CHAPTER 1

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Westerners have been coming to Thailand since before the Ayutthaya period to proselytize and trade. With the increase in foreign trade over the last century Thailand has experienced rapid socio-economic development and cultural change. At the same time foreigners in greater numbers and from more diverse occupational and cultural backgrounds have come to make Thailand their home. From the handful of 'farang'[*] traders, missionaries and advisors living in Siam during the Ayutthaya period, there are now tens of thousands[**] living in modern day Thailand including private and multi-national businessmen, government/military advisors, teachers, students and tourists etc. Not only are the occupations of these foreigners more diverse, but the present farang population in Thailand also includes people from a wider variety of European backgrounds[***].

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[*] The term 'farang' will be used in this paper to refer to 'Westerners' of European and North American descent. A full description and explanation of the choice of terminology will be discussed later in this chapter.

[**] No official figures exist to include all farang living in Thailand. However, US Embassy estimates suggest approx. 10,000 US citizens, while the British Embassy estimates approx. 5,000 British citizens are living in Thailand. (Embassy estimates for the year, 1994.)

[***] Until the end of the last century the farang in Thailand came from the more dominant world traders and Colonial Powers of the times, but now includes people from other European countries.

With a larger population of westerners living in the country, and involved in a more diverse range of occupations, there has been a subsequent increase in Thai cultural and social interactions with farang. However, the majority of these farang live on the periphery of Thai society, in expatriate communities, hotels, and guest-houses and gain little more than a glimpse of Thai life. Thousands stay for periods of less than a week, while others live here for several years and even decades. Their experiences of life in Thailand, as shared by their fellow sojourners involve a struggle to comprehend and adjust to certain cultural differences. But their social relationships with Thais on a personal level are limited: the expatriate with his foreign-educated Thai business associates, his maid and driver; the tourist with the hotel clerk and the tour guide; and the teacher in his superior status with his students. Thus the cultural and social interactions, and relations with these farang are only the tip of the proverbial ice-berg. On the other hand, there are those foreigners who marry Thai men and women, who come to live in and make Thailand their home. These farang spouses are thrown into the midst of Thai society and social interactions and thus face a more immediate need to comprehend and adjust to the basic cultural differences.

Studies of Thai-farang relations have historically been carried out at a political and economic level. Most attempts at analysing Thai relations and social interactions with farang have also been based at this purely superficial level. Contemporary research such as Neils Mulder's Inside Thai Society: An Interpretation of Every day Life (1992) and Cooper's Culture Shock Thailand (1982), try to explain Thai life to those numerous foreigners who have been flocking to Thailand over the past 30 years for various reasons and wish to make sense

of it all. These researchers have themselves spent time in Thailand and report and explain the main cultural differences that they have observed. As such these books are most informative and useful. However, the effects of having to live with such differences and become part of such a different way of life are not felt so completely as they are by farang married to Thais and living in Thailand. How do these farang spouses adjust to Thai culture and society?

Horror stories of farang women married to Thai men abound among the farang communities living in Bangkok. Tales of farang women, living in poverty and isolation, with their Thai husbands playing the field and bringing home minor wives appear to be common knowledge, and one of the first things a new-comer to Thailand will hear. The typical stories are of young farang women who meet their Thai husbands in their home country and fall in love. Upon following him to Thailand she finds that he has changed and 'become Thai', going-out at night and leaving her alone at home or with her in-laws. That many such marriages have ended in divorce has led to the assumption that Thai men and Thai culture are to blame and that all such marriages are doomed. But what are the difficulties these women face and why do so many of these marriages fail? To determine the factors involved and the effects of Thai culture upon such relationships it was decided to focus this study on the experience of farang women married to Thai men.

Although the majority of Thai-farang marriages in Thailand are between Thai women and farang men it is commonly assumed that women as the 'home-makers' are required to adapt more to cultural differences and familial roles than males. Thus, by looking at Thai-farang marriage relationships in which the wife is farang

and the husband is Thai, we can gain a better understanding of the Thai social environment as well as of cultural differences between Thai and farang in terms of social relationships and familial roles. Interveiew data will illustrate the way in which such farang women perceive their experiences and relationships and age-generational differences will allow us to then observe the effects of cultural change in Thai society where it pertains to Thai-farang relations as well as to Thai social, family and gender-based roles.

When first in Thailand I met many farang women married to Thai men who were all too willing to tell their tales of woe and warn of the dangers of marrying a Thai man. The following are true stories which are typical of the 'horror stories' commonly told and highlight some of the common difficulties experienced by farang women married to Thai.

Linda, met her husband 25 years ago when they were both studying in America. After 2 years she married him and they came to live in Thailand. By the time her second child was born, she knew that her husband was seeing other women. At the time she wanted to believe that he would change and several years went by of separations and reconciliations. A third child was born and for a while she believed that everything would be alright again. Then, one day he brought his two children, by his *mia noi* (minor wife) to play with his child from their marriage. Like many women, Linda had been living with her husband's family and although she found the lack of privacy and constant interference difficult to tolerate, she was luckier than most in that his family supported her when this happened. Even his mother would not recognise her illegitimate grandchildren and told her son to leave. Linda begged for a divorce

but her husband would not give his consent or allow her to keep the children. Therefore, she continued to live with her in-laws, saving money until the day her youngest child was old enough to leave the country without his father's consent. Linda had agreed to be interviewed, but left the country sooner than expected because she feared that her husband would find out and try to stop her leaving again. This woman's husband was unfaithful to her and yet would not grant her a divorce. Under Thai law this is a difficult situation as grounds for adultery are not applied equally and a wife must prove that her husband is supporting another woman and publicly presents her as his wife. Also, the problem of child custody complicated matters, and again favoured the husbands. In addition, children need the signature of both parents in order to get passports, which makes it difficult to take them out of the country without their father's consent and thus many farang women who have separated remain in Thailand to be near their children.

