me why don't you trust me? - and I thought - yeah, after 11 years of no reason not to trust why not now?

She says she realised that clinging onto him so tightly was not healthy for them so she let go and then there was no need for him to try to 'break-away'. But Christine was lucky! Having been married 11 years before coming to Thailand, together with the unusual support from her in-laws and the fact that she had her own friends to go out with, this problem was solved within the first year. Although she is not sure if her husband ever did go to prostitutes, or just went drinking as he said, that this behaviour did not last long and has never been a problem since, is what is most important to her now.

That a quarter of the older-generation interviewed experienced their husbands being unfaithful, suggests that many others who experienced this may have already separated and left Thailand. Indeed, such behaviour was cited by many of the respondents as the most serious

potential problem of all. Women of all age-groups noticed the practice among their husbands' friends and family and as Khambhu suggested 30 years ago, there is still an unconscious note of fear. "The practice is too widespread and too matter of factly accepted not to be a constant, if submerged, source of worry to this group of women." (Khambhu 1960:58) However, though many of the older-generation were worried about the possibility of this situation happening to them, the majority of new-comers, as yet, feel they have little to worry about. They trust their husbands who rarely go out without their wives anyway. But the older-generation women believe the new-comers are just fooling themselves and that one day they will discover the truth. Indeed, Catherine had been married over 15 years before she discovered that her husband had a *mia noi*, which was the final straw for her, as it was presumably for most women who have left their marriages! (So perhaps the new-comers should be interviewed again in 10 years or so!) Some older-generation women even said that their own husbands never bothered to hide their infidelities, and perhaps all that has changed is that the younger generation are better at keeping their activities a secret. The older-generation say the new-comers must be turning a blind-eye, or have been lucky so far, but truly don't believe that these husbands are or will be faithful as they believe that all Thai men visit prostitutes. Fran, a new-comer, says she met some older women when she first came but, "My husband doesn't have 3 *mia nois*, but they (the older women) wouldn't believe you - they're sure that you're just stupid, you haven't figured it out yet!" The older-generations' convictions are undoubtedly due to their own bad experiences. But is there really a change in Thai-male sexual behaviour, or are Thai men just better at covering-up than before?

In general, the older-generation women (a quarter of those that remain, and probably most of those who have already left) who discovered that their husbands were unfaithful learnt to turn a blind-eye and devised various coping mechanisms to deal with the situation. For example, blaming themselves for not being pretty or understanding enough, blaming Thai women for chasing their husbands, or focusing the blame on living in Thailand. When the husband took a *mia noi* and or had children by another woman the situation was impossible to ignore any longer, but even those who have since separated/divorced were reluctant to blame their husbands, preferring to blame Thailand and Thai culture for their woes. But what makes these women believe this behaviour is a part of Thai culture?

What makes it a Thai phenomena?

Afterall, as Fran notes, prostitution is not only a problem for Thai or mixed-couples:

imagine a couple, both of them are American, or British or whatever, and he has a good job and maybe goes out to Patpong with his friends or wherever and picks up another girl - what about his wife? She's at home all day, and he does this - there's a lot of it goes on among the ex-pats too, believe me!

Fran and her husband analysed the situation by saying that any man, Thai or farang, who frequents prostitutes or keeps a *mia noi*, is an addict, like smokers or alcoholics. And many wives, both Thai and farang, stay with their husbands for years in the vain hope that he may change, but as an addict, such change is difficult. However, they suggest that as such vices are more

tolerated and readily available in Thailand, the chances that men will be introduced to, and under pressure to try such 'habits' in this country are greater. Interestingly, June's Thai sister-in-law married an American as she believed that farang men were more faithful than Thais. Unfortunately, she is now divorced as her American husband got into the 'habit' of frequenting prostitutes when they came to Thailand together for a holiday and continued the practice when they returned to his home country!

Not surprisingly, many Thais and farang have misconceptions about each others' sexual behaviour. While Thais have seen farang men come here and openly visit prostitutes and hire girls as 'temporary wives', they have also seen countless movies in which farang are jumping in and out of bed with each other. Thus, as much as farang think this is a Thai way of life, Thais believe that farang of both sexes have many partners. However, even though western men can also be unfaithful to their wives, a western man faces public scorn and humiliation if his behaviour is found out, whereas Thai men face no public disapproval but seek only to keep their behaviour as a secret from their wives. Sexual infidelity in Thailand is undeniably more open and apparently more 'tolerated' (if it is paid for!) than in the West.

