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## **An Analysis of Thai Gender Relations**

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**NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY**

**An Analysis of Thai Gender Relations**

**A Thesis Submitted to the**

**University Honors Program**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the**

**Requirements of the Baccalaureate Degree**

**With Upper Division Honors**

**Department of**

**Southeast Asian Studies**

**By**

**Priyanka Amin**

**DeKalb, Illinois**

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**ABSTRACT (100-200 words):**

**Thailand's social behaviors such as gender relations have played a significant part in its culture. Therefore, studying this topic is an essential factor in understanding the rise of its society and civilization. Researching about the Thai culture and social system is a unique experience of its own due to the country's wide-ranging diversity of traditions and rituals. The purpose of this study was to find out the relationship between social behaviors and views, and how these views impacted the role of men and women. The study was limited to examining the changing status of men and women influenced by factors such as religion, family organization, politics, and prostitution of women. This research was done to promote the importance of Thai culture and views. This subject was studied through publications, articles, and personal experiences. As exploring this topic, I discovered that gender relations have been evolving over a period of time and are still continuing to change. They have certainly created a set place or status for men and women in the public eye; however, these set places are modifying as well in the modern times. This topic is very significant, because it supports the extensive research done in Southeast Asian Studies and analysis comparing Western and Eastern cultures.**

In order to understand any culture or environment, it is important to know the people of that culture and their perceptions. It is also essential to know the roots of those traditions and behaviors. Similarly, understanding a country like Thailand requires knowing about its abundant culture and history. Thailand's amazing environment is representative of its unique customs and traditions. In order to gain insight into the Thai social system, one would need to analyze its gender system. The combination of views that are portrayed by each society and the roles that are carried on by either a man or a woman, are what form the societal norms on how each person should behave. They are what form the ideology and basis of generations of relationships that are carried on, thus making it an important topic of discussion. Gender issues and treatment between the men and women in the Southeast Asian society have been the topics of interest for a long period of time. In examining Thai gender relations, there are broad categories that are crucial in Thai lives. Among the few, Buddhism plays a very significant role in the Thai culture, and for this reason, it will be discussed in a great context in order to understand the influence it has on gender differences. In addition, family organization and upbringing, political and economical changes, as well as the intimate roles of men and women have also had an effect on Thai gender relations. Prostitution of women has also been created and found in Thailand's history, and it has continued onto the present time. Prostitution has also been used quite frequently to measure the status of Thai women in comparison to men. Therefore, prostitution as well as the topics mentioned earlier need to be carefully considered within their past and present in order to understand how they play a role in gender differences. It is important to distinguish how they have evolved from traditional times and compare these changes with these in the modern times. Of all the

factors that have played vital roles in the analysis of gender, Buddhism has been an especially significant one.

Theravada Buddhism has played and will continue to play an important role in Thai lives. It is a tradition that continues to shape both urban and rural life. Although these beliefs were developed in ancient times, they have adapted and retained their dominance even in the present times. Buddhist views have left their mark in the cultures of Thai people even ages after its origination. For example, it has shaped the Thai political order by requiring the King to be a Buddhist in order to fulfill his role as the "Protector of the Faith". These ideas are considered significant and long lasting in the eyes of Buddhist believers and in the Thai value system.

Buddhist values and traditions have established separate religious roles that can be fulfilled by either men or women, but not both. In order to understand this concept, it is important to first understand the importance of accumulating merit. The means of achieving Buddhist goals is through merit-making acts (Esterik 1982/1996:17), because the accumulation of this merit will lead a person to attain the highest stage of enlightenment, or *nirvana*. These merit-making acts are described as *karma*, which means the sum of a person's deed or an act is regarded as determining that person's future states of existence. Any act can be defined as merit making or losing, depending on its nature. Although each individual has a position in Buddhism depending on the "balance" of their merit, this position can never be fixed because the individual is constantly gaining or losing their merit causing them to alter positions. Therefore, there are no limits to the "amount" of merit an individual can gain because only their inner souls can guide that decision. However, the highest Buddhist-defined status achieved in this world is known

to be monk hood (Esterik 1982/1996:17). It is important to note that for Thais, differences in status, rank, and merit are more important than gender (Cook 1999:244). But with the merit-making activities that are open to men, they seem to have the advantage when it comes to accumulating merit religiously and gaining higher status. However, as it will be discussed later on, women do tend to rank higher economically than many men.

