



## CHAPTER 2

### INTRODUCTION TO PRESENT DAY THAI-FARANG RELATIONS

In order to set the scene for later analysis of the interview data, this chapter presents the background of Thai-farang relations in the early 1990's using questionnaire and interview data, and has been divided into four parts: first, an overview of the socio-economic and physical environment of present day Thailand and Thai-farang relationships will be given; second, a summary and tables of responses from the questionnaires and interviews giving demographic data of Thai-farang marriages in the 1990's; third, an outline and comparison of the 'typical' women from each generational group; and fourth, brief life-histories of women whose experiences match and contrast with these summaries from which an outline of the common issues to be discussed in further chapters will be drawn.

#### Socio-Economic Environment

After 30 years of economic development plans, Thailand is now one of the fastest growing economies in Asia. More and more western goods and technologies are available in the booming capital of Bangkok. Modern buildings, expensive cars, satellite dishes, mobile phones and other such trappings of an international business center give the capital a deceptive air of similarity with every other modern city in the world.

However, when describing the modernization of Hong Kong, the Culture Shocked Marriages paper warns that, transplanted ideas and values are never the same in another medium ... Despite ... becoming progressively more Western, Hong Kong has a solid Chinese core in its culture. (Culture Shocked Marriages n.d.)

Likewise, Bangkok's western appearance has its own deep-rooted mix of Thai and Chinese cultures which are undergoing a fierce period of confusion and change as they meet head-on with economic development. The effects of such rapid modernisation and the simultaneous social change upon Thai-farang relationships will be analysed throughout this thesis.

### Thai-Farang Relations

Before World War II, farang in the form of missionaries, merchants or mercenaries, were all that a few Thais would ever see outside of Bangkok and other major cities. Since the late 1950's, more and more Thais have gone to travel and study in the west than ever before and the sight of a farang on Bangkok's streets is now no longer a novelty. Most Thais however, are exposed to farang of extremes; the wealthy tourists in the hotels, the 'hippy' backpackers, the expatriates and their families, the businessmen and the sex tourists. Together with the images they see on the big screen (none of which portray the average farang in his/her homeland), Thais have an understandably warped view and impression of farang and farang culture. On the other hand, most farang have an equally warped impression of Thais. The average expatriate and businessman deals exclusively with overseas-educated and professional Thais, or his maid and

driver. The package tourist meets the hotel staff, and the backpacker meets his 'hippy' equivalent at the beach guest house. Naturally misunderstandings arise on both parts and as Klausner warns, "One must appreciate that both Farang and Thai have their fixed views of other cultures, their stereotypes." (Klausner nd:37)

For the farang married to Thais, the need to bridge these gaps is more immediate. With the influx of American GI's and consequential marriages during the Vietnam Era, plus the increased numbers of Thais, both men and women, studying overseas together with the popularity of international travel, the opportunities for and the numbers of Thai-farang marriages have greatly increased since the 1960's. This thesis will analyse the effects of the increase in Thai-farang interactions, and in particular of farang spouses of Thais, upon the degree of inter-cultural understanding between the two groups.

While the majority of Thai-farang relationships are still between Thai women and farang men, unions between Thai men and farang women are now more common than before. Official figures have been difficult to find, but Khambhu's report in the 1960's suggested that there were approximately 30 American women married to Thais at that time. (American women apparantly were the smallest group of farang females at that time, suggesting that there were perhaps over a hundred European women present as well). Today, there are at least 100 names of American and European women on the Women Across Cultures mailing list. As half of the women interviewed were not included in this list, and all of the women interviewed knew of many other women who were not among their immediate groups there may be anything from 300 to 1 or 2 thousand, as some women have estimated.

As one of the aims of this paper is to look at the difficulties these farang women married to Thai men face, and the factors which help them to survive, the following questions will be addressed. Has the fact that until the second half of this century there were but a handful of farang women in Thailand, (many of whom have since divorced and returned to their homelands), affected the position of farang women living in Thailand? Have Thailand's vast physical and social changes over the past 20 years had any affect on the position of farang women in Thai society? Are there any differences in these women's experiences which illustrate change in Thai cultural and social interactions with farang?

