

ต้นฉบับ หน้าขาดหาย

Europe), exposed Thais to western ideals and practice. Similarly the exposure of westerners to Thai culture also increased and as in many cases where the West compared themselves to the rest they deemed their own ways superior.

In order to legitimize their country and gain acceptance of western powers the Thai kings, and later civil governments, implemented measures to modernize the Thai state. The national martial art form, Muay Thai, was one such area that was deemed in need of improvement.

Muay Thai was seen by westerners as a blood sport; uncivilized and barbaric. During the inter-war years, Muay Thai underwent major changes. The fights became regulated by time of rounds, number of rounds, use of a ring, introduction of boxing apparel, weight classifications, and the introduction of western boxing training techniques and terminology. These transformations changed many of the Muay Thai traditions and can be said to have created a new sport out of an old art form.

#### 5.1.2 Industrialization and American Influence

The industrialization of Thailand in the late 1960's created a need for plentiful, cheap labour. That need was met by the untapped potential of the female labourer. When women entered the industrial economy they became more aware of their potential outside of the sphere of the home, where they had previously focused their life energies. The use of female labour often resulted in changing social environments; many young women moved away from home to live and work in factories. There they learned to fight for equal rights in the face of gender inequality and exploitation. The socio-economic reality of these working women promoted the adoption of ideas from the womens liberation movement from the west. Included in these feminist ideals, was the practice of breaking down and breaking into male dominated domains.

In the modern era sport has become a battleground for the war of the sexes. As a sport, Muay Thai became subject to womens' interest and participation. On the grounds of equality, women in the late 1960's and early 1970's began to enter previously unavailable sports. This western phenomenon of women transcending the boundaries of sport influenced Muay Thai as it sought to gain attention on the

world stage and in the general preoccupation of Thai authorities to appear in sink with western norms and values.

Thai women have been actively competing in Muay Thai for over forty years. They were very active in Muay Thai during the years of the Indo-Chinese conflict in Vietnam. The sport as a whole was greatly promoted internationally at that time with bids for an Olympic debut and trips abroad of demonstration teams of both male and female fighters. Female fights were even held in major Bangkok stadiums and televised nationally, according to Stockmann (1979, p.20). Although allowed to fight in such major venues Stockmann also noted that the women were only allowed into the ring after all the male fights were finished and the ring could be torn down after the women exited the ropes (1979, p.20). This practice ensured the sacredness of the ring for male fighters.

Gambling, a side bar to any Muay Thai match, was prevalent when women participated in Muay Thai matches. Thais bet on female fights, as did their foreign visitors of the time, American GIs. In a recent conversation with a former US serviceman stationed in Thailand in 1973, I was informed of the weekly entertainment on tap for American soldiers: female Muay Thai matches. The informant stated that every Tuesday night the local bar staged fights and the servicemen bet on the matches. The girls, they were mostly in their teens, could win 100 Baht or approximately 5 dollars US per fight. The presence of foreign troops in the area created the market for this source of entertainment and helped fuel the involvement of women in competitive Muay Thai at that time.

From 1973 onward, a backlash against American involvement and presence in Thailand developed. The student uprising of that same year was in part a result of the dissatisfaction of the students with the government involvement and cooperation with the Americans. The fall of the military government, resulted partly in the pullout of American troops. The U.S. pull out reduced the number of people gambling on female fights, and gambling not the prize purse is where the money is made in Muay Thai. In the democratic years between 1973 and 1976 women continued to compete in Muay Thai but with the re-establishment of a military regime in 1976 the interest in womens' Muay Thai appears to have plummeted. Reduced interest in gambling on female fights produced unprofitable matches and promotion of female Muay Thai matches all but ceased. The

correlation between military rule and the reduced interest in female Muay Thai may be due to a backlash on western ideologies on womens' liberation and a government campaign to return to the traditional patriarchal hierarchy of Thai society.

### 5.1.3 Globalization

The process of globalization, integration of world economies, has created resurgence in female Muay Thai. The marketing of Thai culture as a product in the world market place has spawned a great interest in Muay Thai among women all over the world. The process of women's liberation has spread throughout the world of sport and seen the development of professional female boxing circuits in western countries. Many of these fighters have been exposed to and enchanted by Muay Thai. In a recent World Amateur Muay Thai competition held in Bangkok women from countries such as Mexico, Finland, Britain, Australia, and The United States competed.

