

An Analysis of Representations from Advertisements in
Contemporary Thai Lifestyle Magazines

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วิทยานิพนธ์ฉบับนี้มีจุดมุ่งหมายที่จะศึกษาวัฒนธรรมการเสพสื่อและการบริโภคสื่อในวิถีชีวิตของสังคมร่วมสมัย ของไทย ผู้วิจัยจะใช้ระเบียบวิธีเชิงคุณภาพด้วยการใช้กรอบทฤษฎีวิวัฒนาการศึกษาในการวิเคราะห์กรณีตัวอย่างภาพที่ถูกเลือกใช้ในนิตยสารแนวไลฟ์สไตล์ เพื่อวิเคราะห์หลักคิดในการใช้ภาพและการเสพภาพดังกล่าวโดยวิทยานิพนธ์ ฉบับนี้จะวิเคราะห์ถึงแรงจูงใจเชิงอุดมการณ์ภายใต้บริบทของชนชั้นทางสังคมในการใช้และเสพภาพในนิตยสารไลฟ์สไตล์ เพื่อนำไปสู่ความเข้าใจถึงวิถีที่แปลกแยกทางวัฒนธรรมของสังคมไทยร่วมสมัย

ผู้วิจัยใช้การวิเคราะห์ด้วยทฤษฎีสัญศาสตร์เป็นพื้นฐานในการเริ่มต้นทำความเข้าใจโครงสร้างของประเด็นปัญหา ที่ผู้วิจัยต้องการวิเคราะห์ ร่วมกับการใช้ทฤษฎีทางสังคมศาสตร์อย่าง เศรษฐศาสตร์, ประวัติศาสตร์, วัฒนธรรมศึกษา และ สังคมวิทยา วิทยานิพนธ์ฉบับนี้จะผนวกทฤษฎีที่กล่าวมาในข้างต้น ในการที่จะวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพกรณีตัวอย่างสามกรณี โดยคัดเลือกมาจากนิตยสารแนวไลฟ์สไตล์ที่วางขายในปี ค.ศ. 2554 ตัวอย่างกรณีศึกษาทั้งสามมาจากนิตยสาร บ้านและสวน เพื่อนเดินทาง และ ไฮโซ ปาร์ตี้ ผู้วิจัยได้เลือกทั้งสามตัวอย่างเป็นกรณีศึกษาในฐานะตัวแทนของนิตยสารแนวไลฟ์สไตล์ที่ได้รับความนิยมในวงกว้างในตลาดนิตยสารของประเทศไทยในปัจจุบัน โดยทั้งสามตัวอย่างนั้นผู้วิจัยได้คัดเลือกภาพที่ใช้เพื่อการประชาสัมพันธ์สินค้า, บทความ และบทบรรณาธิการในฐานะข้อมูลพื้นฐานในอธิบายประเด็นหลักเพื่อใช้ในการวิเคราะห์ข้อกล่าวอ้างใหญ่ของวิทยานิพนธ์ชิ้นนี้

บทวิจัยชิ้นนี้ได้เผยให้เห็นถึงการลงทุนในการใช้สื่อแนวไลฟ์สไตล์ เพื่อสร้างสังคมที่มีชนชั้นขึ้นในสังคมไทยรวมไปถึงข้อบ่งชี้ว่าการบริโภคสื่อเหล่านี้ แสดงให้เห็นถึงภาพความแปลกแยกและเหลื่อมล้ำ ประเด็นหลักของกาศึกษาวิจัยครั้งนี้คือการแสดงให้เห็นถึงวัฒนธรรมการบริโภคในสังคมไทยนั้นถูกตอบสนองอุดมการณ์บางอย่าง เป็นการลงทุนบนความต้องการในการบริโภคบริโภค, การเลือกใช้พื้นที่ และกิจกรรมทางสังคมภายใต้บริบทของความต้องการในการเปลี่ยนแปลงไปสู่ความเป็นสมัยใหม่ในทางสังคมและวัฒนธรรม เมื่อกล่าวถึงวิถีของการบริโภคการวิจัยพบว่า นิตยสารแนวไลฟ์สไตล์ของไทยมีพื้นที่ให้กับแฟชั่นเทคโนโลยี และเครื่องสำอางที่ทำให้ผิวขาว ในเชิงพื้นที่นั้น นิตยสารเหล่านี้สร้างความสำคัญให้กับค่านิยมในการเลือกที่อยู่อาศัยบางประเภท เช่น คอนโดมิเนียม และ ทาวน์เฮาส์ และรวมไปถึงความต้องการที่รวมเอาอุดมการณ์และความเชื่อหลักในการตัดสินใจเลือกใช้พื้นที่บางประเภทในการแสดงออกถึงพลวัตรของเพศสภาพ บทสรุปของการวิจัยชิ้นนี้แสดงให้เห็นว่าวิถีแห่งการบริโภค อาหารการกิน ร้านอาหารและการท่องเที่ยวที่แสดงให้เห็นถึงสถานะทางสังคมอันความเหลื่อมล้ำและแปลกแยกมีรากฐานมาจากภาพใหญ่ของอุดมการณ์หลัก ของโลกสมัยใหม่ของไทย

สาขาวิชา..... ลายมือชื่อนิติ.....
ปีการศึกษา..... ลายมือชื่อ อ.ที่ปริกษาวิทยานิพนธ์หลัก.....

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DANAAN ANDREW-PACLEB: AN ANALYSIS OF REPRESENTATIONS FROM ADVERTISEMENTS IN CONTEMPORARY THAI LIFESTYLE MEDIA. ADVISOR: BRETT FARMER, Ph.D., 128 pp.

This thesis advances a theoretically-informed cultural critique of consumer-based representations in contemporary Thai lifestyle media, through a qualitative case study of visual imagery featured in Thai lifestyle magazines. The thesis analyzes how this imagery is informed by class-based ideologies of social distinction operative in contemporary Thai culture.

Using semiotic textual analysis as its principal critical approach, supplemented with theoretical material drawn from economics, history, cultural studies and sociology, the thesis develops a qualitative analytic exploration of three representative lifestyle magazines that were issued in the Thai market during the 2011 calendar year. The three magazines used for the case study are: *Baan Lae Suan* (House and Garden), *Puen Dern Tang* (Traveler's Companion), and *HiSo Party*. These magazines were chosen as representative examples of the expansive lifestyle magazine market in Thailand today. A range of image-based advertisements, articles and editorials were selected from the magazines as primary data to illustrate the major themes explored in the thesis and substantiate its central claims.

The research reveals that Thai lifestyle media is invested in promoting and normalizing class-based forms of conspicuous consumption and the broader formations of social distinction on which these rest. Specifically the research illustrates that contemporary Thai consumer culture idealizes certain commodities, spaces and consumer-based practices which are invested in and reflective of contextual changes in a rapidly modernizing Thai culture and society. In relation to commodities, the thesis found that Thai lifestyle magazines valorize fashion, technology and whitening cosmetics. In terms of spaces, it shows how these magazines privilege select sites of urban residential spatiality such as townhouses and condominiums and, additionally, inflect these and other domestic spaces with strong gendered dynamics. The final analysis in this thesis shows that the consumerist practices of food, dining and travel also possess socially distinct values as part of a broader ideological discourse of Thai cosmopolitan modernity.

Field of Study: Student's Signature:

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Chapter I

Introduction

1.1 Research Objectives

This thesis aims to develop a critical reading of key ideological themes and functions within contemporary Thai lifestyle media through a qualitative analysis of representative image-based textual material from three Thai lifestyle magazines available in the year 2011. The overarching objective is to define and identify how these magazines represent and promote consumerist ideologies of capitalist modernity to their Thai readership and how these in turn reflect broader sociohistorical issues in contemporary Thai society in relation to various forms of social power such as class, race and gender. The primary research objectives are as follows:

1. To identify the themes and representational strategies used in advertisements in contemporary Thai lifestyle magazines.
2. To analyze idealized representations of Thai lifestyles found in these magazines.

1.2 Background Information

As in many other countries that have been increasingly incorporated into the circuits of global capitalism, contemporary Thais are constantly bombarded by images, texts and other forms of promotional discourse from both domestic and international media that promote commodity consumerism as the new cultural dominant. These discourses not only champion consumerism as a source of potential pleasure but as a foundational framework for cultural identity and its multiple constituents. Today in Thailand, again as most everywhere else in the modern world, one's sense of selfhood—as Thai, as gendered, as classed—is irrevocably enmeshed with the globalized consumer culture of late capitalism. As Rachelle M. Scott (2009) writes:

—The role that...postmodern, western-style consumer culture [has] played in the construction of Thai lifestyles, values and identities [is] an issue not only of Thai modernity but also globalization and Westernization...The global marketing of products such as clothing, cars, and food gave rise to and now sustains a global culture of consumption, a culture that equated the formation of identity with the procurement of specific kinds of goods.” (2009: 163)

The category of lifestyle media provides an ideal forum within which to consider and analyze the increasing interpenetration of consumer culture and Thai social identities. As argued further below, lifestyle media today is a multi-billion dollar global industry and Thailand has experienced a particular explosion of lifestyle media in recent decades in relation to the rise of consumerism as the new cultural dominant in modern Thai society. Lifestyle media is overtly invested not only in promoting and naturalizing consumerism but, moreover, it is central to the formation of modern, class-based identities. The flood of class-based consumerist representations found in Thai lifestyle media help construct a distinctive Thai ideology of conspicuous consumption which is situated between the twin axes of global capitalist class-based consumerism and local Thai-based concepts of hierarchy and outward displays of social status. The net effect of these textual representations is an ideological discourse that equates the purchase, use and display of commodities with the performance of an idealized, superior modern Thai identity. To state it baldly, the dominant discourse espoused by Thai lifestyle media is that to be a successful, middle to upper class Thai today, one needs to fashion a cosmopolitan selfhood out of the various commodities and services available in the marketplace of contemporary commodity consumption.

The print and advertising forms that dominate contemporary Thai lifestyle media, and in particular the primacy of the visual in these texts, place this study within a broader framework of the cultural politics of media representation. Analyzing these representations for what they reveal about the contextual operations of culture, history and social power forms the core objective of this thesis. The following paragraphs provide a preliminary basis for this endeavor by briefly theorizing the category of lifestyle media and identifying some of its primary functions and effects as identified in the growing body of scholarship on this influential global media form.

Let us begin now with a brief overview of the project, followed by a discussion of lifestyle media as a key category within global capitalist modernity and international scholarship on consumerism, globalization and identity formation. Two central ideological themes to this thesis as they relate to image-based media should be outlined before further discussing lifestyle media and its relationship with global capitalism. First, this thesis shows that Thai lifestyle media is in the ideological business of normalizing consumerist middle class practices and consumer habits, and, by extension, of othering alternative or non-dominant representations in a way that appears normal or common sense. Second, this thesis argues that the endless images and photographs found in lifestyle media in general, and in the hundreds of glossy pages compiled for this project's database in particular, are effectively advertisements whether explicitly marked as such or not. In other words, because lifestyle media is constitutively invested in the promotion of consumerism, it is in essence one big textual field of advertising; so that everything—ads, editorials, photo shoots, stories, interviews, and so forth—are essentially geared towards the business of advertising a socially distinct lifestyle based on consumption.

—Advertising works not only on behalf of specific goods and services, it also assumes certain characteristics which are less directly connected to selling. It tries to manipulate people into buying a way of life as well as goods.” (Dyer 2009: 4)

For the purposes of this essay it is critical to understand the connection between advertising and lifestyle media. Advertising and lifestyle media both employ repetitive representations of class-based distinctions in a way that aids in the ‘construction’ of these distinctions. Thus, while the thesis does not focus exclusively on overt examples of advertisements alone, the dynamics of advertising, as well as the critical discourses used for its analysis, form a continuous framework throughout.

Let us now turn to a discussion of lifestyle media as both a central category of global capitalism and a significant focus of international scholarship. Lifestyle media is a broad category of publishing and broadcast programming focused on consumer-based lifestyle practices including, among many others, home decorating, architecture, fashion, beauty, travel, and food. Identifiable forms of lifestyle media have been around since at least the turn of the twentieth century with the rise of consumer capitalism (Barthes 1972:

78-9; Bell, Hollows: 2006). However, there has been a massive expansion of lifestyle media across global markets in the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries with many researchers identifying the trend as a significant cultural phenomenon that reveals much about the shifting dynamics of social identities and relations within the context of late modern global capitalism (Slater 1997; Bell, Hollows 2005; Featherstone 2007). These scholars argue that lifestyle media is not simply neutral but that it plays an active role in reproducing and naturalizing particular ideologies in addition to giving agency to particular cultural identity formations. The consumer of lifestyle media is encouraged not only to “desire” the various commodities and services showcased in the pages of the magazines and the programs and commercials on television, but to link these fantasies to broader notions of cultural value and selfhood. As Bell and Hollows (2006) note: “lifestyle media play a part in creating visibility and legibility” and “a means of ‘writing status’” in which certain lifestyle practices and taste formations—notably those of cultural elites—become inscribed as normalized criteria of “good” or “proper” taste which falls under the umbrella of aspirational ideals for all members of society (5).

Taking its cue from this scholarship, this thesis addresses how the burgeoning market of lifestyle magazines in Thailand works to construct and promote particular forms of “lifestyle” as an idealized cultural norm and marker of social success and legitimacy. In the early 21st century, Thai lifestyle magazines show, or “represent,” endless images of consumerist lifestyle practices which are implicitly defined as a universal benchmark of social desirability and, by extension, a model of successful Thai cultural identity. By close deconstructive reading of these magazines it will be shown that a specific “lifestyle” is constructed, normalized and promoted, all through the arms of capitalist consumerism. This essay uses as an exemplary case study of three popular lifestyle magazines available in the year 2011. These magazines are used as primary data because the analysis of images and photographs in the magazines allows for an in-depth critique or “reading” of the ideological fantasies and ideals constructed therein.

The purpose of critiquing notions of lifestyle for the project stems from the fact that the fantasies and ideals espoused in the images and advertisements are not politically

innocent or neutral but are centrally, if covertly, invested in the legitimation of particular class, regional and even ethnic-based taste formations and their promotion as normalized ideals to Thai society at large. In this way the question this thesis seeks to ask is what lifestyle choices are promoted in these magazines and how do these operate in ideological terms? The lifestyle choices which are represented in the magazines specify a particular form of cultural identity—namely, consumerist, chic, urban, and cosmopolitan or global—as a social exemplar and the optimal definition of successful Thai selfhood in the twenty-first century.

1.3 Significance of the Problem

In Thailand the rise of capitalism and the transformations of social modernity such as urbanization, industrialization, and increased wealth have led to a blossoming of consumer culture and consumer practices. Capitalist modernity has a long history in Thailand dating from at least the 19th century with the Bowring Treaty of 1855, the trade pact between Siam and Great Britain, which allowed increased trade between the countries through to the various economic development plans lead by successive military governments in the 20th century (Wyatt: 2003). However in the past few decades of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, Thailand has experienced a massive intensification in how capitalism has affected everyday life (Cornwel-Smith: 2009). This thesis expands scholarship on Thai values via capitalist change in the early 21st century through an ideological analysis of lifestyle media.

With this growth of economic prosperity and economic liberalization in the global capitalist order, sometimes described as neoliberal development or ‘neoliberalism’ by some scholars, Thailand has experienced distinct changes in its adaptation of neoliberal development and this has effected capitalist consumerism through the normalization of new middle class tastes and practices of commodity consumption (Ockey: 1999, Wyatt: 2003, Harvey 2007, Sophornvay: 2011). These changes in Thai society brought on by capitalist consumption are reflected in the rapid surge of Thai lifestyle media. Incipient forms of what might today be recognized as Thai lifestyle media can be found as early as

the 1920s with the establishment of a popular commercial mass media to service the growing urban middle classes of Siamese/Thai society (Barme 2002). However, it was really only the late 20th century that a dedicated Thai lifestyle media really started to emerge. As detailed further below, the first dedicated Thai lifestyle magazines appeared on local newsstands in the 1970s and 80s, not coincidentally during the era of intensified neoliberal development and the rise of the new middle classes (discussed in more detail in Chapter 2).

In more recent years, there has been a veritable flood of lifestyle media in the form of multiple magazines, both domestic and international, TV programming and innumerable webzines and other forms of digital media. This can be illustrated by the massive amounts of money spent on advertising in Thailand and the volume of publishers and websites dedicated to Thai lifestyle magazines. According to *The Oxford Business Group's Report* in 2012, Thailand's advertising industry was worth three billion US dollars. Thailand's advertising industry has grown from one billion US dollars in 1994 to a record high of over three billion in 2011 before the massive floods that effected large parts of Bangkok and the rest of the country (Media and Advertising 2012: 137). To put this data in perspective, in the 1980's Thailand's advertising sector was worth 60 million US dollars which grew to 1.66 billion US dollars in 1997 and by 2011 had grown to a 3.3 billion dollar industry (Jory 1999: 463; casbaa.com). This massive increase in the Thai advertising industry is accompanied by growth in the Thai publishing industries. In 2003 there were 374 publishers in Thailand; this number grew to 567 in 2010. The publishing industry's total market share was expected to be at 70 to 73 million US dollars in 2011 (Bangkokibf.com). This large publishing industry produces numerous magazines, most of which can be found on websites like *magazinedee.com* and *ookbee.com*. A majority of the magazines on the two websites are lifestyle magazines which cover the various topics described above. *Magazinedee.com* even has magazines from as far back as 1995 available on their website. Both websites have literally hundreds of magazines available on any given month in any number of lifestyle topics. Lifestyle magazines and advertising are big business in the world of Thai publishing.

This thesis is written to analyze changing consumerist practices through an analysis of class-based representations found in Thai lifestyle magazines. As the country has gone through the various processes that accompany globalized capitalist development, identities, consumer habits, and values in relation to commodities and capitalist practices have gone through similar transformations. The following chapters thus seek to uncover and conceptualize lifestyle media as a key category in critically analyzing the changes in socially distinct values. It does this by analyzing three interrelated aspects or forms of consumerism as profiled in contemporary Thai lifestyle media: commodities, spaces and practices. The first of these is the most obvious in as much as consumer culture is by definition the consumption of the manifold *commodities*, or mass manufactured goods and services, of global capitalism. Lifestyle media is replete with representations of all sorts of commodities that are then ideologically recoded as symbols or ‘_signs’ to be used in the identity-projects of consumer culture. The thesis also analyzes the neoliberal development trends of urbanization as it relates to lifestyle media which represents various *spaces* as having unique agency, particularly in relation to class and gender privilege. Lastly, the thesis looks at capitalist based *practices* as having close association with the new wealthy middle class that are invested in cosmopolitan acts such as dining out and traveling.

Not only does this thesis work to tease out notions of privilege and capitalist modernity in Thai society and culture as it relates to lifestyle media and its representations, it also sets a foundation for further study of lifestyle media in Thailand. To date very little English-language research has been done on the contemporary phenomena of Thai lifestyle media in addition to the multitudes of advertisements, television, radio, and print media that construct socially distinct lifestyles as both normal and modern.

1.4 Scope

As argued, the contemporary Thai lifestyle media industry is huge. As such, it would be impossible to cover it exhaustively or even comprehensively in the space of a

single study, especially one as relatively modest as this. For the purposes of pragmatism, therefore, this thesis limits its scope twofold: first, it focuses on lifestyle magazines alone, and not other forms of lifestyle media such as TV programming or digital media, and second, it adopts a qualitative analytic strategy of limiting attention to three selected magazine titles as paradigmatic representatives of the broader field of Thai lifestyle magazines.

Even though it is only one segment of the broader lifestyle media industry in Thailand, lifestyle magazines constitute an expansive field. Dozens of monthly issues appear on newsstands in book stores, convenience stores, and malls both in Bangkok and in provincial Thailand. Furthermore, many of these lifestyle magazines are available in the form of electronic media for tablet computers (ookbee.com). A truly massive amount of lifestyle magazines exist in the Thai lifestyle media market and, moreover, they are consistently among the top-selling publications. The publishing website, ookbee.com lists the top thirty six magazines in Thailand and, apart from *Matichon*, a political current affairs magazine, all the top selling titles are lifestyle magazines. In total, the website features 240 lifestyle magazines as part of their selection which is illustrative of the huge scope of the lifestyle media market in Thailand which has followed Thailand's rapid integration into the global capitalist order in the past few decades.

This thesis narrows its analytical focus to just three of the hundreds of Thai lifestyle magazines available in the Thai lifestyle media market. The procedure and reasons for choosing these magazines are manifold and include: duration of publication; cover appearance; magazine title; cost per issue; readership and circulation data when available; in addition to the way in which each magazine reflects middle to upper class consumerist aspirations and fantasies, specifically from the covers of the magazines. The three magazines chosen for this study are *Baan Lae Suan* (House and Garden), *Puen Dern Tang* (Traveler's Companion), and *HiSo Party*. More detailed information of each magazine is provided below. However let us briefly analyze each magazine according to the criteria of selection.

Baan Lae Suan magazine focuses almost exclusively on gardening and home development and closely mirrors its sister publication in the United States of the same name. *Baan Lae Suan* however occasionally does include travel destinations and other lifestyle tips. The magazine is one of the oldest Thai lifestyle magazines as discussed below and its cover images reflect a middle to upper middle class ideal of home development and suburban living. Images of gardens and suburban houses adorn every issue of the magazine from this studies database as described above. The houses and gardens are usually modest in relation to mansions and elite villas that are associated with upper class and wealthy lifestyles. As such the magazine appears to appeal to middle and middle upper class aspirations of home development and gardening care. The second magazine, *Puen Dern Tang* was also chosen for its equally lengthy publication but also its association with middle upper class taste aspirations of local and international travel. Like *Baan Lae Suan*, the magazine's publication dates back to the 1970s. The cover images predominately feature light skinned Sino-Thai and luk krueng or Eurasian models and celebrities. This magazine again was chosen for its reflection of upper middle to upper class taste aspirations particularly through its dramatic showcasing of models to promote international travel as a distinct taste formation of new middle class values. *HiSo Party* magazine is relatively new to the Thai lifestyle media market and as will be shown later seemingly reflects and promotes Thai upper class ultra-wealthy aspirations. The magazine was chosen primarily because of the keyword in its name, "Hiso" which will be explored deeper in chapter two. This keyword aligns itself with an aspirational urban Bangkok oriented wealthy upper class. Additionally the magazine cover is distinct in the way that it situates, like *Puen Dern Tang*, light skinned Thai celebrities, Sino-Thai, and luk krueng models against a backdrop of mostly urban settings.

This study is done with a limited qualitative analysis. The thesis analyzes image-based texts including articles, advertorials, fashion and photo shoots, in addition to advertisements from select issues of each magazine to substantiate its claims. Examples were chosen for their exemplary qualities associated with socially distinct class based values. From the examples a detailed textual ideological analysis is performed. This

random sampling from the magazines is done for the sake of time and space; a traditional quantitative analysis would not allow for an in-depth qualitative analysis of the ideological representations in the imagery. Additionally, the thesis argues that nearly every image in the magazines could be read in a similar manner, a manner which shows the advertorial quality of lifestyle media as a media which propagates socially distinct class based values by way of repetition.

In keeping with the overall strategy of limiting the scope of its analysis, this thesis not only concerns itself with just three magazines which are illustrative of the various ideological consumer based tastes within a much larger lifestyle print media industry in Thailand, but it also constrains its sample to a single calendar year: 2011. A limited research database was compiled by sourcing every issue of the three selected titles published in 2011. All three magazines are monthly publications so this resulted in a final database of thirty-six magazines. Let us focus closer now on the three magazines selected for this study. These three magazines were chosen for the following reasons as described above: title; design; history and/or duration of publication; content focus; cost per issue; and popularity and/or market share.



Fig. 1 An example of a cover of *Puen Dern Tang* Magazine, –Cover Page.” *Puen Dern Tang* Dec. 2011: Print.

The first magazine chosen for this study is *Puen Dern Tang* or *Traveller's Companion*, a pioneering title in the ever expanding field of Thai lifestyle magazines. The magazine first appeared in June 1978. It has been in continuous publication for over 33 years and forms the flagship title of PM Publishing Pty Ltd (ookbee.com). This magazine is significant in that it historically parallels the late-20th century rise of Thailand's economic modernization and growth of the new middle classes mentioned earlier and outlined in more detail in the following chapter. Apart from being one of the earliest titles in the Thai market devoted to travel and associated leisure activities, *Puen Dern Tang* is also significant for its strategic use of celebrities and models as cultural intermediaries in nearly all of its covers. The magazine comprises twelve issues per year and costs ninety-five baht an issue. *Ookbee.com* sells yearly subscriptions for 599 Thai baht. The magazine is also available for tablet computers. The website describes the primary readership as between 20-40 years of age. The magazine's circulation is about 55,000 issues a month, making it a medium to high-sales magazine. However, the magazine carries additional social weight due to the fact that it is a select title for use by Thai Airways, the national carrier and an icon of middle to upper class Thai discursivity, a fact that is widely proclaimed in promotional material for the magazine.



Fig. 2 An example of a cover of *Baan Lae Suan* magazine, "Cover Page." *Puen Dern Tang* Dec. 2011: Print.

