

**Maternal Femininity in Thailand: A Critical Historical Analysis and Case Studies of
Modern Longform Commercial Advertisements**

By

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Introduction

In recent years, Thailand has become internationally known for producing high-quality longform commercial advertisements. A quick search on Google or YouTube will yield search results with headers such as “Heartwarming Thai Commercial” or “Another Sad Thai Commercial”, or articles that compile a list of Thai longform commercial advertisements that have garnered popularity. Running several minutes in length, these longform commercial advertisements tend to focus less on direct product placement and branding. Instead, they highlight a product’s features or a brand’s value by evoking an emotional response. These commercials often follow a storyline, where cinematic depictions of drama and sometimes comedy tug at the heartstrings of the viewers, making them forget they were even watching an advertisement video.

This form of indirect advertising is worth academic analysis. In order to appeal to a specific target audience, there must be pre-existing assumptions about the relationships depicted onscreen that are re-enacted to elicit such an emotional response. Thus, analyzing Thai longform commercial advertisements can provide a lens that reflects the cultural values and expectations the advertisement attempts to convey to the intended audience. One relationship archetype that is used repeatedly in these commercial advertisements is that of motherhood - the emotional bond between a mother and her child. This thesis will employ an interdisciplinary approach to answer two primary questions: 1) What are the defining feminine maternal attributes in contemporary, urbanized, middle-class Thai society? 2) How are these feminine maternal attributes reiterated and depicted in Thai commercials?

To answer the first question, I will introduce secondary sources and texts that call attention to the sociological, historical, and anthropological factors that shaped ideals of a Thai

femininity rooted in maternal attributes. I refer to Kanjana Thepboriruk's article, "Dear Thai Sisters: Propaganda, Fashion, and the Corporeal Nation under Phibunsongkhram," which asserts that nation building became an inherently gendered task that reflected the experiences of a mother and demanded self-improvement. I will also refer to Penny Van Esterik's *Materializing Thailand*, which explains how historical and cultural processes influenced Thai public culture, specifically the gendered nature of it and how women carried the responsibility of visually representing Thainess. I will also draw from secondary sources that discuss the influence that Theravada Buddhism has had on gender relations, specifically how a women's role in the society focused on motherhood and mothering.

To answer the second question, this thesis analyzes longform commercial advertisements as a primary text. This thesis seeks to employ feminist a media studies approach and utilize media analysis techniques, that include semiotic and musical analysis to view how Thai maternal femininity is presented. Commercial advertisements are a medium through which cultural and societal values are promulgated. In *Media Semiotics*, Jonathan Bignell explores how media signs influence consumers in indirect ways. In regards to advertisements, Bignell states, "ads call on systems of differences which already exist in our culture, and which encode social values," meaning that "ads presuppose[s] that we can read connotations" that are present in them (Bignell 37). Contemporary advertisements depict existing ideology and symbolism. Bignell proposes that the purpose of these commercials is to create an association between a cultural value and a product, in order to foster a sense of familiarity that later influences a consumer's shopping choices. In the case of visual signs and markers in advertisements, Bignell argues that "signs in ads have connotations, meanings which come from our culture" (Bignell 34-35). Indeed, "mass media are agents of social control, a function they serve by reflecting, refracting, and amplifying

values, opinions, and perceptions of major power groupings in a social system (Balasubramanian and Viswanath 119).

It is entirely plausible then that these advertisements both perpetuate existing notions of a maternal femininity, and influence an audience to aim for this idealized version of a motherly womanhood. Models in advertisements are positioned as an ideal and are often paired with positive imagery and actions that are rewarded (122). From this, targeted consumers are more likely to emulate said depicted behavior, whether it be purchasing the item from the commercial, or modeling their own appearances and behavior to match that of the model from the advertisement (122). Following this framework, we can understand that these Thai commercial advertisements are not creating new maternal attributes and qualities, but that these attributes and qualities are signs with specific connotations that are already established and understood by the general public. Because of this, I argue that these commercials perpetuate a conservative idealization and depiction of women. These commercials are inherently conservative in nature and therefore position the products and companies themselves as adhering to traditional values.

The longform commercial advertisements I analyze in this thesis all depict a Thai woman who is either a mother or is performing some sort of mothering. Even if the character is not a mother, her femininity is highlighted through maternal attributes. I treat the advertisement videos as text and offer critical readings of the case studies through content and musical analysis. This analysis includes looking for connotation, carriers of connotation, looking at gaze, objects, and settings in the commercial advertisement videos. I will also apply basic principles of salience during my content analysis. Normally, salience principles are applied to photography, but can be extended to videos as well. Salience principles consist of foregrounding, overlapping,

size, color, tone, focus, angles and viewer relation to specific aspects in the video when seeking to analyze what meaning and content is being conveyed.

I also utilize musical analysis as a method of analyzing content and meaning. In commercial advertisements, music signification, structures, and functions can provide contextual and cotextual perspectives, with cotextual analysis being defined as the relationship between elements in the text. The text is the commercial advertisement video and the textual elements include music, background sounds, visuals, lighting, and scene cuts. Music is an important element in commercial advertisements. In regards to signification, music is a cotextual element that exists with visual elements, an audiovisual intersection between the visual and auditory dimensions in the text. Examination of audiovisual signification looks at the “sequential interactions between sounds as well as the layering of sounds” (Graakjær 97). Music is also a highly functional element of commercial advertisements. A few functional elements of music include the following: the creation of a mood or background for an advertisement, plot support through use of music as a narrative; use of music to represent a location; music as a way to structure time in a commercial; and music as a way to emphasize features or associations as it relates to a product or brand (Graakjær 136-138).

Thai Nationalism and Religion

Before defining what “Thai” motherhood is, and how maternal attributes are presented in Thai national identity, it is necessary to both provide a backdrop of how cultural nation building in Thailand was inherently gendered and demonstrate how images of motherhood have been historically used in the context of nationalism. During the reign of King Vajiravudh (Rama VI, 1910-1925), nationalism took the form of *siwilai*, a word derived from the English “civilized” to

denote the Thai concepts of civilization and progress, in which the monarchy and the Siamese elite served as visual representation of a modernized Siam. Vajiravudh, according to Van Esterik, “viewed the monarchy as key to nationhood” and “sought to impose a standardized, homogeneous, centrally sustained high culture” within the Siamese elite (98). This was most noticeably represented through an increasingly Westernized appearance, specifically through modes of dress. Westerners who were accustomed to “extremes of gender opposition in European constructs of masculinity and femininity,” were disoriented by the visual similarities between Thai men and women, which included short hairstyles and the wearing of *chong kraben*, a cloth garment that resembled loose pants (99). Vajiravudh recognized that there were “Western prejudices against unisex sartorial practices of the Siamese people,” and encouraged his friends and relatives, members of the Siamese elite, to don appearances that were “appropriately masculine and feminine by Western standards” (Thepboriruk 236-237). However, after the end of the absolute monarchy in Siam, there was a need for a “corporeal reassignment to signify a new era” (237).