That this behaviour appears acceptable in Thai society is readily commented on by all the interviewees, but it is the level of social tolerance, rather than the practice that leads to the common presumption that it is a Thai phenomena. But why is there this difference in social tolerance?

Social Tolerance

That Thai women themselves appear to tolerate the situation leads to the general assumption by the farang women and other onlookers that this behaviour is acceptable. Indeed, Margaret believes that,

because it (prostitution) is so acceptable everywhere, a great many women will just say 'that's the way men are', whether they really feel that way or not they appear to accept it.

This level of tolerance indeed seems to be the main difference from the west, and the key to it being called a 'Thai' phenomena dating back a long way (as it also does in the west).

However, in the past prostitution and *mia nois* could be seen as justifiable and acceptable within Thai marriage relations in which women knew and accepted their place and position: the first wife was entitled to the authority of the household and financial security, while the *mia nois* (minor wives) sought financial protection and social connections through their relationships with rich, powerful men. Thus, as long as the major wife retained her status and financial security, there was no opposition to her husband taking a second or third wife. The wives would usually live in the same compound and thus there was no secrecy or deception either. Meanwhile prostitutes sought immediate financial gains as opposed to long-term relationships. Traditional relationships between Thai men and women, from the major wife to the prostitute appear to have been based on practical and economic motives. In addition, Thai wives were in neither an economic or educated position to accept much else, and as is the Thai way, did not cause any confrontation, believing their duty was to keep their

husbands happy and comfortable. In return they felt secure with the protection of their man and had no comparison with any other way of life. But does this mean they accepted such behaviour?

Though statistics are not available as to what percentage of Thai men really have *mia nois* or go to the prostitutes, Margaret notes that,

since it (the practice of having *mia nois*) is tied to money it is increasing, and its not only the number who have mistresses that's increasing because that's been high all along, but the number of mistresses is increasing. The more you have, obviously the richer you are to support all of them, so its a status symbol. Unfortunatley there is a very large body of young women from all social ranks whose main goal in life is to become some rich man's mistress for long enough for her to acquire a car, a house and maybe a child who will be recognised by the man. There are no holds barred. It's true that there are these women everywhere but there is such a large number of these women here.

So, although she acknowledges the economic motivation, like many of the older generation farang women, she also blames Thai women for a husband's promiscuity. A few long-timers even said that Thai women had complained to them that they (the farang) had taken away 'good' Thai men. It seems that a Thai man must be 'good', and/or rich, if he can have, and keep, a farang wife! Thus, say these farang women, it seemed to be a challenge for a potential *mia noi* if the man she was after had a farang wife.

Sally, a new-comer, says she hates the Thai women's attitude of 'if he gives me enough money to look

after the house etc.. then he must be good/can have a *mia noi*, etc...!'... She says, "How can they settle for so little? I wouldn't stand for it." However, with more financial independence and educational opportunities now available to Thai women there are signs of such tolerance changing and Thai women are also beginning to refuse to 'stand for it'. In addition, with the fear of AIDS, and the fact that such behaviour is not prevalent among the new-comers, the position of Thai women can be seen to be improving. What changes can be seen in the position of Thai women and what are the effects of such change upon the farang wives?

Change in the Position of Thai Women

The official position of Thai women has slowly improved over the last half century, but despite the introduction of monogamy in 1935, the practice of the minor wife is still widespread and, when it comes to divorce, the grounds for adultery are still not applied equally. (Asia Magazine. Nov 18-20 1994:9) However, while changes in laws and attitudes are slow to enforce, any improvement for Thai women can only benefit the position of farang women married to Thai men as well. More effective than legal reforms is the fact that many Thai women are gaining in independence due to better education and economic opportunities and thus some are no longer tolerating their husbands' infidelity and simply leave.

Education and economic independence have effected a dramatic turnaround in the status and social well being of women. As a consequence, rather than suffer in silence, increasing numbers of Asian women are opting for divorce as an end to

marital misery. (Asia Magazine. Nov 18-20
1994:9) . . .