There are many stories of women who have had to 'escape', and at times the embassies have informally intervened to prevent possessive husbands from literally dragging their wives and children off planes on the runway. One woman, who did not even have children, tried to escape 3 times before she was finally successful. Her husband drank and frequented prostitutes regularly, returning home physically violent. He would not grant her a divorce and had his subordinates follow her all the time. She was working and had many friends, but no one could help as they too were scared of her husband. After 12 years of living like this, she disappeared one day. Six months later a friend received a postcard from her to say she was OK, but she gave no address and apologised that this would be the last contact she could have with anyone in Thailand. Despite her husband's infidelty, he

was still very possessive of his wife and while this example is one of the more extreme, jealousy and possessivenes was a common problem for many women.

Another, young girl, met her husband at college and 'fell in love' months before his visa was due to expire. She followed him to Thailand where they got married. Less than 6 months later they were returning to her home country for a holiday when, after passing Immigration at the other end he walked off saying he had never loved her but wanted the green-card. This woman suggested that there should be notices posted in all the embassies warning foreign women not to marry Thai men.

Such tradegies were not just a result of a farang girl meeting her future husband in her home country. Penelope met her husband in Thailand while she was doing post-graduate studies and married him after a 4 year courtship. As her husband had never been abroad before and wished to take the opportunity to continue his studies, the couple returned to Penelope's home country. Once there she found her husband was increasingly demanding that she be a 'good wife' and tend to his physical and sexual needs. She relished her independence and he resented it and they divorced within a year.

However, while these stories are apparantly not unique, this study found many farang women happily married to Thai men and living in Thailand who have 'survived' to tell the other side of the story. This suggests that there is a complex relation of factors involved in such relationships and that to place the blame on 'Thai men' and 'Thai culture', as many farang do, is too simplistic an explanation. Instead, by analysing how others have survived, we can determine the variables at play in these Thai-farang marriage

relations. Rather than blaming 'Thai men' such problems can be seen as a combination of their being 'men', or the influence of 'Thai' culture. In addition, socio-economic conditions as well as the individual's personality will also be seen to contribute to difficulties in such Thai-farang marriages. This thesis aims to anaylse the factors which affect these relationships by asking the following questions. To what extent can farang wives of Thais assimilate and what are the factors that help or hinder such a process? What can this tell us about Thai-farang relations in general? Do age-generational differences in these women's experiences highlight change in Thai cultural and social interactions with farang? Have Thailand's vast physical and social changes over the past few decades had any affect on the position of farang women in Thai society?

To address these questions, this thesis aims to trace the history and developments of Thai-farang social interactions and relations using marriage as a focal point. Age-generational differences were found among the interviewees of this research that highlight Thai socio-economic development and change and reflect Thai relations with non-Thai, farang, living in Thailand.

## Definition Of Terminology

### Thai

As the research and interviews were conducted in Bangkok where the greatest contact with and impact of farang is felt, it is the urban Bangkok Thai and Chinese-Thai that will be referred to as 'Thai' or 'Chinese-Thai'

respectively throughout this paper. (However, a small percentage of the respondants and informants are married to Thais of minority groups and this will be indicated when relevent.)

Whilst there are many minority ethnic groups in Thai society, all pertaining to be Thai, the 'Thais' referred to in this thesis are the majority group of descendents from the Siamese of the Central plains. Their culture and traditions, and even their language differs somewhat from 'Thais' of other regions, noteably the Northern, Southern and Northeastern Thais. Also within the Central plains and urban areas are a prominent and growing population of 'Chinese-Thai'. These are the descendents of Chinese immigrants,(who have been coming to Thailand throughout the centuries but in greater numbers during the first half of this century), who dominate the business and trading sectors of urban areas. They retain many Chinese traditions and characteristics but have assimilated well into the middle-classes of Thai society by inter-marriage unions and call themselves Thai.

<u>Farang</u>

Whilst there are many theories as to how the term 'farang' came into Thai usage, that the word is most commonly used by Thais to denote Caucasians is of most significance to this thesis. In general Thais make no distinction between 'farang' of different backgrounds and thus any person of white, 'western' descent, whether from the continents of Europe, America or Australia, is considered and referred to as 'farang'.

## Marriage

This thesis follows Bencha's observations when defining marriage:

> The definition of marriage varies from society to society. Generally marriage is defined as a socially legitimate sexual union, begun with a public announcement and undertaken with some idea of permanence; it is assumed with a more or less explicit marriage contract which spells out reciprocal rights and obligations between spouses. (Bencha 1992:26)

It is the difference in cultural perceptions of these rights and obligations together with the difference in cultural motivations for marriage that are significant in this thesis. Men and women within the same culture often perceive such issues differently and thus many of the issues discussed in this thesis concern marriages in general and are applicable to Thai-Thai and farang-farang relations. What makes these Thai-farang relationships different from others is that cultural perceptions of these same issues also differ. The combination of culture and gender-based role perceptions highlights the issues and the significance of individual characteristics will also be seen. Meanwhile, social changes in Thai society and the effects on male/female role perceptions within Thai marriage will also be discussed to determine the consequence of such changes on Thai-farang marriage relations.

## Expatriate

While the farang women married to Thais may be
'expatriates' in the literal sense of the word, they do
not identify themselves as such and use the term to
distinguish other farang living in Thailand on corporate
contracts and with higher incomes. These women have made
this distinction between themselves and other farang
living in Thailand as the intents, means and purposes of
their stays and life-styles, expectations and experiences
of each group differs widely. While the farang women
married to Thais expect to live in Thailand indefinitely
(if not for life), the 'expatriate' intends to move to
another country after 3-5 years with his/her next
contract. In addition, as the 'expatriate' is provided
with a company house, maid and driver, school fees and
return airfares to his home country, there is a big
difference in the financial status and standard of living
as well as in the experiences of, and with, Thai society
when compared with the financial status and social
position of the farang wife of a Thai man. Therefore,
this thesis will follow the usage of the informants to
refer to other farang who have come to live temporarily
in Thailand on multi-national 'all expenses paid' company
deals as 'expatriates'.