The second magazine chosen for this study is *Baan Lae Suan* which closely resembles its American counterpart, *House and Garden* and is in fact a direct translation of that particular American classic lifestyle magazine. *Baan Lae Suan* was first published in September 1976, making it one of the earliest and most enduring lifestyle magazines in the Thai market (amarin.co.th). *Baan Lae Suan* is a monthly magazine that focuses largely on domestic interior design, architecture and property development, but it also covers other topics such as fashion, style and even travel. The magazine was chosen because it lays claim to being the bestselling home decorating magazine in Thailand with a current print run of 270,000 copies per month. The magazine costs 100 Thai baht per issue and *ookbee.com* offers a yearly subscription for 939 Thai baht. The magazine is also available for tablet computers. Founding editor, Chukiat Utakapan used the success of *Baan Lae Suan* to build up the multi-armed publishing company, Amarin Printing and Publishing Pty Ltd which currently publishes eleven other lifestyle magazines, as well as book imprints, TV programs and lifestyle fairs (amarin.co.th.). The magazine's current editor-in-chief is Jeremiah Pitakwong.

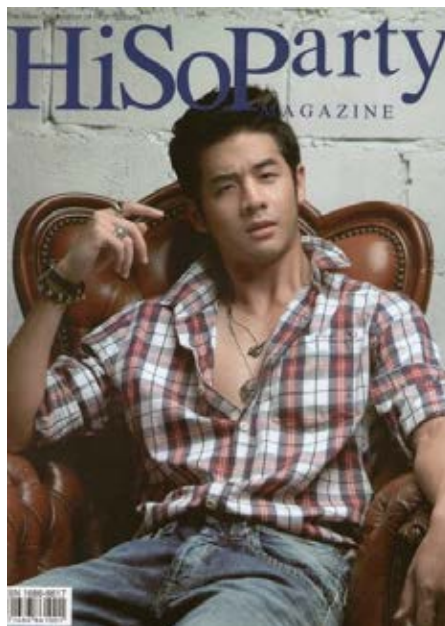


Fig. 3 An example of a cover of *HiSo Party* Magazine, "Cover Page." *HiSo Party* Nov. 2011: 1. Print.

A representative of the more recent wave of Thai lifestyle magazines, *HiSo Party* first appeared on newsstands in May 2005 (magazinedee.com). The magazine is published by Web Publishing Co. Ltd. The magazine was selected not only because of its title which makes explicit the cultural politics of class-based distinction on which lifestyle media operates but also because it focuses on a much broader range of topics than the older generation of lifestyle magazines, including fashion, décor, travel, dining and food, as well as personal grooming. *HiSo Party* magazine underscores its newness and authority on lifestyle by declaring on its cover that it represents, “The New Generation of High Society.” In particular, *HiSo Party* places a premium on the use of young celebrities and socialites as iconic exemplars of elite capitalist taste formations. Every issue of the magazine designates an entire section to covering parties, celebrations and other social events frequented by members of Thailand’s upper class elites or, as they are known in Thai, ‘_hi-so’ culture. While no reliable data is available on the readership and print circulation of the magazine, *HiSo Party* has a well maintained website which serves as a multimedia extension to the print version. The magazine is the most expensive of the three used for this study at 120 Thai baht an issue. *Ookbee.com* provides yearly subscriptions of 1,019 Thai baht a year for twelve issues. The magazine has also joined the more established lifestyle magazines by offering an e-version for tablet computers.

1.5 Methodology

This thesis assumes an interdisciplinary approach, informed largely by the intersecting traditions of Thai studies, cultural studies, and media studies. To that end it is also plural in terms of its methodological system and makes use of a range of critical and analytic approaches.

Firstly this thesis breaks uses twelve issues of each magazine available in 2012. The database breaks down the issues by looking at total page numbers for each month’s magazine, its number of images which is further broken down into number of advertisements and number of non-advertisements. A short discussion will critique this data and set up the reasons for this studies primary employment of ideological textual

analysis rather than more traditional content analysis of the advertisement and non-advertisement imagery.

Month	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Baan Lae Suan	288	308	306	348	344	344	336	332	352	352	356	296
Puen Dern Tang	186	186	186	186	186	186	186	186	186	186	186	186
Hiso Party	219	213	223	235	323	227	215	213	233	225	203	227

Graph 1. A database illustrating the total page number of each issue of the three magazines used in this study broken down by month.

Month	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Baan Lae Suan	836	853	837	920	919	905	903	930	942	949	911	840
Puen Dern Tang	810	817	820	809	821	843	808	814	832	824	840	819
Hiso Party	827	821	848	881	875	839	832	830	858	842	831	861

Graph 2. A database illustrating the total number of images and photographs in each issue of the three magazines used in this study broken down by month.

Month	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Baan Lae Suan	432	478	467	502	491	489	507	471	516	502	498	432
Puen Dern Tang	401	410	398	382	387	412	387	371	412	392	388	379
Hiso Party	314	321	302	343	351	309	311	332	309	319	330	341

Graph 3. A database illustrating the total number of image based advertisements from the total number of images found in each issue of the magazines.

Month	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Baan Lae Suan	404	375	361	418	420	430	398	432	414	440	451	408
Puen Dern Tang	409	407	422	427	434	422	421	443	420	432	452	440
Hiso Party	513	500	546	538	524	530	521	498	549	523	501	520

Graph 4. A database illustrating the total number of non-advertisement images from the total number of images found in each issue of the magazines.

These four graphs form a database for this study and illustrate a number of key issues which inform the methodology of this thesis in addition to contributing to its conclusions and findings at the end. The graphs show that the magazine *Baan Lae Suan* has considerably more advertisements than the other two magazines. The advertisements are generally geared towards the home improvement aspect of lifestyle media. Additionally the advertisements reflect the massive amount of commodities available to Thai consumers. Advertisements showing spaces like townhouses, and condos are also numerous. A large number of the advertisements also come from the end of each issue which includes a classified section with numerous small black and white pictures.

The magazine *Puen Dern Tang* is unique in that it has the same number of pages for every issue of its magazine but still has a massive amount of images, both advertisements and non-advertisements. The magazine tends to have more non-advertisement images which generally illustrate travel and dining practices in addition to several photo shoots for each issue. There are also a significant number of travel service advertisements in addition to general advertisements for electronic commodities.

The last magazine, *Hiso Party* is generally slightly smaller in size than *Baan Lae Suan* magazine however it also carries significantly less advertisements than *Baan Lae Suan*. While there still are significant numbers of advertisements in the magazine, commodities, spaces and practices illustrated in more depth in this study are essentially promoted within the actual editorial pages of the magazine. Commodities are highlighted continuously in the articles and advertorials of the magazine. Specifically, commodities like fashion, technology and cosmetic products take up a majority of the pages both in advertisement and non-advertisement form. Photo shoots also have a significant presence in the magazine. *Hiso Party* is a crucial magazine to advance the hypothesis that lifestyle media is essentially one large advertisement of class based consumerist aspirations.

As suggested however, this thesis is largely designed as a qualitative work of textual analysis. Its principal analytic strategy is to scrutinize and deconstruct a selection of textual material drawn from the magazine database compiled for the study in order to reveal what the material says about ideologies of identity and social distinction in the context of contemporary Thai cultures of consumerism. The methodological techniques of qualitative textual analysis used in this thesis come from a number of sources but, principally, from two seminal works of advertising analysis: Judith Williamson's *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* (1978, rev. ed 2002) and Gillian Dyer's *Advertising as Communication* (2009) These two works were revolutionary in opening up advertising as a crucial field of cultural and media studies. Inspired largely by Marxist theories of ideology, both works argue for advertising as crucial arena of ideological reproduction and interpellation in modern capitalist societies. Advertising and other forms of promotional media provide a dual function, they contend:

firstly, offering consumers information about commodities and goods which in turn supports capitalist consumption, and, secondly, serving to reproduce and manipulate ideological values and social attitudes. As Williamson succinctly puts it: Advertising –obviously has a function, which is to sell things to us. But it has another function, which I believe in many ways replaces that traditionally fulfilled by art or religion. It creates structures of meaning." (Williamson 2002: 12). More specifically, both Williamson and Dyer contend advertising is centrally involved in reproducing the dominant ideological structures of dominant society—its values, meanings, and beliefs--, as well as the social relations and identities that inhere within them. As Dyer writes:

–Advertising helps us to make sense of things. It validates consumer commodities and a consumer life-style by associating goods with personal and social meanings...We come to think that consuming commodities will give us our identities.” (152)

The aim of analysis therefore should be on exposing the ideological structures embedded within advertising and associated promotional discourses, revealing how they operate to naturalize particular identities and value formations. In this endeavor, both Williamson and Dyer make central use of semiotics as a privileged methodology originating in the field of linguistics. Semiotics, the so-called ‘science of signs’, has become a widespread critical tool in many areas of cultural and media studies to critique deeper sociological ideologies at work within imagery and other texts from popular culture including advertisements, television and lifestyle media (Barker 2004:181-2). Semiotics perceives all texts as forms of communication that are determined by the structures—textual, aesthetic, social—that govern them. Each text is composed of ‘signs’, basic units of communication, which are combined together in such a way as to produce specific configurations of meaning. Decode or break apart those signs and one can ostensibly identify the deeper structures at work within them. In particular, Dyer writes that semiotic textual analysis can help to uncover deeper ideological functions within advertising:

–Advertising, like language, is a system consisting of distinct signs. It is a system of differences and oppositions which are crucial in the transfer of meaning. In the commodity market there are many products such as soap, detergent, cosmetics, breakfast cereal, margarine, beer and cigarettes which are essentially the same. Ads for these products have therefore to create differences and distinctions through the use of signs arranged in structures.” (98)

Inspired by the combined work of Williamson and Dyer, this thesis also makes central use of semiotics as a useful tool for “decoding” the representational texts of Thai lifestyle media and, thus, exposing their deeper ideological structures. By employing a basic semiotic framework of textually analyzing images as encoded texts, and the objects and actions in the frame as signs, we can apprehend Thai lifestyle media as a form of structured discourse akin to advertising. As companies create differences and distinctions between products through their various configurations of signs and their emotional meanings, this thesis shows how lifestyle commodities, spaces and practices in Thai lifestyle magazines are imbued with culturally significant sign values in the same way that advertisements are. In this way culturally specific ideologies in lifestyle media imagery can be uncovered. As such, the format used by each of the textual analyses in the three case study chapters follows a basic semiotic model: taking a text from one of the magazines and deconstructing it into constituent signs, identifying its variable levels of meaning, or what semiotics calls its first order ‘denotations’ or surface meanings and second order ‘connotations’ or associated cultural meanings, and then on the basis of the signifying values thus identified proceeding to trace the text’s contextual frames of symbolic or ideological meaning

A number of other theories from various disciplines are employed in this thesis as required to set up and contextualize the semiotic analyses of each chapter in broader social and historical terms. Chapter two uses cultural studies and sociological theories of consumer culture and lifestyle media, as well as associated traditions of ideological analysis in order to better establish the key conceptual coordinates of the project and define the core ideological categories of lifestyle media such as class, social distinction and cultural capital. This chapter also makes substantial use of Thai sociology and economic history to sketch the sociohistorical background to the study and, in particular, the late 20th century rise of the new middle classes in Thailand and their associated cultures of spectacular consumerism and class distinction. Chapter three analyzes the ideological dynamics of commodity representations in Thai lifestyle magazines and employs classical Marxist theories of commodity fetishism and attendant sociological

arguments regarding ‘conspicuous consumption’. Chapter four on spaces outlines and employs cultural studies theories of space and place as categories which continually change meaning and use. Finally, Chapter five analyzes lifestyle practices in Thai lifestyle media and uses a synthesized mix of several of the cultural studies and sociological theories introduced in preceding chapters.

1.6 Benefits of Current Research

This research on the ideological functions of Thai lifestyle media is beneficial on a number of levels. First, this thesis contributes original conceptual and theoretical research to the expanding field of Thai studies. Second, it also adds to the burgeoning study of lifestyle media in international academia. To date these two fields have had little if any overt exchange, certainly not in English language scholarship, and so this study potentially helps to open up a new area of interdisciplinary dialogue by bringing the topic of lifestyle media into the broader field of Thai area studies. While the scope and ambitions of the thesis are necessarily modest, it is hoped that the research outlined here will open up further questions and possible areas of future research regarding Thai consumer culture and its relations to global modernity, representation, and the construction and maintenance of social difference. Possible areas of further research could extend the insights of this thesis to lifestyle television, commercials and even how specific lifestyles are represented and constructed in Thai popular cultural forms such as soap operas and cinema.

Chapter II

Lifestyle Media and Contemporary Thailand

Lifestyle media is a hugely popular and influential subset of the contemporary Thai media and culture industries which both represents and constructs aspirations and identities for the Thai middle and upper classes in the early 21st century. The burgeoning market of lifestyle magazines in Thailand, in particular, works to construct and promote specific forms of “lifestyle” as an idealized cultural norm and marker of social success and legitimacy. Lifestyle media in Thailand is in the business of normalizing capitalist consumer- based lifestyles as the apex of early 21st century Thai modernity.

In order to properly conceptualize the central argument of the thesis, this chapter is divided into two interrelated parts. The first part uses a literature review format to explore lifestyle media and establish central claims made by critics about its key forms and functions. The opening section of this part explores the central category of ‘lifestyle’, briefly outlining its historical constitution and diverse social and ideological dimensions. A second subsection is employed to define lifestyle media and explore lifestyle media’s extraordinary rise to global prominence in the past half a century. A final third subsection analyzes lifestyle media’s functions, illustrating how class, social distinction and cultural capital are key concerns of this particular media.

The second part of the chapter narrows its focus to Thailand and, within this context, addresses three interrelated issues. The first section gives a brief historical overview of capitalist modernization in East and Southeast Asia with an emphasis on Thailand. This historical overview provides the context for the second issue to be addressed: the rise of the new Thai middle classes in the late twentieth century. The third and final subsection proceeds to synthesize the various concerns delineated through a deeper analysis of Thai lifestyle media’s relationship with the burgeoning Thai middle

classes. Here the concluding focus will be on how contemporary Thai lifestyle media operates in the service of the new Thai class hegemonies by promoting a very particular, narrow definition of idealized lifestyle. Here the principal emphasis will be on how Thai lifestyle media continuously produces and promotes ideological representations of capitalist consumption, wealth and Thai modernity which gives context to the analysis of the three case study chapters to follow on commodities, spaces and practices.

2.1 Lifestyle

The Oxford English Dictionary defines lifestyle as simply, “the way in which a person lives,” but then adds, as a further modifier, that lifestyle can also be defined as: “denoting advertising or products designed to appeal to a consumer by association with a desirable lifestyle.” (“Lifestyle”) In other words, it stresses that, today in contemporary societies of the industrialized world; the way in which a person lives has been thoroughly redefined via commodity consumerism as a normalizing ideal. The following scholarship expands on these basic definitions of lifestyle by exploring and critiquing lifestyle as a capitalist phenomenon in which identities are ordered and given meaning through capitalist consumption and consumer based practices which apply to wide range of social groups.(Jagose 2003: 109)

In the book, *Interpreting Everyday Culture*, Annamarie Jagose (2003) writes a chapter entitled, “The Invention of Lifestyle”, which substantiates the claim above and provides additional information on the theory of lifestyle. Lifestyle is in essence bound to consumer culture and capitalist consumption. Drawing from a cultural studies approach to lifestyle, she writes that lifestyle:

“is legible through the frames of meaning enabled by consumer goods and the stylized self-presentation achieved by the individual’s material and affective investment in commodity culture” (110)

Lifestyle in this instance then is defined as a presentation of individual style on the basis of capitalist consumption. For Jagose, lifestyle is bound to the marketplace of capitalist economics and commodity culture, and as a category within capitalist consumer culture with its theoretical and historical roots in the discourses of modernity. Additionally, modern conceptions of lifestyle stand in the place of traditional social hierarchies and social orders —that determine the individual’s place and value in the wider culture.”(111) Unlike previous eras, lifestyle under the guise of modernity is a category in which both actions and goods define one’s identity, which Jagose argues only becomes possible in the modern capitalist era with the loosening of traditional social structures and status. As societies have transformed through the radical upheavals of modernization, notions of social identity and the individual’s position in the social collective have become much more complicated and pluralized. The coterminous rise of mass consumerism and the flood of mass manufactured commodities that have become such a distinctive feature of the modern capitalist world provided a fertile arena within which modern identities could be redefined and repurposed. No longer defined principally in terms of what one does or what one produces, selfhood under capitalist modernity has become more a question of what one consumes. As Don Slater writes:

—Many of our questions about what form we take as modern subjects, about how to understand the very relation between the everyday world and the public space, about our moral and social value, about our privacy and power of disposal over our lives, about ‘who we are’ — many of these questions are taken up in relation to consumption and our social status as a rather new thing called a ‘consumer’: we see ourselves as people who ‘choose’, who are inescapably ‘free’ and self-managing, who make decisions about who we are or want to be and use purchased goods, services and experiences to carry out these identity projects.” (Slater, 1997: 4)

Lifestyle is the category that at once names and naturalizes this potent new social intersection between the formation of modern identities and the consumption of consumer goods and services. On the formation of identity, Jagose (2003) writes that consumer goods take on social meanings in our cultures of everyday life and the consumption of various goods and commodities assists in the construction and formation of capitalist consumer lifestyle. (113-4) Commodity consumption gives meaning to lifestyle and is a large part of the formation of modern identities much in the same way that sex, race, and creed help form identity. As Jagose explains: —The individual’s intense

investment in commodity culture is explicable to the degree that his or her identity, the ongoing production of his or her sense of self, is negotiated in large part through consumption.” (113)

Having defined and theorized the category of lifestyle, let us move now to a brief overview of how the topic of lifestyle has begun to be understood and critiqued differently in recent decades. A number of leading sociologists and cultural studies scholars such as David Bell, Joanne Hollows, and Mike Featherstone argue that the socioeconomic changes of post-industrial capitalism in the latter half of the 20th century has witnessed the proliferation of niche consumer cultures which create multitudes of new and distinct lifestyles. Featherstone writes of the changes to capitalist consumer consumption from the 1950s onwards:

—In contrast to the designation of the 1950s as an era of grey conformism, a time of mass consumption, changes in production techniques, market segmentation and consumer demand for a wider range of products, are often regarded as making possible greater choice...not only for youth of the post-1960s generation, but increasingly for the middle-aged and the elderly.” (Featherstone 2007: 81)

Featherstone contrasts the market shifts from the 1950s ‘grey conformism’ to the burgeoning and massive rise of niche lifestyles brought about by the cultural changes in western countries in the 1960s and the 1970s. Niche markets and new lifestyles allowed for greater consumption of different kinds of goods and services which helped define and form unique identities for people in constructing differing lifestyles based on consumption.

This idea is further outlined by Bell and Hollows as they discuss the changing economic patterns of the late 20th century. According to their book, *Ordinary Lifestyles* (2005), changes in consumption and production patterns in capitalist economies required new ways of thinking about lifestyle as a theoretical category in the social sciences. (2-6) According to Bell and Hollows, lifestyle revolves around the idea of ‘choice’ which, while seemingly democratic in theory, is limited to the market and capitalist production. (5) This new age of post-modern capitalism discussed by Bell and Hollows, influences identity. Similar to Jagose, they write that identity

“It has become... a project of the self: something we are knowingly engaged in... Lifestyle can be seen as a particularly important aid in this work, especially given its flexible accommodation of not just consumer products but also products and practices of self-knowledge and self-improvement.” (2005: 11)

This subsection has defined lifestyle as a product of 20th century consumer culture brought about by shifts in practices of consumption and production in the second half of the 20th century which gave primary agency to freedom of choice within the confines of commodity consumption. Commodities and consumer based practices are essential signs in realizing our identities and lifestyles in the contemporary consumerist world.

2.2 Lifestyle Media

As the notion of lifestyle began to carry more weight in the social sciences and started to be talked about in relation to increasing globalized consumer cultures defined by niche markets, lifestyle media has also become an area of increased scrutiny. This subsection draws primarily from Bell and Hollows, *Ordinary Lifestyles* (2005) to provide a definition of lifestyle media and to provide a brief outline of its rise to global prominence particularly in the decades leading up to the new millennium.

Lifestyle media encompasses a wide range of media including radio, television, video, DVDs, magazines, books, newspaper columns, and even web-based media, as well as advertising and promotional materials. Bell and Hollows (2005) define lifestyle media as any media that aids in, “Producing, circulating, and promoting ideas about taste and lifestyle.” (9) This runs the gamut from television shows like *Martha Stewart Living*, cookbooks, LGBTQ websites, ‘mens’ magazines like *Playboy*, to counter culture magazines like *High Times*. Lifestyle media encompasses a massive range of media and as such encompasses a large range of topics.

Despite its extraordinary diversity, Bell and Hollows argue that there are central overarching themes that seem to be common features of lifestyle media:

“Cookery and other food and drink topics; fashion, style and grooming; home improvement, including DIY, gardening, interiors and property development; self-improvement (bodily,

financially, spiritually and so on); travel; shopping and consumer issues – including cultural consumption.” (9)

While this is not an exhaustive list of the even wider range of features outlined in the massive amount of topics in lifestyle media, particularly in ‘counter culture’ magazines and shows, this list provides a stable foundation for the analytic purposes of this thesis and later discussions of Thai lifestyle media and its representations of normalized middle class based taste.

As far back as the 1950s, French critic Roland Barthes was discussing lifestyle media and its role in the cultures of the new middle classes in his classic essay, ‘Ornamental Cookery’. (Barthes 1972: 78-80) Following the shifts in economic liberalization and consumer habits after the 1950s alluded to earlier, lifestyle media has only grown in significance and popularity. Indeed, Bell and Hollows argue that there has been a steady increase of lifestyle media starting in the 1960s and exploding in the 1980s. (Bell and Hollows 2006: 1, Holliday 2005: 65, Taylor 2005: 114) In fact the two edited collections from Bell and Hollows (2005 and 2006) gather a multitude of essays from various scholars in a number of fields that outline the dramatic rise of lifestyle media from the 1980s and onwards. This explosion in middle class lifestyle media is highlighted in essays by Lisa Taylor about lifestyle media in changing gardening trends and Ruth Holliday’s essay on home improvement British TV shows whose history dates to the early 1960’s, which by the early 21st century included sixteen and a half hours of airtime on a given week. (65) In fact nearly all of the essays in Bell and Hollows show this increasing trend of lifestyle media which is a crucial backdrop to the focus of this thesis on the rise of lifestyle media in Thailand.

2.2.1 Functions of Lifestyle Media

Let us finish this section now by discussing the functions of lifestyle media in three interrelated ways. The three primary theoretical issues at stake in the study of lifestyle media and particularly for this thesis are as follows: the traditional Marxist notion of class; social distinction as discussed in by theorist Pierre Bourdieu; and the sociological concept of cultural capital also theorized by Bourdieu. All three of these

theories and concepts work together to render lifestyle media as a normative hegemonic representation of everyday middle class culture, which in turn masks notions of difference and acts as a process of othering non-normative class representations and tastes.

2.2.1.1 Class

The first primary function of lifestyle media we should address is the Marxist theory of class. This definition is taken primarily from Chris Barker's (2004) *The Sage Dictionary of Cultural Studies* which provides a straightforward and concise definition of class as it relates to culture and society. Additionally the definition in the book also provides a framework for conceptualizing class as it relates to the second two functions of lifestyle media. Quite simply class is defined as, "A classification of persons into groups based on shared socio-economic conditions." (Barker 2004: 26) However classes don't merely stand alone, they exist within a hierarchy of other classes. Essentially power is inscribed into class in that they are relational to one another; the upper class holds more social, cultural or economic power over the lower classes and so on. Originally Karl Marx adopted the term to describe the stratified system of class in industrial society where the ruling class or the *bourgeoisie* held and controlled the means of production and the underclass or the *proletariat* lacked the ownership of property and were forced to sell their labor thus creating a system of domination and exploitation. Barker (2004) indicates that contemporary class structures today are much more complicated and that the middle classes of today's world have changed the balance of traditional marxist perspectives of class. Barker provides a helpful quote for this study on the intricacies of the middle class and lifestyle which sets up a discussion of further ideological functions of lifestyle media in the following paragraphs. He writes that class:

Also includes lifestyle differences based on income, occupation, status, education...class relations today include the much-expanded middle classes who, while they are not owners of the means of production, are nevertheless distanced from the manual working class by income and lifestyle." (27)

2.2.1.2 Social Distinction and Cultural Capital

The theories of social distinction and cultural capital come originally from the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu came up with these more contemporary theories in order to complicate classical Marxist notions of class distinction and economic inequality. Bourdieu argues that social relations have become much more complex under advanced global capitalism and that wealth or the simple possession of economic capital is no longer the sole or even principal axis of class differentiation. Instead, there are a raft of competing and intersecting forms of ‘capital’—possession of education, of prestige, of knowledge, of influence, of institutional affiliation, etcetera—that serve to delineate and enforce social differences and class hierarchies in modern capitalist societies.

Bell and Hollows describe how for Bourdieu lifestyle was a key factor in the changing notions of class and consumption in the 20th century, “While our ability to play with lifestyle is clearly related to the amount of economic capital we have at our disposal, for Bourdieu the distinct ways in which classes consume cannot simply be explained by economic inequalities.” (Bell and Hollows 2005: 6) As such, this section uses the authors who discuss lifestyle media to provide an outline of distinction and cultural capital in order to give a brief synopsis of these often intensely abstract theoretical concepts. Let us begin on the theoretical category of ‘taste’ as key to the central issue of social distinction and cultural capital. In his useful summary of Bourdieuan theory, Don Slater defines taste as “cultural patterns of choice and preference.” (Slater 1997: 159) Slater argues that this taste is not a matter of individual preferences but is culturally and socially constructed and part of a larger system of social stratification within any given culture. Our specific tastes are socially constructed and possess a certain amount of ‘cultural capital’ whose existence, like class, is based on hierarchy and difference. This means that typical notions of taste, whether in terms of food, fashion, music or whatever, are socially structured and legislated.