The emerging social change in Thai tolerance to male promiscuity is due not only to the effects of education and economic opportunities, but perhaps also in part to the fear of AIDS and a greater awareness of the options available. As Thai society develops and has greater exposure to other cultures and perhaps most notably the efforts of womens' liberation in the West, it appears that Thai women are becoming more aware of the alternatives and are forming higher expectations of their marriage relationships. In addition to the higher divorce rate, more Thai women are remaining unmarried, and increasing numbers co-habit with their partners without officially being married, which also indicate the increased independence and higher expectations of Thai women. That the new-comers' husbands appear to no longer be frequenting prostitutes or taking *mia nois* suggests that Thai male expectations of marriage are also changing. Thus the influence of 'westernization' on Thai social roles is felt by the farang women married to Thai men and age-generational differences between the Thai-farang couples in this thesis may in turn be seen to highlight the effects of social change within Thai-Thai relationships.

Thus, if Thai women are beginning to change their tolerance towards their husbands' behaviour, is it fair to place the blame upon Thai women as so many of the older-generation have? Surely the husbands have to face some responsibility? While many husbands did not even attempt to explain their behaviour, those that did blamed their friends and the influence of peer pressure. Margaret explains that,

Fathers take their sons out to prostitutes for their first sexual experience, (or what they think is their first sexual experience) now that's pretty powerful license for the whole idea. And in the offices, government and business, the pressure of being afraid of your wife, that kind of pressure here is awfully strong and hard to resist and I think there are quite a number of men who'd rather not get into that scene at all but they just daren't - they can't take the pressure.

How real is this pressure? Or is it an excuse for the men to escape responsibility?

Peer Pressure

As the majority of the older-generations' husbands were government officers compared to the new-comers' husbands who are private businessmen, these age-generational differences appear to suggest that there is some correlation between the husbands' occupations and their subjection to peer-pressure. It was suggested that certain types of men, from high class or the new rich, pseudo high class, and particularly those in government service (particularly military and police) were most likely to suffer from peer pressure and have *mia nois*. Not only would a *mia noi* improve their status among their like-minded 'macho' colleagues, but also these are the kind of men that attract *mia nois*, ones that have connections and money to benefit her, and her family. (Perhaps this comes back to patron-client relations!) Indeed, from general observations most men who have *mia nois* are those with money, power, or position or those who would like to think, or show, or try to have money,

power, or position. Wendy's husband is one who likes to brag how much money he spends on his car, and house, and likes to flash his mobile-phone, diamond rings and wallet about. Not surprisingly, he attracts girls who would like to share some of his fortune, but unfortunately, what he shows is all he has, and he often spends his wife's savings on his philanderings! While not all Thai men with money, power, or position have *mia nois*, it is suggested that the majority of those who do have *mia nois* are from one of these groups. As for visiting prostitutes, it seems very common among male workers of every class, especially as an after-work social outing or even as part of a business deal.

Thai men often blame peer pressure from the 'boys' for their unfaithful behaviour, and while some women believe this to be a feeble excuse, others believe it is very real. Alice who has been happily married for over 30 years believes, "Any man that just follows his friends, or even worse blames his friends for his behaviour must be a very weak man indeed!" However, Christine says that, "Peer pressure plays a big role - he doesn't like to stand-out, he needs a sense of belonging." And Catherine believes that her husband was obliged (though he 'suffered' admirably!) to join his military colleagues in such activities in order to be accepted into a group which helped him tremendously with his career.

Indeed, it is important to remember that if the husband had left home for higher education he would have lost his associations from school and thus, in his effort to make friends and acquaintances, and develop important business and social networks on his return, the pressure to be accepted by his peers would no doubt be enormous. This situation would have been more extreme for the

older-generation husbands who were at that time marginal themselves to have studied abroad, let alone because they had married a farang women. Perhaps then, with few others in the same situation the older-generation men felt more intense pressure to be accepted by their peers upon their return. In contrast, as many Thais are now studying abroad the new-comer's husbands are in a less marginal position as returnees. However, they are still a minority in that they have farang wives but other changes in Thai society (as previously discussed) allow them more freedom to be 'different'.*

Whatever the older-generations' husbands' excuse, all generations of returnees are likely to experience some form of re-entry adjustment after a stay abroad and separation from their cultural roots and family system. However, for the older-generation husband without his own social network, or financial security, dependence on his family when he returned would have increased. Then, after years of freedom from family interference, and now with the burden of his wife's dependence, the man might feel trapped and frustrated and therefore agree with the peer pressure that he is entitled to his bit of fun. He may even wish he had married a 'typical' Thai bride who would understand his behaviour, know her place and her social roles, which would presumably 'justify' his having a *mia noi*.