## Cultural and Social Interactions

The reciprocal effects of close and regular
contact between Thais and farang upon each respective
social group together with the influence of
'globalisation' and western culture on Thai society and
how this has affected Thai-Thai relations as well as

Thai-farang relations in general and Thai-farang marriage relationships, as seen through the interactions and experiences of farang spouses of Thais.


## Research Methods


The research has been undertaken in three main ways; readings, questionnaires and personal interviews. A number of disciplines including anthropology, sociology, psychology, and communication have been incorporated into the research. A combination of these approaches was deemed necessary in order to cover the full range of issues arising from the rich first-hand data derived from the interviews and the analyses of previous research from various fields. The literature included: basic research methods and theories; previous studies on Thai-farang relations and Thai-farang marriage; literature on marriage practices in Thailand and the west; and general readings on Thai history, society and culture.


### Questionnaires


Preliminary questionnaires[*] were sent out via a foreign woman's club mailing list and distributed in public places where foreigners frequent such as the Community Services of Bangkok (CSB) and American University Alumni (AUA). They were also passed around through social networks. The questionnaires were aimed at gaining a general overview of the current situation of

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[*] A copy of the questionnaire is provided in the Appendix.

Thai-farang marriage relations as well as to test the responsiveness of people in such relationships. Out of 220 questionnaires distributed, 54 were returned. An additional 14 farang women were located for interviews bringing the total to 68. Of the replies, 9 were from Thai men, 14 from Thai women, 8 from farang men and the remaining 37 from farang women. Though marriage between farang women and Thai men is less common than between farang men and Thai women, that farang women were more responsive suggests that these women are more concerned with the concepts involved and their marginal position.

Indeed, the majority of inter-national marriages are generally between minority group males and majority group females. As the majority of women willing to be interviewed were in successful relationships these women are exceptions in both cases. It is the minority status of these women that makes these relationships different from other Thai-Thai, farang-farang or Thai-farang marriages and emphasises the cultural differences between the two groups. While the findings of this research reflect marriage in general, that the wife in these relationships is farang emphasises both culture and gender-based differences in male/female role perceptions. That these women are a minority also exaggerates their marital problems as they are without the usual support mechanisms of family and social networks. In addition, these women face unfamiliar external pressures and social expectations which highlight cultural differences. The way in which these women face such differences also illustrates the importance of the social backgrounds and individual characteristics of both partners in the marriage relationship. Changes in any one variable result in changes in the others and plus by looking at age-generational differences in these Thai-farang marriage relations we can see Thai social change in many

areas. Change in Thai family relations and male/female role expectations and the effect of this on Thai-farang marriage and Thai-farang social interactions will be shown in this thesis.


## Interviews


As the majority of respondents from the questionnaires willing to be interviewed were farang women, the interviews were focused on this group. Through these women and other personal contacts, more informants were found. A total of thirty-two respondents have been interviewed. Twenty-eight of these were farang women, one was a farang man and two were Thai men. Interview data from the male informants will be included when relevent, but due to the greater response from farang women the main focus of this thesis will be placed on the substantial information gained from the farang women interviewed. As this is the first research of its kind, in depth interviews were conducted, posing open-ended questions* to allow respondents to speak freely, which provided an abundance of material for analysis. Each interview lasted an average of 3-4 hours and in the interest of privacy the names of all the interviewees have been changed.

The respondants were initially divided into 3 groups based on the length of marriage, those married less than 10 years, those between 10-20 years , and those over 20 years. However, as not all of these women have lived in Thailand for the length of their marriage, the following results were later divided into two

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* An example of the type of questions posed in the interviews is provided in the Appendix.

generational groups: the 'older-generation' or 'long-timers' and the 'new-comers'.. The 'older-generation' are those who have been married and lived in Thailand for more than 20 years while the 'new-comers', are those who have been married for up to 20 years, but have lived in Thailand for less than 20 years (i.e. before and after the end of Vietnam Era when the real influx of farang to Thailand began).

## Limitations Of Study

This paper focuses on the position of farang women married to Thai men. These farang women are not only the minority within Thai-farang marriage relationships, but that the majority of these respondents are in successful relationships makes them exceptions within their own group. That they have 'survived' living in Thailand, which has apparantly destroyed so many other marriages, highlights the significance of social change and the influence of individual attributes. The unique and valuable data compiled provides a rich source of interesting material and detailed examples of common issues for analysis in this thesis and the variety of experiences among these women continually reveals the interdependence of all the factors involved. This confirms the need for qualitative data in social research as each individual's unique experience highlights the common patterns from which generalisations can be drawn to assess the major factors involved in Thai-farang cross-cultural marriage relationships.

## Review Of The Literature And Background Information

This review of the literature has been divided into four main categories: theory, history, marriage and Thai social change. The theoretical background and research methods include references to culture shock, marginality and communication; the historical background includes the history of Thai-farang relations, the history of Thai-farang inter-marriage, and the position of children; finally a comparison of Thai and farang marriage patterns and expectations is then followed by a review of Thai social change.

## Theoretical Background and Research Methods

Social science research theories regarding the techniques and limitations of questionnaires and interviews were consulted. As the first major study of its kind the emphasis on interview data was necessary to provide valuable first hand material for analyses. This qualitative report focuses on life histories and personal experiences as they apply to various social science theories, and a number of schools of approach to inter-cultural relations were referred to. In particular, social and psychological studies into the effects of inter-cultural adaptation, referring to culture shock, marginality and communication strategies gave useful insights and extra dimensions to the research materials as discussed below.

## Culture Shock

One of the more common schools of thought concerning inter-cultural relations is that concerning the sojourner's experience of and reaction to 'Culture Shock'. Klausner described the emotionally debilitating and psychologically disorientating effects of culture shock stating that, "Misunderstandings arise as the inevitable consequence of cultural differences. This leads to confusion, bewilderment, anxiety and sometimes despair." (Klausner nd:11) While the majority of the women interviewed in this thesis experienced such problems, most have passed this initial stage of their adaptation process and now value the benefits and rewards of cultural differences.