Slater goes on to write that these different tastes create what Bourdieu calls ‘distinction’ which he defines as a “term that captures both the sense of classificatory

schemes by which we distinguish between things and also the use of these things and their meanings to achieve distinction within hierarchical social relations.” (159). In these schema, tastes become a form of what Bourdieu calls ‘cultural capital’, that is to say possession of cultural knowledge and/or other symbolic goods that serve to confer status and power. Certain tastes become associated with different social factions and they become evaluated accordingly. Thus in the field of culinary culture, for example, foodstuffs that are expensive or rarefied or somehow associated with the upper classes—to use Western examples: say, French champagne, caviar, pheasant—possess greater ‘cultural capital’ than those which are more common and associated with lower social classes such as soda pop, burgers and potato chips. Exhibiting knowledge and mastery of the former confers greater prestige and status on an individual than would the latter. Distinction is thus a product of the ‘cultural capital’ associated with specific tastes. One of the ways that social distinction is associated with class-based cultural capital is that it is passed down through family and through learning in educational institutions as taste enters a socially distinct hierarchy. (Bell and Hollows 2005: 6)

Lifestyle media, like family and education, is also a socializing medium or function which “teaches” normalized representations of class and class-based tastes. These tastes are ordered into a network of cultural capital, where some tastes are associated with high and low cultures and are either idealized or marginalized accordingly. The cultural capital of specific tastes found throughout lifestyle media creates networks of distinction within consumerist consumption. Essentially our tastes reveal our social positions and lifestyle media’s functions are to render seemingly normal tastes as having socially distinct cultural capital and authenticity. (Slater 1995: 159-60, Barker 2004: 37, Bell and Hollows 2005: 6-9) In the case of lifestyle media, its principal goal is essentially the celebration and normalization of ‘bourgeois’ or upper middle class taste formations—whether in terms of architecture, décor, gardening, fashion, food, beauty, leisure, or any of the other multiple facets of modern consumerist lifestyles—as an aspirational ideal for all members of the social formation, regardless of their actual or imagined class status. Indeed, most commentators stress the fact that the majority

readership of lifestyle media are not in fact members of the social elites—there simply wouldn't be enough of them to sustain market profitability—but are drawn predominately from lower socioeconomic factions of the petit bourgeoisie or the lower middle and upper working classes. As Bell and Hollows (2005) write,

—The new petit bourgeoisie are not only the natural audience for an expanding lifestyle media but also...lifestyle media and manuals legitimate the tastes of the new middle classes,...The rise of lifestyle media is not about the rise of lifestyle as a move beyond class, but rather an emphasis on lifestyle as an attempt to gain authority by new middle-classes whose cultural capital affords them considerable 'riches' in this area of life." (8)

2.3 Capitalist Modernization in Asia and Thailand

Let us turn attention now to Asia and Thailand and their specific history of capitalist modernization in the past few decades. This brief outlining of capitalist modernization will allow us to broadly frame the new middle classes and their normative representations in Thai lifestyle media more accurately. Over the next couple of paragraphs we will see how Southeast and East Asia's recent history has been defined by massive increases in economic capitalist modernization and consumer consumption. Thailand's modern history is also defined by this trend as it charts considerable economic development despite being at the heart of the Asian economic crisis that defined the late 90s.

We will start by looking briefly at the general Asia Pacific region and then move inwards to look at Thailand's modernization from this East Asian and Southeast Asian perspective. Quite broadly East Asian and Southeast Asian countries enjoyed significant leaps in economic capitalist modernization in the thirty years leading up to the crisis of 1997. This shift in economic modernization has been described by some as the culture of the new rich in developing Asian countries (Pinches 1999: 1-45; Furman, Stiglitz 1998: 9-11). Furman and Stiglitz (1998) note that Asian countries grew quickly from 1966 to 1996, for example, Indonesia's per capita income grew at an annual average rate of 4.7 percent, while in Korea it grew at 7.4 percent, 4.4 percent in Malaysia and 5.7 percent in

Thailand. (10) Urbanization also followed this trend of increased living standards and wage increases such that, according to a population report from UNESCAP in 2011, 51 percent of people lived in urban areas in East and Northeast Asia and 42 percent of people lived in urban centers in Southeast Asian countries. This was followed by an increase in consumer consumption and the rise of new urban middle classes as described in Pinches (1999) essay on the new rich in an increasingly capitalist Asia. As he writes, “Consumer fashions and aesthetic standards have become increasingly fluid in the Asian region and, to varying degrees, new, looser, status structures are being negotiated by and around the new rich.” (Pinches 1999: 38) These new rich and upwardly mobile middle classes are the subject of this thesis and will be looked at closer detail in the second section below. Let us turn briefly first to rapid capitalist modernization, economic liberalization and globalization that define contemporary Bangkok and its consumer classes.

Despite being the epicenter of the 1997 economic crisis, Thailand has experienced unprecedented economic growth throughout the late 20th and early 21st centuries that has considerably expanded its urban population, industrialized its workforce, increased its wages, expanded its middle classes, as well as integrated the nation more fully into the circuits of global capitalism. Below are some key features and examples of this massive transformation in economic liberalization beginning in the 1960s and intensifying rapidly in ensuing decades.

Thailand has encountered a massive shift in population and urbanization in the past half a century. According to David K. Wyatt (2003), following the economic liberalization projects of the 1960s initiated under the military regime of Sarit Thanarat, population and urbanization began to increase. (Wyatt 2003: 281-83) He states that Thailand was a sparsely populated nation state in the 1940s. In 1947 the population stood at about 18 million. This increased to 45 million in 1980. (281) According to UNESCAP this number stood at around 70 million in 2011. Wyatt also indicates the dramatic rise of city centers and urbanization. While not as high as its neighbors of Malaysia and Indonesia, the economic development policies of the Sarit regime helped to increase

urbanization. Urbanization in the 1960s and 1970s increased so much that the according to Wyatt, the city of Bangkok tripled in size. (282) In 1960 Bangkok and its surrounding areas grew from 3.1 million people to 10.1 million people by the year 2000 and was 14.5 million people by 2010.(Choiejit, Teungfung 2005: 4; citypopulation.de) The urban population of Thailand in 2011 was 34 percent and expected to rise to 46 percent by 2030. (UNESCAP)

Additionally, wages, and economic indicators have risen accompanying shifts in exports and industries within the country despite the temporary setbacks of the 1997 economic crisis. Even though Thailand still has a large agricultural sector, the significant change in labor and industry in Thailand following liberalization to a primarily export driven economy can be seen in the changes in export products which signals a shift in the Thai economy. According to Wyatt the leading exports in 1978 were primarily agricultural products: tapioca, rice rubber, tin and textiles. This changed considerably and by 2001 Thailand was an exporter of labor intensive technological factory-made products including: computer parts, garments, motor cars, canned fish, and plastic polymers. The country formerly known for its rice production came as the seventh leading export in comparison to number two in 1978. (Wyatt: 303) The GNP and the GDP per capita has also risen sharply as the country has gone through capitalist modernization. According to the World Bank, Thailand's GNP in 1980 stood at just under 50 Billion US dollars. This figure rose sharply to over 581 Billion US dollars in 30 years. (worldbank.org) The GDP per capita in 1980 was 1,060 US dollars in 1980 and rose to 8,703 US dollars by 2011. (tradingeconomics.com) Despite these gains in economic advancement, there has been a growing concern about the increased income gap and class differences brought about by this industrialization process which has fueled intense debate and growing polarization on Thailand's political landscape. (Sophorntavy 2011: 675-76; McCargo, Thabchumpon 2011) Generally these economic indicators and discussions help to frame the rise of the new middle classes and their increased disposable incomes in the next section.

2.4 The Rise of the New Middle Classes

Various authors and critics discuss the middle classes in Thailand. For the purposes of this thesis, a select group of authors that problematize and provide nuanced critiques of the various middle classes will be quoted and sampled to provide a general overview of middle class Thailand. Quite simply, despite the economic changes discussed above it is difficult to pin point exactly what the new middle classes entail in traditional western Marxist terms. Wyatt (2003) writes,

–It is difficult to define this new middle class. A standard definition by income would be misleading, even if it could be constructed. We might rather suggest its shape and size by examining a few other critical social indicators. It is predominantly urban and nonagricultural...It has arisen in Bangkok and a handful of provincial towns and cities almost entirely since 1960. For this group, modern education at the secondary level and above is the sine qua non for status and the middle-class lifestyle – which includes access to the mass media, especially television, sufficient income to insure quality education for one’s children, and the achievement of some sense of upward social and economic mobility.” (283)

Here Wyatt posits the new middle classes as mostly urban and defines them not through economic indicators but through what Bourdieu would call their ‘cultural capital’: education, access to mass media and social and economic mobility. This definition is helpful to understanding lifestyle media’s representations of urban middle classes later. The fact however is that Wyatt points out that it is difficult to define a single middle class which he and others write have been lumped together while defining the changing socio-economic and political developments of the past two to four decades in Thailand.

James Ockey (1999) helps conceptualize the middle classes as including the new rich and their influence in the political arena in the 1990s. Ockey importantly differentiates between traditional high status employment which doesn’t allow significant consumer consumption and lavish lifestyle and low status employment which does offer dispensable income to pursue particular lifestyles. He writes that: –This results in an unusually high level of fragmentation among various structurally defined middle classes.”(231) Because of this reason Ockey and others suggest that a unique conceptualization of class generally, and middle classes specifically are needed to

understand the Thai class system in the contemporary era. For Ockey, like Wyatt, the key aspects of these new middle classes include people involved in the growing sales and service sectors of the changing Thai economy and those holding higher education degrees from the expanding university system. (235) Increasingly these new middle classes were lumped together as a definitive middle class despite differences in status as it relates to occupation, education, rural and urban immigration, ethnic divisions relating to sino-Thai urban populations and the ancient Thai political system of *sakdina*. (Sophorntavy 2011: 674-80, 682-83, 689)

Importantly Ockey outlines technology, new media and its relationship with these burgeoning new middle classes. Television, advertising and its propagation of massive amounts of commodities became associated with the new middle class consumer lifestyles and identities. (241-243) This association with conspicuous consumption and the new middle classes allowed for a dramatic proliferation of lifestyle media and idealized narrowly defined representations of this new rich, or at least richer, middle class.

2.5 Ideology, the New Rich and Lifestyle Media

In her recent anthropological work on the cultures and worldviews of the various Bangkok middle classes, Sophorntavy Vorng (2011) argues that, despite their striking diversity, the Thai middle classes are characterized by centrally defining ideologies of hierarchy and differentiation. She claims that, while status differentiation is a central dynamic of class-based social systems worldwide, they take on a particularly intense form in contemporary Thai society due to an intersection of historical, social and ideological factors. These ideologies of class in Thailand help to frame and conceptualize the new rich as their cosmopolitan taste formations and identity projects are represented and promoted in Thai lifestyle media.

In particular, Sophornthavy (2011) argues that, unlike other modernizing countries in the region, Thailand never experienced a decisive rupture or paradigm shift in its transition from a pre-modern feudalist social arrangement (the corvee or *sakdina* political/labor system under pre-Rattanakosin absolute monarchy) to a modern capitalist and partially democratic one. (682-3) Because of this, the older hierarchical models arguably persist as a strong current in Thai culture and social relations. Here, Supornthavy points to central Thai cultural concepts such as *phu yai* and *phu noi* (Thai notions of seniority) and *kalatesa* (literally translated as time and place but more generally a social code of behavior according to context and one's place in the social order) as evidence of the way in which –even in contemporary times, relationships...remain partially informed by the ideology of old Siamese society.” (2011: 683-4)

What has changed however are the criteria by which status differentiation is defined and expressed in contemporary Thai culture, particularly around capitalism and consumerism. As Suphorntavy writes:

–Although status differentiation is still a fundamental aspect of urban Thai social life, the indices by which individuals appraise their status relative to others have changed and complexified in many ways to include not only distinction between aristocrats, nobility, or royalty (*phuu dii/jao*) and those of ‘common’ blood, or between an older person or a younger person, but a large range of concepts such as wealth (*thaana*), social status (*sathaana thaana sangkhom*), levels (*radap*), hierarchy (*radap chan*), hi-so and lo-so...poor people (*khon jon*) and rich people (*khon ruay*), upcountry people (*baan nork*) and city people (*khon/chao krung or meuang*), Thai people (*khon Thai*) and those of other cultures and ethnicities and so on.” (2011: 686)

Coupled with this new culture of differentiating status hierarchies in complex ways, a further emphasis in Thai society is placed on the overt visual display of social differentiation. In the field of Thai studies, several scholars have highlighted the distinctive importance and agency that visible status symbols have in Thai culture. Peter Jackson argues that Thai social relations are largely governed via “a regime of images” (2004), while Penny van Esterik claims that “Thailand encourages an essentialism of appearances and surfaces.” (2000: 4) Sophornthavy writes that:

–Within Bangkokian status relations people tend to relate to one another based on external attributes- from personal presentation, to mode of speech, to manners and behavioral conduct.

However, these days, being well presented is no longer about merely looking “appropriate”-it is now also about looking “appropriately wealthy.” In other words, this has translated into the display of power and social position through external markers of material wealth and status...” (2010: 79)

This outward display of appearance and wealth finds intensified expression, and can be neatly illustrated, through the contemporary Thai social category of *hi-so*. A local neologism coined from the English term *high society*, *hi-so* has become a ubiquitous and highly potent marker of social differentiation and prestige in contemporary Thai society (Cornwel-Smith, 2009). Like many such potent markers, the term *hi-so* gets used in complex and sometimes even contradictory ways but essentially it serves to denominate the new social elites of Thailand made up partly by the residual aristocratic *old money* of feudalist Thailand but, even more prominently, the upper middle class *nouveau riche* of global capitalist Thailand and their identities and cultures of spectacular commodity consumption. *Hi-so* conjures up a host of commodity-based identities and practices associated with looking wealthy and indulging in conspicuous consumption as a sign value of cosmopolitan Thai modernity. As Cornwel-Smith notes: “To be hi-so requires more than a good family, wealth, connections, qualifications and official honours. In this multi-media age the true hi-so must present themselves prominently”. (2009: 77)

Furthermore the ideological construction of the term *hi-so* is central to this thesis in that it serves a category of social distinction based on consumerist practices arguably reinforced by traditional forms of distinction like *sakdina*. On the cult of *hi-so* Sophorntavy indicates that generally the contemporary new Thai middle classes espouse and idealize an ideological discourse of “cosmopolitan modernism” as markers of their social differentiation and superiority through the multiple meanings and definitions of the words *hi-so* and its frequent corollary *inter*, another Thai neologism from the English word *international* that is used to refer to cultural capital that is internationalized and cosmopolitan. (2011: 687) The notion of *hi-so* according to Sophorntavy is a blend of the different categories attached to the new middle classes:

–People perceived to be hi-so might also come from wealthy families without royal blood or aristocratic backgrounds who have had a prestigious education and who engage in a particular lifestyle of consumption, especially one which involves foreign school and cosmopolitan taste and style, as exemplified by Bangkok’s *inter* crowd.” (689)

For Sophornvaty the Thai slang word, *hi-so* is a class loaded term which is used to refer to people, places, practices and commodities that have a distinct connection to new middle class wealth and its cosmopolitan taste formations. As new middle class tastes are ordered into a hierarchy of social distinction, *hi-so* is often associated with those categories that define the new middle classes. In particular, the cult of hi-so marks out a series of idealized features or characteristics that have become, if not universal prescriptions, certainly ideal markers of distinction for the new Thai middle classes, including:

- **urbanism:** The natural milieu of the idealized new middle classes is essentially Bangkok, imagined as a global metropolis of internationalized business, commerce and consumerism.
- **education:** Formal schooling and the possession of associated cultural capital such as knowledge of foreign languages, especially English as the global lingua franca, are prized markers of social distinction and, as attested by the Thai bourgeois mania for international schools and degrees from overseas universities, the more internationalized the better.
- **cosmopolitanism:** Eclectic or hybridized taste formations are prized as evidenced, Sophornvaty writes, “in the craze over designer goods and the striking popularity of foreign foods and fashions” (2011: 688)
- **ethnicity:** The new middle classes are predominately, though not exclusively, Sino-Thai and class differentiations have become overlaid with marked ethnic dimensions. This is evident not only in more overt forms such as what Sophornvaty, following Vatikiotis, calls “the rise of ‘Sino-chic’...and the rediscovery of Chinese roots among the middle classes” (2011: 689), but more abstractly through an idealization of fair-skinned, Sino-Thai looks and features as standards of beauty, privilege and success.

- *wealth*: Probably the most important aspect of the new middle classes. Wealth and discretionary income allows the new middle classes incredible freedom in defining their new identities through conspicuous consumption. Upscale shopping destinations like Paragon and Gaysorn Plaza and their respective associations with *hi-so* wealth and respectability are good examples of this.

As will be demonstrated in ensuing chapters, these characteristics are central, frequently reiterated themes in the representational discourses of Thai lifestyle media and, as such, it underscores the extent to which that media is invested in processes of social distinction and the idealization of new middle class lifestyles as idealized norms.

The following three chapters outline the multitudes of ways that the new middle classes are defined by conspicuous consumption and the hegemonic ways in which their taste is normalized and defined as superior in contemporary Thai society. Lifestyle media provides a perfect case study to analyze the values and aspirations of the new Thai middle classes by way of ideology and representation. Lifestyle media provides a context for socially distinct ‘lifestyles’ as markers of social success as distinct representations are played out continuously within the pages of the magazines. The representations of Thai lifestyle magazines show commodities, spaces and practices as having socially distinct cultural capital by the way of Thai cultural practices of outward displays of wealth. This thesis provides a framework and theoretical analysis of Thai consumer culture and the power of socially distinct representations in lifestyle media.

Chapter III

Commodities

The first central theme from magazines used in this study is the significant presence of commodities and technologies in lifestyle media. This chapter discusses the ways in which commodities are both displayed discursively alongside the body or stand by themselves as value laden signs. The magazines use commodities to represent and idealize a socially distinct and racialized upper class identity that is light skinned, fashionable, and technologically advanced. Through the use of textual analysis, this chapter seeks to uncover the underlying myths and ideologies espoused in the three categories of fashion, technology and whiteness. The chapter employs theories concerning consumer culture and lifestyle media to reinforce the framework set up in chapter two to analyze the advertisements and photographs therein. The main sections are divided into three central themes: commodified fashion as historically inclined markers of modernity; technology as a performative practice of urban cosmopolitan modernity; and whiteness as it relates to beauty products and cosmetic procedures as a representation of social and ethnic distinction.

In order to set up a framework for the ensuing analyses, a few select theories are outlined below to explore commodities and commodity culture which will relate to the three themes of fashion, technology, and whiteness. Specifically the chapter discusses what commodities are constructed as modern in the context of Thai lifestyle media. Additionally the chapter seeks to make use of the theoretical process of commodification to understand and critique the underlying ideologies within the realm of Thai beauty, specifically skin whitening and plastic surgery. By employing analyses of fashion and technology, it will be shown how commodities are a powerful marker in modern lifestyle constructions and representations. Furthermore the mythologies and ideologies that are

held within the seemingly natural space of the advertisements and images reflect changing dynamics about beauty, fashion and technology within contemporary Thailand.

3.1 Theoretical background

In the modern consumerist world, conspicuous consumption of commodities is a large part of everyday life and it in essence defines an individual's specific lifestyle. Our identities in a sense are constructed from what we purchase.

–Lifestyle draws promiscuously on a range of concepts such as taste, income, health status, diet, aspiration, subculture and leisure in order to represent everyday life in advanced capitalist cultures as an accretion of personal style achieved primarily through consumption.” (Jagose 2003: 109)

Harkening back to the last chapter, we can remember that the conceptual category of “lifestyle” is a powerful and distinct by-product of capitalist societies and cultures. Lifestyle is in effect a commodification of identity itself, and thus lifestyle is, “consumption as a practice of identity making” (Jagose 2003: 109). Our identities are defined and given meaning by consumer culture and commodity consumption. “Consumer goods are crucial to the way in which we make up our social appearance, our social networks (lifestyle, status group ect.), our structures of social value” (Slater 1997: 30). As discussed in the previous chapter, the category of lifestyle in general and lifestyle media in particular is invested in promoting and naturalizing capitalist consumerism. In a manner of speaking, modern identities or lifestyles are constructed and rooted in consumption practices; in short, identity is a process of commodification (Jagose: 113). Modern industrial consumer culture which dates from the era of blossoming commodity production and consumption in the 19th century has established increased space for the production of lifestyles and identities which are bound to market-capitalist economics. The commodities consumers buy in turn all say something about the particular lifestyle they are “acting out,” or “living.” While all commodities are in a sense part of the modern world, some commodities in particular explicitly connote (post)modern bourgeois wealth, prestige and cosmopolitan urbanism, “consumer goods are drawn into circuits of meaning in excess of their materiality or instrumentality” (114). As such lifestyle is defined as a capitalist consumer practice which uses the consumption of commodities (conspicuous

consumption) for the production and expressions of social meanings and relations (Slater 2007: 70; Aldridge 2003: 66; Featherstone 2007: 86). As will be seen, the ‘circuits of meaning’ associated with commodities helps to inform Marxist critiques of commodities in everyday life as well as the social distinction (class) associated with consuming specific commodities.

The study of lifestyle and lifestyle media has to include an analysis and theoretical discussion of commodities, commodity culture under the broader umbrella of capitalism. Lifestyle and the choices consumers make in the modern world are all based on conspicuous consumption of commodities, anything from skin whitening creams to watches, cameras, clothes, as well as services. One of the earliest and most influential theorists of the rise of capitalism and consumer cultures is Karl Marx. Marx’s basic critique on capitalism and particularly his discussion of commodity fetishism is useful for framing commodities’ relationship to lifestyle and lifestyle media in the 21st century. Marx mused on the ways in which capitalism and capitalist production created class hierarchies, particularly between the upper and lower classes; the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. In a simple manner of speaking he held that the upper classes have the power over production and the lower classes are used as labor to create wealth or profit for the upper class bourgeoisie. The upper classes benefit from the cheap labor and commodities that the lower classes are producing, and this in turn creates an unequal class structured society (Marx, Elster 1986). While this is a very basic and simplistic recognition of Marx’s work, it sets the stage for his critique of consumer culture through his theory of ‘commodity fetishism’.

Marx's theory of commodity fetishism comes from volume one of *Das Kapital* in which he describes how commodities, through exchange value have been given mystical or fantastic properties outside of their actual use value. Marx compares the world of religion and spirituality to the modern world filled with commodities and argues that “human powers and social values” (Slater: 112) that were historically projected onto an image of a god or a totem are now put onto commodities in the modern capitalist world. Exchange value is an important notion here because commodities are given value through

their exchange process with other commodities which in turn erases the labor and actual use value of the commodity.

–Price does not reflect the value of labour and therefore obscures the social relations of production...commodities are treated as if they were persons possessing agency, while persons are reduced to commodities bought and sold merely for their labor power.” (Aldridge 79)

It is in this instance we can see how the commodity specifically from advertising media can be read textually and analyzed as a sign, one which carries ideological baggage. A simplistic example would be a watch; a technological commodity which has ideological connotations of modernity and even masculinity in some cases. By using Marx's theory of commodity fetishism we can begin to unlock the ways in which commodities stand as a sign in relation with one another (exchange value) and take on human characteristics. From this junction it is easier to conceptualize the process in which advertising and particularly lifestyle media plays a key role in forming these hieroglyphics and totems of modernity in everyday life.

The modern era is, among other things defined by Marx's contemporaries as an era of consumerism and commodity consumption within the framework of ever expanding lifestyles (Marx, Elster 1987; Slater 1997: 9-32; Aldridge 2003: 74-5; Featherstone 2007: 84). Employing Marx's theories as a framework to understand class as one of the primary agents of social distinction, the consumption of specific commodities and its relationship with the formation of lifestyle and lifestyle identities is in essence a more contemporary method of dictating and reading social distinction. On a very basic level, the upper classes, or the bourgeoisie, have the wealth and power to acquire more commodities which then in turn function as symbols and proof of the status of an upper class lifestyle, while the lower classes relative lack of material and capital wealth limits them in their pursuit of commodities, especially those that are equated with upper class lifestyles. Bourgeois tastes are thus elevated as idealized high culture. Essentially commodities and lifestyle are important in that they are, –a system of social distinction based on consumption rather than production” (Jagose 2003: 110). Here we see the increasing intersection of class, consumer culture, capitalism and lifestyle. This has led many contemporary scholars to move beyond the traditional Marxist emphasis on

production as the principal axis of social distinction, to an equal emphasis on consumption as the new axis of distinction in modern capitalist societies. Some scholars, and particularly the ones cited in this chapter emphasize that modern or postmodern consumer culture has created a system of social distinction that is driven by commodity consumption (taste) that actively maintains and constructs various differential social relations in society along the lines of not only class but race, ethnicity, gender and even age (Slater: 158-9). For the purposes of this essay both Marx's theory of commodity fetishism and its relationship with class and production as well as more contemporary scholars insistence on exploring consumer cultures relationship with commodity consumption and social distinctions are taken as equally relevant for analyzing commodities as signs in advertising.

