

‘Thainess’ and Bridal Perfection in Thai Wedding Magazines

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Abstract

The object of this thesis is to explore the representation of ‘Thainess’ in Thai wedding magazines. The thesis adopts semiotic and multimodal analysis as methods to examine how cover pages, photographs, editorial contents and advertisements in the magazines communicate their denotative and connotative meanings through primary markers and modality markers such as pose, objects, setting, framing, lights, shadow and colour tone. Subsequently, each image is examined through its depiction of people in the image to determine any stereotypical cultural attributes that highlight a distinction between the traditionalised Thai and modernised Thai bride. This thesis argues that the legacy of Thailand’s semi colonial history constructs an ambivalent relationship with the West and Thailand’s self-orientalising tendency, as well as the diffusion of hybrid cultures and modern Thai beauty ideals. Self-orientalising tendencies and the desire to encapsulate ‘Thainess’ are thusly observed in the magazines’ representation of traditional ‘Thainess’ with a nostalgic overtone, by linking the ideals of traditional beauty to the imagined qualities of heroines in Thai classic literature and aristocratic ladies from pre-modern Siam through fashion and traditional beautifying remedies.

This thesis also examines images of brides and wedding preparation narratives in order to gain an insight into how standards of bridal perfection are constructed for Thai brides-to-be. The findings reveal a constant emphasis on the discipline to maintain beauty and good behaviour as a wife. The thesis argues that this is an evidence of hegemonic discourse to control female bodies in a Buddhist and patriarchal society so that a woman can present herself as a “good woman” and avoid being perceived as a promiscuous or bad woman. Hence, the magazines only represent these images of beautiful brides with all the trappings of cultural expectations and control. Additionally, this thesis demonstrates how wedding magazines have been dominated by advertisement of products such as diamond rings etc., and argues that consumption of such wedding products has been stimulated by myths of their symbolic values to communicate social status, style and identity.

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1

Introduction

1.1 ‘Thainess’

The notion of ‘Thainess’ (*khwam-pen-thai*) has often been critiqued, debated, deconstructed, and redefined by scholars of Thai studies (see Reynolds 1999, Sattayanurak 2005, Van Esterik 2000, and Winichakul 1994, 2010). At the same time, Thai government institutions usually try to endorse ‘Thainess’ through various government sponsored media campaigns in an attempt to ingrain appreciation for Thai culture and uphold the ‘good Thai values’ amongst Thai citizens. There are many facets of ‘Thainess’ represented in mainstream media, including but not limited to Thai arts, Thai literature, Thai architecture, Buddhism, royal family. These examples are amongst many official examples of what is commonly and casually defined as quintessentially Thai (Sattayanurak 2005). Morris (2000 cited in Jackson 2004) points out that essence of Thainess is the appearance and performance of nationalist behaviour.

In Thailand’s century-and-a-half of modernisation, political power has not required the creation of a national subjectivity or an essential Thai personhood, but rather, “the appearance or the performance of ideally nationalist behaviour. It requires that one conform oneself to the ideals of the national, and it makes performance the criterion of proper citizenship” (Morris 2000: 147 in Jackson 2004: 181-182).

‘Thainess’ is ambiguous, especially in the age of globalisation, where there is a constant struggle and desire to embrace foreign cultures. Thus the easiest approach that people choose to embody ‘Thainess’ is through consumption of anything labelled as ‘Thai’ (Tejapira 2001). Tejapira (2001) points out that there is a

widespread attempt to reconcile the overwhelming undeniability and inevitability of cultural globalisation with the nervous desire to hold on to the increasing elusive and slippery Thainess (Tejapira 2001: 210)

After solid Thainess has been melted into air or vaporised and then inhaled or spirited into the psyche, it is then purified or purged of any elements deemed unsuitable for the urgent need to survive and succeed in the increasingly competitive economic and cultural environment of globalised Thailand (Tejapira 2001: 212).

Penny Van Esterik describes Thailand as a society that

“encourages an essentialism of appearance or surface...The real is hidden and unchallenged. The surface is taken for real” (Van Esterik 2000: 4).

Jackson (2004) discussed the power and significance of ‘image,’ ‘reputation,’ or ‘public image’ (*phap-phot* or *phap-lak*) in Thailand.

Thai society is a presentational society, emphasising formality, conformity, belief in ceremony, while easily taking presentation to be the heart of things (Mulder 1985: 143-144 in Jackson 2004: 189).

This appreciation of presentation as the essence of reality describes the phenomenon in which outside appearance is taken to be the essence of social life. It is the manipulation of form as content, or the equation of these two, in the sense that they are understood and taken as being one and the same thing...It is [the] pronounced tendency to take the surface of things for their essence that may be called ‘deep seated satisfaction with presentation.’ The depth of this satisfaction is demonstrated by the emotion that is invested in presentation. Presentation is therefore more than superficial reality: it is essential reality; this mental recognition is at the basis of the tendency to equate the manipulation of the symbols of social reality with its actual mastery (Mulder 1985: 198-199 in Jackson 2004: 189-190).

The above interpretations of ‘Thainess’ provide a common ground that highlights a significance of ‘appearance’ or ‘performance of being Thai.’ Therefore, I would like to contribute a perspective of ‘Thainess’ that can be excavated from representation of images and texts within Thai wedding magazines to demonstrate the appearance of ‘Thainess’ in wedding magazines.

1.2 Wedding Magazines

The wedding magazine is a significant part of the wedding industry. Not only do wedding magazines communicate wedding information to their readers, they also play part in giving meaning to the wedding through their representations of images of

actual weddings, editorial contents, and advertisements. According to Bignell (1997), a magazine is a collection of signs, in which meaning is communicated through signs and representations. Therefore, wedding magazines should prove to be a valuable cultural site for this research. Sharon Boden studied wedding magazines, and according to her, wedding magazines are filled with meanings and images that are influential to their women readers. As Boden (2001, 2003) puts it:

Bridal magazines [...] are thoroughly intertextual, polysemous texts. As well as producing meaning through significations informed by the expanding wedding industry, bridal magazines rely upon their location within the wider genre of women's magazines to insure their reader's possess the cultural literacy to 'read' their publications. Certainly, a magazine's genre shapes its parameters of meaning, along with the expectations and investments of its audience. Women's magazines, for example, condition women to the popular representations of femininity and shape common senses about the consumption needed to imitate this imagery (Boden 2003: 59).

According to Scott Barmé (2002), women magazines played an important role to educate and influence women of Siam since their conception in 1920s. The magazines offered their readers articles about contemporary marriage law, crimes on women, as well as romantic fiction, but they had only few advertisers. The variety and contents of women publications can indicate the social position of women in the society. However, this may only reveal the status of middle-class and elite women in Siam since they had opportunity to receive formal education. In modern day Thailand, more people are literate and the numbers and types of publications grow along with country's literacy rate. It is important to understand the 'who,' 'what,' 'where,' 'why,' 'when,' and 'how' women magazines are communicating and influencing their readers because the quality and type of literature for woman is a reflection on the position of women in the society and as Barmé (2002: 17) puts it:

"the position of women in the society had a fundamental bearing on the well-being and progress of the nation (Barmé 2002: 17)."

According to Bignell (1997), the glossy and colourful pages of the magazines connote pleasure and relaxation rather than seriousness to the readers. Consequently, by reading these magazines the reader experiences the luxury and femininity through the

smell and feel of the glossy paper and find their pleasures of self-adornments through the fantasy-laden imagery and narratives. These magazines present weddings as a symbol and ritual for privileged women. These brides have in common the glamour and allure of a Western femininity in their appearance and attire, the virtues of the noble lady in the narratives written about them and the essence of the bourgeois in the lavish wedding they host. These women are not only expected to attain the role of their superior colonising female role model, but at the same time to maintain their traditional role of traditional Thai feminine duties.

Wedding magazines are published mainly to compile useful information for the future brides to use as references during their wedding planning stage. By assuming the brides are in charge of their wedding planning, the brides-to-be are their main target audience and so the contents of these magazines are about the bridal preparation. The magazines represent an ideal image of a bride and a fantasy of a romantic wedding through images, articles and interviews. They shape the social expectations about weddings and make the process of becoming a bride more than just putting on a white dress. Based on the wedding magazines, becoming a bride is a process of self-transformation that should be taken seriously and be spared no expense in order to emulate the media constructed image of a bride. Through reading the magazines, brides-to-be will therefore come to the conclusion that society expects her to maintain her physical appearance and express her femininity in order to perform the role as a perfect bride.

Therefore, examining the content of Thai wedding magazines can reveal media's perspective on the concept of weddings, on being a bride, and on role of women as a whole. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the type of wedding magazine used in this research has a tendency to create an archetypal femininity based on and for wealthy middle class women. Within each wedding magazine are articles about relationships, wedding fashion, and wedding preparations, accompanied by advertisements of jewellery, professional wedding planning and photography services, all of which can be analysed in order to gain insight into the constructed Thai cultural identity and bridal perfection. As a literature, wedding magazines take their readers through a

journey in which romantic fantasy of a perfect wedding is constructed, represented, and advertised. They serve to project a vision of Thailand, not only as a modern consumerist culture, but also as a cultured nation trying to preserve its traditional cultural identity. Being amongst many significant parts of the wedding industry, as well as influential amongst brides-to-be, wedding magazines are packed with commercially produced images and texts which can be examined to reveal their implicit ideological and cultural messages. How these texts and images are constructed by the magazines and what are being reflected back to the society?

1.3 Thesis Overview

In the same way that culture assigns a meaning to certain objects, magazines produce meanings by representing certain goods as necessities for a wedding and a fulfillment of bridal identity. Even if certain meanings may not be evident for most people, magazines find their ways to incorporate them into the contents and the advertisements as a hegemonic representation. Therefore, the magazines as well as the advertisers may not only be fixing meaning to a wedding and bridal identity, they are essentially constructing a set of weddings and bridal identities which they deemed appropriate and acceptable in a society. Even though they might not be representing an accurate depiction of a real wedding in the society, they are creating it by trying to convey that this is the way it should be done. This research aims to investigate the way in which Thai wedding magazines have constructed and represented the notion of 'Thainess,' Thai femininity in images, editorial contents, and advertisements. Throughout this thesis, it would be apparent that wedding magazines have portrayed wedding to be more than just a ceremony or an elaborate celebration of love, as it highlights the representation of 'Thainess', feminine ideals, standard of beauty, product endorsement, as well as power relations between female and male in modern Thai society. This thesis is composed of nine chapters, including this introductory Chapter 1.

1.3.1 Chapter 2

Chapter 2 presents a theoretical framework on postcolonial discourse in relations to Thai gender perspective. This chapter refers to the work of prominent Thai scholars

such as Rachel Harrison, Peter A. Jackson, Penny Van Esterik, and Thongchai Winichakul, discussing Thailand's history of semi-colonialism and its impact upon Thai's social stratification and position of female in Thai society. The chapter discusses the relevance of the foreigner (*farang*) in modern Thai society and tendency to emulate *farang* ways while at the same time reorienting the self-orientalising gaze back to Thailand. Research done on gender relations in Thailand demonstrated a disadvantage of women in the dynamic of heterosexual relationship. Women are encouraged to perform a dutiful role as the good woman, good daughter, and good wife to avoid being perceived as a bad or promiscuous woman (Barmé 2002).

1.3.2 Chapter 3

Chapter 3 discusses relevant literatures about weddings and the theoretical foundation regarding representation and women magazines, which explains that women magazines are representing a stereotypical view of woman, focusing on the need to maintain beautiful bodies and face. This chapter also refers to work of Stuart Hall, Pierre Bourdieu and Thorstein Veblen and their relevance on human consumptions patterns in relations to their social and financial status. As objects have been transformed into signs, the consumption of products is no longer for the sole purpose of their utilitarian functions, but also for the symbolic potentials promoted by advertisements. Social status, class, cultural and gender identity can be communicated through the commodities one chooses to consume. The image in advertisements is composed of rhetorical images that work to signify an underlying ideology (Sturken and Cartwright 2009). Advertising uses symbols to conjure the fantasy and persuade the audience to desire that fantasy.

1.3.3 Chapter 4

Chapter 4 proposes a systematic research methodology referring to the work of Roland Barthes, Daniel Chandler, and David Machin on semiotics and multimodal analysis, which is used to analyse wedding magazines and to answer research questions below:

Research question 1: What is 'Thainess' and how is it represented in wedding magazines?

Research question 2: How are Thai brides are represented in wedding magazines?

Research question 3: What is being advertised in wedding magazines and why is it meaningful to Thai wedding?

An important element in representation is signs. This chapter sets out to explain the usefulness of semiotic theory as a toolkit to analyse signs and images and understand their potential connotative and denotative meanings from posture, objects, setting and frame of an image. Multimodal analysis approach presents a step by step guide to use different modality markers to collect semiotic resources in images and explains these modality markers such as articulation of details in background, light and shadow, colour tone, modulation, saturation, and differentiation can be analysed to reveal if each image is represented naturalistically or exaggerated to serve other purposes.

1.3.4 Chapter 5

The latter half of the thesis presents research findings in 4 chapters: Chapter 5 – 8. Chapter 5 presents an analysis of magazine cover images and discusses the differences between the constructed ‘traditionalised’ and ‘non-traditional’ (or modern) wedding images. This chapter identifies key signifiers that separate ‘Thainess’ from ‘non-Thainess’ amongst the forty-eight covers of wedding magazines from January 2010 – December 2014. The magazine covers are categorised according to the colour scheme, style of clothing, model posture, and type of model representation to create two main categories of cover page: westernised vs. traditionalised. In addition, westernised cover page is broken down further into three subcategories: cover with just the bride, cover with both bride and groom, and cover without any bride and groom.

This chapter analyses each categories of cover pages individually and illustrates an emergent patterns of representation in the respective categories. Nine traditionalised covers with brides adorned in traditionalised wedding attire are represented in a monochromatic of warm colour scheme of mostly brown, gold and beige, while the

models are represented in an almost identical posture of stillness that connotes the mythical allure conservative and delicate woman, yet almost statue like. On the other hand, the non-traditionalised covers are represented with a more variety of colours, high level of brightness and models in more relaxed, lively, and provocative posture. The differences have highlighted the trapping of 'Thainess' within its nostalgic past, untouched and unchallenged.

1.3.5 Chapter 6

Building on from the findings in Chapter 5, Chapter 6 looks further in the magazines with 'traditionalised' cover pages (9 issues in total) to find embedded message of 'Thainess' and discusses the myths and its recurring signifiers constructed by the magazines. The images of 'Thainess' are being represented around the allure of nostalgic longing for the imagination of authentic and traditional Thai. These images are constructed with the same recipe of 'Thainess,' using certain signifying elements, thus making it convenient to identify what is Thai and what is not and by extension allowing 'Thainess' to be embodied as product of convenience.

The findings illustrated a monochromatic narrative of 'Thainess' in wedding magazines with 'traditionalised' cover pages, where models are adorned in traditionalised wedding attire. 'Traditionalised' Thai brides are described for beauty that can be compared to heroines from classical Thai literature, a lady from an aristocratic family, and a lady from pre-modern Siam. Furthermore, the exoticness of 'traditionalised' brides is emphasised by the need to maintain their beauty in the 'traditionalised' way by using local ingredients such as herbs instead of packaged and branded skincare products. Chapter 6 has also demonstrated that auspiciousness is a significant part of the narrative of 'Thainess' and weddings to the extent that almost everything included in the wedding ceremony can be traced for their auspicious qualities. And lastly this chapter presents a hybrid representation of 'Thainess', where western cultural influence coexist. This has been supported by earlier theoretical

discussion in Chapter 2 that explained many aspects of Thai culture were remodelled after the West.

1.3.6 Chapter 7

Chapter 7 presents findings on constructed notion of bridal perfection amongst Thai brides and discusses the magazines' narrative regarding bridal's transformation process. This chapter examines the endorsed standard of Thai's idealised beauty and demonstrates what it means to be Thai bride through the traditional Thai feminine values, which confirms that 'Thainess' can also be performed through female bodies in their role as a bride.

The findings reveal that a bride represented in these magazine can be considered as a product that has gone through various stages of construction and correction. Despite having very little or no ideal physical traits, such as the perfect slim figure, oval face shape, flawless skin, light complexion or sleek long hair, the magazines have ensured their readers that there is a process available to cater for the needed reconstruction of the female body to fit with the media's disseminated version of the ideal bridal image. Such process of construction and reconstruction includes advertised beauty therapy programmes, daily and nightly beauty regimens and plastic surgeries. The advertisements and editorial contents have normalised the dominant power of ideal beauty discreetly until the control over a female becomes standard practice in the bridal transformation process. Eventually, a female body becomes submissive to the power that the ideal bridal beauty controls. The power of the ideal bridal beauty does not only exert dominant control over a female body, but also washes out the individuality and uniqueness of a woman. Each bride has their femininity masked over by a facade of the predetermined ideals. The bride as product of these wedding magazines then becomes a doll that serves to oppress women within the cage of ideal physical traits and reinforce the hegemony of the cultural expectation of femininity.

The disciplinary power of the media reinforces the ideal discreetly and subtly expands it until it reaches the point where it has become the norm that naturalised the ideal of

Thai bridal image. The core of the ordinary is masked over with a facade of predetermined qualities of an ideal bride. These wedding magazines then have become a manual to create a bridal identity, turning a prospective bride into a doll that fulfils social expectations, governed by the media disseminated principles; an image of a woman who can be distinguished amongst the crowd because there are markers that set her apart from other people. A special status is granted to a bride, making a distinction between her and the ordinary woman she was previously with markers such as the bridal attire, jewellery and ring that signify the status of having engaged in a committed relationship. This symbolic status is attained by going through the stages of transformation such as a weight loss program, beauty therapies, makeup and hairstyling, posture refinement and dress fitting, which result in a perfect image of a Thai bride.

1.3.7 Chapter 8

Chapter 8 presents dominant advertisements found in selected wedding magazines and discusses their symbolic functions and significance towards Thai weddings. This chapter illustrates the social values assigned to wedding-related goods and services by the advertisers and concludes that the consumption of these products is socially interpreted as a sign of status and that 'how' you marry is equally as important as who you marry.

A bride and her wedding are represented entirely by symbols, signs, colours, groom, guests, venue and the expenses that contributed to everything involved. Most weddings represented in the magazines are essentially similar, they follow the social convention of a bride in a white wedding gown, a groom in a tuxedo, a wedding cake, flowers, and a fancy hotel. Even though each wedding may be different, it is essentially all about representing status symbols. There are few unique or unconventional weddings, which incorporate unique themes as opposed to the prevalent luxurious hotel ballroom event, but even the weddings with gimmick ideas are regarded as legitimate since they are thematic and laden with symbolic elements of conspicuous consumption. This confirms Bourdieu's argument that a symbolic representation of class is apparent on each individual because of three factors: social

location, habitus and taste (Bourdieu 1984). The weddings represented in the magazines may be of different couples of different classes, but their similarities in location, habitus and taste show their weddings are represented as the conventional standard of elaborate and bourgeois decorum.

Because of myth, advertising leads people to believe in the symbolic values of the product and consume it for that: ‘the bride in the advertorial is glamorous and elegant, if you are a bride you would be just as glamorous and elegant as her’; ‘a diamond ring is a symbol of eternal love, so you should expect one too.’ Advertising is one of the powerful ideological forces in consumer culture because it generates symbolic meanings for products. As a result, companies can capitalise on the signification of the products and simultaneously people consume these products not only for their function but for their signification as well (Williamson 1978). Thus, it can be argued that advertising is not only selling the product, but it is selling a connotative meaning of the product: not only is a diamond ring an accessory for a woman’s finger (consumption for material purpose), it is also a symbol of her romantic relationship with her fiancé or husband (consumption because of myth). The advertisement for diamond rings from a Thai wedding magazine is representing diamond rings as a symbol of ‘endless love’ and it is trying to sell to its readers the romance that the ring signifies rather than the ring as an accessory. Ultimately a wedding becomes a stage to display various symbols of cultural identity, class, and gender. The bride and groom choose to define themselves through the way their wedding is created, the attire they wear, the ceremony they hold, the venue it takes place, the amount of money they spend, as well as the photograph to capture it all.

1.3.8 Chapter 9

And lastly, Chapter 9 concludes the thesis with a summary of the findings and key arguments that answered the three proposed research questions that highlight the thesis’s academic contribution to the study of ‘Thainess’. Furthermore, limitations of this research highlights that the scope of the thesis is limited to weddings as represented in magazines, and thus have exclusively included certain group of people in the representation, while others are left out. Hence ideas for further studies are

suggested such as to conduct research on real weddings both in the city and countryside, and perhaps base the basis of research on other types television dramas. Finally, this conclusion chapter wraps up the thesis with an argument that ‘Thainess’ is an elaborate façade that has been constructed, reconstructed, borrowed, adapted, told, retold, and finally sublimated into an irrelevant fossilised shell that can be embody when the ‘inner Thainess’ needs to be presented in public

2

Postcolonial Discourse of ‘Thainess’ and Gender

“Postcolonial studies provides a rich body of ideas for understanding the many forms of Thai-Western cultural and intellectual hybridity [...] as effects of differences in power between a hegemonic West and a politically and economically subordinate Thailand.” (Peter A. Jackson 2010: 37)

2.1 Introduction

This theoretical chapter is presented in two main parts. The first part discusses the postcolonial theory and its relevancy in the context of Thailand. It aims to provide a framework to the investigation of the cultural relationships between Thailand and its preconception of the imagined ‘West’ as well as how this connection has constructed the notion of ‘Thainess’ and its cultural identity. I will primarily refer to the notion of ‘semi-colonialism’, which South East Asian scholars such as Peter A. Jackson and Rachel Harrison, in Harrison’s edited book *The Ambiguous Allure of the West: Traces of the Colonial in Thailand*, have used in their examination of the construction of ‘Thainess’ and its relationship with the West to examine the residual effects of colonialism which have been imprinted on Thai contemporary culture. Subsequently, the second part of this chapter discusses the Thai gender perspective through the lens of postcolonial studies. This part presents a theoretical overview of the status and relations between women and men in contemporary Thai society. I have mainly referred to the work of prominent scholars of Thai studies such as Rachel Harrison, Peter A. Jackson, Craig J. Reynolds, Scot Barmé and Penny Van Esterik because their works focus directly upon gender, especially portrayals of female in contemporary Thailand.

This chapter should provide a concrete foundation to unfold my research in examining the notion of Thai identities, female and male gender relations and most importantly the presence of Western cultural imperialism in Thai contemporary culture. Throughout this chapter I use ‘Siam’, (Thailand’s former name until 1949) to refer to the country during the period prior to its official name change, whereas Thailand is used in the ‘after 1949’ context.

Part I

2.2 Postcolonial Thailand

“Our country is very modern. There are many skyscrapers. Everything has changed. We have cars, electricity, movie theatres. We dress in a Western style. We accept Westerners more than we accept one another. We have everything the Westerners have. We are everything that they are and we eat everything that they eat [. . .] we want to be them and refuse to be ourselves.”

The quotation above is a dialogue from one of Thailand’s most well-known novels *Tawiphop*, written by Tomayanti, and due to its popularity has been adapted into films, musicals and television dramas. The main character is a woman named Maneechan, who lives in modern day Bangkok but travels back in time to Siam in the late 1800s during the Franco-Siamese War. In the 2004 film version of *Tawiphop*, *The Siam Renaissance*, Maneechan tells the Siamese she meets about modern Thai society and its people. She encapsulates the essence of the Thailand-West relationship in modern day Bangkok, showing that people have changed and taken foreign cultural influence well, whereas one’s own cultural identity is being ignored. Like the character in *Tawiphop*, looking back in history shall allow us to gain a better understanding of how the present has been shaped.

By acknowledging the significance of Western influence in contemporary Thai society, I refer to postcolonial studies to theorise this research in examining the social and cultural construct of Thailand amidst the complexities of Western presence in the country from the 19th century until the present day. Peter A. Jackson, a distinguished Thai History scholar at the Australian National University pointed out:

“Postcolonial studies provides a rich body of ideas for understanding the many forms of Thai-Western cultural and intellectual hybridity [...] as effects of differences in power between a hegemonic West and a politically and economically subordinate Thailand.” (2010: 37)

Although not an official colony, Western influences in Thailand cannot be overlooked as they have played a significant role in shaping the society of Siam into what is currently Thailand. The presence of the West in Thailand in the past and present is complex and the impact it has upon the country is undeniably far from insignificant. However, to examine the country as a colony even though it has not officially been one could be an overstatement, but we cannot deny the fact that some imperial influence from the West is one of the layers that has laid foundation on modern Thai society and contemporary culture. Therefore, Jackson (2010) suggested that we could underpin Thailand’s relations to Western imperial power with the notion of ‘semicolonialism’. ‘Semicolonialism’ played a significant role in Thai historiography, albeit much debated and refuted by Thailand’s master narrative of non-colonial status. Even though not officially colonised, Siam was made a buffer zone between France and Great Britain, and has hence been influenced by these two imperial powers in politics, economics, social and cultural aspects upon the negotiation between the Siam Royal court and two imperial powers (see Winichakul 2000). Streckfuss (1993: 125, in Jackson 2010: 45) explained “Siam was a virtual colony” because it had been at disadvantage in unequal trading treaties such as the Bowring Treaty with Britain, in which Siam was deprived from sovereign control over foreign and domestic trade (see Harrison 2010 and Jackson 2010). In considering Thailand as a former ‘semicolony,’ the master narrative of Siam’s non-colonial past, which has been dominating Thailand’s mainstream education and media in the understanding of Thailand’s relations with the West, will thusly be challenged.

The mainstream nationalist discourse and master narrative of Thai historiography have raised the status of Thailand above its colonised neighbours by claiming its non-colonised past. Despite King Chulalongkorn’s efforts to maintain national sovereignty, in closer examination Siam was not entirely independent nor was it unaffected by Western imperial domination. King Chulalongkorn and his father King Mongkut were known for their enthusiastic attempts to modernise Siam through technological developments and social reforms, many of which were modelled after

Great Britain and France. Siam was considered an example of neo-colonialism in the age of colonialism. According to Chaiyan Rajchagool (1994: 82),

“Western...penetration of Siam was consummated directly at the economic level and indirectly at the political one. It was this that made Siam singularly different from her Southeast Asian neighbours whose doors were broken by [foreign] politico-military forces. Siam’s door was opened from inside.”
(Chaiyan 1994: 82, in Jackson 2010: 46)

Therefore, even though Thailand has never formally been colonised, it has experienced a colony-like status, thus the nationalist discourse of never having been a colony could be considered a facade to mask its actual subordination as a British “peripheral empire” (Loos 2006: 17 and Jackson 2010: 46). Jackson (2010: 39) has drawn on postcolonial understanding of power, culture and knowledge to position Thailand as a subordinate position in the Western-dominated world order, not as a direct colony but as a semicolony. The ambiguities of Western power in the Thai context are supported by a number of studies that have demonstrated that Thailand has been impacted by Western imperialism economically, politically, culturally and socially, in ways similar to that of Thailand’s colonised neighbours (see Harrison 2010; Kitiarsa 2010; and Winichaiikul 2000; 2010). Despite its non-colonised status, Thailand encountered a semicolonial experience, and therefore logically fit within a postcolonial context. Benedict Anderson (1978: 197) is critical of Siam’s master narrative, in which he considered to be an “unqualified blessing” and its non-colonial status is only a myth that is being overly used to praise the country’s uniqueness.

It is also because of Siam’s resistance to be considered through the lens of postcolonialism or semicolonialism that scholars have considered Thai studies as “theoretical backwater” (see Van Esterick 2000). According to Jackson (2010), Thai studies lack Western theoretical paradigms and it is an isolated discipline within a Western academy because of its absence of colonial history. Due to the fact that Thailand has never been formally colonised, Jackson (2010) argues that Thai studies have not been an area of interest within Western academy and therefore are lacking in terms of theoretical foundation.

Moreover, due to its status as a non-official colony, Thai studies have been overlooked by disciplines such as anthropology which is being taught in Western universities because Western academy focuses more on the empirical data obtained from direct colonies. Therefore, I have decided to challenge Thailand's mainstream master narrative of its imperial independence and examine the country through the lens of semicolonialism. The perception that regards Thailand as independent and free from foreign interference unlike its colonised neighbours shall be extrapolated further in details in subsequent chapters through empirical data collections.

2.2.1 Social stratification of contemporary Thai society

In order to fully comprehend the complexities of social stratification of Thailand society, I have outlined below the three dominant social segments in Thailand. Although primarily derived from Hamilton's (1994: 144) social segments in the Thai film industry, I find it equally appropriate to be used in Thailand's general social construct.

1. the pseudo-traditionalised conservative power elite, including some elements of the bourgeois commercial classes and military groups
2. the younger, educated, Western-orientated bourgeoisie, anxious for social change and pushing at the boundaries of possibilities in the current deeply conflicted political environment
3. the rural and provincial people, many of whom are still engaged in agriculture but who are being incorporated in multiple and little understood ways into global capitalism elements in Thai society: the ethnic and the religious minorities (hill tribes, Muslims), the urban poor, those supported directly by the sex industry, beggars and drug addicts and a variety of others who are, from the dominant segment's perspective, not supposed to exist.

In addition to these three main groups of social segments in Thai society, foreigners in Thailand should also be considered as part of the contemporary society because of the country's semi colonial past and in the age of globalisation.

2.3 Westernisation of a semicolonial Siam

As a result of Thailand's semicolonial past, the relationship with the West is a complex one, which is simultaneously desired and feared. The country and its people are caught in a dilemma of Western "emblem of modernity and civilisation", as much as people love and emulate the West, they reject the influence fearing its power of disfiguration of "unique Thai identity" (Fishel 1999: 166). The process of westernisation has been facilitated by the royal family and bourgeoisie, who have brought back "Western notions of respectability and fashion" to the country after their trips or studies in Europe and the United States in from since early 1900s onwards (Fishel 1999: 158). The changes were most evident since the reign of King Chulalongkorn and his successor King Vajiravudh, both of whom were actively pushing Siam toward modernity in the attempt to be civilised (*siwilai*) as their European counterparts by using the Western model of femininity and masculinity to transform clothing and hairstyles of Thai people both within the royal court and outside (Fishel 1999).

King Chulalongkorn's effort to save Siam from being colonised by the West had led him towards progressive reforms and a modernisation process of the country. He and his entourage travelled to Europe twice during his reign to study the ways of the West and implemented the modern ways in Siam. Some argued that although King Chulalongkorn saved Siam from Western colonisation, he used Bangkok as a centre for internal colonisation (see Winichakul 1994, 2000, 2010). Harrison (2010) summarised King's Chulalongkorn' westernisation strategy as follows:

"In terms of the significance that this excess of conspicuous international consumption held for local audiences, the monarch's overseas visits overtly symbolised the attainment of siwilai status as one aspect of a wider strategy to mimic the imperial aggressor for the purposes of cementing the elite's grip on power." (Harrison 2010: 19)

Chakri dynasty's administrative takeover of the Lanna kingdom in the late nineteenth century is considered as "internal colonialism" (Morris 1998: 363; in Jackson 2010: 45). In essence, Bruce London (in Jackson 2010: 45) argued "Bangkok had assumed

an internally colonising relation to the rest of the country”. This leads to the propensity of self-orientalisation in Thailand, which is reflected in the way Thai people see themselves and how they preferred to be seen by others. Because King Chulalongkorn wanted the West to see Siam as an equally civilised country he had welcomed the Western ways of clothing, mannerism, language and lifestyles to reform the country. It can be argued that the king and his people were orientalisising themselves as the westernised people of Thailand. This desire had emerged from the recognition of lack; “this is something I am not, therefore I am not whole, therefore because this other promise wholeness, I desire [to be] him or her” (Lacan in McRobbie, 2005: 109). David Wyatt further supported this claim with his argument regarding Thailand’s quest for civilisation (siwilai) as below:

“...the agency of the Siamese, observing the King Chulalongkorn returned to Bangkok from visits to the colonies of Singapore, Malaya, Burma, India and Java in 1871 and 1872 with a vision, ‘to turn his kingdom into a miniature European colony, without the Europeans, making it a modernised, ‘civilised’, Asian state’.” (Wyatt 1994a: 279, in Jackson 2010: 45)

In the social and cultural context, Homi Bhabha’s (2004) notion of ambivalence can describe the relationship between Thailand with the West. There are two main perspectives that can define the relationship between Thailand and the ‘West.’ At one extreme, ‘anything’ Thai is being regarded as inferior to the West. With a supposition that Thai ways of doing things were ‘incomplete’ and ‘lacklustre’, while Western ways were ‘much more complete’, much more exemplary by comparison. Thai people are led to believe that foreign influence is not entirely harmful, therefore should be welcomed in the hope of being liberated from ‘backwardness’ in order to enter a new age of modernity and prosperity; thus allowing the perception of everything from the West to signify elite and superior status. At the other extreme, ‘anything’ Thai has rich history and traditions therefore is more exquisite than Western and neighbouring Asian counterparts. As much as Thai people are fascinated with the cultures of the West, they are equally concerned with the porosity of Thai cultures and national identities. Thailand has also undergone a process of rediscovering traditional culture to counter the popularisation of western cultures in the country, to remind people of their roots, and embed a sense of patriotism and desire to preserve what is considered tradition of Thailand or ‘Thainess’. It can be argued that tradition is being eroded

because of Western modernisation, but on the other hand it involved more than a process of erosion, because different cultures are intermixing, creating a fusion or synthesis of cultures rather than just one culture being replaced by another.

It can be argued that the ‘authentic’ ‘Thainess’ is possibly lost or never existed initially since many foreign cultural influences may have spread to the country long before it could be recorded. Many aspects of the Siam culture were reconstructed and modelled after the West, since the king saw it as a way to be considered an equally civilised (*‘sivilai’*) country as other imperial powers like Great Britain and France. Therefore, could it be possible that ‘authentic’ national identity is a myth that has been constructed to prevent people from being confused with their identity and culture in the midst of cultural imperialism. ‘Authentic’ ‘Thainess’ may have been gradually fading, or completely dominated by culture of the ‘Other’ or even non-existent in the first place. Thus the notion of ‘Thainess’ may be considered as something constructed, represented and reproduced.

2.3.1 *Farang* - the great ‘other’

Farang is a term used to identify the West, Western people, and Western derived things” (Kitiarsa 2010: 60). Despite its status as ‘other’ (non-Thai), the term connotes meaning of superior qualities in comparison to local Siamese/Thai counterparts. The valorisation of Western cultural values and practices has been initiated and enforced by King Chulalongkorn himself. Hence it is ineluctable that many Thai people have adopted the pro-foreign attitude, following their monarch and royal elites. Western things have become an effective ‘vehicle’ to represent the superiority among the people in semi-postcolonial Siam, especially among the elites. In essence, the *farang* have become a role model for Thai people to imitate in order to be more superior and modern. According to Winichakul (2000), the Western Others were assimilated to Siam to install a standard of sophistication and fineness, which was necessary for further development; thus creating a distinction between Western assimilated Siamese elites in the urban area and the still ‘primitive’ and backward Siamese in the countryside.

Attributes of *farang* such as an English language ability, fair skin, and light hair colour are adored and desired by local Thai people. The presence of *farang* is very much the foundation of Thai contemporary culture and the success of Thai entertainment industry, which is mainly dominated by half *farang*-half Thai (*luk kreung*) actors, singers and models. Although there may have been a certain doubt and fear that *farang* had taken advantage of the locals, the allure of superiority of *farang* had also made them favoured by the royal elites and common people because they are considered as a gateway to being civilised (*sivilai*) and prosperity (*kwam-chareon*). Pattana Kitiarsa had succinctly concluded:

“From whatever angle ‘Thainess’ is now viewed, farang influences are simple inevitable, and contemporary forms of ‘Thainess’ is now incomplete without the allure of farang-ness.” (Kittiarsa 2010: 73)

2.3.2 Lower class - the backward ‘other’

The lower class ‘Other’ is a contrast to the aforementioned ‘*farang* Other’. In Thailand, lower class are being labelled as people of the countryside (*khon-ban-nok*), whose local ways are considered by middle and upper class as unrefined. Their way of lives could be more authentic than those in the capital (*khon-muang*) since they are secluded from foreign influence due to their geographical locations (i.e. away from Bangkok) as well as the lack of information from media and finance to adorn foreign imports and styles. According to Hamilton (1994), Thai elites despise Thai films because they regard local cinema as a product of the lower class. Thai elites are able to enjoy Western films with minimal language and cultural barriers. While Thai people, especially elites and royals openly accept the West, they simultaneously patronise local people in the country especially those in the lower class and exclude them from the privilege of opportunities to acquire a foreign language education, finance, and social mobility. It can be considered as absurd that while Thai people have made great efforts in trying to be on par with the West either through language acquisition and behavioural imitation in order to modernise themselves hence avoiding Oriental gaze, those who have succeeded in becoming westernised or at least think they have, are turning the Oriental gaze towards their fellow countrymen.

It is ironic that the 'Other' according to Thailand people are not from the West, but from within Thailand. Perhaps because of the absence of 'official' colonial ruler or 'apparent' enemy from the West in Thailand, Thais do not regard the West as an enemy that should be despised. Rather, the government endorsed local Thai to be more like the people in the 'West' so they can be more civilised. Conversely, the real enemy for Thailand is backwardness, poverty and low social status, all of which are deep-rooted in the social structure that without the help from the 'West', the enemy cannot be eradicated. Therefore, this could be another reason why Thais, especially the elites despise lower class people since they are the symbol of poverty and backwardness of the country. Thus, the lower class has inevitably obtained the status as the 'Other' within Thailand. People in the lower class are represented as the underprivileged, poverty stricken and uneducated, this image is a direct opposite of the West, whose image exudes power, prosperity and knowledge. Therefore, it is only natural that people want to move away from being lower class of an underdeveloped country and be more like those refined *farang* beaming with sophistication.

The appropriation of Western cultural practices such as the 'mix and match' of foreign cultural symbols with local traditions can be considered a form of protest against the ruling elites who use the notion of 'West' to distinguish between elites and non-elites and barricade the elites out of their closed society by the reconstruction of a new traditional identity for them to adopt. As mentioned earlier, what is considered 'traditional' Thai culture in modern days is constructed of traditions since the reign of King Mongkut and King Chulalongkorn in the 19th century. So when non-elites challenge the notion of 'Thainess' by refusing to follow the standard practice, it demonstrates their eagerness to exercise their creativity outside the restraints of cultural 'tradition' and to show the elites that they are also capable of comprehending Western cultures and therefore are not inferior. However, as Western cultural practices are being more appropriated by the mass, there will be voices of concern, especially from conservative Thai elites who protest against the westernisation of local traditions. That said, when elites are the ones being westernised it has never really been an issue. This is another form of oppression on the lower class resulting from the process of internal colonisation when people of the country are not allowed to 'speak'.

As Franz Fanon pointed out, anti-colonial nationalism can replace Western colonial ruling class with a Western-educated local ruling class, which speaks on behalf of the people but functions to keep the people disempowered (McLeod 2000, : 108).

Since Thai elites have appropriated many aspects of Western cultures into Thai ways, they have also adopted the Western attitude that oppresses the ‘Other’. Consequently, they ended up oppressing those within their own nation. Considering the aspects of oppression mentioned above, I draw on Sulak Siwalak’s encapsulation that:

“Several key ways Thailand might be better understand as semicolonial rather than fully independent of imperial influence; and that in addition to this, further substantiations provide a contrary view of Siam as highly imitative of Western imperial strategies in its aggressive policies of ,internal colonisation’.” (Harrison 2010: 20)

In Thai society, social structures and cultural practices are designed, planned and regulated by people from high class and middle class. These people observe certain social norms to be practised within the framework they have set out in order to be able to exercise control over social functions and people from the lower class. The privileged groups are allowed to operate outside the framework because they have money, power, knowledge and superior rights over others in the society. Therefore, they are another agent that brings foreign culture into the country and soon after the lower class adapt in ways they see appropriate. Since the lower class lacks education, finance and power, whereas the privileged are equipped with the qualifications that grant them the ability to think and speak, they create the framework of a society that everyone should adhere to.

Part II

2.4 Thai female gender perspective

The second part of this chapter discusses the representation of women as well as the representation of gender differences in postcolonial contexts. The standard of Thai beauty has been influenced by Thailand’s semi colonial history. In modern day Thailand, beauty ideals have been heavily influenced by the West, not only through imports of foreign media, but also through mixed marriages between Thai and Europeans, which have supplied Thai entertainment industry with Eurasians

celebrities (half Caucasian and half Thai children). Nowadays Eurasian children do not carry the stigma as the earlier generation, who were born of American GIs and Thai women during the 1960s to 1970s once had (Reynolds 1999). Instead, they are considered commodities of Thai entertainment industry because the appeal of half-Thai celebrities can be linked to a perfect mixture of east and west facial features that resulted in fair skin, shapely nose with a prominent nose bridge. As Reynolds (1999), argues:

Eurasian facial features in the globalised epoch are highly prized by advertisers of Thai products marketed both in Asia and in the West. It is to this newly revalued female and male Eurasian image [...] illustrate[s] the engendering of a postnationalist Thai self which has been part and parcel of the commercialisation and commodification of beauty in Thai popular culture for some time (Reynolds 1999: 269-270).

2.4.1 Women and beauty

In discussion about women, one cannot deter from a subject of beauty, after all it is the one of the qualities which women are most valued for. There are long-standing social values for women to be responsible for domestic duties and to make themselves look attractive - to function as “mere adornments” (Barmé 2002: 25). For Thais physical appearance such as beauty, skin colour, and hair are considered as a reflection of inner states. Thus the more beautiful a woman is, the more value or attention is given to her. Even the fees paid for prostitution services are determined by the perceived beauty, in addition to features such as skin colour, make-up or fashionable dress (Van Esterik 1999). ‘Beautiful’ is one of the mostly used description of bride not only in Thailand but perhaps in other countries as well. Women are taught to be beautiful since they were just girls and they especially want to be beautiful on their wedding day. Wolf argues “beauty is hard work, few women are born with it, and it is not free” (Wolf 1991: 151, in Van Esterik 2000: 142). Although there are different standards of beauty and all women can be considered beautiful in their own way, the dominating standards of beauty still remain prevalent in a society as seen in the media where lighter skin colour, slim body and flawlessly made up faces are popularised and represented in magazines (see Chapter 5 and Appendix B for images of Thai actresses chosen to be cover models).

An excerpt below is taken from Van Esterik's book, *Materialising Thailand* (2000). She has demonstrated the repression of women through their beauty in beauty pageant.

"The Miss Universe contest continued to attract newspaper coverage, in spite of the pro-democracy protests in Bangkok. Thai papers featured photograph which go for the jugular, along with a few other favourite body parts. Photographers were particularly active in chasing Miss Belgium who 'showed the most cleavage'. The press can hardly be blamed for focusing on body parts when they were provided with rating sheets to compare their scoring with that of the judges in the Miss Thailand World contest. Scores were assigned as follows: face (30 percent), figure (20 percent), legs (10 percent), walking (10 percent), wit (10 percent), personality (10 percent), and character (10 percent). This may help explain why photographers delighted in taking their photos from unflattering angles and supplying them with rude captions. These – close-ups of thighs and crotches and breast without heads – are assembled into Beauty Books following the contests, and sold at book stores and newsstands. The photos and captions confirm the fascination with yet contempt for the women who participate in beauty contests." (Van Esterik 2000: 145 – 146)

Reynolds's (1999) and Van Esterik (2000) analysis on Thai's construction of attractiveness through Thailand's beauty pageant the 1990s is a significant contribution to Thai discourses as it emphasises blurred distinction between 'authentic' Thai and 'synthetic' or 'westernised' Thai. This has been a constant debate of whether women participating in beauty pageant are crowned according to their beauty as a Thai or for their potential to compete against other international beauty contestants, in which case 'westernised' beauty and English language ability are favourable. There is yet another dilemma of desire to be seen as beautiful according to international or globalised standard, and at the same time to resist stepping outside a nationalistic frame. This applies not only to women, but also to other aspects of Thai culture, which are a hybrid of 'authentic' and 'westernised' form (Cook and Jackson 1999; Reynolds 1999; Young 1995) - and wedding is amongst them.

The studies by Van Esterik (2000) have reinvestigated the sexualities and gender in Thailand by referencing to the Buddhist's view on gender differences. In Buddhist perspective, the status of male is higher than female hence undermines the female position by claiming that it is an act of karma to be born as women, and with enough good deeds in this life one could eventually be born as a man in the next life. In essence, there is no such thing as unfair treatment or repression of women, just

karma. Whilst the Buddhist concept of beauty considered beautiful appearance as a result of merit collected from past lives (Van Esterik 2000), with modern technology and surgical expertise, Thai women can achieve Western standards of beauty. Even in beauty contests, women are allowed to perfect their physical features such from hair colour to shape of eyes and breast to conform to national and international beauty standards (Van Esterik 2000). Nonetheless, self-created beauty through surgery and/or material enhancement is still limited to those with financial capability, thus reverts back to the connection between beauty and social class. Any women can be beautiful as long as they have money (Omphornuwat 2010). But as Van Esterik points out, beauty also creates opportunity to meet elite men and allow social mobility.

Appearance matter. Beautiful appearance matter even more...In practice, it is Thai women who are more likely to be affected by judgements about their appearance...Beauty keeps open the possibility of connections between classes and regions today, as in the past. Movies celebrate the beautiful women of 'Old Siam' who could 'jump the queue' and be associated with elite men (Van Esterik 2000: 129).

Having observed various regulations that women are being confined to, Thais can justify this form of repression with a Buddhist view on gender, which considers being born as male is more advantageous than as female. While religion and patriarchal society position women as lower than men in social ranking, it is quite interesting to observe how brides might use an opportunity of a wedding and financial capability to symbolically elevate her social and status through consumption of commodities and relationships to her groom. This struggle between the power of media representation of beauty and societal expectation of women will be extrapolated in more details in the empirical studies in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7, which discusses the images of brides and the over emphasis of her beauty in wedding magazines.

2.4.2 Thai women

Having discussed the power of beauty has upon women in Thai society, this section discusses the exoticised images of Thai women as represented in Western media. Van Esterik (1999) noted that despite the substantial amount of research done on sex and women in Thailand, the subject of gender in Thai studies has been under theorised (see Van Esterik 1999). Moreover, most analysis of the Thai gender are based upon

Western perspective of gender and therefore overlook the fact that the construction of gender is different in other cultures and societies. Thai women are being portrayed as exotic women by Thai tourism and advertising agency to the 'West'. Moreover, they have become exoticised by the allure of Thailand's booming sex industry.