#### Profile of Questionnaire Respondents

The response from the questionnaires and interviews provide a general picture of Thai-farang marriage relations in present day Thailand. Of the 220 questionnaires distributed, 54 replies were received. An additional 14 respondents were located for interviews bringing the total to 68. The questionnaires were aimed at gaining a general overview of the current situation as well as to test the responsiveness of people in such relationships, and the details obtained and summarized below provided a useful basis for developing questions for the interviews. Of the 68 replies, 9 were from Thai men, 14 from Thai women, only 8 from farang men with the remaining 37 from farang women. Both partners of 13 couples replied independently; 6 farang men and their Thai wives, the other 7 being farang women and their Thai husbands.

The majority of respondents and interviewees were farang women married to Thai men. These women also completed their questionnaires more fully than the Thai men and women and the farang men who did not respond to all the questions. This might be a significant reflection of the value farang women attach to the concepts involved compared to Thai women, and all men, although it may just be a case of the other groups misunderstanding the questions at hand as well as a lack of interest in their marriages as 'a subject'. However, that farang women as the minority group in these relations were the majority of respondents and the focus of interviews may also reflect that farang wives are particularly vulnerable to, and more aware of their minority status, when their relationship is relocated to the husbands' environment as was suggested in the Culture Shocked Marriages paper.

Results of the questionnaires are summarised below to show the general characteristics of the respondents. As the focus of this study is on interview responses, the demographic details such as the ethnicity of each partner, their age and the place they first met their spouse, the length of courtship and marriage, and the length of time the farang respondents have lived in Thailand, are tabulated (Table One) at the end of this chapter to provide a general profile of the people referred to throughout this study.

In summary, the average female farang questionnaire respondent married an ethnic Thai whom she had met in her home country when she was younger than 25 years old. She married him between 2-5 years later and is equally likely to have been married and living in Bangkok for less than 10 years, between 10-20 years, or over 20 years.

The average male Thai respondent was ethnic Thai, and was older than 25 years old when he met his farang wife in her home country. He married her within 2-5 years and has been married for less than 10 years.

The average farang male respondent was over 25 years old when he met his Thai wife in Thailand. He married her within a year and has been married less than 10 years.

The average Thai female respondent was also over 25 years old when she met her farang husband in Thailand. She either married him within a year or waited between 2-5 years, and has now been married less than 10 years.

#### A General Comment About Language

All couples communicate in the farang's native language (mostly English) though a sixth of the farang women said they often speak Thai and mix the two. While all the Thai spouses have studied English not even a third of the farang men and women stated that they have ever studied Thai. Most farangs 'picked' it up. A sixth of the farang women said they could speak Thai fluently, while a third of the farang men and women said they could speak Thai well, a third of each could speak a little, and the rest can not speak Thai at all. (This latter group have lived in Thailand less than 2 years). In addition, a quarter of the Thai women communicate with their farang husbands in English which is neither partner's first language. This not only illustrates the domination of the English language, but questions the effects of language and communication ability upon these relationships to be analysed in chapter 6.

That most women, Thai or farang were in their home country when they met their husbands corresponds with Imamura and the Culture Shocked Marriages papers which state that most inter-national marriages are between minority group males and majority group females. However, as the farang female respondents have since moved to live in Thailand, it is these women who are now the minority group. Two thirds of the farang women questionnaire respondents were willing to be interviewed and later passed on names of other women who were also willing to be interviewed. Their profile is summarised below.

#### Profiles Of The Interviewees

Indepth interviews were held with 28 farang women who are married to Thai men and live in Thailand\*. As this thesis aims to illustrate the influence of Thai social change on Thai-farang interactions, these women were divided into two age-generational groups according to the length of time they have lived in Thailand. The 'Older-generation' or 'Long-timers' are those women who have been living in Thailand for more than 20 years, whereas the 'New-comers' are those women who have been living in Thailand for less than 20 years. A separate profile of women from each of the groups is given below.