With that concept described, the cultural system points out that if both men and women were to attempt to maximize their merit, they would be in conflict, which could cause a destruction in the family. Buddhist ideology, therefore, claims that this could be prevented if men and women were not competing for the same merit position (Esterik 1982/1996:21). This means that men and women would have different roles to fulfill in order to avoid conflicts between them. This ideology takes away the most significant factor of Buddhism from women, which is attaining monkhood, since only men are capable of fulfilling this act. If a woman wishes to gain this outstanding status, she must be reborn as a man in a reincarnated life. That does not mean that women cannot participate in other merit making activities or that they are not just as religious as men. In fact, a lot of the temple-related tasks, such as feeding the monks and attending routine services, are taken care of by women.

There is another difference that also exists in these religious roles. The issue of ordination also shows a contrasting characteristic in gender roles. A man's other major meritorious act is ordination in the *sangha*, which refers to a community of ordained monks or a community of "noble ones". On the other hand, a woman's major merit making act is giving a son for ordination (Richter 1992:71). A man is supposed to pass

through the rite of passage of ordination as a monk when he is considered socially mature. Through monkhood, men achieve moral prestige, spiritual enlightenment, and educational attainment that women do not get to enjoy. Monkhood means that the person is mature enough to take on the role of an adult and the responsibility of family life, but since women are never given the chance of going through monkhood, it is indirectly implied that they are not responsible nor mature enough to guide a family and gain the same respect (Richter 1992:71).

It is also argued that men are less attached to the rest of the world compared to women. The reason lies in this role of ordination. Since a woman's meritorious duty is related to a realistic duty of a mother or a sister present in this world, she is said to be attached to this world (Cook 1999:245). However, since men are viewed as having the highest role in Buddhism, they are seen as detached from worldly things. Therefore, men are viewed as more patient, in that they are the ones who do not let worldly or materialistic interests come in their way of achieving Buddhist goals (Esterik 1982/1996:22). However, this perspective is somewhat contradictory with respect to sexuality. Men are seen as being more sexually driven and having natural sexual needs, which are acceptable, but women should not have any sexual needs (Kirsch 16). Above, an argument stated that men are viewed as detached from the world, but contradictorily, have sexual needs that are attached to this world.

Women, on the other hand, are not deemed to possess "patience" the way men are described to have, according to Buddhist terms. Men and women are shown to complement each other due to the qualities they have within themselves. Women are seen as the ones who know their interests better than men, thus implying that women can or do



let worldly interests get in the way of attaining Buddhist goals and norms (Esterik 1982/1996: 22). These qualities have allowed women to be in charge of economic activities in the past. However, a woman's role in the Thai economy stayed local and small, because Buddhist religion considers men to be more superior in matters of politics and the economy. Women's interaction in the labor market did grow significantly over the years, especially in carrying out petty trade in the market place (Phankasem 1998:5). As women became more active in economic exchanges, they had more control of the family spending.

As Buddhist views gradually began to change with time, women were eventually given the chance to be ordained as nuns, called bhikkunis, but their ordination ceremony is still much more private and not as publicized as monks. "According to Buddhist scriptures, when women began to be ordained, the length of the current Buddhist era was thereby halved" (Cook 1999:248). This historical perception shows a woman's image as seen by Buddhists and implies that nuns would not gain the same respect as monks or novices even with the same ordination vows. For a number of years, bhikkunis have not had the same respect as monks. The reasons for this are attributed to the assumptions that nuns lack Buddhist knowledge, and they are not as worthy as monks due to their behavior (Esterik 2000:76). These nuns do not necessarily have a chance to devote their time towards spiritual enlightenment, because the monks might be giving them duties of cleaning or sewing. Since bhikkunis would be consumed during the day with these activities, they would get very tired during the services and feel sleepy or hungry. This behavior would be considered unacceptable and looked down upon by the monks and others.