According to Cook and Jackson (1999), sexualised images of Thailand and female prostitutes are amongst the most dominant perceptions of Thailand. Although this stereotype is an ineluctable impression that foreigners have of the country and its women, Thai general public tends to ignore it, whilst some could be very offended when the country is mentioned in this regard since the majority of Thai female are not associated with sex industry in the country. The fact that Thailand has been given an ignominious alias as the 'brothel of the world' is unjustified to many Thais, simply because some are not aware of the lucrateness of Thailand sex industry or even its existence. A subject of prostitution and sexualities are popular within the field of Thai studies, but because of this, other aspects of women and gender in Thailand are overshadowed by the emphasis given on the country's notorious prostitution industry, although it is to be noted that Reynolds and Van Esterik have also written about beauty contestant in Thailand (see Reynolds 1999 and Van Esterik 2000).

Scott Barmé (2002) has brought up a point about Thailand's image as 'the world's brothel' giving an explanation to Thailand's stereotypical epithet as a result of polygamy. Before polygamy became illegal in Thailand (prior to October 1935), elite men took in many concubines which created feuds and competitions between wedded wives and concubines in the household. The concubines were eventually sold off to local brothels either when the husband passed away, when they misbehaved or when polygamy was prohibited. Local brothels since expanded and the industry opened up to foreigners especially after the Vietnam War (1970s), when there was an influx of American soldiers into Thailand. Eventually, sex tourism became a notorious and lucrative part of the Thai economy. The majority of Thai sex workers are women from the countryside, who either were lured to this line of work without their consent or because of its remunerative prospect (Van Esterik 2000). Nevertheless, such view has received negative response from the general public for damaging the image of "pure" Thailand. Contrary to Western perception and knowledge of gender and

sexualities in Thailand, mainstream Thai culture is predominantly framed by an idealised image of Thailand, whilst simultaneously ignoring and/or refusing to be associated with undesirable images, to put it in famous Thai proverb, '*keep one eye closed*' - a person only sees things one wishes to see and ignores things one does not wish to see or should not be seen. As Jackson (2004) points out, Thailand is more concerned about its image (*phap-phot*) that it maintains a regime of images to enforce public performances of respect for the social order, especially when things may be visible to the Western gaze.

Prostitutes are often considered to be a representation of undesirable women of the society. General public and conservatives seem to be uncomfortable in women's freedom of expression or individuality through their fashion choice and behaviour. Despite being an awkward subject of discussion amongst Thais, the unfavourable reputation of prostitutes is often used as an insult given to women who deviate from the preferred norm of society's expectation of women. Thai women are framed by rules of how to behave, dress and present themselves in public (Barmé 2002). Thus, one may risk being labelled as bad women or being similar to prostitutes if they are unable to control their behaviour and maintain the image of what desirable Thai women should be. This has been evident in criticisms towards many female entertainers who dress provocatively in their acts or public appearance. Women are expected to be reserved and demure, refrain from showing interest in men and uninterested in sex since prostitutes are exactly the opposite. The oppression of women through fashion by refraining women from wearing clothes that are revealing too much skin, especially cleavage and legs, since cleavage bearing dresses, mini-skirts and hot pants are only worn by prostitutes bode well in a patriarchal society, where women are only valued by how they look and are perceived by others. A phrase 'double colonisation' is used by Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford (cited in McLeod 2000) to refer to colonised women who are not only experiencing the oppression of colonialism, but also from the patriarchy of their own country (McLeod 2000: 175). Thus it can be argued that Thai women are colonised under two broad social standards: physical (beauty) and behavioural repressions as the next section explains.

2.4.3 Concept of a “good woman”

On the opposite end of the spectrum of women categorisation, is the concept of a good Thai woman, which plays crucial roles in constructing and maintaining the socially preferred ideal Thai women. Amongst many other effects of westernisation, the concept of a respectable lady is one which has been used to distinguish a good woman from a bad one. A myth of a gentle lady is usually used to control behaviour of women and set certain standard of qualities that women should possess. There is a myth of a perfect daughter hence an ideal of a Thai wife, whose parents groomed her to fulfil the wife’s duty for her ideal husband overshadowing each woman. According to Harrison (1999: 168-169) a “good” woman and “bad” woman is defined in regards to their association with their family, for instance, “a “good” woman is loyal to her family by being a dutiful daughter, faithful wife, and a faultless, all-giving mother. In addition, “good” women are expected to remain monogamous and repress their sexual desires and even a slight interest in men. A well-mannered lady or gentle lady, literally translated in Thai as *‘kunlasatri’*, is influenced by the Western notion of respectability, has since been an expected quality from every women of the society, and thusly has become the emblem of Thai femininity.

Despite the disadvantaged position of women in Thai society, they are valued for the influence they may have upon their families. A good woman, who possesses abilities to be a good wife, provides essential stability to a family and to the nation as a whole. According to Thianwan (cited in Barmé 2002), women’s role is instrumental to the stability of a family. He writes:

“Women were important because they had the power to influence men and the nation in either a positive or a negative way. For example, whether a child became a “good” or “bad” adult was directly related to the quality of its mother...A wife could be compared to a ship’s anchor, a source of stability: “when a man has a loving, caring woman to share his life she will be able to exert a powerful and beneficial influence on him and prevent him from going to ruin.” (Barmé 2002: 24)

“A country whose women lack an education and an awareness, who don’t know how to teach their children, and who don’t know the difference between good and bad, is a country with a limited capacity for progress.” (Barmé 2002: 25)

The secondary position of Thai women continues to be widely observed in contemporary society. Women are considered to be valuable when they have fulfilled the socially expected roles of a daughter and/or a wife, and can contribute to the development of their husband's career or to the stability of their family. According to Barmé (2002) a maning to Barmé (2002)ity al the public domain was dependent on his wife's support in the private sphere of the home. Having an educated woman as a wife is fundamentally important for a man's advancement in his career. Thus, education has become one of the most important aspect to which Thai women can gain a better opportunity in improving their social position as they can be educated on the same level as men. In an article entitled "*A Woman's Duty*", the author gave an account of the characterisation of gender roles:

"Men are the ones who find the means to support a family. In this they are similar to the male bird that brings food to the nest. The female bird, on the other hand, tends the nest and looks after the young. Consequently, it is the duty of a woman to look after the home while a man has the responsibility of providing the sustenance. Since ancient times and almost everywhere in the world it has been customary for men to live and sleep in the home while the duty of women has been to maintain it. However, if a woman is ignorant and lacks the appropriate knowledge to carry out this important task, how can a man go on and have the energy and confidence to do his duty." (Kulasatri 1906: 2 in Barmé 2002: 29)

"A man is like the front legs of an elephant while a woman is like its hind legs. When the front legs move forward the hind legs must follow. If one takes a false step, both will suffer, but if they are both in the step things will work well." (Barmé 2002: 30)

Siam's process of modernisation was the beginning of the first Thai women's magazines. An unnamed writer wrote a short pieced entitled "*Siamese Women Are Becoming Civilised*" in this Kulasatri Magazine (1906 cited in Barmé 2002):

"Way back in the past, Siamese women were like dolls kept in a cupboard...cut off from the outside world. They were strictly controlled and not allowed to go anywhere. They had no books to read or study because their parents or guardians thought that they would learn about men from such things...And when a woman married a man, it wasn't necessary for them to know each other or love each other at all. These days, however, the position of women is much improved, they study the same things as men and most of them are educated. They are coming out of the dark." (Barmé 2002: 34)

These magazines were meant to be a source of information for modern Siamese women by instilling value and knowledge that would make old attitudes towards women become obsolete, particularly the view that women were regarded as similar to buffaloes, while men alone were truly human (Barmé 2002). Despite such movement to raise the position of women in the society such as educational equality, a certain level of repression existed in the domestic sphere. Wibha (1975 in Fishel 1999: 162) noted that although King Vajiravudh had more than one wife he was openly discouraging polygamy. He believed that women could eradicate this practice by “refusing to marry polygynists, and making themselves “attractive”, good housewives, and dear friends to their husbands” (Wibha 1975 in Fishel 1999: 162). This demonstrated that women are not only repressed by standards of “good” women but they are also held responsible for their husbands’ infidelity. On the contrary, men are not expected to repress their sexual desires, and that even though having many wives is prohibited by law, men still have mistresses and visit prostitutes openly (Mills 1995 in Harrison 1999).

There is a long-standing sexual double standard condoning male polygamy and sexual mobility, whereas for women, there is a moral obligation for women to be chaste and monogamous, otherwise they would risk crossing the line to the unfavourable extreme of promiscuity and prostitution (Barmé 2002). Law regarding gender relations in premodern Siam was based on the notion of ownership and control over the female body.

“An unmarried female, regardless of age, was regarded as the possession of her family, of whom the father was the head. Similarly, married women were also deemed to be the exclusive property of their husbands, who had the right to discipline (that is, beat or otherwise abuse) their spouses should they misbehave. Wives, by contrast had no corresponding right to use physical force against their spouses in case of violence.” (Barmé 2002: 19)

Although such views may have predated modern Thai society, the residue of the repression remain intertwined with current values regarding male and female gender relations. Harrison (1999) summarised Thai’s view on female and male social expectation as follows:

“While “good” Thai women are required to avoid allowing more than one man to have access to their bodies, there is no such social or moral obligation for Thai males to remain monogamous or to curb

their sexual desires. On the contrary, men's sexual mobility, expressed through having affairs and mistresses, not only goes uncriticised by Thai society but it is positively valued. This imbalance in the prescriptions for male/female sexual behaviour is only made possible by the construction of the Madonna/whore role dichotomy for women, a distinction which is promoted and accepted by men and women alike and which has become a deeply rooted feature of Thai discourses of female sexuality. As a result, the complexities of female sexual pleasure, long established as a site for the assertion of women's freedom of expression in Western feminist thought, remain something of a Freudian "dark continent" in the Thai cultural context, an aspect of womanhood at best coyly disregarded, at worst aggressively repressed." (Harrison 1999 : 169)

The repression of women in Thai society as discussed has created a frame of socially acceptable and preferable for to contain women. This research sets out to understand this frame that regulates maintenance of beauty and behaviour in women within the context of Thai wedding magazines

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the semi colonial aspect and gender perspective of Thai society. The main overarching argument presented here is that Thailand's semi colonial history has influenced the relationship between Thailand and the West, as well as the relationship between Thailand and its past (Siam) that resulted in the hybridisation of culture. Some features of Western cultures, such as clothing, were localised, while some traditional or local cultures have been self-orientalised. Thus, East and West coexist in many aspects of everyday Thai life, creating a diffusion of hybridised culture where Western style and traditional Thai style can be slipped in and out at will. The latter part of this chapter has demonstrated the structure in which woman are positioned in the society. While Thai perspectives on gender are based on Buddhist teachings, which put women at disadvantage in relation to men, as they are subjected to various societal constraints whose value is dependent upon physical beauty and behavioural conduct. These discourses have provided a foundation and contextual background for which the notion of 'Thainess' are to be extrapolated, analysed and discussed in Chapter 5, Chapter 6, Chapter 7 and Chapter 8. Having discussed the theoretical framework for this research through postcolonial and gender perspectives, the next chapter discusses theories of representation, particularly with regard to media representation of women, as well as consumption of commodities in relations to their intrinsic and symbolic value

3

Representation and Women in Magazines

“Being single is always framed as a temporary condition and long-term romantic relationships are emphasised as the most fulfilling context for sexual expression and, ultimate, for life.” (Milestone and Meyer 2012, pp.92)

3.1 Introduction

The second theoretical chapter discusses the theory of representation especially that of women in print media. It concentrates on the representation of women in women's magazines, which also touches briefly upon the feminist theory. Furthermore, it looks at literatures in which the subject of consumption and weddings is academically discussed. The theories I postulate here will provide a framework to which the research questions will be answered in the following analysis chapters.

3.2 Representation of women in the media

As Stuart Hall (1997) mentioned, all images embedded some type of identity to the people being depicted. Stereotype is another type of representation where a particular meaning is fixed to certain groups of people. In regards to the representation of women, the conventional ideologies about femininity which consider sexual relationship and marriage to be the key goal and source of happiness are reflected in the content of women's magazines (see McRobbie 2005). Moreover, the magazines portrayed women's lives as only as important as the romantic moments occurred in their lives such as marriage proposal and wedding day (Milestone and Meyer 2012).

3.3 Women's magazines

According to a feminist perspective, there are three types of women created in the media: (1) 'wife, mother and housekeeper for men; (2) sex object used to sell products to men; (3) a person trying to be beautiful for men' (Hole and Levine 1971: 249 in van Zoonen 1994: 66). Ros Ballaster writes in her book *Women's World*, that the women's magazine is a bearer of pleasure for readers as well as a "purveyor of oppressive ideologies of sex, class and race difference" (1991: 2). The magazine uses text and images to construct an imaginary world and represents it to the readers, when in reality consumption habits and actual lifestyle are different from the 'lifestyles' portrayed in the magazine (Ballaster et al. 1991). The representation of women in the media is therefore a construction which assigns meaning through the filter of cultural, linguistic and representational system.

Some feminists have considered media to play a major role in constructing gender identity. For instance, early advertising targeting women consumers reinforces an identity of 'angel in the house' (Loeb 1994). Furthermore, Cranny-Francis (2004) showed that popular romantic fiction was criticised for commodifying a 'bourgeois fairy tale' of heterosexual relationship. Radway (1984) suggested women chose to escape the dissatisfaction of real life with romance novels, where women are portrayed as leading characters in an ideal romantic relationship. Boden (2003: 35) argued that such media representation perpetuates "a collective false consciousness of women, or at least of those who read such texts". Consequently, the ideal 'feminine' appearance that is constructed by the media is disseminated through the power of representation among women consumers, who gradually succumb to the 'ideal' representation. Therefore, such representation "serves to commodify women as consumable objects of the male gaze" (Boden 2003: 35).

The idealised images that are produced and represented in magazines and advertising represent the reality of femininity in abstract form (Goffman 1979 in Adrian 2003). The expensive products advertised in the magazines can be an aspiration or a fantasy to their readers (Ballaster et Al. 1991). A glance at almost any sample of magazines will suggest that no matter how femininity is represented, bridal identity is certainly

glamorous and perfect based on the flawless and beautiful models on portraying the role of brides in the magazines. In this regard, it can be assumed that the magazine is constructing a myth of bridal identity around the allure of the glamour of bridal fashion and its accessories. However, the ambiguity of this myth presents a problem for the interpretation since anything can mean potentially anything. Therefore, textual anchorage could help to determine the structure in which myth is constructed (Barthes 1972). Although there is no fixed meaning to any myth, some interpretations are preferred over others (Ballaster et Al. 1991). According to Stuart Hall, “readings are ‘structured in dominance, offering a pattered of preferred option in line with the preferred institutional, political and ideological order” (1980: 134). Ballaster (1991: 29) explains that semiotic theory allows critics to focus on the “formal features of text and meaning” rather than “scrutinising the text for ideological content.”

The descriptions of ideal femininity and images that specify ideal qualities of women are not only apparent but pervasive in our society, by and large they construct conditions and conceptions about what it means to be a woman and what femininity is. Could these be considered as preferred qualities or societal expectations that are imposed upon women rather than a definition or requirements for women? The women’s magazine industry is understood as a monolithic meaning-producer, circulating magazines that contain ‘messages’ and ‘signs’ about the nature of femininity that serve to promote and legitimate dominant interests (Gough-Yates 2003: 7). The representations of femininity in women’s magazines, therefore, are seen as ‘naturalising’ the hegemonic control of women and discursively and hierarchically positioning them in society, which will be discussed in Chapter 7. Consequently, these texts were seen as instruments of domination that contributed to the overall subordination of women’s ‘real’ identities (Hermes 1997: 223 in Gough-Yates 2003: 9).

3.4 Representation, identity, class, and consumption

The compelling imagery disseminated in Thai bridal magazines are simultaneously constructing meaning for weddings as well as reflecting current trends of weddings in the society. These magazines can be considered as a cultural site in which the

construction and representation of Thai wedding and bridal femininity take place. This dissertation sets a theoretical framework for an analysis of Thai bridal magazines by addressing Stuart Hall's work on representation in the media to demonstrate how meaning is created in the representation process, especially the representation of femininity and class consumption.

"At the heart of the meaning process in culture, there are two related 'systems of representation.' The first enables us to give meaning to the world by constructing a set of correspondences or a chain of equivalences between things - people, objects, events, abstracts ideas, etc. - and our system of concepts, our conceptual maps. The second depends on constructing a set of correspondences between our conceptual map and a set of signs, arranged or organised into various languages which stand for or represent those concepts. The relation between 'things', concepts and signs lies at the heart of the production of meaning in language. The process which links these three elements together is what we call 'representation'." (Hall 1997a: 19)

To put it simply, representation is a practice in which meaning is given to the image depicted. Previously, representation has been thought of as a direct depiction of an event by the media apparatus such as television, newspapers, magazines and photographs. However, as Stuart Hall claimed (1997b), representation is a media construction of reality, which consists of multiple meanings, therefore not exclusive to a single interpretation. He offered three main approaches to understand representation as follows: the reflective approach, the intentional approach and the constructionist approach. The reflective representation is when the language is a reflection of an already existed meaning. The intentional representation is when the personal intention of the author is expressed through language. The constructionist representation is when the meaning is being constructed through language (Hall 1997b). Therefore, what is being represented is not simply a reflection but a practice of reconstruction.

3.4.1 What is represented?

According to Hall (1997b), representation can be regarded as a reflection as well as a construction of reality. What is hidden beyond the surface of representation is ideology, notions or ideas that the agent who has the power to exercise over the media apparatus wishes to communicate by representing through language and images. In representation there is a hegemonic stance, which is when the dominant cultural

order and preferred ideology are represented. They are often naturalised hence people do not notice since they have been embedded with such representation since an early age and therefore consider it as the way things are supposed to be. This ideology appears to not be constructed or tampered with because the signs and meanings fixed upon them seem to have achieved a 'near-universality', even though they may be culture-specific (Hall 1980). In essence, hegemonic representation is imposing classification upon the cultural world by leading people to adhere to preferred ideology of the dominant class.

However, when there is a hegemonic representation, there is undoubtedly an oppression which refers to the absence or to what is not being represented (Hall 1997b). Since the images in magazines are constructed for the purpose of selling particular lifestyles, products and services, some of the aspects of weddings and bridal identity are left out. As simply as these images are represented, there are ideas, values, tastes, etiquette, relationships underlying beyond the surface of these images, which require decoding to fully comprehend the connotative meaning. Therefore, in Chapter 5 to Chapter 8, these images in magazines are analysed in order to demonstrate the underlying message of 'Thainess,' bridal identity, and wedding consumption and find out if there are more to weddings and brides other than lavishness and romantic ambiance.

3.4.2 How are meanings created?

Representation is a way in which people can understand how a particular culture constructs meaning and assigns it to certain images or symbols (Hall 1997b). An ordinary object does not have fixed meanings, in fact it does not mean anything until the meaning was constructed for it. Furthermore, the meaning is not interpreted only from what exists in the image, the absence or what is not being represented is proved to be just as significant (Hall 1997a). People construct meanings for such objects using representational system called signification. Signification is a practice in which the culture assigns meanings to something, thereby making them meaningful to that particular culture (Leeds-Hurwitz 1993). Therefore, things like colours can mean different things in different cultures. For instance, the colour white of a wedding dress

does not have any particular meaning, it is simply one of the many colours human eyes could see. However, during the Victorian period, the colour white was considered to symbolise purity and virginity of a woman, therefore it became the preferred colour of Western style bridal gown in contemporary westernised countries (Lowrey and Otnes 1994). In China, even though the colour white is associated with death, the bride still wears a white Western style bridal gown because it also symbolises Western modernity and luxury (Adrian 2003). This example demonstrates the ambiguity of meaning and the power of representation that, although the colour white suggests one meaning, a white bridal gown suggests another. Hall summarises this notion of ambiguity in representation as follows:

“The meaning is not in the object or person or thing, nor is it in the word. It is we who fix the meaning so firmly that, after a while, it comes to seem natural and inevitable. The meaning is constructed by the system of representation.” (Hall 1997b: 21)

Similar to an object, a photograph can also be read in different ways because there is no fixed meaning to an image (Hall 1997b). The interpretation of an image depends upon a variety of factors such as the context, the caption and the reader, therefore it is opened to countless of plausible meanings. As powerful and expressive an image may be, its meaning is ambiguous (see Hall 1997a); Therefore, the ways in which the information is represented, the historical and cultural context are all equally essential in the interpretation process to determine the meaning of what is being represented. According to Hall (1997a), the representation links both meaning and language to a culture by producing meaning and exchanging it amongst members of a culture. He simply puts it as: “representation is the production of meaning through language” (Hall 1997a: 16). Hence, meaning and language are regarded as a foundation which creates a culture, for people to identify themselves within the same culture by the common meaning and language they share. Thus it would be interesting to discover the image and language used by wedding magazines for their Thai readers to identify with traditionalised and westernised style of weddings and bridal images.

3.4.3 Representation of wedding

In their book, *Cinderella Dreams: The Allure of the Lavish Wedding*, Otnes and Pleck (2003) argued that the spread of lavish weddings around the world is partly due to bridal magazines imagery and wedding films from the West. Luxurious Western weddings represented are more enchanting, especially for couples who are trying to recreate the fantasy from Hollywood romantic films. Hence, in many cultures, weddings are becoming more westernised, and a wedding in Thailand is no exception. A cursory scan of a few bridal magazines and of the Thai version of 'Hello!' reveals pages illustrated with professional wedding photography, cluttered with editorials and advertisements of Western style white wedding dresses, diamond rings and much more. Real brides and model brides are adorned with make-up and bridal gowns, exuding an allure of perfection and femininity. As a result, the images in these magazines can be considered as the icon of romantic fantasy, where 'happily ever after' becomes true, or at least is represented.

According to Otnes and Pleck (2003), the spread of luxurious weddings should not be considered a form of cultural imperialism because in many cultures, indigenous traditions are not completely abandoned, but rather they incorporate the new Western ways. Evidence of this claim is demonstrated in the glossy pages of Thai bridal magazines, which not only represent the wedding as a luxurious and romantic celebration of love, they also encapsulate the binary distinction of Thai and Western within many of the images. On one hand, Thai weddings may connote less allure than the lavishness of the Western weddings because they do not possess Hollywood celebrity vibe or as much advertising potentials. On the other hand, a Western wedding conveys luxury and prestige, qualities which make local people seem as sophisticated as their Western counterpart. Although positioning at both ends of the extremes, elements signifying 'Thainess' and Western find their places in the same wedding, making the weddings in these magazines both Thai and Western at the same time. Thai's fascination with the superior 'Other' is undeniably obvious (Jackson 2010), at least in Thai bridal magazines and wedding industry where westernised weddings are represented and proliferated extensively.

It is obvious that there is a denotative level of meaning in the distinction between the essence of a 'Thai' style and a 'Western' style of wedding because of the differences in wedding attire. Thai historians suggested that a 'Thai' style wedding is not purely an authentic tradition, but an invented tradition, which has embodied a maximum level of exoticness to comply with a Western perception of the uniqueness of the Orient (see Winichakul 2010). On the other hand, the 'Western' style represents a binary opposite of that, which is a stylised replica of a wedding as seen in British or American bridal magazines or Hollywood films. The magazines are representing the binary styles of weddings and brides alongside each other, though even both are Thai, they have very different connotative meanings, which shall be discussed in detail in the analysis chapter.

3.4.4 Representing bridal femininity

As Hall (Hall 1997a) mentioned, all images embed some type of identity to the people being depicted. A stereotype is another type of representation where a particular meaning is fixed to certain groups of people. In regards to the representation of women, the conventional ideologies about femininity, which consider sexual relationships and marriage to be the key goals and sources of happiness, are reflected in the content of women's magazines (see McRobbie). Moreover, the magazines portrayed women's lives as only as important as the romantic moments occurred in their lives such as a marriage proposal and a wedding day (Milestone and Meyer 2012).

Bridal magazines can be considered as one of the many cultural texts worth researching. They portray an authoritative role as a provider of wedding knowledge and guidelines for prospective brides ranging from bridal fashion to wedding planning and etiquettes. In addition, the magazines portray a friendly role as a consultant, a first point of reference for prospective brides when wedding ideas are needed. Some feminists have considered the media to play a major role in constructing gender identity. For instance, early advertising targeting women consumers reinforce an identity of 'angel in the house' (Loeb 1994). Furthermore, Cranny-Francis (2004)

showed that popular romantic fiction was criticised for commodifying 'bourgeois fairy tale' of heterosexual relationship. Radway (1984) suggested women chose to escape the dissatisfaction of real life with romance novels, where women's lives are portrayed as heroine in an ideal romantic relationship. Boden (2003: 35) argued that such media representation perpetuates "a collective false consciousness of women, or at least of those who read such texts". Consequently, the ideal 'feminine' appearance that is constructed by the media, is disseminated through the power of representation among women consumers, who gradually succumb to the 'ideal' representation. Therefore, such representation "serves to commodify women as consumable objects of the male gaze" (Boden 2003: 35).

McRobbie (2000), whose studies involved British teenage magazines presents three factors, which reinforced the conventional teenage femininity. Firstly, the ideal teenage femininity prepares young girls for the ideology of adult femininity is perpetuated in women's magazines. Secondly, readers are encouraged to conform to the ideologies. Thirdly, the ideology of teenage women is promoted across many socio-cultural sites such as educational system, family and popular culture. Milestone and Meyer (2012) pointed out that magazines alone may not be able to make readers conform to the ideologies, but as the extent and frequency of the representation escalate it would be more difficult to avoid.

According to Ballaster (1991), there has been some unconventional feminine representations of women for instance, open to discuss sexuality, adopting male mannerism and career-focused women. Despite these variances, the representation of women is still unable to disregard the ideology of romance as a source of happiness and meaning in a woman's life (Radway 1984). A romantic relationship is the central and ultimate goal of women's lives, even though other aspects such as careers, friends, financial security and homes are acknowledged to be important in women's magazines, these aspects should remain peripheral (Ballaster 1991). Romantic relationships which are marked by some significant milestones (engagement, marriage

and pregnancy) are endorsed as 'ideal' across different cultural sites, films, advertising, television, and magazines (Milestone and Meyer 2012). Evidences are found amongst the excessive amount of mainstream Hollywood films, many of which are romantic comedies about a single woman in her search for a perfect man to fall in love with and eventually have a romantic wedding. Additionally, as Milestone and Meyer (2012) pointed out, the ideology of femininity dictates women to depend upon men to fulfil the incomplete aspects in the peripheral such as financial security. This patriarchal ideology that identifies a woman in her relation to a man suggests that a woman is only as good as the man she is married to. Principally, the media and representation of women serve to reinforce this ideology and exemplify that a conventional femininity guarantees happiness with a man and fulfills women's romantic life. As Milestone and Meyer put it:

"Being single is always framed as a temporary condition and long-term romantic relationships are emphasised as the most fulfilling context for sexual expression and ultimately, for life." (Milestone and Meyer 2012: 92)

Women are represented in romance texts and advertisements as the objects of men's desire. Moreover, the ideal femininity is constructed to satisfy the male gaze. The media and their representation of women are often criticised for their construction of feminine beauty and gender stereotypes (Milestone and Meyer 2012). The ideal feminine beauty is also one of the main issue featured in women's magazines as it is an important quality of conventional femininity that facilitates and guarantees women's search for romance. This does not discriminate against women whose beauty does not conform to the ideal standard, since they are encouraging women to utilise cosmetics, fashion and surgery as found in the magazines and advertisements to improve their appearance, but only in moderation so as not to be completely natural physical attributes (Milestone and Meyer 2012). The media representation of women seems to encourage women toward the process of beautification and self-control to achieve the paradox of the ideal standard of beauty that appears natural. This reiterates a Thai proverb_ "If fine feathers make fine birds, women are beautiful when they dress up", suggesting that all women are beautiful as long as they maintain a correct beauty regimen and follow fashion advice from experts. The pressure to look good is

applicable to women of all age groups, as it seems to be linked to the attempt to seek approval from a male counterpart, as women are led to believe through the representation in the media. Not only do women who choose not to conform to the appropriate femininity are represented as having no chance to find romance but they are symbolically punished and are subjected to social scrutiny with judgements and pressure to be more beautiful (Milestone and Meyer 2012).

Milestone and Meyer (2012: 104) criticised the representation of conventional femininity in the media as 'bourgeois femininity' because the woman is often portrayed as a 'domestic goddess' whose priority is her husband, children and family home. In contrast, women who decide to give priority to their careers before a relationship and postpone getting married and having children are portrayed as selfish. Skeggs (1997) supports this argument, suggesting that respectability has always been fundamentally tied to conventional femininity. Women are expected to behave in a way that makes them seem respectable. Milestone and Meyer (2012: 97) suggested that not only does the pressure on women to maintain a conventional femininity has intensified with the representation of an ideal feminine beauty in the media but the standardised image has also become more precise: "slimmer, younger, more expensive clothes, whiter and straighter teeth, fewer wrinkles, tighter stomachs and firmer breasts." In short, the conventional femininity reinforces the 'ideal' appearance and manners upon women, although personal achievement such as education and careers are important they cannot fully construct a feminine identity without beauty. In Chapter 6 and Chapter 7, this thesis develops on Milestone and Meyer's (2012) and Ballaster's (1991) argument of conventional femininity being associated with romantic relationship with a man and discusses it in the context of Thai brides in wedding magazines.

3.4.5 Consumption and the representation of class and style

The relation between Western weddings in magazines featuring alongside some advertisements for diamonds' jewellery and luxury products may connote Western weddings as bourgeois. Love and meaning can be considered as the essence of bridal

marketing, the wedding industry would not have continued growing until today if not for the signifying practices (Penner 2004). In contemporary society, objects are assigned meaning by the culture, commodified by the marketers, represented by the media and consumed by the people. If a ring does not mean anything to anyone, pages of diamond ring advertisements would have been meaningless, and thusly making wedding magazines obsolete. For now, the weddings represented in the Thai bridal magazines can be assumed as bourgeois because there is a clear class element represented in the magazines based on the cursory scan of the advertisements for luxury goods and editorial contents - the overall ensembles signify elegance and luxury. Both the bride and her wedding are by no mean represented as a regular everyday identity and event, but one which requires several months of planning and preparation, and most importantly considerable amount of finance to materialise the idealised imagination into perfection. The magazines are depicting the bride and her wedding as the embodiment of class and style.

Bourdieu's main argument in *Distinction* is that aesthetic preferences or tastes are the main markers that differentiate people into different social groups or classes. A predisposition to art, cuisine, music or fashion is cultivated into each individual in the upbringing within the family and the school at an early age. Therefore, each individual has been pre-arranged into a certain social position and pre-determined a group of friends, occupation, and lifestyles because the individual's preferences and behaviour have been internalised. Aesthetic dispositions of an individual is not merely about preferences and tastes in consumption, in fact aesthetic dispositions can be considered as a socio-cultural apparatus that can be used to determine one's identity and social status, thereby making a distinction between one person from another and one class from another. Tastes in food, music and art are an indication of one's cultural background and social standing in a society because the socially recognised hierarchy predisposes tastes of goods as the marker of class (Bourdieu 1984).

In his theory of class distinction, Bourdieu (1984) recognised a correlation between one's tastes in consumption and one's social status. Since aesthetic dispositions are developed within the class fractions, class distinction can be distinguished by the

preference for products. For Bourdieu (1984) people of similar social and cultural backgrounds have similar tastes and hence have more opportunities to interact with people within the same social class. Besides being a crucial signifiers of social identity, taste is also the primary interactional determinant of class endogamy. Bourdieu argues that an individual is more likely to meet and marry people of similar lifestyles and social classes (Jenkins 2002). For this reason, children raised in a household where both parents are of the same social class and lifestyles are most likely to be cultured amongst that social class and inherit their parents' aesthetic predispositions. According to Veblen (1925), a gentlemen of class has a refined taste, knows the right kind of goods to consume, and does so in an appropriate manner.

Conspicuous consumption is essentially a concept originating from the consumption behaviour of the high class society. This explains the ways in which people think they can gain prestige by showing off symbols of wealth, privilege and leisure time through excessive consumption or consumption of unnecessary goods. Conspicuous consumption in Veblen's view (1925), is a consumption and an indulgence of goods that require high pecuniary expenses and perhaps hired help to offer physical comfort and leisure in consumption. These could be lifestyles, meals, wardrobe, entertainments as well as celebrations. Veblen (1925) identified the practice of 'conspicuous consumption' by the nouveaux riches of the late nineteenth century as a purposive activity of social display undertaken strategically to impress onlookers and to exude wealth and status. In his view, unnecessary or unproductive consumption of goods is an indicator of prowess and dignity. People believe they gain social recognition and elevate their status by being seen as having desirable things and not being confined to regular working schedules, hence are able to afford to spend time and money leisurely. Veblen explained consumption as follows:

"[consumption] becomes substantially honourable to itself, especially the consumption of the more desirable things...luxuries and the comforts of life belong to the leisure class [and] are strictly reserved for the use of the superior class [...] Since the consumption of these more excellent goods is an evidence of wealth, it becomes honorific; and conversely, the failure to consumer in due quantity and quality becomes a mark of inferiority and demerit." (Veblen 1925: 42)

Bourdieu (1984), argued that in competitive social groups, people use the display of cultural capital and consumption as a strategy to display power. Lifestyle and

etiquette of the superior class have become arenas of emulation (see also Luhmann 1980: 128-9 in Gronow 1997: 19) by the inferior class because such lifestyle and etiquette are acknowledged as the legitimate expression of taste. There is a social construction of legitimate taste in the society because the symbolic power that is embodied within the consumption behaviour is prevalent in the social structure (Boden 2003). The superior class and powerful cultural agents such as publishers, critics and theatre managers are constructing and controlling legitimate taste (Jenkins 2002). The superior class and the agents assign meanings to consumable goods as well as the manner with which they should be consumed, thereby manipulating social and cultural identity of a society with consumptions and legitimate taste.

Consumption and the way it is represented have a profound socio-cultural significance. According to Veblen (1925) considered the conspicuous consumption of the leisure class to create desire to imitate such behaviour amongst those who could not afford the expense for the consumption choices. Woodward (in Howard 2006: 24) has drawn on Veblen's (1925) theory of consumption and criticised rich people for their lavish display as a bad example for the poor. This perspective recognised a desire of the inferior classes to adopt the aesthetic preferences of the dominant class in order to conform to the social construction of legitimate taste and be recognised as more socially superior. The structure of the society is embedded with an ideology of consumption that has given conspicuous consumption a symbolic value that communicates wealth, reputability and class. As Veblen remarked:

"In order to stand well in the eyes of the community, it is necessary to come up to a certain, somewhat indefinite, conventional standard of wealth. A certain standard of wealth in the one case, and of prowess in the other, is a necessary condition of reputability, and anything in excess of this normal amount is meritorious." (Veblen 1925: 20)

In Bourdieu's argument, a set of dispositions that influence taste and consumption is cultivated in each individual since childhood, therefore is difficult to change. However, the struggle for social distinction has stimulated people to imitate consumption of the legitimate taste. They acquire symbols that are known to signify status and prestige as a vehicle that would grant social recognition and perhaps

facilitate social mobility, or at least as social pretence to communicate belonging to a certain class. According to Bourdieu:

“Struggle for recognition are a fundamental dimension of social life and that what is at stake in them is an accumulation of a particular form of capital, honour in the sense of reputation and prestige, and that there is, therefore a specific logic behind the accumulation of symbolic capital.” (Bourdieu 1990: 22)

From Veblen’s and Bourdieu’s points of view, it can be argued that amongst other things, consumption can be regarded as a strategy in which people utilise commodities to express power, financial status and class distinction. People thrive for status, prestige and recognition and take advantage of the symbolic power of products as means to achieve desired identity. In Veblen’s words:

“The basis on which good repute in any highly organised industrial community ultimately rests is pecuniary strength; and the means of showing pecuniary strength, and so of gaining or retaining a good name, are leisure and a conspicuous consumption of goods.” (Veblen 1925: 51)

Research showed that in Japan, the accumulated money gifts that the brides and grooms receive from their wedding compensate the amount spent on the ceremony and the wedding party (Goldstein-Gidoni 1997). Affluent couples from wealthy families may not be faced with the dilemma between finance and their perfect wedding, but it might not be so with regular couples. To illustrate this point, almost every material object in a wedding has a productive value for one time only, there is a very slim chance that a bride would wear her wedding gown again, the flowers used to decorate the hotel will become wilted and the wedding favours given to guests will eventually be discarded (Adrian 2003). This corresponds to Veblen’s argument regarding unnecessary consumption as conspicuous consumption, since people are spending a large amount of money for just one short wedding. In some cases, people may be struggling to conform to the legitimate conventions of the weddings as set out by the media, which represent the extravagance of celebrities and the elites’ weddings as the ultimate recipe for romance and perfection. In any case, advertisers and the wedding industry benefit from couples seeking symbolic capitals such as diamond

rings and wedding dresses simply to emulate the legitimate taste and be recognised as having done so.

It can be assumed that magazines play a role of an agent of legitimate taste. Although the couples may not be well-aware about wedding etiquette or selecting wedding catering menu, fashion or decorations, the magazines have already filtered a selection which is approved to be appropriate for such events (Boden 2003). Even though tastes may not be cultivated in prospective brides, the magazines recommend approximately a year to plan a wedding, the time in which the prospective bride would be informed about every essential details about her wedding, from etiquette to fashion (Boden 2001). Ownership of legitimate symbolic capital generates power to be a representative and in the long run recognition as a legitimate institution. The media such as magazines hence become a medium from which consumers learn about the products and their signification.

Therefore, as long as people take pride in the showing off of symbols of wealth to communicate superior status to others thereby gaining some recognition and acceptance as a result, the economic and cultural capital will stand as the boundaries which determine the position for different classes (Gronow 1997). For Bourdieu (1984), consumption is a site of struggle over definitions of legitimate, a stage in a process of communication where people consume not only the things themselves for function but also for the symbolic meaning in its aesthetic value. For instance, a diamond ring is one of the most prevalent examples, as it is one of the most obvious markers of distinction, which distinguishes an engaged woman, a bride and a wife from a single woman. The symbolic value of objects such as diamonds are marketed as the embodiments of romance and privilege status and have become one of the most significant elements of a wedding. The high price of a diamond ring is a representation of economic capital whereas the myth as a symbol of eternal love is a representation of symbolic capital. The symbolic meaning of diamond and other wedding consumer products will be discussed further in Chapter 8 with findings from magazines advertisements. Theorists of the Frankfurt School such as Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse (in Boden 2003: 5) argued:

"Advertising and other ideological institutions in consumer culture transmitted discursive meaning that were generated by those in hegemonic positions of power. Marcuse specifically attacked mass media as agents of manipulation and indoctrination which served the interests of the ruling classes by creating false needs." (Boden 2003: 5)

3.5 Conclusion

The economic growth, social interaction, cultural practices and symbolic implication that are all integrated in the background of wedding consumption make it a complex social structure that needs further analysis. A text like bridal magazines have the power to influence commodification process of products and their aesthetic impact to consumers, because they provide a space for businesses in wedding industry: wedding dresses, venues, jewellers to be represented and become a selection of products or standard guidelines for consumers to make their purchase decisions. Through the power of representation and signs, magazines are creating a structure of meanings, which entices consumers to participate and conform to the preferred ideologies set forth by the wedding industry and reiterated in the magazines (Hall 1997b).

The representation of brides in contemporary wedding is a complex issue since there are traditions and changes, as well as influences from other cultures to take in consideration. Nevertheless, the matters of representation are not to be ignored because they are not simply words and images, but a reflection of society and women. Considering the Western model of femininity, the idealised frame of good women and the beautification regimes, I wonder if women are really confined to these forms of control. Are these qualities superficial or bona fide? Are they simply what make women different from men? I hope that my analysis of wedding interviews will be able to unveil answers and explanations to these questions. The study of the representation of the brides through images and texts in wedding magazines may provide a deeper understanding of how the media are constructing an image of the Thai women, but not just any women, these are the women who could get married - the selected ones. However, I must first clarify that I am not insinuating in any way that brides are better than unmarried women in my decision to study Thai brides, but rather I see them as an intriguing group of women who share the same roles at one point or another: girlfriend in the past, bride in the present, as well as wife and possibly mother

in the future. These identities are indirectly regulated by the society in presenting an image of the Thai women, the media, while simultaneously being performed in relation to men. More importantly they are being written about and read by readers, hence in one way or another they are incorporated into the media-constructed message regarding weddings. Brides and wedding are a showcase of values and concepts of gender, culture and social status of people and society. The analysis of the portrayal of brides and weddings in Chapter 7 would illustrate the way in which culture and gender are being constructed, emulated and reconstructed in the Thai media context.

Methodology: Semiotics and Multimodal Analysis

“Semiology provides the analyst with a conceptual toolkit for approaching sign systems systematically in order to discover how they produce meaning. Much of its precision derives from a series of theoretical distinctions, which are captured in a distinctive vocabulary.” (Penn 2000: 227)

4.1 Introduction

The previous theoretical chapters have presented a conceptual framework from which this research has unfolded. This chapter presents research questions, an overview of semiotic analysis of the image and multimodal research methods implemented to provide the findings for this research. The research questions presented below have stipulated a structure in which the construction of ‘Thainess’ and Thai femininity through the representation of weddings magazines can be investigated.

Wedding magazines are disseminating various arrays of weddings, a wide range of products and processes that work together to produce an outcome of a picture perfect wedding. These magazines can be considered as a notable representative and repository of Thai tradition. Not only are these magazines’ glossy pages showing beautiful pictures and providing contact details for wedding goods and services, they are the reconstruction and reflection of the Thai wedding culture. Within these magazines are webs of intricately woven Thai ideologies and beliefs about relationships, marriage, gender roles, cultural identity and consumption, all of which are embedded within the texts and photographs. The magazines are presented as having captured real weddings, while simultaneously disseminating what is reconstructed as ‘appropriate’ weddings back to consumers. Therefore, the weddings that are being represented in magazines may help illuminate the standard of weddings

according to the wedding industry and media: how a wedding is/should be performed, perceived, and valued in Thailand.

4.2 Research questions

The purpose of this research is to investigate the ways in which ideas, values and discourses are constructed by people, places and objects in images and texts. The primary aim when undertaking this research is not to make a comparative analysis between different magazines regarding their coverage and representations of Thai weddings, instead it intends to demonstrate the media's constructed discourse of Thai wedding and Thai femininity as a whole. Looking at these visual and textual elements represented in the magazines, I ask myself, what do they stand for? What are the kinds of association these images and texts have in relation to the discourse of the notion of 'Thainess'? Three research questions presented below provide a direction to which this research triangulates.

Research question 1: What is 'Thainess' and how is it represented in wedding magazines?

Research question 2: How are Thai brides represented in wedding magazines?

Research question 3: What is being advertised in wedding magazines and why is it meaningful to Thai wedding?

4.3 Materials of analysis

As the primary objective of this research is to explore the constructed notion of 'Thainess' and femininity, as well as the dynamic of East and West in wedding representations, 69 issues of randomly selected Thai language wedding magazines across three different titles during the course of 15 years (1998 - 2013) are chosen as materials analysis. The selected magazines are WE Magazine (56 issues), Wedding Magazine (11 issues) and Wedding Guru (2 issues). The editorial contents, advertisements, fashion photography and interviews in these magazines are all

essential in this research of the Thai wedding representations. Furthermore, 48 cover pages of WE magazine during the course of 4 years (January 2010 - December 2014) will be used for the semiotic analysis of images to answer RQ 1 and RQ 2, specifically in Chapter 5, Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 (see appendix for full sized covers). These magazines are selected for their regular publications and availability in most newsstand both offline and online (iOS eBook store). The main reasons for choosing to focus only on the cover page of WE magazine lie in the accessibility of the materials via its online newsstand, and in its consistent monthly release.

These magazines are categorised as wedding magazines, publishing only wedding related contents. They can be considered as a manual for prospective brides who are preparing for their weddings, they can also be viewed as a compilation of successful wedding stories or hall of fame for great weddings. WE magazine is published and distributed by a Thai owned company, Amarin Printing and Publishing Company Limited, one of Thailand's largest companies in Thailand's publishing industry. WE magazine is a monthly publication; its first issue was released to the market in May 2004. Wedding Magazine is a bi-monthly magazine, published by Burda (Thailand) Company Limited, one of the key players in magazine publishing and distribution. Wedding Guru is also a bi-monthly magazine, published by HM Publishing Bangkok.

At first glance, the overall aesthetic feels of these magazines, albeit different titles, are very similar in their physical attributes. The papers and cover pages are glossy and thick. They feel high quality and rather heavy on the hands. Although the magazines may contain an extensive amount of images, the proportion of the text are not overshadowed by the exquisite photographs and illustrations. The pages are printed in full colour, composed almost entirely with various shades of colours, although pastel pink, white, red, brown, gold and silver seems to be the predominant hues. The physical nature of women's magazines: glossy, colourful, and thick which connote the feeling of luxury, pleasure, relaxation and abundance. As for material contents, these magazines feature relative similar layout: cover page, fashion spread, columns, advertorial tie-ins, and advertisements.

Magazine columns or articles provide information about wedding preparations or interviews from recently married couple about their weddings. The content in these magazine articles are packed with all sorts of information, ranging from basic wedding decorum, suggestions for wedding venue, attire, food, relationship advice, beauty tips, legend of various wedding symbols and much more. The articles are often illustrated with photographs, most of which have been constructed for editorial purposes. For instance, there are photo shoot of models or actresses in bridal gowns in articles suggesting flattering styles of bridal gowns for brides of different body shapes and sizes. There are also longer columns, which provide specific information related to wedding and relationships, such as Thai regulation and common practice on signing marriage license, wedding superstitions in other cultures, and wedding catering. Other examples include various ways of dealing with potential wedding disasters, or personal grooming and diet tips for brides-to-be. These articles have bold and clear title to inform readers of the content to be expected. The title of the articles is written in Thai, but is often accompanied with English phrases or words, some are literal translation of the title, while some provide abstract idea of the article content.

