


Talking About Pen Sao in the 1950s-60s: An Exploration Through Discussion on a History of Design and Manners

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ABSTRACT

 This paper presents a case study on the role objects played in the construction of Thai women as social subjects in the period of the American Era and Development. Based on the analysis of popular Thai etiquette manual *Kritsana son nong: Naenam marayat thi ngam haeng araya samai*, an oral history was generated through conducting interviews with women growing up in the period. The conversations brought to light the term *pen sao* and illustrated that while certain objects and practices were portrayed generally as signs of modernity and civilisation, they could also be perceived as suspicious when being viewed as signs of gender differences.

Keywords: *material culture, history of manners, Thai, women*

INTRODUCTION

In Thailand, the period from the 1940s through to the 1960s is often characterized as the era of national development under the influence of the United States. During this time various, often competing, attempts were made and models proposed to form an appropriate mould for emerging social subjects fit for a rapidly modernizing society.

Kritsana son nong: Naenam marayat thi ngam haeng araya samai was a popular social etiquette manual at the time. The writings were first serialised in a local magazine in 1953 before being compiled into a book. The work was, in fact, based on an American textbook on manners called *Manners Made Easy* written by Mary Beery in 1943. Santa T. Komolabutra, writing under the pseudonym of Kritsana Thewarak, followed the contents from

Beery's book but re-wrote them as letters from an elder sister, Kritsana, to her younger sister, Kritika, thus the name of the book.

The comparison between the Thai etiquette book and its source reveals literary mechanisms devised by the author to negotiate conflicts arising from the domestication of Western-based manners in Thai society (Juthamas, 2016). As a result, a text originally produced to promote good manners in young Americans in the 1940s became a sisterly monologue imploring young, urban Thai women to become *kunlasattri*: women with honourable birth and of gentility. Nevertheless, according to the Thai author, the term *kunlasattri* needed to be redefined to emphasise good manners rather than lineage. Specifically, good manners included the knowledge about as well as the ability to handle modern objects and space. In order to explore these two points, oral

interviews were conducted with four women who grew up in that period.¹

The objectives of the interviews were to find out what ‘manners’ actually meant to the women at the time and how their social identities were formed in relation to the concept of manners as introduced in *Kritsana son nong*. Using qualitative data analysis and an inductive approach to interpret the interviews, two significant themes emerged. First, the commonly used term *pen sao* emerged as a keyword whose meaning needed to be further investigated. Second, while the majority of products and social practices associated with manners from western society were regarded as signs of modernity, some of these provoked an ambiguous status in women who were seen to perform them.

OBJECTIVES

- To discuss meanings of *pen sao* as given by Thai women who grew up between the late 1940s to the early 1960s in oral interviews.
- To discuss how the social identity of a young Thai woman is entwined with her gender identity.
- To discuss the roles consumer products, and therefore design, play in the construction of Thai women’s social and gender identity.
- To suggest possibilities for further research.

DISCUSSIONS

The representation and reproduction of the meaning of ‘teenagers’

In *Kritsana son nong*, Santa Thewarak translated the contents of *Manners Made Easy* and rearranged them into an epistolary format. While the majority of the contents and order in *Kritsana son nong* followed more or less those of *Manners Made Easy*, the new

format allowed Santa to adopt the voice of the elder sister, Kritsana. Through the sister’s voice, he was able to add supplementary contents including verses from *Suphasit son ying*, a traditional Thai didactic text,² and his own opinions. The most significant of these was the first letter, which also served as an introduction to the book. Elsewhere it is argued that, from the title to its contents, *Kritsana son nong*, unlike *Manners Made Easy*, specifically targeted young Thai women (Juthamas: 2016). The reason for this is revealed in the preface to the book in which *Kritsana son nong* is:

...presented as a tribute to the teenage boys and girls, those approaching fifteen going on to sixteen, who are just about to open up their eyes to face with the light of temptation from modern civilisation, having drowsy emotion, restless, disgruntled, sensitive, belligerent towards parents for being under a delusion that they are old enough to look after themselves, those teens who once arrive at the T-junction and will never go back, for they must make up their mind to go either left or right, because there will be a school at the one end and a hotel at another. (*Kritsana Thewarak [Santa T. Komolabutra], 1961, p. 6*)