There is also another role that women or men, in some cases, could take. That is of an *upasika* or *upasaka*, respectively (Esterik 1999:44). *Upasika* means a Buddhist laywoman, whereas, an *upasaka* is a layman. “Lay” means to be outside the sangha, or the monastic order. Laywomen can choose to be devotional by becoming “maechi”, or the women in white robes. Maechis are not the same as bhikkunis, as they are not given the same respect. They do, however, attempt to make merit, meditate, and try to reduce their attachment to worldly concerns (Esterik 2000:76). The role of a maechi may reveal a lot about Buddhist ideology. In the earlier practices when women could not be ordained, it was assumed that women did not meet the conditions for ordination due to the fact that they are attached to this world in their roles as mother, daughter, or wife. However, maechis challenge this assumption by demonstrating that they can move out of their family and leave their husbands and children, while other maechis may move out of their house and not have any children. Since Buddhism started allowing women the right of ordination and supported new religious roles for women, its ideas have transformed gradually to become more modernized and accepting compared to earlier doctrines.

There have been several scholarly arguments about whether Buddhism is part of the early suppression of women and if it is, then whether this suppression is an inherent part of Buddhist views or if the degrading perceptions of women were created socially (Cook 1999:246). The first argument was proposed by Khin Thitsa, a scholar cited in “Gender and Sexualities in Modern Thailand”, who says that Buddhist values created inferiorities in women and devalued their contributions to the society. She implicitly states that Buddhism was the cause of these gender views, and that the negative treatment subsequently forced women into secondary roles in the society. Kornpiva Boonsue, a

scholar also cited in “Gender and Sexualities in Modern Thailand”, made the second argument supporting the same view as the first but says that this suppression was not an inherent part of Buddhism, but it played an active role in creating this inferiority. She argues that Buddhist ideas are supportive of males and men use this as a basis to control and keep women within their limits.

Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, a researcher in the topic of women’s studies, proposes a third argument by stating that Buddhism has not suppressed women directly. She agrees that women are inferior to men in the society. However, she states that social factors rather than religious ones are the cause, because the spiritual level of Buddhism is free from all gender bias. She argues that Buddhism inherently does not differentiate between men and women and thus, is not the cause of this suppression of women. According to some authors, a part of the blame for this inequality also is due to Hindu and Chinese influences. There have been multiple theories regarding whether Buddhism had a part in restricting women through religious attitudes and actions. However, it has been noted that women do enjoy a little more control over the family issues than men do. These aspects are greatly prevalent in Thai family life.

Traditionally, the extended family organization has been popular in Thai households (Kirsch 11). Once the oldest daughter in the family got married, she and her husband would usually move in with the daughter’s family. Then the second oldest daughter and her husband would also move in with the wife’s family, and this trend would continue on so at some point, there would be several married couples residing under the same roof. If one of the couples had children, then they would be free to move out of the wife’s house and establish their own household (Richter 1992:14). In later

years, this trend led to only one of the daughters staying at her parents' house with her husband, because each of the married sisters would move out once the younger sister got married. Part of the reason for this extended kinship on the girl's side was because the wife's parents usually provided the husband with a portion of land to work on. The husband and wife were expected to share the earnings from this land with the rest of the family. Even after the couple moved out, they and their children would still continue to work on the parental property, but keep the income for themselves (Richter 1992:14).