In fact, two opposing models of culture shock were found among the literature, that of Osberg describing the process as painful and unpleasant, and a later model from Adler, who like the women interviewed saw the benefits of such a process. Osberg (1960:177) first defined culture shock as the "anxiety that results from losing all of our familiar signs and signals of social intercourse." (cited in Kim 1989:276) As will be seen in this thesis, the women that came to live in Thailand more than 20 years ago most certainly had less familiar signs than those who have come in more recent years. According to Kim in his paper on Intercultural Adaptation, "most studies view intercultural adaptation experiences as mainly problematic or undesirable, and thus to be minimized." (Kim 1989:279) But an alternative approach by Adler (1972/1987 cited in Kim 1989:276), "places culture shock in a broader context, in which culture shock is regarded as a profound learning experience that leads to greater

self-awareness and personal growth." (Adler 1972/1987 cited in Kim 1989:276) And it will be seen in this thesis that Thailand's increased modernization has facilitated the adaptation process for the women interviewed who appreciated the benefits to be derived from their relationships and experiences.

A paper called <u>Culture Shocked Marriages</u>*, also refers to Adler's culture-shock model (1975) and discusses the problems of western women married to Chinese men living in Hong Kong. Following the progress of women undergoing counselling, and relating their experiences to the culture shock model, the paper highlights the possible personal satisfaction and benefits gained by those who successfully pass through the stages of culture shock. As patterns evolved and similarites with other expatriates were noted, it was suggested that extrapolation of the model to other settings seemed feasible. This would indeed seem a possiblity as many of the women interviewed had similar experiences. However, a significant observation from this research was the 'reentry' shock of the husband returning to his home country, the difficulties faced by the husband and his reaction of compulsive behaviour. Often referred to as 'culture shock in reverse' in anthropological literature, this phenomenon can be readily related to the experience of many Thai husbands returning with their farang wives after studying abroad as will be seen in chapter 5. Therefore, culture shock may be seen to affect either partner in various ways. However, the majority of women who were willing to take

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*This valuable psychology research paper applies the culture shock model for counselling foreign women married to Chinese men. It came from Hong Kong via the Philippines to a woman in Bangkok 6 years ago but unfortunately the name of the author and the date can not be traced. For the purpose of this thesis it will be referred to as the Culture Shocked Marriages paper.

part in this thesis were the successful women, who have survived any culture shock and this theory will only be referred to when directly related to the women's interactions with their Thai husbands and Thai society. As culture shock can affect everyone, the foreigner and the returning native, the distinction is in the marginality of the foreigner. Indeed, this thesis will show that the culture shock issue, real though it is, is not the only factor involved in these Thai-farang marriages, for as the <u>Culture Shocked Marriages</u> paper also notes, "it is the difference in outlook, expectations and approach to problems etc.. which is highlighted in the term 'intercultural' marriage." (Culture Shocked Marriages n.d.:1) It is the difference in cultural perceptions and the adjustments to be made that will be discussed in this thesis.

Kim's <u>Intercultural Adaptation</u> noted that certain characteristics which sojourners brought with them, together with certain conditions of their stay, strongly influenced the extent and nature of their association with the host culture. These factors are indeed what this thesis focuses on as they relate to the social interaction of the women with Thai society, as opposed to the one-way culture shock model which focuses on the individual reaction of the sojourner to his or her experiences with the host culture. Thus by looking at the experience of farang women married to Thai men, it is not necessary to limit ourselves with their personal 'culture shock', but to look at their marginality within Thai society, and the effects these marginals and the society in which they live have upon each other.

## Marginality

As stated in the <u>Culture Shocked Marriages</u> paper, the majority of inter-national marriages are generally between minority group males and majority group females as is the case with most Thai-farang marriages. However, when the women come to live in Thailand with their Thai husbands, it is they that become the minority group. Minority in that they are foreign females, as well as minorities within inter-national marriages. It is the minority status of these women that makes their marriages different from any others. In her paper, <u>Strangers in A Strange Land: Coping with Marginality in International Marriage</u> (1990) Imamura attempts to find universals and specifics of the oppportunities and contraints of international marriage, by looking at the marginality of foreign wives, comparing those in Japan and Nigeria. Many commonalities were found which coincide with the situation in Thailand, in particular when looking at family roles, occupation and participation in the broader society, friendships and social networks. Such similarities suggest that many of the issues are not peculiar to farang women in Thailand, but are common to all marginals. However, the influence of social changes in Thailand can be seen to affect these women in specific ways. This coincides with Imamura's referrence to Hughes (1971) who identified 5 ways to reduce marginality; 2 were related to social change in the host society, 2 to individual change and the fifth was a dialectic between individual and collective social change. This observation applies to the age-generational differences of the farang women interviewed which illustrate that changes in certain variables in Thai society as well as the age-generational differences in personal characteristics of the women and the effects on the

interaction of such variables, serve to simplify the difficulties facing farang wives of Thais today.

## Communication

Kitivipart's PhD dissertation in Psychology on Communication and Interaction Styles in Thai American Cross-Cultural Marriages compared the interaction patterns within Thai-Thai, Thai-American and American-American marriages within America. This thesis compared the basic cultural differences in Thai and American communication styles, noting that Thais avoid direct confrontation and emotional expression whereas Americans are considered to be somewhat aggressive in their direct approach and uncontrolled in their emotional expressiveness. Most significantly, Kitivipart also used psychological tests and questionnaires from which she determined that spouses in cross-cultural marriages need to be more expressive and to communicate their thoughts and feelings to each other in order to prevent misunderstanding of both verbal and non-verbal communication. The result of this was that cross-cultural couples scored highest on affection scores and were able to have richer relationships if they kept channels of communication open. Indeed, this model applies to the the farang women in this survey, the majority of whom are in happy relationships and stressed their ability to 'talk' with their husbands as contributing to their marital satisfaction. All those who lacked good communication with their spouse were those who were in unsatisfactory relationships or had already separated. This model is illustrated most clearly in chapter 5 of this thesis.