On the one hand, this passage may seem straightforward, a genuine concern from a well-intentioned adult for troublesome youths. On the other hand, if it is critically read, it raises a number of questions, especially about how teenagers are represented and why that should be the case. Even though *Manners Made Easy* was written for high school students, the issue of virtue and chastity were not parts of its contents. Perhaps the Thai author felt that this moral perspective should justify the necessity of the book and reflects general anxieties of Thai society at this time.

In the above quotation, teenagers were defined in three different but related ways as follows: first, by age ‘those approaching fifteen going on to sixteen’; second, by self-awareness and the relationship between oneself and one’s social context ‘who are just about to open up their eyes to face with the light

¹ At the time of the interviews, all women lived in Bangkok. During the actual interview, it was found that all of them were originally from other provinces.

² *Suphasit son ying* is regarded as one of the most important traditional didactic texts for Thai women [see *Prachum suphasit son ying* (2012) published by the Fine Arts Department of Thailand for example]. It is believed to be composed by Suthon Phu a poet laureate appointed by king Rama II and IV.

of temptation from modern civilisation'; and third, by their relationship with the opposite sex 'because there will be a school at the one end and a hotel at another'.

In the interviews conducted with the four women who grew up in the period when *Kritsana son nong* was in circulation. Each of the women also talked about the formation of their social and gender identity in relation to age, self-awareness, and in relation to the opposite sex. Specifically, they did so through, and in association with, the commonly used term, *pen sao*.

Pen Sao, what does it actually mean?

In Thai society's everyday conversations, it is common to hear comments about how so and so is *pen sao* if the person in question is a girl, or *pen noom* if the person in question is a boy. Because in most cases, these are comments made in passing, listeners tend not to give any further thought other than that the observed person was no longer a child. Nevertheless, during the research the term *pen sao* was mentioned on numerous occasions and requires an investigation of its different connotations.

In *Elements of Semiology*, Roland Barthes (1977) notes that signs are composed of two planes of meaning, the plane of denotation and the plane of connotation. On the level of denotation, *pen sao* is composed of two words, *pen* and *sao*. The former means 'is' or 'become', the latter means 'young woman'; together, literally, *pen sao* means 'becoming a young woman'. Yet, as will be seen in the discussion below, when *pen sao* was used, it invoked further ideas and feelings relating to becoming a young woman in Thai society. This second level of meaning is socially and culturally constructed. Therefore, by examining the connotations of *pen sao*, issues may be discovered that are considered to be significant in relation to the social and gender identity of young women in Thai society at that time.

Pen sao was first mentioned in a pilot interview. While this encounter will be discussed later on, it will suffice to clarify here that *pen sao* is significant to the research in terms of methodology. The fact that the term was identified during the study and then adopted as a keyword, reflects the inductive nature of the study. Recognising the potential significance of the term proved useful because it helped in communicating with the informants. In comparison

to overly technical terms such as the 'formation of social and gender identity', *pen sao* was much easier for the informants to grasp

Pen sao means no longer a child.

Echoing the definition of 'teenagers' in *Kritsana son nong*, *pen sao* was associated first and foremost with age. In a pilot interview with an expert on vernacular culture and everyday life, Aj A was worried that she might not be the right person to be interviewed because she was not yet *pen sao* in the 1960s. Born in 1951, she was just reaching her early teens during the period under consideration. Instead, she noted that:

'If you had had a chance to talk to Aunt Nij [pseudonym], you would have heard so many more stories. Aunt Nij was such a great storyteller and during that time she was pen sao, compared to me I was merely a child. What I remember is rather fragmented, typical that of a child.' (Aj A [pseudonym] interviewed on 15 January 2015)

In her statement, Aj A believed that Aunt Nij was *pen sao* during that period, first and foremost, because of her age. She was nearly ten years older than Aj A. It was assumed further that Aunt Nij would have not merely remembered what happened but, significantly, understood why this had happened and what it meant. Unlike the term teenager, *pen sao* suggested also some form of intellectual maturity, a point reiterated by other informants. In some cases, the concept was extended to include knowing how to behave and gaining the freedom to live one's life the way one saw fit. It is observed that the contradistinction between the state of being a child and being *pen sao* tended to be portrayed as two opposite states rather than as an uncertain and liminal period.