Led by Army Major General Plaek Phibunsongkhram, the Phibunsongkhram regime first came into power in 1938 to 1944, and again for a second term from 1948 to 1957. Phibunsongkhram was aware of his lack of ‘cultural legitimacy’ in the void left by the Siamese monarchs and recognized the need for a new nation-building campaign. By “transform[ing] the Kingdom of Siam into the nation of Thailand,” the Phibunsongkhram regime attempted to modernize to a new nation but also create a sense of unity through a new Thai national identity (237). In order to create a new sense of Thai/Tai nationalism amongst the people, Phibunsongkhram worked with Major-General Luang Wichitwathakan to create a set of twelve Cultural Mandates, a strategy that would employ what Van Esterik (102-103) calls “nation

building through cultural reconstruction.” Visual representation, more specifically, the representation of the Thai cultural identity through dress, was employed in Phibunsongkhram’s nation building strategy.

In a way, this was very similar to Vajiravudh’s approach of physically embodying the Thai state through appearance, where “Thainess is expressed within the country and represented outside the country” (108). The Phibunsongkhram regime utilized a set of the cultural mandates and propaganda materials that targeted women’s appearances, demeanors and duties. Mandate 10, comprised of seven pleas, outlined how women should dress and act in public. It called for women to appear *riap roi*, “well-mannered” and “polite” through means of appearance and mindset (Thepboriruk 238). The text called for women to physically modify their appearance by growing out their hair in contrast to traditionally short haircuts, wearing clothing that covered their upper bodies, wearing wrap skirts in place of *chong kraben* (see fig. 1), and to wear hats; essentially, it encouraged women to dress in a way that would display Thailand as a modernized nation to Western audiences (238).



Fig. 1. A woman with the traditional short brush cut wearing a *chong kraben* (Posrithong 116)

This mandate is also noteworthy because for the first time, it encouraged a “new and modern aesthetic of self-presentation for everyone regardless of class” (Thepboriruk 238). This provided an opportunity for the growing middle class in Bangkok to not only emulate the traditional elite through sartorial practices, but also indicate their own social statuses and aspirations. Through clothing and physical appearance, a middle class person could present themselves as a *phuu dii*, a person of upper class standing.

The Second Plea in Mandate 10 also made use of motherhood imagery to equate the task of nation building for women to be analogous to that of a mother and child. The excerpt below highlights how imaginings of motherhood are evoked when describing the tasks of nation building:

“[Nation building] is the same as when we have a child. You all try to mold and educate your child so that they become better. Few would allow their child to be illiterate, starve, or get sick. Whatever you would do for your child is what you must do for Nation Building.” (Thepboriruk 244)

Appealing to imagery of motherhood is not uniquely Thai in itself, but rather a commonly used reference in nationalistic discourse. As a matter of fact, contemporary nationalistic regimes during the Phibunsongkhram-era, which included Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, both utilized images of a national mother as part of their nationalistic ideologies. Many scholars have established that images of motherhood have been utilized by military nationalistic regimes to perpetuate and instill nationalistic themes and identities. One of the most common symbols used in many nations is the image of a national mother, in which both heterosexual women and mothers are expected to be “pure and virtuous...to reproduce the nation in body and mind” (Albanese 2).

Whether it is through symbols and images of the national mother, changes to cultural expectations of gender roles, or national public policies and laws that specifically targeted

women, nationalism employs a “distinctly gender-biased ideology, wherein family becomes the source of a nation’s continuity in time and men are seen as martyrs and women as mothers” (2). Gender-based nationalistic rhetoric tends to rely on “state-prescribed notions of motherhood”, a prescriptive and self-sacrificing motherhood, in which the primary goal is to “biologically and ideologically reproduce a particular image of the nation” (3).

The Phibunsongkhram regime emphasized the relationship between self-improvement, self-sacrifice, and motherhood. As gatekeepers of the national identity, ideal Thai women must constantly strive for self-improvement which requires self-sacrifice, as the “child nation was an extension of [a woman’s] own body” (Thepboriruk 244). By utilizing the imagery of motherhood, and thereby conflating all Thai women as mothers of the nation, the task of upholding the national identity and nation building itself, “becomes an internal, individual, and private act to be done in the home” 244). The Second Plea intentionally uses lexical similarities between nation building (*sang chat*) and self-improvement (*sang tong eng*) to draw the parallel and equate the two notions. Women had to improve themselves in a way where their appearance and bodies would serve as “visual representation of progress and civility” (248).

Thus, the Second Plea effectively “relocated modernization and nation building.... onto the bodies of women,” thereby conscripting women “as corporeal proxies for the nation” (234). The gender specific nature of Mandate 10 ensured that nation building and nationalism was inserted into both the public and private lives of women. Private nationalism was “defined as voluntary, cooperative, deeply personal sacrifices,” where an ideal Thai woman was one who conducted herself as a mother to the Thai child-nation; reproducing Thai-ness both culturally and biologically (248). Women had to internalize a sense of private nationalism while publicly displaying an outward application of nationalism through means of demeanor and dress.

To summarize, both Siamese and Thai Kings of past and the Phibun Songkhram regime conscripted women to serve as visual representations of modernity and the national identity. The desired attributes of a model Thai woman depicted a femininity that was inherently maternal. To be a proper Thai women citizen, a woman had to present herself in a way that reflected nationalism in both the private and public spheres, as “Thai women who are more likely to be affected by judgements about their appearance” (Van Esterik 129).

Although nationalistic discourse and propaganda certainly had an effect on shaping the ideals of a maternal femininity, religious beliefs are also factors. In “Localising the Universal: Women, Motherhood and the Appeal of Early Theravada Buddhism”, Barbara Watson Andaya discusses how Theravada Buddhism may have shaped certain gender expectations, especially for women. She states, “Although Buddhism certainly projected varied and sometimes conflicting images of 'femaleness', I believe that the trope of motherhood was initially the most conspicuous, and that it was recognised and embraced by Southeast Asian cultures” (Andaya 30). It is suggested that a form of merit making for women is the act of assuming a role of being a good mother and raising moral children. To be born a woman has the connotation that one did not accumulate enough merit in a previous life to be born as a man (Kirsch 21). Therefore, a woman had to constantly improve herself and sacrifice her own personal well being, in order to improve herself and her status.

