

ต้นฉบับ หน้าขาดหาย



It is the purpose of this thesis to investigate the area of sport and its propagation from a traditional martial art form and the participation of women in sport in Thailand. For the purpose of this study I have chosen to examine the state of women in the recognized national sport of Thailand, Muay Thai. Muay Thai is a source of national pride and identity and the presence or absence of women in this fundamentally Thai activity is a telling measure of gender parity.

My exploration of Thai women in Muay Thai has led to a literature search in the areas of socialization, religion, cultural constructions of the body, and the pollution theory proposed by the anthropologist Mary Douglas. The transition of Muay Thai from traditional martial art form to that of national sport was analyzed by the use of literature on the development of Muay Thai, international relations between Thailand and imperial powers, and the impact of globalization and modernization on the sport and Thailand in general.

1.2 Muay Thai

Muay Thai is the Thai form of martial art. It is a means of self-defense that uses all parts of the body as weapons. The history of Muay Thai is not clear but it was present during the Kingdom of Ayutthaya and the King Phra Sanphet VIII is said to have participated in the sport. The fall of Ayutthaya in 1767 led to the export of the sport to Burma. Thai captives who were trained in Muay Thai fought at the pleasure of the Burmese monarch Mangra and were rewarded for their skill. An early textbook on Muay Thai was made during the reign of Rama III (1824-1851). After WWII more foreigners were exposed to Muay Thai and the sport became internationally known.

Muay Thai is now considered the national sport of Thailand. Some changes have been made, such as the adoption of western style boxing gloves to replace the former cotton hand bandages, now that Muay Thai is on the world stage. Muay Thai is a rite of passage for many Thai men and may be compared to entrance into the monkhood in this respect. It is the proving ground for men and boys throughout the kingdom and as one book on Muay Thai says, "...a game for the man who is proud to be a real man" (Panya, 1999, p.244). This same text says Muay Thai is, "...a form of combat practiced by people everywhere-by children and adults, male and female"

(Panya, 1999, p.15). Other than this mention of women in the sport of Muay Thai, it is clear that women are not frequently associated with the sport. In this thesis I will outline the case of Muay Thai and Thai women as actors within the ring.

1.3 Modernization in Thailand

The process of modernization in Thailand began under the the first of two well-known modernizing monarchs, King Mongkut (1851-68) and King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910). King Mongkut is heralded as the 'Father of Modern Thailand' who secured Siam's independence from Western colonialism and laid the foundations of the nation-state (Stockwell, 2000). He did so by embarking upon a policy of interaction with the western powers which included free trade treaties, land concessions, and the appointment of foreign advisors. This strategy sought to appease the west and sponsored the selective adoption of western ideas, policies and institutions in Siam in accordance with Thai sensibilities rather than the enforcement of change by foreign rulers.

King Chulalongkorn continued in the tradition of his father and furthered the development of modernization in Thailand. He conceded territory and appointed foreign advisors, as his father had done but he took the process to another level by introducing social reforms such as the abolishment of slavery, and the wider introduction of western style education beyond the walls and blood of court and royalty. Throughout his reign, Siam was governed very much as a colony although by the sovereign leader of the country, and was led in business and foreign relations by a western (mainly British) elite.

Thailand is ever keen to assert the historical fact that they were never colonized during the age of western imperialism in Southeast Asia. However, the country was a de facto colony administered by their own monarchs. The policies adopted by the monarchs to preserve the official sovereignty of Siam in this era led to the modernization of the kingdom. Siam was geographically situated to act as a buffer between British and French colonial interest and this as well as the rulers ability to 'bend before the wind' in regards to foreign policy resulted in changes in Thai society.

1.4 Gender Roles

Throughout modern history men and women have been categorized separately emphasizing the differences between the sexes to such an extent that one wonders if they are the same species. Biological differences are only the beginning. True, men and women have different physiological components but the assumptions made about the male/female dichotomy go far beyond this scientific truth. The main constructs of male/female differences are culturally fabricated. The discussion of differences between men and women is shifted from the biological sex-based differences to the sociological gender-based differences.