Pen sao means having an awareness of how one should appear and with what kind of objects

In the novel *The Ghosts*, or *Pi sad*, written by Seinee Saowaphong in 1957, the author implied the waning of the old generation and the waxing of the new by juxtaposing Rachani, the female protagonist, with her mother in terms of their childhood and adolescent years.

Anklets and topknot defined mother's childhood and a gleaming golden belt characterised her sao. Rachani is the only one in the family who never had a topknot as a child and when Rachani pen sao, she could not care less whether it was a copper alloy or a golden belt. Rachani is more than satisfied with an inexpensive leather belt as long as it has the right colour — red, green, brown or blue — whichever one goes well with the outfit she is wearing. Gone is the time for pha muang, pha lai, pha tab, pha thung and jong kra ben, now is the time for trousers and skirts. Gone is the time for turmeric powder, white clay filler and bee wax, now is the time for cream, lipstick, and curly hair oil. (Seinee Saowaphong [Sakchai Bamrungphong], 1957, pp. 11-12)

By drawing upon the contrast between the childhoods and adolescents of two characters from different generations, the author brought our attention to how objects of material culture were significant to a woman's appearance and the formation of her gender identity especially as she approached a state of *pen sao*. Importantly, these objects not only had utilitarian functions but also cultural meanings. This is especially the case with products that suggested self-awareness in one's appearance; they became signifiers of the state of *pen sao*. In other words, *pen sao* are performative through these objects. This idea is exemplified by a story told by participant, Khun Anong.

Among the four women, Khun Anong was the eldest. She was born in 1936 in the northern part of Thailand. Her father and mother divorced when she was very young. Khun Anong lived with her father while her brother and sister lived with her mother. Her father was very strict with her. During her teenage years, Khun Anong was not allowed to have long hair, beautiful hair ribbons or to dress up as others did. She was not even allowed to wear a petticoat.

'My father did not approve of me dressing up. There was this one time, because everybody else wore a petticoat, one with laces, I saved up my spending money and paid the woman next door to make me one. All my friends wore them and I was already grown up by then. It happened that I went to a temple fair with the school and somehow it showed When I got home, oh my, my father scolded at me, "What on earth are you wearing? Let me have it." My father did not want me to pen sao.' (Khun Anong interviewed on 20 June 2015)

After gaining the petticoat, her father cut it up and threw it into the river in front of their house. In her own words, Khun Anong's father did not want her to *pen sao*. It is interesting how a simple artefact such as a petticoat, featured in *Kritsana son nong* as one of the modern products appropriate for female adolescents, came to be one of a range of prohibited objects and appearances in the Thai context. In comparison to the look of a primary school child, which the farther exhorted his daughter to retain — a very short and simple hairstyle for example, was asexual. While one can never know her father's reasoning, it is evident that since the state of being *pen sao* can be defined through products, appearances, and social practices. Denying these was a repudiation of *pen sao*, practically and symbolically.

Pen sao means being different from pen noom

Apart from being defined by age and an awareness of one's appearance, the women often related the state of *pen sao* with the presence of their male counterparts. This reflects the social expectation of how women should behave in relation to men in Thai society, as can be seen in the following accounts of two sisters.

Khun Sai and Khun Sroi were daughters of a senior government officer from the municipal town in the Southern part of Thailand. They had six siblings. Khun Sai was the second child and Khun Sroi was the fourth child. They were born in 1943 and 1948 respectively. Similar to other interviewees, and children of other well-to-do families from other provinces back then, the sisters came to Bangkok after finishing their junior high school to prepare for a University's examination. Khun Sai came first and stayed with one of the teachers. When she did not pass the exam, her family convinced her to study at one of the respectable teacher's colleges located in the outskirts of Bangkok. Moving into the college dormitory was the first time she had to live independently among female and male classmates.