The children of the family already had set norms of behavior depending on their gender. Young boys are normally given more freedom than girls and they are expected to be more social outside of their families. It is acceptable for boys to go out at night with friends, spend money, and have the freedom to drink alcohol. Girls, on the other hand, are expected to stay home, help out with the family, and take care of their parents when in need (Kirsch 12). The reason for this disparity is because the parents fear that they might risk their daughters getting engaged in sexual activities if they give them more freedom. Girls were also forced to dress more neatly by being taught that they should do so because they are girls, and the boys' performance in school or home was not as big of a concern since boys were viewed to be tougher (Somswasdi 1997:589). This gender socialization was also reflected in the different tasks assigned to boys compared to girls, which also reflected societal norms. Boys' physical strength and masculinity are interpreted as signs that they should act as providers and protectors, thus creating an superiority wherein girls are seen as weaker and less important (Somswasdi 1997:589). These differences in the upbringing of boys and girls might contribute to the varying perceptions of a man's and a woman's role in the eyes of the society. From their

experiences, it is more likely for parents to think that daughters will always be more likely to be there for them compared to sons. Older people do generally think that daughters are much better than sons in the sense that they are more thoughtful, can cook, clean, and take care of the parents better when they are older (Richter 1992:49).

Still in the early traditional times, the family authority rested with the father-in-law in the beginning and eventually got passed onto the son-in-law after the death of his wife's parents (Richter 1992:17). Although the father-in-law and later the son-in-law were the heads of the household, that only meant that they were in charge of the external family matters such as welfare or politics. Family and household decisions lay in the woman's hands, usually the mother or the wife. The relationship between husband and wives was pretty simple, because they both knew their responsibilities and under normal circumstances, led their own lives without any communication. It was not very common for husbands and wives to share their intimate feelings and express their emotions. The husband would take care of the externalities of the family, while the wife was expected to guide the family. The husbands and wives were not too open about their "personal" lives.

In the modern period compared to traditional times, fewer numbers of girls are staying with their parents. Even the men move away from their parents to the cities, only supporting them financially. A few reasons for this are the desire for educational advancement, the need for work force in the labor market, and the rage for moving into an urban life for success. Therefore, husband and wives have started to establish their separate households away from the parents or the villages. Currently in the villages, the same traditions still continue where men are the main providers, and the women take part in small trades and raise the children (Eberhardt 1988:7). One other major issue also

existed in Thai families. Some of the Thai married men are frequent visitors of prostitutes. This behavior was known by the wives and was considered acceptable by the older generation (Somswasdi 1997:562). The wives would generally think that they'd much rather have their husbands go to prostitutes than have them keep minor wives, because having minor wives would cause a long term relationship.

Due to the changing lifestyles, the responsibilities within the urban households are not the same as they used to be. These responsibilities have been noted to be more equalized. There is an increasing number of women entering the labor force and attaining reputable jobs due to advanced education (Richter 1992:18). In present time, Thailand is at a turning point with respect to the status of women compared to the men. While women are actively taking their place as being equal to men, it is important to keep in mind that certain situations are still going to take a couple more generations to get around (Tobiyah Holmes, Personal Communication, November 4, 2004). Women seem to retain the role of a caretaker and a homemaker, while the men have also learned to take upon the child rearing role and caring of the house. Men still try to be the provider, but the drastically changing economic conditions seem to make it more difficult for only men to fulfill this duty (Tobiyah Holmes, Personal Communication, November 4, 2004). Thus, women are expanding their roles into the political/social arena. Historically, Thai men have dominated the political arena by becoming the regulators. However, women in the working field do not need men anymore to show them their place in the society. Overall, compared to the complementary roles that men and women historically assumed, they are now taking roles based on mutual cooperation and support (Richter 1992:18). Although both sexes are involved in making mutual decisions concerning marital/family problems,

women are usually the decision makers about issues such as birth spacing, family size, and childcare.