3.1.1 Commodity consumerism in Thailand

The above theories outline quite broadly the ways in which consumer culture and commodity consumption together construct and normalize social relations; this enables deeper discussion of commodities and commodity culture and their relationship with a changing Thai society over the past century and a half. In the nineteenth century Thailand began its process of contemporary modernization. The aim was to show colonial powers that Thailand, then known as Siam, was a country that was modern in terms of not only government bureaucracy but also technology, religion and commodity-based lifestyles (Wyatt 2003; Sunait 2006). The monarch best known for modernizing the country, King Rama V, or King Chulalongkorn, is often seen in photographs donning Western European fashion styles. His support for modernizing the country was not only institutional but economic. During the modernizing periods of the late 19th century following the signing of the Bowring Treaty in 1855, foreign trade increased rapidly and this resulted in a rapid rise in the consumption of imported commodities especially by the royal family and government workers. –Examples of imported goods were scent bottles, lavender perfumes and colognes, rose water and perfumed hair-styling oil. Furthermore,

this social group had a chance to experience other technologies such as vehicles, electricity, communication devices, and other modern conveniences” (Sunait 2006: 77). Following this colonial era, commodities particularly fashion were a much contested practice in the building of a national identity and culture and will be explored in more detail below.

The 20th century after the fall of the absolute monarchy followed by continued modernization both politically and economically brought significant changes to commodity culture within Thailand. In 1939, coup leader Phibul Songkram changed the name of the country to Thailand and began a number of cultural reforms, many of which have been criticized by some as being xenophobic and ethnocentric (Wyatt 2003: 244). These ‘cultural mandates’ as they were called lay at the crossroads of economic and cultural changes instituted by the Phibul regime after the coup which brought about the end of absolute monarchy in 1932. The cultural mandates that effected commodities and commodity consumption revolved around fashion and other commodities like alcohol and smoking and even Thai social practices like traditional music.

–They were encouraged to forswear imports and buy only Thai products; they were required to dress in a modern fashion—the men in coats, trousers, shirt, and tie; women in skirts, blouses, hats, and gloves; and all in shoes”. (244)

The above quote illustrates the growing and changing notions of western modernity and Thai nationalism as it related to commodities and commodity consumption in the country. The second half of the 20th century following World War Two also saw a massive increase in commodity consumption and consumer culture as the country continued its path of capitalist modernization and rural people increasingly began to migrate to the city of Bangkok. As shown in the previous two chapters advertising grew in leaps in bounds in the years after the 1960s as the new middle classes began their rapid rise to prominence, particularly from the 1970s to the 1990s (Ockey; Wyatt). Nearly all of the economic classes were surrounded by more and more commodities to consume; this modern aura surrounding commodities increased tremendously, and it forms the basis of this chapter. The first section of this chapter looks at fashion and its presence in Thai social life and the ideological work that it performs as a key part of Thai lifestyle media.

The second part looks at technologies, their history and their connotations within the realm of modernity. The last section looks at the cult of whiteness in Thai magazines and particularly focuses on whitening products and cosmetics as a path to modernity and ultimate beauty.

3.2 Fashion

Fashion is essentially the clothes we wear in everyday life, both formal and informal. The study of fashion is important in that it displays the relative independence and individualism at work in the modern capitalist world but more importantly it stands a distinct practice of social distinction (Jagose 2003: 140-153; Cornwel-Smith 2009: 72-89). As citizens involved in the world of fashion, we are free to choose our own self-representation espoused by fashion, however we self-represent ourselves through fashion within the confines of availability defined by consumer culture and global capitalism. Fashion then is a key part of consumer culture and modern capitalism and has thus been exploited particularly with the help of advertising and lifestyle media. The fashion industry is a political site of power for identity and identity formation where specific signs and meanings are attached to specific dress types and styles (Jagose: 140). In Thailand this political power of modern fashion and the modern fashion industry has a basis in Thai historical record. Understood historically, fashion allows us to see where sites of distinct power are located, specifically military uniforms or royal garb; this relates to the contemporary era because fashion allows understandings of the dominant ideologies of success and beauty in society.

Understood historically, fashion in Thailand shows two unique sites of power and politics within the course of ongoing notions of modernity which will help to shape analysis of fashion's power in the politics of representation today. Historically, fashion has been part of the modernization process. As mentioned above, fashion and its relationship to the royalty and the royal family has a unique history by positioning power to certain dress codes as well as temporarily historicizing and politicizing 'traditional'

dress styles (Paleggi 2008: 9-10). In the modernization era of King Chulalongkorn, royal attire was shifted to a hybrid nature between Thai and western styles,

–hybrid court attires were created by matching a high necked lace blouse(for females) or colonial-style jacket (for males) with a unisex lower wrap...later on, full Western-style military uniform replaced the king's and princes' Indic garb at official ceremonies.” (Peleggi: 9-10)

Furthermore, Peleggi writes that during the reign of present King Rama the IX, a revivalist movement of wearing royal traditional pre-1870's Thai silk garb was promoted and that the outfit seeks to show a:

–signifier of ‘Thainess’ (khwampenthai) by virtue of its fabric and design, accorded well with the parallel bureaucratic promotion of national culture and identity for both ideological and commercial purposes.” (10)

Looking back again at the the cultural edicts issued by prime minister Phibul Songkram from the late 1930's and early 1940's shows that the edicts were also highly political and vested in the active project of modernity and modernization. As mentioned above Phibul issued cultural edicts which sought to literally fashion the body of the supposed new Thai country (Paleggi, Wyatt). Phibul's cultural edicts ordered people to dress with ‘modern’ western clothes.

–Emphasis continued to be placed on the adoption of Western dress and accoutrements as an index of civilization: –The Thai's are a well-dressed nation” and –Hats will lead Thailand to greatness” were prominent slogans of the period”. (10)

Furthermore, Paleggi states that these cultural edicts were highly stratified between urban upper class Bangkok and rural lower class provincial citizens. This kind of stratified social distinction dictated by not only royal garb mentioned earlier but also western style suits and hats show the continual process of modernization and cosmopolitanism brought about by the conspicuous consumption dictated by the fashion industry. As these were projects of the state the following analysis seeks to ask what is constructed as modern and ideal in today's Thai fashion industries and does the social distinction of these new fashions have any basis in historical developments of fashion as explored above?

3.2.1 Fashion Advertorials



Fig. 8. A fashion advertorial from *HiSo Party Magazine*. –Style Matters.” *HiSo Party* Jan 2011: 58-59. Print.

3.2.1.1 Analysis

Fashion advertorials like the one featured above in the January 2011 edition of *HiSo Party* magazine are a common feature of lifestyle magazines. The technique is used to advertise a specific set of interrelated commodity items. By arranging a graphic composition of shots in which various commodities are placed in contiguity to a human figure—typically, a model or, as in this case, a Chulalongkorn university student—the advertorial works to literalize the ideological operations of commodity-based lifestyle where the message is “you are what you consume” or, in the case of fashion, “you are what you wear”. All of the commodities in the advertorial form a layer of discursive ideological meanings which can be unwrapped and analyzed.

The above spread contains commodities that represent all three of this chapter's principal analytic foci. In particular, these two pages form a discursive construction with commodities which read together represent specific ideologies which, as discussed previously, have special resonance in contemporary Thai society such as modernity, feminine beauty and upper class urban cosmopolitanism. Denotatively and connotatively, these two pages from the January edition of *HiSo Party* show a young woman posing and smiling at the camera with a white dress and high heels. The background is a clean domestic interior. These signs connote cleanliness, particular urban fashion sensibilities and youth. The body of the young woman is juxtaposed with the various commodities that construct and represent her "fashionable self". The perfume, phones, watch, dolls, purse, sunglasses, schedule book and football patch all work together as signs of her cultural identity, projecting her complete fashionable self which is reframed again at the bottom right of the page smiling at the camera in a similarly luxurious domestic interior. Like most advertorials, this text works with a basic narrative structure aims to tell a distinct story beginning with the young woman in the first page before she is defined by her fashionable commodities to her smiling face on the opposite page after she is defined and represented with her commodities. The advertorial constructs her lifestyle through her commodities and her "self" or identity is in turn normalized through consumer consumption. This in turn gets held up and promoted to readers as a desirable ideal, a yardstick against which to measure and/or an aspirational goal upon which to pattern one's own sense of selfhood.

3.2.1.2 Ideology

The above advertorial shows a number of consumer tastes. The ideology at work in these kinds of advertorials is how they fashion the body with consumerism. Essentially they fashion the self and naturalize specific identities as ideally beautiful or modern. Some scholars write that fashion and taste in lifestyle formations are culturally read and culturally understood. As Slater (1997) writes: "in consuming we both exercise and display our taste or style. Taste is not, however, a matter of individual whim; rather it is socially structured." (59) The power of this fashioning of the ideal body is that within a

stratified cultural production system, the girl and her commodities are represented as a natural ideal of upper class identity formation. The commodities in these two photographs give ideological agency to the woman's lifestyle and its constituent "tastes". This dynamic lies in a greater system of social distinction which is made apparent by the title of the magazine, *HiSo Party*, which in effect positions nearly everything in the magazine as having a sign value of upper class society in Thailand. Here we can think back to Sophornvaty's discussion of hi-so in contemporary Bangkok which points to hi-so as a class loaded slang word associated with wealthy people and expensive place, things and practices as socially distinct (689).

As such these advertorials and the people they feature are essentially advertisements for a socially distinct upper class lifestyle. It is here that social distinction and commodity fetishism intersect. The commodities, which stand as signs, possess an exchange value of mystical connotations other than their use value. The commodities take on connotations of modernity, beauty, and youth, all of which work discursively to advertise a socially distinct, idealized lifestyle. The social capital that these representations carry serve to define a select group of privileged individuals--models, rich people, and celebrities—as an idealized elite at the very top of the class spectrum. What members of this rarefied elite wear, possess and consume gives power to their social status and this in turn is proffered as a desirable ideal to the rest of society further down the class system. The advertorials manufacture and sell specific identities, as these identities are in a manner of speaking, boiled down to commodities that can be purchased in the marketplace of global capitalism.

3.2.2 Fashion Advertisements



3.2.2.1 Analysis

These two advertisements also come from *HiSo Party* magazine. The two advertisements signal a number of connotations which highlight some notable representations. The most noticeable representational features of figures 5 and 6 include Eurocentric fashion design, international branding techniques, English as a primary language and modern ambiguously ethnic models. All of these representations give a cosmopolitan modern nature to the advertisements. The overt cosmopolitan nature that is espoused in the advertisements has the ideological function of providing social distinction through particular tastes. These advertisements are useful for understanding deeper how fashion serves as a commodity of social distinction and cultural capital within the realms of lifestyle and lifestyle representations. Slater writes that, “The stratification of social divisions is matched by cultural stratification and hierarchy. Different tastes have different degrees of social legitimacy and value in wider society.”(160) These two advertisements show specific tastes, the fashions on display are given distinct values of an upper-middle class urbanite. Additionally, the advertisements work in ways that are akin to the Thai state-sponsored modernizing periods of the late 19th century and the early 20th century discussed above. However, in the place of the state possessing a hegemonic role over fashion as a symbol of modernity and authoritarian power, advertising and lifestyle media through the lens of consumer culture take its place.

According to the advertisements, modern fashion represented in the magazines carries specific cosmopolitan markers. Quite unlike the traditionalist revival in Thailand’s fashion sector detailed in Peleggi’s article on fashion and state, the cosmopolitan markers possess these key elements: the advertisements above feature Eurocentric themes like use of the English language, the dress styles are western and eastern Asian in style, the advertisements use global branding techniques, and the ads put an emphasis on the sign value of particular fashion tastes. These specific cosmopolitan markers are essentially ideological in nature in that they work to spread the notion that certain tastes have power and authority due to their connotative association with discourses of modernity and class. The analysis of the two advertisements above will show how they construct and represent

socially distinct lifestyles through their use of sign laden fashion commodities and advertising techniques like using the English language.

The two advertisements above are useful to understanding the ideological project of modernization and modernity within Thai consumer culture and lifestyle media. In some sense, the advertisements are almost colonial in nature where white and light skin are used to forge a socially distinct dichotomy between classes, this process is occurring despite the fact that they are local Thai advertisements. Specifically, the two advertisements feature light skinned and ethnically mixed models. Later, this chapter will look closer at how these light skinned bodies normalize representations of mixed Sino-Thai and *luk kreung* identities as having enhanced cultural capital. Suffice to say that the use of mixed race and light skinned Sino-Thai models is a prominent feature in nearly every fashion photo shoot and advertisement throughout the three magazines analyzed for this study.

A second important ideological marker of modernity which appears in these advertisements and many like them is the use of the English language, notably as a tag-line or heading. This use of English is another important sign which is present in nearly every advertisement and photograph used in this study and as such it is worthy of closer scrutiny. The use of English in the spreads and advertisements is a sign because it is not ideologically neutral, by using the English language, the advertisement carries ideological weight of being international, cosmopolitan, urban and chic. Let us take the two advertisements above as primary examples of this technique of using English to connote deeper ideological formations. The first advertisement features the words in gold: *Pak Lane*, followed by the word of the Thailand's capital in flowing script, *Bangkok*. This is followed by the phrase, *Lifestyle Community Mall*, in flowing black italics. The second advertisement for KT Optics has a large green font splashed over the models walking towards the point of view of the camera which reads, *Not Just Glasses but Your Taste Your Lifestyle*.

The two slogans outlined in the previous paragraph work as a sign within the advertisements in that they can be understood as markers of specific international taste formations. In this case to be modern, fashionable and spatially urban is to be fluent, or at least conversant, in the international lingua franca of English. English, in essence, serves as a sign of modernity which is internationally cosmopolitan in nature. Thailand has numerous English language schools, while traveling, studying or working abroad is a much sought after experience and the Thai state frequently underscores the need for increased English facility, even going so far as to moot a back and forth nationalistic rhetoric about making English an official second language of the country (Nagi 2012). The use of English in these two advertisements works to link the generalized ideal of consumerist lifestyle with the international connotations of English as the global lingua franca, and as such puts a specific taste value on the use of English within lifestyle identity formations as the words appeal to the imagined bilingual reader. The use of English also works discursively with the use of western fashion styles, international branding, in addition to the prominent use of Western-style architecture, particularly in the first advertisement.

The advertisements showcase western fashion business and leisure trends which are essentially North American and European in provenance. The first advertisement for Park Lane uses the sign of Western European architecture which in turn works discursively with the English language in the advertisement and the western dress style of the model. It shows a man standing looking off –frame, foregrounded in front of Greco-Roman architecture. He sports an East Asian (South Korean) style haircut and wears an Oxford-style dress shirt, with a sweater over it and an overcoat over that. He also has on black pants and glasses. The fact that much of this fashion has extremely limited use-value for a tropical market like Thailand alerts us to the fact that the advertisement is working principally in the realm of connotative exchange value: selling signs of consumerist class privilege as idealized markers of social distinction. In essence this advertisement constructs and represents the ideal sophisticated urban Thai taste, one that is grounded in internationalism, with a strong Eurocentric cast that has historical roots in

the various modernization periods described above but that has more recently started to incorporate signs of East Asian distinction, notably South Korean and /or Japanese. The second advertisement goes a step further with international branding for KT Optics which features two white models and two Asian models walking towards the camera with expensive glasses on. The international branding works in this advertisement because the internationalism is made whole by featuring two “westerners” and by fashioning all of the models with western business attire and leisure sophisticated fashion like the long flowing dress. The various signs stand together and don’t require a background like the first advertisement. The ideological assumption presented in this advertisement is that expensive designer glasses are a key part of upper class tastes in these particular representations.

The last important discussion to be had regarding these two particular advertisements is their use versus sign value which relates back to Marxist theories of commodity fetishism outlined earlier in this chapter. The sign or exchange value of the fashions in these advertisements is given immensely more importance than the use value, so much so that the sign value seems the natural and unquestioned. It is this process by which consumer culture and lifestyle become so powerful. Simply, the use value of the various fashions in the two advertisements and the advertorial above is minimal, specifically the clothes. Arguably glasses have high use and sign value in that they represent or stand for notions like respectability and education, they also have high use value for protecting eyes from harmful UV rays and helping people’s vision. Fashion, particularly Western-style, cold climate business and leisure attire, as featured in the two advertisements has very little immediate use value. Here we can understand how fashions like business attire have high sign value and thus serve as markers of social distinction. Their sign value carries the ideological weight of being professionally fashionable within an international read western business world. In his book, *Very Thai*, Philip Cornwell-Smith writes,

—Despising uncouth macho laddishness today’s real men still largely aspire to courtesy conformity and plumage befitting rank. Older men thus exude status of *taeng tua dii* (good dressers) Political faction leaders outshine each other with Versace shirts.” (86)

In the dominant Thai worldview dressing well is highly regarded which historical precedence in the modernization periods caused by the monarchy and the military dictatorships later; however modern dress is also influenced by international business culture and fashions. These business and leisure fashion trends are thus fetishes which carry fantastic values and representations specifically wealth, modernity and cosmopolitanism. This in turn fits into the notion that the power of representation is an ideological tool of social distinction. Fashions like suits, sweaters, overcoats, long black dress pants, dress shoes, long billowing dresses, female formal business attire and high heels are regarded as high fashion from their sign value and are socially distinct but have little use value in a country and a capital city that has a median temperature of at least 30 plus degrees Celsius year round.

3.3 Technology

Another important commodity frequently showcased in the magazines used for this study is technologies. Technologies are shown as essential parts of Thai everyday life and no one can deny the powerful sway of technology and technological consumption brought about by decades of advertising in global society and culture. The advertisements and photo shoots represent an idealized young middle and upper class consumerist identity. These representations serve as one of the many themes of modernity in this paper. Technology and the possession of it is another channel in which modernity is represented and constructed. These commodity based icons of technological modernity include cars, cell phones, cameras, watches, computers, and house hold appliances. The rhetoric of modern technological consumption that is established in these magazines through their exchange and sign value is a lifestyle based on perpetual newness, specifically as it relates to youth. Further meanings include quality, attractiveness, sexuality, freedom, travel, art, high culture, creativity, ease, and notions of classic nostalgia as it relates to technologic memorabilia like old cars or old cameras. This commodity-based rhetoric of technology is brought into being via the advertisements and

photo shoots which give technological commodities powerful sign values. To illustrate this claim, a distinct sample of texts will be read and analyzed in the following sections.

3.3.1 The Automobile



Fig. 11. An article about cars. –“Celebrity Car.” *HiSo Party* May 2011: 284-5. Print.

3.3.1.1 Analysis

While advertisements for cars and automobiles are prevalent in all three of the magazines, articles like the one above from the May 2011 issue of *HiSo Party* have particularly notable sign value and representational authority in the realm of lifestyle formation. The article carries significant sign value in the way that it presents the technology as an extension of the owner in addition to its use of English. Furthermore the advertisement constructs rich urban socialites as the naturalized identity for owners of expensive European made sports cars. Their lifestyle is inscribed into their possession of expensive commodities like cars. Cars in essence reflect the ideal wealthy modern Thai

subject- one that is completely invested in global capitalist consumption. In this article, the automobile is both constructed and represented as the apex of upper class taste and desire.

3.3.1.2 Ideology

The dominant ideology behind this article and specifically the photographs is the ideological formation of the automobile being one of the primary status symbols for the rich and wealthy. This formation of technological commodities and their connotations with modernity and class is a global phenomenon and operates in Thailand in similar ways (Brey 2003). However, the car as a heavily loaded sign value has historical precedence in Thai culture (Panrit 2007; Thiesen; Bangkok Post). In global consumer culture, expensive cars have connotations of masculinity, newness, urbanity, mobility, speed, excitement, youth, control and pleasure (Aronoff 1981; Laird 1996; Garman 2004). Articles like the one presented in figure seven, just from the sign value of the photographs alone displays nearly all of these sign markers or connotations. The man stands next to his car, dressed in casual western business attire with dark glasses, which the analysis has already shown to have significant class based sign value. The use of English affirms the man's lifestyle taste formations as being in a hierarchy of social distinction as the magazine declares that expensive European automobiles are, "The Ultimate Superstyle." The use of English affirms connotations of cosmopolitanism and posits the individual within a distinct international wealthy class where imported cars are the ultimate status symbol. Importantly, the man and the cars are set against a semi-rural backdrop of coconut trees. It is a curious, almost incongruent juxtaposition that marks important binarisms—Western/Thai; urban/rural; industrial/agrarian—that have deep ideological and historical significances as Thailand has modernized.

Thailand's incorporation into the global capitalist order has been rapid and over the past 50 years the country has gone through massive processes of industrialization and urbanization. The orientation of the car as class based status symbol, like the town house

or condominium explored in the next chapter, comes from these dual histories of capitalist production and consumption in Thailand and particularly Bangkok. Starting in 1961 under the guidance of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat's authoritarian government, the Thai state pursued an agenda of intense development plans with Thailand achieving a growth rate of 8.9 percent in the decade of 1959-1969 alone. (Wyatt 273) Throughout this period and beyond, the United States was giving aid worth millions of dollars to the economic and military sectors of the Thai economy. Additionally, under Sarit's rule, liberal economic measures of private and foreign investment were encouraged. In the 60's and 70s the Thai population increased dramatically, from 18 million in 1947 to 45 million in 1980. Today the population is about 74 million with 12 to 15 million living in the greater Bangkok metropolis (citypopulation.de). Thailand's massive move to industrial exports also followed the trends of the 60s and 70s; in 1978 the biggest exports were tapioca, rice and rubber. By 2001 the leading exports were computer parts, garments, and motor cars (Wyatt). This massive historical shift from a national economy principally rooted in agrarian production to one newly aligned with industrial manufacture is one of the principal reasons the automobile stands as such a resonant marker of social distinction in Thailand. Part of the sign value of owning a car is the notion of modernity through the lens of industrialization. Cars are so much a part of the notion of Thai modernity and upward mobility that the city of Bangkok has just over 7 million registered vehicles in 2012 with an official population of around 12 million (Vipaporn 2012). This means that one in two people owns or drives a car or other motor vehicle in Bangkok. This is an extraordinary figure for a city in what is still a developing economy that easily rivals, if not surpass, levels of car ownership in more wealthy countries. As such, cars are (over)-valued symbols in Thailand of industrial modernity, and in the country's social hierarchy, cars, and particularly expensive European models take on the ultimate symbol of upper class modernity and status.

3.3.2 Technological Icons of Everyday Consumer Culture



Fig. 12. An advertisement for Hitachi vacuum cleaners. “Hitachi.” *Baan Lae Suan* Feb. 2011: 83. Print.



Fig. 13. An advertisement for a U36 Asus laptop. “Asus.” *Puen Dern Tang* March 2011: 56. Print.



Fig. 14. An advertisement for a Ricoh point and shoot cameras. “*Ricoh.*” *Puen Dern Tang* March 2011: 22. Print.

The above advertisements establish a distinct discourse within the greater discussion of icons of technological modernity of modern Thai lifestyles. The advertisements carry sign value and representational authority of modernity and cosmopolitan consumer culture which is the overarching theme of this chapter. The first advertisement is from the February 2011 issue of *Baan lae Suan* magazine, the second two advertisements are from the March 2011 edition of *Puen Dern Tang* magazine. These three advertisements were chosen partially because it is crucial to understand that lifestyle magazines have advertisements that showcase a wide range of technological commodities. While a magazine such as *HiSo Party* trumpets in its very title the class-based lifestyle practices, spaces and commodities which form the backbone of this thesis, all of the magazines are equally invested in ideological projects of idealizing and normalizing class-based consumerist lifestyles. From the above advertisements connotations of newness, perfection, ease, inspiration, creativity, connection, beauty, youth, freedom, travel, art as it relates to high culture are all attached to values and

ideologies of technological commodity consumption. These connotations help in the construction of these commodities as markers of modernity and affluence in Thai lifestyle media as Thailand has increasingly urbanized and turned to a consumerist industrial society.

3.3.2.2 Analysis and Ideology

Against the backdrop of technology and its association with modernity is a massive increase in industrialization and economic liberalization since the 1960s (Wyatt, Sunait). The power of practicing or performing modernity through technological commodities like the ones above is that it is relatively cheap and readily available, particular in Bangkok and other large cities in Thailand. What is not available to many by the purchase of an automobile is accessible to most through the conspicuous consumption of consumer goods. Additionally the sign value associated with technological commodities is bound with youth, newness and creative individualism, these ideologies help construct the greater naturalized discourses that are bound up with the products. Also within the ideological functions of these advertisements and many like them is not only their value within a hierarchy of social distinction but that they exhibit some form of use value. The commodities are constructed as integral parts of daily urban lifestyles, and thus are constructed as having a certain level of use value in addition to exchange value as status symbols of modernity and cosmopolitanism.

As discussed previously, the advertisements and particularly the photographs establish a distinct rhetoric of newness, youth and creative individualism onto the common sense understanding of the technologies. The close relationship of the Thai middle and upper classes with technological commodities forged across the modern age had, by the late-twentieth century taken on such an intensely rhetorical cast that the massive street protests in 1992 by the newly enfranchised urban middles classes against the military government was widely dubbed the ‘mobile phone mob’ both in recognition of that technological commodity’s use as a communicative tool in the organization of the protests but also as a jocular reference to the conspicuous consumption patterns of the

Thai middle classes (Ockey 1999) Fast-forward to the early twenty first century and it is not hard to see that technological commodities have become an even more entrenched part of everyday life in Thailand where they continue to stand as powerful markers of class based lifestyle formations.