In Katya Balusubramanian and K. Viswanath’s article, “Economic Liberalization, Advertising, and the Construction of Beauty in Indian Advertising,” the two authors discuss how the depictions of womanhood in commercials are indicative of conventionalized preferences. All the female protagonists in both commercials adhere to an expected social and physical appearance, which is not unusual in gendered advertisements. Authors Kathleen Nadeau and

Sangita Rayamajhi describe the expected roles that women have in their families in *Women's Roles in Asia*. Mothers, especially at the middle-income level who may be housewives, are expected to teach their children informal lessons such as gendered expectations and presentation. It is expected that mothers be the ones to teach their daughters to “discipline the body in a way that naturally differentiates girls from boys,” and that “a woman who has reached puberty begins to be closely scrutinized by her mother” (Nadeau and Rayamajhi 88). We see here then that mothers are the figures who teach the next generation about womanhood, and what that can incorporate. The intertwined nature of womanhood and motherhood can explain why commercials that depict model motherhood appeal not only to mothers in Thai culture, but also have the capability to appeal to a wide spectrum of women as well.

Dissemination of a Thai Maternal Femininity and Attributes

The Phibunsongkhram regime also utilized other mediums to further foster nationalism, in an arguably more culturally pervasive way. One example is the utilization of advertisements through popular media and fashion. The Phibunsongkhram regime worked with “fashion tastemakers and intermediaries” to construct a “fashionably patriotic Thai woman” (Thepboriruk 248). Print advertisements in magazines, along with new forms of mass media at the time, which included cinema and wireless radio, would promote ideal aesthetics of a fashionable patriotism (see fig. 2). Even household products would be advertised in a way that appealed to and “complement[ed] a fashionably patriotic woman” (252). Materialistic consumption of products in itself was an act of nationalistic support, as the Bureau of Customary Culture saw this as a deterrent to communism.



Fig. 2. Depictions of a modern Siamese woman from a lifestyle magazine (Posrithong 123)

The Cultural Mandates were official government policies that served to instill an internalized nationalism, where the ideal model of a Thai woman is inherently maternal in nature. Fashion and product advertisements during the Phibunsongkhram-era provided a conduit through which this ideal could be perpetuated to not only a Bangkok elite, but the rapidly growing middle class during that time period as well. As previously mentioned, this is noteworthy because it provided an avenue through which middle class women could portray themselves of higher status through their appearance, demeanor, and behaviors. Adherence to this feminine maternity model, coupled with the consumption of material products was a visual indicator of societal status. If Mandate 10 outlined official government stances and policies on the attributes that an ideal woman, a mother, should have. Fashion and product advertisements also served as an echo chamber and propagator of these ideals during this time period. Therefore, it is possible to examine advertisements as mediums in which cultural ideals and preferences are represented and understood.

While the Cultural Mandates published by the Phibunsongkhram regime provide an official guideline of desired qualities, print advertisements for products also served as a medium that communicated ideals of maternal femininity. During the Phibunsongkhram-era, new forms

of mass media, such as magazine prints, cinema, and wireless radio, contributed to the spread of cultural models of the ideal Thai woman. Similarly, the modern-era has also witnessed a rapid growth in new forms of mass media and communications, that continue to serve as a medium for product advertisements. Analyzing current longform commercial advertisements, especially those that focus on motherhood and mothering, would provide insight into what a maternal femininity in Thai society looks like today.

The commercials I have chosen to analyze in-depth take into consideration not only the perspective of a character in the commercial, but also the brand or item central to the commercial. The first two commercials are from conglomerate brands - one is from CP Foods, a Thai conglomerate while the other is Nestlé, a multinational conglomerate. The third commercial is from Advanced Info Service (AIS), a Thai telecommunications public company. The fourth advertisement is from Wacoal, a company that manufactures women's undergarments and lingerie. Lastly, the fifth commercial is from Thai Life Insurance, the first Thai insurance company and one of the largest insurance companies currently existing in Thailand. These commercials not only depict a mother, but they also frame the perspective from that of a child, or bystanders who witness motherhood or mothering. Each of the following commercials feature one of the following products: feminine product, food product, non-consumable household items. Others, such as commercials for life insurance, banks, or even phone companies, propagate cultural values and expectations of a Thai mother and woman.

The target audience of these products is very specific. These commercials are only available on the internet, and accessibility is limited to people who have reliable internet access, a working smartphone, and the income to pay for the internet data services as well. Accessibility is also limited to consumers with the technological skills to use a computer and the internet. The

nature of the companies that commissioned the production of these videos also delineates a specific target audience, as they sell products from multinational conglomerates with affiliates in Thailand. These companies manufacture brand name products which are easily recognizable from their logos and more desirable because of their international nature. As international consumer items, these products are also more expensive. Therefore, a certain income level is needed to even access the videos or afford the products from these brands. The price point of these products combined with the international association suggests that the target audience for these products is an urbanized middle-class family with enough purchasing power and globalized exposure to be able to recognize and purchase these products.

Other visual signs in the videos also speak to the intended target audience as well. By Thai standards, these women have markers that are preferable and indicative of the middle class: pale skin, clean appearances, and a conservative fashion style. Their contemporary homes are located in urban areas and they have modern appliances. They are also depicted as college educated, or they have children who have completed higher education. All these signs have connotations of an established urban-middle class standing.

Likewise, the music present in these longform commercial advertisements also highlight that the intended audience is the globalized, urban middle class. All of the instruments heard in the background music highlight Western instruments. In almost all of the commercials, touching or poignant scenes utilized a soft piano melody or string instruments. Additionally, all of the musical arrangements follow more Westernized melodies. Popular Thai traditional music styles, such as *luk thung* and *mor lam*, which are usually associated with traditional culture and rural life, are not present in the commercials. While I argue that overall the commercials adhere to traditional notions of motherhood and femininity, the contemporary settings of the ads, the

clothing, and the Western music pair tradition with modernity to reflect the complexities in Thailand today. The intentional use of Westernized music in these commercials further underscore that the intended audience remains an urbanized, middle-class audience in Thai society.

Similarly, it is also worth noting that although the language spoken in these videos is standardized Thai, there are often accompanying English subtitles. The presence of English subtitles in these longform commercials advertisements signals the globalized nature of the products, as well as the presumption that the intended audience either has some basic English knowledge or is not limited to a Thai audience. Moreover, the characters in the videos do not speak regional dialects and are exclusively shown in urban settings, with background features that clearly depict Bangkok. Thus, one can presume that the primary intended audience for the advertisements is the middle class in metropolitan centers of Thailand.

Long-Form Commercial Advertisements Case Studies

This section is a case study of selected long-form commercials. Each commercial will have a narrative description, followed by an in-depth analysis using the methods outlined in the introductory chapter that indicates how motherhood attributes are presented in each of the following commercials. Each of the commercials has at least three of the following motherhood attributes: polished feminine presentation, self-sacrifice, primary caretaker, and homemaker. Attributes are indicated by either a visual marker or an audible marker. The product or brand name and the title of the video is listed at the beginning of each analysis. A subtitle below in italics provides a short description of the plot.