The promotion of Muay Thai, and the involvement of foreign women in Muay Thai, has created the need to sponsor Thai female fighters. The Thais are proud of their national sport. In their efforts to promote their sport and increase their visibility on the world stage they have encountered an interesting conundrum: can foreigners beat them at their own game and transform Muay Thai from the cultural property of Thailand to a generic sport of the world? In the field of female Muay Thai this is a more legitimate fear.

In the desire to preserve the primacy of Thailand in its' own national sport, women are being recruited to defend the nation against foreign rivals. The impact of foreign involvement in Muay Thai has once again created the market for women to enter the ring. As Muay Thai vies for greater international exposure, the profile and number of female Muay Thai combatants in the country is sure to increase.

### 5.1.4 Boxing Body

Recent sociological theory has focused on the body as the location of cultural action and a place to inscribe cultural meaning. I have applied several theories,

namely the body as a source of capital and the body as a source of pollution, to this study of women in Muay Thai. Thai culture is highly conscious of the body, the space that it occupies, the functions it may perform in respect to societal norms and as a demonstration of prevailing hierarchies. Therefore the application of body theorems is extremely appropriate and useful in exploring the current subject matter. First I will address the pollution theory of Mary Douglas and how it is applicable to the situation of women in Muay Thai.

Women have been active in Muay Thai for more than 40 years. Although not a long time in the history of the sport, a seemingly long enough period to suppose that their profile in the national consciousness should be more substantial. This researcher found that in casual conversations with Thais that most, except for those active in the world of Muay Thai, do not know of the existence of female Muay Thai fighters. That begs the question, Why are women so underrepresented in the sport?

#### 5.1.5 Pollution and Taboo

Mary Douglas developed the theory that dirt is matter out of place and that pollution occurs when dirt crosses the boundaries into clean categories (1966). Pollution and fear of pollution is more highly prevalent in societies with strict hierarchies, such as Thailand although it is demonstrably present in all cultures particularly in respect to women and their monthly menstruation.

Pollution is power of a negative sort. Black magic is frequently conjured with commodities that qualify as pollutants such as nail pairings, hair, and blood. The power of these materials results from their dislocation from the body from whence they came. The body as a closed system is believed to maintain a positive sacred energy that can be punctured by such dirt.

In Thailand women are seen as a source of pollution to the most sacred objects and beings within the society: the Sangha, sacred Buddhist relics and sites and any item or person imbued with sacredness. The source of their pollution is their menstrual blood. The restrictions placed on women within the Thai Buddhist system is rarely challenged by the general population.

Acceptance of the taboos placed on women are readily transferred to the context of Muay Thai which is traditionally associated with elements of Thai popular

religion including Buddhism, Brahmanism, and Animism. Women pollute the magic of the ring and the male fighters; a belief that makes the participation of women in Muay Thai more difficult due to the constraints put on the availability of practice space and fight venues.

The power of the taboo against women in the Muay Thai ring varies throughout the different regions of Thailand. In central and northern Thailand the taboo appears to be in full force whereas in the northeast, the region commonly known as Essan, the taboo is generally not given much license. In this region, where a majority of my fieldwork was conducted, women and men used the same ring, sparred together in training and even had mixed sex matches. The female fighters I met there, however, did not live at the camp where they sometimes trained and when questioned about this I was informed that formerly female fighters had lodged at the camp but the practice had been discontinued due to an outbreak of sexual relations between male and female fighters.

Although the taboo prevails in the majority of Muay Thai camps and venues there are signs that this is changing as a result of globalization. In a recent international tournament a ring was first used for the female fights and later used for B class male fighters. The female fights drew considerable interest from the crowd and could not be scheduled as an afterthought to the male fights as was formerly the case in the previous heyday of female fights in the early 1970's. The taboo on women in the ring was superceded by the necessity of the international sporting event.

#### 5.1.6 Physical Capital

The modern age has seen a transformation of the body into a commodity. The capital advantage that can be gained by the exploitation of the body is particularly relevant in the discussion of sport in general and Muay Thai in particular.