The advertisement above in figure eight constructs the modern young Thai couple in a nice bourgeois home. The woman practices the ‘global’ cosmopolitan leisure activity of yoga and meditation which gives the advertisement cultural authenticity as being nominally Asian, which stands in contrast to the man vacuuming the carpet. Traditional gender roles are reversed in interesting ways which also acts as a sign of contemporary modernity: this is a “new age” couple rooted in cosmopolitan, post-feminist ideologies of gender equality and shared domestic labour. The supposedly necessary commodity of the vacuum cleaner stands in stark contrast to this peaceful scene of meditation and domestic harmony. The advertisement connotes that the vacuum cleaner is so quiet that the woman can meditate in peace while the man vacuums. The advertisement reads, ‘Tomorrow Together’, which further enforces connotations of youth, newness, progress and cleanliness, all of which are transferred onto the commodity of the vacuum cleaner. The representational work of the text aims to encode the vacuum cleaner as an integral tool in addition to a valued status symbol of the modern urban Thai lifestyle. As a side note the amount of domestic living spaces with carpets in Bangkok makes the class construction of this advertisement abundantly clear.

The second advertisement inscribes ideologies surrounding youth and creative individualism onto the technological icon of the camera. Advertisements for cameras are widespread in the three magazines used for this study as they are represented as one of the “essential” commodity symbols of the modern urban socialite lifestyle. They construct this in the way that the camera connotes youth and artistic individualism both from the models used and the English language. The advertisement indicates in English that the model’s name is Ayako, a clearly Japanese appellation, and that she is a makeup artist. The advertisement uses a red font to draw attention to the English text so readers who actually read the ad will affiliate East Asian beauty, technologic modernity with the

sign value of the advertisement. As the model holds up the camera, her relative youth and individual creative self-expression is given meaning with her profession and her cultural-ethnic background as Japanese. The individualism bound up with a commodity like cameras is the use of the English language in the advertisement which declares, ‘I can turn any moment into art’. The advertisement situates the pronoun I meaning both the woman in the advertisement and the imagined reader of the advertisement. Cameras as an icon of technological modernity are a significant part of the constructions and representations of youthful middle and upper classes in lifestyle media. Additionally a number of photoshoots in the magazines even feature the models with both digital and classic film cameras.

The last advertisement is a mix between fashion and technology and should be understood within the realm of commodity fetishism and connotations of beauty and youth. With the massive economic growth and industrialization of Thailand in the past half a century, commodities of technology have become increasingly affiliated with the middle and upper classes, specifically with the help of advertisements like the third one above. The increased wealth enjoyed by these privileged urban classes has allowed a substantial number of Thais to use consumerist technologies as a performative practice representing urban cosmopolitan modernity. As the advertisements connote an ideology of beauty, sophistication over use value, items like the laptop above are fetishized with these values over and beyond their immediate use value as tools of business and/or communication. Arguably all of the technological commodities in this section are fetishized by their sign value as their use value is ignored or diminished. The use value of laptops is briefly highlighted in the third advertisement. The English phrase indicates, ‘stunningly light, powerfully beautiful’. The advertisement creates the aura that the laptop is both light and powerful, which is useful for a busy suburbanite commuting in the hot city. The use values are given meaning and authority however from the youthful, light skinned, female model, well-dressed in expensive clothing, floating in the air next to the laptop. The word beautiful then connotes both the model and the laptop. It is in this way that ideological notions of beauty, wealth and youth are transcribed to the

commodity. The advertisement's power in this instance is its construction of commodities as holding meanings and ideological class based formations through the guise of taste and identity.

3.4 Whiteness



Fig. 15. An article for cosmetics. —Beauty Story.” *HiSo Party* June 2011: 192-3: Print.

In the three magazines used for this thesis, as well as in Thai lifestyle media and media cultures more generally, whiteness and light skin are one of the most pronounced markers of modernity. In the previous sections it was shown how fashion and technological commodities provide sign values which are represented as having distinct class based taste profiles. Lifestyle and commodity consumption is part of a larger system

of social distinction within the society and culture of Thailand. The topic of whiteness and light skin highlights the ways in which products for skin whitening, plastic surgery clinics and the performance and practice of being light skinned or white fits within a category of privileged social and ethnic distinction. Here lifestyle media constructs whiteness as the ultimate signifier of beauty both through the practice of skin whitening and plastic surgery. Not only do the commodities of skin whitening and cosmetics possess sign value, but the body itself, becomes in essence a commodity-signifier of social and ethnic distinctions.

Numerous studies exist in Thailand and elsewhere around the world of the power and social authority of whiteness as a category of social distinction and exclusion (Omi, Winant 1994; Persaud 2005; Feigenblatt 2010). While classic texts arising out of the West detail the ways in which whiteness is made invisible and neutral in Eurocentric contexts, international scholarship theorizes the localized ways in which whiteness as a category of distinction functions in diverse, post-colonial capitalist contexts of the early 21st century (Appaduri 1993; Twine, Charles 2008; Young 2009). In particular, numerous scholars have discuss how, in Asia, whiteness is a category of social distinction that blends the multiple influences of local and colonial histories, with international capitalism (Gram 2007; Saraswati 2010). The following analysis shows that in Thailand as in other Southeast Asian societies, light or white skin is one of the most powerful social indicators of beauty, modernity and cosmopolitanism. Like many other consumer markets, the allure or cult of whiteness or light skin is constructed paradoxically as both the norm and as the ideal. Additionally whiteness is commodified as fashionable and beautiful, but also as a performative goal attainable through the use of commodity goods and services such as creams, cosmetics and surgeries. In this instance, we can complicate the notion of whiteness to include bodily plastic surgeries which create hybrid performances of whiteness that is a mix between Thailand, East Asia and Western beauty standards. The lifestyle media used for this study provides endless examples of these complex constructions of modernity and beauty.



Fig. 16. An advertisement for Nirunda-S skin clinic. –Nirunda-S.” *HiSo Party* Dec. 2011: 105. Print



Fig. 17. Articles describing whitening cosmetics and creams. –Reports.” *Puen Dern Tang* May 2011: 36. Print.



Fig. 18. An advertisement for Shiseido Revital whitening serum. –Shiseido.” *HiSo Party* Dec. 2011: 18. Print.

3.4.1 Analysis and Ideology

The first double page advertisement of this section is an article in the June 2011 edition of *HiSo Party* magazine. The article reads –Sophisticated Lady, Sophisticated Skin.” The first advertisement from the image above is from the December 2011 edition of *HiSo Party* magazine, the advertisement is for a skin and plastic surgery clinic and in English the main headline reads, –Let’s Look Fabulous.” The second article above is from the May 2011 issue of *Puen Dern Tang* magazine which outlines various whitening and cosmetic creams. The last advertisement above is one page of a double page advertisement from the December 2011 edition of *HiSo Party* and it is an advertisement for Shiseido Revital Whitening Serum. Each one of these articles and advertisements, like those that have been analyzed in the last two sections as well as almost everywhere else in this thesis, constructs whiteness as the ultimate ideal and norm of Thai beauty and desirability. Representationally, these advertisements and articles for plastic surgery, skin whitening, and cosmetics construct whiteness as an essential commodity in the formation

of particular class based tastes. It is in this formation that we could say that whiteness is performed. As these advertisements and articles render whiteness invisible through representational repetition they illustrate how the nearly universal use of light skinned models and celebrities is idealized as the apex of beauty and cosmopolitanism. This naturalization of whiteness is part of a constant refiguring of modernity within the discourse of lifestyle media in Thailand.

The first example from the June 2011 issue of *HiSo Party* magazine uses English as the cosmopolitan lingua franca described earlier in this chapter. This use of English here connotes a similar ideology described earlier in the chapter where English stands as a marker for global cosmopolitanism. The article is titled, “Beauty Story,” which can be seen in the upper left hand corner of the page. The primary English text, “Sophisticated Lady, Sophisticated skin,” shows almost literally how lifestyle media is invested in constructing light-skinned models and celebrities as the universal apex of beauty and desire. Reading the photographs in this article in conjunction with the English text, we can see how the magazine commodifies the body or the skin, which stand as signs that connote specific meanings. Here the notion of whiteness carries connotations of sophistication and stands at the apex of lifestyle media representations of the body and beauty. From an artistic design standpoint the photograph highlights the almost glowing fantastic beauty of white skin by using a black background and black clothes. Connotations of beauty, success, wealth and sophistication in conjunction with light skin and ultimately whiteness are so prevalent that these connotations seem natural and unquestioned. Whiteness is a critical category in lifestyle identity formation and representation because of the continued repetition which honors whiteness as being the zenith of feminine and increasingly masculine desires.

The second set of advertisements and articles come from both *HiSo Party* and *Puen Dern Tang* magazines. An underlying ideology that needs to be addressed and analyzed in these three samples is the process and representation of women and particular social constructions of femininity which are definitionally aligned with the category of whiteness. These three samples show the discourse of whiteness across various platforms

of lifestyle media. Additionally, whiteness is bound strongly to consumer culture in the practice of skin care and plastic surgery clinics illustrated in the first advertisement. Like the first sample, these three advertisements construct gendered representations concerning whiteness and light skin. All of the articles and advertisements above render connotations of femininity in conjunction with whiteness or light skin in a way that seems invisible. These samples and many like them are powerfully suggestive in constructing whiteness as the standard bearer of modern urban femininity. An example is the first advertisement for Nirunda-S clinic in the way that the two men's gazes are focused on the woman, essentially as a commodified feminine body, one which requires plastic surgery and skin whitening in order to claim this visual, and implicitly sexual, attention. The article's tag line, "Let's look fabulous" posits the women in the advertisement in relation with the imagined reader. The power of representation here is the seemingly natural way in which the body is commodified and idealized as beautiful, youthful, at the center of male attention, and most importantly requiring cosmetics and plastic surgery.

The samples from the magazines above also act as discursive representations as these socially distinct advertisements and articles wouldn't have the same power and agency if they existed on their own. The power of consuming whiteness as a socially constructed commodity comes from the pervasive nature of whiteness in almost all advertising in Thailand. Not surprisingly whiteness is a major classifier for upper class taste in *HiSo Party* magazine; however the second article above illustrates the pervasive nature of whiteness in Thai lifestyle media at large. The second sample shows the reports in the travel magazine *Puen Dern Tang*; while several articles in Thai discuss the latest skin whitening cosmetics. The woman at the bottom right of the page essentially gives power and authority to the products with her light skin, but she also gives the commodities institutional authority with her white doctor's coat, a metonymic signifier of medical legitimacy and professional prowess. The relationship between travel and skin whitening shows lifestyle media's discursive construction of whiteness and light skin as not only the apex of feminine beauty for Thai women but for the leisure classes who can afford to travel abroad as well as anyone who aspires to be in this leisure class.

Plastic surgery and skin care clinics also aid in the construction of idealized beauty and whiteness. Plastic surgery is one of the key services in constructing whiteness. By looking at these advertisements together, whiteness is not just purely light skin but a discursive construction and ultimately a refined lifestyle identity. To be fully invested in the notion of whiteness is to use creams and cosmetics in addition to getting plastic surgery and visiting skin clinics in order to become the idealized cosmopolitan body reflected in the advertisements and articles from these magazines. The representations use celebrities and models that are tall, thin, have long black hair, thin Aquiline noses, white skin, and large eyes. All of these markers of beauty are constructed within the social distinction of whiteness as a hybrid global/local or “glocal” breed of cosmopolitan modernity. The three photographs above essentially create the standard of beauty in Thailand with the aid of plastic surgery and skin whitening cosmetics, which is reflected on the Shisedo model even if she isn’t ethnically Thai. Beauty is internationalized within a representational construction of whiteness in the lifestyle media in the three magazines.

Chapter IV

Spaces

This chapter's primary focus is on how Thai lifestyle media's images and advertisements represent space. The hypothesis for this chapter posits that advertisements and photographs in Thai lifestyle media represent and normalize an idealized vision of space as it relates to the home. This chapter begins with a brief exploration and analysis of space as a theory in cultural studies. The following sections of the chapter explore sequentially a representative selection of advertisements that show various spaces in the magazines. In particular, the analysis focuses on three main spatial paradigms: space as it relates to the town house or suburban home and the family; the space of the ultra-urban condominium and its relationship with representations of class and age, and lastly space as it relates to stereotypical representations of gender and sexuality within the domestic home. Each of these categories will be used to analyze how ideologies inscribed within the realm of space can be understood through this studies overarching concern with social distinction, modernity and class in Thailand.

4.1 Theoretical Background

As mentioned previously, advertisements and photos in lifestyle media are important in that they are at first seen and then read. The reading of advertisements and lifestyle imagery is done subconsciously within the realms of mutual cultural understanding and fluency in the so called languages of advertising as theorized by Dyer and Williamson in chapter one (2009). Understanding representations of space in this instance is crucial to understand how photographs in lifestyle media go about constructing and normalizing particular stereotypes of domestic space, specifically within the realms of ideology. Cultural studies scholarship on space and spatiality use geographic and social theorists like Michel Foucault, Michel de Certeau, and Henri

Lefebvre. Their work has sparked a sub-field of study within geography and cultural studies which explores space as a social category that is filled with meaning and ideology. Specifically, space is given meaning and power through social, historical and cultural forces. This chapter uses the theoretical category of space as it relates to the urban and suburban. The following paragraphs show how cultural geography and cultural studies theorize about space and spatiality as it relates to social, cultural and historic forces.

The three primary scholars mentioned above provide a range of useful ways to conceptualize and analyze space as it relates to power, society, culture and history. Foucault's focus on geography and space as categories to understand power is explored in, *Space, Knowledge, and Power,*" (Crampton, Elden 2007) a scholarly collection of essays written to analyze Foucault's thoughts on power as it relates to geography. In the introduction to the book, Crampton and Elden employ a brief quote from Foucault to describe the importance of understanding space as it relates to society and social relations,

—For Foucault, space, knowledge and power were necessarily related, as he stated it is somewhat arbitrary to try to disassociate the effective practice of freedom by people, the practice of social relations, and spatial distributions in which they find themselves. If they are separated, they become impossible to understand." (Crampton, Elden 2007: 9)

The two authors use Foucault's claim that space and spatiality is useful as an analytical framework, —.spatiality occurs as an integral part of a larger concern...a tool of analysis rather than merely an object of it." (Ibid) Thus for Foucault, space and spatiality should be understood in conjunction with social relationships, but also that spatiality or the process of how space is made meaningful should be used as a tool or framework for critical analysis. Using Foucault's thoughts on power and space, representations of domestic spaces such as the house and the home can be understood through the lens of spatialization, or the process in which space is given meaning in human cultures and societies.

Like Foucault, Michel de Certeau and Henri Lefebvre also theorize about space and spatialization as cultural and geographic categories filled with meaning and ideology. De Certeau is however specifically invested in contextualizing the nuances of space as a marker or category of social meanings, and in his seminal essay, *Walking in the City,*"

(1984) de Certeau theorizes on a central distinction between “place” and “space.” While place is a physical and material location, space is a site of practiced social and cultural production. De Certeau writes that, “Space is practiced place.” (Certeau 1984: 117) De Certeau’s theory provides a useful framework for this chapter in combination with Foucault’s notions of space as a site of power because it highlights that the selection and representation of spaces in the visual texts of lifestyle media are neither neutral nor insignificant. The specific selections of space have the authoritative power of constructing what is the most ideal and desirable. Additionally Foucault and de Certeau’s theories can be used in conjunction with each other when conceptualizing of space as a tool of analysis. For example, considering space as practiced place of power is useful for analyzing the spatialization of the home in lifestyle media as it is filled with representations and meanings of social relations such as class, gender, age and ethnicity. For example, the space of the kitchen is given specific ideological meanings from the practices of the people that use it and as will be demonstrated in more detail later in this chapter, the kitchen becomes, among other things, a deeply gendered space through the practices and performances of the actors within the images.

Henri Lefebvre’s work on spatialization and space also provides a useful framework for this chapter. In his book, *Production of Space*, (1991) Lefebvre contends that space as a social marker and site of continuous ideological reproduction (practiced) is constructed along socio-historical lines (37). More importantly, Lefebvre theorizes space as a social practice that exists in a realm of historical memory and construction. As a result, Lefebvre argues that space is also a site of power and hegemony. The questions arises, what is the dominant view of a particular space, and why is that particular space thought of in that manner? Lefebvre states that, “space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action; that in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence domination, of power.”(26) Lefebvre’s theories inform this chapter by stressing that space is socially and historically constructed. Additionally, Lefebvre tells us that space is also a site of power and struggle as hegemonic representations assist in the construction of common sense understandings of space. Dominant representations in advertising and other media play a large part of this process of spatialization.

The process of spatialization is central to this chapter's hypothesis in that not only are lifestyle media and advertisements socializing agents in Thai culture and society but are part of a wider process of spatialization as it relates to hegemony and social distinction. As shown in the earlier chapters, lifestyle media and advertisements are heavily invested in ideologically normalizing specific tastes, identities, and values as a desirable ideal. Lifestyle media is essentially in the business of selling specific spaces as a norm thus allowing readers to transform the notion of place into a socially constructed ideal space. These spaces are thus containers filled with the ideologies of global capitalism: most notably, modernity, consumerism, idealized urbanism, and cosmopolitanism. Thus the study of space is pertinent to understand and analyze the dominant ideologies of representations in Thai lifestyle media and how space is constructed as being socially distinct.

The following pages outline the various ways in which ideologies embedded in the cultural category of space are constructed and represented within the magazines used for this study. A sample of the most ideologically iconic spaces from the magazines will be used. This chapter's focus has been narrowed down to domestic living spaces and the idealized people and performances that exist within these spaces. In particular, the chapter looks at three key spaces: the suburban home, the urban condominium, and the domestic interior spaces of the kitchen and the bedroom. As shall be argued further below, these three spaces are not only among the most frequently represented in lifestyle media but are also laden with powerful social and ideological values. Deploying the same semiotic inspired mode of deconstructive analysis used in the preceding chapters, a representative selection of visual texts drawn from the magazines will be analyzed.

4.2 The Suburban Townhouse

In the year 2011, House and Garden magazine featured a number of double page advertisements from the real estate company Sansiri which will form the bulk of this analysis on townhouses. The Sansiri Company is invested in providing pre-built town houses and condominiums in Bangkok and other upscale tourist areas which are seeing growth in Thailand's real estate sector (Wade). Additionally Sansiri is notable for having

significant advertising and has established itself as a recognizable brand name from its multimedia advertising (CIMB Securities). According to Sansiri's website, their net profit in 2009 was 970 million Thai baht; in 2010 this nearly doubled to 1,898 million baht, and in 2011, despite the massive floods that impacted Bangkok and other parts of Thailand, the company still posted a slight profit increase of 2,015 million baht profit (Financial Info). Although subsequent searches were unable to discover Sansiri's exact annual budget for advertising, it can be assumed that it is quite large, as the company's advertising encompasses print, billboard, internet and television. Sansiri's advertisements have been chosen because of their large and distinguished double page spreads which provides a perfect opportunity to analyze domestic suburban space as it relates to ideological understandings and representations of the family.

Over the past few decades Thailand has seen a massive shift in urbanization and foreign investment (Jenks 2005: 313-14). Scholar Marc Askew (2002) details his findings in some of his research about increased urbanization in the city and its surrounding areas. Suburban Bangkok grew so rapidly that by the 1970s the city had a tremendous housing shortage for its burgeoning middle classes. At the time private companies like Sansiri accounted for around half of the new home constructions but as Askew writes, "In the mid-1970s the private housing industry was producing about 50 per cent of Bangkok's housing stock, but exclusively for upper-income groups; so much so that only 16 per cent of the population could afford to purchase them." (176) Askew details the various public housing estates that were built and then made into communities for the new middle classes and his article reflects both broader studies of urbanization both in Thailand and internationally.

As Thailand's urbanization has intensified, suburbanization has increased around the city of Bangkok (Goldstein 1971; Webster 2005; Napoli 2012). This follows a trend of urbanization and suburbanization through the developed and developing world in the mid to late 20th century under neoliberal economic development (Kasarda, Crenshaw 1991; Baldassare 1992; Harvey 2005). These studies and many more like them discuss the ways in which urbanization and suburbanization have affected cities in North

America and Southeast Asia. They reflect the way that cities and populations go through significant pains as urbanization affects environment, culture and society in a number of different ways. As Thailand has also gone through urbanization and suburbanization more in the past few decades, the country has joined into networks of global cosmopolitanism as it relates to living spaces, whether they be suburbs or urban condominiums. As such private development companies like Sansiri, and the advertisements that they make for their housing developments, which consist primarily of town houses, reflect changing social dynamics within the family and the space of the home through neoliberal urbanization trends. The following analysis reflects the changes of urbanization and its effect on the Thai family structure and how it is reflected and idealized within advertisements for expensive town houses.



Fig. 19. An advertisement for Sansiri houses. —“Sansiri.” *Baan Lae Suan* Sep. 2011: 30-1.

Print.

4.2.1 Analysis

The layout of the above advertisement is a two page spread that is brought together at the bottom with a blue bar and by two photographs that carry a thematic story arc like a comic book or a film storyboard. Major signs that can be read denotatively on the first photograph are a large house, a pool, a lotus pond, a well-tended lawn, a clean footpath, and a boy running along the path. The second page of the advertisement shows three young people smiling around a black marble tabletop. The table has a number of office supplies like rulers, pencils and pens. Behind the group of people is a pool surrounded by a black barrier. From these various “signs” read denotatively, a number of connotative associations can be analyzed and discussed. On the left page the large house connotes a number of meanings, chief among them wealth, suburban, and cosmopolitan modernity especially in design tastes. The house and the pool read discursively with the vegetation of the lotus pond and the pond grass connotes a domesticization of nature and celebration of natural beauty. The smooth clean path and the well-trimmed grass connote clean suburban space. Both of these connote a certain taming of nature that the suburban space offers. The boy running down the path connotes notions of youth, play, freedom and family as it relates to the house and the photograph on the right. The people in the right image connote notions of cosmopolitan taste formations in their dress styles. The writing utensils on the table connote domesticity. The two women and the boy connote ideas of a modern family, leisure, and happiness. Meanwhile the pool in the background connotes wealth and relaxation.

4.2.2 Ideology

Although the advertisement and its representations of the family are slightly ambiguous, there is still a number of overt ideologies at play. The primary ideologies identifiable in this advertisement are the normalization of the bourgeois nuclear family within the space of idealized wealthy suburban home. The advertisement also reflects a commodification of nature within the space surrounding the house. The walls and commodified natural world that surround the house in effect acts as a screen to any

semblance of a community which is a prominent feature of Thai society and culture.(Bhassornm, Chai, Malinee 1991) A third point of analysis concerning this advertisement is that the advertisement could be from any number of countries that have gone through increased suburbanization in the past fifty years which reflects trends of global cosmopolitan tastes into the ideological realms of Thai advertising.

This advertisement is ideologically iconic in the way that it paints an idealized vision of the suburban home with a small nuclear family laughing and enjoying the private domestic space of the suburban home. Additionally the advertisement is one of many in pinpointing the changing values and constructions of the family in Thai society (United Nations). Essentially the photographs show a change in family structures from the “traditional” Thai family which included extended family living with or near each other (The Family Lifestyle in Thai Society). The advertisement actively constructs and normalizes small happy nuclear family excluding a father figure, within the walls of their private well-manicured suburban paradise. The exclusion of a father figure adds a gendered dynamic to this idealized suburban nuclear family. The assumption is that the father figure is out working as the rest of the family enjoys the domestic life at home. The power of the advertisement is the active construction of particular ideologies about gendered work and the nuclear family even if Thai society and culture doesn’t specifically mirror the ideal world of this advertisement. From this analysis space is given meaning through the idealized setting of the suburban home and the practices and performances by actors in the advertisement.

The second ideological critique that can be made from the denotative and connotative reading of the advertisement is the advertisements use of nature. While nature is tamed it is also celebrated as a commodity beautifying the space of the house but also its placement of blocking off the community around the house. The advertisement commodifies the natural world, one which exists outside the immediate realm of the home. Nature exists in the advertisements as a commodified object of beauty and exists as a symbol of a tamed natural space. Specifically the suburban nature stands in contrast to provincial untamed wilderness. (Bhatti, Church 2001; Wood 2002) Reading the suburban fauna as a sign shows how nature is not only tamed but used as a wall of

privacy, one which actively serves as a barrier to a greater community. This arguably reflects and constructs changing norms of Thai urbanization as the Thai societal trait of close knit communities is essentially erased and replaced with more western upper class representations of the suburban town house centered on the private nuclear family. In this instance, representation of space reflects changing ideologies within Thai culture. This advertisement and others in *Baan Lae Suan* magazine show how power and hegemony are at work as the private suburban home is the primary representation shown. Traditional representations of community and extended family are excluded from the modern representations of the wealthy suburban town house, the nuclear family that inhabits it, as well as the suburban nature that gives them privacy.

Interestingly this advertisement is presented in a way that, as mentioned previously, mirrors suburban representations from lifestyle media in any number of countries that have gone through dramatic urbanization in the past half a century. Thus representations between middle and upper class advertisements within the space of the home show not only a global hegemony of consumer ideologies surrounding urbanization and taste formations, but these representations also reflect on changing local and global representations and constructions of space within the Thai discourse of home and community. Here Thai modernity as it relates to social distinction continues to be a central issue for advertising and representations of space as well as representations of people in lifestyle media. This advertisement is seen within the lens of spatialization and space as a site of meaning and ideology. Here the ideology is one of global and local urbanizational trends meeting with the need to be modern, international and cosmopolitan within the arguments and discussions of social distinction and class. This advertisement shows an idealized consumerist middle or upper class family within the realm of constructed space, the home, while ignoring traditional Thai design and cultural traits of home design and community kinship. Modernity in Thailand continues to be a contested idea, and this advertisement is one of many that shows the ambiguity of Thai modernity as the country is increasingly part of a globalized world based on consumerism and global taste formations.