CP Brand Thailand – Every Mouth is Meaningful (ทุกคำมีความหมาย)

Long-form commercial featuring a mother and an adolescent daughter, with an emphasis on food

The commercial opens with a prepubescent girl, alone at night, who hungrily stares at a fried rice food vendor cart. Somber piano music is heard in the background, the melody static, with only two notes emphasized at a time. The effect of the music is to indicate a sense of sadness and despondency - it is clear that the young girl is alone and unfamiliar with her surroundings. The food vendor, a middle-aged woman, invites the young girl to sit down and eat, despite her lack of money. Despite the scene taking place at night, the cinematography emphasizes the darkness of the night, as the woman's food cart is the only area lit-up in the dark alley. The young girl asks why the older woman is so kind-hearted.

As the older woman begins to talk, the seemingly muted shades of the scene suddenly turn warm and bright as the scene cuts from her frying pan, to that of another frying pan. The pair of hands that appear above this frying pan have soft pale skin, and a silver wedding band on the left hand. The woman's voice switches to that of a narrator, describing a woman who is kinder than she. A slender woman is shown in the kitchen, cooking a plate of fried rice for her daughter. The solo piano is now accompanied by light orchestral strings in a major key, along with a shift of warmer colors, highlighting the woman in a positive way. The narrator describes how, despite her nagging, this woman is kind, and self-sacrificing. The new woman is this young girl's (Ploy's) mother, a homemaker who cares for her child as depicted through her cooking and grocery shopping montage.

Her duties as the homemaker and primary caretaker are further emphasized when she disciplines her child. Ploy returns home late after hanging out with her friends, worrying and angering her mother. In a moment of her own anger and rebellion, Ploy storms into her room

and quickly packs a backpack full of clothes, running away from home. The lighting in this scene is dark and muted.

The scene cuts back to the older woman, who places a fresh plate of fried rice, sans tomatoes and onions in front of Ploy, as the music fades out. Staring back in wonder, Ploy asks how the food vendor knew how to make the fried dish exactly the way she liked it. The scene cuts to Ploy's mother, frantically running around in the market with a picture of Ploy. The somber suspended piano music returns, and the lighting that frames her searching montage is light and soft, contrasting with the harsh fluorescent lighting with the dark scenery of the food cart moments earlier. After talking to police officers, market stall owners, and other people passing by on the street, Ploy's mother asks the fried rice vendor woman if she has seen her daughter. Ploy's mother leaves the woman some money, asking the woman to cook Ploy some food if she does her, since Ploy does not have any money on her. The scene cuts back to the present time, where Ploy is talking to the fried rice vendor. The woman states that the woman who told her how to cook Ploy's fried rice, is the woman who most desperately wants Ploy to return home.

The scene once again cuts to Ploy's mother, basked in a warm, glowing light, as she is happily cooking food for Ploy in the kitchen. In all shots, Ploy's mother is poised and polished, wearing a flattering soft pink tunic with light beige khakis. Even as Ploy's mother is frantically scouring the market for her daughter, she is dressed relatively well, with her tear-streaked face disrupting her otherwise elegant physical dress (see fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Screenshots of the mother searching for her child in public spaces from “Every Mouth is Meaningful” (1:46, 2:10)

The scene swaps back and forth with Ploy crying, as she eats her own fried rice in the dark night with the harsh lighting that emphasizes her tear-streaked face. Each time the scene cuts back to Ploy’s mother, the lighting is warm, almost ethereal in nature. Her mother is shown cooking early for her in the morning, buying good groceries to cook for Ploy in anticipation of her exams. The audience is given flashbacks of Ploy’s mother happily feeding, cooking, and caring for a young Ploy throughout the years (see fig. 4). The piano melody is joined with full orchestral music, picking up in speed and switching to a major key, invoking a sense of joy and positivity.



Fig. 4. Screenshots showing the mother cooking for and feeding her child from “Every Mouth is Meaningful” (2:22, 2:26)

The climax of the scene comes after this montage; the fried rice vendor woman suggests that Ploy should call her mother. The music starts to swell and the color palette becomes increasingly brighter and warmer (there is a reflective rainbow in this scene) as the audience is

shown a scene of Ploy's mom feeding Ploy as a baby, as Ploy responds with "mom". The scene transitions back and forth between current Ploy crying and flashbacks of her happy mother. The music reaches its loudest point when baby Ploy responds with "Mom" as her mom lovingly beams at her daughter.

Nestlé – My Super Mom

Long-form commercial featuring a mother and daughter from adolescent to adult years, with an emphasis on food

A young woman is called into her boss's office as her fellow co-workers gossip about what is going to happen. There is a distinct lack of music and office chatter background noise as her stern boss informs her that he would like to increase her responsibilities. As he hands her a glass of coffee and announces that she will be promoted to a managerial level, a soft piano melody is introduced as background music. As the overjoyed young woman is walking down the hallway, she takes out her cell phone to make a call. She reflects on her tribulations while growing up and talks about her mother's support at every stage in her life.

The scene cuts to her childhood, where her mother picks up a phone call to pick up her daughter and break apart a fight. When they get home, her mother prepares a snack for her and gives her a pep talk, telling her daughter not to worry about naysayers and to have confidence in herself. At this point, there is increased instrumentation in the background music, with a guitar and lights strings added to the ensemble. The audience sees the father figure at the edge of the frame, smiling and reading a newspaper, clearly listening to the conversation but otherwise uninvolved. Through short clips, we watch the female protagonist grow up and see her mother involved at all steps, whether it be supporting her from the sidelines at badminton matches or

dropping off her thesis for her at university. She describes her mother as her personal cheerleader and as a multitasker. She talks about how her mother was always there for her, taking care of her when she's sick, providing her moral support throughout her academic career and professional life. Throughout the scenes, the audience sees how active and vocal her mother is, compared to her father who is only briefly shown and has no speaking parts (see fig. 5).



Fig. 5. Screenshots highlighting the different caretaking roles the narrator's mother from "My Super Mom" (in order from top left, clockwise - 2:30, 5:27, 4:54, and 3:17)

The climax of the clip is the young woman's wedding day. The music fades out, to highlight the emphasis on the dialogue and tension between the mother and daughter. The young woman has torn her wedding dress and asks her mother to help her mend the dress. They argue briefly, her mother chastising her for never learning simple sewing skills and other domestic chores, complaining about how she has to do everything. Her daughter lashes out at her, saying she won't ask her mom for help anymore after the day because she's moving out. Her mother quietly responds saying how nice it'll be to not be so tired all the time anymore. At this moment,

the daughter realizes the amount of energy and support her mother has expended to raise her all these years. The original piano melody first introduced at the beginning of the video re-emerges. The clip shifts back to the present-day scene of her on the phone with her mother. Before her mother picks up, she states that she will never be able to repay her mother for all the love and sacrifices given to her over the years. The only thing she can continue to do is to succeed in life, to prove that her mother's efforts have paid off.