However, while only a quarter of the older-generation interviewed suffered from their husband's promiscuity, many were upset by another form of behavioural change. The way in which their husbands became dominated by family influence and social roles.

* These new-comers are perhaps at the forefront, indicating the direction of these social changes and thus are not necessarily representative of all Thai men of their generation.

Role Play

As previously discussed, the long-timers' husbands never seemed to question their family's expectations and naturally played the family role of 'little boy' again. In contrast, most of the new-comers' husbands feel oppressed by family demands and try to ignore them, or else oblige reluctantly. As the new-comers are no longer economically dependent upon, or living with their families, it was suggested that they may be in a better position to ignore such demands. However, this age-generational difference not only reflects different residence patterns, but also suggests a change in Thai family and social role expectations.

Margaret commented that a major problem for foreign wives was that,

the Thais are taught to conform and role-play, and yet they can be sincere in all their roles. In the US they behave like any nice young American man, but back in Thailand have to conform to Thai social norms, thus many roles: Obedience to his mother, subserviance to his boss, dominance to his subordinates and almost indifference to his wife. In the space of an hour a man can fill all these roles and be totally sincere.

Though most people regularly play more than one social role eg, mother, wife and daughter-in-law, such roles are generally complementary - characterised by caring and loving for others. However, it would appear that Thais have to play so many more social roles which may appear contradictory (eg stern to a subordinate and charming to a superior) in order to fit into the various

hierarchical obligations and expectations within each of their relationships! Not only are the number of Thai social roles greater, but the expectations of each role differs from that of the West. However willing a farang wife may be to conform, the hierarchy and expectations within each Thai social relationship was often difficult for the farang wife to comprehend or adjust to. Even within the family the relative ranking of siblings would cause confusion to the farang who was used to speaking in the same manner to all her relatives. Imamura's research also found that speaking 'up to' elder brothers and sisters, and being 'talked down to' by the same, in the hierarchical social systems of Japan and Nigeria, took foreign wives some getting used to. Thus, if their social roles within the immediate family were complex, the social expectations upon them outside of the domestic domain were even more so. However, despite her attempts to conform, any incongruency in her behaviour would have been noticeable due to her marginal status and often the older-generation Thai husband could not understand his wife's inability to fulfil her roles, for he had had little problem adjusting to the expectations in her country.

As Helen, a new-comer, noticed,

Thai men are very good at adapting to whatever society they are in - they don't cause waves, they're not going to aggravate anybody. If he goes to England, he'll 'become' British if he stays in Thailand he'll 'become' more Thai.

The length of time the husband spent abroad and whether his family supported him or not, may have some influence on the husband's behaviour, for those who stayed the longest, and/or those who had to support themselves, seem less likely to 'change'. Most of the older-generations' husbands who went for higher education overseas were on

government scholarships and/or family funds. As these men were the most likely to 'change' suggests that while these husbands learnt their subjects and passed their exams, many did not 'pick-up' Western ways of thinking, but instead simply mimicked the behaviour of their western counterparts as opposed to adopting it or making it their own.

A major age-generational difference was found in that many of the new-comers' husbands had to support their own stuides (in Thailand or abroad) and thus the motivation to learn as much as possible about everything was perhaps greater. These men may still play the appropriate hierarchical roles demanded by Thai society but as the new-comers do not live with their in-laws, the husbands seldom bring 'the game' back inside the family domain. That these husbands are not seen to change suggests that they have been more able to distinguish between, rather than just mirror social roles, and maybe more able to adopt western or Thai roles with which they feel most comfortable, thus reducing the chances of completely reverting to Thai roles once back in Thailand. That they may be in a position to do this would also suggest a change in Thai social expectations which allows greater freedom in social role-playing. As social conformity lessens within Thai society, so too does the need for farang spouses to adjust to these roles.

While the older-generation husbands were more likely to change their behaviour to fulfil the social role expectations demanded of them, they perhaps unconsciously expected their wives to conform to Thai social role expectations without realising the confusion their wives felt. However, none of them ever discussed the situation with their wives which often led to further misunderstandings and dissatisfaction within the

relationship. In contrast, while social expectations for the new-comers to conform have reduced, more than half of these husbands discuss the issue with their wives.

As social roles become less rigidly applied, there becomes more scope for individual behaviour and expression which is accompanied by social changes in Thai male/female role expectations. As previously discussed, Thai women are gradually expecting more from their marriage relationships, and as will be seen the new-comers' husbands are more likely to discuss problems with their wives, which suggests that both Thai men and women are becoming more expressive. Therefore changes to be seen in these Thai-farang marriages appear to reflect change and the influence of such change in Thai/Thai relationships.