The body has always been a means of capital in that the work it does creates a product, which is a source of income. In the case of Muay Thai the work creates no product other than the display of the body for entertainment. The body on display must however perform, and this performance is facilitated by months of hard

physical training. This form of physical capital is commonly the domain of Thai men.

Thai women are world renown for their physical capital: beauty. This is translated into the sales pitch for Thai tourism, the international recognition of Thai beauty queens, and the prostitution trade. All of these elements of female physical capital have some relevance to the previously discussed importance of globalization on Thai culture. In the era of the American GI, the prevalence of prostitution among Thai women was blamed directly on this foreign market; a claim which continues to be made today although Thai men make up the majority of the consumer base of this product.

Muay Thai, and the availability of another avenue for creating wealth from physical capital, is an important aspect in the promotion of female Muay Thai. Stockmann quotes promoter Thiemboon Intrabut as saying that, "... making an honorable living in the ring was preferable to becoming a prostitute" (1979, p.20). The implication as to the commercial options available for many Thai women could not be more succinctly stated.

#### 5.1.7 Socialization

The socialization of Thai women is performed by many institutions including family, school and religion. I contend that the process of globalization has had a significant impact on what agents have the most influence on the socialization of Thai women. The Group Socialization theory of Judith Rich Harris fits the new realities of Thai culture and helps explain how women in Muay Thai can partake in such a stereotype defying pursuit.

GS theory postulates that while the family is the primary institution of socialization in the earliest years of life, it is the peer group that becomes the most influential once a child enters school (1995). The evidence available in any two-child family supports the theory, where the siblings despite similar environments never become personality clones. Furthermore, everyone is aware of the phenomenon of peer pressure, which is not, as commonly misrepresented, an exerted pressure from others to conform to the group norm but a willingness of the child to fit in with those in their peer group.

In Thailand the impact of globalization has further increased the influence of the peer group on young Thai women. Many young Thai women now leave their family home in pursuit of work in bigger centers such as Bangkok. In such situations they are no longer under the influence of the family and conform to the norms of the peer group in which they socialize. Mills discusses this trend throughout her thesis, "We Are Not Our Mothers" (1993).

In the interviews I conducted with female Muay Thai competitors it was clear that although the family often supported the women's choice to participate in Muay Thai, the attitude toward Muay Thai of their peers was an important factor as well. Some informants had friends in the sport before they decided to enter it and were encouraged by their friends to become active in Muay Thai. Others said that their friends thought it was cool to know a Muay Thai fighter. Furthermore, some informants stated that their own mother was against their participation in Muay Thai but this did not stop them from pursuing their interest in the sport indicating the reduced influence of parents on the decision making process of the young women. Based on this evidence I think that the GS theory is applicable to the case of women in Muay Thai and predict that the increasing dislocation of the family due to the effects of globalization on the Thai village will further increase the importance of peer group socialization.

#### 5.1.8 Recent Developments

It has been several years since I started researching this topic and over that time there have been some developments that suggest the impact of globalization is creating more access to Muay Thai for women and reducing the taboos formerly so strongly associated with women in the ring.

As I have noted before, in recent international competition, the World Amateur Muay Thai Tournament held in August of 2002 in Bangkok, women fought in the same ring which later in the day provided the venue for male matches. In the past Stockmann noted that rings if used by women were always used after all the male matches had concluded and were then disassembled (1979, p.20). On the occasion of the same tournament, the International Federation of Muay Thai



Amateur (IFMA) agreed to include female fighters in all the international Muay Thai Championships to be organized anywhere in the world including Thailand.

Prior to the tournament in 2002, female referees were recruited and trained to adjudicate female matches. This was the first time in the history of Muay Thai in Thailand that matches had been presided over by women. The implication of this suggests that women are making further inroads into the sport and there soon may be female coaches, which would create more equality within Muay Thai.

## 5.2 Topics for Further Study

As a continuation of this study it would be beneficial to research Thai women in other traditionally male dominated sports. Thai women have won Olympic medals in weight lifting, a power sport commonly associated with male athletes. There may be an interesting contrast between the participation of women in this, a western sport, and that of Muay Thai; a sport derived from the traditions and culture of Thailand.

Another interesting line of investigation may be a cross-cultural comparison of women in Muay Thai and the participation of other women in the national sport of their countries. This would be particularly poignant if the cultures examined were also Asian with a traditional martial art form.