'... when I moved to the college, I came to be aware of being pen sao. There were dorms for female and male students. I had to watch my speech and manners. I was not popular. I kept myself to myself, spent most of the time in the dorm, in the study room. I did not go out or party or chose to study in an area such as agriculture because I knew I would not be able to carry all these heavy tools by myself. Some of my women

classmates who were rather perd sakard said that they would ask the men to help them out ... but I said no I didn't want to. I chose instead home economics and nutritional studies which I knew I could manage by myself. I would not bicker with the guys either. At the end of the day I would just go back to my room. I was not the party type. I was rather self-contained.' (Khun Sai [pseudonym] interviewed on 5 February 2015)

Khun Sroi was five years younger than Khun Sai and moved to Bangkok to attend the University. Prior to that, when their father was posted to the Northeast, she and her younger brother went to live with him for two years. Since their mother could not go with them, Khun Sroi was the only woman in the house and there she became aware of the social expectations of her gender performance.

'I did not really feel that I was pen sao, rather the term was put to me by the way people would say to me that I was pen sao so I should not act like this; or because I was pen sao I should not speak like that. It seems like by being pen sao we entered a risky phase without even realising it. For example, I was told not to walk arm in arm with a close male friend even though we grew up together. When I was living with my father and my brother, I could feel that because I was a woman people would regard me as pen sao.' (Khun Sroi [pseudonym] interviewed on 5 February 2015)

According to both sisters' accounts, *pen sao* is closely associated with, or rather opposed to, *pen noom*, being a young man. The sisters were aware of their status and, importantly, of how others would expect them to behave as a proper young woman. Both women considered themselves to be a well-educated, successful and respectable ladies. The assertive ways in which they conducted themselves, especially in relation to the opposite sex, while *pen sao* confirmed their views about themselves.

From Khun Sai's account, we can detect a binary opposition between public and private. The public parameter included 'go out', 'party', 'agriculture' and was used in contrast to a private parameter signified by expressions such as 'study', 'home economics' and 'self-contained'. Furthermore, objects such as 'heavy agricultural tools' were seen as not suitable for women in this case even though in agrarian society Thai women usually worked side-by-side their male counterparts. If, according to Khun

Sroi, *pen sao* was a 'risky' phase because of the presence of men, 'staying in' the private parameter represented a 'safe' space for there would be no others, neither men nor boys.

Contrary to her own manners, Khun Sai observed that women who appeared not to worry about this risk were *perd sakard*. Unlike herself, *perd sakard* women did not shy away from interacting with the opposite sex. She went on to say that:

'I think perd sakard came from Hollywood movies, an overly friendly character who would talk to anyone. One who would do things other girls would not dare to do. Like playing tennis, for example, the teacher would call us in to practice and s/he would say: "You do not realise right that this could help you to prosper in the future. Imagine when you become a young female teacher in the municipal towns where all the senior officers play tennis" "When they needed partners they would come to you. And before you realise you will get promoted with two or even three steps" I think really she only meant for us to have some forms of social skills.' (Khun Sai [pseudonym] interviewed on 5 February 2015)

Unlike *pen sao*, *perd sakard* is not as common in contemporary everyday conversation. Rather it will occasionally be deployed to suggest the past, particularly the period from the 1960s to the 1970s. In the study, all four of the women had something to say about *perd sakard* even though they did not interpret the term in exactly the same way.

Pen sao perd sakard.