## History Of Thai-Farang Relations

Numerous accounts tell of the long history of Thai contacts with farang, dating back to when westerners served in the courts of the Ayutthian Kings, and further back to the traders and missionaries who came before then. Wyatt's <u>Thailand: A Short History</u>, among others recounts how relations between the two groups have waxed and waned, due to various changes in the economic and political climates of respective countries over the centuries. As there is no information of contacts after the ascension of King Ramesuan to the throne of Ayutthaya in 1688 until 1857 trading is presumed to have been halted, (though most likely just subdued). According to Wyatt this era saw a growth in anti-foreign sentiment, most likely in the aftermath of the famous Constance Phualkon affair, and he suggests that in the reign of King Boromakot 'all considerations must have fuelled a xenophobic outburst.' (Wyatt 1982:116) Indeed such attitudes are reflected in the laws of this era as quoted on pages 20-22 of this chapter.

The majority of the foreign population during this period was in fact missionaries of various nationalites. However, after the trade treaties signed by Rama IV in 1857, trade with the west and the number of foreign merchants and tradesmen increased again. The history of relations following these treaties, is unique in this area of Southeast Asia in that Thailand was never politically (though some may say it was economically) 'colonized'. As there was never any need to struggle for independence, the Thais have been able to hold there own in dealings with the west, more so than any other country in the region, and this would imply that the social and cultural interactions between the parties involved were

on a level of comparative equality. Until the end of the
19th century, the West was nothing more than a powerful
but controlable trading partner that whilst feared, was
not allowed to take superiority. Since then, there have
been enormous social and economic changes throughout the
world, and most dramatically in Thailand, which have
influenced and been influenced by social interactions
with the west.

According to Wyatt there was little desire to be
western until the second quarter of this century, before
which conforms were made primarily with the desire to
maintain 'equal status'. Indeed, farang were often
looked down-upon as was anything unfamiliar, and anyone
non-Thai and/or, non-Buddhist. (Wyatt 1982) However,
with the social and economic development of the last few
decades many more young Thais are looking to the West and
accompanying material signs of westernisation, as an
example of the 'good life'. The effect of this change in
attitude and increased interactions can be seen to affect
the position of farang living in Thailand today and is a
significant point throughout this thesis.

## History of Thai-Farang Intermarriage

The oldest records to be found concerning marriage
between Thais and foreigners can be seen in an extract
from _Ruang kotmai tra sam duang_), which illustrates the
official Thai attitude to inter-marriage in the 15th and
17th centuries as kindly translated and summarised for
this thesis by Dr Dhiravat na Pombejra:

    A law in the Achaya Luang (Offences against the
    Crown) section of the Three Seals Code, (c.1433
    or 1657 AD) forbids the King of Siam's subjects,

"Thai or Mon", to "give their daughters away" to "people of wrong beliefs" i.e. "English, Dutch, Javanese, and Malays" (Christians and Muslims). The reasons given by the king are that the offspring of such unions would 1. follow their fathers to be reborn in hell, or as a <u>pret</u>, as a demon, or as an animal, or 2. inform foreigners about the kingdom's affairs. These foreigners will come to harm Ayutthaya and "the Buddhist religion would be in a sad state". The law mentions that the reason why the Thai and Mon were giving their daughters and neices to foreigners of wrong beliefs was because these foreigners were rich. The penalties for transgressing this law ranged from "beheading and confiscation of house" to differing fines, via life imprisonment and being mowers of grass for the royal elephants. (Krom Sinlapakon, 1978 pp479-480)

Later in the 18th century, a law in the <u>Phra ratcha kamnot kao</u> section dated 1763 AD closely resembles the above law, although here the people forbidden to cohabit with foreigners of wrong belief also include "Laos" as well as Thais and Mons. The foreigners here are "Khaek, farang, English, khula and Malays". In this law there is no mention of any reason of state (fear of information about the country's affairs being leaked to foreigners), only the moral/religious reason. Also, here the death penalty alone is mentioned as punishment for those who transgress the law by living with the foreigners of wrong beliefs. The parents and relatives of the offenders were also liable to be punished (no details given) if they were found not to have tried to forbid or prevent such unions. (Krom

Sinlapakon, 1978:695 Translated and summarised for this thesis by Dr Dhiravat na Pombejra)

However, it must also be remembered that during this period, there was a series of manpower shortage and perhaps the state feared foreign spouses would bear claim to their offspring and take them from the country. Indeed, according to both Weisman and Bunchua, it would appear that the Portuguese-Siamese mixed race residents of Ayutthaya were incorporated into Portuguese rather than Siamese society. (Weisman 1993:6) This presumption is supported by the fact that the king of Ayutthaya had granted extra-territorality to the Portuguese as part of their trade agreement so that, politically speaking at least, the Siamese also probably considered the Portuguese-Siamese to be Portuguese as the Portuguese-Siamese were counted as a distinct ethnic group in a census conducted in 1785.

Needless to say, it would seem that the Thai laws above have never been strictly enforced as the Thais are all of mixed blood and there are several well-known incidents of inter-marriage (with people of wrong beliefs) during this period. Church historian Bunchua cites the first recorded racial mixing between Westerners and residents of Siam as that between a delegation of Portuguese Catholic lay missionaries who apparantly came to Ayutthaya in approximately 1492. The Portuguese soon established a community in Ayutthaya, comprising of these mixed-unions and their offspring, as well as merchants and other Europeans who presumably took local wives as well. The famous Persian brothers, ancestors of the great Bunnag family, came to Siam in 1602 and are also know to have taken Thai wives.

However, if the law is a reflection of social values (or at least officially desired social values) then these early laws were enforced to protect Buddhism and the kingdom of Ayutthya, as well as to ensure that manpower remained in the country. Nowadays, the law is not half as severe and indeed, compared to some southern states in the United States where, until 1967, intermarriage (miscegenation) was illegal, it is in some respects more lenient. While the 'official' situation for Thais with foreign spouses has dramatically improved since the 15-18th centuries the increased numbers of farang men coming to Thailand has led to more and more Thai women marrying farang men.

However, the first recorded Thai-farang marriage in which the farang spouse was the wife, occured during Rama III's reign between the 'original Siamese twins' Chang-chun and Eng-in, and the two daughters of an American farmer in 1843.