Problem Solving and Communication Patterns

As most women interviewed cited 'friendship and partnership' amongst their expectations, if their marriage was without communication a major readjustment of their marital expectations and a re-evaluation of the relationship was necessary. According to Imamura, this phenomena appears to be common among mixed-marriages when,

shortly after marriage, the husband became increasingly less communicative with his wife. His communication declined, not only because he conformed to standards of his own society (including the separation of the male and female spheres, where there is no need for spouses to discuss these areas), but also because he did not have knowledge of female roles. Whatever the

cause, this was a major disappointment for her.

(Imamura 1990:177)

However, that there are age-generational differences in the Thai husbands' communication patterns, suggests changes in Thai culture which have affected Thai male/female role expectations.

As already noted, the new-comers' husbands are more inclined to discuss their problems, and include their wife in their plans, while the older-generation husbands often did neither! In fact over half of the older-generation compared with less than a quarter of the new-comers said their husbands were reluctant to discuss problems. Margaret, a long-timer said that her, "husband's refusal to discuss problems made life very difficult." In contrast, many of the new-comers were attracted to their Thai husbands by the fact that they were good listeners and that they could always talk together. But although the majority of the new-comers say they can talk about their problems and feelings with their husbands, women from both generations complained that in general, Thai men are reluctant to discuss problems. However, if some Thai men are good communicators then what prevents other Thai men from communicating, and what makes a husband who used to discuss problems in the woman's home country suddenly stop doing so once in Thailand? Do age-generational differences suggest that this difficulty with communication is simply a Thai male characteristic, or is it one that men all over the world are likely to have? How did the respondents learn to handle such differences successfully, when others have given up and left?

Perceived Changes in Communication Patterns

Whether the husband 'changes' after marriage or not, problems will arise in any marriage. But when one partner is reluctant to discuss the issue, and the other partner is far from home and her support networks such difficulties are magnified. As Imamura suggest,

For any foreign wife, however, the husband is the first mediator of the local culture, and loss of communication may leave her (at least temporarily) virtually networkless and uninformed. (Imamura 1990:178)

As the majority of the new-comers have not found this to be a problem suggests that either the 'new' Thai man is more ready to talk with his wife, and/or that his wife has access to other social networks relieving the pressure on him. However, for the older-generation women, patterns of communication which might have developed to meet the tensions of the marriage in the her home country were not allowed in the face of traditional suppression of conflict and the lack of privacy, when living with the in-laws, for fighting constructively. Consequently, when the patterns of communication and problem solving are changed, the marriage relationship undergoes tremendous pressure. (Culture Shocked Marriages:16)

Presumably, when in their home environment, the women did not depend so much on communicating with their husbands and therefore did not notice a problem until they arrived in Thailand, where they had no one else to turn to. For example, Helen knew her husband over 10 years before coming to Thailand with him and says, "The main problem would be his reticence to talk about things, which for me has only really been a problem since we came

here." This suggests that her husband had not really changed, but because their situation had made her more dependent upon him for communication she became more aware of 'his reticence to talk'. Indeed Diane, a newcomer explains that her husband has 'changed' simply because of their new situation and says he,

always used to listen to my problems but now he doesn't have time - you see now he has his own problems - we're in his shoes now, at that time [when they met] he was studying and probably life is different if you're a student and his family was far away, of course as soon as we came here we had things with his family.

However, she continues that, "If I have some problem I can tell him, but I think now he has enough to worry about and I have nothing serious to tell - he notices when I am quiet and asks if I am OK!"

Helen explains the situation as she perceives it: I found it hard to believe that someone doesn't have an opinion about things - but of course he'd just see it as being over emotional and getting excited about nothing as always, that's just the way they see it. I don't really know if its a 'Thai' thing or not. The problem with these mixed-marriages are - I think, you have to decide what are the things that annoy you and you have to decide whether they are parts of his personality per se, or his culture before you start attacking him because of his culture 'Oh, you're Thai you don't understand these things' etc. But then again, how much of a personality is culture is difficult to define. I have met other Thai men, (married to farang) and they are not the same as him, so I'd say, the way he is, quiet, retiscent and not emotional about things

is actually his personality rather than him being Thai.