According to the website of the Office of the Royal Society, the word *perd sakard* is

... adopted from the word 'first class' in English but with mispronunciation over time, it became perd sakard. Its meaning also has changed somewhat. In English 'first class' means the first class. When being used to describe any substance, it is of the first class, the best quality. But in Thai perd sakard means extravagant, as in dressing up sophisticatedly and highly modern. (Office of the Royal Society [radio broadcast], 17 March 2006)

The foreign connotation Khun Sai suspected of the term was confirmed by its origin. However, beyond that, *perd sakard* also was associated with foreign

ideas and practices such as Western films, Western social interactions and Western sports. As such, it is questionable whether it is a threat to the ideal traditional Thai culture. Tennis, which Khun Sai mentioned, for example, was an imported sport. It required a particular form of sportswear and allowed social interaction between the opposite sexes in ways that were new to the Thai society. A famous female protagonist from a popular Thai novel from the late 1930s, *Prissana*, was known to worry her mother a great deal when her tennis shorts were ‘a pair of super short shorts’.³ Whilst activities such as tennis, ballroom dancing, public speaking and singing, were encouraged as a necessary form of social skill for modern *kunlasattri* (Kritsana, 1961), these activities located women in the public space, open to be gazed upon. A woman’s social identity therefore cannot be disconnected from her gender identity, both would be determined by her manners and self-presentation in the society.

Interestingly, Khun Sroi saw her elder sister as being rather *perd sakard*. Upon graduation, Khun Sai took an upcountry teaching position. Compared to other female teachers, Khun Sai was different. She drove her own car while others rode a motorbike or a local bus. She had a unique style when it came to clothes and accessories. In her sister’s words, “Auntie Sai would stand out in any group photographs.” It is interesting that being *perd sakard* in this sense was seen as admirable, it did not provoke any risk. Perhaps because this particular dialogue followed immediately the one through which Khun Sai established her character as a non-*perd sakard*. It has been previously noted that she hardly socialised with men. Once the issue of the opposite sex was removed from the context, it seemed that a woman could be herself. She could even be *perd sakard* without being judged.

The last women interviewed, Khun Nongluck, was also from the South. She was born in 1947 into an affluent and influential family. Her mother was the

daughter of a high-ranking aristocrat in the court of King Rama V. Her father was a successful and well-respected traditional medicine practitioner. She and her siblings were brought up differently from the local children. Khun Nongluck and her siblings had a personal nanny, the girls had to learn classical Thai dance with their mother and all had to learn to speak English with their father. They were encouraged to read and write even before attending the local school. All were highly educated.

After her junior high school, Khun Nongluck asked her father to enrol her at the Pakawalee music and dance school where she learned to apply cosmetics and perform with the dance troupe.

‘Everyone at Pakawalee was perd sakard, everyone [stress]. It [is the term associated with] women in the past who appeared fashionably dressed, with full make-up but we were also highly well behaved. There cannot be any dispute regarding our reputation I was perd sakard. I was highly stylish. I used Merle Norman cosmetic⁴, following every step right to the end The whole face had to be done in the right way, my make-up kit was the same as the one used by the professional B.A. [beauty adviser]’. (Khun Nongluck [pseudonym] interviewed on 26 February 2015)

Khun Nongluck was very open about and proud of her lifestyle. She was always heavy made-up because she thought it suited her personality. She attended ballroom dances regularly and was rather good at it. She was also the only one interviewed who smoked from a young age. Her father was the one who gave her her first cigarette. Khun Nongluck told me that it was rather common then for society men and women to smoke. She also remembers clearly how her aristocratic aunts would sit in a dark room engulfed with the smell of Thai perfume, gracefully smoking a western cigarette. Professor Susan Fulop also argues that the practice

³ see *Prissana*, a novel written by W. Na Pramuanmak [Her Royal Highness Princess Vibhavadi Rangsit]

⁴ Merle Norman is a US cosmetic brand created by Ms Merle Nethercutt Norman in the late 1920s. In Thailand during the 1940s to 60s, Merle Norman was licensed only to the Nightingale Department Store. The store had a special treatment room where all the fashionable ladies would go for its signature ‘the three steps treatment’.

of smoking among the Thai female elites was part of the civilization project⁵: “A woman who wanted to appear fashionably modern would give up betel nut chewing and tooth polishing, whiten her teeth by various means, and, if her commitment to the project was serious, she might take up smoking—or at least lighting—cigarettes.” (Kepner, 2013, p. 2)