As these interviews have provided the core of the material for this thesis it must be remembered that these

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\* Please see table for breakdown of the farang women and their Thai husbands' ethnic backgrounds. However, as all but one of the women interviewed live in Bangkok, it is the urban Bangkok Thai and Chinese-Thai that will be referred to as 'Thai' or 'Chinese-Thai' respectively throughout this paper.

women are a minority among themselves. That they have 'survived' to tell their tales emphasises the significance of individual circumstances and the multiplicity of interaction between variables but although each woman's experience was unique, general patterns can be drawn from the outlines below.

Profiles of each generation will be outlined separately in the following ways. First, in order to illustrate the age-generational similarities and differences in patterns of Thai-farang social interaction and compare the most common issues arising from the research a profile of the 'typical' experience of women from each group will be given. Then a summary of the demographic background of each spouse (also see Table Two at the end of this chapter) including the ethnicity and age of each partner, as well as their religious, educational and social backgrounds will be shown. In addition, the place these farang women first met their Thai husbands and the length of courtship and marriage, were also considered relevant to draw a clearer picture of the interviewees' characteristics. The pattern of residence, if the couple lived with the in-laws, together with the women's perceptions of their marriage and the factors that most affect their relationships are also outlined to provide a profile of the relationships that these women are in. These outlines will be followed by some sample life-histories for each generation chosen both to fit and contrast with the general 'norm' and will illustrate the influence of the above variables on Thai-farang marriages. Finally, the profile of both generation women will be further summarised to compare and highlight the issues and age-generational differences to be pursued in this thesis.



A profile of the 'Typical Older-generation' woman:

As the older-generation women are the exceptions and 'survivors', notes from Khambhu's research in the 1960's of American women married to Thai men (many of whom have since left their husbands/Thailand), were used to help draw the following profile of the 'typical' older-generation woman below.

The woman who has been married and living in Thailand for more than 20 years typically met her husband in her home country, and was between 18 to 23 years old when she married him. Upon marriage the couple moved to Thailand where they lived with the in-laws for the first 5 years or more of married life. The older-generation woman's husband had been studying in her home country on a government scholarship or with family support and upon his return to Thailand received very low wages and or/controlled family money. The farang wife therefore had to find work to supplement the income. The farang wife of over 20 years ago was under immense social pressure to conform to Thai ways and learn the language. She had very limited, if any social outlets or contact with other farang women. The general public would stare and cry out 'farang farang' and she felt they watched her every movement and that she would never be accepted.

She expected her relationship with her husband to be the same as it had been in her home country where he had been very charming and attentive and they had always done things together. However, once in Thailand, the longtimer felt like she hardly knew her husband. He was his parents' dependent son again and did everything for his family, he stood up for his parents in any disputes and often left his wife at home alone. He would go out

at night with 'the boys', gambling and drinking and visiting prostitutes. He might even have a *mia noi*. He could see nothing wrong with his behaviour for he was being the way 'all men are' in Thailand. She had expected friendship while he had wanted a mother for his children.

She had children within the first 2-3 years of marriage who became not only a binding force, but a legitimate justification for the older generation to stay in the marriage/in Thailand. Due to Thai law at that time, a woman could not divorce her husband for adultery or take her children out of the country without his permission. These children were rarely bilingual as in addition to the farang mothers own need to practice Thai they often refused to speak English to their mothers out of embarrassment to be farang. Also, as airfares were expensive and travel uncommon, the children rarely visited their mothers' home. Thus, they were seldom bicultural and tended to identify as Thai. However, Thai society was not always so accepting and taunted the children with jibes of, '*khaw nok na*'. As both mother and child felt marginalised they developed close relationships. The mother devoted her life to her children who played a crucial role in her rationalisation to tolerate her difficult situation.