Boys and girls are socialized by their parents, community and school to fulfill expected gender roles. The socialization process begins at birth when a female child is wrapped in a pink blanket and the male child is wrapped in a blue one. The case in Thailand is no different than any other country in the world except instead of pink and blue blankets children are assigned gender roles in infancy by the placing of a sewing kit or writing pad and pencil respectively within the cradle (Suwadee, 2001). From the earliest time of life a Thai female is expected to play a domestic role and take care of the house and the family.

Stereotypical gender roles in Thailand have gained official sanction by the government by the promotion of slogans such as, "Men are the gates of the nation and women are the flowers" (Suwadee, 2001, p.29). The Thai government under the first reign of Prime Minister, Field Marshall Pibulsongkram in 1938 promoted this slogan. This maxim reinforced the idea that men were strong, defenders of the nation and that women were delicate, beautiful, weak and in need of protection. It became the duty of every Thai woman to look her best to help relieve the tension her strong husband endured while defending her and the country.

There is a Thai saying that men are the front legs of the elephant and women are the hind legs. Clearly this suggest the patriarchal hierarchy present in Thai society. Women are necessary to support the men but they are undervalued and unappreciated getting stuck in a most unenviable position. Where does women's Muay Thai fit into this gender stereotypical and patriarchal network? The answer is that it doesn't but women are seeking to make space for themselves in this male dominated and defined world.

1.5 Thesis Objectives

- 1 provide a history of the development of Muay Thai.
- 2 analyze the factors promoting the modernization and globalization of Muay Thai
- 3 lay the theoretical groundwork, which illustrates the condition of Thai women in society
- 4 illustrate the suppression of women in Muay Thai.
- 5 explore the ways and means by which society seeks to limit women's competition in the sport.
- 6 outline why these restrictions exist
- 7 discuss the motivation of women in the ring

1.6 Research Questions

- 1 What are the historical factors that caused the transformation of Muay Thai from a traditional Martial form to a sport?
- 2 How and why are women under represented in Muay Thai competition?
- 3 What has lead to an increase in women's participation in competitive Muay Thai in recent years?

1.7 Research Methods

The research for this thesis was done at several locations in Thailand: Chiang Mai, Ubon Ratchathani, and Bangkok. I have pursued the strategy of participant observation in order to gain evidence to support and formulate my hypothesis. I conducted both formal and informal interviews with female and male fighters, Muay Thai coaches and Muay Thai referees.

The formal interviews were conducted with the aid of a questionnaire translated into Thai. The questionnaire posed open-ended questions, which allowed the informants to speak freely. The questionnaires were only administered to female informants and were facilitated by another female Thai informant who was a trusted member of the Muay Thai community but not herself a fighter. The

questionnaire and a table of the formal interview participants' vital statistics will be included in the appendix of the thesis.

Informal interviews were conducted at Muay Thai camps, stadiums, and competitions. I participated in camp life both as an observer and a fellow student of Muay Thai in Ubon Ratchathani and Chiang Mai respectively. I formed personal relationships with referees and coaches.

I located my female informants by conducting a telephone survey of approximately 70 Muay Thai camps through out Thailand. I had limited success in locating fighters and then resorted to a snowball sampling technique; located key individuals and asked them to name others who would be candidates for my research.

The historical review and detailed description of Muay Thais' transformation from martial art form to sport was accomplished by reviewing documents pertaining to the history of Muay Thai and the history of Thailand in the 20th century. The process of modernization in the early part of the century and the influence of the west on Thailand is reviewed and analyzed. Research into the westernisation of sport in non-western countries was beneficial as it showed the general trend of adoption of western sport practice, ideals and games in those countries

1.8 Review of literature and Background Information

This researcher acquired data from source documents, magazines, periodicals, textbooks, web pages, newspapers, videos, television programs, and CD ROMs. The main categories examined in the review of literature are sociological and anthropological theories, history of Muay Thai, modernization in Thailand, globalization of sport, Thai women, and current trends in Muay Thai.