While Khun Nongluck would admit nonchalantly that she was ‘sassy’ and *perd sakard*, she was also ready to affirm her commitment to virtue and chastity. Apart from the quotation above, on several occasions during our conversations Khun Nongluck would return to her manners and conduct as “being *perd sakard*, but ultra conservative” when it came to the opposite sex. She would not, for example, dance a slow dance or a Tango, with a man, the latter particularly because of its sexually symbolic movements. She made it clear that dancing for her was a kind of sport and that accepting a dance from a man did not mean that he was allowed to make any sexual advances towards her. As a self-confessed *perd sakard*, Khun Nongluck must have been aware of the ambiguous position of *perd sakard* women. For her, it was most important that *sao perd sakard* was able to navigate through this ambiguous sphere with their reputation intact. This echoes Khun Sai and Khun Sroi’s accounts of how women must maintain their manners when it came to the opposite sex. In this respect, a woman’s social identity is very much determined by her gender identity and performance. This must explain why the publisher of *Kritsana son nong* used virtue and chastity to justify the necessity of the etiquette book, even though they were not parts of the original text.

The role of consumer products, and therefore design, plays in the construction of ‘a modern *kunlasattri*’

In *Kritsana son nong* more than fifty objects and twenty social spaces were mentioned. Some were discussed in details while other were mentioned only in passing. While sitting properly, speaking gently and having good morals in one’s heart were still regarded as important, signs of good manners were extended to entail white teeth, a fragrant body, tactful telephone conversation, the ability to select the perfect gift for the occasion, and so on. All involved or were mediated by objects, mostly industrially designed and produced goods. *Kritsana son nong* therefore marks an important departure from classic Thai manners books like *Sombat khong phudi* whose emphasis was on the corporeal, verbal and mental aspects of comportment (Jory, 2015).

Furthermore, the content of *Kritsana son nong* also responded to and reflected the modernization of everyday life in urban Thailand at a time when Bangkok and its population were going through rapid and profound transformations.⁶ Among these was the influx of consumer products. When these products were mentioned in *Kritsana son nong*, they acquired meanings which went beyond their operational function. The intended audience of *Kritsana son nong* were supposed to perceive these products as requisites for ‘a modern *kunlasattri*’.

⁵ The civilization project in Thailand is a complex topic and will require a paper of its own. However, in relation to Kepner’s work quoted here, the civilization project refers to the process of modernization and westernization of Thai society initiated by King Mongkut (1851-68) as a response to the European colonization of Southeast Asia. Certain laws and practices such as criminal punishments and polygamy. Most notably, Western material cultures such as dress code, education and manners were adopted especially among the aristocrats and the elites. This civilization project had been well continued into and through the reign of King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910) and King Vajiravudh (1910-25). In many respects, the Thai nation-building programme under Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram (1948-57) was also a part of the civilization project. See, for more details, Thongchai Winichakul. (2000). ‘The Quest for “Siwilai”: A Geographical Discourse of Civilizational Thinking in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Siam.’ *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 59(3), 528-549 and Peleggi, M. (2002) *Lords of things: The fashioning of the Siamese monarchy’s modern image*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press.

⁶ see, for example, a description of changes that took place to Bangkok and her population in Benedict Anderson (1977) ‘Withdrawal Symptoms: Social and Cultural Aspects of the October 6 Coup’, *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 9(3), July-September 1977, pp. 13-30.

TO BE SPOTLESSLY CLEAN AND NEAT ...



... CHECK YOUR SHOULDERS FOR POWDER ...



... CHANGE YOUR UNDERCLOTHES DAILY ...



... TAKE CARE OF YOUR SHIRTS ...



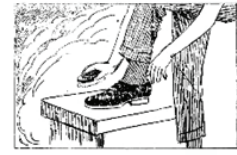
... KEEP YOUR CLOTHES PRESSED ...

Figure 1:
A spread from Beery, M. (1949) *Manners Made Easy*, New York: McGraw-Hill. Chapter 5, pp. 74-75.