For the sake of the children, and as her husband could still be charming, she would convince herself that deep-down, he loved her really. She believed his reassurances (or reassured herself if he didn't produce them!) that she was still No.1 and that any other women in his life did not mean anything. She would even project her dissatisfaction upon Thais and Thailand rather

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\* Literally 'rice outside the field' and refers to these children as social outcasts.

than blame her husband. In the belief that the relationship would improve in her home country where it had first blossomed she would nag her husband to return. She would make promises to herself that she would leave him/Thailand when the children were in school/had left school/ in five years time etc. There are stories of some couples returning but many of these relationships still ended in divorce. If the husband would not return with her, or grant her a divorce, many desperate women attempted to 'escape', occasionally with the unofficial help of their embassy. Others have separated but remained in Thailand to be near their children, while others learnt to accept their situations and adjust their expectations.

#### Older-Generation Women

(11 have lived in Thailand over 20 years):

#### Length of Time Married

All but two women have been married for over 20 years. Though two separated after more than 18 years they have lived in Thailand for more than 30 years.

#### Woman's Ethnic Background

6 American, 4 British and 2 other.

#### Husband's Ethnic Background

7 Thai and 5 Thai/Chinese.

#### Age When Met Spouse:

All but one were younger than 25 when they met.

Where Met Spouse:

7 women met their future husband in her home country, while only 3 met in Thailand, and one met him in a neutral country.

Length of Time Before Marriage

3 knew their husbands less than a year before marriage, 2 between 1-2 years, 4 between 2-5 years and the other 2 more than 5 years.

Lived with Husband's Family

All but 2 women lived with their husband's family at one stage (usually when they first arrived), but half of these women moved out within the first five years. The other half who stayed longer than 5 years (some up to 38 years) and only two of these now live separately from their in-laws.

Woman's Educational/Social Background

All these women finished high-school, though only a quarter went onto further education. Half the women had lived away from their parental home before marriage and most come from lower-middle/middle class social backgrounds.

Husband's Educational/Social Background

All but 2 of the men completed their further education overseas. A third received government/military sponsorships, while the others were sent by their families, only two of which could really afford to do so.

Religion

One woman became Buddhist over 40 years ago, before she ever met her husband. A third are practising Christians and the others are lapsed. All the Thai husbands are Buddhist.

### Describe Marriage As:

Four women describe their marriage as difficult, 4 as happy, and 3 as average.

### Factors That Make Life Difficult

Half the women said their in-laws made their lives difficult and half blamed financial insecurity, personal incompatibility with their husbands, and culture/language as causes of problems.

### Factors That Make Life Happy

Half the women said personal compatibility with their husbands made their lives happy. Only 1 cited financial security as the reason for happiness, half stated culture/language and a quarter said their in-laws contributed to their satisfaction.

## Life-Histories of Older-Generation Women

That the older-generation women interviewed have 'survived' their experiences, implies that a combination of factors affect their ability to overcome any difficulties in their relationships, and/or accept their situations. In order to present a clearer picture and complete context of the women's experiences, life-histories of a few of the interviewees are summarized below. These accounts provide examples of the real experiences of these women and will be used as an initial framework for comparison of the basic age-generational differences.

Catherine met her husband in her home country nearly 40 years ago, when she was just 19 years old. Her husband was on a government scholarship and was due to

return to Thailand in six months time. She knew nothing about the country but a decision had to be made quickly. They married a week before his visa expired and she returned to Thailand with him. As her husband was on a low government salary they lived with the in-laws for the first 7 years until they could afford their own home. Therefore she also had to work to supplement their income and she had to quickly learn Thai as there were few English speakers around her. Having grown-up in the era of 'little girls should be seen and not heard,' she slipped into her role of the 'good wife' looking after her husband and the home. Her husband was very possessive so she never felt comfortable with the few farang missionaries that she knew, and though she used to accompany her husband on official occasions, she had no social life of her own. Over 10 years and three children later, she discovered that instead of all the extra duties he said he had taken on, her husband had another 'wife'. Upon discovery her husband brought the pregnant woman to live in their house to which Catherine gave him an ultimatum - 'she goes or I do'. Her husband did not believe that she could cope without him and so let her take the children with her. She moved out and found work to support herself and the children and never went back. As she had only ever spoken Thai to them, none of her children are bilingual or bicultural and she did not return home until after her youngest child had finished university. She says that she had been quite naive and was unaware of the 'horror stories' until she came to live in Bangkok. Although she speaks Thai fluently and has quiet, gentle mannerisms she says she will never feel accepted here.