4.2.3 Further representations of the suburban townhouse



Fig 20. Second advertisement for Sansiri houses. –Sansiri.” *Baan Lae Suan* Oct. 2011: 34-5. Print

This second advertisement from Sansiri’s advertising campaign also carries significant representations of the changing dynamics of Thai family and family relations. The following paragraphs will provide a brief analysis of this second advertisement from *Baan Lae Suan* magazine to provide an alternative and nuanced view of family as it relates to age and class. The advertisement above constructs and represents an alternative viewpoint of older Thai people which stands apart from the more traditional reflections of the elderly as integral components of the Thai families and communities in which they reside.

4.2.3.1 Analysis

This second advertisement follows the same design layout as the last advertisement and it is part of a series from this study’s database. The left page of the advertisement has a large metal sculpture in the foreground. A road wraps around the sculpture and a black sports car speeds past behind it. Behind the car lies a row of bushes and a large stone wall with out of focus trees rising above. Connotatively the sculpture

connotes class based taste for abstract art, urban design preferences in addition to wealthy urban beautification processes. The black car speeding past behind the sculpture connotes wealth, and mobility. The bushes and the large stone wall connote barriers to an outside world as well as wealth and privacy. The large, out of focus trees rising above the stone wall in the background connote nature, and an outside world away from the confines of the well-manicured space within the stone walls.

The second page of the advertisement shows an elderly, well dressed couple with nice clothes behind the glass of a car window. The couple sits in the back seat of a car. The man wears sunglasses and a tan jacket. The woman sports a pearl necklace and glasses as she looks out of the window. The man is in focus and the woman is slightly out of focus. Palm trees are reflected on the window next to the man. Using semiotic analysis, deconstructing this second image provides specific connotations. The couple with their nice clothes, sunglasses, and pearl necklace connotes notions of old wealth and nostalgia of the past. Their presence in the back seat of the car connotes upper class mobility as they are presumably being driven somewhere by someone else. Their presence as a couple without other actors connotes independence. Discursively, the two photographs represent a wealthy elderly Sino-Thai couple with light skin, dressed in nice clothes which in and of themselves represent and harken back to the cultural edicts discussed in the last chapter as they are being driven around their town house complex by a hired driver. Their presence in the back seat being driven past a large abstract sculpture connotes a wealthy independence away from the traditional family structure and broader community.

4.2.3.2 Ideology

From the brief denotational and connotational analysis above, a number of ideologies can be analyzed within the imagery of this two page advertisement. This advertisement first and foremost displays the changing social dynamics facing Thailand's aging population and the expectations for and of this aging population. Secondly, the advertisements ideological function displays a discourse of upper class wealth and taste as it relates to the space of the home, in this case a gated community exemplified by the

stone walls. As advertisements sell and construct ideology for consumers to read, this advertisement in particular works in the ideological realms of age, sophistication and upper class taste formations, all of which are thus normalized in the space of the home. The home is imagined and defined as spaces of independence, privacy and wealth within the broader discourse of Thai modernity.

This advertisement depicts an alternative representation of the contemporary Thai urban family and thus highlights social changes and diversification. The elderly couple are independent which reflects a distinct change in traditional familial kinship ties and relationships where the elderly lived with their families either in the same home or in the immediate proximity. The representation shows how the elderly are being constructed in contemporary Thai culture as well as the ambiguity of roles the elderly inhabit. The United Nations Population fund in 2011 wrote that by 2050 the population over sixty will reach thirty percent of the Thai population. (United Nations) Thus representations of wealthy elderly people in an advertisement like the one above shows the importance placed on wealth and independence in a time when Thai demographics are undergoing an important change. These new representations of elderly people away from the traditional family structure show an ideal Thai modernity where the elderly can take care of themselves. As changing family dynamics effect advertising, specific cosmopolitan taste formations espoused by the actors in the advertisements and the ideal space they inhabit informs understandings of how modernity is both imagined and constructed in the fantastical world of advertising and lifestyle media.

4.3 The Urban Condominium

In Bangkok, condominiums have a significant and noticeable presence in the physical locality of the city. A quick view of the city's skyline shows a myriad of high rise condominiums sprouting up all over the city with more being built all the time. A newspaper article from late 2012, for example, written to describe one of the many "home and condo" promotional exhibitions notes that, "More than 1,000 residential projects worth in excess of Bt100 billion are on offer, with promotions designed to boost sales during the last quarter of the year." (Somluck 2012) As the market for new

condominiums in the city center reaches saturation, a number of companies also have developments planned for the Bangkok suburbs: “Condominium projects are mushrooming in the suburbs, supplying 64.5 per cent more units than in central Bangkok over the past 12 months.” (The Nation 2012) In the context of this extreme culture of condominium constructions, advertisements like the one above can be seen on billboards all over the city. This plethora of advertisements both as billboards and in the database used for this study sell not only rooms in the new developments but more importantly space as a key tenant of a unique fantastic urban lifestyle.



Fig. 21. A condominium advertisement. —“Circle 2 Condo.” *HiSo Party* July 2011: 103. Print.

4.3.1 Analysis

The advertisement for the Circle 2 Condo by the Fragrant Development Group features a photographic mock-up of the planned development, a graphic of what the building will look like in addition to images of some key features of the condominium, in this case a removable wall. The main photograph in the advertisement shows a corner

room in the planned condo. The viewpoint of the photograph is taken outside the condominium in a voyeuristic fashion as the viewer gets a peek of a section of one story of the condo as the city lights sparkle in the background. The main focus of the advertisement is a couple embracing and looking at each other by the window of their living room. The man holds the woman, and the woman cradles her visibly pregnant abdomen as she looks up at him. Inside the condominium, typical household furniture is illuminated including a bed, chair, and table.

The textual analysis of the signs reveals a number of connotations that can be explored further. The removable wall and the inset illustrations below the main photograph connote ease and the promise of a convenient lifestyle in a condominium with its versatility to change walls as the consumer sees fit. This in turn gives the consumer or reader of the advertisement an imagined independence and consumerist choice. The city lights in the advertisement give connotations of modernity, urbanity, and a sense of high positioning above the city, which in turn connotes a sense of superiority in terms of cultural or social class hierarchy. The primary signs of the couple in the image connote notions of independence, professionalism, new families, heterosexual romance, and ethnic and racially ambiguous light skinned beauty tastes as markers for tenants of the modern Bangkok condominium.

4.3.2 Ideology

This advertisement and others like them construct specific representations of the space of the condominium which in turn have a number of ideologies attached. Although an illustrated mock-up, a collage of the fantastic, this specific advertisement brings together photographic and computer altered illustrations to represent condominiums as spaces of modernity and social distinction through notions of young independent professional heterosexual nuclear families. This interpretation is understood textually from the signs of the couple in the photograph. The representation of the couple and their surrounding space is rooted in a discourse of modernity and its relations to light skinned ethnicity and racialized formations of wealth and class. In this advertisement, socially distinct space as a category of power and social normalization is established quite

strongly. Condominiums are represented as unique spaces of the young, light skinned and wealthy. These socially distinct class categories are inscribed onto the space of the condominium.

Condominiums are further represented as idealized spaces of urban as seen here by the way the condominium and its inhabitants are set against the backdrop of city. The city lies in the background of the main photograph to create an ambient feeling of urbanity. The dark city and the distant lights constructs a hierarchy in which these representations of wealth and modernity through the performances of the actors is situated high above the various connotations associated with the streets of urban Bangkok. Here pristine serenity is contrasted with the grit and darkness of the urban streets. The actors themselves represent an ideological formation of a specific wealthy young professional class that can afford the expensive serenity of the condominium.

This young professional class that is constructed in the advertisement is done so through specific notions of class and ethnicity. Whiteness or light skin as a marker of privilege as previously discussed in chapter three is inscribed into the space of the condominium. Specifically this advertisement shows how class and ethnicity is melded with social connotations of particular spaces. The actor's racial ambiguity in this instance serves the ideological function of inscribing whiteness or light skin as wealthy upper class preference in the literal hierarchy of the condominium. This in turn gives light skin or whiteness power over darker classifications despite the fact that classifying whiteness is at times problematic. Semiotic analysis shows that the text constructs a quite literal binary opposition of color: white versus black; light versus dark; inside versus outside; and high versus low. Modernity is then associated with the socially distinct signs and connotations of light skin, being independent financially and physically from traditional family structures, and occupying the ultra-urban space of the condo. Condos as spaces are thus sites of power and privilege within the cultural geography of the urban city as represented by the advertisement.

The example above is a strong and poignant example of the politics of space in Thai lifestyle media. In concert with Lefebvre's arguments above concerning the cultural and historical process of spatialization, space here clearly emerges as a site of hegemonic

constructions of socially distinct representations in lifestyle media. Hegemony works in a way that is not seen at a surface level, it is a dominant notion of power and privilege that is masked by normalized representations. To repeat, taste formations of light skinned, ultra-urban condominium life, and western nuclear family structures fit within the theory of space as practiced place. These socially distinct representations are inscribed to advertisements about townhouses and condominiums continuously and are thus made normal and unquestionable. The representations are so normal that other representations of these spaces and the people that inhabit them would be viewed as strange and odd. Here the social representations inscribe onto place. The ideal representations of the space of the condominium are part of the greater discussion of social distinction and Thai lifestyle media.

4.4 The Gendered Kitchen

The last section of this chapter focuses on the ways in which advertisements construct and normalize spaces within the domain of the home in gendered ways. These spaces often show stereotypical and traditional gendered roles particularly for women. First, two advertisements concerning the gendered space of the kitchen will be analyzed. Following this connotational and ideological analysis, space as it relates to sexuality and sexualized femininity will be used to show how advertising and photographs gender space in various ways. These two analyses are important to show the traditional and shifting ways in which space within the home is constructed and understood within the rubric of Thai modernity and cosmopolitanism. More specifically they show how femininity is commodified within particular spaces in the home as women are in essence extensions of actual commodities within the advertisements.



Fig. 22. An advertisement for an Electrolux stovetop. –Electrolux.” *Baan Lae Suan* Feb. 2011: 14. Print.



Fig. 23. An advertisement for an Electrolux oven. –Electrolux.” *Baan Lae Suan* April 2011: 44. Print.

4.4.1 Analysis

The above two advertisements form part of a campaign for domestic appliances for the global electrical corporation Electrolux. The first advertisement from this ad campaign for Electrolux ovens and stoves carries a number of primary signs that will be useful later in pin pointing the ideological nature of the advertisements. The advertisement depicts a family. Two children sit to the right of a motherly type figure as they strain their necks to look hungrily at the food in front of them. A young fatherly type figure sits to the left as he also gazes down at the food. The mother stands smiling as she puts down on the table a baked turkey or chicken. The background of the advertisement is a clean white walled kitchen that is neat and orderly. Primary text in English on the top right reads, “Thinking of you,” in cursive text. Below the photograph the English in white characters reads, “Your moment to shine.” The bottom photo on the right hand side shows a stove top with something being cooked in a pot. The second advertisement has nearly the same scene as the first advertisement except this time two women look at another female model that is the same woman representing the mother in the first advertisement. They sit and stand in the kitchen wearing similar western-style clothing and western food as the first advertisement like turkey and bread are clearly visible on the wooden table top. Nearly every character is smiling in both ads. While the family smiles at the food in the first ad, two of the women smile and laugh with the woman preparing food in the second ad.

This advertisement has a number of connotations which carry deeper ideological meaning as domestic spaces that are gendered. In both of the advertisements English language is used as a cosmopolitan connotational marker that speaks to the consumer and imagined women of the advertisement. By using a cursive font, the phrase, “Thinking of you,” connotes a feminine style with its associations of flowery decorative writing. Additionally the phrase espouses cosmopolitan taste formations which carry connotations that the woman in the photograph is thinking of her imagined family by laboriously cooking the food. Furthermore, the phrase has the connotation that the company is thinking of the imagined consumer, essentially women readers. The phrase, “Your moment to shine,” carries connotations of selfless service and sacrifice for the family. It

also carries notions that the act of cooking as an integral part of femininity. These two quotes will be discussed in more detail later in the ideological analysis of this advertisement.

The actual photographs themselves carry a number of connotations as well. In the first photograph the woman's action of putting the food on the table connotes love, caring and service to her family. Her smile connotes acceptance and celebration of her traditional motherly role of cooking for her family. The rest of the family that is seated connotes acceptance of this stereotypically gendered kitchen setting. Their smiles connote happiness and acceptance of the mother's role as a provider. The modern looking kitchen connotes cosmopolitan taste and a specific income bracket. Read discursively, the western style food and clothing all connote an international cosmopolitan modernity within the space of the kitchen. The second advertisement is quite similar to the first however slightly different connotations can be taken from the photograph. As one woman actively takes part in the laborious actions of preparing the food, the other women look to her in awe and wonder. They embrace each other and look up to the woman who possesses the technological prowess of the new oven. The women look up not only to the woman and her cooking skills but the technology that she possesses as a woman of the modern kitchen and a mother of the modern family.

4.4.2 Ideology

The first primary ideology at work in the representations from these advertisements is the way in which gender is inscribed into the space of the kitchen. Specifically the kitchen is represented as a feminine or women's space as the woman in the advertisement brings food to her family or is in the act of preparing the food as in the second advertisement. This ideological representation can be understood in the focus of attention, performance, and placing of the woman in the two advertisements. The kitchen is constructed as a feminine space in the first advertisement as the main motherly character is placed front and center standing and putting food on the table as her family sits in anticipation around her. The ideological formation of women as the caretakers of the family is at once constructed and reflected upon in the stereotypical image of the

mother selflessly bringing food for her family as they sit waiting. Her performance shows her willingness to serve as she stands putting food on the table in the middle of the photograph. In the second advertisement space is gendered as a similar woman actor is in the process of preparing food as her friends admire her. The positioning of three women in the space of the kitchen reflects the ideological construction of the kitchen as the gendered space for women within the realm of the home.

–The kitchen has traditionally been viewed as the realm of the mother...the kitchen has changed from reflecting the managerial power of the women to becoming just a sign of motherhood and femininity.” (Townsend 44)

Townsend's article about gendered space in British society shows the cross cultural aspects of representations found in Thai advertising and the ideological similarities between cultures. The two advertisements reflect a consumerist transnational representation of gendered space within the home. This representation represents the patriarchal construction of women in the home in addition to the commodification of women and the domestic work they do.

A second primary ideology at work in these advertisements is the way in which women and the work they do is commodified and normalized within the space of the modern kitchen, and thus made invisible. The advertisements imagine the 'modern' mother as a person selflessly serving the family with joy and excitement. This is made evident in the English phrases in both of the advertisements. While the use of English and specifically cursive carries connotations of feminine grace, as well as class and privilege, the phrases themselves carry significant ideological baggage. The advertisement in effect positions the intended audience into the stereotypical representation of the primary character in the two advertisements with the word –you,” in the two English phrases, –Thinking of you,” and –Your Moment to shine.” The first phrase positions women and their labor in the kitchen as natural, invisible and inevitable by connotations of selfless motherhood. The woman thinks of her family and her work and labor is made invisible by her love and caring of her family. The second English phrase positions the intended audience to accept the gender roles within the space of the kitchen as labor and work within the kitchen are masked with a celebration of selfless expected labor. Additionally,

the way the motherly character in the first advertisement is situated reveals how her work is made invisible and is commodified. The mother stands and puts food on the table, the family doesn't look at her but looks at the result of her labor, the food on the table. These advertisements gender the space of the kitchen as a feminine space while women's labor is masked by stereotypical representations of the selfless working mother.

A final ideology at work within the two advertisements is the way in which they construct the kitchen as a 'modern' feminine space through the use of technology, the western style kitchen and the western food being served and made. This representation of the kitchen and women is both an active consumerist fantasy and a construction rooted in ideological fascinations with modernity. In the US in the 1950s after World War Two women found that the consumption of new technologies for the kitchen reflected their changing values in the home and society.

In this new age, women had to cope with conflicting sets of values which were complicated by technology which was marketed as value laden. Well established Progressive values of the role of women conflicted with nostalgic reminiscences of Victorian values. With new technology, the construction and shape of the home reinforced and even structured these values in a concrete way. Part of this was an economic story. These values were literally sold through consumption—consumption as a means of buying a better status.” (Lockette 48)

Like the changing values in post war United States, these advertisements also reflect changing values within Thai culture as the consumption of technology is linked closely with the kitchen as a gendered space. The advertisement's deeper ideological function is that it tells consumers that purchasing modern appliances makes women better mothers while at the same time facilitating expected domestic labor. Additionally this construction is rooted in an idealistic consumerist fantasy of modernity and the consumption of technology as modern and international, or western, discussed in the past three chapters. The constructions and aspirations of modernity are reflected not only in the consumption of technology but the preparation and consumption of western foods. By not using local Thai cuisine but showing western food, the advertisement constructs food taste formations as distinctly modern, read western. This western taste formation reflects aspirations of modernity as the modern feminine kitchen is one of upper class consumer habits that prefer consumption of technology and western food as the ultimate ideal.

4.5 The Bedroom – Style and Sex

Similar to the ways in which the kitchen is constructed as gendered space, a number of advertisements in the magazines gender the bedroom in a similar but slightly different fashion. While women are gendered into the kitchen space with connotations of motherhood, in the bedroom they are gendered into the space in terms of patriarchal discourses of feminine sexuality. Women located within the bedroom near or on a bed is a consistent theme in this study's database. The domestic space of the bedroom is represented as a space of the sexually available woman. The images and representations of the women in particular reflect a commodification of their bodies as extensions of the bed. These representations of women and gendered space reflect dominant ideals and tastes which advertising is primarily invested in. This final analysis shows how space in the magazines reflects stereotypical but changing taste formations and ideals of specific domestic spaces within Thai society and culture.



Fig. 24. An advertisement for Santas bed linen. –Santas.” Baan Lae Suan Sept. 2011: 68.
Print.

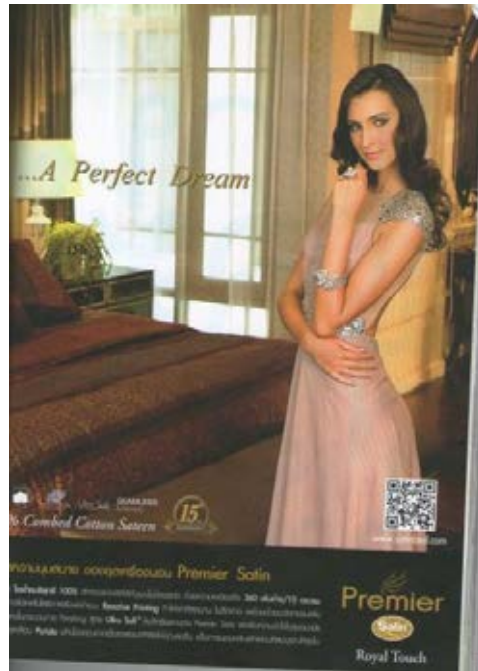


Fig. 25. An advertisement for Premier Satin bed linen. –Premier Satin.” Baan Lae Suan Aug. 2011: 82. Print.

4.5.1 Analysis

The two advertisements above are advertisements for blankets and bed linens and possess a number of similar denotational signs. The primary sign for each of the advertisements are the woman. In the first ad the woman wears a long elegant pink dress. She lies down on the bed and stares seductively outside of the frame to the left as if in waiting. The woman in the second advertisement wears a similar pink dress. She has her hand to her face, is positioned standing to the right of the frame as her gaze is focused in a similar seductive fashion outside of the frame to the right. A perfectly made and furnished bed lies to her left and the rest of the photograph is taken up by the remaining bedroom space. The primary English text in the first advertisement reads, –Stylish bed linen,” while the second advertisement reads, –...A Perfect Dream.”

In these two advertisements the primary sign, the woman, connotes femininity which in turn gives meaning to the setting around her as an overt sexualized space. In the first advertisement the way the woman is positioned in an overtly sexualized way: lying

down with an elegant dress with a seductive gaze peering at an unknown subject outside of the photograph. Her lounging position suggests a sexual willingness; her flowing dress is juxtaposed with the bed and the linen to position the bed with her sexualized femininity. Her seductive gaze connotes a longing and waiting for an unknown subject outside of the frame. The woman's seductive gaze in the second advertisement has an identical connotation, the woman stands looking sexually at an unknown person outside of the frame. Her flowing dress is also juxtaposed with the bed linens in a way that has a connotation that the woman is nearly identical to the bed. Thus the bed in both instances has connotations of sex and sexual availability. Here the signs and their connotations work together to create the ideological meanings which will be explored below. Lastly the English phrases connote the bedroom as a site of style, fantasy and dreams within the categories of sexual willingness and feminine sexuality.

4.5.2 Ideology

The advertisements gender the domestic space of the bedroom as women's space within the categories of sex and sexual performativity. In essence this critique and analysis of the sexualized woman in advertising is a classic analysis of gender and women's studies. The use of the ideological category of the sexually available woman is replicated here in lifestyle media's representation of the domestic space of the bedroom. Here international cosmopolitan ideologies represent women as sexually available beings of the bedroom and sexually commodified extensions of the bed. As mentioned previously, both of the women have long flowing pink dresses which are juxtaposed with the luxurious bed and bed covers. The models' positioning next to or on top of the bed displays the ideology of the sexually available wife or lover. Their performative action of gazing and lying down further show how their bodies are commodified. They are thus sexually commodified extensions of the bed. The bedroom is gendered in an overtly sexualized way. The ideology of patriarchal dominance in the realm of the bedroom is read through these various ways that the women inhabit the bedroom. The bedroom is both overtly feminine and sexual, this ideology is given power and meaning by imaging what lies outside of the frame of the photo; the imagined man.

Within the advertisements, the use of English is a powerful ideological marker which further establishes the gendered representations of the bedroom discussed above. The first English phrase, “Stylish Bed Linen,” works discursively with the image of the woman on the bed looking longingly outside of the frame. The sexualized woman gives the bed linen its sexy stylishness. This thus genders the bed and the room, and commodifies the woman as part of the linen on the bed. She is merely an extension of the bed and patriarchal expectations of women’s sexual performativity. The English phrase in the second advertisement reads, “. . .A Perfect Dream.” This phrase leaves the subject ambiguous; readers are left to their own devices to decide what the perfect dream is. The perfect dream could be the lifestyle tastes of the expensive bed and bedroom, it could be the women, and it could be the more primal urges connoted by the bed and the woman staring longingly outside of the frame. The domestic space of the bedroom is again gendered with overt sexualized aspects of femininity as the ideal bedroom is constructed with women standing and waiting. The realm of the fantastic is constructed with an overtly sexualized woman as a commodity. These representations follow international patterns of using gender stereotypes to sell products and thus reflect international trends surrounding gender and representation.

Chapter V Practices

As argued in the opening chapters of this paper the modern capitalist phenomena of lifestyle revolves around a number of interconnected cultural practices of consumption. Modern global capitalism dictates that nearly everything from shopping, eating and even listening to music and vacationing has been transformed into a consumerist practice which forms the outline of an individual's 'lifestyle' and thus one's cultural identity. Lifestyle media plays a primary goal of promoting and naturalizing specific ideologies. The texts in the magazines provide a broader discourse that lifestyle media promotes value-added consumer based practices.

Thai lifestyle media and specifically the examples used for this paper are no exception to this global trend of promoting and idealizing consumerist practices. An analysis of how local media feature practices of consumerism provides useful insights into Thailand's myriad consumer cultures. Representations of various lifestyle practices allow an understanding of prevalent values and discourses in contemporary Thai society. Thus, this chapter analyzes some of the dominant representations of consumer practices in magazines used for this study. While it would be nearly impossible to cover the full range of consumerist practices featured in the three magazines, this chapter will limit its attention to two representative examples: food based practices of eating and dining out, and the practice of travel and tourism. Both of these consumerist lifestyle practices indicate the intersection between specific lifestyle tastes and social values. Some lifestyle practices relating to food and travel are consistently more valued in the magazines than the others and as such are constructed as sites of social distinction and privilege. In particular, in keeping with the discourse of Thai middle and upper class urban cosmopolitanism outlined earlier, the magazines illuminate quite clearly practices that signify distinct cosmopolitan dynamics which are often a mix between global and local consumerist practices, or 'glocal' as outlined at the beginning of this study.

As briefly stated above, this chapter identifies and analyses the ideologies and values represented in select leisure activities and practices. In a more detailed fashion, this analysis highlights the performative nature of actors and models within the realm of consumer-based practices. By employing textual semiotic image analysis of leisure activities and the performances of the actors in the photographs the chapter will demonstrate how the ideal individual is wrapped up with representations of socially distinct lifestyle practices based on wealth and privilege. The work this chapter hopes to perform is to uncover the muted and hidden ideologies and connotations in what appears to be ordinary lifestyle activities. It is important to remember here that representations and photographic media are made to be read and digested in a way that the lifestyles shown are common-sensical and appear normal on one level while on another appear to bask in the glow of fantasy of commodity fetishism discussed in more detail in chapter three. The ideological formations espoused in the following images are bound to the fantasies of a highly mobile, wealthy urban class while normalized and rooted in practices of everyday lifestyle. Specifically here the privileged class and the commodities and spaces associated with their taste values are idealized in the magazines as naturalized instances of Thai modernity.