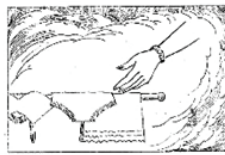
จงรักษาความสะอาดตัวเรา ...



... ตรวจไหล่ของเราเพื่อแป้ง ...



... เปลี่ยนชุดชั้นในทุกวัน ...



... ระวังการขยับในตู้ ...



... ใช้น้ำร้อนให้สะอาด ...

Figure 2:
A spread from Kritsana Thevarak (19XX) *Kritsana son nong: Naenam marayat thi ngam haeng araya samai*. Bangkok: Prae Pittaya. Letter no. 22, pp150-151.

Hygiene and health, for example, was a significant issue for modern life according to *Manners Made Easy* and *Kritsana son nong*. In both books clean bras and underclothes are essential signs of a hygienic body that a civilised person must strive to attain.

In reality, the interviews suggested that there was more to a bra than an undergarment which must be changed daily. Khun Anong, felt that she experienced 'true' feelings of *pen sao* only when she came to study at college in Bangkok, *particularly once she graduated and was a teacher herself. Then she earned her own living and had her own apartment. All of these allowed her to dress up, attend ballroom dances, and shop for things that she liked. Among the things she bought were bras*, which previously, while living in the north, she did not even know existed.

'I only came to wear a bra when I started to work. My colleagues wore them ... brassieres were rather snazzy. To get one, [I] had to go to Nightingale [a department store]. They were rather expensive, the one that had small hooks ... most of them were imported. I was a teacher, I earned around 900 baht per month, the bra cost over a hundred baht'. (Khun Anong [pseudonym] interviewed June 2015)

With the current abundance and varieties of bras available, Khun Anong's account is a reminder how these mundane everyday garments were once a sign of feminine luxury. An examination of the

advertisement for brassiere below shows how it played on the hopes and the dreams for a perfect body. With the line drawing depicting a Western looking model, the ads went on to entice, 'own one today'. Aside from giving us a glimpse of the promise offered by the product in its early day, the ads also remind us that these manners-related products do have economic value and that, though invisible in use, form important parts of consumer culture. If a woman must change her bra daily, she would need at least two or three bras. Even if we went with the advertisement's cheapest model, which was much cheaper than that purchased by Khun Anong, they would still cost her more than ten percent of her monthly salary. The most expensive model was nearly double her salary. Manners are often discussed in relation to moral and ethics. It is easy to forget that they also have a part to play in the country's, and the world's, socioeconomic

Furthermore, a bra, like a petticoat, also alludes to puberty in girls. Talking about *pen sao*, Khun Nongluck, a self-proclaimed *perd sakard* recalled:

'We would notice if anyone showed off their sao such as wearing bras at a young age.... I wore traditional Thai camisole tops until I finished high school. We, I can vouch for my four sisters, did not know and hardly aware of our pen sao. If we saw anyone showing that they were sao, that they were not dek [children], we would become suspicious as to whether they were "good kids".' (Khun Nongluck [pseudonym] interviewed February-March 2015)

ความจริงที่เหมือนฝัน

ความหวังที่ฉันรอคอย และบัดนี้ ก็ได้เกิดขึ้น
 อย่างเป็นทางการที่แน่นอนที่สุดแก่ตัวฉันเองแล้ว เพราะเสื้อชั้นใน
 มีแขนแบบใหม่ ของ วี ให้แปรเปลี่ยนรูปร่างของฉันให้สวยงามได้
 อย่างปลื้ม

ยกทรงแบบพิเศษของ วี ติดเย็บด้วยผ้าลูกไม้ในลอนสวดกนกการชัก และ
 ไม่ต้องรัด สดด้วยผ้าชั้นหนังที่ช่วยให้สวมสบายไม่อึดอัด การตัดอย่างถูก
 ส่วนลึก และฝีมือเย็บที่ปราณีต จะช่วยให้ท่านมีรูปร่างสวยงามอย่างน่าชื่นชม

เป็นเจ้าของเสื้อชั้นในแบบใหม่ เลิกซื้อเสื้อชั้นในเก่าๆ วี ๙๙๒๓
 ถนนสีลม กรุงเทพมหานคร