4.4 Semiotics as research methodology

The representation of weddings by these magazines can be considered as a stage in a process of communication, which requires an act of deciphering, decoding. The pictures of weddings illustrated in the magazines are presented generally in no particular order but the texts and the narratives that accompanied those images play a role in shaping the overall content by narrating the start of a wedding or a romantic relationship and ending with a celebrated wedding as photographed. The semiotic reading of magazines provides another insight into Thai wedding from the prospective of the media rather than from its direct participants. According to Bignell (1997), the glossy and colourful pages of the magazines connote pleasure and relaxation rather than seriousness to readers. Consequently, by reading these magazines the reader experiences the luxury and femininity through the smell and feel of the glossy paper and find their pleasures of self-adornments through the fantasy-laden imagery and narratives. These magazines present weddings as a symbol and ritual for privileged women.

What can be known about a magazine is conveyed through its title, “the use of colour, typeface, photographic style, borders, compositional arrangement, etc.” (Machin 2007: vii). A magazine should be able to communicate its intended information to its audience by using visual resources in space available on the cover page. According to Machin (2007), similar patterns can be found amongst magazines or adverts of the same topic as they rely on particular combinations of features to make effects and for readers to understand the visual cues. This is evident in the sample of magazines selected for this research as their patterns of representation are similar and their classification as wedding magazines are obvious. Visual cues that are apparent to the readers are images of women and/or women and men posing in their respective wedding attires on the cover pages, hence denoting that the contents of these publication focus on wedding related issues. There are images everywhere in the magazines each of which have a meaning and above all they can mean different things to different people in different places. In order to comprehend why certain images and signs being represented in the magazines mean what they mean and to examine how the meaning, myth or ideology is constructed by such representation, the qualitative research method implemented is a semiotic approach of multimodal analysis, in which images, texts and style of representation will be analysed accordingly.

4.4.1 Semiotic analysis of images

Semiotics or semiology is the study of the role of sign in the construction of reality (Chandler 2004). It is a mode of decoding to understand what sign means. Since a culture is a melting pot of signs, all of which are representing something else and have different meanings and on each day people almost never come across non-signifying object (Barthes 1972), thus semiotics is worthy of attention because it allows signs within the culture to be read and understood. “The ultimate goal of semiotics is [...] to unravel the meanings that are built into all kinds of human products, from words, symbols, narratives, symphonies, paintings and comic books to scientific theories and mathematical theorems” (Danesi 2010: 1). The two most influential people accredited for their contribution to semiotics and the study of meaning are an American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce and a Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (Martin 2000).

Saussure writes:

"A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable; it would be a part of social psychology and consequently of general psychology; I shall call it semiology (from Greek semeion "sign"). Semiology would show what constitutes signs, what laws govern them. Since the science does not yet exist, no one can say what it would be; but it has a right to existence, a place staked out in advance. Linguistics is only a part of the general science of semiology; the laws discovered by semiology will be applicable to linguistic, and the latter will circumscribe a well-defined area within the mass of anthropological facts." (Saussure 1916/1969: 16 in Leeds-Hurwitz 1993: 4)

Peirce has a different perspective to semiotics than Saussure. He writes:

"Logic, in its general sense, is, as I believe I have shown, only another name for semiotic, the quasi-necessary, or formal doctrine of signs. By describing the doctrine as 'quasi-necessary', or formal, I mean that we observe the characters of such signs as we know, and from such an observation, by a process which I will not object to naming Abstraction, we are led to statements, eminently fallible, and therefore in one sense by no means necessary, as to what must be the characters of all signs used by a 'scientific' intelligence, that is to say by an intelligence capable of learning by experience." (Peirce 1931/1958 vol. 2: 227 in Leeds-Hurwitz 1993: 4)

The distinction between these two is that Saussure's model is based on behaviour whereas Peirce's model is based on logic. Both models are interrelated nonetheless because behaviour is governed by logic and their work have proven valuable in the studies of semiotics (Leeds-Hurwitz 1993).

Umberto Eco, an Italian semiotician also has his own definition of semiotics as follows:

"Semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign. A sign is everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else. This something else does not necessarily have to exist or to actually be somewhere at the moment in which a sign stands for it. Thus semiotics is in principle the discipline studying everything which can be used in order to lie. If something cannot be used to tell a lie, conversely it cannot be used to tell the truth; it cannot in fact be used 'to tell' at all. I think that the definition of a "theory of the lie" should be taken as a pretty comprehensive programme for a general semiotics." (Eco 1976: 7 in Leeds-Hurwitz 1993)

Penn (2000) defines semiology as a toolkit to study how signs produce meanings. Daniel Chandler (2004) noted that the signs within the text do not just convey meanings, but constitute a medium in which meanings are constructed. Now that the definitions of semiotics from the key theorists have been reviewed, the semiotics should be discussed in further details. There are three main areas of semiotics: the sign, the codes or the system in which signs are organised and the culture within which these codes and signs operate (Fiske 1986).

4.4.2 Sign

According to Charles S. Peirce, “nothing is a sign unless it is interpreted as a sign” (Peirce 1931 in Chandler 2004, pp.16). Anything from words, images, sounds, odours, flavours, acts or objects without intrinsic meaning become signs when meaning is assigned to them or “as long as someone interprets it as signifying something” (Chandler 2004: 16). A sign refers to something other than itself (Fiske 1986). According to Umberto Eco, a sign can be anything that is a substitution for something else, even trivial details can be signs as long as it is referring to something. They belong to a semiotic system that members of a culture use to communicate with each other (Fiske 1986). As with the two main different perspectives on semiotics, Saussure and Peirce also explain signs differently.

Ferdinand de Saussure considers a sign a dichotomy or a two-part relationship. He divides a sign into a ‘signifier’ and a ‘signified.’ The signifier is a visible (or present) form of the sign (i.e. a picture or a sound); the signified is the invisible mental concept that the signifier refers to; Saussure calls the relationship between a signifier and a signified ‘signification’. The presence of a signifier can invoke an ‘immaterial’ presence of a signified (Eco 1976 in Leeds-Hurwitz 1993). For instance, if we assume an act of giving a rose to a loved one as a sign, a rose is the signifier because it is a physical object; romance is the signified because it is a meaning that the rose generates. Signifieds are social constructs determined by the culture or subculture in which they exist.

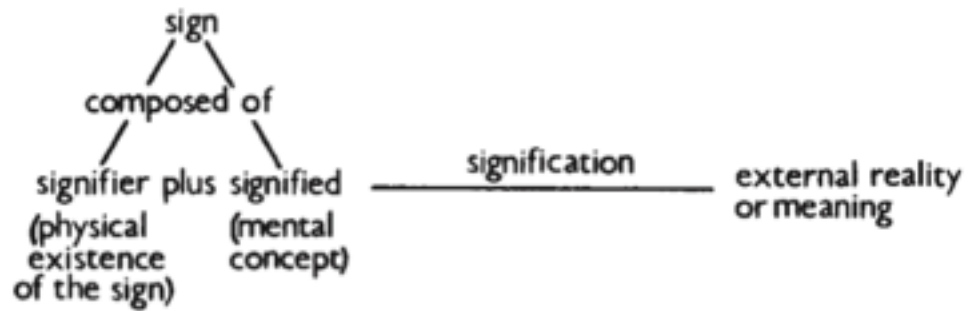


Figure 4.4.1 Ferdinand de Saussure's model of sign (in Berger 1999)

On the other hand, Charles S. Peirce's interpretation of sign is more elaborate than that of Saussure. According to Peirce, sign is a trichotomy or a three part relationship. He writes:

"A sign is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. The sign which creates I call interpretant of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its object." (Fiske 1986: 42)

For Peirce, a sign is consisted of a sign, an object and an interpretant. In this model, a sign refers to something other than itself, which is the object and is understood by somebody who creates a mental concept, which is an interpretant. Peirce also identifies three different kinds of signs which human can interpret: icons, indices and symbols. An icon resembles its conceptual object (i.e. photograph of a bride resembles her therefore it is an icon); an index has a direct existential connection with the object (i.e. a wedding dress is an index of a wedding because it connect the dress to the wedding); a symbol has an arbitrary relationship to the object whose connection is dependent upon convention, rule or agreement (i.e. the colour white of a wedding dress is a symbol because a culture has accepted white as a colour that symbolises innocence and virginity of a bride) (Chandler 2004, Leeds-Hurwitz 1993, Silverman 1983).

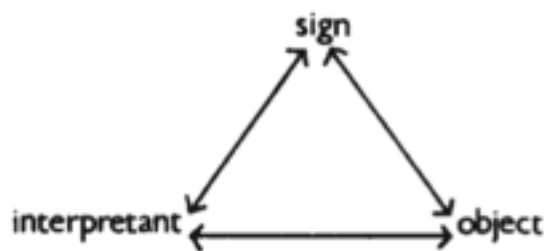


Figure 4.4.2 Charles Sander Peirce's model of Sign (in Berger 1999)

Despite two different models which explain how signs convey meaning, both emphasise the arbitrary nature of signs because there can be multiple meanings to signs. Meaning is better defined by the relationships of one sign to another than by the relationship of that sign to an external reality. This relationship of the sign to others in its system is what Saussure calls value. And for Saussure, value is what primarily determines meaning (Fiske 1986, pp.45). Meaning is the result of the dynamic interaction between the sign, the interpretant, and the object: it is historically located and may well change with time (Fiske 1986: 46).

4.4.3 Denotation and connotation

The relationship between the signifier and the signified is described by the terms: denotation and connotation (Chandler 2004). Barthes (Rylance 1994) uses the terms denotative and connotative to describe different kinds and levels of meaning produced in image reading. The term denotation is referred to the literal or obvious meaning of a sign. Whereas connotation is an implicit and personal meaning of a sign, its meaning varies according to the age, gender, ethnicity and class of interpreter's (Silverman 1983, Chandler 2004). Roland Barthes refers to denotation as the 'first order' of signifying system, while connotation as the 'second order' (Silverman 1983). Umberto Eco also gives his explanation on the differences between denotation and connotation as follows:

"It means a piece of wood soaked in some substance which enables it to burn slowly and give off light. This is the denotative meaning of the word. But in our culture the torch has assumed a connotative meaning of liberty. So if a painting or a movie depicts a man with a torch, it is a sign used for its own connotative power, because I know that in a certain culture a torch represents the idea of liberty. I could look at a primitive painting of a man with a torch, to which I could attribute the meaning of

liberty and I could be wrong because a torch did not have that meaning within the code of that civilisation." (Eco in Balducci 1976: 37 in Leeds-Hurwitz 1993: 27)

Eco emphasises that the distinction between denotation and connotation is that the denotation can be understood on a cross-cultural level, while it is seemingly impossible for the connotation. For example, when a couple has a wedding ceremony at the beach, the denotative meaning is that the wedding is a beach wedding, but the guests might not know the connotation of that beach wedding because it is only known to people who decided on the location. To better illustrate, John Fiske explains the distinction between denotation and connotation in the case of a photograph as: "denotation is what is photographed, connotation is how it is photographed" (1986: 91).

However, Barthes later argued that a denotation is just another connotation because the naturalisation process creates an illusion that makes a denotation to be perceived as a literal and universal meaning (Chandler 2004). A denotation is just a connotation that appears to be natural, it seems literal because we are influenced by an ideology that leads us to believe what is natural is natural. In any case, denotation and connotation are cultural specific. The meanings depend upon the context of the sign and the interpreter. Barthes' observations on the denotative sign are particularly important because "the process of naturalisation [...] leads to the illusion that denotation is a purely literal and universal meaning which is not at all ideological, and indeed that those connotations which seem most obvious to individual interpreters are just as natural" (Chandler 2004: 138).

4.4.4 Cultural code

Culture plays the primary role in how we construct and interpret meaning. Leeds-Hurwitz (1993) considers semiotics to be crucial in the search for meaning of things in our lives and culture in which meanings are produced and exchanged. People from different cultures may not understand or interpret meaning in the same way because they share a different historical and cultural context. Cultural code allows meanings to be communicated and understood in a certain way, and without it the representation

does not make sense. For instance, a person from France may be confused when looking at an image of a Thai wedding, where the bride and groom are adorning in traditional Thai attire. The French person may not understand that it is a wedding because the linkage between the reader and an image is missing since the reader and an image belong to different cultural contexts and do not share the same cultural code. This is an example of myth, a Western myth about the East as well as an Eastern myth about the East. The East is mythically delicate, elaborate and refined. The complicated details on the attire correspond with the representation of Thai culture that is projected toward the 'West' and back to themselves. It may not be exactly how Thais see themselves, but it is definitely how they want to be seen in the eyes of the 'West.' Meaning is created for that society and culture through representation and therefore it is culturally specific since it depends upon the historical and cultural context in which the representation is disseminated.

4.4.5 The myth of photographic truth

Photographs of weddings or images of weddings in magazines are not real weddings. They are a representation of somebody's wedding that has taken place somewhere and sometime ago. In my research, I will attempt to analyse the ways in which weddings are represented in magazines. I will explore the process of meaning creation, in which meanings of weddings are created through their representation. Furthermore, I will examine the contestation between representation and reality to demonstrate whether the representation of weddings in magazines is a reflection of real weddings or a construction of fantasy weddings, or perhaps both?

When a photograph of an event is being represented, it proves the manner and the place in which an event took place, along with the presence of people or objects at the event. "A photograph is often perceived to be an unmediated copy of the real world, a trace of reality skimmed off the very surface of life, and evidence of the real" (Sturken and Cartwright 2009: 17). Because a photograph captures a brief moment of reality it is perceived to be rendering the truth. According to Roland Barthes, a photograph offers an unprecedented conjunction between what was there then (the referent, object, thing or place) and what is here now (the image). However, it can also be argued that photography does not represent reality because it involves a

subjective process of choosing, composing, lighting and framing scenes. In addition, technology and digital editing software have made manipulation of photographs more simple and seamless than in the past. Therefore, a photograph can no longer be considered as an unbiased record of the truth. For Barthes (1977), the truth is just as impure and susceptible to cultural constructs as photographs. Hence, Barthes referred to photographic truth as a myth (Sturken and Cartwright 2009).

4.4.6 Myth

Myth may be popularly known as a traditional story or false ideas that are widely believed. Legends or folklore with unverified truth being told from generation to generation can be considered as myth. However, for Roland Barthes, myth means something different. Myth, according to Barthes, is a culture's explanation about some aspect of reality or nature. It is described as ideologies that work through symbolic codes and appear to be natural or common sense in a culture. Anything can be a myth as long as it is "conveyed by a discourse" (Barthes 1972: 107). Barthes considers everything in this world to be mythologies, which is another type of discourse that does not rely solely on language, but can be embedded in image and conditions of a society or culture (Barthes 1972).

For Lévi-Strauss, a myth is a story that is a specific and local transformation of a deep structure of binary opposed concepts that are important to the culture within which the myth circulates (Levi-Strauss 1972 in Fiske 1986: 122). An example of myth is a myth about women being thought of as more nurturing and caring than men, hence it seems natural for women to be responsible for raising children and doing household chores. Contemporary representations of femininity promote certain qualities of a woman that are idealised and regarded as preferable. These standards constitute a myth because they are constructed rather than "natural", there is no standardised qualities of women because each person is different in her own ways. However, people may have perceived the preferred women represented in the media as a standard because the connotative message has become incorporated within the representation and thereby seem obvious and natural. The principle of myth, according to Roland Barthes is that it "transforms history into nature" (Barthes 1972:

128). Thus, the “mythologist reveals the hidden history and thus the socio-political works of myths by ‘demystifying’ them” (Fiske 1986: 89).

Myth is an explanation of how things come to be perceived as true, but it does not have to be true or false. It “organises the assumptions and beliefs which bond a culture together” (Rylance 1994: 45). Barthes argues that it is the apparent naturalness or innocence of the ‘first-order’ system which validates the authenticity of myth (Rylance 1994). For instance, the sign ‘rose’ has gained multiple associations over time, hence the sign ‘rose’ can function as a symbol. Barthes explains that a rose becomes a mythic or symbolic representation of love when it is given to one’s loved one. Barthes also criticises the bourgeoisie for their propensity to naturalise reality and to take fictions as real, and thus lose their freedom by being subordinated to dominant signs. Barthes does not object the honest use of signs, which are known to be chosen and artificial. However, he disagrees with the dishonest use of signs that are pretended to be natural or obvious (Barthes 1977, Barthes 1972, and Rylance 1994).

The interpretation of the meaning of images requires largely recognition that the images are produced within the dynamics of social power and ideology (Sturken and Cartwright 2009). Ideology is a set of values such as freedom, equality or importance of family that appear as natural and ineluctable aspects of the daily life. Myth is manifested in every culture as a system of belief and they can be presented through images to persuade others to agree or oppose to certain values or views. When one encodes the texts and images within a representation, one can understand the myth of that society. As Sturken and Cartwright succinctly write:

“Images are elements of contemporary advertising and consumer culture through which assumptions about beauty, desire, glamour, and social value are both constructed and lived. Film and television are media through which we see reinforced certain familiar ideological constructions such as the value of romantic love, the norm of heterosexuality, nationalism, or traditional concepts of good and evil. The most important aspect of ideologies in the modernist period was that they appeared to be natural or given, rather than part of a system of belief that a culture produces in order to function in a particular way. Ideologies were thus, like Barthes’s concept of myth, connotations that appear to be natural.”
(Sturken and Cartwright 2009: 23)

4.4.7 Myths and advertising

Advertising uses cultural signifiers to represent qualities or ideals that appeared possible to be realised through the consumption of the product advertised. They connect the audience to the products advertised by creating desire and myth about the product. Rylance (1994) calls modern advertising a perfect example of Barthesian myth-making. According to Williamson (1978), advertisements lead people to participate in ideological ways of seeing themselves and the world. In advertisements, myths are created around the product and people are persuaded to accept the associated myth that are built with imagery, symbols text or speech. Therefore, myth and signs work together in an advertisement to create a new meaning for certain products, and subsequently lead people to believe and desire that product.

“*A diamond is forever*” is a well-known advertising campaign, which Connolly (2011) considered as one of the six advertisements that has changed the way people think in BBC News. This advertising campaign is a perfect illustration of the relationship between advertising and myth. The campaign has successfully created a market by making an association between diamond ring and engagement. The myth that has been created around diamonds has seamlessly infused the rarity and strength of diamonds with the notions of eternity and romance. The campaign uses anchorage to associate meaning with the product, in this case diamond. Anchorage is an anchor between the possible signified or meanings, and the meanings the advertisement wishes the reader to identify (Sturken and Cartwright 2009). The advertisement has successfully used the word ‘forever’ as an anchor to associate with diamond until today. Since then a diamond ring has become a symbol of an engagement and marriage in many parts of the world. The specificities regarding this myth and connotation will be discussed further in Chapter 8.

4.5 Multimodal analysis of images

By using a semiotic approach in this research, it allows us to look at an individual sign for its connotation or symbolic meaning and, in connection with multimodal approach, we can also look at ways in which the signs used are taken into consideration. Kress and Van Leeuwen’s (1996) method of analysing the visual composition of magazines and advertisements allows us to understand the relationship

between basic components and the meanings they create by breaking down the composition. Thus, a semiotic and multimodal approach is implemented in this research to find the connection between the images represented and the texts that accompany them and the meaning that such arrangement have created.

"The meaning lies not so much in the sign itself in isolation but through its membership of a code, a system of visual grammar, which gives its potential to mean. So the meaning of the sign is realised in context through combinations with other signs." (Machin 2007, pp. ix)

According to Machin (2007), the choices in using any semiotic resources are motivated by an interest in communicating things in certain ways, thus the choices should not be regarded as neutral. Such choices allow the social and power relationships to be negotiated between and among its users.

"In fact this act of description is often an undervalued part of the process of study. In many academic disciplines we tend to place higher status on analysis over description. Analysis is viewed as a superior intellectual activity. This means that the important initial work of description is often not given sufficient attention. But it is this that facilitates good analysis. Often media studies students when first engaging with this approach find it difficult to look at an image without immediately jumping from analysis to impressions. Looking at an advert for a car, for example, they wish to talk about the way it connotes excitement and freedom. It takes them a while to realise that this leap may make them miss crucial compositional details that may reveal much more about the actual way that the advert communicates." (Machin 2007, pp. xi)

It should not come as a surprise that the images of people and products in magazines are not organic in ways that they simply record what could have been seen, had one been there when such images were taken. In fact, the images in the magazines may have been edited and restyled multiple times to communicate an intended meaning. Thus, multimodal analysis is implemented on the assumption that representation and communication draw on a multiplicity of modes that contribute to the creation of this meaning. It analyses visual and written resources to demonstrate how these are organised to create meaning. By using multimodal analysis, established by Machin (2007), as a toolkit to undertake this research, the following are steps of taking inventory of semiotic resources from the sample of magazine covers.

4.5.1 Iconography

This step takes inventories of denotation and connotation to uncover the hidden meanings of images. According to Barthes (1977), examining carriers of connotation such as poses, objects, setting and photographic style, meaning potentials can reveal.

- Poses - The way a person poses can have a metaphorical meaning (Machin 2007) and different poses can suggest the kind of person, attitudes, values, and thus can be used as an important part of branding (Machin and Thornborrow (2003, 2006). Thus, how different models brides are posing on magazine covers can be analysed accordingly: are they sitting, standing, facing forward, leaning, etc.?
- Objects - Recording objects apparent on the magazine covers such as wedding dresses, flowers, jewellery, as well as other decorating props such as suitcases, bicycle, and cars.
- Settings - a setting or background of where these model brides had their picture taken. Is the background visible or is it obscure? Is the background outdoor or indoor?
- Photogenia - a style of photography, such as framing, lighting and focus. How much light or shadow is used in the image? What is the main focus of the image?

4.5.2 Modality

According to Sturken and Cartwright (2009), there are two main conflicting ideas about representation. On one hand, representation is thought of as a reflection of reality. It re-presents (or presents again) the reality through mimesis or imitation of an actual event. In this view, what we see in the media (news, magazines, television, photographs, etc.) is an accurate representation and depiction of reality. On the other hand, representation is more widely accepted as a construction of the world rather than a mirror image. It is an interpretation of reality that is constructed through language and images (Hall 1997b). The distinction between representation as a reflection and representation as a construction is best demonstrated with the case of camera generated images. In comparison to still life painting, photography is

considered to be a more accurate representation of reality than the subjective human perception (eyes) and artistic skills (hands) (Sturken and Cartwright 2009).

This step looks at whether each image appears exaggerated or naturalistic as well as potential meanings of these different styles. A high modality image is an image that reflects what could have been seen with one's own eyes. It is a record of a moment as it is without modification. A low modality image is an image that has been modified either to adjust brightness, colour, etc. in order to conceal certain details or enhance others. By examining modality of an image, we can understand how it is intended to be represented by the magazines. According to Machin (2007),

The term modality therefore refers to the way we communicate as how true or as how real a representation should be taken (i.e. not how true or how real it really is) (Machin 2007: 46).

According to Machin (2007: 48-57), to examine modality of an image, the following the markers of modality are to be taken in to account:

- Degrees of articulation of details – by looking at details on the surface an image such as blemishes or scars of a bride on the cover page and judge if it would have been different if we were to see the bride in real life. An image of a flawless face of a bride, without any visible pore is low modality because the magazine needs to communicate beauty of the model, while a small sequin or pattern on a wedding dress is highlighted created a high modality image because the magazine may want to advertise dress and emphasise the glamorous bridal wear.
- Degrees of articulation of the background – a blurred or obscure background creates a low modality image because it is impossible to be certain of its whereabouts. According to Machin (2007), the reduction of background details means that the image is symbolic and thus allows meanings to be communicated through models or props. The majority of magazine covers in this study have blur or very low degree of background articulation, thereby shifting the attention and meanings solely to the model bride in the centre.

- Articulation of depth – a high degree of depth is seen in three-dimensional objects drawn flat or such as in architectural drawings (Machin 2007). In the case of magazine covers, the articulation of depth is low.
- Degrees of illumination – articulation of light and shadow is determined by the realistic of natural light source. The magazine covers in the sample has low modality as evident in the mix usage of bright light and low light to emphasis certain features of the model bride and shadow to obscure background, such as Cover June 2013.
- Degrees of articulation of tone – this is the level of gradation of brightness. An image with ranges of tone from dark to bright is high modality. The magazine covers have multi levels of gradation and thus high modality.
- Degrees of colour modulation – this is the degree of colour representation that ranges from flat to fine nuances. High modality is when colours are represented naturalistically with contours in the presence of lights and shadow. The sample magazine covers are high modality in this markers as the colours of bridal dresses are modulated naturally and not flat.
- Degrees of colour saturation – this is the richness of colours, which ranges from full and intense colour to drained out black and white. High modality is the natural level of saturation that lies in the middle. The majority of magazine covers are saturated, thus low modality.
- Colour differentiation – this marker determines the variety of colours in an image, ranges from monochrome to natural. The majority of magazine covers in the sample is relatively monochrome as there are not more than four to five colour in each cover, thus they are low modality.

The magazine covers are low modality in almost every markers, since they are not documentary photographs. As expected of magazine and advertising images, the level of modality is low because the magazine wants to communicate messages and represent images of models on the covers to readers in an idealised way.

4.5.3 The use of colour

This step examines the communicative functions of colour to reveal the meaning potentials a colour carries. Meaning of colours can be drawn upon the colour combinations and colour schemes rather than from individual colours. In addition, the usage of colour can be analysed through its characteristics such as brightness, saturation, purity, modulation, differentiation, luminosity and hue.

Colour can denote specific people, places and things as well as classes...we find colour used to convey ideas in everyday contexts (Machin 2007: 65).

The magazine covers used in this study are wedding magazines, thus the colour schemes are similar throughout. While covers with brides wearing white wedding dresses are dominated by white, pink, and grey, the covers of with brides wearing 'traditionalised' Thai wedding attire, the colour scheme is a monochromatic palette of brown, gold and beige.

Low differentiation can mean restraint...draw on nostalgia (Machin 2007: 78)

4.5.4 The representation of social actors

This step examines the models on the magazines covers more closely to understand the gaze, and angle and distance of images of bride in the magazines in relation to the readers. As outlined by Machin (2007: 110-116):

- **Gaze:** to what extent we are encouraged to engage with the participants. Examine whether the bride is looking at the readers or not can indicate symbolic interaction between the bride in the photograph and the viewer. When the represented people look at the viewer, it engages to viewer and establishes 'an imaginary relationship.'
- **Angle of interaction:** this can create power relationships and also involvement. For instance, a vertical angle communicates power and superiority relationship – if the viewer is looking up at the model bride in the photograph, it positions the bride at a higher status than the readers. While horizontal angle allows viewer to be more involved with the bride in the image.

- Distance: this is like social distance, suggesting intimacy or remoteness. The distance is determined by whether the photograph is a close shot, medium shot, or long shot. A close shot will allow viewer to see facial expression of the bride in the image, and perhaps better identify the bride as a person with feelings instead of a generic model, as do with long shot.

Based on the work of Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) and Machin (2007: 118), suggests looking further in attributes to understand what kind of people represented in order to communicate particular ideas about the participants.

- Individuals and groups - connecting the viewer to the interests and experiences of the participants. This marker determines if the people represented in the image look like, or pose like each other. Are bride and groom in the image represented as an individual or as a group?
- Categorisation - informing the viewer what kind of participants are involved. This marker determines if the people represented in the image with stereotypical attributes: cultural or biological. In the sample of wedding magazine covers, there are two distinct cultural attributes represented by western and traditional style of clothing.
- Non representation - create anonymity and concealing responsibility for actions or remove the role of some participants. This is the case for some of the wedding magazine covers in which groom is not represented, thus representing just the bride on the covers.

4.5.5 The composition and page layout

The last step is to look at the relationship between all of the elements positioned on the page or 'visual syntax' according to Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996), Jewitt and Oyama (2000). three systems of characterising representational and meanings of composition: salience, information value and framing. Salience is how certain elements might be made to stand out, to have the viewer's attention drawn to them, by using size, colour, tone, focus, foregrounding and overlapping to inform the readers of the most important elements in the composition. Machin (2007: 130)

Based on the assumption that images and signs have meaning potentials rather than having fixed meanings, by taking inventory of semiotic resources using the methodology outlined previously from the magazine covers, we shall be able to comprehend how images have been created and what the meaning potential of these arrangements are. Thus, the analysis in the following four chapters, will demonstrate ideas which the images in the magazines and on the magazine covers represent and meanings they want to communicate. In addition, the resources gathered will allow us to draw a conclusion about the values associated with such representations and how such connections have been established in the context of Thai society. According to Barthes (1977), the elements in a photograph will have a meaning because what they represent is shared by people in a particular culture. Thus, the established associations found in visual compositions are not given but have been developed in cultures over time. Although these associations may seem and are represented as natural, they are actually constructed. Altogether, with the underlying meanings of visual images, certain signs and their associated values have been reproduced and repeated over time they become discourses that dominate that certain culture and society.

4.6 Conclusion

While images, objects and behaviour can and do signify, they never do so autonomously:

Every semiological system has its linguistic admixture. For example, the meaning of a visual image is anchored by accompanying text and by the status of objects, such as food or clothing, as sign systems require 'they rely on a language which extracts their signifiers (in the form of nomenclature) and names their signified (in the forms of usages or reasons)'. (Penner 2004: 229)

A wedding is a cultural site surround by meanings and myths. For instance, myth can be observed in wedding superstitions as well as the role the horoscope has upon the bride, groom and date of wedding, especially in Asian countries like Thailand. In my pilot studies, I came across several couples who mentioned the significance of horoscope when they recounted their narrative of wedding preparation, some even to the extent of postponing their wedding to a year later so that their wedding would fall

on an auspicious date. But the scope of my research only focuses on images and texts about wedding thus, wedding magazines can be considered as one of the many cultural texts worth researching because they portray an authoritative role as a provider of wedding knowledge and guidelines for prospective brides ranging from bridal fashion to wedding planning and etiquettes. In addition, the magazines portray a friendly role as a consultant, a first point of reference for prospective brides to gather various wedding ideas and inspirations.

A combination of visual elements and symbols of varying level of significance makes wedding magazines a resourceful ground for further excavation. By using the semiotic and multimodal research methodology presented here in this chapter, the following four analysis chapters present the findings and discussions regarding the notion of 'Thainess', cultural hybridity, femininity, romance and consumption as well as myths that have been embedded within the magazines' representation of Thai weddings. We shall see how the images in these wedding magazines have contributed to creating meaning and constructing the notion of 'Thainess' as well as normalising the ways weddings are valued, fantasised and performed, through the disseminations of texts and images in the following chapters.

On the Covers: Traditional VS Modern Thai Images

“A press photograph is an object that has been worked on, chosen, composed, constructed, treated according to professional, aesthetic or ideological norms which are so many factors of connotation; while on the other hand, this same photograph is not only perceived, received, it is read, connected more or less consciously by the public that consumes it to a traditional stock of signs.” Roland Barthes (1977: 19)

5.1 Introduction

This research is a quest to find the meaning of ‘Thainess’ within the context of Thai wedding magazines. In this chapter, the notion of ‘Thainess’ is explored through the cover of forty-eight wedding magazines. A magazine cover is the first point of contact between a magazine and its readers, thus the cover image and headlines must be able to attract and communicate intending messages to potential readers. The images and texts on the cover are a representation of a magazine and the contents of each particular issue. This chapter will examine the selected magazine’s covers and illustrate how the elements on the selected magazine’s covers are intertwined to create a meaning of ‘Thainess’ through the representation of an ideal image of Thai brides and Thai weddings.

As discussed in Chapter 4, semiotics and multimodal analysis are used as a methodological research toolkit to decode the images of brides constructed by Thai wedding magazines. The sample size used in this chapter includes forty-eight covers of WE magazine over the span of four years, ranging from January 2011 to December 2014. Cover images are constructed and differentiated through the usage of colours, objects, posture of models and attire.

The process of the analysis began by identifying any possible connotations of stereotypical ‘traditional brides’ and stereotypical ‘modern brides’ by comparing the styles of clothing, posture of models, usage of colour, lighting and headlines. These semiotic resources are considered instrumental to demonstrate the emergent pattern of constructed stereotypes of ‘traditional’ or ‘modern’ bridal identity. Although less detailed images are presented in this chapter, larger and more detailed images of these covers can be found in the appendix. The findings in this chapter will demonstrate how the magazines have defined ‘Thainess’, including how the notions of ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ are constructed and differentiated through the images and texts on these covers.

5.1.1 Magazines overview

All forty-eight magazine covers used in this chapter are from the same magazine, thus bearing same masthead across the four-year period, with the title ‘WE’ in capital letters, positioned at the top left corner of the page, the tagline reads ‘LOVE, WEDDING & LIVING TOGETHER’ in black capital letters and much smaller font, with a web address www.we-mag.com written as a superscript above ‘WE’. The tagline anchors the genre of this publication as a women’s magazine, specifically about wedding and romantic relationships. The title and subtitles imply that this is a magazine about more than one person, i.e. a couple, who are in love and have prospects of having a wedding and living together. All the issues in the study are also bearing a typical magazine cover layout, with cover model position in the centre with headlines on the left, right and bottom of the page. The magazine is made of approximately 150 - 180 colour pages, the selling price of 120 THB (£2.20¹) is marked on the bottom corner of the bind.

N.B. All of the model brides and grooms on these forty-eight covers are either well-known television actresses, models or socialites in Thailand, most of whom are not married in real life.

¹ Thai Baht (THB) to Great Britain Pound (GBP) exchange rate is 0.018 THB = 1 GBP as of September 2015

5.2 ‘Typical’ traditional Thai bridal images

Amongst these forty-eight images, a striking contrast between two dominant styles of wedding attire worn by the cover model can be observed: one is a traditionalised style or as the magazine referred to as Thai dress (*chud-thai*) and the other is a modern white wedding style, which is not specifically labelled. To clarify the word ‘Thai’ when used in Thai within the context of clothing or wedding ceremony, it is usually referred to ‘traditionalised Thai’. For instance, in these magazines ‘Thai dress’ (*chud-thai*) is referred to a ‘traditionalised Thai dress’, similarly ‘Thai wedding ceremony’ (*pi-tee-thai, tang-ngan-bab-thai*) is referred to ‘traditionalised Thai wedding ceremony’. Thus, to avoid further confusion with the word ‘Thai’, in this research ‘Thai dress’ and ‘Thai wedding ceremony’ will be translated as ‘traditionalised Thai dress’ and ‘traditionalised Thai ceremony’ respectively.

This research will separate the covers into two main categories for analysis: first, ‘traditionalised’ covers include any covers in which models are wearing non-modern style of wedding attire, i.e. traditional Thai costumes or as the magazine refers to as ‘Thai dress’; and second, ‘modern’ covers include any covers in which models are wearing modern style of wedding dress in white or any similar colour. Out of forty-eight magazine covers from January 2011 to December 2014 (presented below), there are nine covers with a ‘traditionalised’ theme, featuring images of cover models wearing traditionalised costumes. The nine traditionalised covers of WE magazines are: June 2011, November 2011, June 2012, September 2012, November 2012, June 2013, October 2013, June 2014 and October 2014 (see images in the following pages or in appendix).



We
December 2011
\$2.99 (Saved 25%)



We
November 2011
\$2.99 (Saved 25%)



We
October 2011
\$2.99 (Saved 25%)



We
September 2011
\$2.99 (Saved 25%)



We
August 2011
\$2.99 (Saved 25%)



We
July 2011
\$2.99 (Saved 25%)



We
June 2011
\$2.99 (Saved 25%)



We
May 2011
\$2.99 (Saved 25%)



We
April 2011
\$2.99 (Saved 25%)



We
March 2011
\$2.99 (Saved 25%)



We
February 2011
\$2.99 (Saved 25%)



We
January 2011
\$2.99 (Saved 25%)

Figure 5.1 Cover images of WE from January 2011 - December 2011

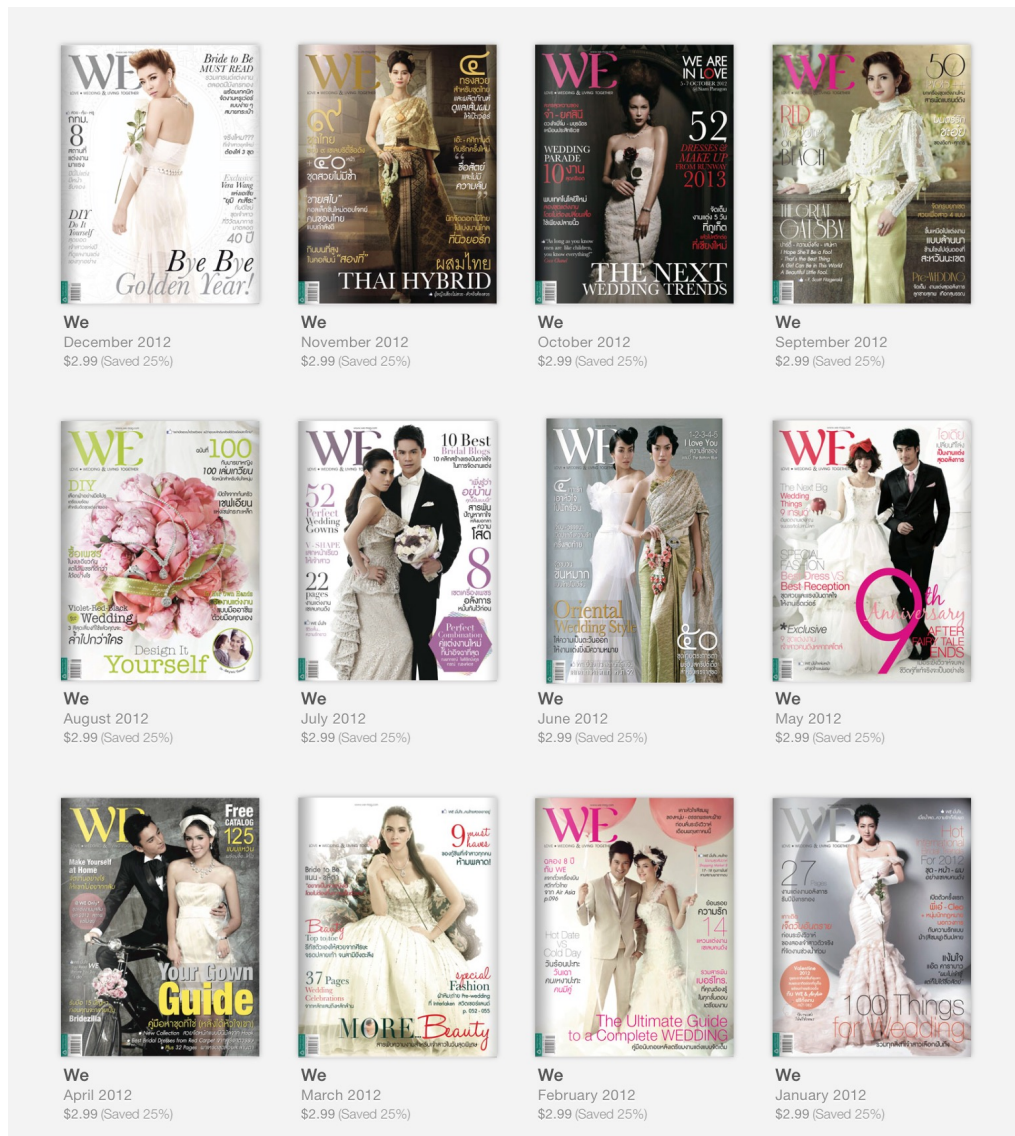


Figure 5.2 Cover images of WE from January 2011 - December 2011

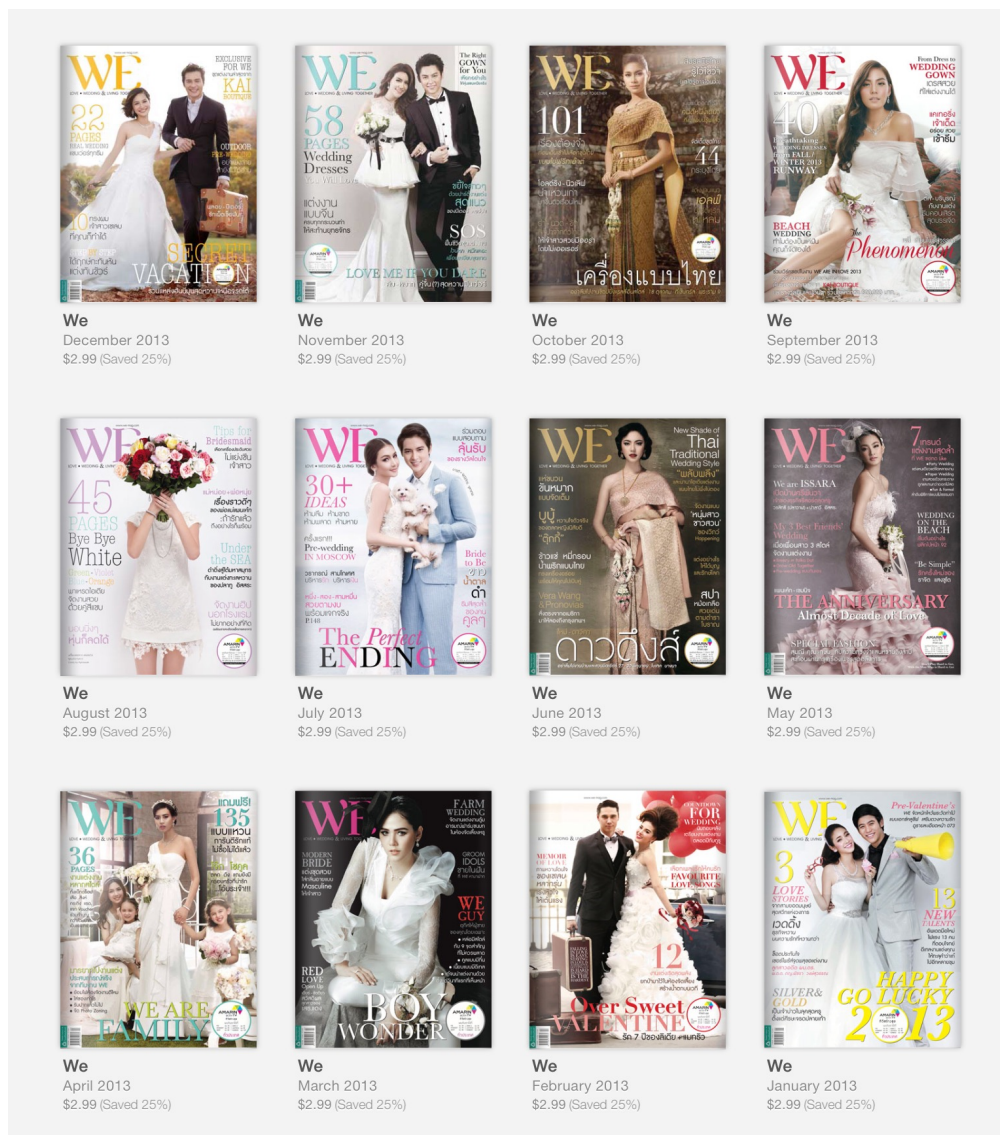


Figure 5.3 Cover images of WE issues from January 2012 - December 2012

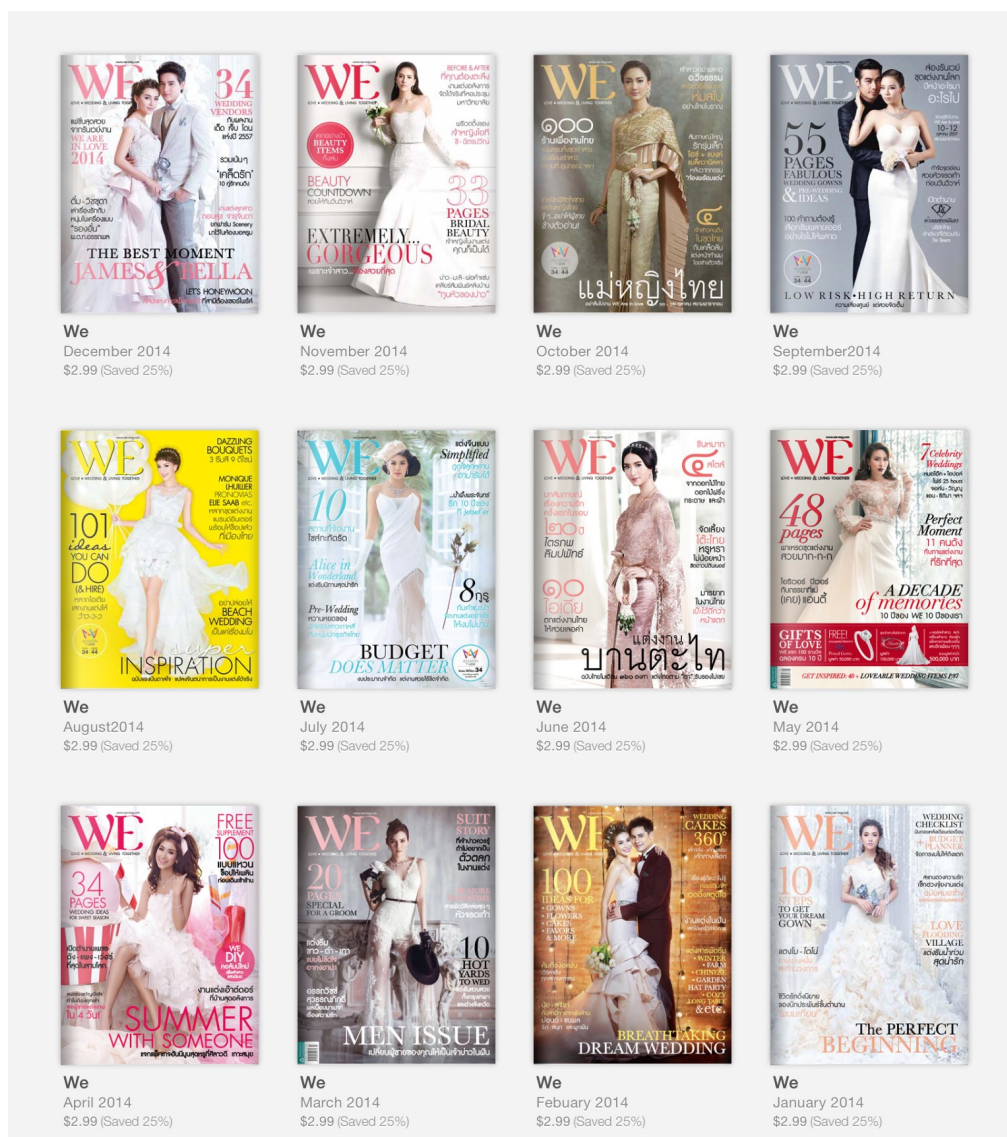


Figure 5.4 Cover images of WE issues from January 2014 - December 2014

5.2.1 Cover June 2011

This cover is the only one 2011onlisedonly one 2011ich both bride and groom are on the cover. Both are wearing a traditional Thai wedding attire, although the groom is only wearing traditionalised attire on the bottom half in shiny gold traditional wrap pants (*chongkraben*²), while his top half is a modern style beige blazer over a white collar shirt and a gold tie, completed with white socks and black laced up shoes. The bride is

² Chongkraben is a knee-length traditional wrap pants worn by both males and females. It is made from one large piece of fabric that is wrapped around the waist, with its end rolled up between the legs and tied at the waist to secure.

wearing a beige embroidered wrap (*sabai*³) with a long golden brown skirt (*pha-sin*⁴). Her gold jewellery consists of a necklace, a bracelet, some earrings and a belt. She is carrying a jasmine garland on her left hand, while her right hand is placed on top of the groom's right hand. The couple are standing in front of two wooden doors, which are left ajar, letting bright lights shining from behind.