This video provides an interesting point of view of the modern young woman in Thailand, especially when the relationship with her is examined. The video is narrated from the young woman's perspective rather than a male perspective. She recounts how her mother was the primary person who raised her, depicting a disciplinarian side but also a more tender and nurturing facet. As mentioned before, this video does depict a fatherly figure in several scenes; however, he has no spoken lines and is inactive even in his appearances. This is consistent with the expected roles of fathers in a Thai family unit. Males are understood to be the breadwinner for the family, bringing in an income. Although the video does not show either parent working outside of the house, it can be inferred that the father does not partake in any homemaking activities. His appearances are limited to public activities outside of the house, such as the badminton game or his daughter's picture for her graduation ceremony.

The mother on the other hand, is practically in every scene. She takes care of her child when she is ill, prepares all meals for her child, and is the person her daughter consults when her daughter is troubled emotionally. Her constant appearances speak to the involvement and active role she has as the homemaker. Even as her daughter matures into an adult, her mother is still providing constant support. This video highlights the homemaking and domestic duties of Thai mothers. At no point in the video is the mother separated from these duties. Outside of the

house, she is constantly moving or doing something for her daughter. Even on the young woman's wedding day, the audience does not see the groom or the father, suggesting that the person closest to the young woman is her mother.

Self-sacrifice is also brought up in the video, albeit briefly and not as directly. In the scene where the mother is arguing with her daughter on the wedding day, she responds to her daughter's angry remarks about how less tired she will be after her daughter moves out. This implies the physical sacrifice the mother has made over the years in raising her daughter and carrying out domestic duties. For the entire duration of the video, the audience only ever sees the two women, mother and daughter, being portrayed in the context of motherhood. Whenever the mother and daughter are shown interacting positively, or the mother is depicting a maternal attribute, there is background music. The only time there is a lack of music between the mother and daughter, is during the argument scene.

In a press release statement from Nestlé Thailand, the company announced that the web film is part of a new campaign called "Mom's Trusted Partner." Nestlé is appealing directly to Thai mothers as the target audience. They state: "Understanding that every mom plays multiple roles in taking care of her family's changing needs in a fast-paced world, Nestlé created a web film called "My Super Mom" to "recognize mom's dedication to her children" ("Choose Wellness, Choose Nestlé").

Despite claiming that the film highlights the changing lives of mothers, the video only depicts the mother as a homemaker. She may be doing a variety of activities, but her presence and actions are confined to the domestic sphere.

AIS - "สับปะรด" (Pineapple)

Long-form commercial focusing on a low-income single parent household with a mother and daughter; Thai phone network company

The audience is presented with a mother, who appears to be about late-30s/early-40s, who stands behind a fruit cart while her daughter, a girl who appears to be in primary school, sits on a bench right outside of a single-room apartment rental, as the sound of traffic fills in background noise. The mother in the scene is the narrator of the commercial, and her voiceover in the opening sequence states that the following events are a story about her, her daughter, and a pineapple. The scene cuts to mother and daughter sitting on the floor in their living space, cutting and preparing a variety of fruits (see fig. 6.). A flute-drone with light guitar plucks accompany the scene as the mother talks about her lack of education, and how this translates in her lack of knowledge on how to parent correctly. The soft music in conjecture with the warm lighting helps highlight the positive relationship between the mother and daughter, while allowing the mother’s narration dialogue and actions on screen to be the primary focus of the scene. As she talks about how she can only lead by example, the scene shows how her daughter watches her mother how to correctly cut a pineapple, after struggling to figure it out on her own. Her daughter successfully cuts a pineapple after looking at her mother, warmly smiling and nodding and her own success.



Fig. 6. Screenshot of the mother and daughter peeling fruit together from “Pineapple”

The scene cuts to a different setting where the young daughter stands outside her school's gate next to her mother who is behind the fruit cart. The young girl stares longingly at a group of children crowding around a bright pink, modern, ice cream cart. The camera switches back and forth between shots of the young girl staring, and the other school children eating their ice cream popsicles. The background music from the previous scene is still present but plucks of bass guitar notes are played when the young girl is staring at the other children and when the mother is seen looking at her lack of money to indicate a sense of sadness and longing.

The tensions of low-income and motherhood are explored in this commercial that features a single mother and her young daughter. The building, fruit cart, and city sounds from the opening scene suggest that the mother and daughter are not a middle-class family, but instead, reside in an urban area and are low-income. The mother, although not as refined-looking as the mothers in previous commercials discussed, still maintains an maternal image. She is in good physical condition, dressing plainly, but still looks well put together.

One symbol of motherhood that is prominent in this commercial is the usage of color as a way to emphasize motherhood. This particular commercial utilized the associations that a Thai audience has with Mother's Day, which is also Queen Sirikit Kitiyakara's birthday. The Queen's color is light blue, the same one that is shown on various objects and scenes in the commercial. The color is inserted subtly throughout the entire video as a way of visually reminding the viewers of the association (see fig. 7). In the opening shot, there is a blue door that separates the mother and daughter. The building walls itself are a mix of light blue and seafoam colors, and the color tint of the opening scene is relatively cool, strongly juxtaposing the dark warm lighting in the succeeding shot of the daughter. The vinyl lining on their living floor, table liners for the collapsible tables, and water coolers are all various shades of light blue.



Fig. 7. Screenshot of a scene highlighting the use of light blue from “Pineapple”

Wanting to teach her daughter skills so that she would succeed in life, the mother tries to encourage her daughter to come up with creative ways to sell pineapple popsicles. She tells her daughter to observe other vendors to learn how to best market their own products. An eight-note melody is heard in the background music as the young girl tentatively walks around the market, observing the marketing techniques of different vendors. As the young girl begins to find success in selling the popsicles, the same eight-note melody is repeated, but the melody begins to crescendo and there is increased instrumentation which includes a snare drum and strings. As the little girl looks at her mother from a distance, the background is toned down and subsides to a variation of just the piano melody while the scene cuts to the mother narrating how proud she is of her daughter who has learned observational skills through her own means.

Wacoal - “The Secret of Jane”

Long-form commercial featuring a young, single mother and daughter, company manufactures women’s lingerie and underwear

The protagonist in this video is Jane, a university student in her final year. The video opens with Jane running down the street in her university uniform. The scene cuts to Jane coming out of the bathroom, now in a cream-colored sleeveless blouse and a pair of black trousers. She looks into the mirror and applies a soft, rosy pink lipstick and checks her phone to

see a message from Phutt, asking her where she is. Jane enters a room, filled with mothers and kindergarten children. Phutt, a young man, is standing in his university uniform against the wall and motions for Jane to enter the room. Jane waves to her young daughter June, who excitedly exclaims, “Mom!”, and the two make silly faces at each other. A soft, high note piano melody in a major key is introduced as the mother and daughter start waving at each other. June is in line with other children for a ceremony. June nervously glances at Phutt, before walking up the stage to take a seat in a row with other mothers. The scene cuts to the older mothers in the room, holding their children and looking at Jane with disdain.