This chapter is based primarily on the theoretical frameworks outlined in the last four chapters. As such, this chapter will dispense with a primary theoretical section and instead quote and source theories as needed within the analysis of the various practices of eating and travel. The following section begins with a brief discussion of food and dining as a distinct category in constructing specific lifestyles in Thai lifestyle media. Following this brief discussion, a deeper analysis of a sampling of advertisements and photographs from the three magazines will be used to illustrate and expound upon the various ideologies and values associated with food and dining. The second half of the chapter illustrates how travel and tourism is normalized as a practice of an imagined wealthy urban class but also as a practice of exclusion and domination. Locations and representations of ideal travelers as *luk kreung* urbanites put into comparison with representations of the non-modern, rural other will complete this chapter.

5.1 Food, Eating and Dining as Markers of Social Distinction

Studies of food and its relationship with society are numerous and cover a wide range of disciplines from the fields of the physical sciences to anthropology, archeology, ethnography, and cultural studies. (Mintz, Du Bois 2002; Van der Veen 2003; Yue 2003; Jenks 2005; Van Esterik 2008) Marijke van der Veen (2003) discusses how the discipline of archeology employs a multidisciplinary framework which uses cultural studies and anthropology to analyze and understand how luxury foods are dictated by power and social distinction within both pre-modern and modern societies. Van der Veen differentiates luxury food consumption between pre-modern and modern periods: Pre-modern societies with strong institutional forms of social ranking stressed quantity of food as luxurious for the elite, while modern cultures with hierarchical societies show that, “where major differences in lifestyle between individuals and groups of individuals are embedded in social institutions – i.e. where sub-cultures exist- tend to use quality and ‘foreignness’.” (412) By employing van der Veen’s analysis of luxury food and social distinction in the modern era, this chapter illustrates the process and representations of how specific foods and dining experiences carry upper class sign value through the process of conspicuous consumption, or consuming to show off power and agency.

The modern era is defined in Chapter three as the era including 19th and 20th centuries when there was a massive global increase in capitalist production and consumption. While orthodox analysis on class and social distinction focuses on production, here for understanding the practices of eating and dining out, let us focus on consumption as the major pathway to understand and conceptualize the process in which food and dining is a lifestyle practice wrought with connotations of luxury, cosmopolitanism and global capitalist modernity. A quick example of the global brand McDonalds allows us to see the global pathways of eating and dining as a primary agent of social distinction. For East and Southeast Asia, the lifestyle practice of going to McDonalds possesses connotations of modernity and cosmopolitanism which stands in stark contrast to the practice of eating at McDonalds in the United States. (Van Esterik 1992; Watson 1997; Yue 2003) Using McDonalds as a basic example of the

cosmopolitan socially distinct nature of food and dining, identifying food practices is essential to gaining a nuanced understanding of the various ways that food and dining are seemingly naturalized within social hierarchies of taste. Lifestyle media used for this study are invested in propagating socially distinct food, recipes and spaces of dining where luxury is represented as an essential aspect of everyday lifestyle.

One of the many facets that Thai lifestyle media has is its ability to influence and construct various cultures of food and practices of food consumption. Food and dining is an immensely celebrated and popular institution in Thai culture, but, as with most cultural practices, it has shifted in dramatic ways as a result of the numerous changes brought on by modernization and transcultural exchange. Specifically these changes have occurred from Thailand's rapid integration into global neoliberal capitalism and its attendant cultures of commodity consumerism. An example of the effect that global capitalism has on food practices within the city of Bangkok and on modern Thai cuisine has been the relatively recent influx of an ever-expanding range of 'foreign' cuisines and food products. Foreign foods have a considerable presence within the cultural geography of the city both through advertising and the literal spaces of restaurants. It is not uncommon to see advertisements for hamburgers, pizza, western coffee chains, donuts and sushi, alongside those for more 'traditional' Thai fare.

Drawing examples from the historical record, Thanet Wongyannava (2009) develops an insightful and significant account of Thai modernity and its historical and more contemporary engagement with foreign food cultures in an article on European and western food in Thailand. Thanet uses as a case study the myriad ways in which Italian cuisine has been incorporated into Thai food consumption patterns. He gives historical precedence to the multiple paths in which international foods have become part of cosmopolitan taste formations for Thai consumers. The scholarly agency given to King Chulalongkorn and his status as a symbolic figure in accounts of modernization and Siamese/Thai modernity also extends to food practices. Wongyannava writes that the king:

–Enjoyed western food as long as it was his only choice among many, especially when accompanied by Thai food. Furthermore, eating western food was less for enjoyment than for demonstrating his sophistication to western elites.” (492)

As we will see in the analysis, this ambiguous relationship that King Chulalongkorn had with western food continues to this day. The article goes on to contemplate how western and Italian food in particular have become important foods which carry sign value for the Thai middle and upper classes. Italian food has entered into the hybrid palate of Thai cuisine. Stir fried spaghetti and pizza tom yum kung come to mind. Thanes’s article suggests that hybrid global and local tastes intersect in the practices of eating foreign foods. His article briefly mentions fast food and foreign food as part of the contemporary taste formations for the middle and upper classes.

–of all the changes in human behavior, food habits are among the most difficult to change; nevertheless, change they do. This especially the elite, do not have a monotheistic cuisine; if one can pay respect to Brahmanism, animism, monarchism and Christianity, than one can also eat a variety of foreign foods.” (509)

Thus a parallel can be drawn here between luxury foods associated with the upper classes described earlier and Italian food as one of the global modernities of conspicuous consumption practices.

This mobilization of Italian food and Western food as a marker of social distinction and a sign of cosmopolitan modernity is a persistent aspect of contemporary food cultures espoused in the magazine articles and advertisements. While these localized adaptations of ‘foreign’ food are prevalent, the taste formations and social distinctions associated with the practice of consuming foreign foods is the primary focus of the subsequent analysis. There is considerable symbolic value attached to consuming international cuisine. The following analysis seeks to ask the question of why specific practices concerning food and dining are represented and why others, like eating sticky rice and papaya salad aren’t represented. The analysis hopes to show how food practices continue to be wrapped up with notions of modernity, cosmopolitanism, class distinction and ultimately power.

5.2 Food and Dining

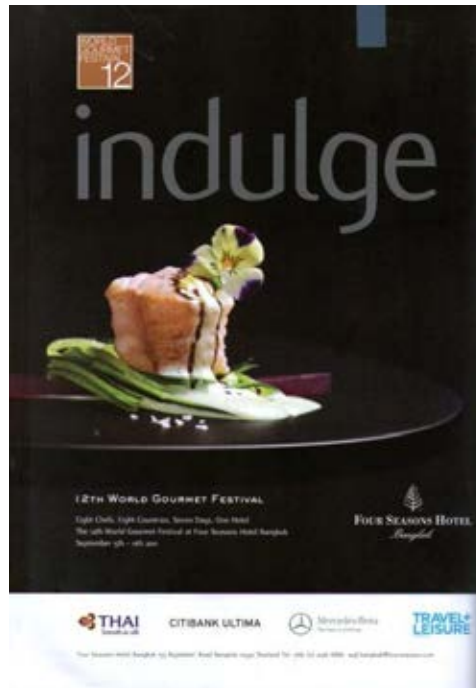


Fig. 26. An advertisement for a food festival in Bangkok. –Four Seasons Hotel.” *Puen Dern Tang* Sept. 2011: 41. Print.

5.2.1 Analysis and Ideology

The above advertisement is found in the September 2011 issue of *Puen Dern Tang*. The advertisement's design features a simple layout and features a black background which foregrounds and highlights the fish and the word indulgence as primary signs. The advertisement was chosen for its focus of food as an ornament of socially distinct taste. The advertisement's power is its relative simplicity as the word 'indulgence' is attached to the exotic-looking fish dish that lies on a black plate. The food is fetishized like the commodities analyzed in chapter three in that the food looks ephemeral or 'ornamental'. Roland Barthes discusses in his short but influential essay 'Ornamental Cookery' that food in French lifestyle media in the mid-20th century featured food that was dripping and glazed over in a way that inscribed food with a

fantastical or ornamental in nature, much like Marx's theory of commodity fetishism.

Barthes writes of food photography like the one above that,

–This is an openly dream-like cookery, as proved in fact by the photographs in Elle, which never show the dishes except from a high angle, as objects at once near and inaccessible, whose consumption can perfectly well be accomplished simply by looking. It is, in the fullest meaning of the word, a cuisine of advertisement.” (Barthes 1972: 79)

Nearly sixty years after Barthes wrote his account of food photography in lifestyle media, the compositional elements have not changed; the advertisement above shares similar dreamlike qualities. The advertisement features the English word, ‘_indulge.’ The widespread use of English language in Thai lifestyle media has already been contextualized earlier as a marker of modernity and social distinction. By including the word ‘_indulgence,’ dreamlike agency is given to the dish as a textual sign laden with class specific tastes and distinction. Moreover, the exotic gourmet nature of the food is given power and authority by its foreignness. The relatively small portion gives the food an ornamental quality which has strong associations with art which arguably lies in the realm of sign value as opposed to use value. Here quite literally the practice of eating or going to a ‘_gourmet’ food festival is bound up with wealth and upper class highbrow taste formations. This in turn is reinforced by the list of sponsors of the festival which features local and foreign companies and brands like Thai Airways and Mercedes Benz that are associated with wealthy elites.



Fig. 27. An advertisement for a credit card from Siam Commercial Bank. –Siam Commercial Bank.” *HiSo Party* Dec. 2011: 87. Print.

The above advertisement is from the December 2011 issue of *HiSo Party* magazine. The advertisement is a promotion for a Siam Commercial Bank credit card which primarily features a photograph of a well-dressed young man looking at the camera in a restaurant surrounded by plates of food. The photograph contains a number of signs which represent the socially distinct practice of eating and dining. Ideologically, the advertisement lies at the juncture between place, commodity and practice. Here, the primarily western foods shown being eaten are textual signs which are socially distinct and carry high sign value. The credit card which looms large over the advertisement gives the western cuisine class specific values by composition and positioning. The connotations of the credit card indicate notions of freedom, wealth, and mobility. The various ornamentalized food items like the salad, ribs, desert, and rice reflect the glocal nature of upper class dining experiences. The actor also gives the food and the practice of eating western foods representational class based authority in that he is fashionable in a

western sense and he exhibits the kind of light skinned modernity described in Chapter three. Additionally, the sign value of a clean white restaurant as a modern urban space gives his conspicuous consumption practices further socially distinct value. Essentially the connotative meanings and representations we get from this particular advertisement is that the practice of eating international or western foods is done by a credit card wielding, fine restaurant going, young, light skinned, fashionable member of the Thai elite. In the same ways that King Chulalongkorn consumed western foods to show off or indicate his modernity; this advertisement also serves as an advertisement of middle and upper class social distinction and modernity. The practice of consuming luxury foods is one steeped in showcasing social distinction as a marker of differentiation from and superiority to the lower classes. It is helpful here to imagine how different the advertisement would be if it featured a dark skinned man wearing traditional clothing eating northeastern Thai food while sitting on the ground. Such an image wouldn't likely sell credit cards because connotations of those signs are not bound to middle and upper class urban modernities in Thailand.



Fig. 28. An advertisement for Mont Clair wine. “Mont Clair.” *Puen Dern Tang* June 2011: 22. Print.

The above advertisement comes from the June 2011 issue of *Puen Dern Tang* magazine. The advertisement is for Mont Clair wine from South Africa, and was chosen for its representational fantasy in constructing sporting and dining practices as elite taste formations. The advertisement features a scenic photograph of a vineyard which fades to white. Four photographs are framed over the sky like a family album. The photographs feature various sporting events of polo and sailing. In English the advertisement declares: “The Official Wine of Thailand’s leading sporting events.” Textually, this advertisement contains elements of social distinction as it relates to class outlined in the last two paragraphs. Additionally the advertisement represents a surreal globalized cosmopolitanism which will be discussed in further detail in the following paragraphs.

Wine in the case of this advertisement is elevated as a luxury beverage which has sign value associated with upper class social distinction. Wine here is cosmopolitan, represented by the space it is grown and as a beverage associated with western dining practices and English sports. The photographs that give meaning to the practice of drinking wine is the serene dreamlike quality of the space of the vineyard and elite sports featured above it. The connotations of the sporting events are the upper class associations affiliated with polo and sailing. A recent editorial about Great Britain’s success at the 2012 Olympic games entitled, “How social class and education are crucial to our Olympic successes,” discusses how Britain excels at the elite private school sporting events of rowing, equestrian sports, and sailing which are wrapped up with notions of class based elite lifestyle activities (Skellington). In Thailand this advertisement reflects how these practices are in turn fetishized as sporting events of a socially distinct Thai upper class who relate within a framework of cosmopolitanism and modernity to British upper class tastes. Meanwhile wine is primarily constructed in cosmopolitan elite terms as a beverage of Europe which is constructed here in relational terms to upper class sports. The title, “The Official Wine of Thailand’s leading sporting events,” normalizes cosmopolitan practices associated with bourgeois consumer consumption. The almost

humorous irony of this advertisement is that its construction of lifestyle practices is rooted in elite cosmopolitan tastes where drinking wine, sailing and polo are more popular than English football, Muay Thai kickboxing and drinking beer or local rice whiskey.



Fig. 29. An advertisement for Breeze restaurant in Bangkok. “Breeze.” *HiSo Party* December 2011. 85. Print.

The above advertisement is from the December 2011 edition of *HiSo Party* magazine. The advertisement is for a 65th floor, rooftop restaurant called ‘Breeze’ which features multi course Asian cuisine. This advertisement was chosen for its idealized focus of the practice of dining out as a cosmopolitan, urban experience and its representations of international modernity while still featuring Asian cuisine. Here the advertisement represents the luxurious practice of dining out as multicultural. The photograph includes finely dressed western and Asian models socializing and looking off-frame to some imagined vista beyond the border of the advertisement. The architecture features a prominent Greco-Roman motif, common in many Bangkok buildings, which reflects a

borrowed, hybridized European architectural modernity. (Cornwel-Smith, 2005) The advertisement even features a pyramid shaped structure with beams of light falling onto it from the cloudy skies above which even further reflects the multicultural nature of the architecture. The pyramid also indicates the fantastic dreamlike nature of the space set up in the advertisement. Indeed the sign value of the architecture serves to highlight the restaurant as modern and chic within imaginations of global upper class taste formations. The local or ‘glocal’ nature of the advertisement is reflected in the serving of Asian cuisine. The advertisement reflects glocal cosmopolitanism because very little about the advertisement appears evidently Thai or even Asian except the food being served. Regarding class based taste, the advertisement is given a distinct regal or elegant feeling by the multicultural dreamlike architecture, the rays of light and the English text, “When heaven is earth.” The practice of dining out is represented as socially distinct and lies in the realm of fantasy. The fantastic space of this advertisement is both socially distinct as it’s constructed as a dining practice for upper class tastes while celebrating cosmopolitan glocal performances and identities for an urban wealthy class.



FUZIO
Asian Contemporary Cuisine

The Place of Good Food & Good Mood at Fuzio. Redecorated in Neoclassical ambience to offer more comfortable elegance. Enter the parlor of fine Italian gourmet recipes. Dine in tune with tasteful music from Fuzio's own collection. Indulge yourself with great views from around the globe. Socialize in style and spice up your life.

Let's meet up at Fuzio.

Please join us on www.facebook.com/fuzio

Rooftop, Mini Car Showroom (Ekkamal Soi 7)
Call (66) 2711 6999
www.fuzio.co.th

THAI BEST

Fig. 30. An advertisement for Fuzio Italian restaurant. —Fuzio.” *HiSo Party* Jan. 2011. 49. Print.

The advertisement above is from the January 2011 issue of *HiSo Party* magazine. The advertisement was chosen because it is exemplary in the way it highlights foreign or Italian food within a network of cosmopolitan taste formations constructed by Thai lifestyle media. The advertisement emphasizes the lifestyle practice of eating and dining out as having a strong link to the consumption of international cuisine. The deeper ideological reading of this advertisement is the notion that consuming the “other,” in this case Italian food, is a socially distinct sign of upper class modernity. The advertisement features a dish which stands as another example of the style of class-based, fetishized ‘ornamental cookery’ described by Roland Barthes earlier. For the purposes of this analysis, by reading the dish as ornamental in nature, the food is constructed and represented within notions of luxury and wealth as the food appears to be a commodity that isn’t just for eating but carries sign value like a European car or an expensive watch. This ornamental food is thus represented as a key commodity in the practice of conspicuous consumption.

The accompanying text in the advertisement uses vocabulary which is associated with the upper classes and luxurious lifestyles. Key words in the paragraph describing the experience of dining at the restaurant include: elegance, gourmet, tasteful, indulge, and style, all of which lend power and authority to the fetishized dish to the left of the text. This vocabulary gives the primary sign of the food connotations beyond its use value of sustenance; the consumption of Italian cuisine is a practice associated with notions of luxury and upper class modernity. As noted at the outset, the incorporation of foreign foods as a marker of social distinction in the lifestyle taste formations of the Thai social elites has a long history dating from the 19th century and the various modernization periods onwards to the contemporary rise of the middle and upper classes in the late 20th and early 21st century. Food and dining practices are crucial sites of power in their representational authority both through exclusion of differing representations and their positioning of certain taste formations with luxury and class.

5.3 Travel

In addition to Thai lifestyle media's representational focus on commodities, spaces and the practices of eating and dining, the practice of travel and tourism is a significant category of social distinction. Thai lifestyle media is invested in trafficking class-based identities within the seemingly normalized confines of the leisure practices of travel and tourism. The magazines' focus is on Thai consumers, yet similar representations can be found in travel media and literature around the world, in large part due to the transnational imperatives of global capitalism. The advertisements position travel as a leisure lifestyle practice which is part of socially distinct representations of power and privilege already highlighted extensively throughout this study. Thus the following analysis will discuss the hegemonic role of travel media in defining travel as a key practice of modern socially distinct lifestyle, travel as a marker of social distinction through glamorous destinations in Thailand and abroad, travel as a cosmopolitan and ideal practice represented by *luk kreung* and light skinned models, and travel as an othering practice where locals are rendered invisible or are commodified as non-modern, rural, and dark skinned.



Fig. 31. An article featuring a stylish traveler. –Stylish Traveler.” *Puen Dern Tang* April 2011. 162-3. Print.

5.3.1 Analysis and Ideology

The above article is from the April 2011 issue of *Puen Dern Tang* magazine. It was chosen because it represents a common genre of article in these magazines: the ‘celebrity profile’ wherein a local media or high society personality is cast as an ideal traveler, offering recommendations for where to stay, where to eat, and where to shop. This article as well as the photo shoots, articles and advertisements that follow present travel and tourism as an integral practice of the specific lifestyle of upper-class, cosmopolitan consumerism promoted in these magazines. In particular, this article presents travel as a distinct practice of this idealized lifestyle by its explicit mobilization of a real-life, high society celebrity as the model example of a ‘stylish traveler’ as literally titled in bold text in the article’s header. By positioning the profiled celebrity as a model stylish traveler, her recommendations are given representational authority as the ultimate word on what’s in trend and stylish. Here the integral practice of tourism is key to defining modern Thai lifestyle representations. This article stands as a sign of upper class social distinction

where particular tastes are stratified in a hierarchy of socially-weighted sign values. The sign value of travel as upper class is encoded in the text in multiple ways. For example, the focus here is on sea cruise travel, a generally expensive form of tourism that is largely associated with a mobile cosmopolitan elite. Furthermore, the visual styling of the accompanying images practically screams upper class luxury through the pointed use of an opulent domestic setting, haute couture fashion and expensive iconographic props. The ideological functions of this advertisement are clearly to construct travel, and cruise travel in particular, as an integral leisure practice that is both stylish and representative of an ideal lifestyle based on conspicuous consumption. Here travel is commodified to show off wealth and class position, the physical object of the commodity is extended to the luxury practice of travel.



Fig. 32. An article about traveling in the Maldives. –“The Maldives.” *HiSo Party* Jan. 2011: 124-5. Print.



Fig. 33. A photo shoot highlighting Hua Hin as a travel destination. –“The Timeless Allure of Hua Hin.” *Puen Dern Tang* Dec. 2011. 110-1. Print.

The following sections discuss in further detail travel as a marker of social distinction through destinations and glamorous representations of celebrities and models. The initial focus here is primarily on idealized destinations as spaces of elite luxury. The first article is from the January 2011 issue of *HiSo Party* magazine, while the second photoshoot is from the December 2011 issue of *Puen Dern Tang* magazine. These two texts are examples of how social distinction is associated with luxury destinations both domestically – Hua Hin, and globally – the Maldives. Generally, *Travelers Companion* and *HiSo Party* feature upmarket hotels in destinations like Chiang Mai, Phuket, and Hua Hin as desirable local travel hotspots. The international destinations are largely European and South, Southeast and East Asian countries.

The literal social distinction espoused and illustrated by the article above is the price of traveling and staying in an upmarket overseas destination like the Maldives.

Connotatively, the Maldives in the article is positioned as an ideal travel destination by the layout of the images in the manner that connotes a family photo album with cut outs that reflect fun and zany emotions and memories juxtaposed against the exotic tropical beauty of the beach, the ocean and the large luxurious hotel rooms. Furthermore, as in the preceding example, this text once again features real-life celebrities, in this case a group of high society women who have presumably gone together on what is popularly dubbed a ‘girlfriends getaway’, a rarefied leisure practice clearly available only to those women with high disposable income and who are relatively unencumbered by the responsibilities of domestic and familial labor. The space is literally constructed and represented as a marker of social distinction by its position of privileged female sociability, fun and luxury within a magazine that highlights and celebrates ideal upper class lifestyle trends. While textually the article constructs the location of the Maldives as an idealized upper class destination associated with fun and smiles, actual prices of traveling and staying there add a literal dimension to the representations and constructions of travel which contains socially distinct sign value. A search online reveals that traveling round trip from Bangkok to the Maldives in business and first class is anywhere between 800 to 4,000 US dollars while two nights at the luxurious Ananta Dhiga Resort highlighted in the article is anywhere between 627 to 1,742 US dollars (Anantara Dhigu Resort; farecompare.com). According to the *CIA Factbook* the average annual Gross Domestic Product per capita in Thailand in 2011 was 9,600 US dollars (Thailand). Two nights in the best room and the most expensive airline ticket would be nearly two thirds of the annual per capita income of an average wage earner in Thailand. Here lifestyle media’s power is to construct travel as a critical lifestyle component of the rich and wealthy that is then proffered as a fetishized fantasy well beyond the reach of the magazine’s majority readership. This in turn posits the privileged people in the article as idealized performers of upper class modernity whose lifestyle practices are seemingly normalized as a common property of the Thai elite.

The positioning of local destinations in Thailand as socially distinct is also an important factor in establishing the lifestyle practices of travel as defined by these magazines. The second example above features a light skinned model wearing a striped

blue and white shirt with a sailor hat gazing suggestively at the camera. The fashion shoot is titled, “The timeless allure of Hua Hin.” *Puen Dern Tang* magazine includes these photoshoots of famous models and celebrities in socially distinct and exotic locations in every issue of their magazine. By using famous celebrities and models as the faces for advertising destinations, a semiotic fusion is constructed between the highlighted destination and the socially-resonant values associated with celebrity, wealth and class. Connotationally and textually, this photo shoot is in effect an advertisement for Hua Hin as a locale which is associated with upper class luxury and beauty. Historically, Hua Hin rose to social prominence in Thailand as the favoured seaside resort for Thai royalty. After Rama VII built a summer palace in the seaside town in the 1920s, it quickly become a local drawcard for other members of the Thai ruling elites and then later in the twentieth century the emergent Bangkok middle classes who were arguably attracted by the resort’s associations with royal elites as a form of conferred social authority. (Hamilton 1994) The photograph implicitly draws from this socially-resonant history with its reference to “timeless allure”, while its use of a young, light skinned female model helps to update the image of Hua Hin and extend its ideological appeal through historically revisionist representations of globalized Thai feminine beauty. The travel destination of Hua Hin is then constructed as a place where the beautiful young upper classes go on vacation with its short distance from Bangkok and its associations with the Thai royal family who have significant spatial presence in the coastal town. Hua Hin is constructed and represented as a destination associated with a wealthy urban, young, upper class elite.