The colour axis on this cover is beige, brown, gold and white. The colours of the attires worn by the bride and groom are reflected in the colour composition of the background image and texts. These warm tone colours exemplify the delicate image of the bride and emphasises her classical appeal as a bride from an ancient era, perhaps a vintage look at mimic the appeal of pre-modern Siam. The masthead is printed in gold colour, while the rest of the text is also in white to complement the gold tone of the bride and groom's attire. The main headline reads: "Thai ceremony...do it...go all out." Another headline: "40 pages of Thai wedding dresses, always beautiful without have to redeem our past sins," illustrates the Thai Buddhist belief that associates a woman's beauty with her good or bad deeds from previous life.

3 Sabai is worn as a top in traditional Thai costume for women. It is a long, rectangular piece of cloth that wraps around the chest area, leaving the longer end to drape over the left shoulder.

4 Pha-sin is a long skirt in traditional Thai costume, worn by women. The skirt is made from a long piece of cloth that ties together at the front. The hemline finishes at the ankle.



Figure 5.5 Cover June 2011



Figure 5.6 Cover November 2011

5.2.2 Cover November 2011

On this cover, the bride is sitting on a chair with her back straight, her body is turning 45 degrees to the right, but her face is directed straight at the reader. Her hair is let down and swept to rest on her left shoulder. The makeup on her face is noticeable especially her long and voluminous eyelashes and thick eyebrows. She also wears a pair of lenses in brown colour that matches her hair. The bride is wearing a white long sleeve lace top that flares just the below the waist, with a traditional Thai style pants made of thick fabric and intricately accented with gold threads in floral patterns. Her jewellery consists of a pair of golden earrings, a matching golden necklace and a long strand of pearl necklace. The bride is holding a white jasmine garland with both hands and resting it on her lap. The background on this cover reveals that the image is taken indoor, in a room with wooden paneling and window. The only piece of furniture visible is the golden brown armchair on which the bride is sitting, which appears to be of Rococo style, with damask pattern upholstery and gold coloured trimming.

The headlines are spread out to both left and right side, as well as on the bottom of the page. The first headline reads: “three couples wed on an auspicious date 11-11-11”. This has illustrated the importance of an auspicious wedding date as a symbol of good luck. The second headline reads: “be a slim-faced bride like ‘*Laweng*’ (fictional female character from classical literature), without surgery.” This cover story is using a fictional character from Thai classics as a reference to which bridal beauty can be measured against. It is very common that when the beauty of a traditional bride is mentioned, classical literature plays a significant role in providing a wide selection of images to be emulated. Basing ideal images on fictional characters has connoted a sense of fantasy to the notion of traditional beauty, while simultaneously elucidates that the ideal traditional beauty does not exist in reality.

The third headline reads: “planning a traditional Thai wedding: what to get and where to get them” and the last headline: “9 designs of traditional tray of offering and counting down to planning your own traditional Thai ceremony”, both headlines are offering readers a general idea of what is needed for a Thai ceremony.

The colour axis on this cover is gold, brown and white, which are the colours of the bridal wear that is reflected in the colour composition of the background and texts. These warm tone colours exemplify the delicate image of the bride and emphasise her classical appeal as a bride from an ancient era. The masthead is printed in shiny gold colour while the rest of the text is also in gold and white to complement the gold accent of the bride’s attire and the colour of the armchair.

5.2.3 Cover June 2012

This cover is different from the rest of the covers in this category because it is the only cover in which one model is presented wearing two different styles of wedding attire, one is a white gown and the other is a traditional Thai dress standing side by side. The modern version bride is wearing a white strapless gown posing with her back slightly bent backward. The traditional version bride is wearing a beige *sabai* with gold embroidered in the fabric, her long olive green coloured skirt is tied at the waist with a silver belt. She wears some gold tone earrings, a necklace, some bracelets on both

wrists and holds a jasmine garland with her right hand. The posture of these two versions of the bride is similar, face forward, glancing directly at the camera, left hand visibly on her side, and right leg slightly forward.

This cover illustrates an embodiment of both modern and traditional dualities in one identity using the leading actress from previous mentioned films in chapter 2 ‘Tawiphop’. Here too, she is a woman of two identities: modern and pre-modern. Yet, the contrast between modern and traditional style is still based on the over emphasis on the exoticness through clothing and accessories of the traditional style, whereas the modern version is styled to be minimal by comparison. The colour axis on this cover is silver, olive green, gold and white which are the colours of the bridal wear that is reflected in the colour composition of the background and texts. These warm tone colours exemplify the delicate image of the bride and emphasise her classical appeal as a bride from an ancient era. The masthead is printed in white, while the rest of the text is also in white, except for the main headline, ‘Oriental Wedding Style’ which is in gold to complement the gold tone of the bride’s traditional attire. The main headline reads: ‘Oriental Wedding Style: adding a touch of the East to make a wedding more meaningful.’



Figure 5.7 Cover June 2012



Figure 5.8 Cover September 2012

5.2.4 Cover September 2012

This cover shows the bride wearing a traditional dress, but from a different period. This style has been influenced by the Victorian style fashion popular during the reign of King Chulalongkorn, emphasising on the feminine modesty through non-revealing clothing, an attempt to create a modern Thai at that time. The long skirt remains similar to the previous style, whereas the top is now a white long sleeve lace blouse, leaving the neck, shoulders or arms unexposed. The bride stands turning slightly to the right, with her right hand resting on a table in the background and her left hand resting on her left thigh. She faces the camera, smiling coyly. The increase in the brightness level, the white and pale yellow colour axis, along with the newer version of the traditional dresses from a period of Siam modernisation have all worked together to connote a touch of modern to this classic traditionalised cover.

5.2.5 Cover November 2012

This cover shows the bride standing straight, looking directly at the reader. She has her hair pull up into a bun on the top of her head, accessorised with a gold circular

shape pin. Her makeup is highlighting her fair complexion with a bright red lipstick. The full body shot reveals her entire outfit, which consists of a beige with gold detail top and a dark brown skirt with a gold detailed tie at the front and secured with a belt. She wears gold earrings and a necklace with a large gold pendant, with gold bangles on both of her wrists. She carries a white jasmine garland in her right hand, which rests slightly below her waist, while her left hand is on her side. Her pointed toe shoes in silvery white are half visible at the bottom of the page.

The background appears within a grand architecture made of stone-like material. The bride is standing at the end of a curved marble staircase. The delicate details of the bridal ensemble are juxtaposed with the stone pillars and arches setting. Her statuesque posture and calm facial expression however, is arguably a reflection of the concrete backdrop. The qualities of the stone in the background have been transferred to the bride and she has become a statue that represents the femininity and ideal of a traditional Thai bride.

The gold colour in the details of the bridal wear is echoed in the golden text in the right and left columns as well as in the shiny gold colour of the masthead. The main headline reads: '9 traditional Thai dresses of 9 Thai celebrities'. Another one reads: '4 beautiful style of traditional Thai dresses and products to achieve the perfect hair'. This cover story suggests that a bride-to-be needs to maintain the perfect appearance in every part of her body, from hair to face, to body, skin complexion as well as the style of her bridal fashion.



Figure 5.9 Cover November 2012



Figure 5.10 Cover June 2013

5.2.6 Cover June 2013

The bride on this cover is wearing a pink tone traditional costume, completed with an embroidered *sabai*, a long skirt in a similar shade of mauve pink with a golden accent embroidery, some golden tone earrings, a long necklace with a pendant, a bangle on her right wrist and a belt. She stands straight, facing the camera with a full front profile, her right arm bending slightly with her hand holding a jasmine garland, while her left arm makes a 90 degrees' angle resting just above her waist with the lower end of her *sabai* draping over.

The colour 'axis' on this cover is gold and mauve pink, which are the colours of the bridal wear, this is reflected in the colour composition of the background and texts. These warm tonal colours and fuzzy background exemplify the delicate image of the bride and again emphasises her classical appeal as a bride from a fantasy of pre-modern Siam.

5.2.7 Cover October 2013

This cover features an almost full body shot of a bride at the centre. She is wearing a traditional wear consisting of a golden brown *sabai* with embroidery draping over her left shoulder, and flowing down the bottom, with a long darker shade of brown skirt, completed with a gold tone belt, earrings, necklace, bracelets on both wrists and a ring on her right ring finger. Her hair is kept neatly behind the back of her head. The makeup emphasises the eyes with long thick lashes, slightly blushed cheeks and nude lips.

Her body is turned 45 degrees to the left, but her head and gaze are directed to the readers. Although the right shoulder is exposed, the way she is standing does not make her revealed shoulder obvious. Her face is neatly made-up and exuding a radiant glow. She holds a white and green jasmine garland with both hands resting just below her waist, showing her manicured fingernails.

In this cover, the colour ‘axis’ is the shade of brown-gold of the bridal wear and the blurry brownish background. This connection suggests a warm and natural image of the bride. The image does not give a clear indication of its location, because there is a blurry backdrop, although the mystique and exoticness appeal is apparent through what seems to resemble an old brick wall of a temple in the background, which is a symbol often associated with traditional ‘Thai.’ The colour schemes consist of dark brown, brown, gold, white and green, coordinating the image and the text in a perfect balance. The masthead is printed in golden brown which balances the colour of the bride’s attire. At the same time, the colours of her attire are duplicated in the colour of the texts printed on her opposite. Although the texts are not small, they do not stand out, since the colours from the same palette complements the colour of the bride’s attire, instead of making a contrast, therefore making the bride the dominant element on the front cover.

The main headline reads: ‘101 tips to remember before choosing a traditional bridal wear without freaking out’. The second one is: ‘A must know about traditional wedding ceremony, and what you shouldn’t ignore’, giving a preview that this issue of

the magazine will educate brides-to-be on all they need to know about planning a traditional Thai wedding. The message is further anchored by the image of the bride dressing in traditional attire as a sneak peek at what could be discovered inside.



Figure 5.11 Cover October 2013



Figure 5.12 Cover June 2014

5.2.8 Cover June 2014

The bride on this cover wears a pink tone traditional costume, completed with a long silvery pink tone skirt and an embroidered pink *sabai* that drapes over her left shoulder. She wears a full set of pink gold jewellery: some earrings, a necklace with a pendant, a bracelet, a belt and a headband. She is standing with her body facing to the right, but her head is slightly bent and facing straight towards the camera. Her left hand is holding a jasmine garland slightly below her waist. Again, the angle of her stand does not make her revealed shoulder obvious.

The colour axis on this cover is pink, white and black which are the colours of the bridal wear reflected in the colour composition of the background and texts. Although this cover is the brightest cover amongst the nine covers in this category, the delicate

image and classical appeal of bride remain intact through her posture and coy smile which is similar to the posture on previous covers.

5.2.9 Cover October 2014

On this cover, the bride is wearing a golden tone traditional costume, with a two tone *sabai* with gold embroidery on the top layer and silky satin mauve pink underneath, as well as a golden tone long skirt. She also wears some golden tone jewellery which includes some earrings, a necklace with a pendant, bangles and a belt. The bride is facing the camera, with her body only slightly turning to the right, her right hand is resting on her side while her left hand is holding a jasmine garland just above her waist. She looks straight at the camera. The colour axis on this cover is gold and white, which are the colours of the bridal wear reflected in the colour composition of the background and texts. The main headlines are: ‘Thai ladies’ ways to win a man’s heart,’ ‘Brides do not miss! Ways to wear a *sabai* the pre-modern way,’ and ‘Four celebrities in traditional dress (*chud-thai*) and hair & makeup tips from professional makeup artists.’



Figure 5.13 Cover October 2014

5.3 Emergent patterns in the ‘typical’ traditional bride images

Having examined the above nine covers individually, a pattern of stereotypical ‘traditional Thainess’ amongst these images has become apparent. Out of the nine covers, five of them have almost an identical colour scheme, style of clothing, body posture and image composition. Hence, this section will further analyse how the magazine is using visual cues of representation to create the ‘traditionalised bride’ and represent ‘Thainess’. The collection of cover images of ‘traditional’ Thai brides is a reconstruction of magazine’s ideal ‘Thainess’ that has been expressed through the images of ‘traditional Thai woman’: the way these brides are dressed, styled and posed.

5.3.1 Poses

The first criterion is body posture. According to Machin (2007), certain poses have values and can connote specific meanings. Here, these brides are in almost identical poses with their body turning diagonal to their right with face forward or standing straight with full frontal profile facing the readers. These brides stand straight, rigid

and expressionless. Their poses connote the constraints that are attached to the notion of ‘traditional Thainess’. The stiffness and statue-like poses are a reflection of how ‘traditional Thainess’ is constructed in order to be preserved and revered. It is preferable to be frozen in time and impervious from diversity or changes. Their bodies which are turned slightly to the right, mirror an action of looking back in time or are about to embark on a journey to the past. The seriousness of the poses and the faces of the brides connote a formal ceremonious value of the traditional Thai wedding ceremony, which is to be performed with conservative manners and respect. Although in some images the brides are smiling, they are doing so minimally and bashfully, which implies a certain level of modesty that comes with this ‘traditionalised’ persona (cover September 2012 and cover June 2014). Altogether, the poses of these brides communicate minimal expressions as they are confined by the vintage allure of ‘traditionalised Thainess’; to be a Thai lady (*mae-ying-thai*) is to be demure and maintaining a ladylike posture.

5.3.2 Objects

The second criterion of the connotation is objects. The most important and distinguishable object here is the bridal attire not only because its style is unique and different from everyday wear, but also because these dresses have been adapted from the traditional Thai wear of the ancient Siam. The traditional dress (*chud-thai*) is a signifier of an attempt to preserve the cultural heritage and recreate a ‘traditional’ authenticity. The material of the bridal wear (mostly silk and lace) and gold accessories connote a delicate and demure image of the bride wearing them. However, the intricate details of the embroidered fabric represent the complexity of the traditional Thai identity that is not only inaccessible but also difficult to replicate. Furthermore, in this category, the brides are seen holding a jasmine garland on every cover except for Cover September 2012. The delicate arrangement of white jasmines and other small flowers is associated with femininity and adoration. The arrangement of white jasmine in a garland is a delicate work, the finished product carrying various meaning within. During the reign of King Chulaongkorn, ladies were taught to arrange flowers into a garland, a process which requires patience and attention to detail. A beautiful jasmine garland is a symbol of ‘traditional’ Thai femininity and ‘Thainess’ (WE May 2008: 48). There are many uses to the jasmine garland, such as

offering it to the spirit temple or shine when praying, presenting it to one's mother on Mother's Day or presenting it to a member of the royal family as a token of respect. Thus, a jasmine garland is considered a symbol of reverence. The combination of traditional bridal wear and jasmine garland have further emphasised the delicate femininity of 'traditionalised' bride, who should be revered and adored rather than sexualised as other women in the media.

5.3.3 Settings

The settings that have provided a background for these nine 'traditional' brides are rather obscured and blurry. More than half of the images are taken against a dark background. The obscurity of the background and the unidentifiable settings have positioned these images within the realm of fantasy. Yet, some of the vague wooden furniture or ancient architectures in a few images connote a vintage appeal of the photographs. According to Machin (2007), the lack of an obvious background can symbolise a concept rather than a particular moment or event. In this case, these images symbolise the embodiment of a 'traditionalised Thainess' as a fantasy that can take place anywhere and anytime for Thai women.

5.3.4 Participants

The women and men on these images are leading actresses and models in Thailand. They are beautiful and slim with light complexion, their faces are fully made-up and their hair are professionally styled. The trademark of a bride is her beauty. As these images are magazines' covers, physical attractiveness is essential to increase their aesthetic appeal. The physical appearance of these brides and their attire connote exotic beauty to the readers through their delicately embellished attire. In addition, the complete set of gold jewellery connotes the level of prosperity of these brides. Their fair skin and flawless complexion also connote social and financial status as being able to afford beauty treatments or skin care regimens and/or limited exposure to the sun. Their makeup style has put a lot of emphasis on the eyes, their hair is all kept neatly behind the back of their heads, with only one bride (cover November 2011) who has long hair fall on the left side of her shoulder. A sense of excess and opulence is obvious through their fashion styles.

5.3.5 Semiotics of colour

According to Machin (2007), certain kinds of colour can convey particular meaning. The design of these nine covers are quite similar, however the usage of colours varies. For the majority of the 'traditional' covers, the colours of the magazine's title are in similar palette: a yellowish, golden tone that corresponds to the brown and gold tone of the traditional attire that the models wear. The colours used in the images are not bright nor vivid, together with the low brightness and darker colours of the background they have given the images a more mysterious and obscured appeal. Furthermore, the level of brightness is low in the 'traditional' covers, some almost dark and low saturation e.g. cover June 2011, cover November 2011, cover November 2012 and cover October 2013 in comparison to the 'modern' covers. The subtle tones and the colour scheme are almost diluted with each other, the fuzzy quality connotes a sense of uncertainties and antiqueness, almost like an old photograph or photography shot with a sepia effect. Although subtle tones are used in the images, the colours gold, brown and beige are saturated to intensify the exotic quality of the images, yet maintaining a certain level of reservation and seriousness. The monochrome colours in the 'traditional' covers are an expression of the restraints and confinement of the notion of 'traditional Thainess', which is constructed to be a flat, one dimension identity. All in all, the colours used represent the essence of 'traditional Thainess' as a facade of a monochromatic vintage image.

5.3.6 Summary of colour dimensions and meaning potentials

This collection of 'traditional' cover images mainly uses similar warm colours such as ivory, beige, golden brown, dark brown, gold, mauve pink and white. The heavy use of gold and brown tones have given an antique and exotic effect to the images. Although the colours used are warm tones, the level of brightness is quite low. The tone of gold is especially radiating. There are some shadows near the edges, but very minimal. The colours are saturated and impure. The colours are realistic, not flat nor generic. There are very minimum colour variations, to the extent that some cover images are almost monochrome.

The ‘Thainess’ that has been expressed through the physical appearance and postures of the nine brides in the above covers is demure and delicate. The jasmine garland that each bride is holding, as well as their elaborate *chud-thai*, are symbols of an exotic and delicate feminine beauty. The covers have constructed an image of ‘traditional Thainess’ within a frame of a mythical allure of a prosperous ancient Siam, where women’s femininity is to be preserved in a conservative manner. These feminine images have become the epitome of an ideal classical Thai beauty. These images have trapped ‘Thainess’ within the imagined ‘pre-modern’ vignette, which have been implemented in order to make these covers distinctively ‘traditional’ as opposed to ‘modern’, which will be discussed in the following sections.

5.4 ‘Typical’ images of modern Thai brides

The thirty nine covers of ‘WE’ magazines featuring images of ‘modern’ Thai brides include issues from January 2011, February 2011, March 2011, April 2011, May 2011, July 2011, August 2011, September 2011, October 2011, December 2011, January 2012, February 2012, March 2012, April 2012, May 2012, June 2012, July 2012, August 2012, October 2012, December 2012, January 2013, February 2013, March 2013, April 2013, May 2013, June 2013, August 2013, September 2013, October 2013, November 2013, December 2013, January 2014, February 2014, March 2014, April 2014, May 2014, July 2014, August 2014, September 2014, November 2014, and December 2014.

These covers also have the same page layout as the aforementioned ‘traditional’ counterparts. However, there are definitely more variety in terms of colour scheme, styles of wedding dresses, posture of models and background composition. These thirty-nine different ‘modern’ covers can be categorised into three subcategories: the covers with a bride only (23 covers), the covers with both bride and groom (14 covers); and the covers with some wedding elements, i.e. diamond and flowers, without either bride nor groom presence (3 covers).

5.4.1 Category 1 - Covers featuring just the bride

There are twenty-three covers featuring just the bride. These brides are wearing 'modern' style wedding dresses either in different shades of white or light pink. In this category, there are a variety of postures, objects, colours and level of brightness amongst these twenty-three images. The brides in this category wear long white wedding dresses in various styles, many of which are styled to accentuate the slim figure of the brides and reveal their flawless skin such as shoulders, back and legs.

The dominant colours are white and pink, for example Cover July 2011, Cover January 2012, Cover May 2013, and Cover April 2014. These images represent a conventional femininity. However, there are also images with darker colours and tones such as Cover October 2012 and Cover March 2013; Cover October 2012 features a bride in a white embroidered strapless mermaid style gown standing in front of a very dark background. Her facial expression, makeup and hairstyle are quite intense, with some dark red lipstick, extra voluminous hair and a dark red rose. Similarly, Cover March 2013 features a bride in a white ruffle jacket and white long pants, sitting in a 'less feminine' pose with her right leg above her left knee. These images have demonstrated that much less constraint has been placed into the composition of these non-traditionalised covers in comparison to the traditionalised covers discussed previously.

For instance, Cover July 2011 and Cover September 2013 (below) share a similar layout composition and relaxing, yet revealing postures of model brides. On Cover July 2011, a bride is sitting with her legs crossed, leaning her shoulders slightly to her right. Her left hand is resting just above her knee, with a diamond ring visible on her ring finger and a diamond bracelet on her left wrist. Her right hand and lower part of her right arm are concealed by a bouquet of assorted pink flowers. The bride is wearing a white wedding dress with a sweetheart neckline and ruffles. The gown seems to be puffy even in a sitting position, the bottom part of the gown occupies almost the entire bottom half of the magazine cover.



Figure 5.14 Cover July 2011



Figure 5.15 Cover September 2013

Her bright red lips and blushed cheeks, highlight the fair complexion of her face. Her hair is brown with a copper and red undertone, falling slightly on her shoulders with soft and voluminous curls. Her fair skin is revealed on her bare shoulder and legs and her sitting posture suggests that she does not mind revealing it. The bride smiles with a slight smirk connoting her image as confident and not at all shy.

The headline reads: 'Beauty checklist: count down to a bridal preparation', 'Wedding ideas from 5 up-and-coming wedding planners', 'steps to organise 3 ceremonies in one day and techniques to making hair and makeup perfect and lasting throughout the ceremonies', 'free facial and beauty therapies worth 5000 baht for all WE reader', '6 pain-free technologies that can brighten your skin', 'beauty secrets from first to last page'. Given this cover is a beauty issue, the majority of the cover stories is beauty related. The reader is given an extensive guide to beautify herself in her preparation to becoming a perfect bride.



Figure 5.16 Cover December 2012



Figure 5.17 Cover April 2011

Both Cover April 2011 and Cover December 2012 (above) show the brides in a similar posture with their back slightly turned towards the readers, their face forward looking resting on the shoulder. Both wear a white backless wedding dress revealing their flawless back. With arms on their side, both hold flowers in their hands. The full body shot, with their bare back towards the reader is revealing a more seductive side of these ‘modern’ brides. They appear more engaging, through their inviting gaze and not stiff stance.

There are also covers featuring brides with an unusual bridal attire such as Cover March 2013 and Cover March 2014 (below). In these covers, the model brides are wearing hats and pants bridal style wear instead of dresses, exuding a touch of masculine vibe through their posture and outfits. This demonstrates that a modern bridal identity is not limited to a single and flat interpreting of the bridal image.



Figure 5.18 Cover March 2013



Figure 5.19 Cover March 2014

The makeup of the brides in the ‘modern’ covers are not limited to a sweet and classic look, there are a few images with heavier and more intense makeup style in Cover October 2012 and Cover May 2014 (below). Dark eye makeup and dark coloured lipstick have created a sultrier bridal image. Although the style of clothing together with makeup and hairstyles has given the look and feel of the images in this category, the bridal fashion inspirations which prospective brides are given offer a variety of styles to experiment rather than a recommended style for the wedding day.



Figure 5.20 Cover October 2012



Figure 5.21 Cover May 2014

5.4.2 Category 2 - Covers featuring both the bride and groom

There are fourteen covers in this category. In this category, the bride and groom are presented on the cover side by side. All the grooms are wearing suits or tuxedos, while the brides are wearing various shades of white wedding dresses. The covers in this category have a similar variety of colours, tones and level of brightness as observed in category 1.

The bride and groom are posing either holding hands, linking arms or in an embrace position. The models in this category appear to be more joyful than in the two previously mentioned categories such as Cover February 2014 and Cover September 2014 shown below, are featuring a bride and a groom in an embrace posture. They are exuding a playful and lively mood through their bright smiles, some are even showing teeth. The atmosphere is relatively the most relaxed amongst the previous categories. A handsome groom and a beautiful bride stylishly dressed, looking as happy as they can be; this is an image which best represents the title of the magazine WE, as well as the imagined future of the prospective brides. Additionally, there are more props used in these covers such as a car and bicycle on Cover October 2011

and April 2012; suitcases on Cover February 2013 and December 2013; puppies on Cover July 2013;

balloons on Cover February 2012, all of which can evoke movement or life.



Figure 5.22 Cover February 2014



Figure 5.23 Cover September 2014



Figure 5.24 Cover October 2011



Figure 5.25 Cover 26 April 2012



Figure 5.26 Cover February 2013



Figure 5.27 Cover December 2013

5.4.3 Category 3 - Covers featuring props without the bride or groom

There are three covers in this category. Cover August 2011 has a picture of a diamond ring on a fondant covered cake. Cover August 2012 has an image of a diamond ring and two diamond necklaces nestled on a bouquet of pink peonies. On cover August 2013 a woman in a short white lace dress is standing while holding a big bouquet of multi coloured roses, which are covering her entire head, she is wearing a pair of diamond earrings, two diamond necklaces (one short and one long), a diamond bracelet and a diamond ring on her left ring finger. Images in the category 3 are not a representation of the feminine body of a bride, nor a representation of the relationship between a bride and a groom, but rather it represents one of the most important products which plays a role in dominating the feminine body and her bridal identity and that is diamond jewellery.

This category has emphasised the notion that a ‘modern’ Thai wedding is more than just about the bride and groom, but it is also about the consumption of products, especially diamonds. Cover August 2011 and Cover August 2012 (below) have justified that diamonds or wedding jewellery are an essential aspect to the wedding, so much so that it can represent the notion of wedding and thus deserve to be on the cover of a

wedding magazine without any accompanying models.



Figure 5.28 Cover August 2011



Figure 5.29 Cover August 2012

5.5 Emergent patterns in the ‘typical’ modern bride images

Having looked at the ‘modern’ images above, it is possible to identify a number of recurring semiotic codes that have made these images distinctly ‘modern’.

5.5.1 Poses

The images in the ‘modern’ covers definitely communicate more energy and more liveliness through the postures and facial expressions of the brides and grooms. There are more signs of movement such as a walking pose, turning to the side pose, sitting crossed legs pose, smiling and opening mouth. The postures in the category 2 are especially lively with the bride and groom linking arms, holding hands and embracing each other. The variety of poses and facial expressions make the images on the ‘modern’ covers seem more realistic and engaging to the readers. They are demonstrating different aspects of a wedding: joy, sultry, excitement, movement and physical intimacy through the postures of the brides and grooms.

5.5.2 Objects

Most recurring objects in these images are diamonds and white wedding dresses. These are props such as a car and the luggage used in the photoshoot in the category 2 of the ‘modern’ covers. The covers in category 1, feature just the bride by herself to represent her as a bride, thus emphasising on her femininity with only some main objects: a dress, some jewellery and some flowers. The combination of these objects with the bride create a myth of modern femininity, whose beauty is radiating through symbols of modern luxurious fashion. However, when the bride and groom are both together, the focus has shifted from the bride to the bride and groom as a couple. The bridal ensemble has become less extravagant, while there are more props used such as luggage and cars, which connote progress in one’s life, symbolising a journey in which the couple is about to embark upon together.

5.5.3 Setting

The colour palette of the images is made up of a few shades of pastel with pink and white being the dominant colours, which connotes the concept of purity, romance,

fairy tale and dream. The outdoor setting in category 2 connotes a sense of reality and genuineness of the bride and groom. It seems more down to earth and approachable, as opposed to the obscurity of the vintage fantasy in the ‘traditionalised’ covers. Although in most covers the background is unidentifiable, this still creates a dreamlike/fantasy to the overall wedding concept.

5.5.4 Participants

The women and men on these images are leading actresses and models in Thailand as in the ‘traditionalised’ covers, although there are more male models in these ‘modern’ covers. There are three types of participant’s representations in this category as mentioned: bride, bride and groom, and no participant. On the covers where brides are individually represented, there are more variety in the postures and facial expressions. There is a sense of independence and carefree attitude in the brides, who actually appear more like model wearing bridal gown for fashion shoot than actual bridal photography. Whereas, when the bride and groom are represented together, there is a sense of harmony and togetherness between the couple, whose posture and facial expression exude happiness. Although there are more variety in the styling fashion, makeup and hair, these flawlessly fair-skinned and slim people are the main attraction of the magazines and are luxuriously represented in extravagant wedding attire. The combination of these connote the social and financial status of the participants as belonging to the well-to-do group.

5.5.5 The semiotics of colours

The design of these thirty-nine covers is quite varied in terms of the usage of colours. For the ‘modern’ covers, the main focus is the white colour of the bridal gown which is positioned at the centre of the page to draw the most attention. However, the colours of the magazine’s titles and backgrounds range from white, pastel pink, pastel green, bright yellow to black. The bright and saturated colours, together with a high level of brightness have given the images a livelier and fashionable feel. Since the white colour of the bridal gown is the primary colour, other colours are blended in with the existing colour scheme naturally, without clashing of tones. Although different colours are used across these ‘modern’ covers, most covers tend to gravitate

towards soft pink tones to intensify the feminine and romantic quality of the images, yet maintaining a certain level of glamour. The variety of colours in the ‘modern’ covers is an expression of a fashionable and unrestricted perspective of the notion of ‘modern Thainess’, which is constructed to be on the opposite end of ‘traditionalised’ cover.

5.5.6 Summary of colour dimensions and meaning potentials

The obvious signifiers of a modern bridal image include a white wedding gown, diamonds, a bouquet and the variety of styles. All these aspects are represented in the thirty-nine ‘modern’ covers. These have become conventional markers of a universally recognised bridal identity and have placed the modern bride within the glamour of romantic fantasy. The refinement of the jewellery, the stylishness of the gown and flowers are being transferred over to the woman possessing these products. Thus, these images of the bride have constructed an epitome of a ‘modern’ bride whose identity and beauty are communicated by her choice of attire, appearance and posture. The white wedding gown is a fashion style influenced by the Western bridal wear, which is a signifier of modernity and trendiness. Signs, codes and colours are used to emphasise the images of the Thai’s ideal of modern femininity as confidence, glamorous and sophisticated. Furthermore, they connote a dream and wish fulfilment as well as being a marker of wealth and status, since the costs of dresses, diamonds and flowers altogether do not come cheap.

5.6 Comparing the ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ Thai images

By summarising the patterns that emerge from the analysis of the magazine covers, a framework that separates ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ Thainess is created. The images of a traditional and modern Thai bride show a contrast in terms of ideals, femininity and aesthetic values. The distinctions are made apparent to the reader through the usage of colours, fashion choices and postures. Traditional brides are not to be looked at for their sex appeal but for their pure and delicate beauty that looks better untouched and preserved in their exotic and classical beauty. The images of the traditional bride evoke sentiments and nostalgia of the past. It is the past that people have not had an opportunity to experience, but can only fantasise about based on the images given. These images are selling to the reader a chance to go back to the past,

through the future action of getting married in a traditional style. As Williamson puts it: the image “poised between our past and our future, but bypassing our actual present” (1978: 159). On the other hand, the modern bride has a more sophisticated and sexy allure, positioning herself on the opposite dichotomy of the traditional bride. In essence as Saussure summarised (1915), their most precise characteristic is that they are what the others are not.

The identity of a ‘modern’ bride is represented as more free spirited, fashionable and not restricted to certain standards of norms. However, the brides on these images appear more as a fashion model. The postures of the models, the styles of dresses, as well as the makeup connote a certain level of sophisticated fashion photography. These images are comparatively more alluring than the ‘traditional’ counterparts. By comparison, the images in this category have the most signs of movement and liveliness. Because the bride and groom are together, the interactions between the two have resulted in a more vivid expressions and lifelike body language. They appear more realistic, more than the ‘traditional’ still counterparts. While they are created to be binary opposite of the traditional bride, the modern bride also represents a symbol of rebellion against the conservative and ‘traditionalised’ Thai identity. Breaking away from the mould of a demure feminine image, the ‘modern’ bride images exudes the confidence of a more modern woman who embraces her individuality through fashion choices, appearance and attitudes. These images are embedded with gender and cultural connotations, which have generated a series of binary oppositions that could be summarised in terms of features with distinct ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ connotations.

Traditional brides do not invite fantasy other than nostalgia. Although she is a bride, she is feminine, the constructed aura of demureness has distinguished her from the modern bride. The overall feel of the traditional bride on the covers is like a window to the past, it feels quiet, ancient, yet eerily familiar. The conventions of ‘Thainess’ have been framed by the conservativeness of traditionalism and these covers do not fail to reinforce this. The images of the traditional Thai brides have been constructed

to dissociate themselves from sex appeal, thus preserve the sanctity of ‘an ideal Thai femininity’.

Colours can express strong cultural connotations and therefore are used as identifiable marker of differences. Shades of brown, gold, orange and beige are used in images to evoke the allure of the past, that is undefined and imaginary - a reconstruction of an ancient mythical image or a vintage photograph. The hazy and nostalgic images such as these have become so common that people are conditioned to remember these as their past and simultaneously, to construct it through buying and consuming the product represented (Williamson 1978: 158). In this context, a traditional bride can be reconstructed through a traditional attire in shades of brown or gold completed with gold jewellery and a jasmine garland in the same way that a modern bride can be reconstructed through a white princess-style wedding gown, diamond jewellery and a bouquet.

Despite their obvious contrast, the images of ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ brides are the promises of the future for the readers. Not only do they provide a selection of identities of a bride within these images, but also a recipe to attain the desired images. According to Williamson (1978: 155), “the past and future are deliberately represented as vaguely as possible so that we may insert ourselves there.” There is no clear indication of the location specificity in these images, suggesting that the act of fulfilment as a bride can happen anywhere. So, through the act of looking at the images, the reader can insert himself into any of the desired images into the realm of the constructed fantasy.

The construction and juxtaposition of signs and codes interject romance and fantasy onto the images and then project them back to the reader. The presence of a full set of jewellery (earrings, necklace, bracelets and belts) suggests that the brides are from a wealthy family or at least have the means to afford these precious accessories. Although it has been made clear that these are images of a bride on the cover of a wedding magazine, there are no groom or no visible sign of masculine presence in any of these images. The absence of a groom could arguably be another myth that

feeds to the fantasy of romance, which is left to the imagination of the reader to do the work. Each of the signs presented has been chosen to generate a meaning. These images communicate their mythic meaning by means of signs, thus their representations of the imaginary are dependent on the symbolic and the signs do the communicating.

While the target audience of a wedding magazine is women and the cover image is for a woman to look at, the way the covers are constructed has taken into account the social code in which “being feminine means taking pleasure in looking at oneself, while simultaneously taking pleasure of being looked at by men” (Bignell 1997: 71). The images of the brides are constructed for brides-to-be to look at and emulate, so in the future on their wedding day they can perform the role of a bride to perfection and take pleasure at being looked at as a beautiful bride.

What modern brides lack in terms of inauthenticity of ‘Thainess’, they make up for it with an extra allure of luxurious qualities. The traditional Thai brides are the representative of purity, authenticity and traditions, which is the stereotypical view of how Thai femininity is constructed and led perceived by people in the society. These romantic images of the two types of brides have been constructed, embodied and are expected. Others that might deviate from the stereotypical images would possibly be received uncomfortably by their parents, wedding guests and society. Both styles of cover image photography are stylised to create the most perfect version of the bride, thus have framed Thai femininity within this “iron cage of perfection.” Even though a woman may already have her own unique style, when she becomes a bride, whether traditionalised or modern, her ideal image has already been constructed and recommended to her.

5.6.1 Distinctive differences between magazines' cover images of 'traditional' and 'modern' brides

Elements of 'Traditional' Connotations	Elements of 'Modern' Connotations
Darker background, monochromatic tones	Use of different bright and lighter coloured backgrounds
Low lighting, a lot of shadows, minimal brightness	A mixture of bright lights, shadows and brightness
Warm colours: brown, gold, beige, ivory and mauve pink	Ranges of warm to cool colours: white, pink, red, green, yellow, black and grey
Exposed shoulder (mostly turned sideways so the exposed shoulder is not clearly visible)	Exposed shoulders, bare back, legs and/or highlight cleavage
Similar stiff posture, standing still, turning slightly to the side	A variety of postures: standing in embrace, holding hands, relaxed stance and sitting down
Emotionless facial expression, direct gaze and minimal bashful smiles	A mixture of seductive gaze, joyful smiles and direct gaze
Delicate, demure and feminine model with darker hair colour	Sophisticated, confidence and sexy model with a different hair colour and styles
Darker shades of clothing such as brown and gold	Clothing are predominantly white or in light pastel shades
Brides hold jasmine garlands only	Brides hold different styles of bouquet (roses or other flowers)
Accessorised with golden tone jewellery	Accessorised with silver and diamond jewellery

5.6.2 Contrasting images of bridal photography: traditional vs modern

Illustrated above, the contrasting images between the traditionalised wedding and modernised wedding covers have a distinctive appeal: the traditionalised cover carries a mythical and ancient appeal whereas the modern cover has a more romantic and sophisticated appeal.

The bride on the traditional covers looks poised and reserved. Almost lifeless and still like a statue, she does not show any obvious emotion, nor gestures. The focal point of the model is her delicately embroidered Thai bridal wear which is composed of a beige *sabai* and a long skirt (*pha sin*) in brown with golden accents, some gold jewellery and a jasmine garland in her hands. The overall composition such as the background

and texts surrounding her are in neutral colours in the same shades as her attire such as brown, beige, gold, ivory and yellow to emphasise the classical allure that resembles a vintage photograph, an antique painting or a sepia effect on a camera.

The ‘traditional’ attire has a more ceremonious connotation whereas the ‘modern’ attire has a celebration connotation. Thus the posture of the models in a ‘traditional’ attire is stiffer, while the posture of the models in a ‘modern’ attire is not only relaxed but also seems joyful. The ‘modern’ cover bride looks more free-spirited and confident than her ‘traditionalised’ counterpart. Despite a different image, she is equally glamorous in a white strapless bridal gown holding a bouquet of colourful flowers. The usage of pastel colours on the cover especially pink and white, connotes the modern notion of love and romance which provides a striking contrast to the traditionalised style. The modern bride looks more youthful in comparison to the traditional one. Youthfulness is one of the many concerns that brides have; an article in WE November 2011 describe how many prospective brides are worried that traditional costumes would make them look older than they actually are since the overall appearance of traditional costumes tend to be linked with the notion of past, antiqueness and vintage. For instance, the traditional bridal hairstyle is an updo, which is styled to closely resemble the way Thai women in the past kept their hair short or neatly tied back, which may give the bride a more mature look. Brides in a traditionalised Thai costume cannot do the long wavy curls or wear a tiara since it would contradict with the traditional costume. Additionally, the ‘Disney princess image’ or a ‘Hollywood glam’ is also not an ideal image of traditional Thai femininity.

5.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, the interminglement of traditional and modern identity and the contrast they have demonstrated present some fascinating pictures of Thai weddings in the magazines. As one of the main ‘bibles’ for prospective brides, the magazines have put their best effort in representing an image of perfection and a romantic fantasy through wedding photography, interviews that recount the wedding and courtship, and a comprehensive wedding planning guide. From the ambiance of an

extravagant wedding and the happiness in the eyes of a picture perfect couple who are beautifully adorned in lavish costumes to the details of the ceremonial pattern of the wedding, all of these have been carefully produced and edited in order to encapsulate the best possible representation of a wedding into consumers' hands. The magazines are capturing, translating and emphasising the essence of a wedding into printed text and a photography format, which makes them a great pool of wedding references for this study.

The representations of weddings in magazines through the contrast between the traditional Thai wedding and the modern Thai wedding have demonstrated the concept of Orientalism that has constructed binary divisions - between the East and the West. Based on the assumption that they exist in opposition to one another: the East is conceived as being everything that the West is not: its 'alter ego' (McLeod 2000). The East is represented as unchanged and historical therefore serving to intensify a sense of the West's modernity. If the Westernised modern wedding is assumed and represented as luxurious, fashionable and romantic, then the traditional Thai wedding is ancient, native and sacred: a romantic film vs a historical museum. Thus traditional Thai and modern weddings are represented through disparate construction. Such indications suggest they are an ineluctable consequence to create a balance in the chaotic confusion of cultural diversification.

The elements of traditional and modern are discernible in the representation of Thai weddings. The traditional features in the Thai style weddings have been represented in a way that can be connected with classical literature and fantasy of the past. It is apparent from the examples gathered that what is considered authentic Thai has suppressed the notion of 'Thainess' in its traditionalised style and/or belonging to the past. The bride and the cover design are styled in monochromatic shades of beige, brown and gold. The overall effect is nostalgic and exotic. The images of traditional model brides are shot differently, they are flat and direct: less brilliantly lit and giving a less three-dimensional feel, thus less realistic by contrast. Although the makeup is unobtrusive, they appear less approachable and more extravagant due to the over accessorising with jewellery on their ears, neck, wrist and waist. The cover subtly restates the constructed ideal feminine quality of wealthy women. While the long and

lush hair of modern brides falling over the bride's cheek and over the shoulder exude a more sensuous appeal. The traditional brides have their sex appeal toned down by comparison with their hair tied neatly showing a full face of porcelain like flawless skin. Emotionless, they definitely look more mature and serious than their 'modern' counterpart.

There are numerous elements of Westernisation presented in Thai weddings, for instance the wedding attire, the usage of the English language in music and decorations and the multilayered wedding cake. It is now common for a bride and groom to host their wedding reception in a hotel, which is very much a resemblance with a wedding scene from a Hollywood movie. Furthermore, there are mentions of some Western brands of wedding "essentials" such as a Vera Wang wedding dress and a Cartier diamond ring in the wedding interviews. This not only demonstrates Westernisation but it is also an indication of class and taste, which shall be examined further in a later chapter. The Western ambiance is also communicated throughout the interviews with the couples' narrative of their journey of love and especially the wedding proposal. Therefore, Westernisation has done more than just make the wedding seem modern and Western, it has also transformed Thai brides into Western brides at the same time.

The 'modern' bridal identity is based on a fantasy of romance rather than a 'wooden cage of tradition'. Thus 'modern' brides are not confined to structure or to certain cultural confinements which have been demonstrated through more daring and adventurous poses, more provocative fashion choices and more skin exposure. If the 'traditional' Thai identity is to be compared to a 'wooden cage' that has been locked and stored on a high shelf, prohibiting anyone from touching or making changes to it, then 'modern' Thai identity can be compared to 'a diamond encrusted fish tank' filled with nothing but bubbles of fantasy, always floating around in a tank welcoming voyeurism.

The connotative powers of these elements when combined together can transport the meanings of ‘traditional Thainess’ to a nostalgic utopia, where everything remains preserved at its most classical state.

“For Barthes, the elements in this photograph will have meaning because what they represent is shared by people in a particular culture. We all know, for instance, what a suit means in terms of formality, business and professionalism. But it is also important to think about how these associations came about. The established associations that we find in visual compositions such as this photograph are not simply given but have become developed in cultures over time. Such established associations can, of course, appear neutral, but they are not.” (Machin 2007: 22)

It is clear that there is an attempt to separate ‘traditional’ from ‘modern’ on the magazine covers. In ‘traditional’ wear, participants seem like they had to be more careful in the way they conduct themselves; especially the bride, her composure must encapsulate the essence of femininity of a Thai bride. The ways couples are photographed together in two different styles have demonstrated the notion of what is considered to be appropriate in the context of fashion. A bride and groom wearing traditional costumes seem to be constrained by what they wear. It is as though they have to conform to the imagined ideas of ‘Thainess’ or to the appropriate ‘traditional’ Thai ways of conduct. The Thai concept of ‘*reap roi*’ or timid and well-mannered that comes attached with traditional wear is a mould that is being used to frame the bride and groom according to social expectations. The myth of authenticity and traditions are constructed, while the bride and groom assume this allure through the consumption of traditional Thai wedding. They have transformed into an invented version of themselves as existed in yesteryears.

6

Myths of ‘Thainess’ in Wedding Magazines

“...To turn vaporised Thainess into a solid sign or signifier, one needs an appropriate, readily recognisable ‘Thai’ form for it. That form, therefore has to be old, venerable, immutable and hence, by the same token, rather useless, irrelevant and fossilised in present-day circumstances.” (Tejapira 2001: 214)

6.1 Introduction

Having examined the differences in which ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ are constructed in Chapter 5, this chapter further discusses the myth of ‘Thainess’ (*khvam-pen-thai*) constructed through the representations of Thai brides and Thai wedding in magazines. The notion of ‘Thainess’ is a loose term, its broad-spectrum overlays the aspect of race, heritage, history and culture. However, the scope of this research has limited the examination of ‘Thainess’ only to that constructed and represented within the wedding magazines.