The audience learns more about Jane and June through a series of vignettes and from the narrator, Phutt. During Phutt’s narration, a piano melody with lower notes is played as background music. He describes how Jane is viewed as a social outcast, and the rumors that surround her because she is a young mother and a single parent. Despite social backlash, Jane is depicted as a dedicated mother. She even approaches a young male art student, who turns out to be Phutt, to give June art lessons. When the camera pans and shows June smiling at Phutt, the piano melody changes to the soft melody first heard when the audience meets Jane. The scene cuts to show a montage of Jane and June’s day-to-day life together with the major key, high-note piano melody heard in the background. As Phutt continues to narrate the story by describing June, a new piano in a minor key but played on higher notes is introduced. He states how Jane is not conventionally pretty by Thai standards, but that the love she has for June is what makes her beautiful in his eyes. The music fades and the scene cuts to June and Phutt talking with each other as June is playing with other children in the background. Phutt asks Jane why she won’t tell people about the truth, and how she could withstand the social stigma of being a young, single mother.

As the scene cuts back to present day and shows Jane pensively thinking at June's school event, a somber, minor-key piano melody in a middle-note range is introduced. June walks up to her mother on stage to hand her a flower garland as the piano melody tempo quickens and becomes more complex. The scene cuts again to show Jane walking home near an empty field in her university school uniform. The melancholy piano melody continues and long string notes are introduced. It is revealed that June is not Jane's biological daughter; in fact, Jane found June as a newborn infant in a suitcase in the middle of a trash dump site. The music stops entirely, giving emphasis to the crying baby and an emotional Jane. As Jane bends down to pick up baby June from the suitcase, a string melody is heard, and Jane is enveloped in warm lighting, comforting baby June while the melody crescendos and progresses into a full orchestral climax. The scene cuts again to present day, as Jane is bowing in front of June as part of the school ceremony. The music pauses for a moment when Jane tells her mother how she loves her, and the music subsides back to the single piano melody, with spare string notes.

In this commercial web film, self-sacrifice and motherly femininity is clearly depicted. Jane's willingness to endure constant public scrutiny for the sake of her daughter can be described as social and emotional sacrifice. She is willing to burden the weight of social stigmatism herself in order to shield her daughter society. Phutt's narration provides not only a Thai societal point of view, but also presents how beauty and motherhood is understood from the male perspective. As mentioned earlier, Phutt describes how Jane is relatively plain looking, but that her love for June is the quality he finds most attractive.

Throughout the video, Jane is also dressed relatively plain. We see her only in her university uniform, her pajamas, and the nondescript outfit she wears on the day of the ceremony at June's school. She wears little to no makeup, and has short black hair. Jane does not dress like

someone who is a fourth-year university student, instead choosing to wear clothing and style her appearances to that of a mother, even if she is a young one. Whether she chooses to dress conservative to appear motherly, or if being a mother influences her outfit choices is unclear. The piano melody heard when showing Jane is also sparse, mirroring the plain characterization of Jane.

The video also presents both Thai society and the male perspective depicts motherhood. The male narrator gives the audience an idea of how men view their partners and what are attractive characteristics for a woman who is a mother. However, this male narration can also highlight how Thai society as a whole views motherhood. Phutt's narration is representative of the patriarchal hierarchy system of Thai society and culture. Other videos in the series are also narrated from a male point of view, discussing how beauty and motherhood are interlinked.

This video is produced by CJ WORX Thailand, an advertising agency that describes itself as, "Thailand largest independent advertising agency". In 2014, CJ WORX Thailand entered the Spikes Asia contest, an annual festival where advertisement agencies conduct workshops and host a competition for best long-form commercials. As a part of the entry application, CJ WORX Thailand submitted the following description about the execution of the video:

Being beautiful is important for women. Thai's perception of women's beauty is skinny, fair skin & perfect face. And the effort of being beautiful among Thai women had become a serious social problem. Wacoal is the brand which stands for every step of womanhood. Wacoal wants to change the perception of women's beauty. To engage the target, viral content marketing combined with social media was the best way. So, Wacoal created "My Beautiful Woman" based on true story online films about three generations of women. The campaign also inspires people to share the picture of their loved one on social media using #mybeautifulwoman. "My Beautiful Woman" achieved 11.3 million total views, and people still share the campaign. Wacoal brings out the conversation about the real beauty of women again.

The advertising agency lists several broad descriptions of what beauty norms in Thailand are considered to be. These descriptions are limited to physical descriptions, and do not indicate a specific age range. It is interesting then that CJ WORX Thailand chose to depict beauty through the lens of motherhood. The women casted as the main leads in each of these videos are all depicted as rather plain initially, but as they embrace motherhood and acts of childrearing, their beauty is enhanced, and they are viewed as truly respectable women. By embracing certain qualities of mothers, these women turn beautiful in the eyes of the male narrator, ergo society. There are certain cinematography cues in “The Secret of Jane” video that also allude to this idea of motherhood equating beauty. As mentioned before, the lighting shifts to a warmer tone and the music transitions from a sparse minor key melody to a fleshed out major key piano arrangement whenever Jane is seen physically holding June or interacting with her (see fig. 8).



Fig. 8. Screenshots depicting the contrast in cool and warm lighting whenever Jane is presented by herself in comparison to when she is shown with June (clockwise from top left - 0:38; 1:20; 3:12; 6:11)

It is evident from the execution description that one of the primary characteristics of motherhood that CJ WORX Thailand tried to perpetuate is the notion of self-sacrifice. In all

three videos that the agency produced, the female protagonists all sacrificed a part of their lives for the wellbeing of their child(ren). In “The Secret of Jane”, Jane sacrifices her reputation and sets aside her emotions regarding these rumors in order to shield her daughter from them. In “Decision of Mother”, the female protagonist makes a physical sacrifice, her own health and chance for survival, as to not harm her child from the side effects of chemotherapy. In the final video, “The Last Resignment”, the female protagonist is a woman working in a corporate company office. She chooses to sacrifice her career and social prominence to take over an orphanage that was previously run by her own mother. Her return to a more domestic sphere to take on a role of being a caretaker for the children at the orphanage is seen as commendable, and garners the respect of her peers, which she did not necessarily have before.