The roles of men and women in familial settings have also altered dramatically in the past couple decades due to other reasons. This change has occurred due to the spurring economy as well as foreign newcomers in the Thai society. Thailand's environment and economy has caused a lot of tourism allowing foreigners, known as *farangs* in Thai, to visit and some of them to eventually permanently settle down. Some of the Thai people even have inter-racial marriages with these *farangs*. These marriages have caused differences of opinions from the husband and the wife. For one, the fact that *farangs* marry for love, while Thais marry for security and social obligations. Since the *farangs* do marry based on love, they have a different perception of gender responsibilities (Somswasdi 1997:556). For example, a *farang* has the expectation that when the marriage is based on a partnership, it means that it would be open and based on equal terms. However, to a Thai, a notion of partnership means that the labor is split equally and they would not burden each other with their individual responsibilities. Thais also tend to prioritize the duty of their families before the duty to their husbands or wives. It is difficult for the *farang* women to accept this view and expect that the husbands make them their primary responsibilities (Somswasdi 1997:557). It is also intolerable for the *farangs* to accept any sort of interference from the Thai extended families.

Due to these marriages and citizens experiencing the "farang life", the traditions and culture of familial men and women roles are starting to modernize. Many Thais no longer live with their families nor tolerate any adverse intrusion in their personal lives. The women have also gained an equal power in the household as far as their relationships

with their husbands. The *farang* women married to Thai men reflected the experiences of gaining greater insight in their husbands' lives (Somswasdi 1997:567). The sexual relations between husbands and wives were merely those for the man's pleasure.

According to the number of middle-aged women surveyed, their husbands do not think about making them sexually happy, but instead criticize their wives for being lazy when it comes to pleasing them (Somswasdi 1997:585). The men would often beat their wives or threaten them that they would get new wives or visit prostitutes if they did not please them sexually. Based on the way that the women have been socialized, their internalized life goals are clearly different from the men, which is the key factor in the differences between their relationship and family happiness. Therefore, a husband and wife's bond seems to appear to be the weakest in all Thai relationships (Somswasdi 1997:336). In the public, most people put their best face forward and play the conservative role of being in an equal relationship. In the end, men sometimes turn against their girlfriends/wives by having multiple women, and women try to cope, sometimes by having multiple men in their lives (Tobiyah Holmes, Personal Communication, November 4, 2004).

The Thai male sexual behavior with the "third woman" has somewhat changed for the better based on the surveys. Although, it is difficult to decide whether the Thai men really have changed or they are just better at covering up the truth (Somswasdi 1997:562). The more pessimistic theory seems to be more prevalent, but has been the cause of more women taking a stand for what they believe. With the women gaining more education and knowledge of their surroundings, they have become more aware of this situation and some of them have even left their husbands for it. The studies with the *farang* women's Thai husbands show that infidelity is not the case. This shows that the



male expectations have been changing according to the wife's attitudes (Somswasdi 1997:563). Thai men may have altered their actions due to their wives stepping up.

Up until a few decades ago, the practice of polygamy was prevalent in the history of Thai relations. Back in the 1600's, women played the roles of consorts and multiple wives to the king (Richter 1992:89). They were even used to mark the territories of the kingdom and were stated to be the king's possession. Polygamy has been practiced by Thai men and has come a long way to get reformed by the policymakers. The men have always been resistant towards legally changing the marriage customs. In 1936, polygamy was finally made illegal, but as far as divorce laws, men were given the right to divorce their wives for infidelity, but wives were denied the same right (Jeffrey 2002:8). This shows that the focus of liberating the marriage customs was not to give women an equal treatment. As the polygamous system began to be more under the question, the monarchs started to defend the changes by suggesting that polygamy is a reflection of Buddhist culture and its creation of the gender system (Somswasdi 1997:563).