> The two twins, who were permanently joined at the chest by a band of cartilage, went to the US in 1829 and travelled North America and Europe with a circus for three years, after which they became their own agents and apparantly saved enough money to begin farming in North Carolina. They subsequently married the two daughters of a local farmer and had 19 children between them! (Weisman 1987:9)

During the 1860's the first Siamese students, members of the royal family and students on scholarships, went to study in various western countries, particularly England and Europe and later to America. At this time the majority of Thai/farang intermarriages were of these students. The first Thai royal to marry a foreign woman was Prince Chakrabongse in 1906, after which the numbers

of Thai men married to foreign women increased. Although Khambhu estimated that by the end of World War I, only 50-60 Thais were studying the US, by 1925 two of them had already married American women. (Khambu 1961:6 and Weisman 1993:14) Unfortunately there are no figures available for those who studied in Europe and married Europeans at this time.

Concerning this era, Kukrit's novel Sii Phaendin, aptly suggests the problems facing Thai students who brought home Farang wives in a letter from Mae Ploi's son reassuring her that he would not, unlike his brother, be marrying a farang (though he did later say that he did not intend to marry at all!):

> You may rest assured there'll be no foreign wife for me. Too many problems for all concerned and I'm a coward and don't like problems. I'm not saying that I believe mixed marriage is doomed from the start. On the contrary, I don't see why a Thai and a Farang who love each other should not be able to lead a happily married life together. So what am I afraid of? Let me try to draw you a picture of what I think could happen. Let us suppose a Maem falls in love with me. Ah, but is it really 'me' we're talking about? No, it is this fascinating stranger from the exotic East she has read and heard so much about, who wears bejewelled costume in his home country, is waited on hand and foot by numberless servants, whose family owns tall buildings in towns and elephants in the forest. For my part, I find her beautiful and desirable and tell myself I cannot live without her. I treat her more gently and speak to her more sweetly (we Thai men are adept woers) than my Farang rivals. I pay her more compliments and bring her more gifts and, to cut

a long story short, we become lovers, we get
married and then we come back to live in Muang
Thai. Before long she finds life in our country
not as colourful and exciting as in that fabulous
land of her imagination. In fact she finds it
not only unglamourous but uncommfortable, if not
downright unsanitary. She suffers from the heat
and the mosquito bites. She's disgusted with our
insects and lizards and the mere thought of
snakes gives her nightmares. And she misses her
Farang friends. As for me, I begin to compare
her with the Thai girls and discover flaws in her
manners, her complexion, her figure, her
temperament, etc., and while she tries vainly to
tolerate the smell of shrimp paste I start to get
fed up, as it were, with the flavour of milk and
butter ... It all adds up to a climate not
exactly favourable to marital bliss, to my way of
thinking. (Kukrit 1981:175-176)

These observations would seem applicable to those
women who have already left, or remain in unsatisfactory
relationships as well as to those who have 'survived'.
The farang's desire for the exotic and her attraction to
an attentive foreigner appear to be common factors found
in the research, but when the wife became disappointed in
reality, or faced other problems the husband often looked
to his own for comfort. It is this clash of expectations
and reality that would perhaps test any marriage
relationship, but for the foreign women in a strange land
with little knowledge of the culture or the language and
no social support system, the test would be too difficult
and indeed, many of these early marriages did not last.

Prince Chula Chakrabongse's autobiographies,
together with his daughter's portrayal of her

grandparent's mixed-marriage, reveal a similar pattern of disintegration in the relationship between Prince Chakrabongse and his Russian bride. Despite more than ten years of a 'happy' relationship once Mom Katherine began to have personal problems the relationship suffered and the Prince found solace in a young Thai girl. These accounts gave many personal and useful insights to the social position of farang women in Thai society at the beginning of the century which are not so different from the experiences of the women interviewed in this thesis. As the first foreign spouse of a high class royal she was in many ways a pioneer, but despite her royal position and unprecedented situation, many of Mom Katherine's problems, notably the isolation and desire to be accepted by the family, are still common among farang women married to Thai men and living in Thailand today.

A monograph written by Leigh Khambhu in 1963, is the only other research that deals exclusively with farang women married to Thai men, and echos the difficulties faced by Mom Katherine. Concerning the experiences of American wives of Thais interviews dealt with the pattern of courtship, the wife's view of Thailand its culture, society and people, her view of her relationship with her husband and his family and her advice to any other American women who might consider marriage to a Thai. The typical American wife in this study was 26 years of age, married for 3-4 years, had resided in Bangkok for 3 years, had one child and worked outside the home, and lived with her in-laws for at least the first few years. Most were uncomfortable with their in-laws and worried about their husbands' behaviour, and all appeared to be lonely. Of the 18 women included in the research, less than 5 are believed to still be married and/or living in Thailand. While there was minimal anaylsis Kambhu's interview data was a valuable

source of comparison for this current research and provided much support for the 'typical' older-generation material used in this thesis.

Many aspects of Mom Katherine's experiences were remarkably similar to those of the older-generation women interviewed for this thesis aswell as those quoted in Khambhu's research. However, differences can be seen with the new-comers' experiences which suggests that little had changed in Thai-farang relations pertaining to the situation of farang women until the the 1970's. Indeed, until this time, the number of farang women living in Thailand for any reason was negligible. This turning point arose naturally from the research and coincides with the start of Thailand's economic boom which opened up greater economic and education opportunities to Thai women and also marked the end of the Vietnam War Era.

The number of Thai-farang inter-marriages remained very small until the build up of the military presence in 1960's which saw a sharp increase in the number of Thai women married to farang men and which also had an immense effect on Thai-farang relations in general. According to US immigration records over 11,000 Thai women were admitted to the US as wives of US citizens between 1968 and 1975. (Weisman 1993:14) That figure does not include those who married and stayed in Thailand, or the number of students studying overseas who married foreigners. Since then, many more Thais have been studying overseas, and more farang are living in Thailand. While there are no figures available, the rate of Thai-farang inter-marriage appears to have increased simultaneously with the rate of Thai-farang social interactions. The effects of the increase in Thai-farang relations and interactions upon each other will be analysed throughout this thesis. However, while many more farang women are marrying Thai

men, most Thai-farang marriages today are still between Thai women and farang men.