Male/Female Roles vs Thai/Farang Cultures

Helen compares male/female role perceptions, Most of us [farang women] that live here feel it us who have to compromise most. We suffer a lot to live here, we do, we give up a lot to stay here. The husbands are unaware of it - 'what are you complaining about - this is life?' that's the way the Thai person is, life is bitter, you suffer, don't complain. Whereas Westerners will think you should always be happy, make life easy and enjoy ourselves while they are thinking of how to survive. I think they are not really aware of what we go through, I mean we're not suffering in any way, but it is hard, especially from a close family like me. If it were the other way round and our husbands were living in our country we'd try to make life easy for them. I think women worry about things, we've got to make sure everybody's OK, that's the nature of women, we're trained to please people. My husband never seems to think, 'is she happy here, is she OK being home a large part of the day by herself with nobody to speak to?' I don't think it would cross their minds. Whereas if we were home, he wouldn't expect me to think, 'is he missing his *tom yum gung*?' but I'd make it for him, buy him Thai newspapers etc or something on a practical level. I just don't think they (men) think. They expect you to accept, and some women

don't! In a way you can see that they are thinking about you, but in a different way:

Daniella also believes it has nothing to do with culture, but is a simply male characteristic:

Usually men - they don't talk about such things - its typically men! You can't blame everything on being Thai - because men and women are really just different it doesn't matter if you're Eskimo or not!

However, if there is a universal difference between males and female, then why do many women insist that Thai men are reluctant to talk? While it appears that men in general are less inclined to discuss personal issues, preferring to talk about football scores and computer programs, but when it comes to problem solving, cultural differences in the approach to discussions can be seen.

Thai vs Farang Approaches to Problem Solving

Like many others, Vernita believes there is a distinct cultural difference in perception of 'discussions', "Thais think farang overdo the idea of feelings - particularly unpleasant things and say you're 'beating it to death' whereas farang think they're 'trying to work it out'" Indeed, Thais are taught from an early age to avoid emotional extremes, and the Buddhist notion of impermanence discourages Thais from dwelling on emotions and situations beyond their control.

One is expected to mask one's emotions, particularly socially destructive ones like anger, hatred and annoyance. One of the factors determining such behaviour is Buddhist teaching

which places a positive religious value on the avoidance of emotional extremes, commitment and confrontation. (Klausner nd:12)

As emotional neutrality is constantly endorsed it is thus the style of approach to, or rather avoidance of problems, that can be seen as a cultural difference between Thai and farang.

Margaret notes that, "Thais are not encouraged to consider or analyse themselves or other people, therefore they cannot see the problem and blame their wives for thinking too much." Indeed, Jane a new-comer, said that though she needs to show emotion her husband did not understand why she wanted to get inside his mind all the time. This used to frustrate her and make her more angry than before. However, the more angry she became, the more quiet her husband would be. Her efforts to make him respond would only result in him withdrawing even more. Eventually she realised that if she remained calm, he would listen and she says that is all she wanted and they have now agreed on each others basic characteristics, and differences and now know how to avoid problems.

After almost 40 years of marriage and living in Thailand Margaret says, "Thai indirectness vs US directness used to cause [her and her husband] difficulties and occasionally still does." Farang are commonly known to be more direct about their thoughts and emotions, while Thais are often described as being indirect. Klausner describes,

the Thai penchant for avoiding social confrontation and conflict. While desirous of being sympathetic, compassionate, generous and kind towards others, there is at the same time, a bias towards avoiding emotional extremes and strong emotional commitment. Resolving conflicts

usually takes the indirect form of compromise.

(Klausner rd:36)

As Patricia a long-timer, notes, "Thais are by nature more indirect, but once you can understand it and know how to handle it, its not an issue".

Compromise

How did these farang women learn to understand their husbands and manage to solve their problems? As Jane says, "The main problem for the first few years was simply not knowing, not being aware of, or realising what or how each other thinks and feels."

Margaret advises that,

You learn how to be indirect, what issues you can discuss and which ones you have to let be. It takes patience! ... I have learnt to understand a lot better about that and how to get around it, but sometimes if something matters very much to me, I may go overboard and go back to being direct, but it never gets me anywhere, not with my husband. In general, with my husband as well, I've had to learn not to be openly critical of anything he does, but do it indirectly. He has learnt not to take umbridge every time I say something critical about Thailand or about Thais - he used to assume that this was a blanket rejection of his country and he reacted very defensively. But he has learnt that I'm just concerned when things are wrong anywhere. I have had to learn to be indirect, but he has never learnt to be direct! In the States, it was part of the culture, so yes, he was more direct there,

but he can't be direct with anyone else here so he - its not a role, its a whole kind of behaviour, he can change his role from one second to the next but not his behaviour. He can be direct with someone distinctly inferior, if one of his staff made a mistake he'd be very direct, but that is acceptable - I guess he doesn't regard me as one of his staff yet!