Women have been used for other forms within the Thai society as well. As mentioned earlier, the kings in the monarchy started off with the idea of polygamy and having multiple women to satisfy their personal and/or political needs. With keeping other factors into consideration, polygamy did have a little to do with the rising signs of prostitution in the society. Prostitution has been a very popular form of business in Thailand for many years. This trade of sexual favors did not initially start as a means of generating income, but as a symbol of pride for the kings. The women acting as consorts or wives were punished severely for adultery or promiscuity (Jeffrey 2002:4). These punishments varied; however, for elite women, they resulted in being forced into sexual

services, although this did not meet the definition for “prostitution”, as Westerners are used to calling it. Commercial prostitution, as the modern definition implies, did not appear in Thailand until early 1700’s (Jeffrey 2002:5). This was due to the liaisons created between European men and lower status women who were mostly sold into debt bondage as slaves and as repayments of money.

Other factors concerning the rising prostitution were related to political pressures. In early 1900’s, the abolishment of slavery practically caused the Thai government to reconfigure their political system (Jeffrey 2002:11). There was a problem of how to incorporate these large numbers of newly freed slaves and utilizing them. The government took more initiative for the men and admitted them into military services as well as offered education to them. The women, on the other hand, did not have any education enforced upon them due to the tight financial constraints and as a reason, could not lead productive lives. They could not sell themselves into slavery and earn money either like the earlier time period, because slavery was no longer prevalent (Jeffrey 2002:11). Abide by these limitations, women seemed to have no choice but to turn towards prostitution as a way of supporting themselves, and in many cases, supporting their families.

Since the beginning of this era, prostitution has been growing increasingly. Child prostitution also became popular during this period, especially children from rural families who were deceived into these acts. The reason for the creation of these conditions for women was the growing market demand for prostitution and female body display. Thai prostitution was quite discrete in the past, and flaunted neither the prostitute nor the relationship (Esterik 1988:3). But the enormous tourist industry in Thailand has

made the situation worse, because the propaganda associated with it attracts more and more foreigners and makes the profession more provocative (Richter 1992:89). Several attempts to reform prostitution has resulted in an outburst by the corrupted government officials and tourist authorities who benefit from this.

A woman's beauty being flaunted in this manner goes completely against what the Thai cultures and values impose. The human body is considered to be very important in the Thai culture. Everything with respect to the body and its appearance is given an importance. Boys and girls are taught to use their clothing to protect and cover their bodies from exposure. Cleanliness is also emphasized and bathing is an important part of the daily routine, especially before eating and sex, in the older days (Cook 1999:283). However, women were discouraged from learning about their own bodies. Many women did not know about their own genitals, knowledge of sexual acts, or where babies came out from until they experienced it themselves (Somswasdi 1997:583). More importantly, these beliefs about women not learning about their bodies prevented them from seeking health care when in the need. This caused them to be in serious conditions when it came to sexual diseases, because they would be too embarrassed to go to the doctor.

A body infected with diseases and physical abnormalities is looked down upon; however, beauty is a major asset in the Thai society. The Thais "tend to be aware of physical bearing and beauty, as well as the use of body as a communication device" (Cook 1999:282). They gain access to their gender identities and their sexuality through their bodies. Prostitution is also given a Buddhist link to the woman's beauty. According to this link, the reason that women are in this condition is due to their former lives and due to them committing wrongful acts. However, if a prostitute is beautiful, this means

that she is working out both good and evil in her present life (Esterik 1988:9). Beautiful women, in general, are praised upon and given special privileges by the Thais. Beauty contests are also an increasing commonality among the Thai community. These contests are used to encourage women to conform to a “morally upright and dutiful gender role, while men still continue to enjoy a double standard of demanding sexual purity for their mothers, sisters, and wives, but practicing exploitative behavior with prostitutes and minor wives” (Esterik 1988:10).

Although prostitution is supported mainly by Western tourism, as mentioned earlier, it was not introduced by Western forces. Prostitution and beauty contests were rather a creation due to the cultural space that is held within the Thai ideology (Esterik 1988:16). Women performing these roles definitely strengthened the Buddhist views we discussed earlier. Women, as prostitutes, fulfill their cultural expectations of being worldly, lustful, corrupting, and greedy (Cook 1999:249). The Buddhist views also support the idea that a woman’s beauty is the result of her former life, meaning an ugly woman must have carried out a life without merit and given no alms to monks. Therefore, a beautiful prostitute is justifiable by saying that she is working out both good and evil in her present life (Esterik 2000:85).