Although the execution entry text states that the video portrays women from three different generations, all of the women appear to be aged 22 – 35. Life stages would be a more accurate description of the three women. It is also worth noting that all the female protagonists in these clips are still conventionally attractive by Thai standards, despite the advertising agencies claim of depicting women outside of accepted notions of beauty.

All three women are well-dressed and come from at least a middle-income class level, based on their jobs, educational background, and ability to pay for health care. Even when depicting Jane to be socially shunned for being a young mother, Jane is depicted as a college student, not a high schooler. She also has the means to live in a small apartment with modern appliances, paying for her own education and her daughter’s. Again, these visual markers that connect the image and brand of these companies to urbanized middle-class Thai citizens, not the poorest of the poor or the richest of the rich.

Thai Life Insurance - "แม่รู้ะไรบ้าง? Mother Knows Best"

The scene opens and focuses on a young boy, approximately 10-12 years old, dressed in his school uniform. He is engrossed in his smartphone while sitting at the dinner table with his mother. The mise-en-scène is that of a middle-class dining room and kitchen area. The lighting is dim, with the main source emanating from a light fixture about the kitchen table. The furnishings and appliances in the area appear greyish and aged. Bookcases filled to the brim and piles of paper adorn the walls. Several plates with dinner entrees and rice sit on the dinner table. As the commercial continues, the boy continues to focus on his cellphone at the dinner table, ignoring his mother when she tells him to eat his meal. When she tells him to eat his meal the second time, her voice raises in frustration and the camera shifts to show his mother. She is approximately late-30s to early-40s, dressed down in a gray t-shirt, with her hair tied up. Her face is free of makeup and expresses exasperation over her son's lack of response. Her son quickly retorts with an "I know," followed by his mother's response of "What do you know?". The young boy asks his mother if she knows about blockchains and quantum computers. His mother looks at him, with slight confusion. A drawn out string note is introduced and is the first time the audience hears any background sounds other than the conversation between the mother and son. During this dialogue, the camera shifts quickly back and forth between the mother and son, building a sense of tension between the pair. The lack of music during this initial dialogue, also puts greater emphasis on the conversation and tension at hand.

The son puts down his phone and pushes his plate away out in front of him. The camera pans out, showing both the mother and son sitting at the dinner table. The son sighs in annoyance, going into a condescending explanation about blockchains, maintaining an air of irritation, which is emphasized by soft string notes played in a minor interval. The camera

continues to move back and forth between the silent, upset mother and her son. As the son's agitation grows along his explanation, a brooding, layered string drone starts to build. The music comes to an abrupt stop and the camera slowly zooms in on the son, seemingly proving his point of being more knowledgeable than his mother.

The son continues to press his mother on other technological terms, asking her "How about IOT? Digital Twin, Algorithms". The mother, seemingly holding back tears, continues to answer a quiet "no" to each of her son's questions. The lack of background music at this moment puts an emphasis on each of the character's body language and tone of voice. The mother, with her dejection and frustration, and the son with his eyes rolling in annoyance. As the son grabs his cellphone and leans back into the chair, the camera shifts to focus on the mother. She is seemingly holding in tears, on the verge of saying something.

For a full ten seconds, the camera slowly pans in towards the mother, focusing on her facial expressions and body language. The initial lack of music during the first five seconds of her pan in forces the audience to acknowledge the visual and audible display of her emotions: the movement of her neck and face as she swallows silent tears and suppresses soft sniffles. A soft brass horn drone emerges, and the mother slowly starts talking all while she looks down in front of her. She talks about how she knows that she must find money to buy food, then pauses. After a deep sigh, she states that she knows her son is lactose intolerant and pauses again. Spaced out piano notes and a wind instrument drone now accompany the initial brass horn drone during another ten second pause from the mother. She then states, "I know that when you were two months old, you suffered a seizure".

The scene cuts to a photograph of a young baby boy, being held by what is presumably the mother based on the angle looking down on him. A single piano note cuts through the drone

at the same time that the scene cuts to the photograph, and a slow melody starts to build, indicating to the audience that an emotional appeal and/or shift is occurring. The scene again cuts back to the mother, as she again talks about something she knows about her son, in this instance, his fear of thunder. As she talks about how he tenses up during thunderstorms, the scene cuts to a close-up of her hand with bandaged fingers, clenching in a fist. The camera pans back out again, showing the mother. As she talks about how she knows she has to work hard, her tears start falling while her voice starts firm up. The sparse piano melody starts to fill-in and gradually increases in sound. She again states that she needs to make money, but this time talks about how money would allow her son to pursue a higher education. She pauses again to sniffle, and states, “this is all I know”.

The camera cuts back to her young son, staring back at his mother apologetically. The mother slowly looks up for the first time since she started her dialogue, and asks her son if they could eat now. He stares down at his plate, and mumbles out to his mother that there are too many bones in his fish. She reaches across the table to cut out a slice of fish for her son and puts it on his plate. In return, the son spoons out a portion from another dish and serves it to his mother and she gives him a small smile (see fig. 9).



Fig. 9. Screenshot of the mother and son eating together at the dinner table (1:53)

The scene ends with black screen with text saying “Give love, take care of life”, as a male voiceover states the name of the company (product), Thai Life Insurance. The final scene

of the commercial best exemplifies the ending text message provided, as the son is able to see his mother's love through her actions, and acknowledging that by copying and reciprocating her actions of serving him food.

Throughout the commercial, the audience is presented with imagery that eludes to notions of Thai motherhood. Firstly, we see that the mother has worked hard to be a homemaker and caretaker for her son, sacrificing emotional and physical labor. From the beginning, the premise of the commercial is that of a mother trying to get her son to eat dinner, in other words, trying to keep him nourished and healthy. Based on the background of the setting, we can also see that they are by no means wealthy, most likely closer to the low-middle class, yet the mother has done her best to ensure her son's success. Her iterations of needing to make money to provide for her son to ensure his health and success in life speaks to her role as caretaker and homemaker. Her self-sacrifice in making this happen is evident through her emotional and physical labor, as evident during the scene that cuts from her silent tears to her bandaged fingers. His school uniform insignia is in English, indicating that at the very least, the mother has put him in a pricier, private school.

The mother's overall appearance also speaks to notions of motherhood. As stated above, it is evident they are low-middle class, and she is presented in a way that is dressed down. Her appearance speaks to her effort in taking care of her son as a woman who is not wealthy. It is implied that her energy and time is spent working, as she states herself, so that she can have money to take care of her son properly. Thai Life Insurance highlights its own services by inserting in a line about medical emergencies during the commercial but draws on these tropes of Thai motherhood to depict that the company embodies what mothers should want for their children if they are indeed ideal mothers.

Analysis

Some of the commercials analyzed do not depict a traditional Thai nuclear family, a conjugal unit comprised of a father, mother, and a child or children. In commercials where the woman does not follow the traditional appearance of what is expected of a Thai mother, for example, a single mother household, attributes of self-sacrifice and caretaking are especially emphasized. It is implied that through overt depiction of maternal attributes, the woman is able to redeem herself in the eyes of society.