However, many of the older-generation women interviewed had successful marriages which, as they are the exceptions, illustrates the importance of personal

attributes and the variety of inter-related factors at hand. Patricia came to Thailand with the Peace Corps in the early 1960's, when she was in her mid-20's. She met her husband after 2 years when her job, language skills and social networks had already been well established. Her husband had never been abroad and was a government official when they first met. Though she never lived with her in-laws, many came to live with them at various times. Working for an international company she was able to return home with her two children every few years, but while the children are more aware of their dual nationality than others of their era, Patricia has always spoken Thai with them and they identify themselves as Thai. Though she had to work to supplement her husband's government salary she was lucky that she enjoyed her work. She keeps an active social life with both Thais and farang, and is still happily married.

Alice met her husband when she was 17 and he was studying (on family finances) in her home country. Her father did not approve of their relationship and so she left home to work and save for her future in Thailand and gained a sense of independence. Her husband lived with a local family and was quite aware of their differences and the difficulties they might face. In 1960, when she had come of age and her husband had graduated they got married and came to Thailand. Although she found the lack of privacy and the amount of interference difficult to accept they lived with the family for the first 25 years. Her husband was a government officer and so she occasionally taught English from home to supplement the income, but she never went out to work as his family did not think it was proper for a young woman to do. She did not know many other farang and admits that she has been very lonely. However her husband seldom went out with his friends and they are still happily married. Although she

spoke English to their four children they always replied in Thai and identify themselves as Thai.

These profiles of the older-generation, when compared to the experiences of the new-comers, highlight the significant effects of social change upon the variables and the individuals involved in these relationships. The profile of the 'typical' new-comer will be followed by an outline of the social backgrounds and sample life-histories of the new-comers. Finally, an outline of the main age-generational differences and issues to be pursued in this thesis will be given.

#### A Profile of the 'Typical New-comer':

The social and economic changes of the past 20 years have affected attitudes and expectations of both Thai and farang, men and women. These changes have contributed to the fact that the typical new-comer's experience was not so bleak as the long-timers. The new-comer may have met her husband in any country, his, hers or a neutral one which illustrates the greater mobility and travel opportunities available to both men and women, resulting in wider life experiences and individual independence. Such experience appears to make people more aware of cultural differences and prepared for possible difficulties in their relationships.

The new-comer was slightly older than the older-generation women, 20-30 years old when she married her Thai husband, and was equally likely to live with him in her own (or another) country for the first few years of marriage, as she was to move immediately to Thailand. The husband may have been sent to study under a government



scholarship, or with family money, but just as often he supported himself. Upon graduation, the husband worked for a private or multi-national company and/or started his own business. Unlike the older-generation, the newcomers did not live with the in-laws and their husbands were both economically and socially independent from their families. He would stand up for his wife, putting her and their children's needs before those of the extended family. If the farang wife went to work it was to relieve her boredom and/or maintain her independence rather than through desperate financial necessity as with the older-generation. Both partners expected friendship and the newcomers' husband included his wife in all major decision making. Though he worked hard, the couple would still socialise together and the woman did not feel neglected. She felt she could trust her husband for they usually went out together and he did not go out alone with his friends very often. The general public were by now quite familiar with farang and though some Thai people still called out and watched, it was not so obvious or intense as in the past. Thus, the farang wife was mistress of her own home and was under much less family influence or social pressure to conform to Thai ways and she could be herself. The need for her to learn Thai was not so pressing as many Thais spoke English and she had many farang friends, mostly other wives of Thai men and her social life was predominantly in English. However, if she wanted to learn Thai she could go to one of many language schools offering Thai classes rather than 'pick it up' as in the past. She may still have had children within the first few years of marriage, though she often waited 4-5 years before having any. As yet, the new-comer does not see her children as the only justification for staying in her marriage/Thailand. Children are often bilingual and used as translators for their mothers. With cheaper travel most children are

familiar with their mother's homeland and are also likely to be bicultural. Those that are not, spent the first years of their life in the west and identify as farang.