First and foremost, it must be noted that an absolute or pure ‘Thainess’ uncontaminated by Western or foreign influences is a nationalistic fantasy. It is impossible to pinpoint certain thing as the purest Thai. Despite an attempt to represent the notion of ‘Thainess’ with the allure of traditionalism and authenticity, ‘Thainess’ exists in its ambiguities and awkwardness, that has been transformed and reconstructed as an illusion that Thais imagine themselves (see Tejapira 2001, Harrison, Jackson, Winichakul and Kitiarsa 2010). From whatever angle ‘Thainess’ is now viewed, *farang* influences are simply inevitable and contemporary forms of ‘Thainess’ are incomplete without the allure of *farang-ness* (Kitiarsa 2010: 73).

According to Tejapira (2001) 'Thainess' is the object of desire, which is becoming more elusive in the midst of globalisation. Thus, the symptom of 'cultural schizophrenia' is evident in the interiorisation of 'Thainess' as people need more constant reminder to express their internal their 'Thainess.' However, a signifier of this desire 'Thainess' have been trapped in within an ancient frame. Tejapira (2001) argued that 'Thainess' is sublimated:

To turn vaporised Thainess into a solid sign or signifier, one needs an appropriate, readily recognisable 'Thai' form for it. That form, therefore, has to be old, venerable, immutable and hence, by the same token, rather useless, irrelevant and fossilised in present-day circumstances (Tejapira 2001: 214).

The word 'Thai' when used in the context of wedding and fashion is used to describe a traditional wedding ceremony and traditional costumes. 'Thai' or 'Thai style' are used throughout the magazines to emphasise traditionalism or authenticity of a certain image, especially to contrast with the Western or modern styles. As previously discussed in Chapter 5, nine issues (out of 48 issues) of the magazine, in which the bride wears a traditional wedding costume, are distinguished from the other issues in terms of style of clothing, page composition as well as the main headlines, which clearly label these issues as 'Thai style' or 'Thai' issue. Here, nine magazines with a 'traditionalised Thai' cover or as the magazine has referred to as a 'Thai issue' will be examined to illustrate the representation of 'Thainess'. Through the magazines 'traditional' costumes are referred to as 'Thai dress' (*chud-thai*), while the 'traditional' wedding ceremony is referred to as 'Thai ceremony' (*pi-tee-thai*). Although the magazine is using the word 'Thai' or 'Thai style' to contrast with the non-Thai wedding attire and ceremony, throughout this study what is labelled as 'Thai' (in Thai by the magazine), will be referred to as 'traditional Thai', as opposed to 'modern Thai' to avoid confusion. It is not my intention to classify things in simplified binary forms, in which one thing must be labelled as Thai while another is labelled as foreign, but rather I want to illustrate the way in which these magazines have made

such a distinction and constructed this unique notion of ‘Thainess’ through images and texts.

This chapter is presented into two main parts to demonstrate the narratives of ‘Thainess.’ The first section discusses three myths of beautiful Thai bodies of ‘Thai’ bride as constructed by the magazine: a heroine from classical literature, a lady of an aristocratic family, and a lady from pre-modern Siam. The second section discusses the constructed connection between ‘Thai’ wedding ceremony and wedding auspiciousness. The third part discusses the juxtaposition and cultural hybridity that have transpired through in the constructed notion of ‘Thainess’. The last part concludes the chapter.

6.2 The epitome of a perfect ‘Traditional Thai’ bride

The “ideal” image of a perfect Thai bride is one which has been constructed and disseminated throughout the wedding magazines, as Chapter 5 discusses how ‘Thainess’ is expressed through ‘traditional Thai’ brides. This section focuses mainly on how beautiful bodies are defined and how an image of a perfect ‘Thai’ bride is constructed through language and other semiotic resources. ‘Traditional Thai’ brides are represented in the magazine in three different ways: a heroine from classical literature, a lady of an aristocratic family and a gentle and demure lady from pre-modern Siam.

The composition of a ‘traditionalised Thai’ bride involves a ‘traditional’ wedding dress (*chud-thai*) which includes a *sabai* - a long piece of cloth, similar to a shawl (it is worn wrapped around the chest, with one end longer than the other, draping diagonally over the right shoulder, with end drops behind the back), a *pha-sin* - a traditional skirt, worn by wrapping around the waist or a *chongkraben* - traditional style pants (it is worn by wrapping some material around the waist and twisting both ends together, pulling between the legs and tucking it in the back of the waist; it can be worn by both

women and men). Below are the discussions about how magazines have represented the bride wearing a *chud-thai* in their fashion editorial.

"Because a wedding day is the only occasion when a woman can wear a traditional Thai costume. And since they have not had the chance to wear one before, they have no idea how to choose. Find out in this column." (WE October 2013: 104)

6.2.1 The Thai bride as a heroine of classical literature

The Thai classical literature is full of beautiful heroines (*nang-nai-wannakadee*). The beauty that radiated near and far have made these heroines an object of desire amongst the male characters, especially the handsome hero in their respective stories. Also, since the 'traditional' brides and the fictional heroines both wear traditional Thai costumes, it is inevitable that these characters become an ideal image for which 'traditional' Thai brides are told to emulate.

"Who can be as beautiful as Thai heroines in classical literatures?" (WE October 2014: 66)



Figure 6.1 'Who can be as beautiful as heroines in classical literature (nang-nai-wannakadee)?' (WE October 2014: 66)

Above is the title of a fourteen-page fashion spread in the October 2014 issue of WE magazine. The model is portrayed as eight different heroines from Thai classic literature in different traditional Thai dresses. The soft light with yellow hue and images of model wearing traditional dress wandering through the forest emphasised the folklore theme of the narrative.

Manora wears a lotus petal pink dress completed with a sabai made from an Italian lace embroidered with beads and a pha-sin made from a jasmine jacquard Turkish silk. This dress is very suitable for Thai ladies with olive undertones because it will make the skin looks fair and glowing.

Sita wears a golden tone pink Thai silk dress. Her sabai is embroidered with real Swarovski crystals. Luxurious and sweet like a heroin from classical literature.

Bussaba is in a classic Thai dress, her sabai is delicately embroidered with some gold threads, matching perfectly with a golden orange pha-sin. This is perfect for women who like to look distinguished and elegant.

Rojana wears a pink gold Indian silk dress, embroidered with crystal beads. This dress is suitable for women of all skin tones, because it makes the skin looks brighter. Adding elegance for a bride to look as beautiful as a noble lady.

Sakuntala wears a lotus petal pink Indian silk pha-sin with a golden white French lace sabai. Another dress that makes the bride look most beautiful and demure on her special day.

Sanonnoi is in a pastel pink dress embroidered with gold threads in a flowery jacquard. It looks beautiful and exquisite. Any bride who likes delicate embroidery will be impressed.

Suvannamalee is in a pink dress, a distinguished pha-sin with French lace sabai is suitable for a sweet and gentle lady with slim figure.

Mantana wears an embroidered gold Indian silk with a pastel pink chiffon lining and a gold Indian silk pha-sin. This dress is suitable for a chic and sweet bride for a traditional Thai ceremony.

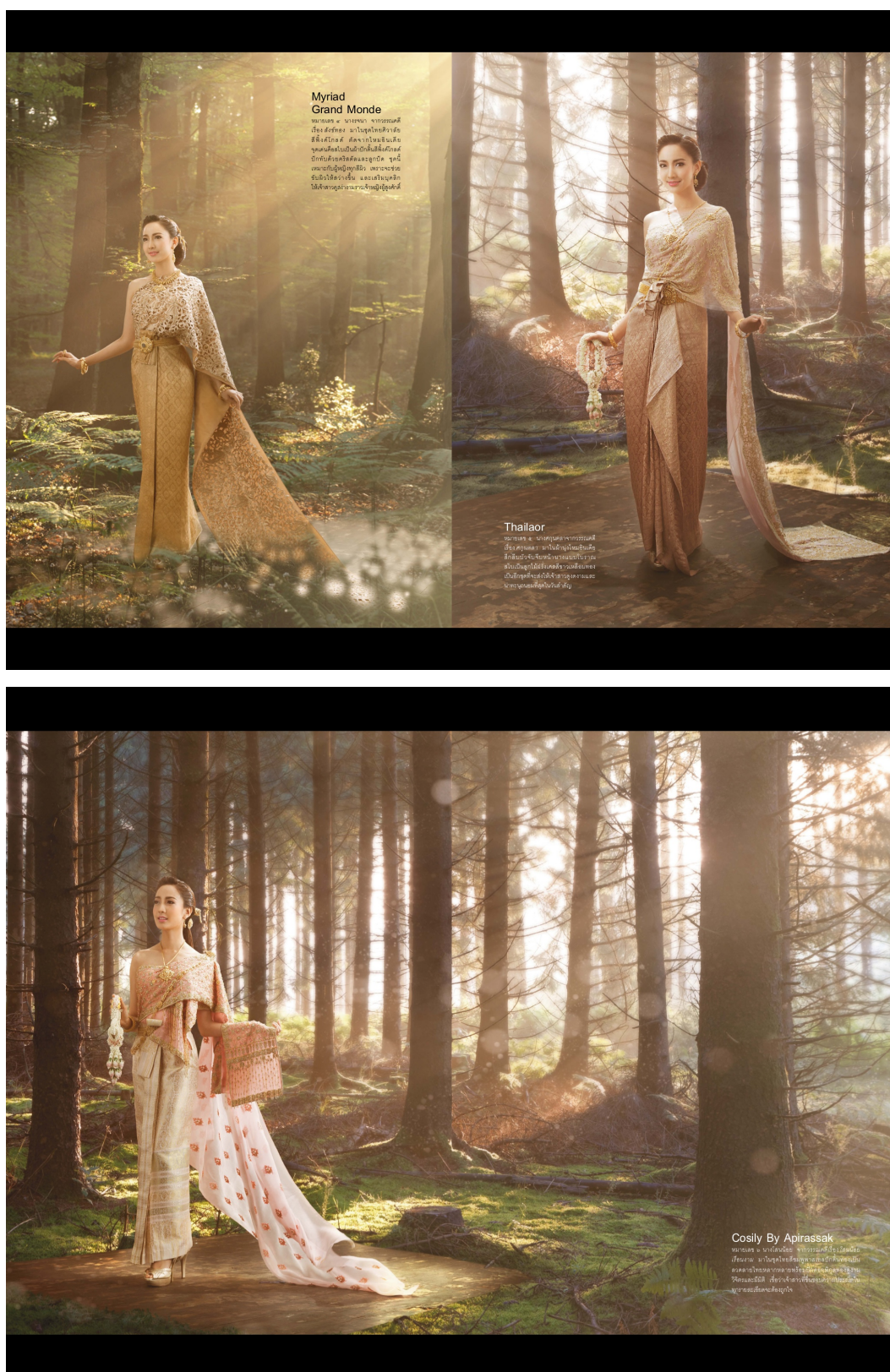


Figure 6.3 Rojana (top left), Sakuljala (top right), and Sanonoi (bottom) (WE October 2014: 72-75)

Notice that none of these captions mention details about these heroines other than their names. Also, no clear connection has been made regarding the style of the dress and the identity of the represented fictional character. Apart from the examples above, other fashion photographs and captions do not specify from which classical literature the bride is being compared to. They generally have written as 'beautiful as a heroine from classical literature.' The descriptions have generalised the identity of different heroines into one mould of an ideal 'traditional' Thai lady. They are delicate and beautiful, with flawless and smooth porcelain skin and a slim figure. This could either be because the overall physical characteristics and personalities of these heroines are similar or the magazine simply does not want to confuse its readers whom may not be familiar with certain characters. But whatever the reason may be, this image of perfection has retained a representation of 'traditional' Thai women within a small, one dimensional frame of a fictionalised beauty ideal, as demonstrated in the captions below taken from the traditional costume fashion photographs.

This model is sweet and charmingly beautiful like a nymph from Himavanta (WE October 2014: 2).

This delicate lotus pink costume which includes a Thai silk skirt embroidered with shiny beads and a French lace sabai makes the bride beautiful and fair (skinned) as a female heroine in classical literature (WE June 2014: 79).

(...) with Thai silk in golden pink and embroidered real Swarovski crystal, luxurious and sweet as a female heroine in classical literature (WE October 2014: 70).

Turkish silk embroidered with gold threads to create an ancient appeal, together with a French lace sabai embroidered with pink gold crystals, makes the wearer look sweet and exquisite like a female heroine in classical literature (WE June 2013: 66).

This extravagant dress is a delicate work in which the beads are embroidered into a large piece of sabai. Although it is heavy, when worn with a silk pha-sin, the bride would look as exquisite as a female heroine in classical literature (WE October 2013: 68).

However, in the process of transformation of a bride, an article has compared it to a story about one of these characters.

To attain all the qualities of femininity like in classical literature is rather difficult. So women should embrace and maintain their most attractive features. If you are not satisfied with any of your particular features, try and fix them with patience, just like Mantana from 'The Legend of the Rose'

who had to wait patiently for one day each month, when she was able to transform into a beautiful woman. And every time she made her appearance (after transformation), her beauty did not fail to disappoint onlookers (WE May 2008: 118).

The process of a woman's transformation into a beautiful bride is being compared to the one of a fictional character in literature who transforms herself into a beautiful woman once a month. By suggesting that even though beauty is a quality that not everyone is born with, it can be enhanced if a woman has enough diligence to make such effort. The magazine emphasises that beauty is a necessary quality for a bride and one which requires patience to achieve. Even though *Mantana*, is a beautiful woman for just one day, she makes sure that her beauty would be most appreciated by making an appearance in public in order to be looked at by others. In a similar way, a bride is taught to make herself look as beautiful as she could because she will also be looked at by her groom and her wedding party, not once a month (like *Mantana*), but possibly for just one day for the rest of her life.

Nevertheless, for women who are not blessed with natural born beauty, an encouragement is given by comparing them to a fictional ugly sea witch (*pi-sua-sa-mut*). Furthermore, poetry prose taken from these classical novels is used to describe and praise the beauty of brides in traditional costumes. These poems are written in old language uncommonly used today, and are used throughout the magazine with 'traditional' covers.

"Nothing is impossible, for example, an ugly giant sea (Pea-sua-samut) witch can transform herself into a beautiful woman, beautiful enough to attract the handsome hero of the story (Phra-aphai-manee). (Thus) Women with wrinkles, dark spots, scars or sun spots have nothing to worry about." (WE May 2008: 118)

The unmatched beauty and the desirability of these fictional characters have become a representation of the ideal image of a 'traditional' Thai bride, whereas the witch is used to compare women who have yet to achieve a standard of beauty. Throughout the magazines, the brides in traditional costume are represented as being as beautiful as heroines in classical literature. Therefore, when a traditional costume is

worn, a woman has immediately been fictionalised to associate and compare her beauty with a ‘fictional’ ideal of beauty. She is not only a bride, but a mirror of a heroine in classical literature.

It is important to note that the magazines do not provide readers with many details about these fictional characters and their background stories, other than their names in the above examples from October 2014 issues. But in other issues, they are simply referred to as heroines in classic literature (*nang-nai-wannakadee*). The magazines may have already assumed the readers’ knowledge of Thai classics, or it could simply be that it does not matter what the names of these characters are since they are known collectively as women with extraordinary beauty, desired by many male characters in their respective tales. As long as a traditional dress is worn, a bride immediately represented as the embodiment of a classic heroine. Thus, this comparison between a bride and a heroine in Thai classic literature have framed ‘Thainess’ within the realm of fantasy.

6.2.2 Thai bride as a noble elite

The second frame of beauty for ‘traditional’ Thai beauty is the beauty of elite women. Due to the lavishness of traditional costumes, the magazine has associated the image of brides in traditional costumes with the status and prestige of the aristocracy as illustrated in the examples below.

More elegant than anyone in an aristocrat style with a costume inspired by fashion during Rama V reign, a pale pink chiffon and lace top with silvery grey traditional pants (WE November 2011: 104).

Sweet and beautiful like a daughter of a king in mythology (...) using gold jewellery with a pink tone costume make the look complete (WE November 2012: 110).

During Ayutthaya⁵ period, a bride who was the daughter of an aristocrat or wealthy family would wear gold rings on her middle finger, the ring finger and the baby finger, or as much as she could. It would be great if brides were still doing this now (WE October 2013: 12).

⁵ Ayutthaya was a Siamese kingdom founded in 1351 which lasted until 1767.

An embroidered silvery gold sabai with a pha-sin embroidered with gold threads, glittering and elegant as a dress worn by a noble lady (WE October 2013: 69).

Beautiful in a Rama V style dress, long sleeved and closed neck blouse made from French lace, and traditional pants made from a pastel pink silk, dainty as an aristocrat lady (WE June 2014: 71).

A dark red Thai dress with a sabai embroidered with gold threads, beads and a woven Indian silk pha-sin. It matches well with the copper tone jewellery making the bride look like a lady of a noble family, elegant and confident (WE June 2014: 75).

Making you a noble lady with an authentically beautiful Thai style (WE June 2014: 106).

Beautiful like the daughter of a king of a mythical city with delicately embroidered gold fabric. This makes you beautiful like a mythical Thai lady (WE October 2014: 92).

The lavishness and delicate details of a traditional costume is not only a symbol of wealth, but also of social class because the fashion of a ‘traditional’ costume used as bridal wear has been adapted from the style worn by elites since the 14th century (WE October 2014: 61). According to these magazines, when a traditional Thai costume is worn, a woman’s persona has immediately been elevated to resemble an aristocrat lady or someone from a noble household.

From the examples above, traditional dress is a signifier of a bride’s resemblance to elite women. The essence of a traditional Thai dress includes the complexity of putting on a traditional dress, the delicately embroidered silk and the accompanied jewellery. All of these have been made into a symbolic representation of wealth. Moreover, the composition and photography of these traditional costumes have emphasised the symbolic sense of prestige.

For instance, the three images below were taken against grand structures: a grand marble interior with multiple staircases and tiled floors, similar to a museum in figure 6.3, an old temple in figure 6.4 and an open plan living area with marble floors and large windows in figure 6.5. In figure 6.4, a bride is accompanied with another four people in less extravagant costumes, the way she stands with a lady holding an umbrella to provide shade connotes a sense of higher status relations like an

aristocratic lady and her handmaiden or female servants. Also the tone of these images is subtle, with low saturations (except for the dress), connoting a sense of subtle elegance. The gaze of the brides is not aimed at the readers, but to a further point in the distance. Together with the angle of interactions in which these images were taken, a higher status is created by the vertical angle that positions readers at a lower angle and thus require them to 'look up' to these brides. The myths of traditional beauty have been built around women's physical attributes such as facial features and skin tone, also an underlying perception of brides as beautiful and feminine. Such representation of traditional Thai brides has disseminated, as unique in terms of identity as a cultural specific bride as well as belonging to a high class of the society.



Figure 6.5 “Sweet and beautiful like the daughter of a king in mythology (...) using gold jewellery with a pink tone costume make the look complete.” (WE November 2012: 110)



Figure 6.6 “An embroidered silvery gold sabai with a pha-sin embroidered with gold threads, glittering and elegant as a dress worn by a noble lady.” (WE October 2013: 69)



Figure 6.7 "A dark red Thai dress with a sabai embroidered with gold threads, beads and a woven Indian silk pha-sin. It matches well with the copper tone jewellery making the bride look like a lady of a noble family, elegant and confident." (WE June 2014: 75)

6.2.3 The Thai bride as a lady from pre-modern Siam

The magazine has been trying to maintain the connection between the image of the 'traditional' costume with the 'imagined' image of a lady in pre-modern Siam by positioning the 'traditional' costume as a 'time machine' which is capable of making a bride look like she is from a different era. A nostalgic fantasy about the pre-modern Siam can be fulfilled by the act of wearing a 'traditional' costume as illustrated in the examples below. In the September 2012 issue, the wedding dress fashion photography is titled 'Drawing of the past,' which features a collection of 'traditional' Thai dresses spread across fourteen pages. In the WE October 2013 issue, the setting of the fashion spread is set to emulate the old style photography studio with an old style camera and a photographer taking pictures of a models dressed in 'traditional' Thai dresses.



Figure 6.8 'Drawing of the Past' (WE September 2012: 108-109)



Figure 6.9 'Portraits' of ladies from pre-modern Siam (WE October 2013: 94-95)



Figure 6.10 How to wear a 'sabai' like a Thai woman of the past (WE October 2014: 60-61)

(...) it is very special and beautiful (...) I feel like a female character in classical literature, it's like I went back to pre-modern Thailand (WE November 2012: 96).

Many brides who have worn (traditional) Thai costume like this with a full set of jewellery will feel proud, like they have gone back to pre-modern Thailand, people dressed beautifully and paid attention to styling, which is different from today's simple fashion. Although the process (of getting into a traditional costume) takes time, the difficulties make the wearer understand the meticulousness of people in the past (WE November 2012: 100).

Beautiful like a true lady of ancient Thailand with a fully embroidered gold sabai, and traditional pants made from a delicately women Thai fabric (WE October 2013: 71).

The traditional Thai bridal fashion and jewellery have been adapted to emulate the female fashion of Thai elites in 19th century. Thus, it is important that the choice of bridal wear and jewellery can express the social status and luxurious taste of the pre-modern Thai ladies (WE October 2014: 61).

In the past, when a woman wore only a sabai without another layer embroidered cloth (sa-pak), she would wear more pieces of jewellery than usual to look more luxurious and communicate her financial and social status (WE October 2014: 61).

Nostalgia and the desire to keep in touch with one's cultural heritage are fulfilled by the reinvention of the past through the traditionalised wedding. 'Thainess' has been transpired within the intermixture of symbols, signs and traditions within these texts and images. The notion of traditional Thai is woven into the delicate embroidery and silk fabric of these costumes. This works because this style of fashion does not exist as part of the Thais' daily life, thus making an intriguing fantasy in which people of modern day Thailand yearn for. The traditionalised Thai wedding attire is thus regarded as a 'time machine' that can transport the bride, groom and the rest of the wedding party back in time to be in the presence of the woman from the imagined pre-modern Siam.

6.3 The standard of 'traditional Thai's beauty

What does it mean to be beautiful in the traditional 'Thai style'? What is the standard of perfection built around the image of a Thai bride in the magazines? How to be a bride the 'Thai way'? The complexity of the finely intricate details of clothes and jewellery discussed above is a part of being a 'traditionalised' Thai bride. The magazines have also laid out the steps for the bride to look beautiful the 'Thai' way.

6.3.1 Beautiful Thai bodies

The magazines' definition of Thai beauty is not a complex one. To be beautiful is to have flawless complexion, glowing milky white or porcelain skin and a slim figure as represented by the models in the magazines. Various definitions of beauty have been taken from the prose found in classical Thai literature to be featured besides the brides in traditional wear to demonstrate an exotic sublimity that can only be apparent in the images of a traditional bride.

6.3.2 Thai beauty and primitive beauty regimen

The magazines are offering various recommendations to their readers to beautify themselves in preparation for the big day. However, looking beautiful as a Thai bride is distinguishably different from looking beautiful as a regular bride. Traditional

beauty is represented as unusual, yet captivating with the allure of exoticness. In the Thai issues, especially in the WE May 2008, June 2012 and October 2013's ones, there are extensive beauty articles featuring some home remedy using local ingredients and constructed images of what a traditionalised Thai bride should look like. An example below illustrates that the notion of 'Thainess' represented here is accompanied by the use of local fruits or herb as beauty remedies instead of packaged and branded skincare products. In addition, there are recommended do-it-yourself facials instead of using beauty gadgets or commercialised beauty institute such as a dermatologist clinic. It is implied here that a traditionalised Thai bride makes an effort to make herself looking beautiful in a traditionalised way instead of a commercialised approach.

1. Cut a slice of aloe vera, wash away the residue and use the aloe vera jelly as a face mask. Rinse with water. This will keep the skin hydrated and rejuvenated. This is also a great remedy for skin allergies and reduces inflammation.

2. Juice a starfruit and dilute the juice with a little water. Apply on the face. This will brighten and smooth the skin layer.

3. Lightly massage your face before going to bed every night to stimulate the lymph node and blood circulation to give the skin its radiance back (WE May 2008: 118).

Below are some articles about some traditional hair dying techniques with some local herbs as well as using traditional Thai massage as a beauty therapy to combat the wedding planning related stress. Recommended skin care products are those made from tropical and herbal ingredients such as coconut oil, ginger, turmeric, lime, jasmine and lotus. The magazine is associating the notion of 'traditional' Thai and 'Thainess' with 'natural,' 'local' and non-globalised products and beautifying processes.

Achieve the silky smooth skin for the special day with a naturally extracted skin care brand, that's also authentically Thai (WE October 2013: 118).

The first spa that offers massaging techniques that have been inspired by the traditional Thai dance movements (WE October 2013: 118).

Massaging techniques that have been inspired from the methods used in the palace. Together with aromatic ingredients including lemongrass, cardamom, coriander seed and sesame oil, for the balance of the body, mind and spirit (WE October 2013: 120).



The image of the ‘traditional’ Thai bride has been desexualised with an over emphasis on the preferred ‘Thai femininity’, that is sweet, gentle and demure, just like a lady of pre-modern Siam. The composition of traditional costumes also plays a role in constraining the body movements of the wearer. The long and fitted skirt or *pha-sin* dictates small and slow steps to be taken to avoid tripping. The *sabai* makes the wearer remain conscious of her movement in order to not disrupt the shape and fold of the fabric. Overall, the thick silk fabric as well as the heavy full set of jewellery make the wearer move slower than in everyday wear. This is an example how a body is under the control of clothing one wears.

(...) even if it takes hours to get dressed in traditional Thai costumes, (brides) do not mind because it is their one in a life time opportunity to be beautiful like a (traditional) Thai lady (WE October 2014: 60).

When a woman wears a 'sabai' her manners immediately become composed (WE November 2012: 82).

Flawlessly beautiful according to the authentic Thai standard at a distance and up close (WE October 2013: 72).

This 'Thai' feminine qualities are suppressing the 'traditional' image of women under the standard of beauty but this is a different kind of beauty, a beauty that has been desexualised. These 'traditional' items of clothing have desexualised the image of the bride, by elevating her to an identity which needs '*khwam-na-tanu-tanom*' (gentle and to be cherished or preserved). A bride in traditional costume is a representation of *kunlasatri* (ladies of good birth and breeding), which is the Thais' preferred femininity, reserved and demure. However, the traditional bridal costumes are not entirely conservative, they can accentuate the shape of the wearer's body more prominently than the white and puffy wedding gown. The tight fitted *pha-sin* can accentuate the shape of a woman's buttocks, while the *sabai* which is tightly wrapped around the chest can highlight its shape as well as revealing an entire right shoulder. Regardless, the traditional costumes have been desexualised in the magazines through the language used to describe them as well as the posture of models and camera angles.

It is worth noticing the posture of the brides in traditional costumes in the examples below. They are either standing straight or turning to their right side, in a way that can reveal the delicate embroidery of their *sabai* and/or not revealing their exposed shoulders to the camera. Their posture of stillness and expressionless have made these brides resemble a statue or a painting more than a woman.



Figure 6.12 WE traditional covers 2010-2014

The representation of these images as bridal perfection is a subtle reinforcement for the readers to emulate. Not only do prospective brides have to emulate the beauty of these models, but also the beauty of these models as the personification of the 'idealised' and 'imagined' beauty of classic literature's heroines, ladies of aristocratic

family and ladies of pre-modern Siam. The representation of a 'Thai' idealised image of brides in these magazines has demonstrated a patriarchal ideology, which implies that a woman can emulate these images of a perfect bride for her groom and society by being beautiful: having beautiful facial features with fair and glowing skin, maintaining a slim figure and most importantly looking elegant in an elaborated Thai traditional costume and jewellery, thereby inviting the gaze to be fixed upon her.

Despite the numerous pages of fashion photography and articles, countless styles of traditional bridal wear worn by different models in ten issues of magazine, over the span of seven years, the only one emphasis that has been continuously repeated is that a Thai bride is valued according to her beauty. There are five main beauty ideals which have been represented as Thai's images of perfection: beautiful like a heroine in classical literature, beautiful and elegant like a lady of an aristocratic family, beautiful like a lady in pre-modern Siam; these Thai's beauty ideals can be achieved by using local herbal ingredients in a beauty regime and gentle and feminine manners. Instead of opening prospective brides to the possibilities of beauty ideals, these images are trapping them under these myths of constructed 'traditional Thai' bridal facade.

6.4 Thai wedding and auspiciousness

The representation of a traditionalised Thai wedding in the magazines has revealed that 'Thainess' is constructed from an Orientalist perspective and has been traditionalised with nostalgia for the 'imagined' past. The language used and the images depicted as the representation of 'Thainess' have been a reinvention of what past Thai is 'imagined' to be. Hence, the traditionalised Thai wedding has become a re-enactment of a fantasy for pre-modern Siam. Despite being a reconstructed style, the magazines have portrayed traditionalised Thai wedding as a destination where a bride and a groom can reconnect with their heritage and embody the richness of one's cultural traditions. The findings have revealed that a traditionalised Thai wedding is constructed around beliefs of auspiciousness (*khwam-siri-mongkol*). However, there are a few recurring elements that can be observed in the majority of a Thai

wedding ceremony such as the presence of Buddhist monks, parents and bride price (*sinsod*). Together, these aspects have become a representative of a 'Thai wedding' as constructed by wedding magazines.

It is undeniable that superstition is a part of Thai's culture, which has been ingrained into the very core of the society so that it has become a part of the daily life of people in Thailand (Jackson 2010). Superstition has permeated its relevance into many aspects of life and wedding is not an exception. Thai wedding magazines, although how modern or westernised they are portrayed to be, cannot deny or ignore the fact that the value that Thai people have given to superstition is substantial. These magazines have frequently written about wedding superstitions and most couples interviewed by the magazines have mentioned the crucial role that wedding superstitions have upon their decision to have a wedding ceremony. Wedding superstition serves to give reassurance to the bride and groom that the marriage will be a blissful one.

Auspiciousness is a prevalent concept throughout many aspects of Thai cultural rituals, especially in Thai wedding ceremonies because people want to make sure that an auspicious time will likely result in a prosperous and successful marriage. Auspiciousness has encapsulated the mythical prospect of everlasting prosperity and bliss, which is undeniably the preferred consequence of a long-term commitment such as marriage. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that couples who have invested a considerable amount of time and money to plan an elaborate their wedding to adhere to superstition as an emotional insurance that promises a successful outcome, however trivial they may seem. Also superstitions and traditional beliefs are considered to be a part of the traditions of Thai ritual practices and therefore is mentioned and emphasised more in the traditional Thai wedding.

A Thai wedding ceremony is an auspicious and complicated event. Each and every step of the ceremony is equally significant because symbolic auspicious meanings are embedded within (WE May 2008: 22).

6.4.1 Auspicious love

The narratives of traditionalised Thai wedding have demonstrated the underlying Thai's beliefs about fate and superstitions, even in the present day's globalised society. Firstly, even before the wedding day, finding love also requires auspiciousness; In the WE June 2012 issue, there is an article titled 'Magic for Love' which informs readers of the temples and shrines popular amongst those wishing to find a soulmate and success in their love life.

Shrine A: It is believed that couples who write their names on a kite and offer it to the shrine will be blessed with a long and stable relationship.

Shrine B: The trick for this shrine is to offer the Buddha statue a pair of candle sticks and spritz blessed water on your lover.

Shrine C: This shrine is popular amongst those wishing for success in love life because it is believed that the goddess Lakshmi is loved by the god Vishnu.

Shrine D: It is believed that this shrine can grant romantic wishes because when this god used to live among humans on Earth he only loved one woman all his life, even though he had one hundred thousand concubines.

Shrine E: It is believed that any woman wishing for love will find success after praying at this shrine, especially women above 30, they are likely to find a soulmate and get married soon. They should pray on a Tuesday and their offerings need to include rice noodles, fish sauce, eight sticks of incense, eight sticks of candle, eight stem of lotus and eight Thai baht. After the incense has burned, eat the rice noodles because the long strings of noodles are believed to be able to connect to one's soulmate.

Shrine F: Anyone who prays at this shrine will find success in their love life and friendship. But anyone with red flowers, red clothing and red jewellery is prohibited from entering the shrine because red is believed to be the colour of blood, which is a result of war (WE June 2012: 92-94).

6.4.2 Auspicious day and time

Astrology is one of the main concerns at the initial stage of any wedding preparation. At the beginning of the year, famous astrologers in the country will publish their predictions for each zodiac sign as well as the auspicious dates throughout the year. Each zodiac year will fall in unlucky year every few years so when either the bride or groom happen to be in their unlucky year, the wedding ceremony is usually postponed until it becomes more auspicious. In most issues, there is a calendar of the auspicious days for each month in that particular year which has been calculated by

astrologers as suitable for a wedding day. Additionally, there is an easy-to-read table that outlines which zodiac signs are in their lucky or unlucky year, completed with what to do to avoid bad luck for those in their unlucky year.

Finding an auspicious wedding date should take the birthdays of the bride and groom into account. Even number months (duen-koo⁶: February, April, June, August, October) are preferable for weddings, except December because it is believed to be a mating season for animals. Although, September is an exception because it is believed to be the month of progress (the Thai word for nine sounds the same as the Thai word for progress) (Wedding July - September 2003: 30).

An auspicious time to have a wedding starts in June, which is the beginning of a rainy seasons and planting season for farmers. This is an auspicious time to start a new family as the newlyweds can expect abundance in food from the upcoming harvesting season (WE May 2008: 38).

Asking the bride's family for her hand in marriage (pi-tee-sue-kor) must be done with sweet words. The bride's family must keep their home clean to welcome the groom's party. Then, the adults (who consult with the astrologer too) determine the compatibility between the bride and groom. On some occasions, either family can deny the marriage proposal citing astrological incompatibility (Wedding January - March 2002: 134).

It is believed that a wedding should not be held on a Thursday because according to an ancient Thai folklore, the daughter of Jupiter got married to Sun, but cheated on him with Mars. Therefore, it is considered unlucky and most people avoid Thursdays. Towards the end of July is the beginning of the harvest season in Thailand and hence considered to be an auspicious time to start a new family. This is also the origin of why the first couple of months the newlyweds are called "kao-mai-pla-mun", which means the beginning of the harvest season and when fish are fully grown and most delicious. This means that everything for the newlyweds is pleasant and perfect as they are deeply in love and start a new family comfortably in abundance. (WE May 2008: 40).

Apart from an auspicious date for a wedding, there is also an auspicious time for the ceremony. A sample schedule of a Thai wedding ceremony is outlined below indicating precisely what should be done at which hour of the day:

7 am - arrival of the monks, pray, make merit and give alms to the monks, the bride and groom receive the blessings

8.15 am - end of the Buddhist ceremony, time for light snacks and refreshments for the guests

9.09 am – the engagement parade begins, the leader of the parade must already be married and neither divorced nor widowed

9.39 am – the bride and groom pay respect to their parents and/or elder relatives

⁶ Deun-koo is a Thai word for even number months: 2nd month (February), 4th month (April), 6th month (June), 8th month, 10th month (October), 12th month (December).

10.09 am – the water ceremony begins; a bride must always sit on the left of the groom throughout the ceremony (WE June 2011: 91)

Notice that the schedule starts at 9th minute after the hour or half an hour because number nine is an auspicious number for Thais since it sounds similar to the Thai word for progress or step forward. Following this strict schedule also makes a practical sense because it ensures a smooth flow in every step of what could have been a hectic day, especially for a host of hundreds of guests. Additionally, the bride and groom are ensured peace of mind knowing that things have been carried out in the most auspicious manners as possible for a blissful start of their marriage.

6.4.3 Auspicious colours

Auspiciousness can also be enhanced with the use of the right colours, from wedding car to beddings for the newlyweds and the wedding attire worn by the bride and groom.

Choosing the right colour of bedding helps prolonging the marriage. The colour of bedding used on the wedding night should not be white because it is the colour of death. But if white is favoured, it is preferable to opt for some white bedding with a coloured trimming or prints. Nonetheless, pastel colours like pink or blue are more recommended (WE May 2008: 34).

There are a variety of colour choices for the traditional costumes, they are not limited to white like the modern wedding gown, which symbolises innocence and virginity of a bride. Instead, Thais use colours for auspiciousness rather than to communicate meaning. For instance, if a wedding is on a Wednesday, the bride would choose a green fabric for her long skirt or *pha-sin*, which is an auspicious colour for Wednesday. The WE November 2012 issue provides an auspicious colour guideline for the readers to follow below, which is also believed to be how Thai ladies dressed in the past.

On a Monday, wear a pastel yellow bottom with a pale blue or magenta top or wear dove blue on the bottom, with a magnolia red top.

On a Tuesday, wear a mauve pink or violet bottom with a green top or a light green bottom with a pastel purple top

On a Wednesday, wear a pea green or steel grey bottom with a yellow top

On a Thursday, wear a leaf green bottom with a ruby red top or reddish orange bottom with a pale green top

On a Friday, wear a royal blue bottom with a yellow top

On a Saturday, wear a violet bottom with a green top

On a Sunday, wear the same colours as on a Thursday or a lychee red or maroon bottom with a green top.

Below is an excerpt from an article by a Thai fortune-teller with tip for choosing an auspicious colour for a wedding car in WEDDING April - May 2011 issue.

Bride and groom must be busy finding an auspicious date and time for their wedding, but there is another important detail that cannot be overlooked, which is the car that will be used on the wedding day. Choosing the right colour of the wedding car can be auspicious and bless the married life for the couple.

Cool white is suitable for people born on a Wednesday and Friday. White is a symbol of purity and a representation of Yang energy in Chinese Feng Shui, which is also a symbol of brightness and goodness. It communicates bright energy in simplistic form.

Sparkling gold is suitable for people born in Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday. The luxurious gold colour is auspicious according to Chinese belief because it is a symbol of greatness, as well as prosperity, positive energy, and friendship (WEDDING April-May 2011: 52).



Figure 6.13 Choosing auspicious colours for wedding car (WEDDING April - May 2011: 52)

6.5 Thai wedding and other symbols of ‘Thainess’

The magazines have used the traditionalised wedding as a representative of ‘Thainess’ by labelling it as ‘Thai.’ Icons of exoticness structure the narrative of a traditionalised Thai styled wedding: jasmine, banana leaves, Thai fabric as well as other delicately handcrafted memorabilia and decorations. A traditionalised Thai wedding is depicted in a vintage allure of soft tone sepia styled photography as illustrated by the cover images discussed in Chapter 5. In these issues, the brides in the bridal fashion spread are dressed in neutral beige, gold and brown wedding attire, standing against a backdrop of the exquisiteness and nostalgia: historical building, traditional Thai house and wooden furniture. There are a few recurring elements in the representation of traditionalised Thai weddings such as the jasmine garland and the engagement trays

(phan-khan-mark), the engagement parade, the Buddhist monks and the water blessing ceremony.

6.5.1 Parents and respected elders

Parents and older relatives are considered as a significant part in a Thai wedding ceremony. When a traditional Thai wedding ceremony is represented in the magazines, it is usually illustrated with images of the bride and groom paying their respect to their parents and/older relatives. The magazines have classified a traditional wedding ceremony as an event for the parents and other older guests (*pu-yai*), hence it is recommended that things should be planned more carefully and that the bride and groom are aware of a higher level formality should be uphold. The significance of the parents is made apparent at the initial stage, even before the actual wedding begins since the groom needs to ask the bride's parents for their permission to marry her.

According to Thai customs, a groom cannot simply walk in to a bride's house and ask her parents for their permission to marry her. He needs to be escorted by a respected elder (preferably someone who is also highly respected by the bride's family to make sure the negotiation runs smoothly) (WE May 2008: 22).

In a Thai wedding ceremony, other than aesthetic appeal, the contentment of the elder family members is also important. Thus traditions, beliefs and familial prohibitions shall not be overlooked (WE, October 2014: 39).

*A Thai ceremony is a family event which can show how close-knit each family is. Even though I have organised hundreds of weddings I always well up whenever I see the bride and groom prostrate themselves before the feet of their parents (*krap*) while their parents give them blessing. The family-feel makes a Thai ceremony sacred and real (WE June 2011: 87).*

For a bride who wishes to wear multiple dresses for the different ceremonies (i.e. one dress for the engagement parade and another dress for the water blessing ceremony), it is recommended that she should take the time while the guests are having morning snacks to change into a new outfit quickly and avoid changing her hairstyle and makeup. This is because the guests in the 'Thai' ceremony are mostly elder relatives or acquaintances of her parents. It is inappropriate to let these guests wait, just because a bride wants to look beautiful (WE June 2014: 65).

According to the customs only guests who are older than the bride and groom are allowed to give blessing to the couple in water ceremony. Make sure that younger guests know hierarchy of guests and not cut in front of elder guests in the queue to give blessing (WE June 2014: 65).

Make sure that the younger guests behave in consideration of the elder guests' presence and not walk randomly around just to take photos to upload to social media because it is only disruptive but also looks disrespectful to the elder guests (WE June 2014: 64).



Figure 6.14 The bride and groom prostrate themselves before the feet of their parents (top left) (WE May 2008: 160), the water blessing ceremony (top right and bottom) (WE June 2011: 78-79)

In the images where the bride and groom are prostrating themselves before the feet of their parents, the couple is sitting on the ground at a position lower than their parents. But they bow down even further to show the highest sign of respect. As for the water blessing ceremony, the bride and groom are also sitting with their body bent slightly forward with their hands stretched out in a prayer position. The elder guests stand in front of them with a water-filled conch in their hands while giving them blessings. These demonstrate that a Thai wedding ceremony is not solely about two people getting married but more about them being accepted and blessed as a husband and wife by their parents and respected elders.

6.5.2 Engagement gifts and the bride's price

The revelation of a bride's price or engagement gifts can be seen throughout the coverage of a Thai wedding ceremony. Not only is this a display of wealth by the groom's family but also a sign of respect to the bride's family, which also implies the

quality of the bride, who is worthy to receive such amount (the bride's price). In figure 6.13, the bride's price includes 19 million baht of cash⁷, 199 (Thai unit of gold)⁸ of gold bars, four sets of diamond jewellery and a Porsche car. Notice here the recurrence of number nine in the bride's price, due to its auspiciousness.

An appropriate amount for the bride's price is expected from the groom's family. Gold is to be included since it has been used as an engagement offering in the past. This is also how the word for engagement offering in Thai takes its origin from: engagement gold (thong-mun) (WE May 2008: 24).

This tray is decorated with flowers to keep in with the theme of Thai classic literature (...) The tray of a bride's price (phan-sin-sod) receives the most attention at the ceremony because people want to know what is on it and if there are a lot on it, thus making it (the tray of the bride's price) one of the main points of focus (WE November 2011: 72).

Thai people believe in the auspiciousness of even number for a wedding because it is an event for two. Thus, the engagement gifts on an offering tray (phan) must also come in even number (Wedding, January - March 2002: 134).

Not everyone can be a part of this (Thai) ceremony. Only suitable people are chosen and then assigned appropriate tasks. For instance, a person who carries the main tray of engagement gifts (phan-khan-mark-ake) must be a young lady who is legally married according to (Thai) traditions, comes from a good family, dresses nicely, but sometimes a young lady who is a virgin can be chosen to perform this task instead. During the ceremony, everyone involved must conduct themselves well and only speak of nice things (mongkol) (Wedding, January - March 2002: 134).

⁷ 19 million Thai baht is equivalent to £345,000 (exchange rate is 55 THB = 1 GBP as of September 2015)

⁸ equivalent to 3 kilogram of gold bars



Figure 6.15 A display of the bride's price in an engagement ceremony (WE June 2011: 70-71)



Figure 6.16 A decorated tray of the bride's price (phan-sin-sod) (WE November 2011: 72)



Figure 6.17 A display of the bride's price (WE October 2014: 72)

6.5.3 Buddhist monks

The presence of Buddhist monks does not only serve as a religious requirement for the bride and groom to receive the blessings, but also to intensify the level of sacredness of the ceremony. The monks are also involved at the early stage of the wedding in order to determine the compatibility between the bride and groom and find an auspicious wedding date for the couple.

Parents should consult a Buddhist monk or a Brahman to find an auspicious date for the ceremony (Wedding, January - March 2002: 134).

As for the water ceremony (pi-tee-rod-nam-sang), in the past Buddhist monks were invited to pray and give blessings to the bride and groom for auspiciousness. But these days, some couples have the ceremony in the evening or at hotels so inviting monks becomes less convenient (Wedding, January - March 2002: 134).

The bride and groom should make a merit offering to an even number of monks, also counting the Buddha statue as one (i.e. 9 monks plus one Buddha statue) (Wedding, January - March 2002: 134).

Giving alms (tak-bat) to the monks is the first activity a bride and groom do together. Giving alms by using the same spoon is traditionally believed to make the couple become soulmate in the next life. If a bride wishes to have more say in the household, she should put her hand on top of her groom's hand when giving the alms (WE May 2008: 38).



Figure 6.18 Buddha statue in and Buddhist monks in Thai wedding ceremony (WE June 2013: 94), (WE June 2011: 70), WE May 2008: 30)

As demonstrated, a traditionalised Thai wedding is represented with certain symbols of auspiciousness or sacred qualities. For instance, certain ceremonial practices such as the water blessing or the anointment on the bride's and groom's forehead by a respected elder have increased the level of sacredness of traditionalised Thai weddings. These examples of traditional Thai wedding myths and superstitions are given not as a direct order on what should be done but as recommendations to achieve a desirable marriage bliss. Thus, anything that is believed to bring fortune and a blissful marriage to the bride and groom is important and will be incorporated to the ceremony. Most of the symbols used in a traditional Thai wedding ceremony are often equipped with anecdotes that support their reasons for being considered auspicious.



Figure 6.19 Images of 'Thainess' in a Thai wedding ceremony



Figure 6.20 Images of 'Thainess' in Thai wedding ceremony

6.6 'Thainess' and cultural hybridity

'Thainess' as constructed in the wedding magazines is transpired in the ambiguities and awkwardness of cultural representations. Apart from the traditionalised Thai wedding mentioned earlier in this chapter, there are also westernised Thai weddings represented in the magazines. These westernised weddings are those where the bride wears a white princess styled bridal gown and the groom is in a suit or tuxedo, they are photographed in a background of an upscale venue such as a five-star hotel. A sense of awkwardness is created in the misspelled English love quotes on display, the misinterpretation of Western wedding traditions and the overt display of wealth in a wedding celebration. It is this awkwardness that has infused 'Thainess' in the westernised style of white wedding. In what could have been just another replica of a Western wedding celebration, such representation of westernised white wedding in Thailand becomes a product of cultural hybridity.