Prostitution is considered degrading and only women from impoverished families would take such jobs. However, this “degrading” job does have its advantages in the eyes of some women. Many women believe that it is better for their husbands to visit prostitutes instead of having minor wives, since minor wives are a permanent familial threat to the wife. A lot of women also feel that prostitutes play an important role in the society by providing an immediate answer to male’s urging sexual drives and thus,

reducing the incidence of rape (Somswadi 1997:583). Over the past decades, there have been mixed opinions about the practice of prostitution in the Thai society. Prostitution is tolerated in the Buddhist society, but is still not considered an ideal role for Buddhist women just the way it was viewed in early Buddhist times (Keyes 1984:236). However, the analysis for prostitution has often been substituted for the analysis of gender relations in Thailand. Prostitution has been used frequently to measure the position of Thai women (Eberhardt 1988:5). Analysts have been presenting in their arguments that prostitution arose from social conditions that women aren't entirely to blame for.

After discussing the many factors that have influenced the position of men and women in Thailand, I have several findings and opinions of my own. Buddhism originated with a lot of its own ideas and views in respect to the way a person should lead and hold a meaning to their life. A woman's status and role is clearly identified within these views. I believe that Buddhism originally pointed out the gender differences and women's lower rights in its earlier writings, but it was the Thai society who carried on with this mindset and created an even a bigger inequality between men and women. Buddhism does have a very influential position in Thai culture; however, in my opinion, Buddhist ideas were never meant to create a gap nor degrade women in the public eyes. It was the general public who took these religious ideas to the extreme, which caused the women to be deprived of human rights for years.

In terms with what the analysts have had to say about the issue of prostitution, I agree with the argument of women not being solely responsible for promoting prostitution. Over the number of years, prostitution has become not more than a job for women, just as being a salesperson or a doctor would be to other women. Outside

influences have had the most to do with promoting this idea and patronization of women because of it. The reason that the topic of prostitution has been given so much importance in this research is because it has a lot to do with the degrading of women in the Thai culture. I believe that this has created some of the gender differences between the men and women, and caused the men to believe that they are more superior to the women. Their reason for this superiority might be due to the perception they have that women are beneath them and the men can lure them into doing whatever they please.

In my opinion, the same ideology has prevailed in marital and other male/female relationships as well. Men had a notion that they can treat their wives unfairly by keeping them at home while they visited prostitutes. According to the research, I think that these times have changed and the grounds between men and women have somewhat come more to equal terms. Women, along with the men, have created a separate life for themselves outside of their homes and families.

Gender relations have been evolving from the traditional times into the more liberal views of modern times. I believe that there are some parts to these gender based issues that will not change as drastically, due to the Thai Buddhist background and its strong influence on culture. Some of the older beliefs have still not altered and will continue to be part of the family tradition. However, I think these unchanged matters will continue to diversify slowly as the foreign forces and lifestyles are taking over. In the modern days, the western lifestyle has had a great impact on the mentalities of young generation and as a result, changes have been seen throughout the country. In my opinion, Thailand has created a strong sense of individuality in South East Asia due to its

strong beliefs and remarkable culture. On the other hand, however, the Thai culture has also adapted to the changing forces of life.

This analysis of gender relations has helped me learn the history of Thai culture. In coming to these conclusions, I gained exposure to many unanswered questions prior to the start of this research. Due to my recent trip to Thailand, I had been interested in making a thorough connection on how genders are portrayed and resembled in Thailand. This made a particularly interesting topic due to the fact that Eastern cultures have a very different view about interpersonal behaviors as oppose to the Western cultures. Being a Westerner, it was very intriguing to study the roots of an Eastern culture supported by Buddhist ideas. Conducting an extensive research of gender relations led me to achieve more knowledge and gain an even bigger appreciation of Thai culture, people, and views.

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