#### The New-comers

(17 women have lived in Thailand less than 20 years):

##### Length of Time Married

Seven women have been married less than 10 years, 8 women have been married between 10 and 20 years, 2 have been married over 20 years.

##### Length of Time Lived in Thailand

Two thirds have lived in Thailand for less than 10 years, and one has lived here for 15 years, but has been married only 11. Over half spent the first few years of marriage living outside Thailand.

##### Woman's Ethnic Background

8 American, 3 British, 3 European, and 3 'Other'

##### Husband's Ethnic Background

9 Thai, 7 Chinese (though 3 of these wives said their husbands were more 'Thai' than 'Chinese') and 1 'Other'.

##### Age When Met Spouse:

9 were younger than 25 when they met their spouses.

##### Where Met Spouse:

7 met in the woman's home country, 6 in Thailand and 4 in neutral countries.

##### Length of Time Before Marriage

6 married within the first year, 5 between 1-2 years, 4 between 2-5 years and 2 over 5 years

#### Lived with Husband's Family

3 women still live with their husbands' family, 7 used to live with them but have since got their own homes, while 7 have never lived with their husbands' families at all.

#### Woman's Educational/Social Background

All but one of these women have graduated from university and all but one had been independent before they met their husbands. All the women were from middle-class social backgrounds

#### Husband's Educational/Social Background

Two thirds of these husbands had their higher education overseas, a quarter of which supported themselves. The others put themselves through college in Thailand while one only completed M.6. (Thai High School). Most of these men are from middle-class urban backgrounds.

#### Religion

Two women changed to their husbands' religion (Buddhist and Muslim) and five are practising Christians, the rest are lapsed Christians. The men are all Buddhists except for four. One man changed his religion to that of his wife (Catholic) and the rest have none.

#### Describe Marriage As:

Two women describe their marriage as difficult, 10 as happy, and 5 as average.

#### Factors That Make Life Difficult

Seven women said their in-laws made their lives difficult and two stated financial insecurity, 2 blamed personal incompatibility and 4 cited culture/language as causes of problems.

### Factors That Make Life Happy

Two thirds of these women said personal compatibility made their lives happy and 7 also cited financial security, 3 cited financial security and culture/language.

### Life-Histories of the New-comers

Mandy met her husband when they were both in their teens and studying in a neutral country. They lived together for 5 years before getting married and in contrast to the older-generation women, did not come to Thailand until 10 years later. Like most new-comers, her husband works for an international company and they live separately from the in-laws. They have two young children who are bilingual, but as her social life is all in English and revolves around other farang women married to Thais with small children she herself does not speak much Thai. Like other new-comers she says she would like to work when the children are old enough to go to school for the social outlets working would provide.

Fran met her husband in her home country when they were both in their mid-twenties and paying for their own way through school. They married within two years and after a holiday in Thailand they decided to live here for a while. Even though they had financial difficulties setting-up their own business, they never considered living with the in-laws who were in fact, economically dependent on their son. Fran is pleased that she is able to work in a field that she loves but unlike many new-comers she was keen to learn Thai straight away. In contrast to the older-generation, she and her husband have a joint social life and do not yet have children.

Betty met her husband while they were both at college in her home country. They married within a year as his visa was due to expire. They never planned to live in Thailand and lived in her country for 15 years before his mother's poor health made them come here 5 years ago. Her husband works for an international company but also helps with the family business and unlike most new-comers they live in the family compound. She says her first few years in Thailand were lonely as she did not realise that they would be here for a long time. However, now that she has started Thai classes and joined social clubs she is meeting other people and enjoys her way of life and the fact that she does not have to work. Although her husband is busy, he is usually home in the evenings and is very family oriented. They have five children, and says the older three are predominantly American, the other two are quite bicultural, but only the youngest is at ease in both cultures and languages.