These commercials are immensely popular to both Thai audiences and international audiences. In comment sections below the videos, users comment in both Thai and English the videos really about how the videos did a great job at depicting what a Thai mother or woman should be. Users commented that the videos resonated with them and reminded them of their own mothers or maternal figures.

A close look at these longform commercial advertisements shows that there are three main maternal attributes that are constantly reiterated. The attributes are as follows: (1) self-sacrifice and/or self-improvement as a mother; (2) a polished, or well-mannered presentation in both appearance and demeanor; (3) the role as a primary caretaker or homemaker within a household. These attributes are present in commercial advertisements that depict mothers and motherhood.

Attribute 1: Self Sacrifice/Self-Improvement as a Mother

As discussed in the first chapter, a sense of self-improvement and self-sacrifice was integral in the depiction of a Thai woman who served as a mother to the then Thai child-nation.

The concept of self-sacrifice and self-improvement as inherent to mothering is also rooted in religion. The history of self-sacrifice as being an important part of child-rearing is still prevalent in Thai society today. Mothering, and motherhood is understood to be an act of selflessness and lifelong obligations, where a woman must constantly strive to improve her appearance and mind - the ultimate act of sacrifice. The concept of self-sacrifice can be broken into three categories: physical, emotional, and social. These subdivisions serve as an example of self-sacrifice itself, but also helps the intended viewer understand the acts of the onscreen character represent self-sacrifice. These categories of sacrifice can be marked in different ways, such as willingness to subjugate health and wellbeing for the sake of the offspring, or enduring social stigmatism. Constantly thinking about and worrying for one's child can also be a marker of sacrifice, namely an emotional sacrifice. In all of the videos that will be discussed, sacrificial maternal motifs are repeatedly used to highlight how maternal a character is.

Attribute 2: Polished Feminine Presentation - Riap Roi

Another defining attribute is a polished feminine presentation, *riap roi* in Thai. Thepboriruk describes *riap roi* in the following way: "...but when describing a person, the term means 'well-mannered' or 'polite.' A task that is *riap roi* is one that is 'ready' or 'all set.'". Taken together, to dress *riap roi* is to present oneself as someone who is tidy, well-mannered, and ready for nation building" (Thepboriruk 238). In commercials that depict an urban, middle-class family, the mother is always well-groomed. She is in good physical condition, and is never shown as being drastically overweight or underweight. Her dress attire is never revealing, and heavy makeup is not worn. In the videos, the female protagonist mother characters all had similar physical markers such as light makeup or conservative outfits. This attribute is

reinforced in ways such as physical appearance, societal expectations, and a shift in self-identity. In Thai society, the intersection of moral beauty and objectification, is what allows a woman to transcend “family connections, money or class, as well as other ascribed and achieved attributes of women” (Van Esterik 129). A woman’s appearances and actions both influence how she is perceived by society as a mother, while simultaneously indicating her own status, or desired status, in society.

Attribute 3: Primary Caretaker and Homemaker

In the context of early Thai nationalism, women were to show devotion to the nation and fulfill their societal role by showing devotion to their husband and family, fulfilling the maternal role in the family unit. In Thai society, women are seen as the nucleus of the family unit. Household chores and childrearing are the responsibilities of a mother. Despite a growing number of married women entering the workforce, the duties of ensuring a smoothly operating family still falls on the wife. Bencha Yoddumnern-Atting’s article, “Conjugal and Parental Roles: A Behavioral Look into the Past and Present,” states that “[Thai] mothers play the central role as bearers, nursers and socializings of their children" which stems from Thai women having greater control over economic decisions within the family, as men were expected to control all other matters outside of the household (34). Yoddumnern-Atting argues that women “serve[s] as the family’s treasurer and financial manager, in addition to her principal roles of mother and wife” (32).

In the commercials selected, the mothers that are depicted as the primary caretakers of the entire family. From buying groceries, to cooking and cleaning, to raising the children, and supporting the child’s endeavors, these are all assumed duties of the mother. Mothers are seen as providers of both physical and emotional support for their child. In the videos that will be

discussed, all of the female protagonists are depicted as being knowledgeable on all fronts of domestic duties. In the videos that will be discussed, all of the female protagonists are depicted as being knowledgeable on all fronts of domestic duties. Regardless of whether or not there is a husband in these videos, the male presence seems to be secondary and uninvolved in active child rearing.

Conclusion

In all of these videos discussed, either all three of the feminine maternal attributes, or a combination of at least two out the three attributes are presented in the video advertisements. If one of the attributes is not present, then the other two attributes are presented in a way that almost overcompensates for the missing attribute. For example, in “Pineapple”, the mother does not have a polished feminine presentation; however, the self-sacrifice and caretaking are strongly represented. The mother is shown staying up late at night to prepare for work, and is sole and primary caretaker for her daughter. In “The Secret of Jane”, the young single mother’s femininity is emphasized entirely on maternal attributes she depicts. In fact, the narrator, the man who is interested in Jane, claims that her beauty stems from her maternal presentation in caring for her adoptive daughter. Indeed, all the commercial advertisements incorporate all the attributes in a way that emphasizes how femininity in Thailand is so closely linked to maternity.

The nation building efforts during the late-19th and early-20th century in Thailand produced gendered roles and expectations to help strengthen nationalistic efforts. For Thai women, this meant the public display and private internalization of what the Thai national identity is. To be an ideal Thai woman meant that one had to publicly express the Thai national identity through means of dress and appearance, while adhering to principles of self-sacrifice and

self-development in the private sphere. Women were mothers to the Thai nation-state, as well as mothers and caretakers of their private domestic lives as well.

Advertisements during the Phibunsongkhram regime marketed products in a way that appealed to and encouraged these ideals of a maternal femininity. Media studies has continued to show that even in the modern era, advertisements are a medium through which cultural and societal ideals and expectations are promulgated, thus making it possible to look at commercial advertisements as medium to determine if the maternal femininity ideals of the Phibunsongkhram era are still being presented in modern Thai society.

I contend that these depictions of motherhood in these commercial advertisements emphasizes what characteristics are essential to a Thai maternal femininity, depicting what is expected of an urbanite, middle-class Thai woman. These longform commercials and web films use specific themes and visual cues that target Thai women and mothers. In order to best appeal to a Thai audience and consumer market, multinational conglomerates and even domestic Thai companies, paint a picture of what constitutes an ideal Thai maternal femininity. Self-sacrifice, caretaking and homemaking, and a polished feminine presentation are the three essential attributes that are constantly reproduced to indicate what femininity and motherhood is to an urbanized middle-class Thai audience, thus further reinforcing class standing and economic status.

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