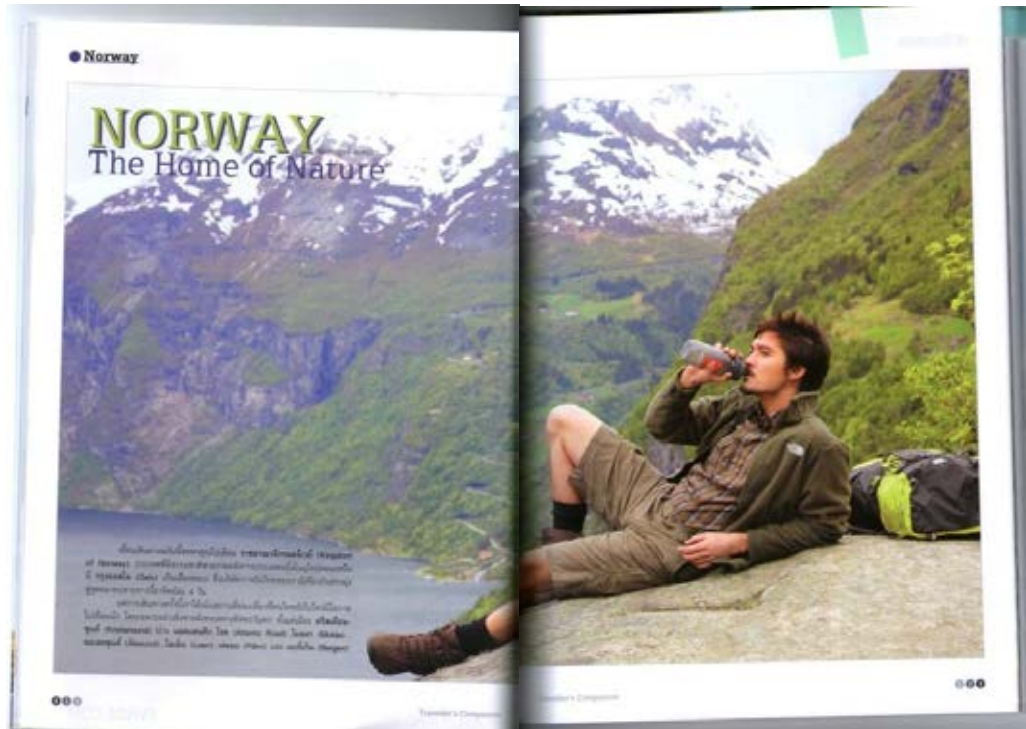


Fig. 34. A photo shoot highlighting Norway as a travel destination. “Norway.” *Puen Dern Tang* July 2011: 38-9. Print

Building on the developing argument so far outlined, let us now turn to the constructional nature of travel as a cosmopolitan practice represented by *luk khrueng* and light skinned models and celebrities. The photographic spread above is from the July issue of *Puen Dern Tang* magazine. This image was chosen because of the representational quality of beauty and glamor of the individual in the photograph, which in turns gives connotational sign value to travel and place. The photoshoot features the *luk khrueng* half Australian, half Laotian film star and model, Ananda Everingham relaxing on a boulder drinking from a water bottle with the rural splendour of Norway behind him. Here the practice of travel is affiliated and represented by a famous cosmopolitan Eurasian celebrity. He stands as a sign that when read textually associates travel with urban beauty and celebrity glamor. The power of representation of featuring the celebrity Ananda is that he stands as a commodity representing internationally minded cosmopolitan socially distinct values.

Spreads like these use celebrities to sell the notion of travel as a crucial component of modern cosmopolitan identities.

5.4 Representations of the ‘other’

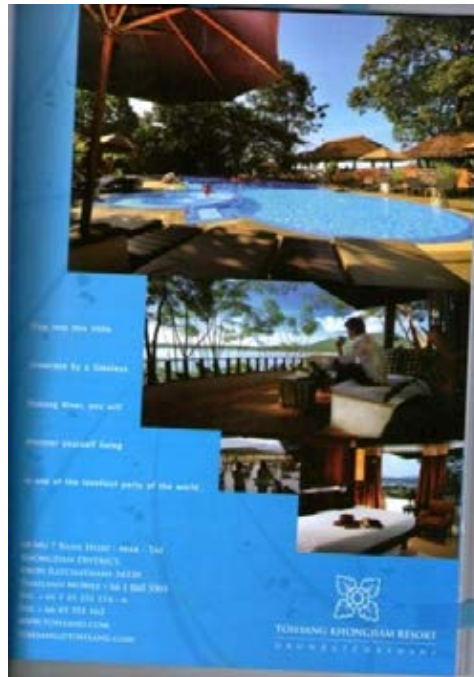


Fig. 35. An advertisement for Tohsang Khongjiam Resort in the province of Ubon Ratchathani. —“Tohsang Khongjiam Resort.” *Puen Dern Tang* Dec. 2011: 79. Print.

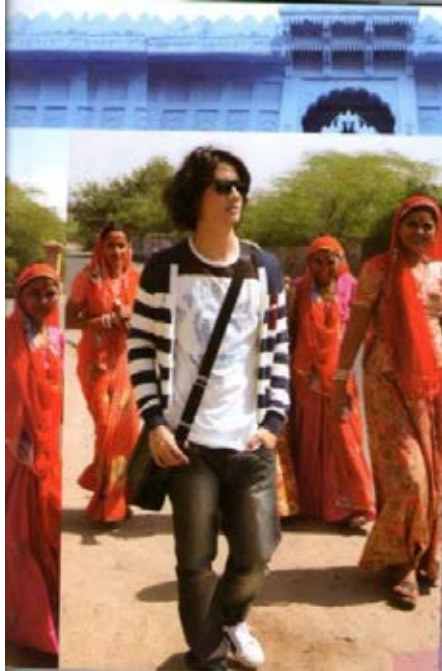


Fig. 36. A photo shoot highlighting Jodhpur, India as a travel destination. —“The Romance of Rajasthan.” Puen Dern Tang May 2011: 73. Print.



Fig. 37. A photograph from an article presenting Doi Ang Khang Royal Research Station in Chiang Mai as a travel destination. —“Doi Ang Khang.” Puen Dern Tang May 2011: 156. Print.

The primary focus of the following paragraphs is the process by which travel imagery ‘others’ local peoples. In the photographs above, locals are either rendered invisible or commodified within a theoretical framework of ‘the tourist gaze’, as influentially defined by John Urry (2002). Urry contends that modern tourism has largely developed as a practice of commodified and commodifying looking. What is sold and consumed in tourism is essentially a series of commodified spectacles: places, sites, vistas, experiences and people all packaged as commodities for the tourist’s pleasurable consumption. By extension, Urry suggests the commodifying logic of the tourism inscribes a key power differential between the privileged tourist and the local sites and peoples that are rendered subordinate objects to his/her imperious gaze. It is in essence a division between the privileged tourist self and the objectified local other.

This paper has focused almost exclusively on social distinction as it relates to images of the middle and upper classes and the often invisible power of the various lifestyle media in Thailand in constructing and normalizing these upper class tastes as a universal benchmark. These socially distinct representations appear normal as other lifestyles and peoples are essentially ignored or are constructed in sharp distinction against the dominant representations of what these media publications proclaim it is to be ‘a modern Thai’. The following analysis will allow further discussions of invisible and commodified representations of local people who are othered by the tourist gaze discussed in more detail below.

5.4.1 Analysis and Ideology

The first example above is an advertisement for the Tohsan Khongjiam Resort in Ubon Ratchathani, a town in the Northeast of Thailand which borders Southern Laos. The advertisement is from the December 2011 issue of *Puen Dern Tang* magazine and was chosen because it represents a luxurious resort while seemingly rendering local people invisible. The advertisement represents a nostalgic memory of the slow paced beauty of rural Thailand while advertising the ideal luxury space of the resort, like advertisements and articles for more socially distinct destinations like Phuket and Hua Hin. Evrard and Prasit in their article, “Monks, Monarchs, Mountain Folk” write that, “the urban way of

life and the feeling of nostalgia (toward the past, popular culture and nature) appear as universal characteristics of ‘modern’ tourists, whatever their cultural background.” (2009: 303) They go on to discuss the political implications of national tourism in Thailand as a project of both state building and, what they call, “internal colonization,” a process in which the Thai state established its hegemony over a multicultural Thai nation through cultural, economic and political processes. Their article lends credence to the notion that the above advertisement reflects a longing and exoticizing of the past and the unspoiled beauty of rural environments. In turn the advertisement ideologically celebrates the place of Ubon Ratchathani as a rural paradise but it is a paradise that is strikingly devoid of Thai-Laos culture and people. The English slogan used to accompany the photographs reads, “Step into this little Showcase by a timeless Mekong River, you will discover yourself living in one of the loveliest parts of the world...” This passage celebrates the place while the photographs render representations of local people invisible. Even workers at the hotel seemingly do not exist. Rather the sole figure seen in the space is the privileged, light-skinned urban tourist who takes the primary attention of the viewer as he sips a beverage and looks at the pristine peaceful rural view. The advertisement essentially constructs the destination as one of urban luxurious Bangkok lifestyle within the hinterland of Thai modernity and the Thai state. Again, the local people are othered in a way that they are rendered invisible as space is constructed as a nostalgic rural travel destination which stands in binary opposition against urban modern Bangkok.

The second image is part of photoshoot in the May 2011 issue of *Puen Dern Tang* magazine. The image was chosen because it exemplifies how social distinction is given meaning by contrasting and juxtaposing a model with local peoples. This photograph and the following photograph illustrate primarily how John Urry’s theory of the tourist gaze is a prominent feature in the othering process that these magazines are actively engaged in. Urry’s seminal work on tourism, power and difference sheds light on this representational othering. Urry (2002) writes of the tourist gaze and its relationship with difference that,

–There is no single tourist gaze as such. It varies by society, by social group and by historical period. Such gazes are constructed through difference...the gaze in any historical period is constructed in relation to its opposite, to non-tourist forms of social experience and consciousness.” (1)

While the tourist gaze is constructed and maintained differently in different cultures and eras, the overarching influence of global capitalism allows for similar readings of authenticity and difference as it relates to the above examples. The photograph shows a young light skinned Thai donning western fashion styles. He is surrounded by dark skinned Indian women in traditional red clothing. Their gaze is focused on him, while his gaze, hidden behind black glasses is focused outside of the frame. What is significant in this photograph is how global capitalism allows the tourist gaze of the parent culture, Thailand, to gaze upon the local people and culture of India in a similar manner that the tourist gaze works for an American gaze on the exotic tourist destination of Thailand. (Redden 2007) Here the quest for authenticity and the establishment of difference works between two non-western countries. The local women are also commodified by the sign value of their clothing which stands in stark contrast to the modern western fashion style of the model. They appear non-modern and traditional exemplified by their clothing, the architecture and the dirt road. Most importantly their dark skin juxtaposes the model’s light skin in a way that others the host culture as standing on one side of a binary between non-modern and modern. Here signs of Thai modernity explored previously are given value over other Asian cultures through Thai lifestyle media’s tourist gaze.

The third advertisement shows how the tourist gaze is a primary agent constructing difference within a discourse of nation and internal colonialism as described by Evrard and Prasit in their article. The third example above is taken from the May 2011 issue of *Puen Dern Tang* magazine. The photograph features two northern Thai tribal women in traditional clothing in front of a fruit orchard with a heavily forested mountain in the background. Again, Evrard and Prasit’s article provides a useful framework for analyzing this image. In the article they discuss how rural Thailand is idealized by domestic tourism which plays a part in the internal colonization of the periphery of the nation state by modern urban Bangkok. Thai lifestyle media is part of this process because mass media and lifestyle media are invested in ordering and organizing specific ways of looking.

The above image shows the othering process of rural Thai peoples. The sign value of the traditional clothing, their dark skin, confused posture, the fruit orchard and the tree covered mountain all connote signs which are rendered opposite to all of the socially distinct values examined and critiqued up to this point. The traditional hill tribe clothes in the photograph above stand at the opposite extreme of something like the Park Lane fashion advertisement analyzed in chapter three. The clothes are socially distinct in that they represent a commodified non-modern, rural past. The women's dark skin stands opposite to the value attached to white and light skin discussed at the end of chapter three. Their confused or non-posing posture reflects an opposition to the dream like idealized posing found in the Thai fashion industry. Rural agricultural work represented by the fruit orchard stands as a nostalgia and exoticism of agricultural work which is a far cry from middle and upper class office work in Bangkok. The mountains in the background commodify and exoticize rural Thailand in the same way that Marx's commodities are fetishized. The rural is constructed as heavenly under the tourist gaze of Thai lifestyle media. This photograph illustrates vividly the othering process of Thai lifestyle media as all the signs are essentially opposite to the socially distinct values profiled right throughout this study. The power of representation is its normalization of specific values and styles. The photograph above illustrates the political power of seemingly neutral and normal travel and tourist representations in lifestyle media. Evrard and Prasit's theory of internal colonization as it relates to the practice of tourism is illustrated clearly in this othering of hill tribe people.

Chapter VI

Summary and Conclusion

This thesis has shown how representation is part of a larger circuit of ideological formations that are at work in Thai lifestyle media. Chapter one laid out the objectives of the thesis, which were to identify the themes and representational strategies used in advertisements in contemporary Thai lifestyle media and to analyze idealized representations of Thai lifestyles found in the magazines. Chapter two employed literature review to establish the essay's focus on lifestyle media, its functions and the rise of the new middle classes and their ideologies of wealth and modernity. The last three chapters of semiotic analysis have shown continuously that the primary representations of Thai lifestyles is of a primarily urban wealthy cosmopolitan class whose identities rely on socially distinct consumer based tastes of commodities, places and practices. While the thesis started out analyzing just advertisements, it was quickly understood that nearly every page of the lifestyle magazines were essentially advertisements for a socially distinct lifestyle. Following this realization, the thesis expanded its data and analysis to include image based representations including articles and photo shoots.

Chapter one established groundwork and theoretical footing for the analysis employed in this thesis. By using the analytical techniques of ideological semiotic analysis as outlined by Gillian Dyer and Judith Williamson concerning advertising, this thesis has shown repeatedly how lifestyle media is in essence one large advertisement of a socially distinct Thai lifestyle through the reading of image based media as a text. The thesis employed a qualitative analysis of the content from three lifestyle magazines available in the calendar year: 2011. The magazines included the garden and home development magazine *Baan Lae Suan*, the travel magazine *Puen Dern Tang*, and the class specific lifestyle magazine *HiSo Party*. Chapter one detailed the reasons for using lifestyle media to understand and analyze representations in Thai media: lifestyle as a

global business is invested in propagating socially distinct class based representations which in turn normalize their tastes.

Chapter two employed a theoretical analysis and literature review to back up the claims of the first chapter. First the chapter explored the category of lifestyle, its meanings and its applications in understanding contemporary consumer culture. The modern notion of lifestyle comes primarily from the conspicuous consumption of commodities. This consumption in turn aids in the construction of identity in the modern era. Identity and consumption are two central categories in the analysis of lifestyle media and its representations. The chapter then went on to outline theories on lifestyle media and its primary functions. The primary functions of lifestyle media as they relate to this study are class, cultural capital and social distinction. Class relates to lifestyle media in that lifestyle media is invested in representing and constructing specific classes. Cultural capital is a primary function of lifestyle media in that consumerist practices and commodities carry more cultural capital and exchange value than others. The thesis illustrated over and over again how certain commodities, places and practices have distinct class based cultural capital. The third primary function of lifestyle media, social distinction, shows that certain taste formations and commodities which are loaded with class based cultural capital enjoy a particular amount of distinction within society at large. These three functions of lifestyle media work together to produce the ideological representations found in this study.

Chapter two went on to outline the processes of modernization and neoliberal development in Asia and in Thailand. The East and South East Asian region and Thailand specifically have gone through intense forms of urbanization and development in the past fifty years. Despite the 1997 Asian economic crisis Thailand still enjoys significant development and economic growth which is relational to the dramatic increase in the new middle classes in Thailand. The chapter went on to relate how the new middle classes are defined by wealth, consumerism, and outward displays of status which is represented and constructed in Thai lifestyle media. Most importantly the ideal markers of social distinction for the new middle classes include: urbanism, cosmopolitanism, education,

ethnicity and wealth. These five markers help to understand the new middle classes in Thailand as upwardly mobile and invested in consumerism. For the new Thai middle classes, old notions of class hierarchies meld with contemporary consumerist class definitions to form a unique form of class distinction and status differentiation based on outward displays of wealth as status.

Chapter three outlined the ways in which consumer culture via commodities interacts with the socially distinct category of lifestyle and lifestyle media. The chapter began with a discussion of lifestyle, capitalism and its relationship with commodities. It outlined the theoretical category of commodity fetishism and the way in which commodities are given fantastic meanings and connotations. In particular, the chapter showed the numerous ways in which sign or exchange values of commodities aids in the construction of socially distinct meanings. The use value of commodities is often pushed to the back or ignored altogether as in the case of western business dress attire in a tropical climate or fast expensive European cars in a city like Bangkok that has major traffic issues. However, these commodities are framed and showcased in terms of their powerful class based exchange value for lifestyle formations. In essence the products define the user's class position, whether real or imagined, as they stand as socially distinct status symbols.

Meanwhile history, culture and economics help define and provide nuanced ways to understand the power of commodity consumption in Thailand. For the commodities of fashion, this chapter briefly rehearsed how fashion has been part of an ongoing process of Thai modernization and lifestyle from the 1800s to the present. The chapter argued that mass media has essentially assumed the role performed in earlier periods by state hegemony in asserting and promoting Thai fashion's relationship with modernity. The chapter claimed that fashion and other consumer-based forms showcased in Thai lifestyle magazines are powerful markers that intertwine local histories, international economics, Western and East Asian cultural influences into the hybrid formations of contemporary Thai commodity cultures and lifestyles. Concerning technologic commodities the chapter outlined the ways in which the massive transformations of urbanization and

industrialization over the past forty years has created and expanded middle and upper class factions whose technological commodities assist in the formation of distinct class based lifestyles. Indeed consumption of technologies helps to define these class-based lifestyle identities, all of which are widely represented in lifestyle media. The chapter finished with a discussion and analysis of whiteness as a marker of glocalized Thai modernity and ultimate beauty within Thai lifestyle media. It argued that whiteness is not purely the pursuit of light skin but is bound up with plastic surgery and skin clinics. Whiteness and light skin stand at the apex of beauty in the advertisements and articles in these lifestyle magazines.

Chapter four outlined the multitudes of ways in which space is represented in Thai lifestyle media. Space is not an empty sign, but is filled with deep connotational meanings and ideologies. Three key theorist and writers discuss space which provides a framework for this chapter. Michael Foucault famously theorized space as a key tool of analysis to understand power and hegemony. Foucault writes about spatialization, or how space is given meaning from cultures and societies. A second writer, Michel De Certeau writes that space is practiced place and that space is a category filled with social meanings or a site of practiced social and cultural productions. A third writer, Henri Lefebvre argues that space is also a site of historical memory and is thus part of the ideological realm of power and hegemony as space is remembered and practiced. These three scholars provide correlative theoretical frameworks to understand space as a site of continuous construction and consent from the rubrics of power, hegemony, class, culture, society and history. This chapter has shown how power and hegemony works within the category of space. The advertisements show how representations are active in allowing hegemonic views to persist and spread, the power of the advertisements lies in the fact that specific tastes relating to space are idealized. These tastes are part of an idealized and constructed upper class. This analysis of space shows the ways in which space can be analyzed from popular media to understand shifting notions of modernity in Thailand.

A number of ideologies are at play in all of these advertisements which reflect the ambiguous nature of modernity in Thailand. Primary domestic spaces like the suburban

home, the urban condominium, the gendered kitchen and bedroom show how both cosmopolitan international taste formations work in conjunction with Thai cultural and societal trends to reflect an ambiguous and changing modernity. The ideologies found in each advertisement are a reflection that space is practiced, a category that is filled with multiple relations of power and privilege. Readers and consumers are given specific representations of privileged lifestyle tastes like the beautiful ideal suburban town house, or the ultra-urban condominium. Despite the privileged constructions of these spaces, the texts also represent space as a site of both tradition and modernity. The new idealized nuclear family to the stereotypical sexualized lover in the bedroom shows Thai society in flux as it seeks to define modern space and their social meanings. While these spaces reflect changing norms in Thai culture, they also lie in the realm of the cosmopolitan fantastic as they sell ideologies and products to Thai consumers.

Chapter five went on to discuss the practices of eating, dining and travel as socially distinct representations in the lifestyle magazines used for this study. The chapter employed a number of theories used in the previous chapters and added two more theories, particularly the commodity fetishism inspired article ‘Ornamental Cookery’ by Roland Barthes as well as the notion of the tourist gaze by John Urry later in the chapter. The chapter analyzed the practices of food and dining as socially distinct and part of a long historical trajectory of modernity and modernization in the Thai historical record. The chapter showed the connections between King Rama the V’s fascination with western food as showcasing Siam’s modernity to the wealthy and socially distinct practices of eating out and dining in urban Bangkok which is also represented as modern and cosmopolitan. The practice of eating and dining, like the categories of spaces and commodities are another area in which socially distinct cultural capital is located for Thai consumers.

The chapter continued on to discuss travel as a socially distinct practice represented continuously in the lifestyle magazines used in this study. The semiotic analysis of various articles and photo shoots showed how some people are rendered as ideal travelers. The photo shoots in the magazines particularly constructed the idealized

travelers as models and celebrities. Meanwhile places like the Maldives, Eastern Asia and Europe were celebrated as ideal places to travel. Local ideal travel destinations included locales like Hua Hin, Phuket and Chiang Mai. For the example of Hua Hin, traveling there is short and the local has connotations of royalty and prestige.

The last part of the chapter looked at the representations of the other, particularly as it pertains to the socially distinct practice of travel. This analysis showed that local people are either rendered invisible or othered in a binary opposition to the class based representations from lifestyle media. The local people were brown or dark skinned, they wore traditional clothes, and were placed in nature or outside. In another instance, particularly from an advertisement for a resort in the North East of Thailand, local people and workers were essentially rendered invisible and not represented at all. This last analysis brings up more questions and areas of research as questions of representations of the other in Thai media and Thai lifestyle media in particular are highlighted.

Possibly one of the greatest strengths but arguably one of its weaknesses is this project's over-reliance on textual analysis as a primary methodological analysis. That said, this thesis has been written to look at ideologies of consumerism and cultural fantasy brought about by the rapid integration of the new middle classes into Thai cultural hegemony. As such this paper doesn't focus extensively on empirical data. While this may distract from the traditionally scientific agency of content analysis in the realm of social studies, cultural studies at its core is fixated more distinctly on understanding and critiquing deeper notions of the processes and functions of media and its role in shaping power and privilege in culture and society. Arguably content analysis doesn't allow this the same kind of in depth reading that this thesis has performed continuously in the past three chapters.

This thesis has primarily made use of ideological textual analysis borrowed from Dyer and Williamson to critique under the surface ideologies found on what appears to be basic image based advertisements, advertorials and photo shoots. This thesis found that lifestyle media and its imagery is almost exclusively invested in promoting and

advertising a socially distinct class based representation of Thai individuals. The images represent aspirational values of upward mobility and outward displays of wealth as status. To briefly bring back an example, in chapter four on spaces the analysis on condominium advertisements illustrated clearly the way in which the condominium is inscribed with socially distinct exchange value. The condominium ideological stands as a symbol of middle and upper class Thai aspirations and reflects a socially distinct aspiration with an idealized heterosexual mixed race couple. All of the commodities including fashion, cars, technology and whiteness are rooted in the ideological construction of commodity consumption and aspirational symbols of contemporary Thai modernity.

Additionally the thesis shows that these three criteria, commodities, spaces, and practices are part of larger circuits of conspicuous consumption in Thai society and culture. This conspicuous consumption highlights the cultural fantasy associated with these numerous products, services and spaces. Numerous advertisements and images in this research show how imagery lies in the realm of cultural fantasy and ideology. Images of a light skinned woman floating above the city and a laptop, or a chic Asian food lounge at an expensive hotel with clouds parting in the background illuminating a scene below all work in this ideological realm of cultural fantasy based on consumption and capitalist modernity. These images reflect the Thai fascination with outward appearances as they are elevated into the realm of the fantastic. The thesis shows that consumerism and wealth is the primary pursuit of the new middle classes in their quest for contemporary Thai modernity, one that is both rooted in international commodity consumption while retaining historical Thai hierarchies of power and privilege, most notably from the Sakdina labor, royal and religious systems of the historical Thai/Siamese social order. One of the most fascinating aspects of this study is that while the advertisements and photos seemingly reflect advertisements and lifestyle magazines from the west, they are actual part of a larger platform and ideology of unique Thai conspicuous consumption. Interestingly the advertisements don't exhibit the same humor and intrigue that Thai commercials are known for. In this way Thai lifestyle print advertising is unique. It is obsessed and invested heavily in the dreams, aspirations and

fantasies of being wealthy and all of the various consumerist aspects which constitute such an identity while not exhibiting the humor that Thai advertising is known for. The Thai print and advertising industry is a more serious version of its television counterpart. Thai lifestyle media is intensely international, East Asian and western, and rooted in traditional notions of power and privilege through outward appearances and class structures. The new Thai middle classes have established their presence in Thai culture and this is seen continuously in the ideological formations of Thai lifestyle media.

There are a number of benefits of this research. This thesis contributes to the ever expanding field of Thai studies and Southeast Asian area studies. The benefits of this study highlight the interdisciplinary nature of Thai studies which employs theories in the fields of semiotics, cultural studies, history, economics, sociology and media studies. The research opens up new line of inquiry into the expanding influence of lifestyle media and its effects on Thai society and culture. As it stands now, there is very little to no research and analysis of Thai lifestyle media in the English language. This research opens up this possible field of study and lays the groundwork for any future studies on Thai lifestyle media.

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Biography

Mr. Danaan Andrew-Pacleb is from Carmel Valley, California and was born in 1985. He is particularly interested in culture, media, race, gender and the fine arts.

He attended Pacific Grove High School in California where he started a spoken word poetry club in his senior year. Following this he went on to attend Lane Community College in Eugene, Oregon where he obtained an associate's degree. Danaan transferred to the University of Oregon and majored in Ethnic Studies. During his time at university Danaan had the opportunity to attend a study abroad program at Payap University where he furthered his study of the Thai language and Thai culture at the universities Thai studies program. On his return Danaan wrote his undergraduate thesis on remittances and representations of migrant workers and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree with Departmental Honors. He returned to Thailand and in 2010 enrolled at Thai studies program at Chulalongkorn University.

Danaan has primarily worked teaching and tutoring English during his undergraduate and graduate studies. He hopes to start a career in art and photography following his Masters Degree.