ยกทรงมีแขนธรรมดา ราคา ตัวละ ๔๐-๒๐๐ บาท
 ยกทรงไม่มีแขน ราคา ตัวละ ๖๐-๒๐๐ บาท
 ยกทรงไม่มีแขนแบบพิเศษ ราคา ตัวละ ๕๐๐-๑,๐๐๐ บาท
 ยกทรงไม่มีแขนแบบพิเศษ ราคา ตัวละ ๑,๕๐๐ บาท

วี แผนกลอน ลอนทูลวัน เว้นวันเสาร์ และ วันอาทิตย์

Figure 3:
 An advertisement of Wee in a local newspaper around 1957. According to the advertisement Wee offered a range of ready-made bras as well as made-to-order service. It also had a teaching section. The basic line costed from 40-200 baht per bra. The most sophisticated one cost 1,500 baht. The headline "The reality that feels like a dream" is followed by "The hope that I have been waiting for". The advertisement goes on to elaborate that "The utmost reality is finally happened to me for the new style, a new sleeveless bra from Wee, has transformed my body into this amazingly beautiful shape".

This reminiscence echoes the incident between Khun Anong and her petticoat. Even without the presence of any man, but simply by their insinuation to the stage of adolescence these products can become an object that signified and differentiate, a child from a *sao*; 'us' from 'them', 'a good kid' from 'a not-quite-good kid'. The advice on how to wear brassieres properly was given its own section in *Sombat khong kunlasattri*, a manners book published ten years after *Kritsana son nong*. The content, however, turned out to be about the author's disapproval of women whose bra, and some parts of their breast, could be visible underneath the thin outer garment (Pattrawadee, 1966, 22-24). In other words, brassieres were to be worn but not to be seen.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

In this paper, the content was drawn from *Kritsana son nong*, a Thai etiquette manual, with oral history accounts given by women growing up in the 1950s to 1960s. The term *pen sao* emerged as a key social concern in the study. Significantly, this commonly used term invoked three interrelated and rather complex connotations, which also echoed Santa Thewarak's, the Thai author of *Kritsana son nong*, view on Thai teenagers at that time.

First and foremost, *pen sao* meant reaching certain age and having some intellectual maturity. In this

sense, *pen sao* was often regarded as different from being a child, in a way that the two stages were opposites rather than points on a continuum. Second, *pen sao* meant having an awareness of oneself in terms of one's age, gender and social identity. There was a close link between material objects through which a woman can display her state of being *pen sao*. Third, being *pen sao* meant an awareness of their male counterparts in society, either with their actual presence or simply as an abstract concept. This point also involved the social expectation of a woman's gender performance in socialising with the opposite sex. There was an unspoken implication that the state of being *pen sao* can be 'unsafe' because it was also about being sexually mature.

In terms of research methodology, combining oral history interviews with their focus on language with literary analysis helped to bring to light issues that might have been overlooked and which proved useful to the study of design. In this way, the research responds to Victor Margolin's assertion that:

A world history of design will most effectively explain design's place in human culture by discussing it within a narrative that is driven by political, economic and social factors rather than treating it within a chronology of objects or styles that are distributed over time across a geographic terrain, no matter how wide. (Margolin, 2005, p. 241)

In particular, the discussion of *pen sao* brought to light that in actuality products could have multiple, sometimes even conflicting, meanings. While being signs of modernity, bras, petticoats and make-up, also emphasised the vulnerability of women's social reputation when being linked to the concepts of virtue and chastity. In other words, talking about *pen sao* illustrated the fact that inanimate objects can be turned into socio-cultural mechanisms which regulate and police the formation of the ideal Thai woman. It is important to develop further studies identifying these ambiguous products, social interactions and spaces at this stage in order to set out to investigate how else they were represented, consumed and produced in other forms of media, such as advertisements and movies. The intention of this research was to add to the corpus of the history of manners and material cultures in Thailand while revealing the influence of the American and Development period; a time when the design profession and education in Thailand began to form their roots.

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