The examples above have illustrated some of the more common experiences of the new-comers. A brief summary of the 'typical' woman from each generation is given below to a clear outline of the age-generational differences for comparison.

#### Comparison Of The 'Typical' Woman From Both Generations

##### The 'typical' older-generation woman:

- met her husband in her home country
- was between 18-23 when she married and had completed high school
- was not independent and had no travel experience

- came to live in Thailand immediately after marriage
- lived with in-laws for the first 5 years or so
- had to work to supplement the family income
- was socially (& often physically) isolated
- was under immense pressure to conform to Thai ways/  
learn Thai
- had children within first 3 years
- could not afford to return home often

In addition her:

- husband studied abroad on government scholarship/  
family money
- husband received low wages/controlled finances
- her children were rarely bilingual/bicultural,
- her children identified as Thai
- her husband 'changed' when they moved to Thailand,  
bowing to family obligations and often straying at  
night!

In contrast, the 'Typical' new-comer:

- met her husband in Thailand, at home, or in a  
neutral country
- was slightly older, 20-30 when she married
- did not necessarily come to live in Thailand  
immediately
- did not live with in-laws, but if she did she  
soon moved out
- shared a social life with her husband
- had many other social outlets available
- was under little pressure to learn Thai or bow to  
cultural norms
- may have waited 2-5 years before having children

In addition her:

- husband supported his own studies/was on a commercial scholarship
- husband worked for a multinational/had his own business
- children were generally bilingual/bicultural,
- children often identified as farang
- husband is not likely to 'change', either being dominated by family/peer pressure or going out alone at night!

#### Summary of Age-Generational Differences

The above outlines reflect the general age-generational differences and patterns of experience of these farang women and serve as the general framework for analysis in this thesis. These factors are in no way fixed variables and are seen to have changed over time. Age-generational differences arose in a number of major areas:

the woman's life experience before marriage. The older-generation were younger and less independent than the new-comers;

the place she met her spouse. In contrast to the older-generation, the new-comers were equally likely to meet their husbands in Thailand or a neutral country as they were to meet their husbands in their home country;

her husband's independence from his family. Unlike the older-generations' husbands, the new-comers' husbands were economically and socially independent from their families;

her proximity to the extended family. The new-comers were less likely to live with the in-laws, and if they did, it was not for long;

her husband's propensity to change. The new-comers have not yet found their husbands to 'change' since living in Thailand as the older-generation found;

the need to work and the social outlets available to her. While both generations work, the new-comers have less financial pressure to do so. At the same time, the new-comers have more social outlets available to them;

the social pressure for her to speak Thai and conform to Thai social roles. The new-comers do not feel the need to learn Thai or conform to Thai behaviour patterns as the older-generation women did;

the role of children and the effects of social pressures on their cultural identity. In contrast to the older-generations' children who were ridiculed for being *luuk-khrueng*, speak Thai and identified themselves as Thai, the new-comers' children are admired and envied for being *luuk-khrueng*, speak English and often identify themselves as *farang*.

Differences in cultural expectations and perceptions of these factors, together with the age-generational differences to be seen among these women's experiences serve to highlight cultural differences and social change in both Thailand and the 'West' over the past 40 years.

Changes in the general patterns of experience and form of the variables outlined above reflect the effects of social and cultural change. The effects of these variables upon the couple's relationship will not only provide an insight into mixed-marriages in general, but also on the social changes that affect the pattern of Thai-*farang* cultural and social interactions. Each individual's experience highlights the range of external factors that affect *farang* women living in Thailand, and also illustrates the significance of the individual's



personal background on her response to external challenges.