Time and practice have helped Alison understand her husband who, doesn't talk freely on personal issues. But we've been together long enough for me to know when he's worried about something, or something's bothering him and I have to guess, and he's quite relieved to have me do that actually, for it to come out rather than sit around for days ... Sometimes we have to agree to disagree, but we both know we come from different angles and respect that in each other. He's got a valid set of propositions and I've got a valid set of propositions, and we understand enough about each others culture to know where we're coming from even though we can't always bridge that, and sometimes there's not a need. More often, being married to a Thai you find that, well, why make it an issue, why bother? Which is a tremendous thing to learn - just to learn to let go sometimes is tremendous.

Indeed, some of the women agree that they as farang do think too much, and have learnt to be less introspective as a result. In addition, many believe that the Thai penchant for compromise also helps them to put their lives and relationships into perspective. Patricia says she is quite happy to give up her little

'whims' in return for a stable and secure relationship and says, it's a 'trade-off' - and a question of priorities. "What's important to you, a happy relationship or having your own way over minor issues?" Of course if it's something she feels strongly about she won't give in easily, and she says they often argue, but it's more in a humorous manner, both playing/teasing on the others' weakness and bad habits. When they argue, she says she tells him that she's 'just trying to make his life more exciting!' With a good sense of humour she says you can get away with saying a lot of things in a good-natured way!

Thus, all the women who said they had problems with their husband's ability to communicate, believe that realising and understanding the differences, be they culture or gender-based, has helped them to adapt their behaviour and expectations and reach a satisfactory compromise.

While some women believe that a husband's lack of communication can be as much a problem in the West, and suggest that it is simply a male/female role difference, rather than a cultural characteristic, the indirect nature of Thai culture appears to emphasise these gender-based differences. That there are age-generational differences in the Thai husbands' communication patterns, suggests that changes in Thai culture have affected Thai male/female role expectations and thus the phenomena maybe seen as a combination of culture and sex roles, with cultural differences in male-female behaviour being magnified. The social changes in Thai culture may be seen as bridging the culture and sex-role gaps reflecting greater similarity with western expectations and therefore as there is less pressure and for the new-comers to

conform there is less tendency for the Thai husband to 'change'.

Chapter Summary

Of the three common areas of a husband's 'change', the husband's infidelity was the hardest for the older-generation women to accept and peer pressure excused the husband of any blame. Socially ascribed roles could be learnt while the break-down of communication and even the separation of social lives could be replaced by friendships and social networks. However, while the husband's promiscuity was emotionally harmful in the past, the physical dangers of disease particularly AIDS today makes it doubly difficult for farang or Thai women to tolerate. That this problem does not appear to be a threat to the new-comers suggests that a gradual decrease in Thai women's tolerance towards such behaviour, together with the increase of AIDS awareness is reducing the practice among educated men.

The findings of this chapter suggest that there are social changes taking place in Thai male and female roles, which have been influenced by socio-economic development, education and globalisation, and were seen to have affected marriage relationships between Thai and farang. That the new-comers have not noticed a drastic change in their husbands' behaviour implies the direction of Thai social change leading towards more individualism, emotional intensity and commitment! The age-generational differences in the experiences of the interviewees, show that the degree of family interference and peer pressure has reduced on the new-comers' husbands who appear to be more independent in their way of thinking and behaviour

which reflects an increase in social tolerance towards individualism. The new-comer's husband may still 'play' the appropriate hierarchical roles demanded by Thai society but as society is changing towards more egalitarianism he is under less pressure to do so and seldom brings 'the game' back inside the family domain for his farang wife to see. As he seldom goes out without her it would appear that he is not easily lured into the vices of the older-generation or controlled by 'peer-pressure'. In addition, that most new-comers' husbands confide in their wives, it is believed that the 'new generation' Thai men and women are looking for more depth and emotional partnership in their marriage relationships. However, rather than being representative of ALL Thai men, the new-comers' husbands are still marginal themselves and thus are at the forefront of Thai social changes.