1.9 Hypotheses

1 The transition of Muay Thai from martial art to sport is a direct result of the modernization process in Thailand from the late 1800's to the mid-1950's.

2 Women are dissuaded from participating in Muay Thai competition by traditional gender roles and superstitions about bodily contamination of the Muay Thai ring and boxers based in traditional culture and popular Buddhism.

3 Women's increased participation in Muay Thai at present is fueled by the globalization of the sport and was historically a product of the industrialization process in combination with the women's liberation movement.

1.10 Scope of Study

1 The history of Muay Thai

Modernization and globalization of the sport

2 Current female participation in Muay Thai

I limited the scope of the work to Muay Thai competitors excluding women who studied Muay Thai for self-defense or fitness purposes

3 Sociological factors inhibiting women's participation in Muay Thai

socialization, gender roles, religion, pollution theory

4 Fieldwork conducted in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, and Ubon Ratchathani

1.11 Definition of Terms

Globalization –

a broad process in which markets, trade, labour relations and culture itself have attained global dimensions, that is, the forms of organizations that connect them have a global character. In the field of sport it has been the combination of the emergence of a world media system and an international sport system that has given the sports business its global character (Horne, 1999, p. 276-277).

Martial art - form of self defense using the body only as a weapon.

Muay Thai - the Thai form of martial art using all four limbs and accompanied by traditional elements such as the *wai Khru* and the traditional costume including the *mong kon* and the exclusion of any foot ware.

Popular religion - religious beliefs that do not ascribe to the canonical teachings of any given religion. May incorporate aspects of other belief systems.

Proxemics - the study of the perception and use of space by humans

Sport- Sport is an institutionalized system of competitive, delimited, codified and conventionally governed physical practices which have the avowed aim of selecting the best competitor (Brohm as quoted in Sleaf, 1998, p. 2).

Sports are the institutionalized competitive activities that involve vigorous physical exertion or the use of relatively complex physical skills by individuals whose participation is motivated by a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Coakley as quoted in Sleaf, 1998, p. 2).

Sport is a physical activity that is fair, competitive, nondeviant, and that is guided by rules, organization, and/or tradition (Curry and Jobu as quoted in Sleaf, 1998, p.2).

Notes on word usage- reference to women in Muay Thai is always to be understood as Thai women unless otherwise stated.

1.12 Limitations of Study

This researcher faced limitations in both the literature review and participant observer components of the study. Language was a key limitation in both areas. Media commentary on Muay Thai in English is limited. There are several books authored or translated into English on the sport but these do not give a clear picture of Muay Thai history and rarely mention women in Muay Thai. Reference documents cited by these works are typically from Thai sources, which makes authentication difficult. Likewise television interviews and commentary on Muay Thai competitions are conducted in Thai and had to be translated or summarized in English.

Fieldwork was conducted in the Thai language with the aid of an interpreter or a taped translation following an interview. This may have caused a loss of information and a loss of other potentially profitable lines of questioning.

The limited number of women active in Muay Thai competition resulted in a paucity of research subjects. The total number of women competing in Muay Thai is difficult to ascertain and my sample of informants formed a small circle of associates. The limited size of the sample may have skewed the results of the study.

1.13 Theoretical Framework

The first part of the thesis will examine historical and traditional perspectives of Muay Thai, the path to modernization and the effects of globalization. Next I will examine the socio-cultural factors affecting women in Thailand and hence their place in Muay Thai. I'll apply theories on socialization, gender roles, and use the body pollution theory of Mary Douglas to deconstruct the superstition that surrounds the taboo of women in the ring. Finally, I'll examine the arrival of women in the ring and the challenges to that activity. I will examine the lives of the actual fighters, the challenges they face, their expectations and reasons for fighting etc.

1.14 Goals of Study

1) Develop the academic discourse on a highly visible cultural performance in Thai society.

2) Contribute to gender studies in the Thai Studies field beyond the usual economic and development concerns.