The hybrid between the modern and tradition is what makes a Thai wedding special. A wedding is an event that is able to incorporate different traditions together. The new traditions are seen in the old and the old cultural practices are seen in the new, as well as a mix and match of East and West expression of identity, although they may appear awkward and contradictory. This chaotic confusion is an inevitable consequence of multiculturalism and globalisation. Different traditions have been adapted and applied according to the cultural norm, social trends and personal tastes. The representation of weddings in the magazines shows the uniqueness for each wedding, all of which express the identity of the couple in the way they wish to be seen. While the dominant representations of certain images construct the standard for what is appropriate, the magazines set flexible guidelines for the expression of individual identity through the hybridisation of cultural rituals and symbols based on the trends as well as on cultural norms and values.

The parallel representations of both traditional and white wedding are done accordingly, to depict their distinctive differences that are reflected from the binary opposition between East and West. The modernity of a white wedding is depicted against the nostalgia of a traditional wedding. This is a truly unique and authentic cultural tradition that exists outside obvious commodities of a consumerist society. It brings back the forgotten world of the past and the memories of an authentic cultural identity that has been lost in the contemporary consumerist society.

"Thai and West is a result of the postcolonial notion of nation and ethnicity. And hybridised 'Thainess' is a result of encounters with Western cultures since the colonial periods. While Thai elites chose to embrace a more progressive material culture of the West, they tried to preserve their cultural identity and blended East and West together, creating a hybridised Western culture with a touch of Thai, and simultaneously making the primitive Thai culture seem less barbaric." (Prasannam 2011)

Weddings in Thai magazines are similar to those of other countries in Asia such as China, Japan and South Korea, in the sense that these countries perform two distinct styles of weddings: one in traditional costumes and one in modern wedding attires. While the brides and groom are keeping up with the current trends from the West, weddings similar to that seen in Hollywood films or of celebrities are popularised. Even though the modern style of wedding is westernised, which may seem similar to

weddings in Europe or America, it is not the same, nor is it the same as a modern style of wedding in other Asian countries. Modern Thai wedding is westernised but with a Thai flair.

The two styles of wedding representations have different trajectories despite being performed by a common cultural group of people. While the representation of a westernised style of wedding is engaged with the fantasy of romance, luxury and modernity, a traditionalised style of wedding is represented as a reflection of both tradition and cultural heritage. Both styles are represented in the magazines side by side, but it is obvious that they appear worlds apart in terms of the notion of place, time and ideology. Nevertheless, Thai brides choose to embrace both the westernised style and traditional styles at different time for different ceremonies. While the traditionalised Thai style is reserved for the morning ceremony to accommodate auspicious time, westernised styles are later performed in the evening or on another day. This demonstrates a change in Thai bridal identity as she begins her journey by emulating the past, and gradually transitions into the modern and globalised bride.

Thai weddings have already been westernised and they are becoming even more modern and luxurious; and the modern ways are contributing to the growth of services and advertisements. Although the modern Thai wedding has been westernised through fashion, photography and ceremonies, it is not entirely a duplicate of a Western white wedding. A modern Thai wedding is expressing its 'Thainess' and constructing its own interpretation of a modern white wedding with a Thai twist. For instance, when a Thai bride wears a white wedding gown she does not automatically transform herself into a western bride. However, she has maintained her Thai identity and traditions by also wearing a jasmine garland round her neck, she greets her guests with the Thai '*wai*' (pressing both palms together and bow her head). She has a wedding in luxurious five-star hotel but on an auspicious date that she has agreed, after consulting with her astrologer. Therefore, rather than a western bride, she has become a modern Thai bride, a representation which is commonly represented in the magazines. Therefore, this style of Thai wedding is considered as a hybridised Thai wedding.

Because of the globalisation, Thai brides now know about wedding traditions from other cultures and can also wear a wedding dress designed by a world-renowned bridal gown designer such as Vera Wang. Thai brides can also be expected to be proposed with an engagement ring from Tiffany or Harry Winston (WE May/June 2011). These wedding products are not just limited to Western brides anymore. It is no longer just the white gown that makes a bride a modern bride, but also the name it carries. A wedding has been depicted as more than just a ceremony and celebration, it is also a way of consumption. It is not just a question of who you marry, but also how you marry. What do you wear on your wedding day? What kind of bridal persona do you portray?

When comparing the two styles of Thai wedding, the traditional style is placed on the opposite end of dichotomy of the modern one. Different styles of weddings are placed in relation to each other, illuminating their uniqueness and distinctions, all the while fitted in the local Thai framework. The notion of 'Thainess' is as constructed and contested in the context of Thai wedding including the ideal image of bride, wedding traditions and foreign influence. The production of authenticity is a way to encapsulate and embody uniqueness of cultural identity and to differentiate it amidst the cultural convergence brought by globalisation. It is a process in which the cultural identity is drawn into the construction and representation of the wedding.

Globalisation have created two versions of Thai weddings: one is westernised, emulating the styles of white wedding as seen in the United States and Western Europe, and another is traditionalised, that has been reconstructed to solidify the notion of an authentic historical Thai wedding. A westernised wedding can be interpreted as a journey towards modernity and the West. With the inclusion of Western brands that have been highlighted previously, the brides and grooms are equipped with the necessary products as they began their journey towards a western notion of romance. It is the romance that is believed to come with materials, emphasising the length people are made to go for love. An emphasis is being made on

the traditional wedding as a memory or a pathway that leads back to the lineage and history. It is a way to embed oneself in the authenticity of Thai cultural identity.

Undoubtedly wedding magazines have shaped the way weddings are performed by providing advices, etiquettes, recommendations for goods and services required for a successful wedding. Also they are the sources of information about wedding traditions and ceremonies. For Thai people whose daily life is far from what is considered 'authentic' in a Thai way, the magazines prove to be a helpful reference to wedding fashion and traditions. Assuming that Thai people do not know how to be 'authentically' Thai, the magazines inform them about traditions and expose them to the 'authenticity' of the Thai cultural identity. Such representations are ridden with historical and cultural connotations. Symbols are used to make linkage between the wedding and the essence of the Thai identity. Traditional customs, local food and rare traditional desserts are correlated with the level of 'authenticity' of a wedding. While a traditional ceremony is represented as raw and unmediated experience, the authenticity that it is trying to pass off is actually a socio and cultural construction which is reproduced and recorded as 'authentic' and 'traditional'. As long as modern white weddings are performed in Thailand, Thai people can also learn how to be 'authentic' Thais again.

Regardless, the exotic aspect of 'Thainess' can also be regarded as a symbol that has been chosen to embody an individual in order to express one's identity in the eyes of the others. When expressing the distinctiveness of one's cultural identity in the presence of others, a degree of exoticness could have been overly exaggerated. However, after a wedding is finished, the bride and groom would give up their identity as a bride and groom, and then revert back to their original identity or assume a new one, who might wear American brand clothes, drive Japanese car and eat Chinese food, just like any other Thais in the society. After the wedding, both are no longer a bride nor a groom, but a wife and a husband, they remain just another married couple living in the Thai society without any obvious symbolic representation of cultural distinctiveness or glorified performance to highlight their cultural identity.

6.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has examined the construction of 'Thainess' through the magazine narratives of 'traditional Thai' weddings. The findings have revealed that the notion of 'Thainess' represented here is a 'Thainess' according to Bangkok middle class. The magazines have constructed three identifiable meanings of 'Thainess' through the representation of 'traditional Thai' brides and 'traditional Thai' weddings. Firstly, an image of 'Thainess' is an imagined identity - imagined in a sense that when one is labelled as Thai, one is immediately being compared to an 'imagined' and 'noble' identity: a fictional character, an imagined aristocrat woman and a lady from the past. Secondly, 'Thainess' is always represented in connection with auspiciousness. And lastly, an image of 'Thainess' is an awkward hybridisation of culture between Thai and others. These myths have played a crucial role in the construction of images of 'Thainess,' and for them to be perceived as being 'authentically' Thai. These images of nostalgia act as a reminder of traditional 'Thainess' and prosperous past of the good old days that have disappeared from today's society.

In any case, 'Thainess' remains a contentious notion. The perceived contradiction of 'Thainess' has created a complex representation of duality, one which tries hard to embrace the exoticness and "authentic" traditionalised identity, even though that said 'authenticity' is an invention, created to define oneself. The magazines represent the traditionalised style and westernised style of Thai weddings as binary opposites according to Edward Said's (1977) Orientalist perspective. Despite its exotic and primitive appeal, this version of traditionalised 'Thainess' is far from a generic portrayal of the local. Traditionalised 'Thainess' is a stylised portrayal of what middle class consumerists' version of 'Thainess' might have looked like. Such representations of 'Thainess' through the lens of weddings magazines have demonstrated a struggle of the transition from the present to the past in its search for 'authentic Thainess' within

the framework of modern globalised society, which is ambiguous and awkward or what Tejapira calls 'cultural schizophrenia' (2001: 210).

Having discussed the Thai semicolonial historiography in Chapter 2, the notion of authentic 'Thainess' is doubtful. Since Thailand has been adapting various aspects of many foreign cultures and incorporating them into local way of life, perhaps the very essence of authentic Thai culture is hybridity. It is rather difficult to find a cultural element that Thailand can claim as authentic Thai. For instance, Buddhist or traditional folklore, which Thais claim to be their basic foundation of their way of life, which further shaped the ways in which Thai people behave, believe and interact with one another and more importantly has appeared frequently throughout the magazine as the standard of ideal 'traditional Thai femininity, is actually based on stories adapted from Hindu classic literature. In essence, there is nothing in Thai culture as authentic as hybridity. In a similar way, '*farangness*' in Thailand is not authentic Western either because it has become localised into Thai context during the 'translation' process. As Winichakul (quoted in Harrison 2010: 36) explained accordingly: that element becomes Thai-ised and is no longer Western in the sense that it comes to exist and operate in a Thai context. In Thailand "the West" is in fact always the Thai-ised West.

When some of what is considered 'traditional' Thai culture is made of reinvented cultures and has been reconstructed multiple times, why should people be alarmed of the changes Thai cultures are currently undergoing to the point that they try to prevent the changes from happening. Why must Thai culture be 'restricted' or 'frozen' to a particular image and notion, even though they are not actually 'authentic' as many are led to believe? Could it be because they are trying to cling on to the image that they think best represent themselves, according to how they believe the West and the 'Others' see them? Before we can actually call ourselves Thai and treasure everything that is Thai, it is crucial that we must look back and ask ourselves: what is it that makes something or someone Thai and more importantly what constitutes 'Thainess'? Otherwise, we would only be able to identify ourselves in

relations to the ‘Others’ – because we are not ‘*farang*’ and hence we are Thai. Is the supposition that everything in Thailand has been borrowed and influenced from foreign nations a condescending attitude towards a Thai national heritage or is it simply the truth that people should accept?

The magazines reinforce a monochromatic version of Thainess: images infused with fantasies from the past: embroidered silk, herbal cosmetics, fortune-tellers, banana leaves and jasmine garland. This image has been embedded as a representation of preservation of the ‘traditional’ Thai culture and ‘Thainess’ amongst the people in the country for many generations. This has kept the essence of ‘Thainess’ from venturing outside this framework of national identity to explore other things. What has been considered ‘traditional’, when in fact, they are merely reconstructed traditions has also been borrowed from foreign cultures and reinvented as ‘Thai’ not that long ago. This ‘tradition-obsessed elitist’ perspective does nothing more than barricading people within the ‘oppressed traditionalism’ because if they have successfully managed to break free from the cultural ‘cage’ of traditions, then the power relations between the state and the people, the elite and lower class, the holy and common could have been disrupted. If this is the case, can Thailand still be considered civilised and worthy enough of the name ‘Thailand’ (land of free) since the people of the country are being trapped, not from people outside but ironically from within our own illusion of ‘Thainess’. All these myths surrounding ‘Thainess’ are constructed through this process of symbolic representation and the consumption of commodified traditions, which will be discussed further in Chapter 8. As Tejapira (2001) argues:

...pseudo-chemically sublimated Thainess is returned to us in a solid but useless, irrelevant and fossilised, or mummified form, in a temple, theatre or museum [...] Thainess has been ripped away from its traditional, historical, theatrical or religious context and deprived of its aura, it becomes and empty shell, a neutral terrain, a free-floating signifier which can be entered into-and ‘exited’ at will by commodities of whatever nationality or ethnicity (Tejapira 2001: 216).

Images of Brides in Thai Wedding Magazines

Appearances matter. Beautiful appearances matter even more. In Thailand, beauty can override family connections, money or class, as well as other ascribed and achieved attributes of women, and to a lesser degree men. In practice, it is Thai women who are more likely to be affected by judgements about their appearance...The moral power of beauty, and the extreme objectification of women intersect in contemporary Thailand (Van Esterik 2000: 129).

7.1 Introduction

As illustrated and discussed in previous chapters, the brides in Thai wedding magazines are represented into two distinctive archetypal images, one is traditionalised and another is westernised. Despite their differences, both of these bridal archetypes have been shaped by the narratives of wedding magazines to conform to the ideals of Thai femininity and together, they have set a standard of social expectation and acceptance of women. Thai wedding magazines are laden with images, articles, interviews and advertisements, all of which have played a part in disseminating ideals of Thai brides as suitable marriage partners. According to McRobbie, magazines should be considered a “powerful ideological force” in a society (2005: 69). In this chapter, I examine the images and narratives in wedding magazines, in which the notion of Thai femininity has been formulated and presented as a powerful ideological force in Thai society. We shall be able to understand how Thai women and their femininity are framed in modern Thai society through the images and behavioural ideologies embedded within these representations.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section discusses the notion of bridal beauty by examining how brides are defined by magazines as beautiful. It further extrapolates the ideal Thai beauty by looking at the process of bridal

preparation and beauty products recommended for the brides. The second section examines the representation of brides from the perspective of bridal fashion. Finally, the third section discusses the magazines written narratives about the brides through some articles and interviews to demonstrate the ideal qualities of the brides. Van Esterik's (1999) ten propositions outlined in chapter 2 will be used as a guided framework for analysing such constructed ideal brides.

7.2 Bridal beauty

In this section, I begin with an examination into a media constructed bridal beauty from magazine headlines and articles in the beauty columns since beautiful bridal images can be considered the core of wedding magazines and of the wedding itself. A bride does not only become a subject to be looked at by her groom and the wedding party, but her appearance as a bride is being photographed and documented by a high definition camera for still and moving images where enlarged pores, acne scar or any imperfection can be visible. This level of beauty perfection is especially important in Thailand, being a society described by Van Esterik (2000: 4) as one that "encourages an essentialism of appearance or surface...The real is hidden and unchallenged. The surface is taken for real". Therefore, it is inevitable that the makeup and skin care routine have been emphasised throughout the magazines as the top of the bride's priority list, so that the bride will always look beautiful on and off camera. Beauty is essential for women, as Van Esterik puts it:

Appearances matter. Beautiful appearances matter even more. In Thailand, beauty can override family connections, money or class, as well as other ascribed and achieved attributes of women, and to a lesser degree men. In practice, it is Thai women who are more likely to be affected by judgements about their appearance...The moral power of beauty, and the extreme objectification of women intersect in contemporary Thailand (Van Esterik 2000: 129).

"Every bride wants to be perfectly beautiful on her special day." (Wedding, May 2011: 148)

There is at least more than one beauty column in each of the magazines in the sample. The contents of these beauty columns are dominated by features of beauty products, represented in various forms such as a 'buying guide', 'recommendations for beauty

therapies', *'beauty tips*' or *'how to do the bridal makeup and hair*'. There is an overwhelming range of products and beauty therapies suitable for all women with any skin type and skin tone. These columns serve as preliminary suggestions for the prospective brides because they do not solely focus on the bridal makeup, but also emphasise that skincare is a more important issue, because having a good skin ensures a perfect bridal makeup. An emphasis has been made on physical appearance because the most significant and most obvious aspect of the constructed bridal image is her beauty.

According to Winship (1987), to achieve the perfect bridal image is an act of discipline and can be considered as a 'work' of consuming femininity. The 'work' to ensure a beautiful bride as a finished result requires discipline and patience be devoted to skincare routines, make-up and styling. Bonnie Adrian (2003) argues that the lengthy process of making up the bride is one that signifies the crucial moment of transformation from an ordinary woman into a bride. An excerpt below is an account from an ethnographic observation of a Taiwanese bridal salon from Adrian's (2003), *'Framing the Bride'*.

"Brides wear a sort of mask painted right onto their skin, glued to their eyelashes, carved out of their eyebrows with razor blades. Bridal makeovers turn women into brides, transforming everyday women with their individual characteristics into generic look-alike beauties in three hours' time. Meticulous hairstyling sculpts hair into perfectly shaped curls, aided with hair extensions and glue-like hairspray. Bridal stylists target not only the hair and face but also the breasts and hips in their labours, outfitting brides with breast padding and hip-exaggerating gowns. The stylists' work involves laborious transformative processes that bring women's bodies into compliance with the beauty standards of the mass media, many specifically emulating the image of white women's bodies produced and circulated by interests in Hollywood, New York, London and Paris. After her makeover, a bride's closest friends and relatives often can no longer recognise her with ease." (Adrian 2003: 147)

7.2.1 The ideal bridal look

The most important aspect of a magazine is its front cover because it is the first thing a reader notices and it also acts as an indication to the readers of what is to be expected within the magazine. The front cover provides a preview of the contents of the magazines, which will fulfil the needs of the individual and her group by selling a future image of the reader as "happier, more desirable" (Bignell 1997: 67). All three

magazines use an image of a bride wearing a wedding dress on the majority of their front covers. According to Bignell (1997: 69), the images of beautiful women on the covers of female magazines are “iconic signs which represent the better self which every woman desires to become.” These front cover images give a sense of aspiration to the women readers in their journey towards becoming a beautiful bride.

Each bride on the front cover in the examples (Figure 5.1 - Figure 5.4 in Chapter 5) represents a future image of the reader, it is an image which can be attained through reading the magazines and following the recommendations given inside. There is a consistency in the imagery of brides on the magazines’ covers. All the model brides are Thai celebrities (either actress, model or singer) each of whom has slightly fairer than average skin tone and flawless complexion. They are beautifully made up and adorned with a big white wedding dress and accessorised with diamond jewellery on their neckline and a ring on their finger. The diamonds connote a sense of luxury while the white wedding dress connotes romance and fantasy. Their femininity is highlighted through their female bodies with low-cut dresses that expose their shoulders, allowing a small glimpse of cleavage, blushed cheeks, a gentle smile and a captivating gaze looking directly at the readers. On the magazines’ covers, these model brides are the embodiment of the bride that every woman should want to be and every man should want to marry - beautiful, glamorous and feminine. The readers are encouraged to believe that these are the ideal image of a bride and that she could be just like the bride on the cover one day.



Figure 7.1 WE April 2014



Figure 7.2 WE November 2012



Figure 7.3 WE December 2012

The images in the example of magazine covers are the ideal bridal beauty. Within each issue the ideal bridal images are being constructed in order to set a standard for which brides-to-be should aim to achieve. A bride is not just a bride, she is usually compared to an ideal woman such as a fairy tale princess, a real life royal princess or a fictional character from classic literature (most of which are of noble birth). A Thai bride can embody dual cultural personas; she can be a traditional Thai bride as well as a modern Thai bride. While the main distinctions between traditional bride and modern bride as discussed in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 exist, the magazines further categorised bridal makeup look into three categories. Firstly, a sweet and feminine bride has a soft and gentle image, she is described as an angel and a delicate flower (Figure 7.1). Secondly, a classic and mystically charming bride has captivating charms and an allure of mystic around her, this is an epitome of a perfect traditionalised bride according to Thai's imagination of noble lady from pre-modern Siam (Figure 7.2). And lastly, an elegant and sophisticated bride stands out from the crowd, sparkling with aura of luxury and elegance (Figure 7.3).

Perfection, glamour and beauty are the qualities that the magazines use to define a bride. Her beauty is a quality that is seen, portrayed, asked about and talked about the most. When a bride is written about, she is usually praised on how beautiful she looks. A woman can be ordinary looking, cute, sexy or beautiful, but a bride is always described as beautiful. The image of a bride has been constructed so as to be the most

beautiful woman at a wedding; even her bridesmaids along with the other wedding guests are recommended to wear makeup and dress in a way that will not outshine the bride as a common wedding etiquette. The constructed image of an ideal Thai bride is not only the woman of a man's dream, but also the woman of any woman's dream too - the woman that any woman should dream to be. As quotes chosen from the magazines have illustrated below:

"Really big things you can't miss is to be a super perfect girl." (WE July 2011 154)

"Natural glam is a simplistic image with a touch of glamour." (WE July 2011: 140)

The ideal beauty of a bride constructed and disseminated by the media have pressured brides to conform to these standards by undergoing bridal makeovers (Adrian 2003). A bridal makeover marks an important moment when a woman transforms into a more beautiful version of herself in preparation to performing her role as a bride. The process of transformation cannot be completed without the essential tools of beauty products and beauty enhancement procedures. The importance of bridal makeup is justified on the premise that a bride is constantly photographed on her wedding day as well as on the day of her pre-wedding photo shoot, and thus it is necessary for her to look as beautiful as she possibly can. An emphasis is being made throughout the magazines that a bride should be beautiful, the 'Beauty checklist' column in WE magazines has a subtext in English that reads:

"To be an irresistibly beautiful bride in the most unforgettable occasion of the lifetime." (WE July 2011: 158)

7.2.2 Beauty products and beauty enhancement procedures

Beauty has been packaged as a commodity by these magazines. The maintenance of physical appearance has been emphasised to correlate with the success of the wedding and the fulfilment of the role as a bride. Since a bride becomes the centre of attention at her wedding, she is put on a pedestal to be observed and looked at by her wedding party, it is understandable that she should look her best in order to avoid becoming an object of scrutiny later on for not being beautiful enough and therefore does not befit

the role of a bride which could potentially make her future role as a wife and mother doubtful. In this context, unattractiveness is considered not as a natural quality but as a result of laziness and inattentiveness. A popular belief that any woman can be beautiful when she puts on makeup or takes care of herself has turned unattractiveness from being a physical issue into a character issue, which is often used as a justification for discrimination. Although this constructed myth of an 'ideal' bride and woman's beauty as endorsed in the media is unrealistic, it has been embedded throughout the contents and images of the magazines. A woman or a bride would always be first and foremost appreciated based on her beauty and a woman with imperfections can be transformed if she has enough patience.

The magazines have emphasised the myth about the wedding day as one of the most special days in a woman's life, thus she is encouraged to put her best efforts into becoming her most beautiful self on such an important day, even cosmetic and surgical beauty is heavily encouraged and expected among those who may need some help. WE magazine (July 2011) suggests that it is ideal that the bride is committed to the preparation of beautifying herself approximately nine to twelve months prior to the wedding day. The first and most important thing to consider is the budget. The magazine specifically suggests that prospective brides must go all out because beauty is an investment that a woman should make on herself. A bride should have a separate budget set for beauty expenditures so that she would not overspend on other less important wedding products during the planning because:

"Nothing is more important than being a beautiful bride." (WE July 2011: 158)

"One should not be satisfied even if she is blessed with natural beauty. Natural beauty may be alright for a casual day off, relaxing with nature but certainly not enough for a wedding. On any other day a woman can be less beautiful, but on her wedding day she can only be two things: very beautiful and most beautiful. So it is recommended that she becomes friendly with a good makeup artist and only uses products that she can trust. Finish off with a little bit of glitter to make the skin more radiant and shimmering." (WE May 2008: 116)

"What is equally important is the bride's health especially before the wedding. Make sure to rest so you look well-rested. No matter how nervous you are, get enough sleep because on the wedding day there are many different things to do like waking up really early in the morning to get your hair and makeup done and always smiling to greet the guests during the reception in the evening. Don't forget that you must be the most beautiful woman on that day." (WE September 2008: 60)

A woman should pay extra attention to her looks on her wedding day because she becomes a subject of gaze. In reference to Laura Mulvey's (1975) argument that women are subject to be looked at by men, here the presence of a woman is acknowledged when she is "looked at", and when she is looked at, she is no longer invisible. A woman who lacks beauty is therefore overlooked and she therefore becomes invisible. Subsequently, in order to exist, she must let her beauty be apparent and hence visible to be looked at. The physical traits of women are considered to be a commodity that correlates with the value of one's femininity and suitability to the role of bride.

The importance of being a beautiful bride is emphasised through these texts and reinforced with 'before and after' photos that show a comparison between an ordinary looking woman who has transformed into a better version of herself, sometimes beyond recognition after the makeup and hair styling. This example of transformation process has suggested what a woman could become if she puts an effort into maintaining her appearance. It is demonstrating a visual fantasy of beauty for women to aspire to. I like to relate the process of the woman transformation from an ordinary woman into a bride to the popularised superheroes comics and films in terms of their narratives. The manners in which a bride undergoes a process of transformation that makes her beautiful and therefore becomes empowered is similar to the way that an ordinary young man transforms himself into a superhero to fight evils in American comic books, or a female high school student transforms herself into 'Sailormoon'⁹ to protect the earth in a popular Japanese animation. The transformation process of a bride not only turns her into a beautiful bride but also empowers and aligns her in an upward trajectory, a woman who is more special than any other person at that moment.

"And finally a really important day has come - the only day that will transform you into a beautiful princess just overnight." (WE July 2011: 163)

⁹ Sailormoon is a character from Japanese comic book and animation. She is a regular high school student who can transform herself into Sailormoon when battling with villains.

"Because the bride must be beautiful in 360 degrees for perfect pre-wedding photography and one hundred percent confidence when surrounded by hundreds and thousands of guests. A bride should be three dimensionally beautiful, beautiful in facial feature and skin texture." (WE November 2011: 146)

However, the process of a bridal transformation is more than just a simple makeup session because to be a beautiful bride is to be visibly beautiful from all angles. There are various beauty treatment programmes in the bridal makeover package from beauty therapies to non-surgical procedure such as filler¹⁰, Botox¹¹ and skin rejuvenation laser¹², all of which are recommended as a quick fix and not so painful process into attaining a perfect appearance for an upcoming wedding. In advertisements as well as magazine articles, readers are taught to investigate their bodies for "defects" which are in need of "corrections" by using beauty treatments such as hair removal, reduction of pores and vanish cellulite, therefore morphing women into the frame constructed and represented by the media as the ideal image.

"Every bride wishes to have a slender and most perfect body on her important day. Although exercise and healthy diets can help you achieve the desired body, they could take more than six months. But with the advance in beauty enhancement technology, any bride without much time can have a slender body within a short time." (Wedding October - November 2011: 85)

"To wear a beautiful dress, a bride must also have a beautiful body. In this article 'Best dresses, best body,' you can get the body you want instantly." (Wedding October - November 2011: 85)

"U.S. beauty standards tend to normalise Anglo-Saxon physical features and proclaim all other types as defective" (Adrian 2003: 153). Likewise, Thai wedding magazines have normalised generic physical attributes of magazine models and set them as the standard for women to work towards achieving this ideal. Women whose features do not conform to these norms are offered suggestions and kindly advised to take advantage of the advances in the beauty industry to meet the ideal. Physical attributes different from these norms are considered unattractive and hence should be fixed,

¹⁰ Filler is a cosmetic procedure, it is an injection made into a part of a patient's face to correct flaws.

¹¹ Botox is a cosmetic procedure, it is an injection made into a part of a patient's face to reduce the appearance of wrinkles and fine lines.

¹² Skin rejuvenation laser is a cosmetic procedure to treat the texture of a patient's skin, usually to remove a scar.

either by makeup or digitally photo-shopped. The magazines recommend that it is important for a bride to make a list of her unattractive physical features in order to make appropriate improvements. For instance, a flat nose bridge that could be higher, flappy upper arms that could be firmer and droopy eyes that could be lifted. Self-remedies such as exercise techniques and skincare routine are suggested for minor flaws, but for great results the magazines advise that a bride should visit a dermatologist or a beauty clinic to make the needed corrections.

Another popular beauty practice in bridal package is skin whitening. In Thailand, fair skin is considered to be one of the ideal qualities of a woman and a signifier of noble status, although the majority of women are not born as such. According to the perception that ladies of noble families do not have to work outdoor under the hot sun, and thus limited their exposure to UV rays, resulting in a fairer skin than the lower class women's who spent their days on the farm and working in the fields. There are a variety of products advertised as having skin whitening properties, ranging from body lotion, beauty supplements and cosmetic surgery that inject 'glutathione¹³' into the patients' blood vessels to slow down the melanin production in one's system. As the fair skin obsession trend remains strong in Thai society, skin whitening products are not only available for the face and body, but also expand to various other areas such as underarms and bikini line (see Samabuddhi 2012 and Chaipraditkul 2013).

Since the selected magazines used in this research are Thai magazines created for the Thai market, the advertisements or beauty recommendations are based on skins concerns or beauty trends amongst Thai consumers. The recommended products and makeup tips featured in the magazines are catered towards to medium skin women, such as products with brightening or whitening properties:

"Shiseido White Lucent Brightening Refining Softener." (WE May 2008: 118)

13 Glutathione is a molecule naturally produced in the body. Its antioxidant properties are believed to having skin whitening properties.

"A white bridal gown might not look as beautiful if your skin is dark and dull. Try Blanc Expert from Lancite." (Wedding March/April 2001: 113)

Although magazines do not explicitly indicate that medium skin or dark skin is not beautiful, by recommending skincare products with whitening properties or suggest makeup tips that will brighten the skin for women who have medium and dark skin could imply that lighter skin is a preferable standard that prospective brides should aim to attain. Although the skin colour is a genetic quality which human are born with, therefore it is unlikely that it can be drastically changed; the advertisements ignore this fact and still try to sell products with the promise to provide a solution for women who want to achieve the media endorsed standard of beauty of lighter skin colour. This trend of skin whitening has become steadily prominent in Thai society, where the majority of population does not have fair skin like Caucasians, nor light pale skin like North Asian countries people such as China, South Korean or Japan.

There are also a few poems that have been written to praise the beauty of a woman, many of which complimented her skin that was as fair as a banana stalk (*yua-kluay*), peeled boiled egg (*kai-plok*) and cotton (*sam-lee*). An obsession for fair skin as observed in the old poetry suggest that the association between the bride and beauty is not a recent phenomenon. Beauty has always been a preferred quality of a woman, but the globalisation of media and consumer culture have made beauty more accessible to women who are not born with the preferred beauty. In one way, it can be argued that nowadays beauty has been democratised because it has been commodified into a product and thus can be bought by anyone who can afford it. However, in a society driven by consumer capitalism, an equilibrium in human desire cannot be achieved. Therefore, people are constantly made to feel unsatisfied with themselves so that the only way they will be 'empowered' will always be through fantasies of what they could be (Adrian 2003).

"I'm getting old. My friend Sarah teased me to be careful because my groom could be mistake me for his 'mum' instead. She was right because every time I was with my boyfriend, other people had mistaken me for his older sister. If I let this go on, I could easily have passed off as his mother."

Sara recommended I take extra care of my tired and dull skin, although my wrinkles haven't appeared yet, with the help of Visible Results, a moisturiser with skin rejuvenating and anti-ageing properties. This simple skincare routine is suitable for brides who do not have the time.

On the first day of use, my skin felt immediately softer. My skin became noticeably smoother over the next few days. On the eighth day, what used to be a dull skin became hydrated and my wrinkles have diminished. I felt so lucky to have found this simple method of reducing wrinkles within days. Otherwise I might look much older than my groom on the big day.” (Wedding January - March 2006: 186)

“Now Sarah said I should pay special attention to my body. She said I should get rid of the cellulite on my thighs before the groom sees them. Begin with Perfect Slim gel, which has slimming and firming properties. My upper arms and legs would be firm and smooth within 8 days. Follow by White Perfect which has whitening properties, helping me become a bride with a healthy and smooth skin without any dark spot. Now I can confidently wear a strapless and backless bridal gown.” (Wedding January - March 2006: 189)

“For the last step, my friend said the trick to a man's heart is natural beauty. It is not good to only be beautiful during the day, but when all the makeup is washed off, the groom is shocked thinking he married a different girl.

Natural beauty is not difficult as long as you eat nutritious food and take time to relax because beauty begins from within. Other than this, makeup can also help brighten the face. Soft pink blush on the cheeks makes you look healthy and lip gloss makes your lips full and glowing.” (Wedding January - March 2006: 190)

As the magazine promotes a “feminine culture” and defines and shapes the woman's world (McRobbie 2005: 69), we can see that it becomes a familiar friend for the female - it advises her and provides entertainment, amusement and escapism for the reader and speaks to her in a language she understands. Not only do magazines teach women how to be a bride, they also warn them of unpleasant consequences should the ideal bridal image not be achieved. There are indirect words of warnings and scenarios of potential wedding disasters, which have given the readers another fantasy - an unfavourable one. These unpleasant consequences are what could happen if brides choose to ignore the significance of an effort in enhancing their beauty and maintaining it.

“The most important thing for a bride on her wedding day is that she looks beautiful from head to toe. Don't let happiness overwhelm you that you forget your beauty preparation, otherwise the next thing you know is your wedding is tomorrow and you only look beautiful from 100 metres away. You don't want your body and face to look terrible from close just because you did not take care of them. Let us inform you the steps of beauty preparation a year prior to your wedding so that you will be beautiful

enough to wear a crown on your special day. Whenever a man gets on his knee to propose, beauty preparation must start immediately the next morning.” (WE July 2011: 158)

“It is not all right to have a beautifully decorated wedding, but the bride looks ghastly.” (WE July 2011: 158)

“Women of our times with problematic skin are more fortunate than those in the past because there is a variety of products that can help beautify any woman.” (WE May 2008: 114)

Bridal beauty is more than what meets the eyes. The power that beauty has is more than aesthetic pleasures; there are also social implications. The high price of the beauty products is justified because they are imported from overseas and claim to have properties that can make any woman beautiful. While these beauty products and therapies help the bride achieve the ideal bridal beauty, they have transcended into becoming a marker of wealth and social status. On the surface, a bride is perceived either as beautiful or not beautiful, but to be a beautiful bride, as the magazines suggested is not a simple task. Although the amount of time and finance that is required to complete the recommended transformation process does not come cheap, this process is endorsed by the magazines as an investment that no bride-to-be can afford to miss.

The wedding budget is recommended to be separated into two main categories: a beauty preparation budget, which is allocated to bridal beauty courses such as spa, facials, etc., and a wedding day beauty budget, which includes the fees for makeup artist and hair on the wedding day (WE May 2008). A bride is advised to make a great deal of time and financial investment in order for her to transform herself into a beautiful bride. There are countless skincare and makeup products that she should buy and more beauty therapies that she should book. The cost of these clinic visits is in fact quite expensive. An average price for one facial mask treatment is 10,000 baht (approximately £200), which is just a little less than a minimum monthly salary of an office worker in Bangkok.

Simone de Beauvoir (1952) argued that the female body is being colonised by unnecessary beauty practices such as foot binding and high-heeled shoes. The attractiveness of a woman is being boosted by restricting her physical freedom and the devotion that women are expected to give to beauty is just another ploy to divert their attention from other important issues and accept male dominance. Additionally, it highlights a shallow assumption between male and female, by reducing the men's appreciation for women only to her beauty. It further takes a woman for granted by implying that a woman has nothing much else to offer except for her beauty and that beauty is the only way a woman can attract a suitable male partner and be appreciated. However, it can also be argued that women actually have control over their beauty practices as tools to cultivate power. The work of creating beauty - dieting, exercising, applying make-up, sculpting hair - should be seen as the work of creating wealth and power, rather than a diversion from such pursuits. As Van Esterik points out:

Beauty keeps open the possibility of connections between classes and regions today, as in the past. Movies celebrates the beautiful women of 'Old Siam' who could jump the queue' and be associated with elite men (Van Esterik 2000: 129).

Beauty and fashion magazines are notorious for what Naomi Wolf (1995) calls the "visual censorship" of natural physical features common among women, such as the pores of the skin, the unadorned lips and the fat deposits on the hips. The message being communicated through the text and imagery in the magazines emphasises that to be a bride is not simply being adorned with a wedding dress, but a woman must transform her features to fit the role. It is portraying that being the woman that she is up until the wedding is not enough and she needs to transform herself before she can completely fulfil her role as a bride. Therefore, as beauty becomes a luxury and globalisation has made it more accessible by facilitating the flow of information and products from one continent to another, the ideal bridal image is becoming more consistent.

"In one sense we therefore view the Thai nation as one big family, and when the nation is likened to a family, then "women" become both the mothers and the daughters of the national family, to be

protected and cared for because daughters and mothers are the ones who undertake the task of producing and rearing the national populace.” (Kham Phaka 2014: 181)

“The body of the nation is further likened to the body of a woman, as exemplified in the term “Motherland.” And if the nation is invaded by strangers, whether by an enemy force, by foreigners, or by the wheels of development, then we tend to speak of it in terms of a “violation” of the land. Any country considered underdeveloped tends to be seen as a “pure” or “virgin” territory.” (Kham Phaka 2014: 181)

7.3 Bridal fashion

As the standard of beauty has been framed, magazine style editors have also set a guideline for choosing the styles of wedding dress that would look most flattering on different body types. From reading the magazines, prospective brides are taught not to blindly follow the fashion trends in the magazine without taking into account the suitability of the style for their own body shapes, as the advice below from ‘Wedding’ (April-May 2011 issue) suggested:

“Many brides usually spend a lot of time before finding a wedding dress that they like. But when they actually find the style that they like, they usually forget that they don’t have supermodel figures, so the dress might not be appropriate for their body type. Each person has flaws that might need to be hidden, so finding the right dress also means finding one that is suitable for one’s body.” (Wedding April-May 2011: 81)

“Choosing a perfect wedding dress is to choose a style that is suited to a bride’s body shape.” (Wedding April-May 2011: 61)

7.3.1 Modern bridal wear

A bridal gown is the most obvious symbol of a modern bride, an essential tool to complete the bridal transformation process. It is a piece of clothing that the media has led many women to believe as the most important and most beautiful dress that a woman could wear in her life. A wedding dress distinguishes a bride from an ordinary woman, as well as from the rest of her wedding party. This is the dress that makes a woman become the centre of attention, by marking a special moment in her life, as she is ascending to a legally committed relationship of marriage.

As with fashion, there is a particular dress code for the bride and recommendations for styles that should be followed. Bridal fashion varies from one place to another according to history, culture and social codes. Colour being one of the most significant elements of bridal fashion, as different culture has assigned meanings to colours differently. However, nowadays, white has become a universally accepted as a symbolic colour of a bridal gown. The colour white, has been widely acknowledged as a symbol of innocence and purity, and thus appropriate for a bride to wear for the wedding ceremony.

"A bridal gown is a woman's dream in a fabric form. To avoid disappointment for dreams of being fulfilled, you must do a lot of research before making decision (in choosing a bridal gown)." (Wedding 1998/9: 76)

In the past, there was no standard style of wedding dress since a bride would wear one of her best outfits for the wedding ceremony. The fashion of a white wedding dress became popular after Queen Victoria of England wore a white dress for her royal wedding to Prince Albert in 1840 (Ingraham 1999 and Jellison 2008). Since then, a white wedding dress has found its place in women's fashion trend around the world and has slowly become today's most significant symbol of a bride. Although a white wedding dress can be interpreted as a symbol of a bride's innocence and purity in the Western context, in Thailand, a white wedding is more commonly popular for its connotation of Western modernity, luxury and romantic wedding.

"A puffy white gown gives a luxurious princess appeal that makes a woman more captivating." (Wedding April - May 2011: 26)

In each issue of a wedding magazine, there is a large selection of wedding dresses for prospective brides to refer to, represented in the form of a photo shoot, fashion editorial, advertisement and interview. The magazine has given the significance of the wedding dress as one of the main symbolic representations of a modern bride. Finding the perfect dress has been compared to finding your destiny as illustrated in Figure 7.4. Thus within each issue, the magazines have compiled a range of styles of the modern wedding dresses from local boutiques to international high end designers.

"A bridal gown is a dress every women dreams of wearing once in their life. Even though there is a chance to fix a mistake (in a second or third try), most people do not want to." (WE August 2005: 31)

"Elegant dresses for the most important day of a woman's life, nowhere else can compare to a variety of choices and a range of styles that we have compiled for you." (Wedding April - May 2011: 26)

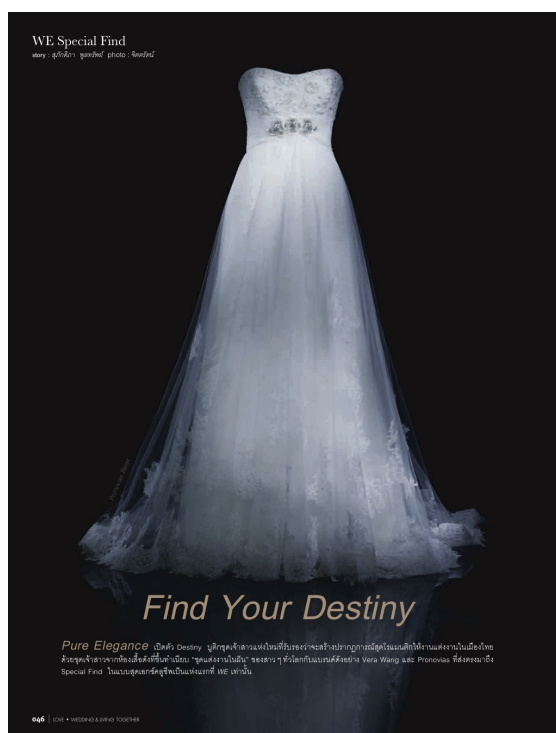


Figure 7.4 Find your destiny (WE June 2013: 46)



Figure 7.5 Dress like a princess (WE June 2013: 52)

In 'Wedding' (April-May 2011: 20-22) the style column features a collection of haute couture bridal wedding dresses from high-end designers such as Chanel, Valentino, Christian Dior and Vera Wang, which emphasise the fact that a modern Thai bride can also wear international brands that women all over the world dream of wearing.

Ellie Saab - This collection is suitable as bridal wear because of the feminine details especially the neckline that highlights the female silhouette, with a touch of luxury, elegance and soft tone colours.

Basil Soda - Ultra chic with a futuristic vibe but with a sweet feminine allure. Suitable for brides who want a unique style.

Chanel - Sheer fabric, embellished with pearls and sparking crystal, flowy and delicate details that look beautiful on all brides.

Valentino - The softness of the fabric used in this collection, as well as the soft colour tone and feminine details such as the ruffles make this collection very suitable as bridal wear.

Christian Dior – A vintage allure and captivating lavishness that comes from an oversized silhouette, but at the same time, sweet with soft pastel shades.

Vera Wang – The asymmetrical drape creates a unique style in a puffy ball gown and sheath wedding dress. A different colour sash at the waist accentuates the slimmer silhouette.



Figure 7.6 Designer brand of modern bridal wear from the runway (WEDDING April - May 2011: 20)

Although it is not specific what the magazine mean by 'feminine details'. But according to the examples given in the descriptions above, a wedding dress is feminine if it accentuates the female features, embellished with crystals, and is either white or any soft colour tone such as pastel shades. One of the most important functions of a wedding dress is to be flattering on a bride's body as well as highlighting

her silhouette. Below are some example captions in the bridal wear section from 'Wedding' (April – May 2011):

Add an enchanting sweetness with a variety of special designs for a special bride.

An off-white ball gown style, fitted at the top makes the bride appear slimmer at the waistline. A flared balloon skirt, made from taffeta fabric, creates dimension making the bride stand out beautifully (Wedding April-May 2011: 84).

An A-line bridal gown with a sweetheart neckline, fitted at the chest and waist area, highlighting the bride's silhouette. Made from good quality organza fabric. The simple but elegant design makes the bride more captivating (Wedding April-May 2011: 85).

Simple elegance with an A-line bridal gown with a sweetheart neckline, embellished with good quality crystal beads and lace. Made from organza fabric and good quality sheer fabric. The dress makes the bride look graceful, sweet and unique (Wedding April-May 2011: 86).

Eye-catching with an exclusively luxurious design in an off-white princess style strapless gown, which is suitable for all body shapes. The neckline is stylishly draped and the waistline is embellished with crystal beads and sequins. Dazzling in a delicately pleated balloon skirt, making a bride look perfect on her special day (Wedding April-May 2011: 87).

Looking sweet in a strapless A-line gown. The detailing of the drape on the chest area is of simplistic elegance suitable for a modern bride. The ruffle skirt is made from a good quality satin fabric; the bride looks perfectly beautiful (Wedding April-May 2011: 88).

Showing off her back in a luxurious and a little bit sexy strapless A-line gown (Wedding April-May 2011: 89).

The design accentuates the silhouette of the bride, radiating her beauty that not even light or shadow can hide (Wedding April-May 2011: 92).

An A-line gown creates the luxury allure of a princess and elegance of a professional model (Wedding, April - May 2011: 96).

The dreamy softness of the colour white when combined with soft texture and details becomes the ultimate wish of every bride.

Like a princess gown in a fairy-tale, a strapless gown with plunging neckline. The skirt is draped and gathered at the front. Adding glam with perforated details on the front of the skirt.

A gown similar to that of a royal princess connotes luxury and glamour. With crystal beads embellishment and an eye-catching sash that resembles that of a princess. A puffy skirt embroidered with some flower detailing.

Beautiful, luxurious and vivacious, this is the definition of beauty that deserves to be given to every woman on their special day of.

A beige strapless bridal gown. Made from Turkish silk and embellished with various kinds of fabric to create texture. A hand embroidered golden brown sash is tied at the waist, adding style and also creating an illusion of a slimmer waist.

Pretty, pure, flattering silhouette, elegant, soft, sweet and glamorous, these are the main definitions given to a bride wearing a bridal gown. A bridal gown helps a bride achieve these ideal qualities simply by wearing a gown that is suitable. The examples reveal that the magazines portray wedding dresses as having the ability to highlight the point of focus in the female bodies. The focal point in a female body is enhanced by the cutting and embellishment of each dress to create a final result that is feminine and befitting of a bride.

An A-line gown is flattering on most body shapes and also prevents the bride from looking awkward (since she does not have to mind the overly puffy and long skirt). Plus, an A-line gown would not let the bride be mistaken for a 'sausage' (which she could be if she has a problematic figure and wears a form-fitting gown). It is given now that most brides would either reveal their flawless back or shoulders in these bridal gowns, so take your pick from these thin straps, strapless, or off-shoulder designs (Wedding, April - June 2002: 124).