## Children

Children fulfil important roles in al marriages, but none so crucial as the mixed-marriage. As previously mentioned, many women have stayed in their marriage/in Thailand for the sake of their children. However, age-generational differences in the interview data illustrate the effects of Thai social change upon the position and roles of *luuk-khrueng* children (half-children).

Weisman's paper on Amerasian children discusses various accounts of inter-ethnic tensions together with those "pointing to a neutral or even favourable Thai attitude toward intermarriage and interracial individuals". (Weisman 1993:1) Changes in attitudes were found which reflect changes in Thai-farang interactions over the last half century. Before the Vietnam Era, the off-spring of Thai-farang relationships were simply different in their physical appearance from other Thai children. However, the number of illegitimate *luuk-khrueng* born from the numerous liasions between American GI's and Thai bar girls during the 1960's and 1970's created negative attitudes towards such children who were no longer just different but were outcast, ridiculed and despised. Many children of the older-generation women interviewed experienced teasing and torment at school and were often ashamed of their farang mothers. Today, with the sudden popularity of *luuk-khrueng* in the media, these children are now envied and admired. The dramatic change in Thai social attitudes towards these off-spring reflects a number of social changes in Thai-farang relations which will be seen to not only affect the

position of these children, but also the position of
their farang mothers in Thai society.


## Marriage Patterns and Expectations


Much has been written about marriage expectations
in both Thai society and the 'west'. However, there is
enormous cultural variety within the West, let alone
within Thailand's own diverse society which should not be
forgotten. In addition, with the socio-economic
development of the past few decades, as with other
aspects of Thai culture, marriage expectations are fast
changing. Thus, many of the readings were out-dated,
while others, like Ward and Hanks were over-simplified
and not particularly accurate!

However, the readings did provide some insight to
the general basic differences between Thai and western
(American) cultures that will serve as a basis of
comparison with this research. Sumalee, in her thesis,
Conventions of Mate Selection in 20th century Central
Thailand, (1991) noted that while different regions may
have different traditions of mate selection, arranged
marriages of the past only involved the higher classes.
The general peasant and middle-class population matched
through individual choice but parental approval was
always sought. Indeed, children are imbued with a life-
long sense of gratitude towards their parents for their
birth and up-bringing and consequently, "obligations to
one's parents is a cultural and moral imperative in Thai
society." (Klausner nd:69)

> Thais place high value on the relationship and
> obligations between a husband, his wife and other
> family members, consisting of either or both sets

of parents and unmarried children ... and collateral relatives ·of any generation. (Kitivipart 1987:19)

In contrast, American culture encourages autonomy and separation from the the older generation. Many farang women found it hard to accept their husbands relationship with his family. However, with socio-economic development Thai family organisation and obligations are changing, particularly in urban Bangkok. As can be seen by the new-comers in the interviews, many Thai husbands no longer expect to live with their families, and no longer tolerate adverse interference in the personal lives as did the older-generation. Thus, such distinct differences between Thai and farang familial expectations are merging as cultures change. This issue of family obligations and interference is seen as an important factor in the survival rate of Thai-farang marriages and is dealt with more fully in chapter 4.

Just as influential are the cultural differences in personal marriage expectations. Vibul and Golden (1954) described Thai expectations in general as:

> Marriage is not conceived of as a partnership, a
> union of hearts, following a prevalent American
> view but rather as a juncture of complementary
> functions, by and large exclusive of each other.
> (Vibul & Golden 1954:383)

Traditionally, marriage was supposed to give the female security, the opportunity to exercise her functions as a mother and mistress of the house and in return, she would be dutiful to and uncritical of her husband except as to his role as head of the household. (Vibul & Golden 1954:383) Indeed, according to a recent article in Asia Magazine, "Asian traditions decree that you love the

person you marry - rather than marry the person you love." (Nov· 18-20, 1994:9)  According to Mace and Mace (1960),

> it was assumed that Thai men and women, did not marry primarily for happiness, but to fulfill their family and social obligations.  Any happiness that marriage bought was, therefore accepted as a gift and not as a right. In other words, expectations of what marriage would bring, in terms of interpersonal fulfillment, have been very low." (cited in Kitivipart 1987:41)

This coincides with the questionnaire response in which both Thai men and women had very low expectations of marriage, if any.   In contrast, people of western cultures select their mates based on the concept of romantic love, and marry for personal happiness and fulfillment.   Western marital expectations are complex requiring "togetherness, sharing, open communication between spouses, and keeping the romance going." (Kitivipart 1987:42)  In the questionnaires, both farang men and women cited partnership as a priority among their marriage expectations.  However, the social change in the position of Thai women and an increase in the divorce rate together with age-generational differences found in the interviews suggests that Thai marriage expectations are fast changing and becoming more like the general western model.  This issue will be discussed more fully in chapter 3.

However, the most serious threat to the Thai-farang marriage appeared to be the question of mia nois and prostitutes dating from the days of polygamous relationships.  A phenomena that a young farang women arriving in Thailand with her Thai husband would be unaware of, and unprepared to deal with in the same way as her Thai sisters, who were already familiar with the

behaviour, and with social support had learnt to tolerate, if not accept the practice. Bencha states that the Thais are generally monogamous, and the rate of polygamy and minor wives is generally low and limited largely to wealthy farmers and upper-class individuals, but despite the 1932 law under which only one registered wife is legally recognized, the practice still continues and was a constant fear for the older-generation interviewees. However, it is quite different from that of prostitution, which appears to be more readily accepted on the part of Thai women and is much more common among all ranks of Thai males. As Klausner notes, "one of the accepted perks of a government official on a visit up-country is the services of one of the town's more favoured ladies of the night." (Klausner nd:44) That both practices still continue is documented to the present day in more recent newspaper and journal articles. Interestingly, while the older-generation women feared the practices, and many suffered from such behaviour, another age-generational difference appeared from the interviews in which the new-comers though concerned about the phenomena in general, did not believe their husbands were susceptible to it. This issue is discussed more fully in chapter 5.