These are the most common and interdependent issues faced by farang women living in Thailand, many of which may be said to pertain to marriages in general, either in Thai or western societies. However, it is the question of the farang women's marginality in Thai society that sets these marriages apart from any other and which serves to highlight cultural differences and social change. As there were few other farang women living in Thailand and most lived with the in-laws, the older-generation women faced more social pressure to conform and learn Thai. But although most of the older-generation said that they have made the greatest effort to conform many feel they will never feel accepted as Thai. In contrast, most of the new-comers have not felt the need to 'become' Thai and have many social support networks to help them. However, they also feel that they are not accepted as part of Thai society. This suggests that not only have the social pressures and conditions that made farang women marginal in the past changed but that the women's perceptions of marginality and the need to become Thai has also changed. Thus, age-generational differences found in the experience of farang women married to Thai men reveal a correlation between changes in socio-economic conditions, Thai family obligations and male/female role expectations, Thai-farang social interactions, and the effects of this social change within Thai society upon a farang woman's marginal position in Thai society. To what extent can and do these women really 'fit-in' to Thai society? Is there a place for them in Thai society?

In order to address these questions, the issues that have arisen from the interviews to be discussed in

this thesis include age-generational differences in the social and economic background of both spouses, together with a comparison of the farang women's expectations of, versus their perceptions of reality in, their relationships with their husbands and Thai society, their living environment in Thailand, as well as their social outlets and coping mechanisms. The interactions of all these variables will be seen from various angles in this thesis to analyse the reciprocal effects of change in the 'foreground' of Thai society and the 'background' of the women's personal attributes, and what this can tell about Thai-farang relations in general (Kim 1989).

TABLE ONE: RESULTS FROM QUESTIONNAIRES

TOTAL NO.	Age When Met		Where Met			How Long Before Married (Years)				How Long Married (Years)			
	< 25	> 25	Farang Home	Bangkok Thailand	Other	< 1	1-2	2-5	> 5	< 10	10-20	> 20	
Farang Women	37	24	13	20	10	7	13	7	15	3	13	11	13
Thai Men	9	1	8	5	1	3	3	-	5	1	5	3	1
Farang Men	8	2	6	2	5	1	4	2	2	-	8	-	-
Thai Women	14	5	9	4	8	2	4	3	5	2	12	2	-

	Describe Marriage As				Factors that make life difficult				Factors that make life happy			
	Difficult	Boring	Happy	Average	Family In-laws	Finance Insec. *	Personal Incomp. #	Culture lang. ~	Family In-laws	Finance Security	Personal Compat @	Culture lang. ~
Farang Women	5	1	17	11	12	11	7	6	5	11	19	11
Thai Men	-	1	6	1	1	2	1	-	1	2	4	2
Farang Men	1	-	5	2	-	1	3	2	2	2	3	1
Thai Women	2	-	12	3	3	-	3	3	3	2	6	2

\* Financial difficulties

# Personal/Emotional Incompatibility with spouse

~ Culture/Language differences

@ Personal/Emotional Compatibility with spouse

TABLE TWO: RESULTS FROM INTERVIEWS

	No.	Time in Thailand (Years)	Time Married (Years)			Age When Met		Where Met			How Long Before Married			
			< 10	10-20	> 20	< 25	> 25	Farang Home	Bangkok Thailand	Other	< 1	1-2	2-5	> 5
Long-Timers	11	> 20	-	-	11	10	1	7	3	1	3	2	4	2
New-Comers	17	< 20	7	8	2	9	8	7	6	4	6	5	4	2

	Woman's Ethnic Background				Husband's Ethnic Background			Speak Thai			Lived with In-Laws		
	American	British	European	Other	Thai	Chinese/Thai	Thai/Other	Well	O.K.	A little None	Yes > 5yrs	Yes < 5yrs	No Never
Long-Timers	6	4	-	1	7	4	-	9	1	1	4	5	2
New-Comers	8	3	3	3	9	7	1	7	7	3	3	7	7

	Describe Marriage As			Factors that make life difficult				Factors that make life happy			
	Difficult	Happy	Average	Family In-laws	Finance Insec. *	Personal Incomp. #	Culture lang. ~	Family In-laws	Finance Security	Personal Compat @	Culture lang. ~
Long-Timers	4	4	3	5	6	5	5	2	1	5	6
New-Comers	-	10	5	7	2	2	4	1	7	10	3

\* Financial difficulties

# Personal/Emotional Incompatability with spouse

~ Culture/Language differences

@ Personal/Emotional Compatability with spouse