A bride cannot be perfectly beautiful if she is not confident in her body. Most bridal gowns are form fitting so the wearers must have their best body in their own way to shine on such an important night (Wedding January - March 2002: 108).

7.3.2 Traditional bridal wear

Traditional bridal wear is also as extravagant as the modern bridal wear. The point of reference for traditional bridal wear is the female heroines from the Thai classical literature. The details of the dresses are not explicitly described other than how the bride would look when wearing them and which fictional characters she would resemble.

Beautiful as a female heroine from classical Thai literature with this exquisite traditional Thai bridal wear (WE May 2008: 63).

By wearing a white wedding dress, a woman resembles a princess and while wearing a Thai traditional dress she resembles a fictional character from the Thai literature. So the bride is never truly the woman she was prior to wearing the dress, and not the woman she will become once the wedding is over either. A wedding is her most and

only grandiose moment before she becomes a wife and a mother, bearing the responsibilities of homemaking, career and parenting in the future. Thus, the symbolic significance of a wedding dress has been emphasised as a dress that would make a fantasy of a perfect wedding and blissful marriage becomes a reality.

The bridal attire is highly prescribed and policed, with precise instructions of what colour combinations should be worn and which jewellery is appropriate or which flowers should be held. Thus her bride's body becomes a constructed commodity, embellished with symbolic elements that highlights her quality, regulated by a dress code that expects nothing less than perfection.



Figure 7.7 Traditional Thai bridal wear (October 2013: 106 - 107)

The traditional Thai bridal wear has a classical appeal as opposed to a modern glam that comes with a white bridal gown. However, the designs of traditionalised bridal wear have been readjusted to create a more contemporary design to avoid being considered as outdated and most importantly to satisfy the taste of today's modern brides. However, rather than defining the traditionalised bridal wear in the same way as its modern counterpart, the magazines put more emphasis on the intricate details

of the traditionalised bridal wear. Brides wearing the traditionalised Thai bridal attire are described only for their classical appeal, in a way that is similar to beautiful fictional characters in Thai classical literature.

Beautifully designed white French lace on top of a pink 'sabai' is matched with a mystical Thai silk with hand woven flower details on a 'pha-sin' (Wedding, April - May 2011: 140).

As there are more details on the traditionalised bridal wear than the modern one, a bride wearing a traditionalised attire seems to be overshadowed by what she wears. As discussed in Chapter 6, when a traditionalised bridal wear is worn, a bride's own identity is replaced with either a literature heroine, a noblewoman or a lady from pre-modern Siam. Whereas when a modern bridal wear is worn, a bride is described as a more beautiful version of herself or that the dress compliments her features.

7.4 Thai femininity

"As a result of the illusions created by the novel 'si phanen din' (Four Reigns), with the twisted vision it provides of the Thai nation, Thai culture and Thai women, we are given to understand that Thai culture has nothing but a rich heritage, delicate sophistication and a heightened sense of aesthetics." (Kham Phaka, 2014: 185)

The magazine's prescriptions that must be adhered to by those who are becoming brides have reinforced the traditional Thai views of women: to be a perfect bride, one must possess the preferred ideal Thai femininity. One of the most famous Thai poets during the 19th century, *Phra Soontorn*¹⁴ wrote many poems and proverbs, most of which have implications on how a proper Thai lady should portray herself. The magazines have used many excerpts from his poem as captions in traditional bridal wear fashion spread. For instance, this poem below is printed alongside a collection of traditionalised bridal fashion images in May 2008 issue.

"Born a woman, should always appear as a woman. Do not ignore femininity. A woman who behaves like a man is unappealing. People do not admire women without femininity, they ignore them." (WE May 2008: 115)

¹⁴ Phra Soontorn or Soontorn Phu was a Thai poet. His work has remained influential to Thai literature and values to this day.

This value of Thai femininity is prevalent throughout the magazines. While the magazines guide women to be transformed into a fitting bride with the assistance of makeup and fashion as previously discussed, they also provide guidelines on how a bride can embody the preferred feminine qualities.

Apart from providing an ideal bridal appearance, 'WE' magazine has published an article about the ideal qualities of Thai brides, titled '*The ten commandments of brides-to-be*' (WE November 2005: 156). This discourse is not only a representation of the male and female gender relations in Thai society, but also a condition in which the identity of the males and females are constructed. The article stipulates that a marriage does not only mean a relationship between two people who love each other. In reality, extended families are also a part of any marriage, especially in Thai society. In the past, when a couple got married, the groom would move in with the bride into her parents' home, but recently many newlyweds prefer to live separately from their in-laws for convenience and to avoid familial conflicts. Despite living separately, both the bride and groom shall always maintain a good relationship with the in-laws. Thus these 'Ten Commandments' for prospective brides, based on the Buddhist teaching, have been suggested as pillars for a successful marriage. The commandments are outlined as follows:

Do not let the 'fire' out - a bride shall not speak badly of her husband and his parents to other people.

Do not let the 'fire' in - a bride shall not report any gossip she heard about her in-laws back to them.

Lend only to those who return - a bride shall be generous and lend to people.

Do not lend to those who do not return - a bride shall not lend to people randomly.

Lend and give to people who give back, as well as those who do not - a bride shall be generous especially to relatives who need help.

Sit appropriately - a bride shall not sit in ways that would obstruct the way of her husband and in-laws.

Sleep appropriately - a bride shall not sleep before her husband and her in-laws sleep.

Eat appropriately - a bride shall eat when her husband and her in-laws have already eaten.

Maintain the 'fire' - a bride shall always take care of her husband and her in-laws.

Respect the live-in 'angels' - a bride shall always regard her husband and her in-laws as angels and give them the utmost respect. (See appendix for original in Thai)

These commandments which are given as a recommended behaviour for prospective brides have shown that even though the majority of target readers of a wedding magazine are women, the magazine do not completely demonstrate their understanding and respect for the value of women. Instead they reinforce a patriarchal perspective that not only devalues the femininity but ridicules it in ways that consider such submissive behaviour to be expected of a respectable future bride. Women are rewarded with a lavish celebratory wedding event, beautifully dressed and made up to be remembered that she is one of the most special person. The temporary identity of a bride lasts for a moment, which follows by a lifetime of oppression under a patriarchal family in which women are expected to be docile. However, these teachings may not entirely be considered as demeaning to women in the Thai society, because such beliefs system has been embedded within the culture and society over a long period of time. Thus this discourse may very well be considered as normal and should remain unchallenged.

Furthermore, prospective brides are taught to maintain seven other qualities as follows:

A bride shall maintain her physical appearance and shall not let shabbiness overtake her beauty.

A bride shall be generous and kind, but shall not be lazy.

A bride shall maintain a clean home environment.

A bride shall not be selfish and shall be willing to sacrifice herself for the sake of her husband, family members and her neighbours.

A bride shall know what to say and what not to say, and shall know when to be quiet and when to give words of encouragement.

A bride shall be patient through tough times.

A bride shall always prepare water for her husband to drink and water for him to bath. (See appendix for original in Thai)

These ‘Ten Commandments’ are believed to be based on the preaching that *Visaka*’s¹⁵ father had given her daughter prior to her marriage. It is believed that *Visaka* had a very successful marriage and was an everlasting beauty, that even after giving birth to her ten daughters, people were still mistaken herself as one of the daughters if she were to be walking amongst them. Therefore, any man who marries a woman who possesses all these qualities is believed to be blessed with a blissful marriage. Ideal Thai brides are defined by the magazines as beautiful, well-mannered, gentle, loyal, well-behaved and sweet, so prospective brides are expected to aspire to achieve and/or maintain this standard. A bride who possesses these qualities of Thai femininity is believed to be a perfect representation of womanhood, befit to be a wife and mother.

A woman is born with virtues, she shall maintain her body flawlessly and correctly to avoid being bullied and gossiped.

A beautiful and flawless woman is like a valuable gemstone that the price decreases when broken or tarnished. Her pleasant scent can disappear too. (WE, June 2012: 30)

The translated poem above was featured in a diamond ring advertisement in the June 2012 issue. The poem is a teaching for women: a woman shall maintain her virginity or remain chaste in order to prevent herself from being the subject of gossips. A beautiful woman can be compared to a valuable gemstone, which could lose its value when damaged. Thus the message to all women is to behave like a ‘good woman’ otherwise their image could be ruined by the rotten stench of gossips (WE June 2012).

These teachings for prospective brides have oppressed women under a patriarchal dominance. Not only is a bride taught to be overly attentive to her husband and in-laws, she is also expected to disregard her personal freedom and to behave for the

¹⁵ Visaka, according to Buddhist teaching was a woman who lived during Buddha’s time.

sake of satisfying her husband. Although these teachings are not stipulated as the ultimate code of conducts for brides, and could be taken with a grain of salt, these messages have been embedded in the social core values of the society for so long that it has been normalised and thus become a standard social expectation. Inevitably, they have become unspoken expectations of a bride and a wife, and at the same time may create a stigma towards women who do not, or choose not to conform to these constructed ideals. They exist as a standard of control to keep the women docile within the family, as well as to maintain the status quo of men in his family. On the other hand, it could also be interpreted as a warning for a prospective bride and wife of what could be expected of them after the wedding. And perhaps it could be represented with a purpose of satire on the imbalance of gender relations in Thai society. Therefore, these magazines bear the responsibility of informing their readers of the notion of wedding and thus indirectly set expectations for prospective brides and teach them how to achieve these constructed ideals.

The social perception of romance, true love, femininity and bride are interrelated. The brides represented in magazines do not defy this social expectation of Thai femininity, but rather reinforce it. Thus, Thai women, especially brides remain subjugated and suppressed by these constructed ideals. The conventional view of femininity takes a dominant stance, even without the representation of 'bad' women, the notion 'good' women is reflected in her role as a bride, and her wedding as an evidence to support it. An absence of a dichotomy between good and bad women is compensated by the lavishness of the wedding celebration - implying what 'bad' women could be missing out by not conforming to the social expectations of Thai femininity.

7.5 A good woman becomes a bride

The discussion in this section is based on the theoretical framework of Thai gender relations and sexuality as presented in Chapter 2. Looking at how good women (brides) have been portrayed in a way that distinguishes them from the 'bad' women (prostitutes). An examination of Thai brides will not only increase the understanding of Thai women but also the understanding of the relations between women and men,

since the role of a bride can only be fully transformed in the presence of a groom. Van Esterik (1999) pointed out that most work within Thai gender studies have focused on women, while ignoring the relations between men and women, and men in general, therefore I hope that my research will be able to fill in some of gaps in this area with a closer examination of the portrayal of the bride as well as the groom in magazines.

The construction of femininity, expression of taste and consumption transpired in a wedding can demonstrate how a bridal identity is being represented. Although it is only a temporary identity, the magazines portray it as an identity in which most women are looking forward to embody at one point or another. In addition, by using actresses who are popularised by their roles as protagonist (*nang-aek*) in television dramas and films on magazine covers, the magazines have associated the concept of ‘good woman’ with image of a bride. These protagonist actresses (*nang-aek*) have already embodied the image of a ‘good woman’ from on screen roles, thus this ideal image being carried across platform over onto magazine covers. Hence these *nang-aek* on magazine covers connote the role of ‘good woman’ in their representation as brides. The media has successfully portrayed that a bridal identity can only be embodied by a ‘good’ woman, to the extent that the law prohibited a man from registering a marriage license with a prostitute, when the marriage registration was first introduced in Thailand.

“When the marriage license was first introduced and incorporated as a requirement into a wedding, the royal Thai family law did not limit the number of wives a man can register his marriage license with, however, it prohibited him from registering a marriage license with a prostitute (so-pe-ni or ying-pat-sa-ya),” (Sukalarbkij 2014:105)

The images of women that are being publicised in the Thai mass media demonstrate that the Thai culture is constructing two kinds of women, the good woman and the bad one. As much as there are images of glamorous women in glossy magazines in white wedding gowns and glamorous traditional Thai dresses, there are unpleasant images of Thai women for instance images of rape victims, nude models and victims of gruesome violence in the newspapers and television (Mulder 1997: 224 in Van Esterik 2000). The magazines have illustrated the extent to which ‘good’ women are

glorified by the media. Brides are portrayed in the magazines as possessing elegance, flawless skin, light complexion, shapely oval face and a slim figure, all of which are qualities deemed suitable for a perfect bride, the ideal bride in which women should aspire to be and men desire to be with.

"The former allows only one man to have sexual access to her for the purposes of procreation within the marriage, and the latter, more than one man, outside of long-term commitment. Thus the prostitute is more than a metaphor for the bad woman – she is her embodiment." (Van Esterik 2000: 167)

Whereas the bride is not only a metaphor of the good woman - but an aspiration of many. Perhaps this may be one of the reasons why the bride's education and her other qualities are expressively mentioned in a real wedding coverage. Moreover, the beautification regimes, cultivation of manners and skills such as cooking, homemaking, education and career, among other means of regulation of female bodies, are considered as valuable assets as much as an investment that women are willing to make to secure their prospect as brides of suitable grooms of equal status or higher. The marriage proposal represents men as the ones having more power to decide when to make the commitment, although the final answer is decided by women, culturally, she has to be asked first before she could give him an answer (Schweinegruber et al. 2008). But these qualities of women serve as the justification that they are not merely products that can symbolically traded from their family to their husbands' family.

The moral power of beauty, and the extreme objectification of women intersect in contemporary Thailand, building on the palimpsest of the elite court culture of 'Old Siam' where, the attributes of gentleness, subservience, silence and virtue are intertwined with the attributes of grace, composure and beauty. It is this phuu dii construction of beauty that strengthens the hold of cultural models of the feminine on elite Thai women. Mass media brings these models to rural and minority women throughout the country (Van Esterik 2000: 129).

In Thailand, the bride's price is a common practice, the groom or his family is expected to give the bride or her family some sort of payment either in the form of money, real estate, car, or other valuables such as jewellery and gold as illustrated in Chapter 6. The amount varies depending on the social and financial status of both

families as well as the quality of a bride. A research was conducted by a Thai economist in 2006 to determine an appropriate amount for the bride's price to be paid in Thailand by using variables such as age, education, income and job security of both the bride and groom (Wedding April - May 2011). Another Thai author, Kusuma na Kampu (2010) boldly argued that the wedding ritual is an expensive way to legally gain access to female bodies, taken into account the cost of the bride's price and wedding ceremony whereas the access to prostitutes is at a much lower price. I do not completely agree with this argument since the preconditions of a wedding cannot be merely reduced to the access to female bodies, but it is a combination of more significant factors such as love, marriage life and family. However, I cannot help but wonder if the extravagance and lavishness of the wedding along with a complete transformation of a princess-like bride are indirectly making a symbolic distinction between a bride and a prostitute. One woman deserves a glamorous ceremony and more money when another one does not, simply because it is her job and she is classified as a "bad" woman without possessing the qualities of a prospective wife and mother. In addition, since the findings in the previous chapters have demonstrated that a wedding is a bourgeois concept, or at least being portrayed as bourgeois, hence a woman's status is being elevated once she becomes a bride.

In these magazines, the brides are constructed as a representative of the Thai nation and of Thai women, a role model in which the women are shaped into during their transformation into becoming a bride. A bride must fulfil the role of a good daughter because she is grateful, obedient and loyal towards her parents. A Thai bride portrays an allure of virginity and innocence, as none of the brides represented by the magazines are pregnant in their wedding dress. The magazines also do not offer fashion advice on wedding dress for pregnant brides. The archetypal "good woman" is reserved, virgin, and a beautiful bride thus remains as an ideal image that represents Thai femininity. Women who are different from this archetypal ideal are considered either as unfeminine or not Thai, and hence are not represented.

According to Harrison (2010 and 2014), the female sexuality is the subject of social taboos. A good woman is portrayed as innocent and is absent of any sexual desires.

Sex before marriage is widely perceived as the behaviour of unfavourable women in Thai society, and such topic will be avoided to preserve the decency of pure romance. Thus, a wedding is only sacred and romantic for the women who possess the ideal feminine qualities. A wedding in which a bride is a few months pregnant, although a normal occurrence, is stigmatised for her unfavourable and unfeminine behaviour. Consequently, the allure of romance has diminished since a wedding becomes de-romanticised as an inevitable consequence of unplanned pregnancy, instead of the perceived notion of romantic love.

Noteworthy here is the magazines' depiction of Thai femininity through the representation of weddings in Bangkok's wealthy families (including upper-middle class and upper class). Therefore, the magazines are notable for their inclusion of the details of the brides' and groom's background in almost every aspect such as education, financial capability, careers, family and social status. These details draw attention towards the significance of social class, status and intellectual prowess in the suitability of one's marriage companion. Although women are made to believe that they have a choice in their partner's selection, this selection process is masked under the framework of patriarchal dominance. The narrative of a woman's transformation journey has portrayed a romantic wedding as a reward for a 'good' woman, who has found a suitable man who has chosen her. The romantic relationship between the bride and groom is then glorified by the allure of luxury and entitlement.

7.6 Conclusion

The bridal identities discussed here in relation to Thailand and Thai culture are deliberately critical against the mainstream discourse of Thai woman and weddings. The analysis has been undertaken in order to demonstrate a narrative structure in which the ideal Thai beauty and femininity are represented through the image of the brides in the magazines. It is without a doubt that the perception of beauty has been distorted by the digitally enhanced images circulated in the media. Women's femininity is highlighted with a slimmer body and face, more defined eyes and glossy

lips as a result of makeup, beauty treatments and digital retouch programmes. The features of the women's physical attributes are accentuated with makeup to create a look that conforms to the ideal image of a Thai bride. Therefore, the woman loses her individuality in her transformation into a bride. A bride is recognised not for her personal uniqueness or anything idiosyncratic, but for her tall slim body, beautifully made up face and her bridal fashion.

A bridal identity has been constructed on the basis of a disciplined female body. Prospective brides are disciplined by wedding magazines to learn and prepare for their future roles as brides. According to Boden,

"Disciplined not only through diet, beauty regimes, costume, gesture and posture (expressed in totality through the lived spatiality of the cover bride), but also through confronting to the more traditional proprieties of wedding etiquette and formality." (Boden, 2001: 65)

The magazines are disseminating an artificial representation of brides to a stereotypical audience. They do not provide an altogether accurate representation of weddings and brides, but they are subliminally shaping women into an ideal bride and provide them with fantasies of a romantic and slightly theatrical wedding. Brides are taught by the media to be their most beautiful self and the images of the brides being disseminated have reinforced this expectation. Being a bride and having a wedding is a fantasy indulging experience and the magazines are constructing recipes on how to indulge in the fantasy. The imagery and narratives create a mystique, a fantasy of romance and perfection that is normally absent in the women's daily life. This fantasy of a romantic wedding is a moment women have been building up to look towards, and once it is over, it will become the moment women look back through their wedding photographs with nostalgia.

"When a belief or practice is so taken for granted or naturalised that it is not discussed, questioned and debated, that belief or practice can be called hegemonic." (Adrian 2003: 147)

These magazines reinforce a society-wide expectation that a bride should be beautiful and have a luxurious wedding more than emphasising on maintaining a successful marriage. However, they have left out the weddings of the minority, and ignoring the issues that are problematic in a wedding preparation. Women and weddings are therefore stereotyped by the magazines as a romantic fantasy as they are presented with perfected images and stories of weddings, many of which are laden with wealth and social privileges. These constructed ideals have been subliminally implanting the notion of weddings and brides in the minds of the readers. As readers aspire to have weddings like what are being represented, they should also have aspired to aim for power and prestige.

In exploring the notion of Thai weddings and the identity of a bride through the theoretical lens of gender, it can be concluded that there are many aspects of the wedding which demonstrate the oppression of women. The oppressed women in Thailand are defined by their relations to men. There is the recurring myth of the woman, which only defines her as a good woman when she becomes a bride, a wife and a mother. An unmarried woman is usually stigmatised and deemed as lacking in feminine virtues, otherwise she would have already been married. There is an issue with the change of surname to the husband's surname and the move into the husband's house (or husband's parents' house) after the wedding. In addition, there is an issue with the bride's price (the money which groom's family gives to the bride's family), which is usually one of the most enquired subjects and sometimes is announced to the public, as if the value correlates with the quality of a particular bride. Moreover, there is the dramatic transformation of a woman into a glamorous Hollywood-esque bride on her wedding day. Is she not a woman without these exterior embellishments? Why is it that women have to be elaborately decorated while men are exempted from such laborious process? Is it to satisfy her responsibility of being "looked at"? These are just some of the formula that every (good) woman should follow in the Thailand context. Women are oppressed under the standards of beauty, the duty of being a wife, daughter and mother, all of which are being reinforced by the media and supported by the capitalist markets.

Based on the premise that women's magazines communicate their mythic meaning by means of signs, thus their "representation of the imaginary is dependent on the symbolic, the signs which do the communicating" (Bignell 1997: 87). The images of the brides as constructed and represented by the magazines as discussed above have demonstrated a slightly distorted version Thai femininity. The overtly emphasised notion of beauty has not only diverted magazines' readers from finding flaws on their faces and fix any imperfections, but also reduced the identity of a bride as a simply beautiful woman and nothing more. Thus making a bride an object to be looked at and appreciated just for her beauty. These brides have started off as a subject and eventually transformed themselves into an object that represents perfection. An object to be perfected, in order to conform, perform and be documented. Thai femininity, traditional or modern, is still oppressed under these myths of social expectations and constructed images, which cannot disassociate beauty and the role of a bride, wife and mother away from the standard of 'preferred' female perfection, perhaps because Thai brides are framed as the representative of national women.

Commodification of Romance and ‘Thainess’

“...the signified of Thainess also changes, from the supposed embodiment of the inherent essence of all things Thai into just one identity option among many others, national, ethnic or otherwise, which anyone can partake of and indulge in through the purchase and consumption of commodities and signs...the consumption of consumer products not for their intrinsic use value or socio-economic exchange value, but for their cultural value as signs of desired identity.” (Tejapira 2001: 208)

8.1 Introduction

The previous three chapters have discussed the magazines’ representation of ‘Thainess’ and Thai brides on the cover pages and in the editorial articles. However, advertisements are also a significant part of the magazines because the products and services advertised are represented as crucial to the wedding. Thus, this chapter sets out to examine the notion of ‘Thainess’, romance and femininity in magazine advertisements by looking at the products being advertised and discussing their roles in constructing meanings and/or myths about Thai weddings.

This chapter is presented into four sections. The first section discusses the relationship between wedding magazines and advertisements. The second section examines the meanings given to the products advertised and the myths that have been constructed around them. The analysis in this section reveals a range of dominant wedding products and the symbolic meanings embedded within the disseminated texts and images. The third part explores the format of presentation and labels used to associate the products with the notion of romance and ‘Thainess’ in Thai weddings, as well as

the dominant images being used in advertisements and articles in the commodification process. And the last section concludes the chapter.

8.2 Weddings and advertisements

Wedding magazines have made consumption a part of the wedding culture through the consolidated advertisements of wedding-related products and professional services because they are dependent upon selling advertising space (Howard 2006). Through the coverage of society weddings of wealthy and famous people as well as various pages of advertisements, wedding magazines have endorsed the notion that the celebration of a perfect wedding can be made possible when brides and grooms spend money and buy products.

According to Ingraham (1999), westernised 'white weddings' are heavily implicated in 'romancing' - that is, creating an illusion of - the institution of heterosexuality, and in upholding a dominant race, gender, class and labour relation. Kim (1996: 143) regarded weddings as a product of the imagination and realisations of one's most romantic fantasies. Value and sacredness have been given to these commodities, thus making them different from ordinary consumer products as Boden (2003) suggested also 'implicating them in the attempt to live out fantasies, especially that of being the fairy-tale bride/princess'. Otnes and Lowrey see American weddings as a 'consumption-oriented rite of passage' (1993: 325). Goldstein-Gidoni referred to Hobsbawm's idea (1983) of the 'invention of tradition' to understand how the wedding industry manipulates both traditional and Western cultural referents and repackages them into an invention of what comes to be regarded as decidedly 'Japanese'. The works of these authors have provided a groundwork which will be applied in the discussion of advertisements in Thai wedding magazines.

In the selected issues of the magazines, pages of advertisements and advertorial tie-ins contribute to almost half of the entire 170 - 200 pages magazine. It is evident that both the wedding industry and wedding magazines remain commercially viable through mutual support. The commercial sector sponsors the publications in

exchange for pages of advertisements and promotions, while it is the responsibility of the magazines to attract readers and maintain profitable circulations [see Chaudhuri 2009, Cronin 2004, Winship 1987]. The term 'wedding industry' used in this study refers to bridal magazines, wedding-related goods and service providers such as jewellers, bridal dresses boutiques, wedding photographers, hotels, etc. The target audience of these wedding magazines is mainly brides-to-be as well as their mothers, sisters and friends who are searching for information and references while planning for the big day. Thus, the magazines serve as a convenient point of resources packed with wedding ideas, suggestions and most importantly contact details for the products and services required. Advertisements in wedding magazines are not simply selling weddings, but they are selling fantasies of a successful romantic relationship, a perfect wedding and a blissful marriage. These fantasies and expectations have been constructed and are continuously built-up by the media and wedding industry through professional wedding images and interviews. These texts and images are ensuring the readers that the way these dreams could be realised is through the purchase of the products and services being marketed.

In these magazines, a wedding is depicted as a celebration of a successful and committed love, a love which can be measured by the amount of money people are willing to spend. According to Howard (2006) and Jellison (2008), a bigger wedding gives the marriage a greater "stature and meaning." Because the wedding is a ritual and a celebration, it has always been associated with excessive spending. According to Penner (2004), a celebration is characterised as a "conspicuously wasteful expenditure." The purpose of such spending is to impress others through the display of wealth. As it is pointed out in Schmidt (1995), "a common feature of the festivity is to overindulge, to eat, drink or spend to excess and to lavishly use up resources otherwise diligently saved" (Schmidt 1995: 8). Hence, consumable goods and the commercials are used as a marker to indicate one's affluence and social status. For an event like a wedding, which has been socially regarded as a very special occasion that happens only once in a lifetime, it is justifiable that a bride, a groom and their families choose to spend lavishly to display their opulent wealth as well as to acknowledge the sanctity of their marriage.

Not only did the celebration of marriage has been “infiltrated” by businesses, the expectations and expenditures associated with the celebrated love have also increased and an emphasis on the wedding consumption has been placed on “external” factors such as rings, gowns, flowers and gifts for having the power to communicate a social status and taste as well as to celebrate the nuptial (Penner 2004: 2). In this regard, the notion of romance and wedding has been commodified and has become what Veblen calls “devout consumption” in the same manner that Christmas and Valentine’s Day are (Penner 2004: 2).

Within each wedding commercial transactions are the integral mechanism that are coordinating everything together, making a wedding what the bride and groom want it to be. Wedding magazines are bridging the gap between businesses such as jewellers, designers, florists, caterers, photographers, etc. and consumers with the advertisements by giving a cultural significance to these commodities and thereby embedding their necessity in a consumers’ wedding purchase. For instance, the advertisements have solidified the significance of a diamond ring as the ultimate symbol of true love, romance, glamour and status, thus this has increased the demand for such product as it has been intertwined within the human romantic life (Falls 2008). Hence, the consumption pattern of prospective brides and grooms has already been mapped out in the publications, through the represented images and texts.

8.3 Products and services advertised

The most recurring advertisements observed in the selection of wedding magazines include diamond rings, jewellery, wedding dresses, wedding planners, wedding photographers, hotels and other wedding venues, as well as honeymoon destinations. Some advertisements are disguised in the format of articles or interviews (advertorial), while others are presented as advertisements. The commodification of weddings has not only increased the number of choices of products and services available for the bride and groom but also made them more culturally significant to the wedding. The ideological meanings created for the products in wedding magazines have made the purchase of certain wedding-related goods and services compulsory, or preferable to

ensure that the wedding and the bride achieve the maximum level of perfection. The lavish spending and excessive consumption for a wedding have made it a modern tale of consumer culture (Boden 2003).

The findings reveal that a wedding has been romanticised by the media and wedding industry through myths that are tied to the products and services being endorsed in these publications. The fantasies or myths about weddings that have been constructed by the advertisements have encouraged the readers to indulge in the consumptions that have romantic connotations or promises of perfection. Advertisements in the wedding magazines are 'romantic supremacy', focusing mainly on products being constructed around the notion of romantic love. There is an emphasis on the need to have the most romantic wedding venue, the most romantic music and the most romantic food. A ritual of commitment has been transformed into a ritual of consumption. According to Schudson (1984: 210), "advertising tends to promote attitudes and lifestyles which extol acquisition and consumption at the expense of other values." It is constructing a fictional world in which consumers are drawn into and consequently develops the need for the products advertised. Hence, the language and images in certain advertisements have been employed in order to promote these wedding consumptions as well as to 'guarantee' a degree of romance and perfection to be expected from such consumption. Thus, how perfect or luxurious a wedding is can be defined by the type of commodities being incorporated into it.

"You cannot design love, but you can design your wedding." (WE, May 2011)

When weddings in magazines are examined semiotically, it is apparent that there is an assortment of signs incorporated in the images and texts. These signs and meanings have communicated the identity and cultural values that are significant to the bride and groom. As Lester (2000) puts it:

"You will find that any and all images have something to tell you because every picture created has some meaning to communicate. The producer of the image took the time to frame and make the picture for a reason." (Lester 2000)

In the case of advertisements, meanings are given to the advertised products, and thus creating myths that have enveloped the product and its consumption together. Mythology according to Roland Barthes (Barthes 1972, Leak 1994 and Rylance 1994) is the signifying cultural belief that is blurred to the extent that it seems natural. It can be considered a process of illusion. Although, this does not mean that myth is a made up lie or false advertising, in fact a myth presents everything that is apparent without obscuring anything. The fact that when everything is presented, it seems natural and so people do not realise that everything that is being presented is a cultural construct. Therefore, people may be under the illusion that everything they practice or believe in, is natural, when in fact it is a myth. Myth is a representation of a belief in our everyday life which has constructed the image of this world and people that are living in it. Therefore, wedding related myths are constructed and reinforced by wedding magazines through the imagery and discourse within the magazines.

The romanticisation of commodities can be best observed in the ways they are advertised. As previously mentioned, advertisement makes up a substantial part of a wedding magazine. The representative of the dominant trend in wedding advertisements includes diamonds, wedding venues, wedding photography and honeymoon destinations. The advertisements of these products and services will be discussed below in regards to the myths and romantic connotations they have disseminated.

“In these new commercial venues, the marriage itself became a consumer rite, the subject of advertising and merchandising.” (Howard 2006: 219)

8.3.1 Diamond rings

A wedding magazine is not complete without an advertisement for a diamond ring or jewellery. In fact, the diamond ring advertisement dominates the advertising space in most wedding magazines. A diamond is scientifically suggested as the strongest gemstone and therefore its strength has been popularly used as a representative symbol of love that is also just as strong (see Howard 2006). Some advertisements portray diamonds as “strongly gendered (as well as racialised and classed)” (Falls 2008:

450), whereas in the case of the diamond ring advertisements in the Thai wedding magazines used in this study, marketers have used a non-identification approach as to not limit its appeal to certain demographic groups while excluding others. The majority of diamond ring advertisements are portrayed without models, emphasising that this signification of true love and opulence is available for everyone to be aspired to. Thus it is common to see diamonds being consumed and used symbolically in rituals and as signifier of social status and identities, since the symbolic connotations were constructed through marketing (Falls 2008).

The advertisement of diamond rings found in the wedding magazines are composed of photographs of the rings and advertising copy that are related to love and the majority of them are written in English (see examples in Figure 8.1 – Figure 8.5). The advertisement has constructed the myth about a diamond ring being the ultimate symbol of love in order to sustain its romantic value, as well as its monetary value. Subsequently they have successfully become one of the most important elements to any wedding, having been the requirement for marriage proposal stage, as well as during the commitment ceremony, and then again to be worn by married men and women to signify their status of being part of a committed relationship. Below are selected advertising copies and examples of diamond ring advertisement in wedding magazines. The focus of the print ads is a collection of various styles of diamond rings set against an almost plain background. The print ads are not cluttered with other objects nor with a variety of colours. The use of white and silver tone colours is to mirror the physical characteristic of diamond rings, they are simple and sophisticated. The texts in the ads include the jeweller's name and contact info, and the name of the diamond certification institution to guarantee the quality, all of which are positioned discreetly either at the top or bottom of the page. These advertising copies demonstrate that diamond rings are advertised as a symbolic representation of love and instead of addressing the product directly, these advertisements only feature a picture of the ring with some captions as in the examples below:

One perfect love, one perfect ring. (Wedding July – September 2004: 64)

Soulmates ... The everlasting love together through the end of time. (Wedding July-September 2004:5)

The sweetest moment that will last forever. (Wedding Guru, Issue 9 2011: 25)

Jewellery for the perfect moment. Cherish your love journey. The most beautiful diamond ... power of love. (WE November 2011: 21)

Thousand words of love can be created. (WE November 2011: 13)

Being with you, every moment. (WE July 2011: 9)

Love is forever. (WE November 2011: 31)

Endless Love. (Wedding October 2011: 30)

The proof of love. (WE May 2008: 21)

Where your love begins. (WE June 2013: 17)

The only place where love is imprinted on forever. (Wedding January - March 2002: 226)

Luxurious diamond ring with modern design in white gold or gold plating. With super special promotions you can easily purchase (own). (WE July 2011: back cover)

Fulfill your love (in English) If you are looking for a symbol that represents love, we have a variety of rings for you. Our experienced design team created rings that are timeless, just like your love. (WE June 2011: 30)

WE Shop : Jewel

STD DESIGN

Fulfill your love...

หากคุณกำลังมองหาสิ่งที่เป็นเครื่องหมายแทนความรัก
เราเป็นความหมายและคำสัญญาที่สมบูรณ์แบบ
ด้วยชิ้นงานที่ออกแบบมาอย่างดีด้วยประสบการณ์
บรรจงสร้างสรรค์ผลงานที่เปี่ยมด้วยคุณค่าและเวลา
ใจเหนือ... ความรักของคุณ

STD DESIGN Boutique : 198-200 ถนนสีลม 1 (ถนนสีลม) Tel: 02-6359858.
081-9949826 Fax: 02-6358749 www.std-design.com

Figure 8.1 Diamond ring advertisement - Fulfill your love (WE June 2011: 30 - 31)

SETTE

"Where your love begins..."

il mio amore

SETTE Engagement Ring and Marriage Set Ring

SETTE BOUTIQUE THE SIAM PARAGON M31, MAIN LEVEL TEL: 66 2 129 4848 EMAIL: sette@sette-peccati.com

Figure 8.2 Diamond ring advertisement - Where your love begins (WE June 2013: 17)

Proud Gems

Being with You,
Every Moment...

* เรนพลมประกันคุณภาพ

ที่ Proud Gems เราตั้งใจ เพื่อให้แหวนวงนี้ แทนความทรงจำที่พิเศษสุดสำหรับคุณ...ตลอดไป

** รับส่วนลดพิเศษสำหรับคู่แต่งงาน WE

แหวนหมั้นเพชร แหวนคู่ Collection ใหม่ล่าสุด
เพชร Certificate GIA EX/EX H&A ที่ปลอดภัยที่สุด

พร้อมรับคำแนะนำในการเลือกซื้อเพชรแบบส่วนตัว
จากนักวิเคราะห์หลักเกณฑ์ GIA

คุณ ณลวรรณ เอกนันท์
Doctor Diamond

พิเศษสำหรับลูกค้า WE ส่วนลด 15% พร้อมบริการผ่อนชำระ: 0% นานถึง 6 เดือน

Proud Gems
3rd Fl. Siam Center
Tel : 02-2514949 Open Daily
www.proud-gems.com

Figure 8.3 Diamond ring advertisement - Being with you, Every moment (WE July 2011: 9)

"THE SWEETEST MOMENT THAT WILL LAST FOREVER."

MESCHERES
Diamond

WWW.MESCHERESDIAMOND.COM

S.K. BUILDING 71 KRUNGTHONBURI RD. KLONGSAN, BKK 10110 TEL: 081-889-1840
CENTRAL CHIDLOM 2nd FLOOR CENTRAL RAMA 3 1st FLOOR CENTRAL CHANGWATANA 1 FLOOR

Figure 8.4 Diamond ring advertisement - The sweetest moment that will last forever (WE September 2012: 39)

Love is...forever

World Class Guarantee by Quality through Design. GIA

PRIMA DIAMOND

12th Floor, Central City Bangna Building, 589/64 Bangna - Trad Road, Bangna, Bangkok 10260
Customer Service : 02 745 6111 Ext. 122,123
www.primadiamond.co.th

Figure 8.5 Diamond ring advertisement - Love is forever (WE November 2012: 35)

The advertisements for diamond rings are celebrating the value of true love and promoting romantic gestures of expressing true love. Furthermore, the high price of a diamond ring has also made the consumption and possession of a diamond a display of wealth. The social significance and value given to a diamond ring have increased its cultural dominance and made it a popular commodity and a subject of desire (Schweingruber et al. 2008). The commercial sector has made diamond rings available to be bought, valued and used as one of the status marker by a larger market. Consequently, the notion of love has been commodified into a diamond ring, which not only encapsulates love into an object, but also makes it valued according to the physical and financial values of the diamond ring that represents it.



Figure 8.6 Diamond ring advertisement with size of diamond and price listed (WE October 2014: 12 - 13)

Some of the more direct and descriptive advertisements for diamond ring as a symbolic representation of love are illustrated as follows:

It is good if we can invest our money in a piece of valuable jewellery as a present for ourselves or someone we love. This is an alternative way to invest apart from putting money in a bank, stock

market, bonds or real estate. It can also be passed on to our grandchildren in the future. (WE, May 2008: 104)

A wedding ring given to the woman you love will win her heart and minimise the risk of you being heartbroken. (WE, May 2011: 26)

When considering what is important for a wedding, the majority of prospective brides will give priority to a diamond ring. A diamond ring is a representation of one's heart, which stands for pure love in a relationship and that will remain with them forever. (WE, September 2008: 23)

The intangibility of love and romance have made it possible and necessary for people to transfer this concept onto something tangible so as to encapsulate the notion and confirm its existence. This is the basic understanding of myth, which is essentially a way of communicating a cultural belief by presenting it as natural. What may seem natural to people, either in newspaper, television or our conscious mind are in fact a construction, it is not natural, but cultural. Magazines and advertisements have reinforced the transfer of the notion of love and romance onto material objects such as a diamond ring, and consequently it has become a symbol of eternal love between a man and a woman (Falls 2008). Therefore, a myth of love is being constructed, it has become so customary and frequently represented across the media that it now seems natural that a man proposes the woman he wants to marry or signify a commitment status between a bride and groom with a diamond ring (Howard 2006 and Schweingruber et al. 2008).

From the quoted magazine advertisements illustrated above, it is clear that the captions in the diamond ring advertisements are not actually advertising the qualities of the rings at all, but instead they are promoting the concept of love, a feeling which consumers should imagine themselves feeling once a diamond is either bought, given or worn. The advertisements are advertising a lifestyle that is associated with the consumption of the product rather than advertising the product itself. Hence, the language of advertisements is communicating about consumption of the product to the consumer instead of communicating what the products are (Chaudhuri 2009). By and large, material goods have communicative power, they are valued and appreciated not only for what they are, but also for way they mean and express. The advertisements for diamond rings in wedding magazines have done just that.

This has also demonstrated the way in which businesses in the wedding industry such as jewellers have ingratiated themselves into contemporary weddings (Penner 2004). It is also noteworthy that the diamond ring advertisement is the only part in the magazine where there is a clear mention of the product's monetary value, as the price of the advertised rings are specifically made apparent next to the image of the products shown. Thus, the way that diamonds rings are being advertised in the magazines may suggest that the gateway to successful love is money. Although love is intangible, its value can be translated and commodified into symbols like a diamond ring to express love and romance of wedding. Thus, if love could be measured, it would be measured by carat, clarity, colour and cutting (the 4Cs of the diamond grading system), as well as the amount of money one is willing to spend on it. These advertisements have demonstrated that marketers have successfully portrayed a diamond ring as a matchless symbol of commitment and marriage, "a public demonstration of a man's love for a woman" (Howard 2006: 42).

"For working women, wearing an engagement ring signified success in the competitive marriage market. Popular culture was full of examples of women boasting about their diamonds - the bigger the better - or regretting their lack of this symbol of commitment and marriage. (Howard 2006: 58-59)

"Marketing tries to attach ideas of romance, status and love with the generic-type diamond. And although the arbitrary nature of deeming for diamonds has not remained completely hidden, it nevertheless remains socially powerful" (Falls 2008: 455)

8.3.2 Luxurious wedding venues

The venue where a wedding takes place is important since it has to serve as a locality that encapsulates the overall ceremony, while accommodating guests of the wedding party. If a wedding is to be considered as a performance, a wedding venue should be considered as a stage, a place where the performance takes place. The wedding magazines are promoting hotels, most of which are global brands or Western franchises, as the ideal venues to have a wedding. Hotels, especially those with four to five stars have become "synonymous with the lavish white wedding" (Howard 2006: 178). As weddings have become more commercial, the bride and groom make this

family affair more public by employing the services offered by the commercial sectors such as the hotels, restaurants and professional caterers to organise their wedding.

The advertisements for hotels promote their suitability as wedding venues with some photographs depicting the perfected wedding atmosphere filled with romantic sentiments. More than available spaces, these businesses are offering the consumers a sense of prestige and luxurious experience that can be translated into the surrounding atmosphere that each venue can create for a wedding ceremony and wedding reception. Although these luxury hotels are perceived as places that cater mostly elite clients, the advertisements have ensured the wedding consumers it is not necessary to be part of the elites to employ their services as long as they can afford the expenses that will incur. These venues promise to make the bride and groom the most important persons, and hence can be considered as one of the elites' clientele through the process of such consumption.

In addition, the hotels are promoting their expertise in wedding organisation and impressive atmosphere that are essential to make a wedding perfect. The advertisements use images of the venues and the bride and grooms can be seen smiling with happiness. They have to persuade the marrying couples that they possess the professional skills that are not only able to make the wedding day a success, but also they are also capable of making their dreams come true (Figure 8.7 and 8.8). The images in these advertisements capture a moment that signifies a wedding - a bride throwing her bouquet. These ads are making connections between a happy couple having celebrated their wedding with the success of the event being held at the advertised venue. The texts in these ads include a brief description of the service the hotel has to offer, as well as the venue's name and contact information, but they are rather discreet and do not overwhelm that ad, leaving the image of the happy couple or their event be the main focus.

Just bring your other half, we will take care of the rest... (Wedding July - September 2003: 59)

Sparklingly celebrate your wonderful wedding day at the finest venue. If you are planning for an unforgettable wedding (venue's name) is the answer. (WE June 2012: 27)

Fulfilling all your dreams on your most special day. (WE May 2008: 41)

A day to remember. The day of happiness and cherished memories start here. (WE June 2012: 61)

Forever starts here. (WE June 2013: 21)

At Royal Jubilee Ballroom, you are our Princess. Magically transform the dreams and memories of every couple at Royal Jubilee Ballroom. (WE September 2008: 169)

Some hotels are promising more than a venue for the wedding, but also an auspicious future for the bride and groom. As one of the hotel advertisements in the magazines translates:

According to a Feng Shui theory, the perfect ballroom should be a square shape. A square shape represents wood energy, and wood symbolises a stable and growing love. Our 'Infinity' ballroom is built according to the rules of Feng Shui. The bride and groom whom wedding is celebrated here will be blessed with love, wish fulfilment and will have a stable and long-lasting marriage. The entrance into the ballroom is located to the north of the building, where an auspicious energy will result in promising career prospects for the bride and groom. A successful career can contribute to a successful marriage. (WE May 2008: 25)

As modern weddings are held in luxurious hotels, venues for traditional weddings include traditional style houses and gardens available for rent. New meanings are given to tradition by the wedding industry. Luxurious 'Western' franchised hotels associate a 'white' wedding with glamour and an emblem of modernity. Whereas the venues arranged for 'traditional' weddings display exoticness to match the 'invented' fantasy of traditional Thai. The tradition of the commitment ritual has transformed into a performance that is deemed not perfect without the perfect stage. Advertisements put an emphasis on perfection that can only be achieved by the "wedding experts" and justified consumers' choices to rely on the wedding industry for their dream wedding. Hence these advertisements confirm that the wedding venue is

not only trying to offer wedding services, but is also offering meaningful sentiments such as the realisation of dreams and perfection to their clients.

8.3.3 Wedding photography and planning services

Weddings are highly regarded for their symbolic value. The contents of magazines, and their accounts of actual weddings and magazine articles, emphasise a wedding as a significant event, a public demonstration of love between the bride and groom. It is not just an event that can be planned in a few days or celebrated casually. On the contrary, weddings magazines depict weddings as a magnificent reward of a loving and romantic relationship between a bride and her groom. In the wedding interviews and advice columns, professional wedding planners and photographers are represented as helpful and crucial in achieving wedding perfection. Both services are usually offered as a package deal by the same company, while a wedding planner ensures the venue is beautifully decorated, the professional quality wedding photography provides an affirmation that the couples are blessed with a beautiful happy ending with photographic evidence.

Photography is one of the main elements a wedding cannot be without as it is the only way to capture the joyous moments and document the completeness and success of a wedding in material forms. The romantic narratives and images in the magazines and advertisements have reawaken the consumers' dissatisfaction of the ordinariness of their lives by making everything about a wedding grander and larger than life. Thus, the advertisements emphasise that a wedding is the greatest moment in one's life and one that should be unforgettable. The photographs do not only capture a moment, but they are also a memorabilia of the most cherished memories.

Let us take your great memories. (WE July 2011: 25).

Capturing precious moments for unforgettable memories (WE July 2011: 39)

Every beautiful photograph is a cherished memory. (Wedding May 2008: 33)

Photograph of a cherished memory. A memorable moment in a lifetime. A special day that can be captured in a photograph. We are ready to capture every special moment because you are special. (Wedding July-September 2003: 17)

Luxury, lustre, legacy. As time goes by ... only memories can make you smile. (WE April 2005: 125)

The advertisements for the services illustrated below are showing their artistic photography skills, capturing moments that seem exclusive to the bride and groom, detached from the rest of the wedding party. The images in these ads combine shadow and low lighting with minimum brightness, making them different than other common wedding photographs that usually capture the event at large.