The readings suggest a general difference between Thai and Farang marriage expectations. However, the presumption that 'farang' marry for love and 'Thais' marry for practical reasons of security and social obligations are questioned by the interview data. Age-generational differences from the interviews suggest that while this distinction may have rung some truth in the past, various socio-economic changes in Thai society have altered Thai male/female role and marriage expectations. Family ties and obligations were indeed much more influential in the past than they are now, when many

Thai-Thai couples live separately from the in-laws. And although it ·may be easier ·for ·a woman to turn a blind-eye to her husband's promiscuity if she has financial security, this may apply equally to Thai or farang women. Therefore, cultural and age-generational differences in marriage expectations can be seen to affect Thai-Thai marriage relations aswell as Thai-farang marriages. In addition, that the farang wives expectations differ both between ethnic background and generation as will also be shown.

## Thai Social Change

The economic and social impact of 'westernization' was intially received in Bangkok and this thesis will highlight areas of social change that affect and have been affected by this process. As there is an obvious inter-relation between economic development and social change, social scientists have been anaylsing the progress of social change in Thai society, in particular where it pertains to family life. In the early 1970's, Klausner predicted that as, "social and cultural patterns are fast changing in Bangkok, the traditional behaviour and attitudes in relation to children and parents will change and take on farang colour." (Klausner nd:70) We will see later, what effect this has had upon the farang women married to Thai men and living in Thailand.

Vibul and Golden in 1954 described westernization as a major cause for the disintegration of family life and the desire for unessential material comfort and lament the change in the traditional line of respect with money now seen as the criterion of respectabilty. Hanks and Hanks presumed that the sexual division of labour in

Thai society allowed Thai women sexual equality and noted
that:

> If money becomes the source of authority in a
> world increasingly inclined to judge in
> accountant's terms, Thai women are in danger of
> losing their position as equals in the marriage
> partnership. (Hanks and Hanks 1963:389)

That Thailand's economic development started the ball
rolling for radical changes upon the position and social
roles of Thai women is indisputable but as Kerry Richter
noted in her contribution to Mahidol University's
Changing Roles and Statuses of Women in Thailand the
effects on women have not necessarily been so negative:

> Economic development has brought women out of the
> domestic domain allowing them access to greater
> education and political opportunites and thus
> challenging their traditional roles. (Richter
> 1992:101)

It is the change in traditional Thai sex roles in Thai-
Thai marriage relationships that can be seen to affect
the position of farang women in Thai-farang marriage
relationships too.

In his series of articles in the early 1970's
Klausner noted the effects of change on the position of
women:

> As more Thai women become educated at the
> university level, both in Thailand and abroad,
> their expectations of a Thai husband's behaviour
> will be bound to change. Such change in values
> on the part of Thai women will inevitably affect
> the cultural context in which judges render their
> decision. (Klausner nd:39)

Indeed,

> education and economic independence have effected
> a dramatic turnaround in the status and social

wellbeing 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 effects of the greater opportunities available to
Thai women, upon their position in Thai society and in
their relationships with their husbands, have affected
the situation for farang women married to Thai men as
will be and will be discussed more fully in chapters 3
and 5.

Social change is universal, but the rate of change
is particular. Klausner notes that as,

The generation gap is rearing its divisive head
in the Thai as well as Farang cultures. There is
need for mutual understanding and commmunication
not only between Thai and farang communities but
within the Thai community itself. (Klausner
nd:147)

Changes in Thai-Thai relationships affect the nature of
Thai-farang relationships and thus by looking at age-
generational differences among the interviewees, this
thesis will show the effects of Thai social change upon
the position of farang women in Thai society and upon the
interations between these groups.

In his paper on Intercultural Adaptation (1989),
Kim describes the host environment as:

the 'foreground' or sociocultural context in
which strangers mobilize their resources and to
which they strive to adapt. At the sametime, the
stranger's own disposition serves as the
'background' from which the adaptive responses
are mobilized. Together, the environmental and
predispositional conditions help set the
parameters within which each individual finds a

uniquely personlised passage of adaption. (Kim
1989:288)

Thus it is the interaction of both the 'foreground' of
Thai society, and 'background' of the women's personal
attributes which forms a major focus of this study and
through which the influence of change in each variable
may be seen. Therefore a profile of the couple's social
backgrounds and the woman's expectations of life which
shape and influence her ability to adjust to her new life
will be compared with the 'foreground' of her experience
and perceptions of reality in her living environment,
marriage and social outlets. Age-generational
differences to be seen throughout the thesis will
highlight changes in both the foreground of Thailand and
Thai society, and the background of the women's change in
perceptions and reflections upon their situation. In
addition, the reciprocal effects of Thai-farang
interactions over the past few decades will be analysed.

With a general background of the previous literature
and research questions in mind, the next chapter will
summarize the responses from the questionnaires and
interviews in order to introduce the general situation of
current Thai-farang marriages. In chapter 3 the
literature and questionnaire responses will be compared
with the interviewees' to assess cultural and gender-
based differences of marriage expectations and
perceptions of their lives. The thesis will emphasise
age-generational differences in the interview data from
Chapter 4 onwards, comparing it only with the literature
and will look at the farang women's perceptions of their
social and physical environment in Thailand reflecting
Thailand's socio-economic development of the past few
decades. Chapter 5 will analyse the age-generational
differences in the women's perceptions of their
relationships with their husbands as a result of the

effects of social change on Thai male/female roles.
Chapter 6 will analyse the change in social outlets
available to the farang women, the effects of language
skills and children on their lives and their perception
of their marginality, and what these changes can tell us
about Thai social change. In Chapter 7 we will see how
these women perceive Thailand's socio-economic changes,
their perception of the factors that have helped them
'survive' and their advice for other women contemplating
marriage to a Thai. Finally, Chapter 8 will summarize
the findings of the rich interview data and what this
thesis can tell about Thai socio-economic development and
Thai-farang relations.