These advertisements have highlighted a wedding as the most significant time, which nothing else could surpass. Giving such importance to a wedding, everything that is wedding related becomes special as a consequence. First the bride is taught to be her most beautiful self, not only because she will be looked at by her wedding party, but also because she will be photographed, a photograph that will remain even as time passes and looks faded as a reminder of her greatest moment and her most beautiful self. Therefore, much of the content of the magazines devote to helping the bride select the perfect wedding dress, achieve the perfect makeup and perfect hair, preparing her to be ready to be beautifully photographed. The models wearing the wedding dresses in the magazines represent a social type or demographic group of women instead of a particular person. Collectively they are representing women of marital age, who would like to be married and also an example of a perfectly photographed bride.



Figure 8.9 Wedding planner advertisement (WE June 2012: 81)

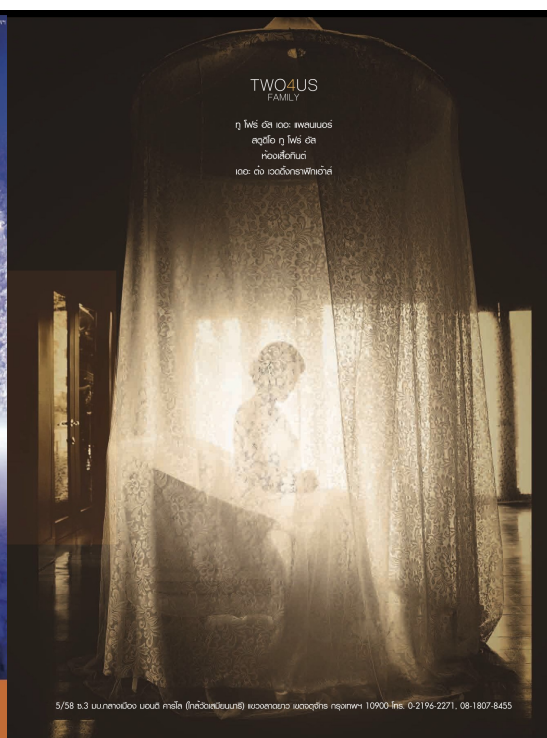


Figure 8.10 Wedding planner advertisement (WE June 2013: 73)

Women's magazines have been targeted as the reason for perpetuating an unrealistic ideal of beauty that favours youth, thinness and whiteness (Frith, Shaw et al. 2009: 193). However, the ideals communicated in wedding magazines strengthen these further than generic women's magazines, due to their social significance as a ceremony tends to be photographed more than any ordinary day. Only for the purpose of being photographed, a lot of transactions are made in the preparation process. The service fees for the photographer and the photographs in various formats then complete another process of the purchase of wedding commodities.

8.3.4 Products of auspiciousness

As discussed in previous chapters, auspiciousness still remains as one of the important aspects in Thai weddings and there are various products advertised for their auspicious meanings. Although these products are advertised for traditional Thai ceremony rather than the modern wedding. Not only do these products reassure the bride of groom of their prospect for a blissful marriage, they also add a touch of ‘Thainess’ to a wedding.

A traditional Thai wedding ceremony is a complicated event, which requires various specific products for their specific meanings based on traditional beliefs. These products have been commodified so that auspiciousness can be afforded by brides and grooms. For instance, it is believed that a cat is auspicious because it is a domesticated animal, and thus symbolises a future where the married couple will live happily at home. But since it may be inconvenient to get a live cat, the magazine has recommended a ceramic cat, which can be bought easily as a replacement. Similarly, Thai desserts which are required in the ceremony for their auspicious sounding name are also available for purchase by shops, which claimed to make them with ‘authentic’ recipes.

Essential things for the wedding night ceremony (pi-tee-rieng-morn) are a winter melon, an herb-grinding stone, a cat, a pouch of beans and sesame seeds, coins and flower petals [...] sharp objects are not permitted in the bride and groom's wedding night room [...] But these days most bride and groom spend their wedding night at the hotel (where the wedding reception is held) essential things such as a cat would be inconvenient. So a ceramic cat is used instead. Also a semi-precious stone with healing properties such as rose quartz is used to replace the herbal-grinding stone which is difficult to find. (Wedding July - September 2003: 37)

The nine auspicious desserts (kanom-mongkol) are required in the gifts presentation for their symbolic meaning based on their auspicious sounding names. The meanings for the 9 auspicious traditional Thai desserts are: success in career, Charms and loveable qualities, long-lasting love, growth and strength, prosperity in business, long life, support from other people and good luck with finance. (WE May 2008: 24)

This place has catered Thai desserts for 25 years. It brings back a taste from the past to consumers. (WE November 2011: 88)

The recipes of this Thai desserts shop is very authentic since they have been passed down from generation to generation. (WE November 2011: 88)



Figure 8.11 Auspicious wedding products

Other products which are advertised not only for their auspicious meanings but also for their functions of intensifying the level of ‘Thainess’ and sacred quality to a wedding ceremony such as jasmine garlands and conch for water blessing ceremony.

A traditional belief regarded a conch (hoy-sang) as a holy object because the tip of the conch has a similar marking to one of the gods. Therefore, a conch is used to contain blessed water for the water blessing ceremony for auspiciousness of the bride and groom. (WE May 2008: 32)

Sustaining a sense of ‘Thainess’ with a jasmine garland. (WE May 2008: 49)

A jasmine garland is one of the most valuable objects passed on from our ancestor. No jasmine garland from any country can be more beautiful than ours (Thai’s). A marigold garland from India or Hawaiian plumeria lei is not as meticulously embroidered: one by one from small stem flowers of various colours like this. (WE May 2008: 48)

8.3.5 A wedding with a theme

Overall, readers of these magazines are saturated with images and texts that advertised wedding day perfection. The narrative of wedding magazines is accompanied by two things: a descriptive story of the romantic relationship and the arrays of products used to signify the romance and serve the ritual purposes. It further

emphasises the fact that even though one cannot decide how love happens, one can always design how their love is celebrated in public.

Thai contemporary weddings are created with themes. They are often planned based on a theme preferred by the bride and groom. The theme of a wedding can be as simple as a colour scheme. For instance, a silver and gold dress code specified in the wedding invitation will inform the wedding guests to be dressed in either colour, in addition, the bride and groom will conform to the dress code such as a wearing a silver necktie for the groom and a silver accented hem on the white gown for the bride. The decorations of the venue, wedding favours will also be in shades of silver and gold in keeping with the theme.

A wedding with an obvious theme makes everything go well together, it is fabulous (WE December 2010: 72).

But a theme can also be more complex than just a colour scheme and can be as elaborate as a recreation of a favourite scene from a movie or imaginary depiction of a novel. For instance, Jane Austen was chosen as a theme for a wedding of a magazine editor and a newspaper journalist (WE September 2008). The wedding favour given to the guests was a small teacup decorated with a comic drawing of the bride and groom and a short love quote from Jane Austen:

“Sometimes affection is a shy flow that takes time to blossom.”

The bride wanted the hotel ballroom to look like a small English garden, filled with white roses (imported from China), while the dance floor was a recreation of a scene from Jane Austen’s ‘Pride and Prejudice’. Another example, is a Shanghai theme wedding was chosen because the bride’s family had business in Bangkok China Town (WE December 2010). The wedding was decorated to resemble the atmosphere of Shanghai old town, completed with Chinese tea and food stalls, and where wedding guests were also required to dressed in Chinese costumes. These magazine’s representations of weddings demonstrate that the bride and groom should be

encouraged to express their tastes or personality through the use of colours and symbols in the wedding design, which are intended to be unique and personal.



Figure 8.12 Wedding with a old Shanghai theme (WE December 2010: 67)



Figure 8.13 Wedding with a swan theme (WE December 2010: 72)

Apart from being able to communicate the identity of the bride and groom, a wedding is also an exhibition of their love story or how they met. As stated previously, wedding magazines regard weddings as a reward for a romantic relationship and therefore the notion of romance is heavily emphasised through the representation of weddings. The weddings in the magazines are carefully planned, where attention is given to every little detail, everything is well-thought out so that the final product is the embodiment of the love that the couple has for each other. The narrative of the real wedding account highlights the ways that the bride and groom articulate their love into the details of their wedding, everything that is incorporated in the wedding has a special meaning to the couple. For instance, the bride and groom dedicate a corner of their wedding venue to hold a small exhibition to display some memorabilia of their relationship such as letters and love notes they have written to each other, an LED signboard he used to propose to her and a video clip showing the moment he proposed to her (WE July 2011). This is an evidence of a romantic belief that regards weddings as a manifestation of the love between a bride and a groom.

On the whole, a wedding magazine could be interpreted as an advertisement for the concept of wedding itself: all of its content from the first to the last, from wedding interviews to magazine columns, a magazine is advertising the general concept of a wedding. Magazines operate by selling their readers beautiful images of weddings, sparkly jewellery, and of course beautiful brides in beautiful dresses. As Williamson explains (1978), advertisements are not only selling a product with a meaning for us, but they are also selling a future image of ourselves as happier and more desirable. Therefore, not only are wedding magazines selling weddings to their readers, but they are also selling a notion of a perfect wedding and bridal beauty.

However, the representation does not have space for weddings lacking in romantic tales or lavish celebrations. The absence of other kinds of weddings results in the invisibility if bride and groom do not fit the pattern of the contemporary Thai fantasy. These magazines contain countless wedding coverages and interviews within one issue, but they are dominantly heterosexual weddings between a female bride and a male groom. Generally, the brides or grooms are professionals working in Bangkok in their twenties or thirties. Thus, the weddings represented in these magazines are only of contemporary middle to upper class brides and grooms. People expect to see a certain type of weddings, a certain representation, certain narratives of their romantic encounters, to be otherwise is more than out of the norm, but unexpected and unfavourable because it fails to satisfy the fantasy and the constructed notion of romance. Additionally, the economy depends on the myth of such perfection and fantasy that can be fulfilled with an act of consumption. An individual thus, consumes to embody an identity which is assigned to each individual through consumption. Thus, the magazine represents weddings as an image of a bourgeois relationship, of consumption and respectability, all of which play a role in facilitating the system of a capitalist society, increasing the consumption of products that the economy depends upon.

Such social behaviour is the norm of consumption that emerged in societies fascinated by things (Cronin 2004: 9). If we were to interpret in Marx's context of capital where

there are two kinds of consumer goods - necessities and luxuries, the wedding consumption is definitely a luxury. Although the tendency to purchase products that are not fundamental material needs to display status may be construed as economically irrational and that people are too vain and foolish and are easily influenced by the persuasion of advertisements, the consumption also serves to satisfy their desire to fulfil a romantic illusion of love, marriage and traditional rituals. Thus, it makes sense that advertising messages are implemented to reflect the social norms and cultural values of particular society.

8.4 Styles of wedding advertisements

The advertisement in the magazines represents weddings in a larger-than-life concept. According to Cronin (2004), “advertising has been framed and a manipulative force that fabricates [...] the needs and desires of the individual.” Sometimes, advertising use puffery or exaggerated language to present a product in unnecessarily dramatic ways (Williamson 1978). This perspective has put a blame on advertising for creating false needs for products that may not be necessary for people. However, for Raymond Williams (2009), advertising is effective because people are not materialistic enough, since the products are not wanted purely for their function, but for their symbolic values.

“Advertising has passed the frontier of the selling of goods and services and has become involved with the teaching of social and personal values.” (Williams 2009)

Within the context of consumer culture, advertising can be seen to “shape and reflect” a social reality, by drawing upon patterns of meanings within the cultural and social world to construct symbolic associations for consumer goods, and these commodity discourses become ingrained within the popular psyche and shape the consumer experiences of social reality (Sherry 1987 in Kelly, Lawlor et al. 2009).

Advertising is a form of communication whose function is “providing symbolic meaning and developing symbolic association for brands within consumer culture” (Elliot 1999 in Kelly, Lawlor et al. 2009). The advertisements in the magazines have persuasive rhetoric as opposed to a descriptive style of the articles. The rudimentary

purpose of advertising in wedding magazines is to sell the products by emphasising its association with the outcome of a successful and romantic wedding. It is the responsibility of advertisements to make the audience believe in love, want to have a perfect wedding and subsequently desire the products advertised because they supposedly encapsulate love or symbolise it.

Further analysis of wedding advertisements and wedding coverage reveal the use of hyperbolic language and beautifully edited images to attract the readers and evoke their emotions. The wedding industry is generated by ideological discourses of romantic narratives. The choice of words, structure of language, photograph selection and presentation create an overall positive message about weddings. Words such as 'magnificent', 'magical', 'elaborate' and 'everlasting' are used throughout the magazines to communicate that a wedding is the most special moment of one's life, that many have fantasised about. While the use of words such as 'cherish', 'love', 'perfection' and 'romantic,' is predominant, the pecuniary value of products is downplayed and advertisers focus on the symbolic and 'sacred' qualities of products instead. The language used in wedding magazines, especially in advertisements has the functions to romanticise a wedding and persuades readers to believe in achieving perfection in a romantic relationship and wedding.

The majority of the advertisements are composed of romantic images of bride and groom, accompanied by texts, some of which are written in English. The usage of English language in wedding advertising is common in Thai wedding magazines, from the name of the company or product (brand), copy, to contact details. This approach of communication has already assumed readers of magazines are capable of reading and understanding English, which also suggested certain level of education and class in their target market. In addition, English texts have also raised the status of products advertised to be regarded as being relevant on a global scale rather than locally or cultural specific.

The imagery and narrative of advertisements in the magazines work together to magnify the myth of romance and wedding perfection. A wedding may or may not naturally be romantic since it is simply a ritual whose purpose is to confirm and celebrate the union of two people. However, the ways in which weddings are being depicted and the products advertised in the magazines resemble the narrative of romance films or novels, except they are not stories about fictional characters. Perhaps this is blurring the line between what is natural and what is a construction in the context of a wedding even more. If the real weddings are portrayed as romantic, and wedding participants are described as having felt the romance, hence the notion of romantic weddings could easily appear natural.

8.5 Conclusion

The wedding industry is constructing the people who are getting married as consumers, by making the purchase of products necessary in order to fulfil their roles of bride and groom and have a perfect wedding. The magazines construct a set of general recipes about femininity, beauty and romance and disseminate them through their images and texts. The bride's imagination is being colonised by market forces that promise the realisation of a perfect wedding. These advertisements function to construct and reinforce ideas about how the wedding day and its build-up should feel. They stimulate the desires of ordinary consumers to emulate these ideals, thus turning the wedding into a fantasy-laden cultural event that is dependent upon consumption. Thus, a wedding becomes more than just a ceremony, it is also a consumption choice, an opportunity for the bride and groom to demonstrate their aesthetic preferences, their tastes in fashion and financial capabilities. The question now is no longer limited to who you marry, but also how you marry. Throughout this chapter, the myths of romantic wedding and bridal identity that are being constructed in magazines by the wedding industry through the commercialisation of romance have been discussed. It is evident that the wedding industry, advertisements and the media together form a powerful force that can manipulate and fabricate the needs and desires of the individual (see Cronin 2004).

The magazines commodified the notion of love by emphasising wedding as a spectacular event, which is inextricably tied to consumption of products. Any object, as long as it can be sold or incorporated into a wedding has its own story, even if it does not have one, a story is constructed by marketers and advertisers. According to Schmidt (1995) and (Penner 2004), the spirit of romanticism has been pitted against that of commodification to the point that the sincerity and authentic self-expression have been trivialised by the mass production and industry. The constructed narrative of advertisements has communicated the way a wedding is idealised, the manners in which romance is celebrated and glorified, and the resources required to make a wedding become perfection. The whole magazine is merely a collection of advertisements that sells a fantasy of a commodified romance. Such convention of wedding magazine narratives has constructed a bias and myths about the notion of wedding, love and femininity. It has incubated a desire for fantasy but has failed to inform their readers of the many important aspects that a wedding and a marriage entail, arguably because the magazines only aim to facilitate the purchase of commodities. Hence, the attention has been given to the pre-wedding build-up as well as to the day itself. This thesis has demonstrated that the wedding advertisements are not trying to sell a wedding as a ritual which changes one's marital status, but instead as a heightened state of consciousness of love and romance, thus making it 'the most special day of our lives' (Boden 2003: 74).

These magazines are a powerful source that not only sells fantasy, but also plays a part in directing how the fantasy should be constructed and performed. Through the imperative and directive approach, the magazines do not only provide a detailed steps by steps procedure for how a wedding is to be planned but also what kind of products are necessary to perfect such performance. However, the products in wedding magazines are not marketed for their functional purposes, but rather marketed on their symbolic significance. Jewellery advertisements are not only selling a sparkly gemstone or a piece of jewellery, but a promise of eternal love. Wedding studios advertisements are not only selling photographs, but an opportunity to capture a moment filled with love and happiness. Hotel advertisements are not only selling a location to host a wedding, but a prestige the hotel carries as well as the luxurious experience associated with the brand and its services. Wedding planning services

advertisements are not only selling organisational skills but a professionalism in the form of friendship full of great advice. These are examples of some of the integral businesses running the wedding industry whose product, the realisation of a dream wedding is dependent upon, and without which, a wedding would become meaningless and ordinary.

In wedding consumption, people consume in order to preserve the myth constructed by the media. They consume invented 'traditional' wedding apparel to preserve the Thai cultural identity; women consume beauty products to preserve their femininity, couples consume diamond rings and photography services to preserve the romance, they consume wedding experience to preserve the union of marriage and family. Therefore, the social importance of wedding-related goods and services and the myths constructed around them attach higher materials values to the consumption for such products. Despite being simply a social act to consume commodities for their basic functions, the myths constructed for these products allow the act of consumption to be an act of defining their wedding, as well as demonstrating their social status, taste gender and cultural identity, but not exclusively. As Tejapira puts it:

the signified of Thainess also changes, from the supposed embodiment of the inherent essence of all things Thai into just one identity option among many others, national, ethnic or otherwise, which anyone can partake of and indulge in through the purchase and consumption of commodities and signs...the consumption of consumer products not for their intrinsic use value or socio-economic exchange value, but for their cultural value as signs of desired identity. " (Tejapira 2001: 208).

9

Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

This thesis has examined the representation of ‘Thainess’ and bridal perfection in Thai wedding magazines through the images and texts from the magazines’ editorial contents, advertisements and covers pages. The findings and analyses in this thesis have contributed to one of the many perspectives of what ‘Thainess’ is, as well as have highlighted the stereotypical distinction created by magazines between traditionalised and westernised Thai. Moreover, the findings have revealed various idealised qualities of a Thai bride, many of which are reinforced to be perfected and attained through the material consumptions of products advertised within the magazines. In this final chapter, the main arguments and findings discussed in the previous chapters will be summed up with concluding remarks. Subsequently, the limitations of this research, as well as the suggestions for further studies beyond this scope will be addressed in the last section.

9.2 Summary of the thesis’ key arguments and discussions

Three main theoretical frameworks of postcolonial studies, media representations of female and consumption of commodities triangulate this thesis. Thailand’s semi colonial history, the ambivalent relationship with the West, and its tendency to self-orientalise its local culture has resulted in the diffusion of hybrid cultures that have embraced the modernised way of the West but also remain nostalgic to its traditional past. While Western influence also has effects on Thai standard of beauty to favour fair skin, Buddhist gender perspective presents a constraint to the position to fit the mould of ‘good woman’ whose value are defined by their beauty and duties to serve her husband (Van Esterik 2000). Theories of representation have provided insights into how femininity and image of women are being represented by the media that dominate by the ideals of beauty. Furthermore, they have been utilised to demonstrate the significance of meanings in commodities for their consumption can be stimulated by their symbolic value to communicate social class, cultural identity

and style. These theories have established groundwork to contextualise the research and develop methodology to excavate Thai wedding magazines for further analysis.

The methodological tools used were semiotics and multimodal analysis. Semiotics has provided a methodological toolkit to study the images and texts within the magazines. Machin's (2007) multimodal analysis approach provided a step-by-step guide to take inventory of semiotic resources of bridal images in the magazines. It started by examining how each image communicates its denotative and connotative meanings through primary markers such as pose, objects, setting and framing. Subsequently the images were examined for the way they are being representing by the magazines through modality markers such as articulation of details in background, light and shadow, colour tone, modulation, saturation, and differentiation to reveal if each image is represented naturalistically or exaggerated to serve other purposes. Furthermore, each image was examined through its depiction of people in the image, by looking at gaze, angle of interaction, distance to determine the level of imaginary relationship between the viewer of the image and people in the image. Additional step of image analysis looked at the type of people represented to determine if they were represented as an individual or group, if they were represented with cultural attributes that connote stereotypical characterisation, and if certain people were not represented in the image.

This research has examined the representation of Thai weddings and bridal images through three perspectives: cover images, editorial contents and advertisements. Not overshadowed by the allure romance that may have been obvious within countless interviews and photographs of couples finding success in romantic relationships, three main arguments regarding 'Thainess' and bridal perfection have been identified. Firstly, the magazines make a clear distinction between traditionalised and modern Thai weddings: a traditionalised wedding is represented as an expression of cultural traditions and nostalgic fulfilment, whereas a westernised white wedding is represented as an expression of modernity and romantic luxury. Secondly, the magazines have constructed an ideal image of a Thai bride not only as her most beautiful self on her wedding day, but also beautiful as if she was either a heroine in

Thai classics, a noblewoman or a woman from pre-modern Siam. Thirdly, the magazines have reinforced the importance of material consumptions in weddings for their symbolic meanings, through product advertisements.

9.2.1 Defining ‘Thainess’: Myths and the dichotomy between traditionalised and modernised Thai

The first research question, ‘What is ‘Thainess’ and how is it represented in wedding magazines?’ seeks to understand ‘Thainess’ as defined by wedding magazines. Chapter 2 presents works by prominent scholar of Thai cultural studies such as Harrison (2010), Jackson (2004) and Winichakul (2000) that explain Thailand’s semi colonial history. The Western influence has resulted in a diffusion of western cultures and consequently a hybrid culture. In Chapter 5, the analysis has shown that the magazine has created a distinction between traditionalised Thai and modernised Thai through its cover designs and bridal images. By attaching the label of ‘Thai’ to traditionalised wedding images and Thai traditional bridal wear, the magazines have classified weddings into two major styles: ‘Thai’ and ‘non-Thai,’ ‘Westernised,’ or ‘modernised.’ The images from the traditional and modern covers when shown side by side, the contrast is remarkable, especially in the page compositions: the use of colours and brightness as well as the postures, gaze and attires of the models. Traditional brides are portrayed with a mysterious allure of the past, with darker colours: mainly brown and gold, shadows and the brides look demure and reserved. On the other hand, modern brides are on the opposite extreme, represented with a variety of bright colours: mainly white, higher level of brightness and most importantly the models are portrayed as confident and lively brides, some even with revealing pose and wedding dress.

A modern wedding is not only an attempt to fulfil a dream of romance, but also a dream of modernity, luxury and the Western way. While a traditional Thai ceremony is embraced, it has been preserved as a cultural epoch, one that always remains unchanged. A traditional Thai wedding does not change or transform with time, it remains what it is invented to be. Perhaps it can be considered as a museum that has preserved some historical and cultural rituals, waiting to be visited by those who have

nostalgia for the imagined past. Traditional weddings are represented by the magazines to juxtapose with the modern weddings in order to clearly satisfy the aspiration for traditional authenticity, before the couple are en route to the West as the destination either in a western style wedding reception in five-star hotels or places like Paris or Milan for their honeymoon.

In Chapter 6, the contents and images of within the magazines were examined. Four most recurrent significations of 'Thainess' were identified in the magazine's representation of 'traditional' Thai wedding: first, the reference to an imagined female ideal such as a classic literature heroine, an aristocrat woman, a lady from pre-modern Siam, second, the appreciation for traditional feminine ideal qualities and beautification process, third, the reliance on auspiciousness and fourth the displayed respect to the elders and the monks. The magazines have emphasised on the traditional and exotic essence in 'traditional' Thai weddings in an attempt to display a side of 'Thainess' that is unique and vintage. The idea of an authentic 'Thainess' has trapped the 'traditional' Thai wedding in its mythological past. What is 'Thainess' in the context of wedding when it has been reconstructed through the use of symbols? These material objects are not being used purely for their basic functions, but they are also used for symbolic meanings: the meanings that have been given to the material objects and subsequently making the combination of these symbols a powerful representation of 'Thainess'. The allure of the untouched beauty of a 'traditional' Thai bride, the sacred and auspicious ceremony are longed for in the midst of westernised and globalised society. Perhaps the emphasis on the pre-modern allure of Thai ceremonies has been exaggerated in order to counteract with the morph of modern white weddings that is represented with the fashion-forward and confident modern brides who are wrapped around in luxurious western designer labels in a modern consumerist Thai society.

Nostalgic yearning for the good old days or imagined past Thai heritage is apparent in the magazines' depiction of traditionalised Thai weddings. A sense of contradiction has also brought the illusion of the past to the modern consumerist society. Although

the physical past maybe beyond reach, a fantasy of the past is made accessible in their commodified states as products. Wedding magazines are continuously constructing 'traditional' Thai weddings as a way to serve a nostalgic fulfilment. "Tradition is considered as a thing of the past," and has no relevance in a modern way of life (Thompson 1996). According to John Thompson, the significance of traditions gradually diminishes as modern society progresses in developments, and thus "ceases to play a meaningful role in the lives of most individuals." To observe this phenomenon in the Thai context, traditions rarely have place in people's daily life. However, their significance has been intensifying through the performance of cultural rituals such as weddings.

Traditional Thai wedding ceremonies in the magazines are more a representation of nostalgia than a representation of tradition or cultural identity. This is because the traditional Thai weddings ceremonies are not meant to be an accurate reproduction of ancient wedding traditions, but a reconstruction of the imagined Thai identity and traditions. They are the rendition of what Thai tradition is claimed and believed to be, instead of what it was. The invention of the imagined traditional weddings became another cultural product that serves to create another fantasy. This imagined fantasy also limits the way in which Thai society is being confined to and thus unable to break away from this grammatical system of a Thai wedding ceremony. The representation of Thai weddings seen in the magazines is adorning traditional customs and delicate embroidery that is represented to be unique and authentic. However, the quest for authenticity has become an interplay of the construction of tradition and preservation (Luke 1996). As supported by Tejapira (2001),

To turn vaporised Thainess into a solid sign or signifier, one needs an appropriate readily recognisable 'Thai' form for it. That form, therefore, has to be old, venerable, immutable and hence, by the same token, rather than useless, irrelevant and fossilised in present-day circumstances (Tejapira 2001: 214).

The concept of Edward Said's (1977) Orientalism was used to observe that Thai weddings tend to be represented as 'primitive' in to contrast the Westernised white weddings through acts of self-orientalising.

9.2.2 Understanding Thai brides: The fascination with bridal perfection and idealised Thai femininity

The second research question 'How are Thai brides represented in wedding magazines?' seeks to explore the messages that the media are communicating to their readers, especially during their pre-wedding days, and most importantly the steps required for a Thai woman to transform and fulfil her role as a perfect Thai bride. Chapter 2 presents works from key scholars of Thai women studies such as Van Esterik (2000), Barmé (2002), and Reynolds (1999), which explained social perspective on Thai women. In Chapter 3, media representation theory, with particular attention on women magazines and representation of women in media.

Building upon the theoretical framework in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, this thesis presented the findings in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7, which revealed the magazines' consistent emphasis on a bride's physical attractiveness and often described them as beautiful. Chapter 6, presented the findings on the ideal traditional Thai bride which are categorised as beautiful as a leading character from Thai classic literatures, beautiful as an aristocrat woman; and beautiful as a lady of pre-modern Siam. Chapter 7 has demonstrated that the main focus of being a bride is to achieve the ideal bridal beauty, appropriate bridal fashion and bridal femininity. Articles about choosing the 'right' dress for a specific body type, recommended beauty treatments and make-up tips have all converged in one direction, which is to create a similar idealised version of a Thai bride and to resemble the models on the magazine covers. In the images shown in the magazines, the brides are seen radiating with a natural glow and adorning in exquisite attire and jewellery. Such representations reinforce the ideals of Thai femininity in which the readers can emulate in the future. The magazines act as a complete guide of bridal transformation, which offer tips and information along with examples of successful transformations. In the preparation of

becoming a bride, a woman is encouraged to follow specific regimens, because such short-term restrictive behaviour will ensure the prospective pleasures of a fulfilled femininity on the wedding day (Boden 2003). As much as many women may enjoy the process of beautifying themselves and appreciate being beautiful, the fact that beauty is the first and foremost quality of a woman has underappreciated other qualities of a woman.

Both Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 conceptualised identity of the bride has been constructed by the magazines that the images of beautiful brides in wedding magazines have created an ideal that dominates and represses prospective brides under the controlled of traditional ideology and beauty enhancement products. This oppression has submerged the notion of Thai femininity to mere physical traits, focusing on the outer appearance, that if it were to differ from the standard of ideal shall be corrected. While the ideal 'traditional' image of women has been trapped within the sepia photo of imagined past, the ideal 'modern' image of women on the other hand has been trapped under the commercialised beauty products and cosmetic surgeries. All in all, these representations of women have not only created a standard for a conformity of beauty, but also marginalised those who appear different. The power that society has imposed upon its people has disregarded the individuality and differences. By trying to construct and represent similar versions of an ideal bride, the media has essentially influenced women to conform to this constructed mould of femininity.

The magazines sustain the nostalgic fantasy for 'Thainess' with traditional wedding ceremonies and brides in traditional wedding dresses. The represented images and meanings embedded within the images have been constructed to control the notion of 'Thainess' and Thai femininity. These representations influence the way women defined themselves and the dynamics of male and female romantic relationships. Moreover, articles about relationships have created a stereotypical image of a good and desirable Thai woman, one who is beautiful as well as possessing the preferred feminine virtues, by putting her husband and family before her needs. These have

reinforced the pride in Thai femininity and the image of the good Thai women as a bride in a patriarchal society.

At the same time, the multi-dimensions of Thai femininity have been defined through the standards of beauty, anti-ageing and beautification process, and having a suitable marriage partner at a suitable age. These are the qualities that have been attached to Thai female virtues, to attain a perfect wedding and fulfil the role of a good woman and a good bride. While availability of ways to improve or beautify women is an indication that there is a democratisation of beauty and by extension a democratisation of a romantic wedding. The core of the problem is embedded within the texts in these magazines which are indirectly represented as cultural principles to discipline women. The images of Thai women as brides presented in the magazines are not diverse, in fact they remain stereotypically monochromatic and docile. The aura of perfection built around the magazine brides form a standard of ideal to which prospective brides aspire to emulate. Thus the readers can be dominated by the power of an ideal beauty and confined inside a metaphorical 'diamond encrusted cage', where the only reassurance to possessing a valuable piece of jewellery and be rewarded with a spectacular wedding is to conform to the principles of femininity and bridal transformation. The findings also revealed an indicator of unbalance of social expectation, that positions wedding as a female thing and thus lack male presence in wedding magazines. While the amount of time and effort that men and women spend on grooming varies in great extent, it demonstrates that women have gradually become subject of beauty ideals while the media pressure given to men about beauty and grooming is much lower. In the case of wedding magazines, there are no beauty columns or skincare recommendations given specifically to prospective grooms. This research has emphasised that wedding magazines support capitalism and reinforce heterogeneous wedding in a patriarch society.

9.2.3 Advertising weddings: Creating a perfect Thai bride and Thai wedding through material consumptions

The third research question, 'What is being advertised in wedding magazines and why is it meaningful to Thai weddings?' seeks to examine advertisements in wedding

magazines since they make up nearly fifty percent of the pages in each issue. In chapter 8, the findings have identified four major categories of advertisements in wedding magazines: the diamond ring, the luxurious wedding venue the professional wedding planner and photographer and last but not least a theme wedding. Each of the products advertised promises to create a perfect wedding. The diamond ring advertisements represent a diamond ring as a material representative of the love between the bride and the groom. The luxurious wedding venues advertisements present their services as a place where a dream wedding comes true. The professional wedding planner and photographer advertised themselves as being able to organise a perfect wedding for the bride and groom to experience and to remember it after the event has ended. Lastly the wedding magazines themselves advertise the whole concept of the wedding as a goal for couples, a celebration that should be prepared with care in order to create a wedding that will best represent the identity, status and style of the bride and groom.

It is without a doubt that the media that play a crucial role in defining the standards to which a bride and her wedding should look like. Magazines and capitalism work together to promote particular images of romance, ones which are abundantly commodified through the consumption of products that promise realisation of fantasy. The imagery and texts they disseminate along with the products and services they promote are constructing a fantasy for a perfect wedding and a perfect bride. These fantasies are not beyond reach, as the magazines are laden with evidence of numerous successful ones which have been beautifully captured and represented. These success stories and photographs of weddings are selected to represent a realisation of a fantasy, a dream come true. The conventional and heavily used headlines such as 'romantic event', 'luxurious wedding reception' and 'the most beautiful bride', along with the photographs of beautiful brides and their grooms together reinforce such myths. Thus, the ideological content of bridal magazines may be considered as similar to that of a romantic fiction because of its fantasy-laden romantic narrative, where the bride is the leading female character. Overall, the represented images of the weddings and beautiful women in a bridal attire have reinforced the fantasy of one of women's life's achievements, a reward and celebration for a successful romantic relationship and the beautiful beginning of a family. The brides represented here in these

magazines became an idealised version of the Thai female, who not only possess all of the desirable qualities such as physical attractiveness, social status, education, careers and finance, they have also found love, worthy enough to commit and celebrate it.

While findings in Chapter 5, Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 revealed that ‘Thainess’ and Thai femininity are defined by the magazines through represented images and texts, creating a binary opposition between the perfect Thai wedding and an ordinary wedding, as well as between an ideal bride and an ordinary bride. In Chapter 8 the two parameters of the dichotomy are separated are social class and wealth. However, crossing over to the other side is made possible through the bridge of product consumption. The advertised products can provide a guise of being and having, for instance, an elaborate traditional wedding dress can make the bride look like an aristocrat lady who is also an emblem of ‘Thainess’, while beauty products can beautify a bride and correct imperfections; a wedding reception at a five-star hotel can imply the level of wealth of the bride and groom and a diamond ring can solidify their love.

In a society driven by consumerism, the need to have is inevitable, from a tangible object like a dress or a ring to something as intangible as feminine beauty, cultural identity and romantic love. The magazines do an exceptional job in encapsulating the signifiers and signifieds together into the images of an ideal ‘Thainess’, ideal bride and ideal wedding as demonstrated. The magazines represent bridal perfection, ‘Thainess’ and the general concept of weddings as an ideal, whereas the products they advertise, such as wedding dresses (both traditional and modern), cosmetics, diamond rings etc. are represented as a symbolic representation of these ideals. Magazines and commercial corporations selling dresses, rings, photography, catering and wedding planning services may represent a form of colonisation of a wedding ritual by the commodifying flow of global capitalism. The romantic atmosphere of modern Thai weddings has downplayed the tedious ceremonial rites and superstitions of weddings, while emphasising the lavishness and romance. Not only do these commodities nurture the romantic fantasy of weddings and heterosexual relationships together with wedding services and shaping dreams for women through images and narratives they

also carry cultural meaning potentials. According to Tejapira (2001), commodities have also been used as signs of cultural identity:

These commodities have indeed been turned into signs of Thainess and has changed Thainess willy-nilly into one identity option among many others in the free market of limitless plurality of commodities and/or brand names...By dint of association with, or signification by commodity signs, Thainess has become alongside Chineseness, Europeanness, Englishness, etc. another choice among a variety of national/ethnic signifiers to be worn or shed according to the fluctuations of their respective cultural value (Tejapira 2001: 216).

9.3 Research's limitations and suggestions for future studies

At the initial stage of this study, I had a rather narrow preconception of what 'Thainess' was. Thus, the challenge presented itself in the quest to define the notion of 'Thainess' because different people or institutions define 'Thainess' differently. What is 'Thainess' to one may not be the same for others. As previously mentioned in Chapter 1 and Chapter 5, the scope of this research is limited to Thai wedding magazines, thus what is being identified as 'Thainess' here may or may not represent what 'Thainess' is in other types of media or in a different industry context. I also want to justify that what is being represented as 'Thainess' within these magazines is a commercialised 'Thainess' which is marketed through commodities to be bought and sold. While the magazines are helping the wedding industry to benefit from the simulated wedding product consumptions, 'Thainess' remains another effective tool, either as a theme for a wedding, a packaged 'Thainess' or symbol of cultural appreciation. Another limitation to this research is my translation from Thai to English of the articles, poems and advertisements I have used as examples throughout this research. Since I am not a professional translator, some translated sentences may not read as smoothly. Nevertheless, I tried to keep the core meaning of the original Thai texts in the translated English version while making it as straight forward as possible.

The magazines are abundantly packed with cultural evidence of Thai wedding practices, which deserved to be explored further. They are a significant cultural site, which can reveal the underpinning aspects of 'Thainess' in wedding context. It is worth to note that the weddings that are photographed, written about and selected to feature in the magazines might not be an absolutely accurate representation of all weddings in Thailand, or wedding of particular class or subcultures because the main aim of wedding magazines is to provide potential brides and interested readers with the most curated information about perfect wedding. Thus, the weddings in these magazines are, at the very least, an illustrative demonstration of standards of perfection for weddings in modern Thailand as it has left out other non-wealthy middle class couples, especially those not based in Bangkok, and other style of wedding such as local wedding in the countryside.

The embodiment of 'Thainess' is elevated by the combination of traditional Thai ceremony, Thai auspicious wedding superstitions, traditionalised Thai wedding attire and anything else that signifies traditions. But the findings in this research are only limited to what is represented by the magazines. The magazines present the process of embodiment into the ideal Thai bride with stature. Thus further studies could look into real weddings both in the city and countryside to fill the gap left by the magazines that only represented wedding of wealthy middle class in Bangkok. Such study could reveal new perspective to ask more questions such as: whether the bride and groom who skip the traditional ceremony are lacking in their appreciation for one's own heritage? Would this make them less Thai by comparison? Do brides who do not wear traditional Thai dress appear less Thai and less idealised as the epitome of Thai women? Would an unmarried woman having never worn a traditional Thai dress be able to experience and fully appreciate 'Thainess' and be beautiful the 'Thai way' without this 'uniform of Thainess?' Moreover, future studies could investigate intercultural weddings between a Thai and a foreigner. Since the Thai society is far from being homogeneous and there are many interracial couples, these couples are not receiving much attention by the wedding magazines. This approach will like reveals an interesting interplay of different cultures and how the differences can be incorporated together in one wedding of bride and groom from different cultural and

ethnic background. Another interesting direction for future studies would be to examine the representation of 'Thainess' or Thai femininity in other types of media such as television drama to observe the characterisation of the good women and bad women more details. Perhaps a comparative study could be conducted between heroine in period drama and modern drama and possibly a comparative between female protagonist and female antagonist in these dramas.

9.4 Concluding remarks

In summary, this thesis argues that the represented images have trapped the notion of 'Thainess' within the 'imagined' frame of pre-modern Siam. However, the images of mythical allure of the exotic East, superstitions and traditional values are juxtaposed with a modern trend of consumerism that embraces romance and luxury. The intermingle of traditions and modern ambiance have also resulted in the representation of a hybridised culture, which has made the contents in the wedding magazines worthy of cultural research and discussions. What this research has presented here is just one of the many versions of 'Thainess', a perspective that has been constructed and represented through the lens of Thai wedding magazines. Thus 'Thainess' in this research is just another version of 'Thainess', which adds another piece of puzzle to the study of 'Thainess.'

Ultimately, defining 'Thainess' is difficult and subjective. 'Thainess' may be defined as a way to exclude or suppress other groups. When 'Thainess' is defined by elites, imposing elite's version of 'Thainess' to non-elites is suppressed under the colonisation of 'Thainess'. The control of Thai femininity within the frame of elite's beauty and virtue is the silent suppression of females. The representation of ideal bridal images influenced by Thai classic literature highlight the importance of nobility, feminine quality and sacredness of traditions. 'Thainess' as constructed and represented in wedding magazines can simply be regarded as being on one side of the dichotomy between Thai and non-Thai. This simplistic representation of 'Thainess', although misleading, has been effective in distinguishing 'Thainess' from otherness. What is

being represented as ‘Thainess’ here is merely defined by a small group within the weddings and magazine industries. It is a bourgeois version of ‘Thainess’, a ‘Thainess’ that has been polished and refined to create the most elaborate representation of the traditional value of being Thai.

The imagined traditional Thai identity that is represented as untouched and pure is dislocated from the Thais’ daily life. But when represented in a remarkable contrast to the modern and western style of hybridised Thai wedding, the sacredness and implied ‘authenticity’ of traditional wedding have been intensified. While Thai wedding magazines desire to keep up with the trends of weddings on international levels, at the same time they strive to represent the traditional Thai weddings and reaffirms what it means to be Thai. The desire to be modern together with the nostalgic yearning for ‘authentic’ Thai identity have been interwoven together in the construction and representation of Thai weddings in the magazines. Rather than trying to capture ‘Thainess’ in a frame, ‘Thainess’ should be considered as constantly transforming and will always be defined and be re-defined, especially in a globalising world. As Harrison (2010) puts it “the quest for Thai identities remains, unsurprisingly, in process.”

‘Thainess in its full form does not exist. There are a variety of personas and different understandings from one person to the next. It is widely used as a myth to include or exclude certain person or thing, or used as a mask to shield oneself from foreignness. There are many institutions claiming to possess the very definition of ‘Thainess,’ that version of ‘Thainess’ is then packaged and made available for consumption. I like to think of ‘Thainess’ as the holy ghost, because ‘Thainess’ is constructed with a certain level of sacredness attached to it, which requires ‘Thainess’ to be revered, respected and appreciated instead of being feared or avoided. The holy ghost of ‘Thainess’ has been with the Thai society and its people for so long, it has been constructed, reconstructed, borrowed, adapted, told and retold for many generations that it is impossible to pinpoint and encapsulate ‘Thainess’ into a single form of representation.

Perhaps like a ghost that it exists or does not exist, there are different stories, different shapes and forms for different people. Ultimately, ‘Thainess’ could just be an illusion constructed by certain institutions to exert control over people or prevent people to deviate from the standards preferred by society. As long as there is a fascination to present an ideal public image (*phap-phot*, or *phap-lak*) (Jackson 2004), there will always be a quest to define and embody ‘Thainess.’ Then I have come to a conclusion that ‘Thainess’ can be whatever it can be because ultimately it is a shell that has been and will be used to present an image of Thai, as Tejapira (2001) succinctly notes:

Thus, pseudo-chemically sublimated Thainess is returned to us in a solid but useless, irrelevant and fossilised, or mummified form, in a temple, theatre or museum. And this is as it should be for now that Thainess has been ripped away from its traditional, historical, theatrical or religious context and deprived of its aura, it becomes an empty shell, a neutral terrain, a free-floating signifier which can be entered into and ‘exited’ at will by commodities of whatever nationality or ethnicity (Tejapira 2001: 216).

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Appendix A

List of all issues of wedding magazines used in the study:

4. WE, April 2005. Issue No. 12
5. WE, August 2005. Issue No. 16
6. WE, November 2005. Issue No. 19
7. WE, May 2008. Issue No. 49
8. WE, September 2008. Issue No. 53
9. WE, March 2009. Issue No. 59
10. WE, November 2010. Issue No. 79
11. WE, November 2010. Issue No. 80
12. WE, January 2011. Issue No. 81
13. WE, February 2011. Issue No. 82
14. WE, March 2011. Issue No. 83
15. WE, April 2011. Issue No. 84
16. WE, May 2011. Issue No. 85
17. WE, June 2011. Issue No. 86
18. WE, July 2011. Issue No. 87
19. WE, August 2011. Issue No. 88
20. WE, September 2011. Issue No. 89
21. WE, October 2011. Issue No. 90
22. WE, November 2011. Issue No. 91
23. We, December 2011. Issue No. 92
24. We, January 2012. Issue No. 93
25. WE, February 2012. Issue No. 94
26. WE, March 2012. Issue No. 95
27. WE, April 2012. Issue No. 96
28. WE, May 2012. Issue No. 97
29. WE, June 2012. Issue No. 98
30. WE, July 2012. Issue No. 99
31. WE, August 2012. Issue No. 100

32. WE, September 2012. Issue No. 101
33. WE, October 2012. Issue No. 102
34. WE, November 2012. Issue No. 103
35. We, December 2012. Issue No. 104
36. We, January 2013. Issue No. 105
37. WE, February 2013. Issue No. 106
38. WE, March 2013. Issue No. 107
39. WE, April 2013. Issue No. 108
40. WE, May 2013. Issue No. 109
41. WE, June 2013. Issue No. 110
42. WE, July 2013. Issue No. 111
43. WE, August 2013. Issue No. 112
44. WE, September 2013. Issue No. 113
45. WE, October 2013. Issue No. 114
46. WE, November 2013. Issue No. 115
47. We, December 2013. Issue No. 116
48. We, January 2014. Issue No. 117
49. WE, February 2014. Issue No. 118
50. WE, March 2014. Issue No. 119
51. WE, April 2014. Issue No. 120
52. WE, May 2014. Issue No. 121
53. WE, June 2014. Issue No. 122
54. WE, July 2014. Issue No. 123
55. WE, August 2014. Issue No. 124
56. WE, September 2014. Issue No. 125
57. WE, October 2014. Issue No. 126
58. WE, November 2014. Issue No. 127
59. We, December 2014. Issue No. 128
60. Wedding, November 1998 - February 1999
61. Wedding, March - May 2001
62. Wedding, January - March 2002
63. Wedding, April - June 2002

- 64. Wedding, July - September 2002
- 65. Wedding, October - December 2002
- 66. Wedding, January - March 2003
- 67. Wedding, July - September 2003
- 68. Wedding, July - September 2004
- 69. Wedding, April/May 2011
- 70. Wedding, October/November 2011
- 71. Wedding Guru, 2011. Issue No. 9
- 72. Wedding Guru, 2011. Issue No. 11

Appendix B



Traditional covers from 2011 - 2014

WE June 2011



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ด้วยตัวเอง

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WE November 2011

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เอาหัวใจ
ไปปักรื้อน

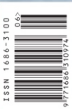
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Wedding
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BEACH

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GATSBY
ปาร์ตี้ - ความมั่งคั่ง - เสน่ห์
I Hope She'll Be a Fool
- That's the Best Thing
A Girl Can Be in This World
A Beautiful Little Fool.
- F. Scott Fitzgerald

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ชาวสวน’
ของพีวีกว
Happening

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